Sustainability, health and safety, or quality? Tour operator supply chain management under scrutiny

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Abstract

Tour operators requesting their suppliers to measure and report their sustainability actions are finding a number of barriers to introducing sustainable supply chain management measures. This article reviews how sustainability systems are being challenged by organisational habit and perceptions rather than analytical decision making, with respect to the relationship between health and safety, quality and sustainability. The data suggests ways for improving the tour operators management tool Travelife including its auditing processes, to iron out teething problems identified by Thomas Cook UK and Ireland when rolling out this system across its supply chain.

Keywords: auditing, hotels, risk, health, safety, quality, sustainability

Introduction

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. This paper reports on the efforts undertaken by Thomas Cook UK and Ireland to introduce sustainable supply chain management systems for the hotels they contract, using the Travelife systems developed and adopted by a variety of European tour operators. The research will focus on the perspective of the Travelife auditor as it was deemed the person that has first hand access to the actual practices of hotels and has to take decisions on scoring sustainability actions in the field. We shall 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 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, 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 principle 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 accommodation suppliers in destinations.

The literature review looks at the origin of SCM and its integration into the tourism industry. As SCM is concerned with effective management and cost efficiency,

environmental factors become an extension of the original concept due to their cost saving potential. Socio-economic factors concerned with labour standards, particularly with manufactured goods from overseas, involve reputational risk if not addressed. Sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) is therefore discussed in terms of how it has been adopted by the tourism industry and identifies the difficulties of implementing this in practice.

Literature review

1. Supply Chain Management

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 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 manage their supply chain sustainability impacts. 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.

Travelife is primarily concerned with engaging tour operators' accommodation, excursion and transport suppliers with sustainability principles, hence a function of supply chain management (SCM). 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 organisation and its supply channels (Eastham et al. 2001). 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. Authors such as Frolich (2001) conclude that the more a business actively engages with its supply chain, both upstream with suppliers and downstream with customers, the better it performs. Both Mentzer (2001) and Chen and Paulraj (2004) agree that providing and maintaining good quality products and services is imperative to business success. This is no longer a competitive advantage but a consumer expectation. Globalisation, the internet and improved transport links allow companies to source their products from a world-wide supplier base, putting the real competition into the hands of the supply chain and not necessarily the retailer or the service provider.

Evaluation of supplier performance in any industry is difficult due to the variation of consumer expectations of the actual product or service. Some authors believe that only the customer can define the criteria against which service quality can be measured (Groonroos 1990), while others believe that metrics are required that truly capture the essence of organisation's performance and reflect a balance between financial and non-financial measures (Gunasekaran et al 2004). Brewer and Speh's balanced scorecard measurement (2000) complements Gunasekaran's approach. It is arguably the most comprehensive method to ensure the performance and longevity of

a business, both in the short and long term. This would be a more fitting approach for tour operators to take going forward, as historically their priorities have been on increased profit margins in the short term and the longevity of their own business. However the economic sustainability of those suppliers reliant upon the tour operators to survive, particularly in overseas destinations, has not historically been considered (Bastakis et al 2004).

The predominant supply chain focus for tour operators is the quality of the contracted accommodation, excursion or transport supplier and the services provided by them. The Customer Service Questionnaire (CSQ) is the main tool used to measure this- having been distributed to customers on their return flights for over 20 years. These contain a significant number of key performance indicators for all points of the customer journey. Accommodation suppliers are rated against 23 criteria ranging from cleanliness and choice of food through to reception service. Results influence the brand by which the hotelier will be promoted. Minimum score requirements must be consistently met in order to remain within that brand. Failure to maintain the brand standard will result in the accommodation being placed on an improvement plan, placed within a lower branded brochure or, as a last resort, cancelled from the tour operator's programme. The improvement plan demonstrates Harrington and Leneghan's point regarding the gradual change in the quality philosophy over the decades from 'order giving and fear' to 'training and constructive leadership' (Harrington and Leneghan 1998). The objective of the CSQ is to identify areas of improvement to the overall customer experience.

2 Sustainable Supply Chain Management

Supply chain management has evolved- from a primary concern about quality and eventually it has come to consider many other aspects of business. Sustainable supply chain management adds the environmental, social and economic impacts of business activities into the management process. These factors build upon the quality management models for which supply chain management was originally designed (Schwartz et al 2008). Eraqi (2006: 470) summarises that 'it is no longer sufficient just to maintain a business; it is necessary to move forward if a business wants to achieve a sustainable future. Customer care, improvements in efficiency…staff training and development are vital for survival in a changing business environment.'

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- significant reductions in energy and water consumption directly improve the financial bottom line, and positively impact upon the environment. 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, particularly where poor working conditions in their supply chains are involved. 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 such as those contained within the Global Code of Ethics (UNWTO 1999). There is still a

great deal to be done in this area if a tangible difference is to be made. Many tour operators will need to address their own working conditions before influencing their suppliers. Many companies now recognise the value of investing in skills development and training of front line staff, not least because this increases staff retention and reduces the need for re-training and its associated time and costs. For tour operators these initiatives help to address the commitments in the Global Code of Ethics.

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 amongst 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 member of staff whose responsibilities include sustainability. FTO members signed a statement of commitment similar to that of the WTO in January 2004. Whilst this was a major step in the right direction, the document was signed voluntarily and comprises just one time bound target around developing a sustainability policy. The use of words such as endeavour, aim, encourage and strive alludes to a more aspirational statement than agreed and targeted actions.

Interestingly, the Dutch Tourism Association ANVR took a tougher stance with its members by *obliging* them to adopt sustainability measures. Van der Duim and Van Marwijk (2006) recognised that the task of truly changing the current ways of ordering of tour operators would be particularly laborious. Nevertheless, the board of the VRO (Netherlands Association of Tour Operators) compelled its members to reconfigure their operations and to acquire a 'PMZ' (Product Oriented Environmental Management) certificate prior to April of 2003. Any members that did not pass would be expelled from the VRO. There were very mixed reactions to the compulsory PMZ certificate with 70-80% of operators showing resistance despite the criteria having a 'cut off threshold so low that almost all tour operators could earn the certification.' (Van der Duim and Van Marwijk 2006: 467).

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 (2nd party tour operators and 3rd party independent auditors) and approximately 1800 accommodation providers have been audited against the environmental and social 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 suppliers against key sustainability criteria. The reporting area of the Travelife website allows tour operators to check at a glance supplier achievements down to individual indicators and to monitor progress. For example, if a tour operator creates a target that 50% of their key supply chain should have an environmental policy by the end of 2010, 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 July 2010 are Thomas Cook UK & Belgium, TUI UK, Netherlands and Germany, Cosmos, Kuoni and Sunvil. The objective is to present a united strategy of sustainable supply chain management to accommodation, transport and excursion providers and a consistent message to European consumers. Supported by Gunasekaran's theory of a joint approach (2004), European tour operators involved in Travelife feel that a supply chain wide performance approach is the most appropriate. All subscribed operators participate in a well co-ordinated manner to ensure effective management throughout a shared supply chain.

3 Barriers to implementing sustainability within the tourism supply chain

The literature suggests a range of issues limiting supplier's ability to respond to buyers' requirements for sustainability, including the cost of investments (Tapper 2001; Font et al 2006; Bastakis et al 2004) and resistance to change (Amoah and Baum 1997; Dong and Wilkinson 2007) and limited market demand (Richards 2010). While the latter is considerable (Richards stated that 74% of customers prioritised safety, hygiene and security and 58% prioritised quality over the more sustainable elements of the holiday package), the focus of this study is the link between sustainability and health and safety (H&S) requirements. The biggest issue tour operators claim to face when implementing practical sustainable measures in accommodations is H&S. For over a decade, hotel managers have been bombarded with H&S literature: codes of practice, Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points, legionella procedures and many more. Managers are wary of implementing any new initiatives when they appear to conflict with H&S or quality. 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 EU Package Travel Regulations 1992 place liability on tour operators for the performance of their suppliers. This factor alone is a significant barrier to sustainability quoted by most tour operators interviewed for research purposes (Tapper 2001; Schwartz et al 2008, Font et al 2009). 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 (Nelson-Jones and Stewart 1998). This demonstrates the huge responsibility upon the tour operator when you consider that they are held accountable for any default in the provision of goods or services by any part of the supply chain. As such H&S and environmental compliance enforcement are essential (Eraqi 2006) in order to avoid risks associated with suppliers that are less conscious of the H&S, environmental or social implications of their product or service. To date however, it has only been H&S that has been enforced and failure to comply with best practice can lead to cancellation of contracts.

The reasons given by customers for breach of contract (and therefore affecting price reductions and court claims) are overwhelmingly quality and safety, and not sustainability related (in part because H&S is much more regulated than environmental aspects which are more generally subject to self regulation- Aalders and Wilthagen 1997). It is only obvious therefore which criteria will take priority in supplier management. The standard response of tour operators, fearful of customers expecting price reductions or suing them for costs incurred, has been to increase the level of control over their suppliers. 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) in order to avoid potentially higher costs from a court case. 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. A recent case seems to have set guidelines on what can be expected as claim against disappointment or distress following breach of holiday contract (Scargill 2010), and guidelines are being developed to calculate the price reduction in hotel services (Bech-Serrat 2011).

Slovic (1987) explains that most of the population takes decisions based on their perception of risk, which is influenced by their voluntary participation in an activity, understanding the risk, being familiar with it and believing they are in control of it. The more a risk is perceived to be outside their control and more as a hazard, the more that the population wants it regulated. Risk does not stop companies (and their customers) from undertaking activities, it simply requires the company to take responsibility for understanding risk and to put in place risk management procedures that bring the risk down to an acceptable level (HSE 1997). However some businesses do not manage the risks from not meeting health and safety standards appropriately. This is the result of not understanding what causes the risk, nor the impact of taking certain actions towards it. In this case, operatives usually prefer to fall on the side of caution and overapply the solutions to manage that 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.

Buyer requirements for product shelf life and aesthetic/quality standards have increased the use of pesticides, with negative environmental impacts on the land and non target plants as well as the health of workers and to a lesser extent, consumers (Okello and Okello 2010). Their study shows how the requirement of buyers to introduce safety standards as part of environmental supply chain management have had a positive effect on sustainability, because alternative, less harmful to the environment standard operating procedures were available without substantially increasing cost or workers' discomfort (from the usage of protective clothing). More work however is needed to understand under which conditions will buyer requirements for sustainability have a positive or negative impact on other production of criteria that continue to take precedence. However the importance placed in researching sustainable supply chain management is minimal compared to traditional logistics aspects of quality and H&S. Akkerman et al's (2010) review of research in this field shows how the question of whether quality and safety are prioritised over sustainability is not even acknowledged as an issue.

The literature presents how the introduction of sustainability measurement methods and encouragement of suppliers to improve performance has developed for the tour operator sector, and has outlined a number of barriers faced particularly against the reality and perception of H&S and quality requirements.

Methodology

The primary research set out to 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 to 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. 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.

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 judgements, in three stages: anonymous response through questionnaires, iteration and controlled feedback in a sequence of rounds, 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. In the case of this research the questionnaires were not kept anonymous. It was important to identify the destinations that were represented in order to ascertain if there was a common thread of conflict across resorts.

The Delphi questionnaire asked staff to compare the relationship between the content of three audits that accommodation suppliers are assessed with regards to health and safety, quality and sustainability at Thomas Cook. First, there are different H&S audits ranging from nine pages to 26 pages depending upon auditor qualifications, covering fire safety, swimming pool safety, hygiene, balcony safety, fuel and energy

safety, children's club safety, beach safety and general safety. Second, the CSQ is completed by customers on their return flight to the UK. It contains 23 key performance indicators which measure the quality of service, accommodation and facilities provided by hotel and apartment suppliers. Brand standards are set in accordance with CSQ targets and suppliers are expected to consistently meet or exceed them in order to remain featured in a certain brand and brochure. Third, the Travelife audit is divided into two sections covering 'environment and people'. Questions can be defined as mandatory (required to achieve any award) or non-mandatory (of which a certain percentage need to be met, to qualify for a bronze, silver or gold level award).

Travelife criteria were numerically ranked by the Travelife auditors using a Likert scale where 1 demonstrated the least important perceived conflict and 5 demonstrated the most important perceived conflict with H&S and quality. This was supported with qualitative questions to explain their reasons and provide examples. Due to the quantity of questions within the Travelife audit it was unreasonable to expect all auditors to rank and provide comments or examples for each individual question, resulting in lower response rates and less detail in the open question justifying the answers. For this reason the contents of the Travelife audit was divided into 17 different questionnaires each including two environment and two people indicators which were randomly selected. Two open questions were also included to give participants an opportunity to comment on any other specific issues that may not have been relevant to the questions they were asked, but which they felt were of importance to the research. There was also an opportunity for them to identify Travelife criteria that could complement H&S audits or CSQ performance indicators.

Participants were purposefully selected due to their roles in health and safety, quality assurance or sustainability. 29 participants had experience in all three areas, ranging from one to nine years of experience. Nine of them dealt with H&S and sustainability and one person just dealt with sustainability. Participants were purposefully divided into groups to ensure that responses reflected global issues within the Thomas Cook destination management structure (Greece and Canaries (7); Turkey and Egypt (9); Longhaul (5); Spain, Portugal and the Balearics (12), and Rest of the World (6). Participants were then randomly placed into further sub groups regardless of their geographical area and each member of the same sub group received the same questionnaire (eg: Questionnaire 1 to Zante, Algarve and Mexico, questionnaire 2 to Rhodes, Malta and Cuba etc). Questionnaires were allocated on a random basis to reduce the possibility of bias. This first round of 54 questionnaires was distributed by email to 39 participants during the first week of May 2010. Some participants received two different questionnaires to ensure that all questions were covered. They were asked to return their responses within seven days.

The results from the first round of questionnaires were collated into a table and the average result for each question was calculated. The top ten issues according to their rank were tabulated along with qualitative supporting evidence. During phase 2, the 54 participants were asked to agree or disagree with the ranking and asked to make further comments. All 39 respondents (72%) agreed with the 'top ten' ranking, with additional comments received from 12 of them.

The next step was to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected questionnaire participants and members of the FTO Travelife & H&S teams to understand their perceptions and to identify solutions. The original questionnaires were used as a base from which to identify the preferred participants for the semi-structured telephone interviews, ensuring that at least two people from the same geographical area were selected. Each person was chosen purposefully due to them having provided detailed evidence and observations of the conflicts they had faced in their resorts. Interviews lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. Each member of staff taking part had previously received the finalised top ten list by email and had been given two or three days to read through the findings.

Each person was asked whether they had personally experienced conflict when addressing those particular Travelife questions during an audit. If they had, they were asked to provide specific and detailed examples of this, along with any recommendations they may have made to rectify the issue. If they had not personally experienced any conflict, they were asked to comment on what recommendations they would offer should they find themselves in the same situations experienced by some of their colleagues. Responses were expected to reflect specific issues dependant upon the location of the participant. The selection of participants by geographical area therefore was particularly important to ensure a balance.

Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with the heads of the Travelife sustainability team and the H&S department at the Federation of Tour Operators, and the heads of H&S and Quality Assurance at Thomas Cook. Their interviews followed the same format as the telephone interviews with overseas Thomas Cook staff, however more emphasis was placed on provision of recommendations and solutions to the issues raised rather than upon the conflicts they had personally experienced.

The last step of this research was to conduct desk based research to identify the impact of H&S defect reports and quality improvement plans upon the implementation of Travelife criteria. This was an additional phase not originally planned and arising from the field results, when a H&S Advisor raises an issue that had not previously been considered – that it is not the actual question on a H&S audit that conflicts with Travelife criteria, but the defect report generated by a negative response due to supplier non-compliance. 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 which questions had the potential to generate a 'defect report' that would conflict with the Travelife criteria. Similarly, the interview with a member of the Quality Assurance team highlighted that the conflict issue lies with the recommendations behind the Key Performance Indicators in the event that a hotel is underperforming. The actual questions on the CSQ have no bearing upon the Travelife criteria. The researcher extended the interview with the participant in order to ascertain which recommendations were likely to conflict with the Travelife criteria.

Results and discussion

The top ten conflicting issues are presented in tables 1 and 2, with a sample of the comments provided during the Delphi consultation rounds and the subsequent interviews, to provide meaning to the rankings. The reasons given by the

interviewees for rating these issues as conflicting have been transcribed in verbatim to allow the reader to judge their appropriateness.

*** insert table 1.

The results of the desk-based research demonstrate that when all of the H&S advisor audit questions and defects are considered, only 2% of these appear to potentially conflict with the Travelife sustainability criteria. However this was raised during interviews as a perception of risk, from the H&S defect report (generated by non-compliance of a hotel to a question on the H&S audit) triggering decisions detrimental to sustainability management. For this reason a risk assessment review of the 749 questions on the Federation of Tour Operators H&S advisor audit revealed that 16 of them could generate a defect that has the potential to conflict with the Travelife sustainability principles. An example would be H&S Question 02.06.13b requiring the swimming pool to be lit at night, conflicting with Travelife Question 02.02.01 (is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy and costs). On the other hand however, this exercise also revealed that there are 25 H&S questions that are complementary in nature to the Travelife criteria, such as H&S Question 03.01.04c (are freezers defrosted regularly) and Travelife Question 02.02.01 (Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy and costs), which is achieved through efficient operation of regularly cleaned freezers amongst other actions. 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.

Equally the comparison of Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires (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, amongst 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. On a positive note, there are also key performance indicators that can be complemented by the adoption of the Travelife principles, for example 'food quality'. Locally grown produce is often cheaper and of better taste and quality than imported produce, particularly fruit and vegetables. If these are added to the buffet and labelled as locally produced it is likely that the quality (and the variety) will improve.

*** insert table 2 around here.

Most of the written material researched during the literature review is academic or idealistic and fails to recognise the complexity of turning theory into successful practice. 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, 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 has existed for some time, whereas the Travelife audit is relatively new in comparison having been developed in 2004 through a stakeholder engagement process. 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 recognise the complexity of turning theory into successful practice. Thus sustainability is often left to so-called experts and special interest groups (Bell and Morse, 2005) and not integrated into mainstream business.

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, whilst the H&S departments have them on a risk list due to safety issues. This presents a very confusing message both to the hotelier and to overseas staff (personal communication). Whilst 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 dependant upon the quality of the auditor.

The interviews identified that some auditors may not complete the audit as conscientiously as expected, as demonstrated by the recycling question when auditing Spanish hotels. The verb 'reciclar' in Spanish directly translates as 'to recycle' (as in the actual technical procedure required to reproduce a product). In order for hoteliers to fully understand these questions, the verb that should be used is 'separar' which means 'to separate'. This confusion has led to hoteliers responding inappropriately, with only some auditors identifying the issue during site inspection. Both issues of

indicators and of auditor training are currently being addressed by Thomas Cook to ensure their staff fully understand the term 'actively' engaging in sustainability. If doubt exists, staff are directed to answer 'no', in which case the hotelier must provide evidence to the contrary.

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 jeopardise the integrity of the system in the eyes of the supplier, it is vitally important to avoid this as ultimately they 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. 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). 64% of the Travelife audited hotels (n=1800) 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
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 back wash swimming pool filters daily to ensure clean, hygienic water. This procedure can use approximately 2000 litres 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 whilst attending to other jobs. Two to three minutes approximately twice a week dependant 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. In the UK, a claim could be brought against a swimming pool operator under legislation such as Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, 2002; Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations, 1996 and Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations, 1998.

As tour operator customers generally tend to be British citizens, they are entitled to use UK legislation to form the basis of a claim. UK legislation tends to be stricter than in many of the destinations tour operators visit therefore standards overseas can be incredibly varied. Even if the hotelier meets local legislation, there is still the possibility that a claim can be brought against the tour operator under the Package Travel Regulations 1992.

*** insert table 3 here

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 a health and safety issue when in fact, recognised 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. A tour operator should never ask a hotel to save water by omitting running taps for a few minutes in rooms unoccupied for a long period of time, standard procedure in legionella control. Legionella is a serious illness contracted by inhaling small droplets of water that contain the bacteria. Such is the severity of the illness that an outbreak of just two cases in one establishment is considered to be a cluster. Strict legislation applies to the prevention and reporting of legionella including, Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, 2002; Reporting Regulations of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences,1995 and The Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974.

*** insert Table 4 here

Suppliers find it easier to justify their inactivity on health and safety 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. Page (undated) found that despite significant cost savings, owners of a building in the USA opted for a conventional retrofit when refurbishing, even when state of the art technology would have reduced energy bills four-fold and the return on investment was estimated at nine months. It is difficult to understand why behaviour leads a business to take a decision that ultimately has a negative impact on its commercial value.

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 ploughed into improvements of H&S than into more expensive environmental measures such as solar panels, or socio-economic measures.

Conclusions

Since the introduction of Travelife audits, Thomas Cook auditing staff have cited 'health and safety' and 'fear of legal claims' as the principle barriers to implementation of the criteria, but have typically failed to provide evidence to support their statements. As tour operators begin to dedicate more resource to sustainability, these barriers become an increasingly heavy burden and obstruct progress. The literature review demonstrated that there is very little guidance available to tour operators and accommodation providers to assist with making *practical* changes that *do not* compromise other areas of the business. It was particularly important therefore to use this research project to identify whether these barriers are rooted in reality or perception. Rather than analyse each issue individually, the patterns generated an improved understanding of the main issues faced by Travelife auditors across diverse destinations.

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 taking decisions.

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Table 1 Sustainability-Health and Safety conflict Delphi and interview comments and Delphi ranking

Travelife Question	Experience / Comments	Rank 1-5
02.04.01 Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in water consumption (also reduces costs)?	• Hoteliers claim that they will use excess water washing toughened plastic glasses therefore they continue to use disposable plastics. • Hoteliers believe that the swimming pool backwash should be done daily for hygiene reasons. • Hotels in Greece tend not to have pool manufacturer instructions or pressure gauges on filters, they therefore backwash daily to be on the safe side. • Hotels must run showers for 5 minutes if a room has been unoccupied for over a week to avoid legionella. • Dual flush cisterns are ineffective, sometimes not flushing everything away meaning customers need to flush twice • Hand-washing might be affected if staff are asked to reduce water usage • Half of the Jacuzzi water needs to be thrown away every day for hygiene reasons. It can't be used elsewhere in the hotel due to the high bacteria count	4
02.02.01 Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy consumption and costs?	• Hoteliers cannot reduce the temperature of the hot water as it would lead to legionella issues. • Turning off lights in corridors might lead to increased accidents • Motion sensors are too expensive and might not activate immediately possibly causing accidents • Some hotels in Egypt are turning electricity off for 2 hours every day, this means fridges and freezers are not supplied with power and is causing sickness issues. • Hotels just using solar power for water heating with no back up system cannot reach high enough temperatures for legionella prevention. • Tarpaulins placed over heated swimming pools so as not to waste energy overnight are dangerous. If someone falls into the pool accidentally it would be impossible to see them and this could result in drowning.	3.5
02.06.10 – 02.06.12 If refrigeration equipment utilises CFC's or HCFC's as its coolant, does the business identify, repair and	• No comments provided	3.5

replace these?		
02.01.03 Are regular (at least annual) progress reports made on environmental issues	• No comments provided	3
02.06.05 Is recyclable/reusable waste separated and recycled / reused?	• I have found that where the hotelier encourages the guests to recycle, bins have been placed around the hotel on each floor. These have become fire hazards as customers have been dropping lit cigarettes into the paper recycling bins thinking that they are rubbish bins. There have been a couple of fires in hotels this season because of this. • Where hoteliers are recycling paper and cardboard, there have been accumulations of this at the back of kitchens which have become nesting places for rodents and insects. • This is emotive in Destination X due to the fact that many suppliers were separating recyclable waste only to find that a lot of it was ending up in the same landfill. Suppliers therefore became suspicious of carrying out any other rectifications for some time. • COSSH regulations specify that chemicals / hazardous liquids must be correctly stored. Some hotels re-use 5 litre water bottles to store chemicals to try and reduce their waste. This is dangerous.	3
02.06.09 Does the business purchase cleaning materials with low environmental impact?	• If cleaning materials aren't strong enough there could be hygiene issues • Some hotels use lemon and vinegar for cleaning windows and mirrors, I'm worried that they might do this in other areas of the hotel too and there will be hygiene issues as a result	3
02.07.02 Is the business actively involved in minimising chemicals that damage health or the environment?	• This is a difficult one as many different cleaning products are generally used throughout a hotel. • To reduce the risk of infection in a hotel, chemical products are generally used. • In my experience most hotels now work with one manufacturer and the products are consistent throughout the hotel. • Smaller properties such as family run properties may use general household products.	3
02.04.03 Are employees regularly reminded to save water?	• Reusing old water and keeping buckets of dirty water can be a hygiene hazard. • Most employees are reminded verbally but probably won't go out of their way to do it. • This could affect hand-washing hygiene. • Cleaners might use the same cloth for toilets, sinks and surfaces to save water.	2.5
02.04.05	• Could mean water is too hot or not hot enough.	2.5

Are energy saving taps (eg: mixer or temperature controlled) fitted to ensure water is delivered at the temperature it is required?	• In some countries these are very expensive so cost is prohibitive. • Very hot water can cause scalding. If taps have signs to say water is very hot then people might just use the cold which means hand-washing won't be effective.	
02.04.07 – 02.04.10 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?	• Waste water might be used for the gardens, if this is not correctly treated it will be full of bacteria and raise serious health issues. • The optimal time to water is 0300 / 0400 but systems are manual and gardeners don't work nights. Grass gets watered in the morning but children play on this grass therefore the water needs to be clean. • Manual procedures require a lot of staff training and there just isn't the time to monitor every member of staff to ensure they are not leaving hosepipes on too long etc.	2.5

Table 2 Sustainability-Quality conflict Delphi and interview comments and Delphi ranking

Travelife Question	Experience / Comments	Rank 1- 5
02.03.01 Do the regulations in your country specify that you must buy all of your energy from a specific supplier?	• This may have a very negative impact if suppliers have to pay high rates for their energy. • If a regulation stipulates that they are restricted to purchase from one source this may reduce the disposable income for the running and upkeep of the property. • If the electricity company / supply is not reliable, it could lead to power cuts that will affect overall customer enjoyment.	4.5
02.09.03 Is there a system in place for reducing the number of towel changes in guest rooms?	• Some hotels are contracted to change them just 2 or 3 times per week. If they gave guests the choice it is likely that they would have to change them much more frequently • Even though there are signs in the rooms asking customers to leave towels in the bath when they would like them changed, hoteliers just do it every day as they are frightened that the tour operator will pay compensation if the guest complains about cleanliness of the room • I believe that there is only conflict when things aren't done properly or are misunderstood. Reducing the towel / linen change doesn't have to be a lesser experience, if you actually offer the customer a choice in an interactive way and respect their wishes, it will make the customer feel involved and listened to and therefore be of a better service. • Hotels don't want to cut down on towel and linen changes as they believe this negatively affects their CSQ results • There is no real short-term effect. Long-term savings	4

	may increase the budget. Water saving by not washing towels and bed sheets so often reduces the quality.	
02.02.01 Is the business actively engaged in achieving a reduction in energy consumption and costs?	• This could affect cleaning standards and therefore the overall impression of the unit. • Guests might want to leave the air conditioning on all day. They complain if they can't do this. • If air conditioning is only contracted for certain months of the year but it is too hot either earlier or later in the season hotels are requested to extend the dates and hours.	3
02.04.03 Are employees regularly reminded to save water?	• This could affect cleaning standards and cause complaints • Cleaners might use the same water for the bedrooms and bathrooms, this would be unhygienic.	3
02.04.06 Are low flush toilets fitted or water saving devices installed?	• These are not always effective and people end up flushing twice • Some devices seem to cause leaks and therefore not save any water • There are so many different types of dual flush that the customer doesn't even realise it is one.	3
02.05.02 – 02.05.05 Does the establishment dispose of all waste water to: septic tanks, package treatment plants, local sewers, sewage lagoon system or other method?	• If this is not done correctly it can cause nasty smells and attract insects • We do not want hoteliers to have their own package treatment plants on site in case something goes wrong and they can't fix them.	3
02.07.02 Is the business actively involved in minimising chemicals that damage health or the environment?	• Reducing the amount of chemicals that are used in a property may result in cleaning issues and attract pests such as rats, mice and flies • If cleaning scores consistently low on CSQ's hotels are asked to increase the frequency and quality of the cleaning.	3
02.06.08 Does the business minimise waste by buying in bulk?	• Large bowls of jam and slabs of butter are messy and give a bad impression to customers • Some purchases may end up going past their sell by date if they buy too much, therefore being of inferior quality or going to waste • If All Inclusive hotels don't buy enough food there are severe quality consequences. They usually over order to make sure that this doesn't happen as they don't want customer complaints.	2
02.06.09 Does the business purchase cleaning materials with low environmental impact?	• Guests may perceive a lack of cleanliness if proper cleaning materials aren't used and the room doesn't smell clean. • Guests might not think the room is clean on arrival if there are no 'disinfected' strips over the toilet or bags around the bathroom glasses	2
02.06.05 Is recyclable / reusable waste separated and recycled / reused?	• Could be a cause of guest complaints if not correctly undertaken and managed.	2

Table 3 Perception –v- reality relative to the frequency of the pool filter back wash

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.	02.09.08 & 02.09.09 Chlorine and pH records to be recorded 3 times daily to indicate the water quality. 02.04.11e 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. 02.09.07, 02.09.18 & 02.09.19 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

Table 4 Perception –v- 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.	09.01.01, 09.01.02 & 09.01.03 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: EWGLI 14 point plan, Travelife audit, FTO H&S Advisor Audit