

Barriers to Tour Operator Sustainable Supply Chain Management

JOANNE BADDELEY and XAVIER FONT

Abstract: Tour operators requesting their contracted overseas accommodations providers to apply, measure and report their sustainability actions are facing a number of barriers when trying to ensure the effective implementation of environmental sustainability criteria in particular. This article reviews how sustainability systems are being challenged by organizational habit and perceptions rather than analytical decision-making with respect to the relationship between health and safety, quality and sustainability. Environmental indicators are identified as the most conflictive; the key findings demonstrate that most challenges require a change in human behaviour rather than a technical solution. The data suggests that tour operators need to develop sustainability auditing tools that consider the impacts upon health, safety and quality within the accommodations. The Travelife sustainability auditing system provides a useful case study to demonstrate the necessary requirement for a complementary approach when conducting accommodations audits.

Keywords: accommodation auditing; hotels; risk; tour operators; Travelife; sustainability; supply chain management.

Introduction

Major UK tour operators have subscribed to the Travelife Sustainability System as their preferred means of assessing their accommodation providers against environmental, social and economic criteria. Travelife is in effect a form of business to business sustainability certification programme, with increasing market exposure through tour operators. Some of these companies operate from a variety of source markets within the EU and as far away as Egypt, Canada and India, vastly increasing the potential for Travelife to become a globally recognized brand. As companies aim to meet sustainability criteria and indicators under the Travelife system or other schemes, they are finding perceived and real barriers and symbiosis between these and other aspects of managing their business, such as quality, and health and safety (H&S) requirements.

The Travelife Sustainability System is a web-based data platform allowing accommodation businesses to monitor and self-assess their current sustainability performance across environmental, social and economic impacts. Businesses can purchase a subscription to the system and have their performance level independently assessed via an audit and the top performers in terms of these verified audits receive a Travelife award of Gold, Silver or Bronze. Tour operators are able to purchase a subscription to the system and can then

use it as a means to understanding and managing the impacts of their accommodation providers. Participating tour operators are able to promote the awards to customers via their websites and brochures. Currently, award promotion is available to tour operators for all awarded businesses that have purchased a subscription to the Travelife System.

This paper reports on the efforts undertaken by Thomas Cook UK and Ireland to assess the sustainability policies, procedures and activities of the hotels they contract using the Travelife system. Tour operators have trained staff to audit accommodation providers against the Travelife criteria. The research focuses on the auditor's perspective, as they ultimately have direct access to the actual practices of the hotels and are responsible for scoring sustainability actions in the field. We will compare these auditor perceptions against literature, expert advice and personal experience in auditing to assess the gap between perception and likelihood of sustainability impacting both positively and negatively in quality and H&S requirements, to draw lessons for further research and practice.

A review of the available literature revealed that there is actually very little written about the specific barriers to implementation of environmental or social criteria in the context of H&S or quality assurance. On the other hand,

JOANNE BADDELEY is Sustainable Destinations Manager, Thomas Cook UK & Ireland, Western Maintenance Area, Runger Lane, Manchester Airport, M90 5FL, UK. e-mail: joanne.baddeley@thomascok.com

XAVIER FONT is Director of Studies, International Centre for Responsible Tourism, Leeds Metropolitan University, Bronte 113 Headingley Campus LS6 3QW, Leeds, UK. e-mail: x.font@leedsmet.ac.uk

supply chain management (SCM) as a complementary factor to good quality products has been widely researched, particularly in the manufacturing sector. The research that has been undertaken regarding why the tourism industry has been slow to integrate sustainability into these SCM practices highlights H&S and legislation as the principal barriers; however, there is a distinct lack of written material that recommends practical solutions for the tourism supply chain to be able to overcome this. For this reason, the literature review focuses on the development from SCM to sustainable supply chain management (SSCM), the extent to which this has been integrated into the tour operating sector and the challenges that tour operators face in order to implement SSCM with their accommodations suppliers in destinations.

Literature Review

Supply Chain Management

SCM has its origins in logistics, concerned with the management of the flow of materials and information from source to customer across the entire range of materials handling and movement functions, and throughout an organization and its supply channels (Eastham et al. 2001; Font et al. 2008; Schwartz et al. 2008). Available literature focuses predominantly on the manufacturing industry with the majority of references featuring products rather than services. The objective of supply chain management tends to be improved quality, efficiency and profitability—the more a business actively engages with its supply chain, both upstream with suppliers and downstream with customers, the better it performs (Frolich 2001; Tan 2001). This is no longer a competitive advantage but a consumer expectation.

The predominant supply chain focus for tour operators is the quality of the contracted accommodations, excursion or transportation supplier and the services provided by them. Customer Service Questionnaires (CSQs) have been distributed to customers on their return flights for over 20 years to measure this. These contain key performance indicators for all points of the customer journey. Accommodations suppliers are rated against 23 criteria ranging from cleanliness and choice of food through to reception service. Minimum score requirements must be consistently met in order to remain within that brand. Failure to maintain the brand standard will result in the accommodations being placed on an improvement plan, placed within a lower branded brochure or, as a last resort, cancelled from the tour operator's programme.

Sustainable Supply Chain Management

Sustainable supply chain management adds the environmental, social and economic impacts of business

activities into the quality management models for which supply chain management was originally designed (Schwartz et al. 2008). Environmental concerns demand increasing attention on the corporate agenda, with varying reasons—from aiming to reduce suppliers' costs to keep overall product prices down, to more genuine concerns for the environmental stewardship of the product (Tan 2001). Font et al. (2006) believe that cost reduction is the most successful area of tour operators' supply chain strategies (e.g., energy and water consumption reductions directly improve the financial bottom line). As supply chain management concerns itself with improved efficiencies, it is obvious that environmental initiatives fit well within these practices. Social and economic issues are also increasingly included in the corporate agenda. The tourism industry has a reputation for low wages and poor working conditions, exacerbated by seasonality and pressures to keep contract prices low. Tour operators are encouraged to make positive changes by adopting voluntary codes of practice.

Only recently did tour operators begin to evaluate the environmental impacts of their operations and those of their suppliers. Tapper's research (2001) highlighted the disparity between business approaches to engagement with sustainable tourism among a variety of small, medium and large tour operators. Since that research however, engagement has significantly increased, with the majority of the Federation of Tour Operators (FTO) members now employing sustainability teams, or at least one staff member whose responsibilities include sustainability, and having signed sustainability commitment statements.

Van der Duim and Van Marwijk (2006) recognized that the task of truly changing the current ways of ordering of tour operators would be particularly laborious. UK-based tour operators demonstrate similar justifications to those in the Netherlands: lack of time, small profit margins, focus on price and volume. For those operators looking to engage further with sustainability there are guides and recommendations advising them how to implement sustainability management into their business (Schwartz et al. 2008; UNEP 2004). The challenge for tour operators going forward is how to practically integrate sustainability into their supply chain when they are only just beginning to understand it and tackle it themselves.

The Travelife Sustainability System was developed through lengthy stakeholder consultations as part of an EU Life Project in 2004 to address the increasing number of green certification schemes that were confusing suppliers and consumers. Travelife was adopted by the FTO members as their preferred means of sustainable supply chain management. Tour operator employees familiar with health

and safety auditing procedures were the first to be trained in conducting Travelife audits in accommodations overseas. At the time of writing this paper, there are almost 400 Travelife auditors (tour operator staff and independent auditors) and approximately 1,800 accommodation providers have been audited against the sustainability criteria. The Travelife checklist is essential to conducting a baseline assessment of suppliers. From this, operators can formulate action plans and monitor supplier progress as suggested in UNEP's manual for supply chain engagement (2004).

As Schwartz and Font (2009) point out however, the different goals and priorities of suppliers and operators, the low-cost focus in European markets and the complexity of tour operator supply chains compound the difficulty of putting theory into practice. It is vital, therefore, that those responsible for auditing the supply chain are provided with adequate information, so as they can recommend solutions that do not compromise health and safety or the quality of the product. Tour operators are using the Travelife system to monitor the progress of their accommodation providers against key sustainability criteria. The reporting area of the Travelife website allows tour operators to check at a glance hoteliers' achievements down to individual indicators and to monitor progress. For example, if a tour operator creates a target that 50% of their contracted accommodations should have an environmental policy by the end of 2011, the Travelife system makes it very easy for them to measure and report on this. Central to this process is the collection of reliable data from these suppliers, to date done through field audits.

Travelife is evolving into an industry-wide tool for SSCM. Included in the scheme as of April 2011 are the Thomas Cook Group; TUI UK, Netherlands and Germany; Cosmos; Kuoni; and Sunvil. The objective is to present a united strategy of sustainable supply chain management to accommodations, transportation and excursion providers and a consistent message to European consumers.

Barriers to Implementing Sustainability

The literature suggests a range of issues limiting supplier's ability to respond to buyers' requirements for sustainability. First, sustainability activities may carry a financial cost, or they are at least perceived that way (Bohdanowicz et al. 2011). Cash flow and ever-diminishing tour operator contract rates are blamed by many authors for the lack of financial investment in technical solutions (Bastakis et al. 2004; Font et al. 2006; Tapper 2001). Payback from no-cost/low-cost measures could be used to fund technical solutions that require initial financial investment; however, a lack of willingness or ability to engage means that this opportunity is not always exploited.

Second, human barriers include resistance to change, a lack of qualified staff and training programmes, a lack of understanding and the inability to plan (Amoah and Baum 1997; Bohdanowicz et al. 2011; Dong and Wilkinson 2007). Tour operator resources and those of their suppliers may be too limited to engage in technical assistance or investment programmes (Schwartz and Font 2009).

The third issue cited repeatedly is lack of demand. A "green gap" exists between the results from surveys claiming customers want sustainable products and their actual purchasing behaviour. Also, the industry has been encouraged to demonstrate its efforts to make all holidays more sustainable at no increased premium (ABTA 2011).

It is in this context that tour operators claim to face a huge challenge in the perception and reality of Health and Safety (H&S) as the barrier to implementing environmental measures; hence it is the primary focus of this study. For over a decade, hotel managers have been bombarded with H&S codes of practice, Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points, legionella procedures and more. Managers are wary of implementing new initiatives that appear to conflict with H&S. There are very similar comparisons in the building trade between "minimum standards" of codes of practice for safety versus "best practice initiatives" for sustainability (Dong and Wilkinson 2007).

The EC Travel Package Directive (1990), transposed into UK law by the Package Travel Regulations 1992, places liability on tour operators for the performance of their suppliers. This factor alone is a significant barrier to environmental sustainability (Schwartz and Font 2009; Schwartz et al. 2008; Tapper 2001). Regulation 15(1) provides that the tour operator is liable to the consumer for proper performance of the obligations under the contract, whether these are performed by the tour operator or any of its suppliers (Grant and Mason 2007; Saggerson 2007). It is obvious, therefore, which criteria will take priority in supplier management. The standard response of tour operators, fearful of compensation claims, has been to show increased due diligence through a stricter level of control over their suppliers and the application of risk management strategies.

Personal communication with tour operating staff highlights that even they are wary of making suggestions for environmental improvements due to the apparent H&S-environmental conflict. Operatives usually prefer to fall on the side of caution and over apply the solutions to manage or eliminate the risk without understanding the consequences of doing so. Service recovery methods in hotels tend to focus on applying discounts or providing free services, rather than being guided by hotel contract law

(Bech-Serrat 2011) to avoid potentially higher court costs. A tour operator is liable for its own negligence (measured by UK standards) and supplier's negligence (measured by local standards). UK standards are used in the destination as a yardstick not because they are applicable (or liable against), but because understanding local standards in each destination is more difficult than applying one blanket set of standards, whether these are higher or lower. This does, however, generate a fear of the unknown and reticence to make changes.

Most aspects of quality that the client or tour operator will expect are not part of the contract established between the hotel and the tour operator, or the hotel and the direct customer—much of the contract is based on unspoken expectations law (Bech-Serrat 2011; Grant and Mason 2007). For example, there is no standard that says that pools must be lit at night, but if that's the accepted practice and therefore the accepted standard, there might be liability but under quality complaints (strict liability) and H&S complaints (fault liability). In this case, operatives usually prefer to fall on the side of caution and over apply the solutions to manage the risk without understanding the consequences of doing this. Fear of not meeting health standards leads for example to the overuse of pesticides, over chilling of foods, the use of disposable rather than reusable plastic, over-wrapping of prepared food, and so on.

Thomas Cook Case Study

Thomas Cook UK was a founding member of Travelife and has been involved in its development since 2004. The system gives the operator a means to assess and monitor sustainability progress within the first layer of the overseas supply chain—the accommodations provider. Thomas Cook UK agreed to an FTO target of auditing 51% of its core supply chain against Travelife criteria before October 2010. The company achieved 42% meaning that over one million passengers are staying in audited accommodations. Limited resources and small passenger volumes to some hotels prohibited the company from reaching its target.

Public limited company obligations require Thomas Cook to report on the impacts of their operations. The Travelife system provides a unified means by which all tour operators can monitor progress within the supply chain allowing for suitable comparisons to be drawn within the industry. This united approach by tour operators carries more weight and is likely to bear more influence upon the accommodations provider. Competition is put to one side as operators work together in resorts to achieve the same goal and make efficient use of available resources, similar to how H&S work is carried out in destinations. Thomas Cook overseas staff will continue to provide support to hoteliers, although auditing

will be done independently, once an accommodation provider has subscribed to the system. This removes the possibility of any commercial interest and ensures that the system is more robust and transparent.

The utilization of Thomas Cook H&S auditing staff to conduct Travelife audits led to the realization of conflict between some of the H&S and sustainability criteria and ultimately resulted in the need for this research. The auditors found themselves to be compromised at times and unsure of how to make environmental recommendations that would not negatively affect health and safety within the complex. Thomas Cook has addressed the issues raised in the research with ABTA's Travelife and H&S teams and will continue to work closely with them to develop a more complementary approach to H&S and Travelife auditing procedures.

Methodology

The primary research set out to identify the perceived barriers to the implementation of the Travelife sustainability criteria in tourist accommodations. The objectives were:

1. Identify to what extent the Travelife criteria are perceived to conflict with the FTO H&S audit criteria and the quality assurance objectives of the overseas Thomas Cook teams; and
2. Identify common denominators and obtain agreement from Thomas Cook auditing staff on the results of the ranking exercise.

The research was carried out over a period of four months, using a case study approach. This allowed for the design, distribution and collation of data from a Delphi questionnaire, the identification of suitable interview candidates and completion of interviews, the subsequent desk-based research and the collation of data thereafter. Central to this research is the engagement of the research team in data collection and in promoting positive internal change, which is visible in much of the data analysis.

The Delphi Technique was chosen as the preferred data collection method for this phase due to the size of the sample group, their differing geographical locations, and their level of expertise, understanding and experience of sustainability in relation to their job role. The Delphi Technique is concerned with eliciting and refining group judgments, in three stages: anonymous response through questionnaires, iteration and controlled feedback in a sequence of rounds, and incorporating a statistical group response that ensures that the opinion of every member is represented in the final response. As the Travelife audit encompasses a wide spectrum of issues, and the sample group of participants

was formed of Thomas Cook staff with differing levels of experience and expertise, the Delphi Technique fitted perfectly as the data collection method for phases. Questionnaires were not kept anonymous as it was important to identify the destinations that were represented in order to ascertain if there was a common thread of conflict across resorts.

In order to achieve the research objective it was first necessary to identify the criteria against which accommodation suppliers are currently assessed with regard to health and safety, quality and sustainability. There are three main ways that these assessments are conducted at Thomas Cook:

1. The Health and Safety Audit—carried out by trained staff and covering areas such as hygiene, pool and fire safety, children's clubs, balconies and fuel surveys.
2. The CSQ—completed by customers on their return flight and rating the accommodation provider against 23 key performance indicators for service and quality.
3. The Travelife Audit—carried out by trained staff who are usually H&S trained and covering areas such as environmental management, employee welfare and community involvement.

The Travelife audit has 68 question headings with some questions requiring more than one answer. It would have been unreasonable to ask each auditor to rank and provide comments for every question, therefore, it was decided that four questions per auditor would be a reasonable number to provide in-depth responses and should ensure a higher response rate. This resulted in 17 questionnaires (68/4=17). Thirty-nine employees with Travelife, quality assurance or H&S experience were selected to participate in the research and were purposefully divided into groups representing their geographical areas of responsibility: 7 for Greece and the Canary Islands, 9 for Turkey and Egypt, 5 long haul, 12 for Spain, Portugal and the Balearics, and 6 for Rest of the World.

The 17 questionnaires were randomly distributed between the participants to ensure a degree of global coverage and to reduce the possibility of bias. There are more questionnaires than participants in order to increase the probability of returns and of each Travelife question being ranked at least once. Seventeen participants returned 24 questionnaires (44% participation), this equates to a 44% return of the 54 questionnaires distributed.

One participant returned 3 questionnaires, 5 participants returned 2 questionnaires and 11 participants returned 1 questionnaire. 41% of questions (28 questions) were ranked by one respondent, and 59% of questions were

ranked by 2 or more respondents.

Participants were asked to rank the degree of conflict (in their opinion) between the Travelife criteria and health, safety and quality criteria. A Likert scale was used, where 1 represented the least important perceived conflict and 5 represented the most important perceived conflict. A comments section was provided for supporting evidence of a qualitative nature should they be able to provide it. The results from the Likert scale exercise were calculated by adding the rank results together and dividing by the number of questionnaire returns (e.g., rank 4 + rank 5/2 returns = rank 4.5). The top 10 issues according to their rank were tabulated along with qualitative supporting evidence (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sustainability-Health and Safety Conflict Delphi and Interview Comments and Delphi Ranking

During phase 2, the 39 employees were asked to agree or disagree with the ranking results from phase 1 and to

Travelife Question	Rank 1-5
Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in water consumption (also reduces costs)?	4.0
Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy consumption and costs?	3.5
If refrigeration equipment utilizes CFC's or HCFC's as its coolant, does the business identify, repair and replace these?	3.5
Are regular (at least annual) progress reports made on environmental issues	3.0
Is recyclable/reusable waste separated and recycled/reused?	3.0
Does the business purchase cleaning materials with low environmental impact?	3.0
Is the business actively involved in minimizing chemicals that damage health or the environment?	3.0
Are employees regularly reminded to save water?	2.5
Are energy saving taps (e.g., mixer or temperature controlled) fitted to ensure water is delivered at the temperature it is required?	2.5
Do irrigation systems for the hotel grounds and gardens have any of the following features: use treated waste water, having timing devices of manual procedures, have moisture sensors, deliver water below soil level?	2.5

make further comments. All 39 respondents agreed with the "top 10" issues identified and an additional 12 comments were added to the supporting qualitative data.

The next step was to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected questionnaire participants to elaborate on the qualitative data. Participants that had provided detailed feedback and observations of conflicts in their destination were chosen to be interviewed with each

geographical area being represented. This equated to 13 interview participants based on the above factors. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Each interviewee was asked to provide examples of conflict along with possible solutions to the top 10 issues identified and agreed by the group. The same interview process was carried out with members of the Travelife team, the ABTA H&S coordinator and a Quality Assurance manager from Thomas Cook with an additional focus on solutions.

An additional stage was added to the research plan following an interview with one of the H&S Advisors who identified that in many cases the actual H&S audit question does not conflict with Travelife, instead it is the defect generated by non-compliance that presents the problem. For example, non-conformance to the H&S question “Is the swimming pool lit at night?” generates a defect recommending the hotelier illuminates the pool during the hours of darkness—a perceived conflict with the energy reduction questions on the Travelife audit. This prompted the researcher, who has six years experience as a Consumer Affairs Executive for Thomas Cook UK and Ireland, to carry out a full desk-based analysis of the H&S audit to identify other questions with the potential to generate a “defect report” that would conflict with the Travelife criteria. The interview with the Quality Assurance manager highlighted a similar issue. The conflict between quality and sustainability lies with the recommendations made to an underperforming hotel; for example, a complaint about cleanliness may lead to more frequent linen and towel changes which conflicts with reducing energy, water and chemical use.

Results and Discussion

The top 10 conflicting issues are presented further below in Tables 2 and 3, with a sample of the comments provided during the Delphi consultation rounds and the subsequent interviews. It is important to note upfront at this stage that all the top conflicting issues were believed to be environmental and none socio-economic.

Respondents believed that the greatest conflict with health and safety was from water reduction measures. Respondents report hoteliers claiming a wide range of reasons from saying that they will use excess water washing toughened plastic glasses therefore they continue to use disposable plastics, to dual flush cisterns being ineffective. Some reported reasons are evidence of mismanagement to be on the safe side. For example, swimming pool backwash is believed to be needed daily for hygiene reasons, with many instances of doing so against the advice of misplaced pool manufacturer instructions or pressure gauges on filters. Other issues reported included a reluctance to cut down on washing or running showers in unused showers/Jacuzzis done to

prevent bacteria accumulation which is clearly something that cannot be cut down past a certain level where there is an increased H&S risk. After water, energy was the second highest conflicting issue. Reasons given included legionella prevention (reduction of hot water temperature, unsuitability of solar power only), increased accidents from turning off lights or using motion sensors or using tarpaulins over heated swimming pools.

Further examples of interest include reasons given for not managing waste, which include fire risk from misuse of recycling bins as cigarette bins, accumulation of recycling paper/cardboard outside kitchens encouraging rodents/insects, or incorrect storage of chemicals and hazardous liquids due to using large containers. Hotels are reported to be reluctant to purchase low environmental impact chemicals as they assume this signifies not being hygienic, an increase in the risk of infection and that these products will only work for small properties (see Table 2).

Table 2. Sustainability-Quality Conflict Delphi and Interview Comments and Delphi Ranking

The reasons given for sustainability and quality conflict

Travelife Question	Rank 1-5
Do the regulations in your country specify that you must buy all of your energy from a specific supplier?	4.5
Is there a system in place for reducing the number of towel changes in guest rooms?	4.0
Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy consumption and costs?	3.0
Are employees regularly reminded to save water?	3.0
Are low flush toilets fitted or water saving devices installed?	3.0
Does the establishment dispose of all waste water to: septic tanks, package treatment plants, local sewers, sewage lagoon system or other method?	3.0
Is the business actively involved in minimizing chemicals that damage health or the environment?	3.0
Does the business minimize waste by buying in bulk?	2.0
Does the business purchase cleaning materials with low environmental impact?	2.0
Is recyclable / reusable waste separated and recycled/reused?	2.0

were equally illustrative, and again relate exclusively to environmental management and not socio-economic issues. Hotels were reported not to cut down on towel and linen changes as they believe this negatively affects their CSQ results, and despite putting signs offering reuse they would change towels as standard. Equally with energy reduction, there’s the perception that the customer is always right even if they want to leave the air conditioning permanently on, for example, or with dual flush toilets

customers might not know how to operate them. Water reduction was not welcomed for fears of reducing cleanliness or reusing dirty water for bedrooms and bathrooms, waste water treatment was feared for possible smells and the likelihood of causing illness or infection. Cutting down on chemicals harmful to health and the environment was frowned upon for fear of attracting pests. As a final example, bulk purchases were not welcomed for fears that “large bowls of jam and slabs of butter look messy” or some purchases may end up going past their sell-by date.

Delphi results were expanded on via qualitative interviews. The majority of the discussions focused on the H&S barriers to the implementation of sustainability. Reference to quality assurance indicators has been minimal; however, the interview with the Thomas Cook quality assurance manager revealed that the topic must be given consideration if a more coherent approach to sustainability is to be taken. As with H&S, there are elements of quality assurance work that can lead to improved sustainability and an improved customer experience (Font et al. 2008).

Equally, the comparison of CSQs against sustainability criteria suggested that almost one-third of the current key performance indicators behind the CSQ questions are likely to conflict with sustainability requirements. Cleanliness, standard of bathrooms, maid services were perceived to conflict with water reduction, chemical choice and usage, choice of food, all-inclusive packages and furniture and décor with reduction of solid waste and energy, among others. Typical recommendations from underperforming in “room cleanliness” would be asking the hotelier to increase the frequency of cleaning along with the frequency of towel and linen changes (where this is a contractual agreement and not a voluntary system giving customers the choice). This directly contradicts the reduction of chemical use and the towel re-use programmes. Equally, in the underperforming in “décor,” the hotelier may be asked to fit ambient lighting; however it often uses huge amounts of energy solely to provide “atmosphere” and not for actual lighting purposes. This contradicts energy reduction.

The results of the desk-based research demonstrate that only 16 (2%) of the 749 H&S advisor audit questions could actually conflict with the Travelife sustainability criteria triggering decisions detrimental to sustainability management. However, the perception of potential conflict in the Delphi study was considerably higher. This exercise also revealed that there are 25 H&S questions that are complementary in nature to the Travelife criteria, such as the H&S question “Are freezers defrosted regularly?” and the Travelife question “Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy and costs?,” as efficient

operation of freezers both saves energy and contributes to hygienic storage. It becomes evident that the perception of risk is far greater than the reality, yet, it is the perception that acts as a barrier to enforcement of sustainability requirements.

Most of the written material researched during the literature review presents how technically sustainable solutions are feasible, and assumes rational behaviour, yet fails to address the human aspects challenging behaviour change. Thus, sustainability is often left to so-called experts and special interest groups (Bell and Morse 2005) and not integrated into mainstream business. There are reasons for conflict between sustainability, health and safety and quality both on the side of the SSCM system and the suppliers.

Sustainable Supply Chain Management System Issues

Limited auditor training and, in some cases, lack of conviction from auditors could partly explain why hotel suppliers can quickly revert to health and safety or quality arguments to not undertake actions. Auditors are either not comfortable or do not have the expertise to challenge them or propose alternatives. Just over half (54%) of the participants in this research are trained in all three areas of H&S, quality and sustainability, initial sustainability training is limited and Travelife does not have an auditor mentoring process in place, reducing reliability. Within Thomas Cook, the delivery of H&S, quality assurance and sustainability training is done in isolation by the head of the corresponding departments and when relevant, with independent consultants. Similarly, the FTO H&S audit was first used in 1989 with more comprehensive suite of audits for different levels of auditors developed with the Preferred Codes of Practice in 2002 (and this version was used to do the comparisons), whereas the Travelife audit is relatively new (2004). Furthermore, it would appear that Travelife did not give consideration to the implications that the H&S audit would have upon its application. As CSQs are internal to Thomas Cook, development of these would not take into consideration shared FTO paperwork currently in use.

The adage that springs to mind here is that of “not looking outside of the box.” The indicators for the above mentioned checklists have been developed at different times and in isolation of each other. Training is delivered separately, therefore, auditors are not encouraged to think laterally or to challenge the status quo. The conflicts do not necessarily present themselves in a classroom situation; it is more likely that they would only be considered at the point of conducting a Travelife audit, making evident how most of the written material is academic or idealistic and fails to recognize the complexity of turning theory into successful practice.

Ultimately, the exclusion of H&S and quality information from the development of the indicators has led to a gap in the auditing process. This is exacerbated by the lack of a cohesive training programme that should consider all three areas as a combined focus. Extreme consequences of this lack of focus has resulted in a minority of hotels being featured in tour operator brochures with Travelife awards, while the H&S departments have them on a risk list due to safety issues. During interviews, it was made clear that this presents a very confusing message both to the hotelier and to overseas staff. While the development and training issues are not related to the quality of auditing staff, it is fair to say that the quality of an audit is also dependent upon the quality of the auditor.

The auditing process gap does not cause any specific conflict between H&S, quality and sustainability in itself; however, it exacerbates the situation and serves to confuse the supplier. It can also jeopardize the integrity of the system in the eyes of the supplier, and it is vitally important to avoid this, as, ultimately, the system is reliant upon their subscriptions in order to be financially sustainable.

The data collected has also demonstrated that both hoteliers and auditors are giving priority to environmental aspects over socio-economic ones, compromising the meaning of sustainability (as seen in Font and Harris 2004). Most interviewees associated the word ‘sustainability’ with environmental issues and only mentioned socio-economic aspects when prompted, in line with the literature showing that people are more likely to understand the impacts associated with the environment than those of social issues or of the word ‘sustainability’ (Guyton 2006). The evidence for this comes from the choices of Travelife indicators that are perceived to have an impact on H&S and quality (all of them are environmental). Sixty four per cent of the Travelife audited hotels (n=1,800) have an environmental policy, while only 51% have a social policy, and the latter have less detail, in line with the primarily environmental nature of tourism sustainability standards (Font and Buckley 2001). Auditors also find social standards as softer and more open to interpretation (Font and Harris 2004), exacerbated by the fact that auditors can change destination seasonally, making their understanding of the local society more complex, whereas it is easier to determine the suitability of environmental issues, that are more visible during a hotel inspection.

Supplier Issues

What we mostly see are not technical reasons why businesses cannot implement sustainability actions but human behavioural reasons (Bohdanowicz and Zientara 2008; UNEP, IH&RA and EUHOFA 2005; Kollmuss and

Agyeman 2002). Management fear of legal claims is a key reason behind the reluctance to promote or adopt operational changes that improve sustainability. This results from suppliers lacking knowledge on both sustainability and H&S, and, therefore, managing the perception and not the analysis of risk (Slovic 1987).

Water conservation actions are used to exemplify this issue. Travelife requires auditors to check for active engagement, understood as undertaking measures including reducing unnecessary backwashing of pool filters, staff communications and leak detection programmes. A number of auditors stated that hotel pool maintenance staff generally backwash swimming pool filters daily to ensure clean, hygienic water. This procedure can use approximately 2000 liters of water each time for an average sized swimming pool and is therefore not thought to be conducive to “reducing water consumption.” Inadequately trained pool maintenance staff have also been found to leave the backwash running for over 20 minutes while attending to other jobs. Two to three minutes approximately twice a week dependent upon bather load and other additional factors is the recommended time and frequency for performance of the backwash operation (PWTAG 2009). Fear of the consequences brought about by ineffective water treatment systems (irritations, respiratory problems and waterborne diseases) contributes to this excessive backwashing (see Table 3).

Table 3. Perception Versus Reality Relative to the Frequency of the Pool Filter Backwash

Perception	Reality	Complementary H&S audit questions to support less frequent backwashing
Quality of swimming pool water is better if the filter is backwashed daily.	Swimming pool water is of better quality when the sand in the filter has settled for some time therefore capturing greater amounts of debris. This provides cleaner water until such a time as the pressure gauge indicates that a backwash is necessary.	Chlorine and pH records to be recorded 3 times daily to indicate the water quality. Signage to encourage customers to shower before entering pool in order to remove sun-cream, sweat and skin, therefore avoiding excessive build up of pollution. Pool maintenance staff should be trained in the operation of the pool and its filtration system and should consult local authorities if they are unclear.

Source: Travelife Audit, FTO H&S Advisor Audit, PWTAG

The hotel procedures in these cases are driven by the fear of a claim under the Package Travel Regulations 1992. Auditors report a lack of technical expertise as an additional reason for why they do not feel comfortable recommending such measures as a reduction in the backwash frequency. Hoteliers and auditors perceive the reduction as an H&S issue when in fact, recognized recommended practice and/or manufacturers instructions provided on actual filter systems demonstrate that this is not the case. Similarly, auditors from various destinations were consistent in their concerns regarding the prevention of legionella relative to reducing water consumption. Risk areas in a hotel are primarily the air conditioning and the hot water systems/facilities. In this case, the perceived and real issue is actually one and the same (see Table 4).

Table 4. Perception Versus Reality Relative to Legionella Management

Perception	Reality	Complementary H&S audit questions
Showers must run for 5 minutes in rooms that have been unoccupied for over a week to prevent legionella.	This is in fact a reality and hoteliers are recommended to take this course of action, particularly at the start of a new season or when a room has been unoccupied for some time.	Tour operators provide the EWGLI 14 point plan to hoteliers to be used as part of their legionella management policy. The hotel should appoint a member of staff as being responsible for legionella management and ensure that they are adequately trained.

Source: Travelife Audit, FTO H&S Advisor Audit

Suppliers find it easier to justify their inactivity on H&S and quality, than to seek viable technical and human solutions for gaining the knowledge to manage the sustainability issue viably. Hoteliers' cost-benefit analysis of what actions they want to implement is often based on limited information on how they would undertake the actions and what consequences these would have. The cost, to a large extent, is not only financial but accepting that they have to change their behaviour and work patterns. As seen in the case of Hilton in Continental Europe, it was the process of staff team empowerment that made a substantial difference to the implementation of a group-wide policy (Bohdanowicz

et al. 2011).

This behaviour is echoed in the tourism industry. Throughout the course of this research, overseas staff in particular reported that hoteliers find some of the Travelife initiatives cost-prohibitive. The Travelife improvement plan suggests a number of means by which changes can be made to improve the sustainability of a hotel operation. A variety of these involve an initial cost, the return on investment can range from a month for simple measures such as flow restrictors, to a number of years for a solar heating system, for example. This, however, seems to be where the conflict lies and where sustainability once again comes up against H&S and quality. Any environmental financial savings are more likely to be plowed into improvements of H&S than into more expensive environmental measures such as solar panels, or socio-economic measures.

Conclusions

This exercise unanimously identified that auditors consider the environmental indicators to be the most conflictive, not necessarily because these have more conflict, but because auditors place more importance on the environment or have a better understanding of environmental issues than of social issues. Auditors believe that suppliers are confused from the conflicting messages from quality, H&S and sustainability requirements from the same company showing that there has historically been limited in-house coordination between relevant departments within Thomas Cook UK & Ireland. Auditors also report unwillingness from suppliers to meet "non-essential" tour operator recommendations, particularly if there is a financial cost involved that the auditor cannot successfully justify. This is in part due to the need for higher level sustainability auditing skills, for a team that has typically conducted H&S audits. Continuous professional development and mentoring for auditors is essential at this stage to avoid developing bad habits and losing confidence in the sustainability auditing process. This research aims to contribute to the growing literature demonstrating that most sustainability challenges are not technical, but resulting from human behaviour. As such, the sustainability solutions developed need to take into consideration what might initially be considered as irrational behaviour that does not respond to assumed obvious stimuli, but to consider the importance of habit and perceptions in making decisions.

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