

# Understanding the Sustainable Development of Tourism

5

## Sustainable Human Resource Management

### Contents

<b>Human resource management</b>	4
<b>Strategies for sustainable human resource management</b>	7
<b>Organising, controlling and implementing sustainable human resources</b>	9
<b>Human resource evaluation/monitoring</b>	16
<b>Future challenges/issues</b>	20

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## Sustainable Human Resource Management

*Rajka Presbury*

### Rationale

The cornerstone of sustainable human resources is the recognition that it is the 'people' input that is of the greatest importance (Baum, 1995, 2006). This is because tourism is about people's experience as guests, and the delivery of the tourism product and service is evaluated by people's demands and expectations. The delivery of the product and service is also by people, and tourism and hospitality employees are part of the product which visitors pay for. Therefore investment in people should be a long-term commitment by which all actions are guided. Consequently tourism development must include sustainable practices in human resource management.

Unlike many business sectors, tourism is a blend of various industries and sectors offering products and services which range from airline and cruise ship travel and accommodation, to restaurant meals, entertainment, souvenirs and gifts, park services, recreational vehicles, resort development, safaris, leisure and recreational opportunities. Consequently it should be understood that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a major part of the travel and tourism sector. Although the human resource management needs of small business are not of the same size or complexity as those of a large organisation, they face equally important human resource management issues. As Wager (1998) suggests, small firms are best advised to emulate successful large firms in managing their human resources.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce, discuss and analyse the main elements of human resource management that reflect sustainable tourism practices. The chapter emphasises the critical role of human resource management in promoting sustainable tourism, whether it be in a large organisation that has the full resources of an experienced and qualified human resource team or a small operation where the owner operator or manager has the responsibility for the management of human resources. Although this chapter focuses on large tourism operators, many of the policies regarding human resource issues can be documented and implemented by even the most modest of business enterprises. Furthermore this chapter emphasises the importance of evaluating performance in achieving sustainable practice in human resources and addresses future challenges/issues associated with the way human resource management can contribute to the sustainable development of tourism.

vehicle for disclosing information about the organisation's programmes as well as soliciting feedback on the company's performance.

As a part of the annual reporting process, organisations measure and evaluate their performance, and communicate their progress and challenges. Together, these activities help organisations continually improve their contributions toward addressing global sustainability challenges and advancing sustainability at the local level.

The commitment to sustainable development requires that management understands the immediate and longer-term interactions with, and impacts on people and the environment. It requires business decisions that enhance stakeholder trust, and build social and environmental capacity. This commitment can only be successful if organisations engage in the following practices:

- ◆ **Walking the talk.** An organisation cannot promote change in others if it is not striving to exemplify that change in its own organisational values and activities.
- ◆ **Keeping up to date.** As professionals, employees have a responsibility to keep learning and constantly informing themselves about the emerging science and practice of sustainability – both what is happening to the world, and what can be done about it.
- ◆ **Telling the truth about the trends, as you see it.** In a world of great media noise and confusion, where sustainability issues and global concerns must compete for attention, organisations have a responsibility to their clients to keep them informed. Be clear to clients about what the most important trends affecting the world and their future may be, and why.
- ◆ **Sharing information, and credit, with other professionals.** While client confidentiality must always be respected, it slows down progress in the field of change for sustainability if information is hoarded regarding new ideas, the development of new methods and relevant activity in the market. It also damages overall progress when the work of other people is used without appropriate permission or citation.
- ◆ **Prioritising cooperation over competition, and impact over income.** In the community of sustainability practice, seek first for opportunities to work with others and build on complementary strengths, rather than to compete for primacy; and weigh the chance to make change as more important than making money.
- ◆ **Make referrals to other professionals whenever appropriate.** If someone else, or a different methodology, would be significantly more effective in meeting a specific client's needs, make the client aware of that option.
- ◆ **Tithe to the volunteers.** Donate some fraction of your revenues to voluntary or non-profit initiatives that are advancing the practice of sustainability.
- ◆ **Explain your ethical choices.** Be transparent about the criteria used for structuring human resource practices and for choosing professional engagements.
- ◆ **Consider the systemic impacts of your advice and actions.** Human resource managers have a special obligation to think systemically, and to take into account

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