

**A multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary approach to integrating the principles of sustainable development into human resource management curriculums in hospitality and tourism.**

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**Abstract**

The sustainability of the hospitality and tourism industry is dependent upon managers who adopt sustainable development principles as part of their management philosophy. Achieving this aim requires the integration of the principles of sustainable development into the curriculum of hospitality and tourism management courses. The article explains how a multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary team of academics and practitioners used the nominal group technique to reach consensus on a curriculum module that integrated sustainability principles into a human resource management course. The process and the results of the consensus building process are discussed. The relationship between sustainable development principles in human resource management and socio-economic, cultural, and environmental issues is explained.

## **A multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary approach to integrating the principles of sustainable development into human resource management curriculums in hospitality and tourism.**

The long term sustainability of the hospitality and tourism industry is dependent upon managers who understand and adopt the principles of sustainable development as part of their management philosophy. When students are taught how these principles are related to specific management functions in various courses, they will be better prepared to apply them in the management of hospitality and tourism operations than if they were to learn the principles in a single course offering. However, the integration of the principles into current course work can be a complex and difficult process. This article presents the results of a curriculum development exercise aimed at incorporating the principles of sustainable development into the curriculum of a human resource management course in hospitality and tourism. The curriculum development exercise was carried out using the nominal group technique (NGT) by a team of academics and practitioners from a diversity of cultures and disciplines.

The curriculum development exercise took place as part of a Think Tank arranged by Business Enterprise for Sustainable Travel (BEST). BEST is an initiative of the Conference Board, in association with the World Travel and Tourism Council. The Conference Board is a worldwide network of more than 3000 companies and other organizations in 67 countries whose purpose is to improve the the business enterprise system and enhance the contribution of business to society (The Conference Board, About TBC, para.1). The World Travel and Tourism Council is a global business leaders' forum for travel and tourism (WTTC, 2001, About WTTC, para. 1). As a leading source

of knowledge on innovative travel industry BEST focuses on encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices, stimulating demand for sustainable tourism products and assisting communities with the development of pilot travel enterprises (The Conference Board 2001a, About Best para. 3).

The objective of the Think Tank on Sustainable Tourism was to “produce a model curriculum on sustainable tourism that will be distributed to hospitality and tourism education programs throughout the world” (The Conference Board 2001b, para 1). The participants worked in small groups to develop curriculum modules for three subject areas – planning and development, marketing, and human resource management. Although various modules were developed in each of the subject areas, only one of the modules relating to human resource management course curriculum is discussed in this paper.

The venue selected for the BEST Think Tank on Sustainable Tourism stimulated creative thinking for the curriculum development process. It was held at the Bongani Mountain Lodge in South Africa. The lodge is operated by the Conservation Corporation Africa (CCAfrica), an organization that strives to implement the principles of sustainability in the operation of its lodges and camps. Mr. Dave Varty, CCAfrica’s founder and first CEO, expressed CCAfrica’s commitment to sustainable development: “We set out to create a model in wise land management, integrating international travelers and rural people to their mutual benefit, and demonstrating that wildlife can be used on a sustainable basis by all.” (The Conference Board, 2001a, Best Practices, para. 6).

## **Sustainable development and sustainable tourism**

Current ideas of sustainable development and the related sustainable tourism can be traced to a variety of antecedents. International conferences and reports have framed interest, notably the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the 1980 World Conservation Strategy and the 3 independent UN Commissions. Established in 1977 – 1984, Brandt, Palme and Brundtland, all of whom are former prime ministers, chaired the three UN Commissions. The Commissions were to report on what was summarized as “the interlocking crisis of the global commons” by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987, p. 4). This includes, but is not limited to, a growing awareness of environmental degradation and major discrepancies between the rich, industrialized nations and the poor, developing countries. Hence, world population increase, ecological depletion of the ozone layer, air and water pollution, soil degradation, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, hunger, poverty, illiteracy and uneven development were recognized as having a profound negative impact on the ability of all people to sustain continued progress for generations to come.

Two sources, both cause and effect of the crisis were identified by the Brundtland Commission, namely, Third World poverty and over consumption by the First World. Given this framework, perhaps surprisingly, the Brundtland Report’s overarching recommendation was further economic growth (WCED, 1987p. xii). Introducing limits to growth, which are not absolute limitations, the widely accepted definition of sustainable development is: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p 43).

In short, the idea of sustainability hinges on a holistic integration of economic, environmental and socio-cultural development. Sustainable development is presented as a more responsible and balanced form of development that allows for the conservation of natural resources and the environment while permitting it to be exploited in order to secure continued economic growth.

The Brundtland Report, entitled *Our Common Future*, builds on the core recommendation of the Brandt Reports to increase industrialization, production, and thus economic growth in the Third World, despite the apparent failure of kindred development schemes and the underlying modernization theory. Moreover, the Brundtland Commission carries through Palme's participatory approach and concerns of security, which is not limited to global disarmament. Civil and ecological survival are emphasized through the importance of intergenerational equity, intersectoral linkages, maintenance of the ecological resource base and empowerment of smallholders, women, indigenous people, rural farmers and local communities (WCED, 1987, pp. 63, 116, & 143).

The latter is of particular interest to students of human resource management because the meaning and practice of sustainable development and sustainable tourism cannot be separate from the socio-cultural values and the context in which they exist. Simply considering socio-cultural issues as part of the wider system, or as an inconsequential backdrop or commodity does not solve the problem (Harrison, 1996). Culture is about shared values, traditions, beliefs and meanings that exist between people in different contexts. Culture is reflected in notions of identity, language, integrity and feelings of belonging, which changes according to the context and situation

at stake. However, not all cultural changes are conscious choices determined by those who identify with a particular culture.

Tourism development is well known for producing unequal encounters between the destination population and the visiting tourists. Sustainable development accordingly calls for cultural changes that are acceptable for the destination community as it determines what is to be sustained for whom and how by the people whose habitat is, or may become, the object of tourism. While there are multiple stakeholders involved in tourism, the local community is *de facto* in a better position than most to delineate what is culturally acceptable (Robinson, 1999). A stakeholder is defined as any person, group, or organization that is affected by the causes or consequences of an issue (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999). Accordingly, stakeholder involvement is not dependent on the size and maturity of the tourism operation but applicable to all forms of sustainable tourism development.

Human resource management students need to be aware that consensus cannot be assumed in local destination communities, nor are the stakeholders a homogenous group of people. Consequently, democratic processes of consultation and local stakeholder participation in decision-making are central to sustainable planning and policy-making. In this endeavor, collaboration is of vital importance. Collaboration is defined as: “a process of joint decision making among autonomous and key stakeholders of an interorganizational domain to resolve problems of the domain and/or to manage issues related to the domain” (Grey in Robinson, 1999, p. 387). Collaboration rarely takes place upon an even playing field, whether in economic, environmental, socio-cultural, local or global terms. Therefore, the collaborative process should act as a legitimizing mechanism

for implementing more equitable human resource policies in areas of gender, age, race, religion, salary, etc.

Sustainable development and sustainable tourism must help empower local destination communities through more equitable and collaborative efforts. While human resource managers traditionally address relationships at the workplace, collaboration and respect for local cultures extend beyond this immediate context. It involves an understanding of the cultural importance of employees' families and circle of friends, recognizing the changing conditions in the work force and learning how to maximize economic and social benefits to the surrounding community, to mention some areas of socio-cultural concern.

In short, understanding and respecting cultural diversity should underline sustainable development efforts by human resource managers as they cultivate fruitful collective engagements through human collaboration at multiple levels.

Few development proposals, if any, have been met with similar enthusiastic support from government and non-government agencies and other groups regardless of political ideology, which has been accompanied by academic endorsement and evident public sympathy - at least in the First World (Butler, 1998, p. 26). Indeed, the widespread approval at multiple levels is established through the very generality of the concept, which is easily embraced as a positive approach to 'good practices' of making things last, whether an ecosystem, an economy, a culture or an industry. Built on a foundation of equity, sustainable development is ultimately concerned with the quality of human life for all.

As one of the world's fastest growing industries, tourism has clear vested interests in the natural environment as resource base and as a significant means to economic growth. Nonetheless, tourism is not mentioned in the Brundtland Report. On the other hand, discussing the sustainability of tourism development on a sectoral basis, as independent of other activities and processes is contradictory to the Report's proposed philosophy of integrated development and holistic thinking. It was not until after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, popularly known as the Earth Summit, that world leaders discussed policies related to tourism. Participants in the Earth Summit adopted a 300-page plan, Agenda 21, for achieving sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, 1999a). Tourism was not specifically mentioned in this document either but the document provided the basis for the principles and policies defined in "Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry: Toward Environmentally Sustainable Development". The World Tourism Organization, the World Travel and Tourism Council and the Earth Council created the latter document that presented an action plan emphasizing the importance of partnerships between government, industry and non-government entities. The 10 guiding principles are displayed in Exhibit 1. The guidelines are summarized by the definition of sustainable tourism development posed by the World Tourism Organization:

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Sustainable tourism is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural

integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (WTO, 2001, Concepts and Definitions, para. 1).

#### Exhibit 1 About Here

Whereas sustainable tourism lacks precision in conceptual meaning and practice, a considerable amount has been written over the past decade on definitions and the imperative of adopting the principles and policies of sustainable development in tourism. Predicted to reach 1.6 billion by 2020, the volume of international tourism arrivals has caused well-known negative environmental impacts (World Tourism Organisation, 1997). With mass-tourism crowned as the primary obliterating element in unsustainable tourism practices, 'greener' and small-scale forms of sustainable tourism continue to gain interest. The UN has even designated the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism.

Unfortunately, the issue of scale and context escapes critical attention in the fascination with everything small and green. As suggested by Butler (1998) "while some developments may have moved significantly towards sustainability, to claim that they are sustainable is clearly at best premature, and possibly completely inaccurate"(p.28). Moreover, tourism's impacts can only be assessed in the geographical region in which it occurs. Yet, the relations of those tourism activities and managerial ties extend far beyond the specific destination, just as tourism is not the only agent of change or impact in the destination. Sustainable tourism in a particular region does not denote a sustainable tourism industry, especially when the existing problems of the tourism industry lie in the unplanned tourism facilities of the past and in the continuous growing number of tourists.

Furthermore, the meaning and practice of sustainable tourism cannot be separate from the cultural values and the context in which they exist (Liburd, 1999). As argued by Harrison (1996), simply considering socio-cultural issues as part of the wider system, or as an inconsequential backdrop, does not solve the problem. All systems are maintained around equilibrium. The fundamental idea of sustainability and the system is to uphold balance. This functionalist approach fails to acknowledge that elements of continuity and change are the norm for culture, the environment and the economy, just as change does not automatically equal destruction. This calls for a collaborative interpretation of what is to be sustained for whom and how by the people whose habitat is, or may become, the object of tourism. In other words, the uncritical acceptance of economic growth, the naïve assumption of inter-generational equity and the fundamental imbalances of power and knowledge must be centered into the heart of sustainable development and sustainable tourism (Liburd, 1999).

Charged with the opportunistic mandate to expose these much-neglected issues and sensitize attention to the socio-cultural context in which sustainable tourism may occur accordingly became an integral task of the multi-disciplinary module development process. As expressed in Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism, “the main aim is to establish systems and procedures to incorporate sustainable development issues as part of the core management function and to identify actions needed to bring sustainable tourism into being” (WTTC, 2001, Strategy and Development, Agenda 21, para. 8). The purpose of the training module presented in this paper is to encourage human resource managers to incorporate sustainable development principles into the policies, procedures and activities of their organizations.

## The Nominal Group Technique

The content of the curriculum module was derived through a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural group decision making process. A team of nine practitioners and academics from the Bahamas, Canada, Denmark, Mexico, South Africa, Spain and the United States worked together to develop a curriculum module for current human resource management courses. Each individual brought a different perspective to the discussion. The disciplines represented included program administration, hospitality management, marketing, research, public communication, anthropology, sociology, natural science, environmental sciences, environmental education, and tourism development.

Consensus on the content of the curriculum modules was achieved through the use of the nominal group technique (NGT). This group decision making technique is a structured activity specifically designed to facilitate group-based decision making (Partington, 1993 in Chapple & Murphy, 1996). The terms "nominal " and "group" are used because individuals work alone for a period of time in the presence of a group without interacting (Van de Ven, 1974 in Chapple & Murphy, 1996). NGT is well known for its ability to help groups reach consensus without hindering individual thinking or creating conflicts. The process encourages the development of individual views that are debated and given consideration by the group (Chapple & Murphy, 1996). It was developed by Delbecq and van de Ven in 1968 who synthesized studies related to social psychology, management-science, and social work (Ho, Lai, & Chang, 1999). Within the technique are elements of brainstorming and brainwriting as well as voting techniques that balance participation among group members.

The technique has been widely applied to facilitate group decision on curriculum development (Burton, Pathak, & Burton, 1977; Davis, Rhodes & Baker, 1998; Hegarty, 1977; Holtz & Olson, 1976; Hugenberg & O'Neill, 1987; Lonsdale, 1974; Parr & Done, 1979; Rojewski, Lynch & Smith, 1992; Zastrow & Navarre, 1979). Other uses for NGT in education include the evaluation of courses and programs (Chapple & Murphy, 1996; McCormick & James, 1983; Wells, 1987).

The use of NGT is not limited to the field of education. The field of business has applied the technique to a variety of business problems. For example Roth, Schleifer and Switzer (1995) demonstrated that NGT was an effective instrument for the implementation of total quality management (TQM) programs. Its usefulness has been demonstrated for the analysis of consumer feelings (Bristol & Fern, 1996), as a performance improvement tool (Elliot, 1991), as a method to improve decision making (Anderson, 1990; Martin & Tate, 1999; Thomas, McDaniel & Dooris, 1989), as a method for determining CEO incentive pay (Brown & Meade, 1997), to uncover problems in relationship marketing (Perrien & Filiatrault, 1993) and for selecting leaders (Edgeman & Williams, 1998)

NGT has been demonstrated to be effective and efficient for idea generation and group consensus building (Beruvides, 1995; Kolano, 1991; Sink, 1983). There is empirical evidence to support the contention that the technique has been more successful in identifying ideas and issues than other group activities (Greene, 1994; Hegarty, 1977; Hegedus & Rasmussen, 1986; Penley, 1978; Van de Ven, 1974).

The nominal group technique begins with the articulation of the problem or question by a facilitator. It is important that the problem be a distinct task that gives the

participants a specific question to which they can respond (Roth, et al., 1995). Group members are encouraged to seek clarification of the issue to be discussed. Once all group members clearly understand the problem, the process proceeds through five distinct steps. Participants in the human resource curriculum module development process were asked, “What should be included in a module designed to teach principles of sustainable development that are relevant to human resource management?” The group agreed to focus on topics relevant to university level students majoring in hospitality and/or tourism management. The five steps that followed the identification of the task are described below.

*Step 1: Silent Generation of Ideas.* Group members were given about 20 minutes to think about the question and write down specific topics they felt should be included in the human resource module on sustainable development. No discussion of ideas took place during the first step. Participants were encouraged to generate as many ideas as possible and not constrain their thinking.

*Step 2: Reporting of Generated Ideas.* After the members worked alone on the question, the facilitator asked each member to present one of their ideas. The leader asked each individual, one at a time in round robin fashion, to contribute a concept that should be included in the curriculum module. Each idea was written on a chart that was visible to all the participants. The process continued until every individual member had no further ideas to contribute. In this stage of the process, the facilitator ensured that each member was allowed to present his/her ideas without interference or comment by other members. This control is required so that ideas are not stifled or discouraged (Brown & Meade, 1997). A list of the ideas generated is presented in Exhibit 2.

## Exhibit 2 About Here

*Step 3 Clarification of Ideas.* Open discussion of the generated ideas took place in the third stage. The members discussed each concept written on the chart. Questions about the concepts were posed resulting in a clarification of the ideas. This discussion facilitated the combining of similar concepts and the generation of a final list of concepts.

*Step 4 Ranking of Ideas.* The goal of this step was to reach a consensus on the concepts that should be included in the curriculum module. Each of the eight members was given 10 adhesive dots to place on the concepts s/he considered most important. Each member was permitted to place up to two dots on any particular concept.

*Step 5 Presentation and discussion of the results of the voting process.* After the group leader counted the votes, the group decided to select only those concepts that received at least seven votes. These were then prioritized into four categories of learning outcomes: sustainable development, socio-economic and cultural issues, environmental impacts and employment processes. The results of this discussion are presented next and summarized in Exhibit 3.

## Exhibit 3 About Here

### **The Human Resource Management Module**

Prior to arriving at a title for the module, the team of academics and practitioners discussed the principles of sustainable development that might be applicable to human resource management. They agreed to focus on three core principles outlined in Agenda 21: 1) the eradication of poverty, 2) equity in income distribution, and 3) human resource development that insured access to training opportunities regardless of social status, age, gender, race or religion (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, 1999a).

The discussion led to the development of the following title “Integrating principles of sustainable development in human resource management.” Little discussion was needed to conclude that the main objective of the module was “to provide students with an understanding of the principles of sustainable development in human resources management in tourism.” The group agreed to limit the content of the module to topics suitable for university level students who were taking a course on human resource management in either a hospitality or tourism management program.

The content of the module was divided into four sections listed below. The content of each section is further described in sections that follow.

- Sustainable Development
- Socio-Economic and Cultural Issues
- Environmental Impacts
- Employment Processes

### **Sustainable Development**

The initial segment of the module must begin with the development of an understanding of the fundamental principles of sustainable development as they relate to human resource management unless these have been previously presented in the students' course work. In most cases, students of tourism management will have been exposed to these concepts in introductory courses while students of hospitality management may not have the same background. In the latter case, the module should include a discussion of the reasoning behind sustainable development and the global reports and agreements that led to the wide spread adaptation of the principles of sustainable development. The introductory session should emphasize the value and importance of incorporating

sustainable development principles into the human resource management. Minimally, the five principles of sustainable tourism development outlined by the World Tourism Organization in its *Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism* (1998) that are displayed in Exhibit 4 should be critically discussed. Specific emphasis should be placed on intra-generational equity and spreading the benefits of tourism through the society in relation to employment and human resource development.

#### Exhibit 4 About Here

In addition to developing an understanding of the importance of incorporating sustainable development principles, the team felt that this segment of the module should explain why sustainable development principles make sense and are good business. For more than a decade, the hospitality industry has recognized the securing and retention of qualified staff as a critical concern (Baum, 1998; Esichaikul & Baum, 1998; International Hotel Association, 1988). Sustainable practices that train and educate local residents as stakeholders will help create a more stable and dedicated workforce. This, in turn, is likely to affect customer service and overall profits in a positive direction. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure a meaningful existence for local residents, visitors and tourism managers alike.

An important human resource management task is to imbue within the workforce the culture of the organization that directs the actions and activities of the workforce. Consequently, the task force felt it was important that students understand that the mission statement of the human resource department must contain sustainable policies and develop an understanding of different values in company cultures. Examples of hotels that have incorporated sustainable development policies into their mission

statements can be found in the World Travel and Tourism Council's "Steps to Success" publication (WTTC, 1999).

A final point made by the team of experts was that the ethical issue of equity in recruitment and salary should be discussed. Specifically, the students should be aware of the training objectives listed in Chapter 36 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 21, in relation to social status, gender, race and religion. The objectives are displayed in Exhibit 5.

Exhibit 5 About Here

### **Socio-Economic and Cultural Issues**

Based on the discussion and the results of the NGT process, the authors have concluded that the term "issues" in the title of this section does not express the intent of the group. In fact, the team discussed "approaches" to human resource management that affect the social, economic and cultural aspects of the community rather than "issues". The curriculum development team grouped approaches to planning and managing economic, social and cultural conditions within the community in this category.

The five content areas reflect the principle of sustainability that recognizes the importance of retaining or adapting elements of the culture that distinguish one people from other (Mowforth and Munt, 1998, p.109). This includes values, knowledge, traditions and identity, which are represented in a diversity of processes and performances. Cultural integrity and the tangible goal of equity in sustainable development are part of these ongoing and selective processes. Students should recognize, understand and respect this diversity.

Employment can mean different things to different people just as the cultural importance of family and friends vary. Employment in hospitality and tourism, or the development of a tourism industry, may not always seem desirable, especially if the tourism and hospitality sector is associated with low-paying menial jobs. It is therefore of pivotal importance to ensure that local people become involved through equitable collaborations which aim at maximizing the economic and social benefits to employees as well as the local community. Students should also be cognizant of how the discussion of local involvement in tourism and sustainable development predominantly focus upon indigenous people in the so-called Third World (c.f. Mowforth and Munt, 1998). However, these issues are relevant to local cultures and communities everywhere and should be reflected in human resource policy and management in all contexts.

Specifically, the curriculum development team identified the following five subject areas in which the students should have basic knowledge:

1. **Students should know how to maximize the use and involvement of local people.** Involvement of local people includes the use of their cultural artifacts and traditions in the design of the structure and procedures of the organization as well as the employment of local people within all levels of the organization.
2. **Students should be able to determine the role of employment in the structure of society.** Students need to recognize that all societies may not view the importance or the value of employment in the same light as they do. For example, a basic concept that students should learn is that some societies work to live while others live to work.

3. **Students should understand how conditions in the workforce change and that cultures are dynamic rather than frozen in time or space.** In correspondence with the principles of sustainable development, long-term planning efforts in human resource management will need ongoing adjustments to meet the needs of future employees and employers.
4. **Students should have a respect for the cultural importance of employees' families and their circle of friends.** In many cultures, the employment of friends and relatives is considered inappropriate but students need to understand that in some cultures, the employment of friends and relatives is expected and valued.
5. **Students should understand the importance of adjusting work schedules to avoid conflicts with important local religious and other events.** The importance of acquiring knowledge of important local religious and other events of cultural significance should be emphasized. Adjustments can feasibly be incorporated into work schedules in order to avoid conflicting interests between the company and the local community. This will serve to sustain a good working relationship over time.

### **Environmental Impacts**

Once again, the authors felt that the title of this section did not reflect the discussion of the group. The title would better express the consensus of the group if it was “managing environmental impacts” or “minimizing the impacts of tourism on the environment” because the discussion did not focus on the impacts themselves but instead on the role of human resource managers in the management of the impacts. There is no

question as to the importance of maintaining a quality natural environment for a tourism enterprise to be sustainable. This point is strongly emphasized in the Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism document. Consequently, the team recommended that the human resource management training module include the concept of “Green Teams” and basic principles related to water and energy saving. The implementation of these two strategies into the everyday operation of a tourist facility will serve to minimize negative environmental impacts.

The implementation of “Green Teams” is seen as important to the facilitation of the goals of sustainable development in an organization (Hartman and Stafford, 1997; Moxon and Strachan, 1998; Beard and Rees, 2000). Green teams are useful to “generate ideas, enhance learning experiences, explore issues, identify conflict and focus action to enhance understanding about why, what, how, where and when to pursue the best practicable environmental options (BPEOs)” (Beard and Rees, 2000:27). Beard (1996) contents that the first step to changing the business culture and implementing environmentally friendly practices is the training of green teams. Students need to understand that the human resource department is responsible for organizing and executing such training. In addition, they should be aware that the human resource department appoints members of the staff to the “Green Team” and assigns these staff members the responsibility of ensuring that all activities are conducted in the most environmental friendly manner in all departments at all levels.

The curriculum development team recognized that ecological thinking and training should include instruction in various subjects such as choice of product, facilities, construction, use of technology, energy, heating and air conditioning, devices, water and

waste (Diwok, Glauber, Schnock & Schott 2001). However, it may not be possible to include a discussion of all of these within one course module. Consequently, the discussion was limited to water and energy because they are the most visible and often the measures that will also result in cost savings, which will drive further steps towards sustainability.

## **Employment Process**

Major goals of sustainable development are the eradication of poverty, greater equity in income distribution and human resource development. The employment of local residents is a critical function required to reach these goals. Consequently, it is important that students understand how the employment process is related to sustainability.

For the sake of parsimony, the curriculum development team organized the employment process into three basic classifications: hiring, training, and retention. Recruitment, selection and placement activities and policies were grouped into the section called hiring. Training included orientation for new employees, on the job training and skill development through videos, workshops, classes and other means. The final classification, retention, emphasized motivational tools and incentives to help employees achieve their maximum potential and minimize their frustration levels, opportunities for growth and development, and performance evaluation techniques.

### **Hiring**

The team concluded that three important principles related to hiring policies and practices needed to be discussed in the module. First, the module should stress the importance of determining the role of employment in the structure of a society prior to

creating recruitment material or designing a hiring process. Students need to understand that the local social structure is an important aspect of how information is distributed throughout a community. When unemployment is widespread and a large portion of the population has not been previously employed, significantly different techniques may be needed to recruit in an equitable manner. For example, job announcements, job fairs and job descriptions may be ineffective because only those with employment experience will understand how the process works. Consequently, traditional methods of recruitment may exacerbate any inequalities that may exist within the system. In some cultures, a greater dependence on word of mouth and recommendations of those first employed may be more effective while in other cultures formal procedures may be required.

Secondly, it is important for students to understand that it is critical to hire local people and involve them as stakeholders in tourism. The travel and tourism industry can play an important role in the eradication of poverty and in the achievement of income equity by hiring and promoting local people. This policy not only benefits those employed by the tourist business but also encourages further economic development, especially in rural areas. It is important to spread the benefits throughout the local community because tourism affects many aspects of their everyday living. By involving local people as stakeholders, they will be in a position to allocate the meanings and values of tourism into their everyday lives and formulate a tourism product that is meaningful to them. This way, negative effects of tourism in local communities can be addressed and hopefully prevented.

The third component of this segment of the training module is information on how to design a skills analysis measure that ensures that people are placed in positions

for which they are fully qualified and are likely to succeed. Employment of the local people may lead to the goal of reducing poverty and improving income equality if those who come to work in the tourism business have a positive experience. If, however, they are placed in positions for which they do not have the skills, it will be difficult to retain them as employees and the goal will be lost. The skills analysis measure will provide the tools for appropriate placement of individuals. In addition, the tool can be used to determine the type of training necessary to equalize income.

### **Training**

The curriculum development team gave a high priority to three specific sustainable development concepts in relation to training. The team felt it was especially critical for students to grasp the importance of planning and implementing continuous education programs for the staff. Continuous education ensures that each employee has the opportunity to develop skills needed to achieve higher positions within the organization. Income equalization is dependent upon the design of a program that effectively develops the skills and knowledge of the local people.

The team also recognized the importance of educating the students on how to design a skills analysis that matches the corporate needs in correspondence with the mission statement that reflects the principles of sustainability. Skills should be analyzed to ensure that employees have the necessary experience and ability to implement sustainable principles in human resource management. Students should be aware of suitable training methods to ensure that the shortcomings are erased or solved.

The third point that should be stressed in the human resource curriculum is the importance of cross-cultural exchanges. Sustainable tourism is dependent upon the

avoidance of ethnocentrism and stereotyping. All cultures must be equally respected within the organization. Local knowledge and traditional materials should be used in the construction of the facility so that the facility blends in with local building styles. Indeed, the 1992 Rio Convention on Biodiversity and the Statement of Forest Principles (United Nations, 1993) specifically recognize the traditional knowledge held by indigenous peoples and the genetic diversity that they represent as key elements in sustainable development of the planet (Robinson, 1999).

### **Retention**

Four concepts were identified as important for sustainable human resource retention policies and practices. First, students need to know a variety of motivational and evaluation techniques that are appropriate for the cultural context. Motivation techniques that work in individualistic and achievement-oriented cultures are likely to fail in cultures that are more collective and egalitarian. For example, the “employee of the month” motivational technique commonly used in the US would be meaningless in an egalitarian society. Incentives must be structured to reflect the culture and values of the society in which the hospitality business is operating to be effective and sustainable.

Second, students should know how to set up appropriate channels for settling staff problems and grievances. The channels and processes used in low power distance cultures are likely to be unacceptable for a high power distance culture.

Another important concept that students should understand is that performance appraisals must include principles of sustainable development. The awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity in intercultural interactions, such as performance appraisals is key to a meaningful evaluation. Students should have an understanding of

hidden cultural assumptions and value diversity in meanings of work and promotion. Drawing attention to individual achievements in a collectively oriented culture may be offensive and should be avoided. Rather than singling out individuals for performance interviews, paying attention to an employee's own words and actions can represent an opportunity for learning and useful evaluation. Phillips and Edwards (2000) provide a good example of constructively assessing group performances in different cultures as does the training modules in Brislin and Yoshinda (1994 eds).

Finally, students need to have a toolbox of activities that will encourage their employees to talk to them about their concerns and ideas. Promoting feedback is an important and ongoing element of sustainable development, which further strengthens the relationship between the people and the company. The aforementioned source materials describe activities that will promote feedback within the organization.

## Discussion

Instructors can use the curriculum module developed through the nominal group decision making technique as described in this paper to integrate the principles of sustainable development into human resource management classes. The integration of the principles of sustainable development is critical because, as one of the world's largest industries, hospitality and tourism should actively contribute to implementing the environmental and socio-cultural principles of sustainable development. Despite the ambiguous definition and uncritical interpretation of sustainable development as continued economic growth - only now with environmental constraints - the principles of sustainable development provide an important agenda for local and global wellbeing. Cognizant of the gap between implementation of the principles of sustainable

development in tourism and the existing literature on the subject, BEST's module curriculum development initiative aims to enhance existing hospitality and tourism education programs by emphasizing the importance of sustainable tourism. The initiative treats education on sustainability as a management philosophy rather than as a subject matter. Hence, there is a need to integrate sustainability principles into courses so that leaders of the hospitality and tourism industry are convinced that they should be applying sustainable practices in their daily operations.

Human resource managers in hospitality and tourism are in a unique position to recognize, respect, and facilitate understandings of the value of sustaining local diversity in the global commons. In particular, students of human resource management must be aware of how sustainable tourism aims to empower local communities through more equitable efforts of collaboration. This moreover targets the eradication of poverty, greater equity in income distribution and human resource development, which are key elements to sustainable development. Building positive relationships with local stakeholders also provides legitimacy as well as a comprehensive framework for determining what is to be sustained how and by whom for present and future generations in a particular tourism destination. Unless future hospitality and tourism managers develop a management philosophy of sustainability, implementation of the sustainable development principles at all levels in the tourism operation remains highly unlikely. For example, only students exposed to the module are likely to implement the concept of "Green Teams" as a human resource management tool to encourage collaboration to effectively minimize the negative environmental impacts from tourism.

The nominal group technique proved to be a valuable tool for synthesizing ideas and for drawing out a number of different view points about what sustainable development practices should be integrated into current human resource management curriculum. Group consensus was achieved without creating conflicts or hindering individual thinking among team members. Differences in cultures and disciplines did not cause conflicts because the preference of each individual in the group was reflected in the final product since consensus was reached by mutual interaction. This process is yet another demonstration of the effectiveness and efficiency of the NGT decision making process that has been described in the literature (Beruvide, 1995; Kolano, 1991; Sink, 1993).

As predicted by Bristol and Fern (1996), the nominal group technique allowed members to participate in the development of the curriculum without the typical negative affect of group dynamics. No member of the group felt s/he needed to impress other members, nor were they inhibited by self-evaluation. Each member appeared to be acting independently. There was no pressure for everyone to accept one point of view.

The inhibiting factor of group conformity was avoided by giving the participants time for uninterrupted thought and the recording of their ideas. Even minority ideas and opinions were represented, as each participant was able to influence the group's decision. The voting process gave each member of the team an equal voice to prioritize the concepts that should be included in the module. Consequently, the views of the most vocal or dominant members of the group did not have greater weight than those of others in the group.

Working in a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural environment further stimulated the NGT process and enhanced the overall quality of the final product. With a multiplicity of academic disciplines and public and private sector interests represented in the group, each participant was forced to make their own area of expertise intelligible without having the security of shared conceptualizations to rely on. The free flow of conflicting ideas and concepts proved to be particularly critical for creative thinking and for discovering new connections between topical areas and academic disciplines that otherwise might have seemed at odds. As participants were allowed sufficient time to explain their ideas, ethnocentric acts of judging each other based on one's own criteria or conventional categories of gender, age, race, ethnicity or discipline were avoided.

By comparing Exhibits 2 and 3, the reader will notice that the thoughts and concepts improved after group consensus had been achieved. For example, "Understand how sustainability informs human resources content, principles and practices" and "Understand and orient relevant parities to the principles of sustainable development" became clearer in the final product where the concept was expressed, "Understand fundamental principles of sustainable development as applied to human resource management, specifically, how sustainability affects and enhances human resource management in principle and practice." The concept of ethical issues of equity were defined and clarified in the process, as were issues of local involvement.

### **Implications**

The results of this curriculum development exercise indicate that NGT is a valuable tool for building consensus on modular curriculum development. However, the process has much broader applications. The same process followed in this exercise can be

used to achieve faculty consensus on issues where there is likely to be conflicting points of view such as program curriculum, textbook adoptions, college/departmental goals or other strategic issues. For example, many programs rely on input from future employers, alumni, current students, administration and faculty to update skills and knowledge students need to succeed in the next five years. Integrating the varying viewpoints is often difficult. Other techniques such as focus groups that are well suited for exploratory tasks appear less useful for achieving consensus and arriving at a decision (Bristol & Fern, 1996). Often one individual's viewpoint is expressed so forcefully that it is adopted when many in the group are opposed (Chapple & Murphy, 1996). By utilizing the nominal group technique, each segment can contribute equally to the final product. The views of the students and recent graduates will be considered along with those of the industry professional and the academic. A more balanced outcome is likely.

In addition, the process can be applied to the development of criteria for evaluating teaching and learning experiences (Chapple and Murphy, 1996) or selection parameters for candidates for new positions (Edgeman and Williams, 1998). The results reported here indicate that diversity in the membership of the decision making team will encourage creativity and reduce the potential for group think.

## **Conclusion**

There is a critical need to develop hospitality and tourism industry leaders with a managerial philosophy that will put into practice the principles of sustainable development. In contrast to a single course on sustainability, the modular approach helps the students understand how to apply the principles to specific subject matters and industry sectors. For example, students who take a food and beverage management

course that incorporates a sustainability module will understand how to operationalize sustainability in the food service system. BEST is in the process of producing a set of model curricula on the subject of sustainable tourism to be distributed at no cost to educational institutions. Readers are encouraged to integrate these modules into their course. For information on how to obtain the modules visit the BEST website at <http://www.sustainabletravel.org/>.

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**Exhibit 1****Guiding Principles of Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry toward Environmentally Sustainable Development**

- Travel & Tourism should assist people in leading healthy and productive lives in harmony with nature
- Travel & Tourism should contribute to the conservation, protection and restoration of the earth's ecosystem
- Travel & Tourism should be based upon sustainable patterns of production and consumption
- Travel & Tourism, peace, development and environmental protection are independent
- Protectionism in trade in Travel & Tourism services should be halted or reversed
- Environmental protection should constitute an integral part of the tourism development process
- Tourism development issues should be handled with the participation of concerned citizens, with planning decisions being adopted at local level
- Nations shall warn one another of natural disasters that could affect tourists or tourist areas
- Travel & Tourism should use its capacity to create employment for women and indigenous peoples to the fullest extent
- Tourism development should recognize and support the identity, culture and interests of indigenous peoples
- International laws protecting the environment should be respected by the Travel & Tourism industry.

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council (2001)

**Exhibit 2**  
**List of Concepts Generated by Individual Participants in Step 2 of the NGT Process**

Understand how sustainability informs human resources content, principles and practices  
 Understand and orient relevant parties to the principles of sustainable development  
 Maximize use of local people  
 Determine the role of employment in the structure of a society  
 Realize that the responsibility of human resource management is also to encourage employees to potentially become employers  
 Know the concept of developing “Green Teams”  
 Draw a career path for each position (upward mobility)  
 Plan/implement continuous education/training programs for working staff  
 Ensure advancement of local people in destination communities  
 Place importance on the selection process with sensitivity to sustainable development  
 Aware of and able to explain relevant examples of good practices  
 Set up appropriate channels for addressing staff problems and grievances  
 How to explain to staff how and why they should/are acting sustainable  
 Promote feedback (top down, bottom up)  
 Aware of ethical issues of equity (including recruitment, salary, gender, age) promotion  
 Design performance appraisals that include principles of sustainable development  
 Consider gender issues in cultural context  
 Understanding of stereotypes in job positioning  
 Know how to train staff to implement water and energy saving programs and control waste  
 Sustainable principles should be put into orientation  
 Understand changing conditions in work force (mobility, e.g. Migration, economic, social)  
 Understand the cultural importance of family and circle of friends  
 Understand that mission statements should contain sustainable policies  
 Maximize local benefits through human resource policies  
 Understand the recruitment procedures  
 People management should take place in close cooperation with local people’s (schools, churches, etc) schedules  
 Understand salary structures and benefits and their ultimate utilization  
 Relations between image of tourism operation and visitor satisfaction  
 How to treat non-staff and utilize traditional knowledge

**Exhibit 3**

Group Consensus on Learning Outcomes for the Human Resource Module on Sustainable Tourism

**Sustainable Development Learning Outcomes**

- Understand fundamental principles of sustainable development as applied to human resource management, specifically, how sustainability affects and enhances human resource management in principle and practice.
- Understand that mission statements must contain sustainable policies and develop an understanding of different values in company cultures.
- Be aware of and able to explain good practices, especially of ethical issues of equity in areas of recruitment, salary, gender, age, religion.

**Learning Outcomes related to socio-economic and cultural issues**

- Know how to maximize positive use and involvement of local people.
- Be able to determine the role of employment in the structure of society.
- Understand changing conditions in the work force
- Understand the cultural importance of employees' families and their circle of friends
- Know how to maximize economic and social benefits to the local community through human resource practices and policies
- Understand the importance of adjusting work schedules in to avoid conflicts with important local religious and other events

**Learning Outcomes related to environmental protection and preservation**

- Know concept of developing 'Green Teams'.
- Know how to train staff to implement water and energy saving programs and control waste

**Employment Processes Learning Outcomes**

Hiring:

- Realize that the responsibility of the human resource management team is to encourage employees to become employers.
- Place importance of the selection process with sensitivity to sustainable development.
- Design a skills analysis that matches the needs in a sustainable manner and in correspondence with mission statement.

Training:

- Plan and implement continues education, training programs for working staff.
- Design a skills analysis that matches the needs in a sustainable manner and in correspondence with mission statement.
- Educate staff on how to use non-staff to utilize traditional knowledge.

Retention:

- Know a variety of motivational and evaluation techniques appropriate for the cultural context.
- Be able to develop appropriate channels for settling staff problems and grievances.
- Be able to design performance appraisals that include principles of sustainable development.
- Know how to promote feedback from the working staff.

## Exhibit 4

## Principles of Sustainable Tourism Development

- The natural, historical, cultural and other resources for tourism are conserved for continuous use in the future, while still bringing benefits to the present society.
- Tourism development is planned and managed so that it does not generate serious environmental or socio-cultural problems in the tourism area.
- The overall environmental quality of the tourism area is maintained and improved where needed
- A high level of tourist satisfaction is maintained so that the tourist destinations will retain their marketability and popularity
- The benefits of tourism are widely spread throughout the society.

Source: World Tourism Organization: Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism, 1998

## Exhibit 5

## Agenda 21 Training Objectives

- To promote a flexible and adaptable workforce of various ages equipped to meet growing environment and development problems and changes arising from the transition to a sustainable society;
- To strengthen national capacities, particularly in scientific education and training, to enable Governments, employers and workers to meet their environmental and development objectives and to facilitate the transfer and assimilation of new environmentally sound, socially acceptable and appropriate technology and know-how;
- To ensure that environmental and human ecological considerations are integrated at all managerial levels and in all functional management areas, such as marketing, production and finance.

Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 21, Chapter 36 (1999b).