

Article

# Human Aspect as a Critical Factor for Organization Sustainability in the Tourism Industry

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**Abstract:** Organizations adopt diverse strategies to govern the technical and managerial aspects of sustainability implementation processes. The need for better leading and managing people-related issues emerges as companies aim for more effective change towards sustainability. The human aspect of the sustainability implementation process is mostly not paid enough attention, but it can significantly affect the success of a change management program by creating hurdles or easing the process. This study considers three human-related factors: resistance to change, internal communication, and employee engagement in sustainability activities of organizations. The aim of the study is to explore how these human factors are managed by tourism companies for organizational sustainability. For this purpose four companies from different sectors of tourism are chosen as case studies and the results are examined using qualitative data analysis techniques. The results indicate that the companies which are in a more advanced stage of sustainability implementation manage human factors using a greater number of channels and employ varied strategies. The results can provide insights into how organizations tackle the challenges of managing human aspect and display the practices that contribute to successful change management programs for achieving organizational sustainability through people.

**Keywords:** organisational sustainability; human factors; tourism; Turkey; change management; collective case study

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## 1. Introduction

The history of the sustainability concept in organizations dates back to the environmental movement which began to have influence in the 1960s; a time period which environmental exploitation of corporations was emphasized by activist groups and the business effects on ecology was began to be realized [1]. Organizational sustainability has appeared as a new management model that takes into consideration economic, environmental, and social needs. It can also be thought of as a business approach that supports the long-term profitability of the business without harming other stakeholders affected by the organization's activities. Within the organization context, sustainability means managing according to a concept which Elkington [2] described as the 'triple bottom line': integrating and leveling environmental and social issues with economic considerations when making decisions. Some scholars and practitioners also use corporate social responsibility (CSR) to assert the integration of TBL into an organization [3] and the terms are also used interchangeably in this paper.

As the number of international tourists is expected to rise from 1.1 billion in 2014 to 1.8 billion by 2030, the tourism industry is highly recognized as being one of the most prominent engines of economic development and one of the most important sectors of economic growth worldwide, with 9% of the global GDP [4]. On the other hand, the industry has been criticized for its unsustainable

practices, such as the exploitation of the environment and local population, environmental and social nature, economic leakage, noise, air and water pollution, degradation of natural resources, labor issues, and overbuilding [5]. Initially, many people thought that sustainability was a passing fad, but it is now clear that sustainability is here to stay [6]. The increase in the environmental consciousness in the mid to late 1980s, which was followed by the Rio Earth Summit, put the people in a position to reconsider the role of tourism and its potentially negative impacts [7]. The drivers for consumers who demand more sustainable and ecological tourism products are stated as dissatisfaction with available products, the rise in environmental and cultural sensitivity, destination perception of resource vulnerability, and shifts in developer and tour operators' attitudes by [8].

The action to move towards a more sustainable approach in tourism industry has been limited because most companies do not see a need or gain in shifting their attitude [9]. The tourism companies which pursue environmental goals are more likely to practice the objectives which can be manifested in terms of cost reduction [10]. However, if we consider the current or upcoming decision-makers for the industry, the study on Generation Y of business and tourism students proves that this cohort has a green and environmental consciousness [11].

While the need for changing towards sustainability is stated in the literature, there is no agreement among researchers on how the companies embrace sustainability. While some researchers state that organizations are in need of a paradigm shift to act sustainably [12], some researchers assert the idea that moderate changes in the processes of the company and reward systems can lead the way to sustainability [13]. Dunphy, Griffiths, and Benn [14] suggested a model in which the sustainability development of a company can be tracked in both environmental and human domains.

Change management literature seems to pay relatively less attention to the employees, who are the critical actors of change management programs. Boston [15] states that the human side of change is most of the time ignored or not handled adequately in spite of the managers' good intentions or their intellectual understanding of how difficult change is. While employees are crucial for an effective change management program, the organizational change literature seems to focus more on examining change from the eye of the change agent [16] and addressing technical issues of sustainability [1]. There is a notable gap in the literature in viewing the change process from the employee's perspective.

Most of the research on environmental commitment and sustainability has focused on manufacturing industries [5]. Similarly, previous research that examines human factors in the field of organizational sustainability [17] has been conducted for the manufacturing industries. Within this framework service industry studies, such as the tourism industry, have received little interest in the literature. The aim of the study is to explore how human factors are managed by the tourism companies for organizational sustainability. Four case companies from airport management, airport transportation, hotel and meetings, and events and conferences sectors that are operating from Turkey have been chosen. Within the human aspect of change towards sustainability framework the three dimensions that will be examined are resistance to change, internal communication, and employee engagement in sustainability practices.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research is designed to be a qualitative research study as its nature and the research question is to explore how a situation happened in a real-life context [18]. Yin [19] suggests five major research strategies: experiments, case studies, surveys, histories, and the analysis of archival information and argues that when the research question involves questions like "how", "why", and "what", the case study is a suitable strategy. Bryman and Bell [20] note that case study is the most applied method in qualitative research. Case study is also an appropriate method in that it focuses on the processes instead of constant situations. Using case studies for sustainability is suitable as it is a context-dependent phenomenon. Yin describes single, holistic case studies and multiple case studies. A multiple-case study is also similar to what Stake [21] defines as a collective case study. It allows the researcher to

make comparisons within and across cases and increases the reliability of the findings by reporting on more than one story. For these reasons, in this study, a multi-case study is utilized.

### 2.1. Sampling

Tourism is a highly-fragmented industry which mainly includes accommodation, travel services, meetings, events and conferences (MICE), recreation and entertainment, food and beverage services, and transportation sectors. Considering this variety, multiple sectors were targeted in order to achieve a wholesome view of the industry (Table 1). Sample companies are carefully chosen to either replicate findings across cases or to predict contrasting results in multiple-case studies [18]. In addition to this criterion the choice of the companies was mainly dependent on their efforts for organizational sustainability. To fulfil this criterion companies were chosen depending on the availability of a sustainability report or membership to a sustainability related non-governmental organization (NGO). As there are only a handful of companies fulfilling this criterion in the industry four case companies were selected for this study.

**Table 1.** Case study companies.

Name of the Company *	AirportCo	TransportCo	HotelCo	CongressCo
Location	Istanbul	Istanbul	Istanbul/Ankara	Istanbul
Industry	Airport Management	Airport Transportation	Group (Including Hotels)	Meetings, Events and Conferences
Internationalization	Multinational	Multinational	Multinational	Multinational
Ownership	Publicly Listed	Publicly Listed	Privately Owned	Privately Owned
Employee size	15,000	4000	31,000	70
First self-standing sustainability report	2010	2013	2014	None, NGO membership

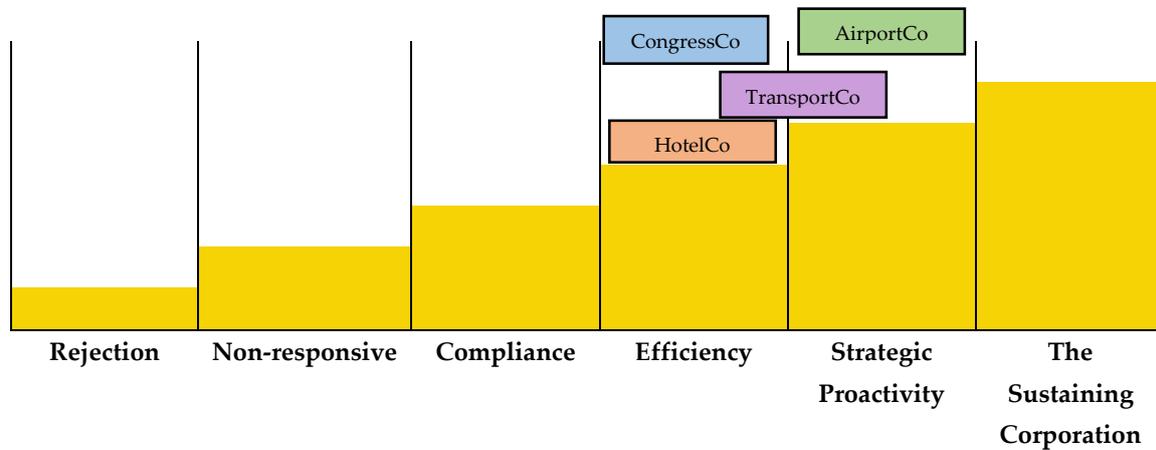
\*: Names of the companies have been changed to maintain anonymity.

The participants for the semi-interviews were chosen according to their position and involvement in sustainability. The key managers, such as Sustainability Manager or Human Resources Manager, were targeted for this, assuming that they would be involved in change process decisions and encountered human-related challenges during the process. The table below shows detailed information on sample companies.

### 2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Yin [18] suggests four potential data collection activities in qualitative research: interviewing, observing, collecting, and examining. Yin also motivates the researchers to combine different methods in that each method can reveal different evidence. In this research, as a primary data collection technique, qualitative interviews with questions derived from the theoretical models is preferred. Interviews with open-ended questions have the advantages of flexibility and they are more concentrated on the interviewee's own perceptions. The in-depth, face-to-face interviews took place in the headquarters of the companies and lasted between two to three hours. The interview questions were based on the sub-themes of (1) history of sustainability implementation in the organization, (2) current practices of sustainability (both in products and services and processes), and (3) the three indicators of the study. Secondary data from reports and web sites was also employed to triangulate the results. The interviews were transcribed and later coded using qualitative data analysis software NVivo 9.0. The clustering of the topics was firstly done using the theoretically-driven indicators and then brought together for case companies. After completing a within-case analysis, a cross-case analysis was conducted between four companies that helped to display the commonalities and differences between the cases. Figure 1 shows that what emerged from the findings of this research is a result of

“recognising patterns of relationships among constructs within and among cases and their underlying logical arguments” [22] (p. 25).



**Figure 1.** Comparative environmental sustainability of case companies.

The research design brings along some limitations as well. Firstly, it is difficult to assess how exactly the change process took place in case organizations without actually being a part of the processes; therefore, the findings rely on the perceptions of the interviewees. To overcome this hurdle we have asked managers to cite specific examples to support their perceptions. Secondly, the study is derived from a single industry, which can limit the generalizations of the results. Additionally, the research setting is an emerging market economy and the implementation of organizational sustainability needs to be evaluated within this context. Having recorded these shortcomings, we should also note that case companies are all multinationals, having operations within and outside of Turkey. Their operations in Turkey are geographically dispersed and both large and medium sized organizations are represented. The next section explains the conceptual framework and the relevant models used for exploring human factors. It aims to make the analysis process more transparent by explaining the indicators and the constructs in the models.

### 2.3. Conceptual Framework

Considering that becoming a sustainable corporation does not happen in a single day, organizations should treat sustainability achievement as a long term process. Accordingly, it is suggested that a paradigm shift is required to integrate sustainability holistically into organizations' operations [23]. As in many planned change management programs, progress is likely to be dependent on the long term commitment of the top management and organizational support for managers and employees. Doppelt [24], based on his research in the public and private institutions in the US and Europe, has suggested that in order for cultural change towards sustainability to happen interventions must be made to the governance system and leadership must be provided. This study interprets the sustainability implementation process as a planned change management program within organizations and benefits from the organizational change management literature [1,25]. An organization's stage of development in environmentally and socially responsible actions is considered to be important in evaluating the sustainability progress [26]. Scholars have put forward several models that depict the stages organisations go through for corporate sustainability. For this research the “Sustainability Phase Model” of Dunphy, Griffiths, and Benn [14] is used to describe the advancement stage of each case study company. Their model defines the level of human and ecological sustainability each organization attains as they move to a higher level of sustainability integration. As organizations progress across six stages of sustainability it is suggested that they will add on new strategies and practices into their operations that will make them more engaged in environmental and social activities.

Based on Velhurst and Boks' [17] definition we take *human factors* as those factors related to people management that can enable or disable the sustainability implementation process within organizations. In their research of eight Belgian and Dutch companies, Velhurst and Boks have considered the role of empowerment, internal communication, organizational culture, and resistance against change as human-related factors [17,27]. For this research indicators of resistance to change, internal communication, and employee engagement are deemed to be the most important for exploring human-related factors.

- (1) *Resistance to Change*: The seminal study by Coch and French [28] was the first to acknowledge resistance to change by employees and suggested that employees may react to change by being absent, displaying low efficiency, and showing aggression towards management. Similarly, as companies focus on installing change for sustainability they encounter resistance by employees at different levels. Based on Luthans' theory on attitudes, Lozano [29] explains attitudes and barriers to change at individual, group, and organizational levels. Accordingly, organizations develop diverse strategies to overcome barriers at different levels. In this research resistance to change questions were grouped into (1) resistance to change at individual, group and organizational levels, and (2) strategies used to overcome resistance at these levels.
- (2) *Internal Communication*: Effective internal communication can aid appropriate messages about sustainability implementation strategies to reach employees in a useful and acceptable manner. In this context, generally how sustainability is communicated to employees, or more specifically the content and the channels of communication, become critical for effective internal communication. Welch and Jackson [30] proposed to examine internal communication based on multiple stakeholders. The internal stakeholders are identified as line management, team peers, project peers, and corporate communication members. The fourth dimension is claimed to lead employee engagement and takes a broad approach, containing all employees rather than a specific group of employees. The framework that Welch and Jackson developed groups internal communication with regards to their level, direction, participants, and content. In this research internal communication questions were grouped into (1) participants, (2) direction, (3) content, (4) purpose, and (5) method.
- (3) *Employee Engagement in Sustainability Practices*: Human resource management (HRM) specialists can use CSR initiatives to attract, recruit, and retain employees that value an organization's commitment to the society [31]. Similarly, HRM can direct people-related policies so that employees are encouraged to give support for and take part in sustainability initiatives. It is significant to achieve organization-wide commitment to sustainability in order to achieve higher sustainability performance. Savitz [31] argues that companies create two types of employee groups in terms of engagement in sustainability practices. The first group is defined as *bystanders*, who are not directly involved in sustainability practices but are informed and content with the sustainability practices of the company. The second group is *participating employees* who are actively involved in sustainability efforts of the company. Another distinction that Savitz [30] makes is whether organizations follow strategies to engage employees at their work life or also personal life. In this research, employee engagement strategies-related questions were grouped into (1) bystander engagement and (2) participative engagement.

### 3. Results

This section reports on the within-case analysis. Each case section starts with company background, as the sector and the products/services are stated to have an influence on the strategies adopted for sustainability implementation [26].

### 3.1. CongressCo

#### 3.1.1. Sector and Company Background

The MICE sector, which involves the gathering of large groups, is global in its reach and economic impact. For the purposes of this study, the “events industry” is used for business falling under MICE. Events are typically held at hotels, conference centers, arenas, and convention or exhibition centers organized by agencies. The Turkish events industry is an important part of the tourism and hospitality business. Karagöz [32] stated that the Formula 1 Turkish Grand Prix in 2005 had caused 18 million TL increase in tourism sector earnings and, to a lesser extent, caused income gains in the agriculture industry, construction industry, in the trade sector, in the banking sector, and in the overall services sector.

With the economic gains it brings, the events industry offers a new source of economic income in the regions where attractiveness for traditional tourism decreases [33] and can lessen the negative effect of seasonality of tourism. However with a focus on only economic gains it is suggested that the negative impacts of conference tourism are, most of the time, neglected [34]. Raj and Musgrave [35] show us that air pollution due to transportation, material use, and pollution are severe impacts generated by the events sector. On the other hand, there is a tendency in the events sector to go green with the motivations of cost savings, customer pressures, community pressures, and legal constraints [36]. However, it is not easy to define a green event. David's [37] framework, which suggests to categories of waste, transport, accommodation, food consumption, energy, and water serve as a powerful tool to describe green events.

CongressCo is formed in 1991 in Turkey and serves global, regional, and local organizations. Since 2009 CongressCo has been organizing international conferences in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Ireland, and in the United States. CongressCo runs an average of 60 conferences per year with almost 40,000 meeting participants. As in many event companies, the organization consists of core employees (70+) and employs temporary workers during events and also outsources most of the work.

#### 3.1.2. Organizational Sustainability

CongressCo started its involvement with organizational sustainability when the company owner founded the Sustainable Development Association (a local NGO) in 2004. Later on, the company joined other voluntary initiatives like WWF Green Office and has received ISO 14001 certificate. So far the company is stated to be the only one in the MICE sector in Turkey with a commitment to sustainability. Matching international competition is stated as a motive in explaining their commitment to sustainability. Their international competitors are already offering green meetings to their customers. Along with this, they also recognize the cost savings they attain as a result of their environmental sustainability practices.

The HRM department manages the sustainability at CongressCo. Although sustainability orientation is not a prerequisite for recruitment in the company, it is stated to be a plus. There is no specific training program for sustainability, but during orientation training environmental policies of the company are transmitted to the newcomers. After arrival, the employees are informed about the environmental policies through the company intranet; Green Office practices around the world are shared routinely and employees are encouraged to attend Sustainable Development Association meetings.

For environmental sustainability the company is beyond the compliance level as they do more than what the national laws require. The company has adopted several Green Office practices, such as controlling their energy, water, and office supplies consumption. The company also makes use of web conferences with its customers whenever they can. However, the results of these efforts are not measured and reported, which means that they will probably not be as effectively managed as imagined. So far, despite an emerging trend in the sector, CongressCo does not offer green events; indicating that sustainability is not yet reflected in their service offering. Judging on these examples

the management of environment component stays between the Compliance and Efficiency levels in Dunphy *et al.*'s [14] phase model.

For human sustainability, the company stays on the Compliance level as there is no effort to go beyond the legislative framework. The company conducts occupational health and safety (OH and S) trainings and employee surveys. Quite interestingly, the manager explains human sustainability in terms of the customers and their efforts for this aim, rather than for employees as the interviewee states "We are trying to create an important awareness among our customers; therefore we began to announce our future conferences via digital means".

### 3.1.3. Human Factors

The company states to observe no resistance when sustainability was introduced to the company at the individual or group levels. To the contrary, the employees embraced sustainability efforts because the newly introduced software program reduced their paperwork and lessened daily workload. The reported resistance came from the system dimension for CongressCo. The company operates from a shared apartment building which does not allow the company to track the individual electricity and water consumption.

As for the strategies to overcome resistance, the company focuses on individual and group level strategies, as they develop no strategy for the system level. To lessen any resistance to change, the company developed a reward system in which the departments which use the least paper are rewarded and the company pays attention to keeping their employees informed through training and sharing of information. The drawback on the system level is perceived as it is out of their control area. Taking into account that their sustainability level is at a basic phase, and they have not yet integrated sustainability into their services, it is expected that they will not face much resistance and, accordingly, their strategies are at a basic level. At this point, judging on their strategies, we may say that they are undermining the effects of resistance to change that might take place at later stages of sustainability implementation.

CongressCo aims to make employees aware of sustainability related goals, educate them, and engage employees through internal communication of sustainability. The company observes an increase in job performance as a result of clear and open internal communication. The content of the sustainability communication can be grouped into (1) benefits of sustainability to the company and (2) current activities on sustainability. The company works on project basis and small company size enables a lot of informal and direct communication through which they can reach their employees. The channel of internal communication is via face-to-face meetings and e-mails. CongressCo prefers to receive feedback through employee surveys and informal voice opportunities.

Overall, the company is aware of the importance of internal communication as they see many benefits in it and use it for multiple purposes. The company relies on the informal office environment for open communication; however, the number of channels used can be considered to be inadequate considering the broadness of messages they aim to communicate. The messages on sustainability should be conveyed clearly with a richer content, in addition to announcements and achievements.

CongressCo aims to create business-oriented employees through its diverse engagement programs. Sustainability is made one of the stated company values and is partially represented in employee KPI as the mastery of technological use. The engagement activities are aimed at both bystander and participative engagement. The internal awareness-raising communication and training and employee surveys are examples for bystander engagement practices. The reward system is an example for the participative engagement programs. Having noted that, we need to also record that the programs are geared for more work-related behavior. For the personal engagement of employees and families the company collects the technological wastes of the employees for recycling. Overall CongressCo is in a good position to manage employee engagement; the pace needs to pick up as the company aims for higher levels of sustainability implementation.

### 3.2. AirportCo

#### 3.2.1. Sector and Company Background

In Turkey, the aviation sector started with a small airport in Istanbul in 1912. The first flight abroad was realized in 1947. Since then the sector has grown to include 55 airports in the country and there are two international airports in Istanbul and another one under construction. The national airline company Turkish Airlines Company (THY) has also grown noticeably over the years and was chosen to be the leader in Europe for four consecutive years [38]. The government outsources the management of airports to private institutions and one of the two airports in Istanbul is under AirportCo's management.

AirportCo was established in 1997 and today is the leading airport operator in Turkey. Along with its domestic operations AirportCo manages 14 airports in seven countries. The company has been publicly traded on the Istanbul Stock Exchange since 2007.

While airports are aiming for increasing their capacity and quality, sustainability is becoming an important concern for airports. Airport Cooperative Research Programme researched the current and future driving forces behind sustainability [39]. The study showed that governmental regulations arose as the key driver for implementation of sustainability practices, followed by airport policies, corporate responsibility, and stakeholder concerns/relations and suggested that stakeholder concerns are an upcoming key factor for the future.

#### 3.2.2. Organizational Sustainability

Middle and top management conjointly started the sustainability at AirportCo with the aim of setting a framework for the environmental and social practices of the company. As the interviewee states "Initially we had CSR initiatives then we progressed to sustainability implementation. We approached sustainability more systematically; we first identified our key stakeholders and later developed strategies for starting a dialogue with them".

The first self-standing sustainability report was released in 2010 and the company views these reports as part of their dialogue building practices and an opportunity for increased transparency. Sustainability management is coordinated by a Sustainability Committee, which works directly under the Corporate Communications Director and the Group CEO. The Committee, which is also accountable to the Board of Directors, coordinates the activities of sustainability work groups at each airport that AirportCo manages. These groups take responsibility in sustainability measurements and report to the general managers of each airport. We may interpret this highly-planned matrix structure as the companies' positive intentions to further integrate sustainability implementation to both lower levels and all its operations and group companies.

The environmental sustainability is stated as one of the strategic priorities of the company. AirportCo has been reporting about its carbon footprint to CDP, follows Airport Carbon Accreditation programs, and goes beyond common standards like ISO 14001. Environmental impacts are measured and reported on and new technical tools are developed to tackle operational difficulties with sustainability implementation. The company is also in the process of extending its efforts to its purchasing decisions. The company records that their operational productivity increased after sustainability implementation. We may note that the AirportCo has gone beyond Efficiency gains phase into Strategic Proactivity phase in terms of environmental sustainability.

In the social domain, the company puts emphasis on both employees and customers. The certificates that they have received for OH and S and customer satisfaction, the measuring and reporting of human-related factors, like number of disabled and immigrant workers, women at technical and managerial jobs, hours of training, accidents, and communicating its policies for better managing these issues suggest that the company has gone beyond the Efficiency gains stage, and made human-related issues a part of their strategy.

### 3.2.3. Human Factors

AirportCo has experienced the highest resistance in the initial stages of sustainability implementation. During this time period, the lack of expertise within the company acted as a barrier as they were building the structure for sustainability. Most resistance was on the individual level, as employees saw sustainability implementation as an extra burden to their day-to-day tasks. They also did not know how to proceed due to lack of prior experience and proper internal communication. At the group level, a major challenge was differences of the stakeholders on how they perceived and applied sustainability.

The lack of awareness among employees had initially become a hurdle for the managers of sustainability. They overcame this by introducing sustainability communication practices, such as creating awareness-raising posters and providing sustainability training. The perception differences of sustainability at the group level were transformed into an advantage by treating this as a means for knowledge sharing. Top-management support is also stated to be a key determinant for effective dealing with resistance.

AirportCo aims for two way communication and develops channels to realize this aim. Along with traditional channels like e-mail and the company intranet, an innovative channel used by the company is a corporate social network site called Yammers in which stakeholder dialogue is developed. The corporate magazine *Newsport* is also used for sustainability communication and *Ideaport*, an idea incubator, rewards innovative projects. The content of sustainability communication are (1) sustainability goals, (2) achievements, and (3) current projects, together with targets. AirportCo pays attention to a well-planned and rich communication because it sees many benefits in it.

AirportCo is aware of human-related challenges in implementing sustainability. The interviewee states "Management of resources, human resources, lack of awareness are among our challenges. Our first initiative for these problems was to raise awareness of the employees through trainings".

Engagement of employees is measured by employee turnover and employee engagement surveys in the company. Communication of sustainability and training are treated as engagement activities. Sustainability is integrated into jobs of a certain group of employees and performance evaluation based on sustainability is conducted only for them. Overall, we may record that specific activity to create action remains limited.

## 3.3. *TransportCo*

### 3.3.1. Sector and Company Background

Airports with their highly-spread land use, large facilities, and the technologies they employ require the cooperation of many parties for effective management [38]. The ground service function of an airport handles passenger and baggage services. In Turkey, the legal authority for ground services, Civil Aviation General Directory, regulates all the details of this service. Although all of the services can be provided by a single company, different companies can operate and provide different parts of the ground services. In Istanbul Atatürk Airport *TransportCo* is one of the three companies that offer ground services. *TransportCo* was firstly established as a unit to provide food and ground services for the national airline THY in 1993. After 1958, it was formed as a self-standing company and began to provide services for other airline companies, as well. In 1987 it was divided into two companies, with *TransportCo* continuing to provide only ground services. The company was privatized and since 2012 AirportCo owns the company. *TransportCo* operates in 28 airports in Turkey and eight airports internationally.

### 3.3.2. Organizational Sustainability

*TransportCo* that was involved in quality management processes for a long time began its first sustainability management practices within this work unit. After being acquired by AirportCo in 2012 the sustainability efforts became more organized around the concept and the first sustainability report was released in 2013. Voluntary certification is received for quality management, environmental

management, OH and S, and customer satisfaction and the company is certified as a “Green Organization” by the Civil Aviation General Directory.

In terms of environmental sustainability, the company goes beyond legislation and is gradually moving beyond efficiency gains. As the interviewer has stated “We have to go beyond compliance with the legislations. We adhere to voluntary certification because we want to do more. We want to increase our efficiency and achieve cost savings because of our sustainable practices”.

The company cooperates with competitors operating at the same airport for waste management, energy savings, and reduction of carbon emissions for their customer transport busses.

For human sustainability, the company gives priority to employee and customer safety. In addition to basic training TransportCo develops specific tools for preventing injuries and increasing safety. They provide a safety alert system on their corporate website. The company goes beyond legislation in hiring disadvantaged people; all employees are given sign language training and the HR department has learned interview techniques for hiring disadvantaged people. The awareness-raising activities go beyond the company and reach families of the employees, as well. It can be seen that the company is more developed in terms of human sustainability with more complex and varied tools.

### 3.3.3. Human Factors

TransportCo reports to encounter most resistance from blue collar workers. The interviewee states that “52% of our annual budget consists of labor costs. And three fourths of our employees are blue collar workers. Creating a common language for sustainability becomes difficult with a diverse workforce (educational and socio-economic background). The term sustainability can stay as an abstract concept in people’s mind”.

The barrier on the individual and group level seems to stem from the complex and vague definition of sustainability as it is hard for a blue collar worker to fully understand and adapt it into his/her daily business. Following up sustainability-related developments is also a challenge for the employees as there are few resources in the Turkish language and lack of foreign language acts as a barrier to follow international context. The company rents the rights to operate in an airport from the government and, at the same time, buys electricity and water from the government. As there is no government incentive for sustainability initiatives (e.g., reduction of energy and water use) the company fears that the use of alternative sources of energy, such as solar power, would threaten the continuity of its business with government. This creates a system-level resistance for the company.

To manage the resistance effectively TransportCo reverts to effective communication tools. A simple language is used to reach blue collar workers. Sustainability is not made a company value but the concept is made visible through projects aimed at blue collar workers. Representatives of blue collar workers are included in the project meetings on sustainability.

The management system aims to reach all employees using as many channels and methods as possible. This is maintained by nine Integrated Management Responsible Officers, who are located at different departments within the operating units of the company. A two-way communication is sustained through these officers using toolbox meetings before each shift, weekly meetings, and monthly OH and S meetings. The Communications department uses LCD screens that are located throughout the facilities and posters for sustainability communication. All points are visited two times a year by the management team and feedback from employees is taken during these site visits.

The content of the sustainability messages are (1) education of employees, (2) reasoning the causes for implementing sustainability, and (3) explaining the projected gains of sustainability implementation. The company believes that effective communication practices lead to job commitment and sustainability awareness, which will later create employee participation and business risk minimization.

TransportCo takes the human element of sustainability as a critical factor to be managed. The company creates both bystander and participating employees as the level of awareness and job requirements vary among different groups of employees. Through effective use of internal communication channels and sustainability training provided to all employees, the company creates

bystander employees, who are knowledgeable but not participative in initiatives. The company believes that families of employees are an important part of their stakeholders and the interviewee states that “We believe that awareness at work will be transformed to awareness and action at home and employees will adopt their job behaviors to their house environment as well”.

Most of the human related effort by the company is on creating participating employees. Sustainability related criteria are made part of the performance evaluations of those employees that have sustainability implementation as a part of their job definition and rewards are provided accordingly. Sustainability performance is also measured at group level for each operation and also rewarded. Top management support is stated as a driver for the reduction of resistance and attaining higher engagement, especially for those employees who have longer tenure in the company.

### 3.4. HotelCo

#### 3.4.1. Sector and Company Background

The first hotels started to open in the 19th century in Istanbul, such as the Pera Palace Hotel, which was made popular by the Orient Express [40]. In the 1950s new international chain hotels entered the market and Istanbul Hilton Bosphorus was the first five star international hotel in the country. Today, a recent study shows that local chain hotels outnumber international chain hotels in Turkey [41]. HotelCo is a conglomerate, which has investments in sectors like tourism, energy, airport management, construction, port management, and food. The conglomerate was founded in 1976 and has entered tourism and airport sectors consecutively in 1995 and 2008. Today the group own and operates eight hotels in the country.

#### 3.4.2. Organizational Sustainability

HotelCo shows its commitment to sustainability by being a member of Sustainable Development Association and signing the UN Global compact. The sustainability vision is given as “meeting today's needs without harming future generation's capacity to meet their needs”, which can be evaluated as very generic and shows that they are at the early stages of their sustainability journey. Some of their group companies go beyond legislations and they now aim to develop a framework for sustainability for the entire group of companies. They have assigned a sustainability officer for each sector and are forming a committee at the top management level overseeing the sustainability activities of the group. The reporting of sustainability is stated to help the company to perform better in sustainability implementation as Assaf [42] has suggested. The company displays differences in levels of their human and environmental sustainability development.

The environmental sustainability is concentrated more on efficiency improvements, such as water and energy use, and measurement of their carbon footprint. The hotels do a little bit more by being involved in forestation activities and protection of biodiversity around their facilities. On the other hand, in terms of human sustainability, HotelCo only complies with legal requirements, such as compulsory OH and S training and providing employee rights enforced by the government. Most activities are designed as CSR activities considering the customers and the society.

#### 3.4.3. Human Factors

HotelCo experienced resistance during the initial steps of the process. The extra workload together with the lack of awareness about the business case for sustainability made it highly difficult for all employees. At the organizational level, communication among different departments and individuals during the reporting period was a hurdle for the company. This situation was also due to lack of a sustainability framework and a system. The interviewee recalled that time period as “At first, collecting data, obtaining accurate data, understanding the reporting, content of the report, information exchange, etc. problems occurred and there was a delay in the release of the report. When I look back now, I can say that it was a tough job. Beginning the journey was the hardest part”.

To handle the resistance and barriers, effective communication was utilized for persuasion. Persistence is found to be effective for communication of sustainability. The individual-level resistance is also stated to fade away with the increasing employee awareness of the issues. The company aims to overcome the organizational level resistance by the formation of the sustainability committee and setting a corporate sustainability system.

The sustainability report is seen as a tool for internal communication in which the company reports on its sustainability projects and accomplishments. A two-way communication is targeted by means of an online suggestions system, workshops, and a survey administered to white-collar employees that include a detailed set of questions asking their feedback on sustainability initiatives. The content of the messages conveyed in these channels are (1) sustainability policies, (2) information on current projects, and (3) future plans for sustainability. The company projects to achieve employee support and raise awareness through their communication efforts. Employee commitment is also expected to increase with a sense of honour and care on the employee side.

The company measures and monitors the employee satisfaction about sustainability implementation processes. So far, sustainability is used in performance evaluations of few employees that have sustainability in their job definitions. Their first sustainability report helped to raise awareness, but they believe the second report will go beyond just creating awareness, but there will also be an increase in employee commitment to the initiatives. Many employees take part in the CSR projects as volunteers and the company aims to encourage their participation with training. Having recorded these we can define their efforts as geared toward work-focused engagement and creating bystander engagement. The bystanders are expected to turn into participants at work through voluntary activities and also act as aware employees at home.

#### 4. Discussion

The human aspect of the sustainability implementation processes is an under-researched area in the literature. It is asserted that human factors significantly affect the success of a change management program by creating hurdles or easing the process. This research explored how three human-related factors are managed by tourism companies during sustainability implementation processes. The findings display advancement of sustainability implementation in these organizations in terms of environmental and human aspects and explore the use of strategies for managing three human factors.

In three case companies their environmental sustainability is found to be ahead of their human sustainability. Figures 1 and 2 show organizational sustainability development of case companies using the “Sustainability Phase Model” of Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn [14]. Often, environmental sustainability is tackled first as it is possible to achieve cost savings and show efficiency in operational goals much more quickly than the human dimension.

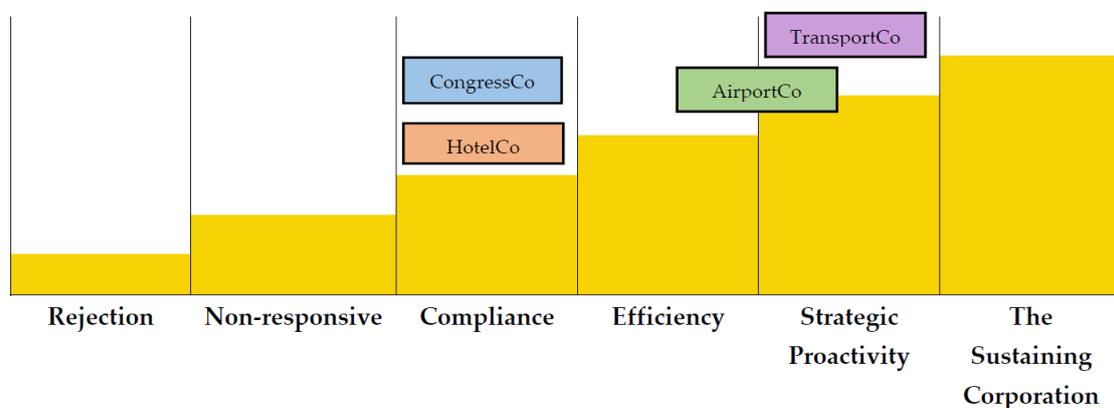


Figure 2. Comparative human sustainability of case companies.

Two of the four case companies are found to be only fulfilling their legal obligations in terms of human sustainability (Figure 2). This is partially surprising when the weight of human factors involved is to be considered in the tourism industry. Case organizations describe human sustainability more in terms of the customer component than employee component. On the contrary, previous experience in sustainability management suggests getting employees involved is a better corporate strategy than customers as it is potentially more rewarding in terms of business results [29]. There is no integration found between environmental and human strategies as none of the companies have moved to the strategic proactivity stage in both domains. TransportCo is found to be in a better position to begin integrating strategies and aim for a more holistic sustainability understanding.

Previous experiences in the change management literature suggest that if top management support is missing from sustainability management initiatives they are likely to fail or be ineffective [43]. The findings of our research support this point as all interviewees mentioned top management support as essential for getting the message across and lessening resistance. In three case organizations sustainability initiatives have been started top-down, and in one case organization it had started with the efforts of top management and an individual department so each organization had actually experienced this type of support. Kuster *et al.* [43] suggest the biggest impact is made when managers and supervisors are engaged in the initiatives. However, an organization-wide engagement from managers is not observed in any of the companies yet.

Organizations adopt diverse strategies for sustainability management and they may start from different entry points. Savitz and Weber [44] suggest companies may initiate sustainability change for various reasons, such as achieving higher operational goals, fulfilling customer expectations, or gaining competitive advantage in the marketplace. Parallel to this conclusion, the case study organizations in this research have also displayed different motives for change. CongressCo has started because of their competitors, AirportCo started with a sustainability framework and strategy to gain competitive advantage, and TransportCo had started for achieving higher operational goals.

Individuals and groups will be involved in the sustainability implementation processes differently and at different times [31,43]. Some groups will be involved with the changes prior to the others as their job requirement involves sustainability implementation, such as sustainability and CSR managers and quality assurance officers. At TransportCo, the sustainability officer, previously the quality management officer, has been involved in the processes much before than the other managers. Clearly, these employees' absorption capacity, knowledge level, and commitment is going to be higher than the others. During this transition period these groups may pressure other managers or employees for speed [43]. The three case companies experienced this kind of pressure during their first sustainability reporting, where some had to pressure the others for data collection and data sharing.

Changes in organizations can cause employees to experience fear and uncertainty [43] and they may not know how to proceed. The interviewee at AirportCo has shared that there were times when employees were stagnated as they did not comprehend what the next step was. During the transition phase people give up the familiar and routine processes and adapt to the new ones, which may cause resistance [43]. Three of the four case companies indicated that they faced resistance in the initial steps as employees had complained about extra work. So we may say the resistance was not for the sustainability concept but rather to the workload or lack of a system. This finding is similar to Verhulst and Boks [17] had found in their study. Most of the resistance is uttered on the organizational level in the initial stages of sustainability integration in the company system.

Strategies that are set up in the top management level demonstrate organizational members a road map for achieving organizational goals. As in other planned change management programs an effective change for sustainability requires an "integrated strategic plan" and "an aligned sustainability task force" [45] (p. 2). Even when it starts as *ad hoc* change, it is recommended that a strategic approach to sustainability to be developed and linked with business and HRM strategies [31]. In this research we observe that as case organizations start to integrate sustainability into their operations, they acknowledge that the lack of a framework slows their progress and they can only move onto the

next level by taking a more strategic and planned approach to sustainability. Three case organizations have set up sustainability committees at the top level and assigned sustainability officers within different levels. This finding confirms with literature as many companies that take a strategic approach to sustainability are hiring sustainability officers [31,46]. The case organizations prefer to assign internal recruits for these positions as they believe the sustainability manager needs to understand the business needs of the organization together with principles of sustainability. CongressCo is the only organization that has given the sustainability management duty to the HRM department.

A common view among scholars studying sustainability management has become that HRM is significant for sustainability [47]. In addition to strategic HRM, integration with people practices, such as workforce planning, recruitment, training, performance management, and rewards, are needed to support sustainability strategies [48]. We observe that the most common integration with HRM functions has been in the training programs of the case study organizations. While CongressCo has included sustainability as a part of its orientation program, the other three use trainings as knowledge-sharing opportunities. Multinational companies like Unilever and Walmart have started their sustainability journeys a while ago and have already included employee engagement strategies as a part of their change management programs [49]. Unilever, for instance, have placed sustainability criteria in every employee's KPIs. In the case study organizations, performance criteria and rewards have been provided for only those employees that are directly involved in sustainability projects. This finding is expected as case organizations are in early stages of their sustainability implementation processes (Figures 1 and 2) and sustainability has not yet been made every manager's job.

Within-case analysis show two important patterns among case companies. The first pattern suggests that the most addressed human aspect is *internal communication* as it used to influence both resistance to change and employee engagement in sustainability (Figure 3). The close involvement of communication managers of the case companies in sustainability practices can have a role in this outcome. Through two-way communication organizations expect to reduce employee resistance to change. They use communication to raise awareness and transfer knowledge, which is an outcome that creates *bystander employees* in sustainability practices. The *bystander employee* term in this research is not particularly used in a negative meaning, but indicates that these employees are informed and content about sustainability practices but do not directly contribute to sustainability-related processes. The second pattern points out that companies who are more advanced in the human sustainability phase use a greater number of communication channels with fuller content (e.g., TransportCo).



**Figure 3.** Human aspect model: interacting human factors during sustainability implementation.

*Resistance to change* is reported to exist in the initial stages of implementation, which organizations overcome by increasing internal communication. Advanced companies such as TransportCo develop a greater number of strategies when they face resistance. Cross-case analysis demonstrates that consistent management of resistance and barriers makes it easier for such companies to move to the next stage of sustainability integration.

The strategies followed by organizations result in creating more *bystander employees* than *participative employees* (Figure 3). Awareness is considered to be the initial step for creating *participating employees* by case companies, which is also confirmed by the literature. Employees go through “three distinct stages” before they are fully engaged in organizational activities [49] (p. 15). After informing the employees about sustainability issues, organizations should get to know their “employee types, motivations, identity, collective norms and desired ‘To be’ state” [49] (p. 15). Then can organizations develop better engagement strategies for sustainability.

Since two case study organizations deal more with *resistance* at their current sustainability stage they are not occupied with development of engaged employees and yet they do not fully conceptualize the importance of having *participative employees* for sustainability integration (HotelCo, CongressCo, and AirportCo to some extent). However, those organizations that are more advanced in human sustainability practices develop clearer strategies for developing *participative engagement* (e.g., TransportCo in Figure 2). Another explanation to why engagement to sustainability programs is not managed effectively could also be explained by the lack of involvement of HRM in the processes. Sustainability managers view human-related issues as HRM’s responsibility. On the other hand, HRM professionals do not manage sustainability engagement carefully because they see it as a part of sustainability officer’s work. Organizations will need to clear this role ambiguity to start developing comprehensive strategies and policies for encouraging employees to become participative in actions.

We accept that there is a difference in readiness of case companies to move forward toward sustainable practices. Even if they are all part of the tourism sector and founded in the same country, external and internal factors like ownership structure, organizational history, size, sector, customers, profitability, and organizational culture effect their motivation and how they embrace sustainability. Two of the four organizations (TransportCo and AirportCo) are found to be more advanced in terms of having invested in both environmental and human dimensions (Figures 1 and 2).

Both the Sustainability Phase Model [14] and Human Aspect Model (Figure 3) allow us to make a systematic comparison of case organizations. Using these two models we may mention an emerging pattern about managing human aspect of sustainability. There is a positive link between advancement in the organizational sustainability phase and sophistication in the management of human aspects. The scores of TransportCo put the company apart from the other three (Figure 4). Based on this observation we may state that organizations that are at a more advanced level of sustainability also develop sophisticated strategies to manage their human-related factors of resistance, communication, and engagement.

Dunphy, Griffiths, and Benn [14] argue that competitive advantages can be gained when ecological and human sustainability elements have been effectively integrated to the strategies of the organization at all levels. TransportCo lacks integration as it is more advanced in the human domain, while the environmental domain is in transition from the Efficiency to the Proactivity phase. Therefore, the company is in need for a fully-integrated sustainability framework and supporting environmental and social supporting systems.

	CongressCo	AirportCo	TransportCo	HotelCo
Resistance	3	4	4	3
Communication	3	4	4	4
Engagement	4	3	5	4

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not Effective				Effective	

**Figure 4.** Comparative human factors of case study companies.

## 5. Implications for Management and Conclusions

This qualitative study explored how four tourism organizations founded in Turkey managed human-related factors during sustainability implementation. We believe embedding sustainability is more than top manager's or sustainability officer's agenda, but also the middle managers' concern. The results from this paper offer valuable insights for practitioners. First, it has shown the positive link between management of human factors and advancement in organizational sustainability in practice. This can assist managers to purposefully take into account human-related factors and increase their chances of successful sustainability implementation. Second, this research warns practitioners on the trap of communicating too much but not achieving the desired results. The ultimate goal of organizations in relation to managing human factors should be to reduce resistance to change and get employees involved in work-related sustainability practices [27]. Informing the employees and getting them on board is the first step, but not enough for participative engagement. The companies who are better at engaging their employees are the ones who can produce a link between the employee's daily work and sustainability. Managers need to take into account the existing sub-cultures within the organization, get to know their employees' motivations and align the new value system with daily tasks. Indeed, the results confirm that employees are not resistant to sustainability but they are resistant to extra workload and are perplexed due to lack of guidance. Therefore, providing support during implementation stages can overcome these difficulties (e.g., trainings, coaching, supporting catalyzing social networks, green teams, and directed volunteer programs).

Third, sustainability requires a deep change that necessitates engagement of employees throughout the organization. The involvement of educated human resource managers for employee engagement appears essential. HRM can contribute in two ways. The functions of employee management can become more sustainable (e.g., virtual employment screening of job applicants) and become exemplary for the other managers [48]. HRM can add a sustainability component to its human resource management functions (e.g., selecting green-oriented employees, reshaping the employee brand as a sustainable company, including sustainability criteria as a part of goals, performance evaluations and rewards, encouraging employee voice for improvements, and monitoring through tools like sustainability engagement surveys). Fourth, moving beyond the efficiency level and gaining competitive advantages can only happen through integration of sustainability in the two domains. A framework that embraces consistent message from top-down, embedded sustainability into core job functions and decision processes, organization-wide sustainability goals are suggested as methods for engaging employees in the implementation processes [31,45].

While this article has referred to much work from recent literature and attempted to add upon previous scholarly work, there remains many more unanswered questions about the human aspects of sustainability. Further research is required to explore how *bystander employees* can be transformed into *participating employees* and which HRM strategies can support this transformation in other contexts.

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### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

NGO	non-governmental organization
MICE	meetings, events and conferences
CDP	Carbon Disclosure Project

HRM	human resource management
KPI	key performance indicator
CSR	corporate social responsibility
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
THY	Turkish Airlines

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