

Responsible Hospitality: Theory and Practice

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Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The reasons for doing good	19
Chapter 3: Defining good – the principles of responsible business	29
Chapter 4: Good in the context of hospitality	46
Principle 1: Avoid wasteful use of resources and protect and, where possible, improve the environment	66
Principle 2: Prepare for the (un)expected	97
Principle 3: Develop products that are responsible and can be operated responsibly	112
Principle 4: Develop mechanisms to take full account of the views of people and communities	134
Principle 5: Embed responsible business practices throughout the supply chain	151
Principle 6: Engage employees and customers in actions that support environmental, economic and social wellbeing	175
Principle 7: Contribute to the development of public policy that promotes environmental, social and economic wellbeing	205
Principle 8: Define responsible business values and communicate good practice	218
Principle 9: Build trust through transparency	232
Principle 10: Take responsible business to the heart of the company	248
Chapter 5: A Faustian bargain?	258
Afterword	267
Glossary of terms	275
List of acronyms	278

4

Good in the context of hospitality

Hotels, airlines, tour operators and others are engaging in a variety of activities that would have been unheard of ten years ago. As travellers seek out more unique experiences, pioneering companies are trailblazing new practices for the entire industry. The glimmers of the future of tourism are evident in this work.

Michael Seltzer, Director, Business Enterprises for Sustainable Tourism, quoted in *Corporate Social Leadership in Travel & Tourism* (WTTC, 2002)

The hospitality sector was a relative latecomer to the concept of responsible business. Nevertheless a number of hospitality businesses, including many global corporations, now claim to operate according to its principles (see Text box 5). Most of these businesses have at the very least engaged executives with dedicated roles to implement responsible business programmes. Some have gone further and host training programmes to engage employees in the implementation of responsible business strategies, have reviewed their supplier registers to ensure that their supply chain practices match their own responsible business criteria, and/or have developed 'eco' brands with clear environmental and/or social associations. A handful claim that responsible business is embedded into the core of their business (or their corporate DNA) and one or two would claim to have integrated a responsible business dimension into all business decisions.

What has been achieved by some hospitality companies is impressive. It would, however, be misleading to claim that all hospitality businesses that claim to be operating responsibly are doing so, or even that the corporate companies that have adopted responsible business practices (usually with highly motivated and passionate responsible business managers) are able to implement them to a consistent standard throughout all units. There are undoubtedly some real champions of responsible business, many of which are referenced in the chapters that follow. Even those businesses that are champions often realise that the responsible business journey is a long one and that it is difficult to take every business unit in all locations along on that journey.

When one takes a look at practices worldwide it is likely that the vast majority of hospitality businesses have done little to respond to the full breadth of issues embraced by the responsible business agenda. In fact, many of those that claim to be operating responsibly have done little more than implement a handful of eco-efficiency practices, most of which provide pay-back periods of less than five years. While eco-efficiency initiatives are important, one has to question whether they represent the sea change in practices that is required to address the range of social, environmental and economic issues that are referenced in the Introduction.

Text box 5: Responsible business in the hospitality sector

The Rezidor approach

'Our ambition is to be a good company to work for, stay with and invest in. This means that we take our commitment to being a responsible business seriously: taking responsibility for the Health & Safety of guests and employees, respecting social and ethical issues in the company and the community and minimizing our environmental footprint.'

The IHG approach

'Corporate Responsibility is integral to the way we conduct our business and sits at the heart of our strategy. As well as helping us to create value for IHG and build competitive advantage, acting responsibly plays a key role in our efforts to manage costs and drive revenue more effectively.'

Scandic's vision

'We want to be a source of inspiration for conscious people and we want to help to make a better world. We can provide the inspiration by making guests aware of simple, sustainable solutions that they can put into practice at work and at home. We believe that people are going to become increasingly conscious of the choices they make – and we want those conscious people to opt for Scandic because we are a good choice in every way – economically, socially and environmentally. They know what we stand for and share our values.

Omtanke (care and consideration for others) has been an important value for Scandic. Omtanke in how we relate to others and in how we relate to the world around us.'

The Baxter Storey approach

'After keeping you healthy we also like to keep the planet healthy too. We have a huge respect for the produce we work with and are committed to driving forward new and innovative environmental schemes that will help protect those resources.

We are currently the only company in our sector to have invested in a dedicated specialist responsible for developing environmental management schemes – for our business and those of our clients.'

The Pret-a-Manger strategy

'We don't believe in long-winded 'eco' policies that simply don't ring true. This is our Sustainability Strategy; it explains what we actually do at Pret rather than just what we'd like to. We looked at each part of Pret that affects the environment and drew up a list of our priorities and, more importantly, what we're doing about them.'

Within accommodation establishments at least, the importance of protecting the environment and community assets of destinations has long since been accepted (see, for example, early works by Krippendorff, Butler and Young). This acceptance came alongside a realisation that accommodation businesses (in leisure tourism destinations at least) are dependent on the quality of the environment, culture and

Chapter extract

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