Responsible Hospitality:
Theory and Practice

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1 | Introduction

> *Apparently solid financial institutions have tumbled. So what else that we currently take for granted might be prone to sudden collapse?*
>
> Schumacker Lecture, 4 October 2008 – delivered by Andrew Simms

The modern world is rife with turbulence and complexity and daunting challenges lie ahead. In the words of Jonathon Porritt (former chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission), the world is facing a perfect storm as the forces of the financial and energy crises meet with environmental crisis, climate change, massive population increases and emerging pandemics.[1]

There is a considerable level of debate about the relative importance of each of these phenomena and – in a few cases – about the scientific basis for their existence. Most people agree, however, that effective solutions are required to secure a prosperous future for mankind.[2] These solutions will deliver radically different modes of living, consuming, doing business, interacting, distributing wealth and so on – in short, solutions that require a comprehensive revolution on a scale that has not been seen in modern history.

Some would point to the changes in policy, consumer attitudes and business practices to claim that such a revolution is already taking place. Others would point to the ongoing growth in emissions of carbon, the paltry changes consumers have made to their lifestyles; the growth in the gap between rich and poor; and the increasing influence of big business to demonstrate that – if it is a revolution – it has neither the scale nor the intensity required to safeguard the future of humankind.

In such turbulent times, there is inevitably debate and discord about the steps necessary to deliver global security. Many consider there to be a need for widespread changes throughout society to prevent a global calamity. The finger of blame for our current state is often pointed at the global corporations that have seen an astronomical growth in their wealth and cultural influence in the last thirty years or so. Over this period many have grown to have balance sheets that exceed the GDP of small states. Others see these global goliaths as holding one of the most powerful keys to securing the future of humankind.

While this latter thought may sound radical when said aloud (especially in the presence of many an environmental campaigner), it is not really such a radical or

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1 John Beddington (UK Government's Chief Science Advisor) echoed this sentiment in 2009.

2 Many commentators claim that it is the future of the world that is at stake, but this is untrue. The aim of most modern environmentalists is not to save the world, but to secure a prosperous future of the human race on the planet.

unprecedented thought that major corporations may be able to lead the path towards more sustainable patterns of development. Visionaries such as Joseph Rowntree and the Cadbury family played a key role in improving conditions and mitigating environmental damage from their respective enterprises in the late 1800s. In modern times, economists such as Archie Carroll recognise a wide scope of responsibility, as expressed in his Pyramid of Social Responsibility Model, which comprise of economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities, which he terms 'the four faces of moral leadership' (Carroll, 1991). These are echoed by the World Business Council For Sustainable Development, which acknowledges 'we are learning that the most effective way to address many of the world's most pressing problems is to mobilize the corporate [private] sector where both companies and society can benefit' (WRI *et al.*, n.d.).

While many would applaud the sentiment behind this declaration, there are concerns that businesses are perhaps not equipped to achieve the scale of change that is necessary to avoid the 'perfect storm' described by Jonathon Porritt. Hundreds of exciting examples exist of businesses 'doing more with less' or practising 'eco-efficiency'. These businesses are typically referred to as good practice case studies. But these 'good practice' examples all too often hide a rather different reality. And that is the fact that they produce 'overwhelming resource savings [but promote] even larger growth in the production of the wrong products, produced by the wrong processes, from the wrong materials, in the wrong place, at the wrong scale and using the wrong business models' (Hawken *et al.*, 1999).

The aim of this book is to look at the evolving concepts included under the umbrella of what has become known as the responsible business movement. Specifically, the book aims to explore if the concepts of responsible business are being implemented within the hospitality sector and to assess whether the responses delivered by that sector thus far are indeed promoting the production of the wrong products, using the wrong processes, from the wrong materials, in the wrong place, at the wrong scale and using the wrong business models, or whether they have the potential to help deliver some of the solutions to global environmental and social challenges!

The focus of the text is to move the debate away from the very practical 'how to' manuals that have thus far dominated bookshelves on this topic for hospitality businesses to:

♦ Examine the theoretical context for responsible business in general and responsible hospitality in particular;

♦ Establish the core principles to which any business laying claim to responsible practices in the hospitality sector should aspire;

♦ Assess the range of actions taken by the sector to implement these principles;

♦ Build a vision of a hospitality sector that is economically successful and operates

Chapter extract

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