

# Sustainability in services: Are we ready for it?

The idea of sustainability has seen a slow but sure awakening in the various business industries. An increasing number of enterprises are pursuing sustainability because it not only brings operational benefits such as cost savings and waste reduction but also improves innovative performance. According to Wolfson (2016), the concept of sustainability lies within a simple golden rule, “Treat others as you would like to be treated”. In general, the idea of sustainability is concerned with the integration and reconciliation of three essential aspects — environmental, social and economic values — to maintain life in the long term.

Sustainable service can be defined as “a service that goes beyond fulfilling immediate customer demands (perpetuated for a long time) without negatively affecting the natural and social environment”. The discussion of sustainability in the service industry is relatively new. This is not surprising as, by nature, it is a people-intensive industry that relies less on natural capital and more on human capital. Hence, it is common for service-based management to build the wrong perception that their business is less concerned about sustainability as the industry causes less harm to the environment.

Services permeate every aspect of our lives and the distinctions between goods and services are not always clear. Even in businesses providing services, there are still some tangible elements such as buildings, equipment and facilities for daily operations. Hence, there are still opportunities for the service providers to integrate eco- and sustainability tools such as CleanServ in their business to boost profits, strengthen the community and protect the environment.

## The CleanServ — Concept

According to Wolfson, Tavor and Mark (2013), clean service or CleanServ was designed with sustainability at its core — efficiently using resources to minimise



Serving it  
up to green

BY  
DR TAN AILING  
School of Hospitality  
Sunway University

or avoid altogether an undesirable effect on the natural environment or offering alternatives that will somehow reduce current production processes or services. It comprises five categories defined in descending order: prevention, reduction, replacement, efficiency and offset. It is categorised from most to least sustainable based on its “clean character” or in other words, its potential to decrease the production of goods.

## CleanServ — Prevention

This type of service prevents the production of additional goods or delivery of another service by offering an alternative solution. This solution is solely based on service delivery. An example is repairing used furniture to provide people with a more affordable alternative to buying new furniture.

## CleanServ — Reduction

This type of service offers an alternative solution based on less intensive use of the same resources, products and technology. In other words, it provides sustainability by minimising the utilisation of natural resources or goods to reduce damage to the environment. An example is using an energy saving system in hotel rooms.

## CleanServ — Replace

This involves exploiting other resources, products and technologies to deliver the same solution in the form of alternative products or services with the aim of reducing the use of natural resources. The issuance of e-billing by hotels or restaurants is a good example in the hospitality industry.

## CleanServ — Efficiency

This service type enhances operational performance and efficiency by improving the utilisation of resources and/or reducing discharge during the

production, delivery or use of a certain goods or service. It involves complementary services that are delivered in parallel to the production and delivery process and includes ecosystem services and environment services. For example, usage of carbon labelling to describe carbon emission during the production, transport and disposal of products is a good way to oblige suppliers to improve productivity and provide customers with a consistent method to evaluate and choose the most sustainable product.

## CleanServ — Offset

The last category is offset. This is a complementary service that compensates for the amount of resources utilised and/or discharged during the production, delivery or use of a certain goods or service. An example of “offset” that can be used is the use of recycled paper during production.

In conclusion, CleanServ should also uphold four fundamental principles. First, promote sustainability on a global scale. The service should involve a more sustainable solution that aims to minimise the use of natural resources or cuts or eliminates emissions and waste. Second, to reduce the production of goods, the service should offer an alternative solution and reduce or, if possible, eliminate the tangible products that are involved in the service. The third principle is that all services should imbue both their core value and super value with sustainability and oblige both the customers and the suppliers to adopt more responsible approaches to minimise the negative impact on the social and natural environments. Lastly, they must function jointly and reciprocally. The service should incorporate multiple suppliers and customers, with the aim of propagating the value of co-creation. Are we ready to grab the bull by the horns? E