

BSE Conference 2005 Doctoral workshop paper (6, 328 words all inclusive)

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Sustainable Supplier Development in the UK tour operating industry

Introduction

This paper presents the theoretical basis of a conceptual framework designed to study Sustainable Supplier Development (SSD) in the UK tour operating industry. Three key areas are identified for examination within this framework: activities, processes, and influences on decision-making. The framework is grounded in literature on Supply Chain Management (SCM), Supplier Development (SD), organisational purchasing, organisational behaviour, inter-organisational relationships, sustainable development, environmental management, corporate social responsibility and tour operations.

The paper does not address the research methodology or findings, but the framework presented here has been validated through case studies of large operators (n=3) and in-depth interviews with smaller operators (n = 17). This has provided data on SSD activities, processes and some influences. The second stage of research will further investigate influences on SSD decision-making through operator and expert response to Delphi technique questionnaires. The findings of the study will further knowledge on supplier development in a tour operations and sustainability context, and contribute to industry understanding of the application of SSD.

The research context: Sustainable Supply Chain Management of tour operations

Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) is based on understanding of the business responsibility for managing environmental, social and economic impacts over the whole product life cycle (Bergkamp, 2002; BSR, 2003; NEETF, 2001;

Young and Kielkiewicz-Young, 2001; Zairi and Peters, 2002). It basically adds sustainability considerations into SCM processes. There is no universal definition of SCM (Croom, Romano, Giannakis, 2000), but is here defined as ‘a philosophy of management that involves the management and integration of a set of selected key business processes from end user through original suppliers, that provides products, services, and information that add value for customers and other stakeholders through the collaborative efforts of supply chain members’ (Ho, Au, Newton, 2002: 4422).

Sustainability is interpreted in various ways (Dunphy, Griffiths, Benn, 2003), but is here defined in a business context as “.....living and working in such a way that human society will be possible for generations to come – and translating that into the changes required of an individual organisation – changes which maintain the organisation’s capacity for producing human benefits, and including the profitability needed for survival, while optimising the environmental balance of its operations” (Crosbie and Knight, 1995:15)

Unchecked and rapid tourism development has led to widespread criticism of the industry of the impacts arising from such growth (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Poon, 1993; Smith and Duffy, 2003). This is a particular criticism of mass market operators, which are generally considered responsible for generating the most severe impacts through high capacity, aggressive pricing and branding policies (Bastakis, Buhalis, Butler, 2004; Budeanu, 2005). However, recent research has shown that tour operators are increasingly implementing aspects of sustainability in tourism supply chains (Tapper and Font, 2004).

Tour operators provide packages comprised principally of suppliers of accommodation, transport, excursion/activity providers, ground handlers, and food and craft production. It has been widely argued that operators can influence the development of destinations through their position as intermediaries between suppliers and consumers (Carbone, Font, Tapper, forthcoming; Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997; Klemm and Parkinson, 2001; Tapper, 2001). Yet operators have claimed to lack control over suppliers (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998; Miller, 2001; Swarbrooke, 1999; Tearfund, 2001), and are said to not

take a long term view to the sustainable development of destinations (Holden, 1996; Klemm and Parkinson, 2001; Tapper, 2001; Welford, Ytterhus, Eligh, 1999).

The tour operating industry in particular is lagging behind other sectors in the implementation of SSCM, and there is little empirical research to date into tour operator attitudes and actions in this area (Font, Tapper and Kornilaki – forthcoming). Due to a lack of published research on the application of SSCM to service based industries, this research draws on experiences in the manufacturing sector. Research in this area has focused on environmental management of the supply chain (Green, Morton, New, 1998; Handfield, Sroufe, Walton, 2005; McIntyre, Smith, Henham et al., 1998; Min and Galle, 2001; NEETF, 2001; Preuss, 2005; Rao, 2005; Young and Kielkiewicz-Young, 2001; Zhu and Sarkis, 2004; Zsidisin, 1998). This research broadens the focus on environmental aspects, to the intrinsic relationship between the environment, local peoples and local economy, which characterises the tour operator product and is ultimately key to the sustainable development of destinations.

The research construct: Sustainable Supplier Development

This research is conceptualised in the field of ‘supplier development’ (SD) as it is found that constructs applied in research in this area provide the necessary detail to analyse the processes and activities tour operators may use to develop supply chain sustainability. Krause, Scannell, Calantone (2000: 34) define SD as “any effort by the buying firm with its supplier(s) to increase the performance and/or capabilities of the supplier and meet the buying firm’s short- and/or long-term supply needs.” No research has been identified which addresses the application of SD to improving sustainability. For the purpose of this research, this is defined as ‘Sustainable Supplier Development’ (SSD), and adapts the above definition to “any effort by tour operators to increase the performance and/or capabilities of suppliers in order to improve the sustainability of operations.”

The term SD was first coined by Leenders (1966), and although published research in this area has been argued to be sparse (Krause, 1999), it has been used to describe purchasing and supply aspects of SCM (Chen and Paulraj, 2004a; Croom, Romano,

Giannakis, 2000; Tan et al, 1998, Scannell et al, 2000; Ho, Au, Newton, 2002; Tan, Handfield, Krause, 1998; Tan, Kannan, Handfield, 1998; Tan, Lyman, Wisner, 2002), and in the purchasing literature to describe strategic supplier selection and relationship management (Chen, Paulraj, Lado, 2004; Humphreys, Li, Chan, 2004; Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998; Quayle, 2000). The research on SD primarily dates from the early 1990s, has focused on manufacturing industries primarily in the USA, has taken a survey-based approach with some case studies and conceptual papers, with Krause as the most prolific author. Several research themes are outlined below, which have been instrumental in the design of the research conceptual framework:

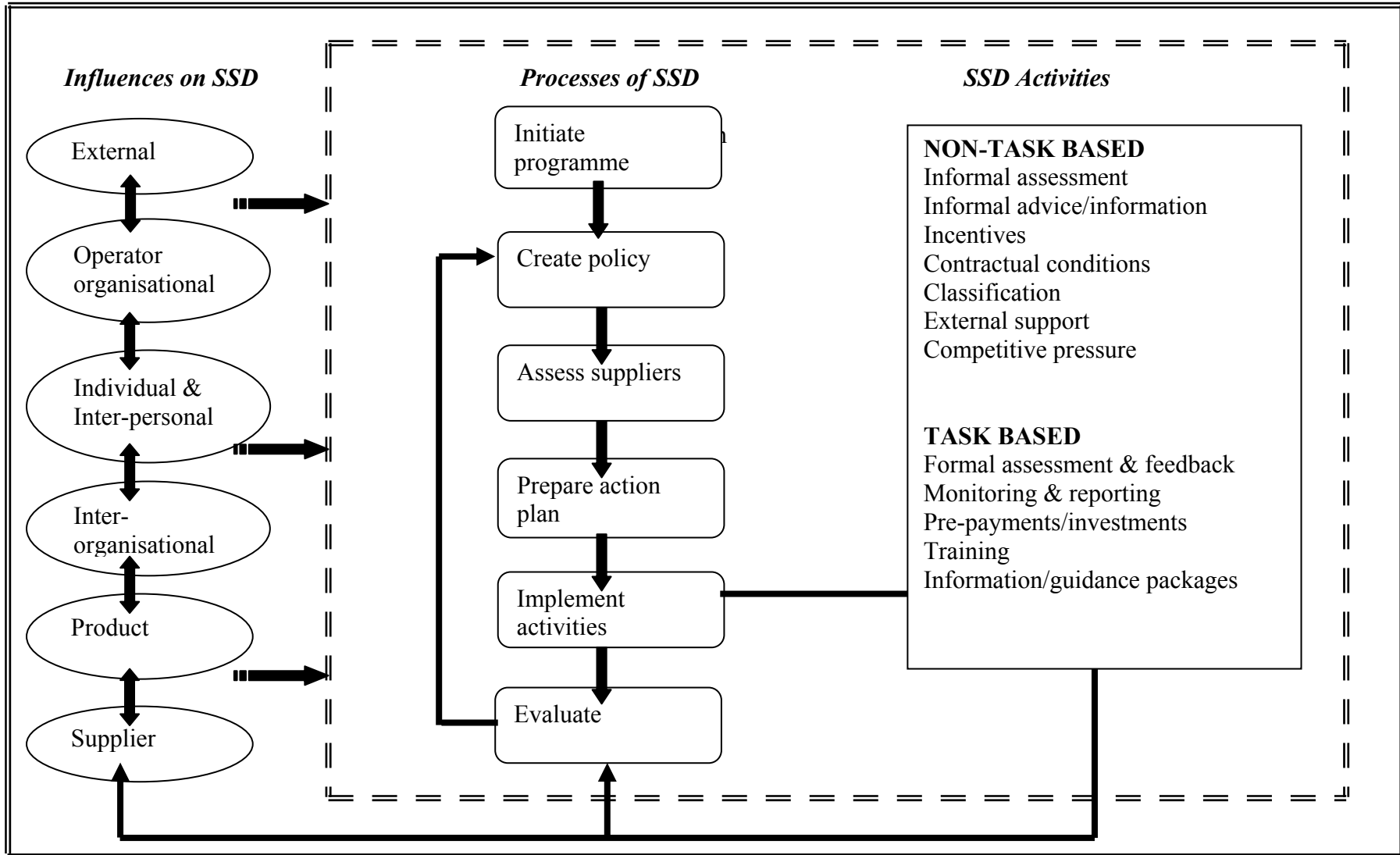
- *Process steps of supplier development programmes* (Dunn and Young, 2004; Hahn, Watts, Kim, 1990; Handfield and Krause, 2000; Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998; Lascelles and Dale, 1990)
- *Supplier development approaches/activities* (Galt and Dale, 1991; Giunipero, 1990; Hartley and Jones, 1997; Hines, 1994; Krause, 1997; Krause and Ellram, 1997a; Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998; Krause and Scannell, 2002; Krause, Scannell, Calantone, 2000; Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993; Newman and Rhee, 1990; Prahinski and Benton, 2004; Walton, Handfield, Melnyk, 1998)
- *Antecedents and influencing factors on supplier development* (Bache, Carr, Parnaby et al., 1987; Dunn and Young, 2004; Forker, Ruch, Hershauer, 1999; Handfield and Krause, 2000; Krause, 1997;,1999; Krause and Ellram, 1997b; Krause, Ragatz, Hughley, 1999; Lascelles and Dale, 1990; MacDuffie and Helper, 1997; Prahinski and Benton, 2004; Watts and Hahn, 1993)
- *The relationship between supplier development and buyer/supplier performance* (Chen, Paulraj, Lado, 2004; De Toni and Nassimbeni, 2000; Handfield and Krause, 1999; Humphreys, Li, Chan, 2004; Wen-li, Humphreys, Chan et al., 2003)
- *The benefits of supplier development* (Hartley and Choi, 1996; Leenders, 1966; Quayle, 2000)

The research framework: Sustainable Supplier Development of tour operations

The research framework (see model 1 overleaf) details process steps and differing types of activities that tour operators may use to improve supplier sustainability, and factors that influence these processes and activities. This is a cyclical process, based upon an understanding that activities and processes are the outcome of inter-related influencing factors, which are themselves influenced by the experience of engaging in SSD activities. Processes, activities and influences are therefore all intrinsically linked.

Models of purchasing behaviour, SD and SCM were significantly drawn upon in the framework design. This framework furthers work in these fields through synthesising cross-disciplinary knowledge and considering the inter-related factors of activities, processes and influences. This presents a significant extension to existing models, which do not consider inter-related factors. For example, purchasing models were found to provide concepts relating to processes and influences, but do not inter-relate these factors. SD and SCM models were also found to separately present influences, processes and activities, but only in a few instances indicate a basis link between influences and activities (Chen and Paulraj, 2004a; Krause, 1999). The following sections present the theoretical basis of the framework concepts.

Model 1: Sustainable Supplier Development (SSD) in the tour operating industry: a research framework



Processes of sustainable supplier development

The process steps set out 6 stages of SSD, from conceptualisation through to implementation of activities. This includes initiate programme, create policy, assess suppliers, prepare action plan, implement activities and evaluate. The processes are seen to be cyclical in nature, whereby policy is reviewed according to the outcome of activities. It is a basic process map designed to fit differing company structures and approaches. This was based on the experience of Parkinson and Baker (1986) who described the purchasing process as complex, difficult to model, different by product/industry and different across buying situations.

Parkinson and Baker (1986) and Hill and Hillier (1982) present a comprehensive overview of purchasing models that encapsulate processes appropriate to the SSD framework in terms of purchase initiation, establishing requirements, identifying, evaluating and selecting suppliers, and giving performance feedback. However, the models differ in that they do not consider the management of suppliers post purchase, and that they describe situations whereby buyers 'evaluate proposals' of suppliers (Moller, 1981; Parkinson and Baker, 1986; Robinson, Faris, Wind, 1967) or 'evaluate alternatives' (Kelly, 1974, Bradley, 1977; Parkinson and Baker, 1986; Webster and Wind, 1972). This may not apply to the tour operations industry where operators may only have a limited choice of suppliers in certain destinations, and contract large numbers of suppliers in a tight time frame. It is also likely that SSD considerations will be given varying degrees of emphasis depending on the nature of the operator and product.

Models of SD processes (Hahn, Watts, Kim, 1990; Hartley and Choi, 1996; Hartley and Jones, 1997; Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998; Lascelles and Dale, 1990), were useful in identifying the steps of initiate programme, implement activities and evaluate. However, the models differ in that they detail specific steps based on manufacturing industries, such as reducing the supply base (Lascelles and Dale, 1990), which does not apply to the world-wide use of a large number of suppliers that is characteristic of tour operations. SD process models also do not consider the relation to specific types of activities, or company size, so for example include processes that involve significant commitment by buyers and suppliers such as

‘provide joint resources’ (Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998) which was not felt to be applicable to all SD activities. Steps such as ‘forming cross functional commodity teams’ (Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998) or ‘form a capable buyer-supplier development team’ (Hartley and Choi, 1996) may also not necessarily apply to the structure of small tour operations or suppliers where staffing is minimal, and processes are informally designed.

The framework also draws closely on a ‘supply chain engagement for sustainability’ model from the industry based association the ‘Tour Operators Initiative’ (TOI and CELB, 2004) which is based on three steps, with sub points. The first step begins with creating a policy, assessing suppliers, preparing an action plan and monitoring/reporting on progress. All of these steps are featured in the SSD framework, with the addition of ‘programme initiation’, which is felt to be useful to consider the motivations for engaging in SSD. Other steps are included in the SSD framework as ‘activities’.

Sustainable Supplier Development activities

The literature on SD activities shows a wide variation in the terminology used to describe the activities, and includes:

- Direct involvement (Krause, 1997;,1999; Krause and Scannell, 2002; Krause, Scannell, Calantone, 2000; Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993; Wen-li, Humphreys, Chan et al., 2003)
- Transaction specific (Humphreys, Li, Chan, 2004; Krause, 1999; Krause and Scannell, 2002; Prahinski and Benton, 2004)
- Indirect involvement (Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993)
- Steady/aggressive approaches (Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993)
- Results/process oriented (Hartley and Jones, 1997)
- Strategic/reactive approaches (Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998)
- Externalised/internalised activities (Krause, Scannell, Calantone, 2000)
- Indirect influence strategy (Prahinski and Benton, 2004)

Despite the variation in terminology, the activities presented by differing authors are similar. The most complete identification of SD activities is by Krause (1997; 1999) who identified the following activities from the literature:

- Evaluation (Giunipero, 1990; Hahn, Watts, Kim, 1990; Watts and Hahn, 1993)
- Raising performance expectations/goals (Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993)
- Recognition and awards (Galt and Dale, 1991; Lascelles and Dale, 1989; Krause, 1999)
- Training and education of supplier's personnel (Galt and Dale, 1991; Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993)
- Exchange of personnel (Hartley and Choi, 1996; Krause, 1999; Newman and Rhee, 1990)
- Direct investment in supplier (Galt and Dale, 1991; Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993)
- Buying from alternative suppliers to provide competition for current suppliers (Dyer and Ouchi, 1993; Giunipero, 1990)
- Promises of increased present and future business (Giunipero, 1990; MacDuffie and Helper, 1997; Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993)

Krause (1997) further detailed SD activities through discussions with the industry and academia to include:

- Assessment of supplier's performance through informal evaluation, which takes place on an ad-hoc basis with no set procedures
- Assessment through formal evaluations using established guidelines and procedures
- Providing feedback on results of evaluation
- Use of a supplier certification programme
- Site visits - to help supplier to improve

The terminology to describe activities is complex, with little universal agreement. The most commonly used term is 'direct involvement' activities (first used by Krause, 1997), to describe activities where buyers commit to active involvement, and make time and resource commitments in the supplier to improve performance. This includes

formal evaluation, feedback, certification, site visits, investment, information sharing, recognition, training and education. Such activities are also referred to as ‘transaction specific’, which through the commitment of resources, involve some risk if the relationship collapses as investments are non transferable and non refundable (Krause, 1999). Additionally, Prahinski and Benton (2004) refer to ‘direct involvement’ activities of education, communication, evaluation and feedback as ‘indirect influence strategies’.

Other activities not described as ‘direct involvement’ are only grouped by Monczka, Trent, Callahan (1993) who label supplier encouragement, training and self improvement as ‘indirect involvement’. Krause (1997) originally labelled other activities as ‘incentives’ and ‘competition’. In later work (2002) ‘assessment (evaluation, certification and feedback)’ was added, to encompass all activities that ‘incorporate the comparative use of competition’. Activities are further distinguished as being results/process oriented (Hartley and Jones, 1997), internalized/externalized (Krause, Scannell, Calantone, 2000), implemented through a strategic/reactive approach (Krause, Handfield, Scannell, 1998) or a steady/aggressive approach (Monczka, Trent, Callahan, 1993).

Direct involvement activities can be seen as similar to steady, strategic, process-orientated, and internalized activities as they involve greater time and commitment. Aggressive, reactive, results-orientated, and externalized activities rely more on the external market to instigate performance improvement. Differing terminology again is used by Medina-Munoz, Medina-Munoz and Garcia-Falcon (2003) who carried out research into tour operator practices in managing suppliers, which they termed ‘inter-organizational control’, seen from the broader perspective of ‘inter-organizational relationships’. They identified twelve areas of operator control over suppliers, including severe influence strategies, soft influence strategies, indirect integrative mechanisms and direct integrative mechanisms.

Based upon consideration of terminology used in previous research, and the apparent challenge in labelling activities not seen as ‘direct’, the SSD framework conceptualises activities as ‘task based’ and ‘non-task based’. These are terms used in the purchasing literature to describe economic and emotional considerations in buying

behaviour (Hill and Hillier, 1982). Task based activities are here defined as those which require significant time, financial, or personnel commitment to the SSD programme. They are similar to the 'direct involvement' activities and include formal assessment and feedback, monitoring and reporting, pre-payments/investments, training, information/guidance packages. Non-task based activities are those which require less time, financial or personnel commitment to the SSD programme, and rely more on suppliers to proactively implement change. They include informal assessment, informal advice/information, incentives, contractual conditions, classification schemes, directing suppliers to external sources of support and competitive pressure.

The activities include all those cited in the academic literature, apart from the exchange of personnel, which is more applicable to manufacturing industries than the tour operating industry. Activities are also added from the TOI and CELB (2004) to include referring supplier to external sources of support, use of certification/classification schemes and monitoring and reporting. The TOI and CELB (2004) also detail raising awareness among staff and clients in order to achieve sustainability goals. These are not directly included in the SSD framework as they are internal activities, but are implicitly recognised as necessary to implement activities.

Influences on Sustainable Supplier Development

The framework presents factors from operators' and suppliers' external and internal operating environment that may influence SSD decision-making. This includes external, operator organisational, individual/inter-personal, inter-organisational, product and supplier factors. It is recognised that the factors are inter-connected, and will have varying degrees of influence on SSD programmes. The intangible nature of many of the influences, and the size and complexity of operator businesses means that the exact nature of the influences may not be clearly identifiable. However, they indicate how activities and processes may be influenced, key success factors, and possible challenges in the implementation of SSD programmes.

External influences

There is some debate among the industry concerning whether regulation or voluntary initiatives are the most effective method by which sustainability can be improved (Curtin and Busby, 1999; Holden, 1996; Miller, 2001; Tapper, 2001). Miller (2001) found that consumerism is a key trigger in corporate social responsibility activities of tour operators. However, there is little evidence of widespread green consumerism in holiday choice (Middleton and Hawkins, 1998; Sharpley, 2001), and it has been suggested that consumers are unwilling to shoulder the costs of environmental improvement (Font and Tribe, 2001). Market trends are therefore likely to play a key part in motivating and influencing the nature of SSD engagement, depending also on the nature of the operator and its products.

Industry wide approaches play an important part in motivating SSCM (Font, Tapper, Kornilaki, forthcoming), and there are many groups currently working on sustainability methodologies including the Tour Operators Initiative, the Travel Foundation, the Association of Independent Tour Operators and the Federation of Tour Operators. Organisational behaviour may also be partly driven by stakeholder expectations of a firm (De Bakker and Nijhof, 2002), and pressure groups such as Tourism Concern and the World Wildlife Fund are also actively involved in developing industry standards and support tools. The extent and nature of SSD in tour operator activities is therefore very likely to be influenced by factors such as regulatory, peer, market and stakeholder pressure.

Operator organisational influences

Engagement in SD is influenced by the nature of top management support and resources that are committed to initiatives (Chen and Paulraj, 2004a; 2004b; Krause, 1999). In terms of SSD, this depends on the perceived benefits arising from a business commitment to sustainability. Company commitment to sustainability may also be driven by a sense of moral obligation of the role of business in society

(Kalisch, 2002; Welford, 1996). SSCM is said to depend on cultures that embrace sustainability (Font, Tapper, Kornilaki, forthcoming; Tan, Lyman, Wisner, 2002), and business structures that facilitate the free flow of information (Dunphy, Griffiths, Benn, 2003; Welford, 1997). This will therefore influence the nature of SSD engagement.

Since larger firms have greater resources, they are reported to have greater propensity to engage in SD (Watts and Hahn, 1993) than smaller firms which are more likely to be challenged by time, financial resources and expertise (Friedman, Miles, Adams, 2000; Hobson and Essex, 2001; Simpson and Wren, 1997; UNEP, 2003). Smaller tour operators also have less purchasing power than mass-counterparts to influence suppliers (Curtin and Busby, 1999; Miller, 2001; Tapper and Font, 2004). The interplay of company size, structure, culture, resources, capabilities and strategic outlook in regard to sustainability will therefore influence both the extent and nature of SSD activities that operators pursue.

Individual and interpersonal influences

The role of purchasers' psychological make up in terms of motivations, learning styles, values and personality and behaviour communication and negotiation styles is reported to influence the purchasing process (Webster and Wind, Wind, Nielsen: Hill and Hillier, 1982; Parkinson and Baker, 1986; Sheth, 1973). In terms of tour operators, this requires effective communication with worldwide suppliers that may operate in destinations with differing cultures, attitudes to sustainability, and business priorities and practices.

SSD implementation is influenced by staff buy-in, and in larger companies, inter-departmental characteristics and relationships. Characteristics of team members are likely to reflect 'sub-cultures' of the company depending on members' gender, education, age, race, hierarchy and profession (Crane, 1997; Malloy and Fennell, 1998). Crane (1997) suggests that the underlying assumptions of individuals indicates the extent to which environmental beliefs and values are shared by the organisation as a whole. This suggests that SSD requires communication throughout the entire company of the benefits of sustainability in the wider context of its impacts on

everyday life, in order to inform, engage and motivate staff. This will directly influence the approach taken to communicating with suppliers on sustainability issues, and thereby influence the extent and nature of SSD.

Inter-organisational influences

The implementation of SD is said to require buyers and suppliers to share similar strategic and philosophical outlooks (Humphreys, Li, Chan, 2004; Stuart and McCutcheon, 1996). Both buyers and suppliers are also reported to likely to be more willing to engage in SD if they sense commitment from each other (Kumer et al, 1995, Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Hartley and Jones, 1997; Prahinski and Benton, 2004). In a study of the relationship between small accommodation suppliers and European tour operators, Bastakis, Buhalis and Butler (2004) found that smaller enterprises poorly rated relationships with large operators, while smaller operators were reported to build up close, longer-term relationships with suppliers based on mutual trust.

In a study of tourism supply chains, Tapper and Font (2004) note three factors that are important to facilitate investment and cement trust in tour operator supply chain initiatives; long term partnership, fair pricing and consistent volume of operations. However, the tour operating industry is reported to use dominant buying power tactics, which places suppliers in a dependency relationship (Budeanu, 2005; Buhalis, 2000; Shaw and Williams, 1994; Klemm and Parkinson, 2001; Medina-Munoz, Medina-Munoz, Garcia-Falcon, 2003; Poon, 1993). Bastakis, Buhalis and Butler (2004:158) in fact say “The different and in many cases opposing nature, orientation and interest of all the key players provokes and maintains a complex system of co-operation, competition, conflict and inter-dependency between and among them”. The implementation of SSD will therefore be influenced by the size and characteristics of operators and supplier, and the relationship between the parties.

Product factors

Krause (1999) found that firms that viewed purchases as important to the firm were likely to commit more resources to SD. Operators offer a range of products ranging

from specialist activities through to standardized packages. Tapper and Font (2004) found that specialist brands that rely on natural environments and high cultural interaction, select suppliers that meet many of the characteristics of sustainability, since small, locally-owned services and unobtrusive authentic cultural interactions are a key part of product. They also found increasing evidence that mass-market operators appreciate environmental and social concerns in product decisions, mostly as it strongly reflects on quality.

The same study identified that most SSCM initiatives among mass market operators' focus on environmental management of accommodations through the reduction of costs from energy, water and waste. Smaller operators were found to be more engaged in developing activities that benefit local communities. Tapper and Font (2004: 1) report: "It will be easiest to implement sustainability requirements in accommodation and most difficult in transport, most visible in excursions and activities while most beneficial to the local economy when this supports food and craft production." SSD decision-making is therefore likely to consider the type of product and target market, the relative importance of the product in terms of sales, the impacts of product activities, and the ease of identifying and addressing impacts.

Supplier factors

Engagement in SSD depends upon characteristics of suppliers and the local operating environment. If for example extreme poverty levels exist, awareness of environmental issues is low, or there is poor governmental support for sustainable development, it is likely to be more difficult for tour operators to implement SSD programmes. Smaller suppliers in particular may be restricted in terms of resources and capabilities to engage in SSD.

Larger suppliers may have greater resources and capabilities, but it still may not be a priority for top management, or suppliers may have greater choice of buyers, and therefore be unresponsive to demands that require investment in SSD. The implementation of SSD therefore depends on the characteristics of the local operating environment in terms of the level of competition, regulatory controls, infrastructure

and facilities such as recycling, in addition to the capacities and attitudes of individual suppliers.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the activities, processes and influences of SSD. A strength of the framework is its development of existing literature to consider the relationship between influences, processes and activities, in a unique application to the service based context of the tour operating industry. This framework provides a basis to study industry engagement in SSD in tour operations, and will be extended and refined through the research. It is designed to be flexible to suit differing types of operations, and it is recognised that companies may omit or recycle stages. It is also expected that different firms will progress at different levels and the focus of any SSD programme is one of continuous improvement, rather than a claim to sustainability throughout operations.

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