

Responsible Hospitality: Theory and Practice

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Principle 2: Prepare for the (un)expected

The unexpected

We are playing Russian roulette with features of the planet's atmosphere that will profoundly impact generations to come. How long are we willing to gamble?

David Suzuki – eminent environmentalist

The title of this chapter is a little misleading. None of the issues described in the text that follows are unexpected. They are often discussed by scientists, academics, politicians, environmentalists and others. Most are not new. For some businesses, however, planning for the scale, likely implications, timescales and outcomes of many of these issues is entirely lacking. What is focusing minds now is the growing evidence that the implications of some of these issues are becoming evident and are already having an unwelcome impact on businesses and economies.⁵

In the text that follows, the range of issues is presented as if they are separate. In truth, of course, they are closely related. For example, climate change exacerbates water scarcity in some parts of the world and over-abundance in others. Water scarcity and over-abundance undermines agricultural productivity. Crop failure puts additional pressure on mineral resources as food imports increase. Equally, shortages of mineral resources (and oil in particular) have impacted upon the availability of land for food production as pressure has increased to produce bio fuels. Increases in oil costs also impact on food costs because of the energy intensity of modern food supply methods.

It is rarely a single issue that pushes businesses into a crisis, but a number of smaller interconnected issues. As the number of potential issues increase, so does the likelihood that they will combine to produce crisis conditions for companies.

Climate change

Of the sustainable development issues, climate change is probably the best known.⁶

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- 5 There are a number of commentators – including James Stacey of Earth Capital Partners – who state that some areas of Kenya is not suffering from a drought but from climate change. Statements such as this can make investors reappraise the conditions they place upon loans or review the geographical areas in which they are willing to operate.
 - 6 Contrary to popular opinion, there is broad-based consensus – even among many climate sceptics – that climate change is happening. A few commentators do deny that climate change is occurring, but most of the debate on this topic relates not to the existence of the phenomenon but to the cause, scale and implications of climate change.

Scientists predict that it is necessary to halve emissions of CO₂ from 1990 levels by 2050 to prevent catastrophic global warming. This is thought likely to keep global temperature increases to around 2°C (the lowest threshold of anticipated temperature change). Even within this threshold, it is thought that 20–30% of species could face extinction and there are predicted to be serious effects on the environment, food and water supplies, and health (UK Metrological Office, 2010). One of the biggest problems with climate change is the fact that the science is uncertain and while there is general consensus of the fact that the world is warming, there is little consensus of the scale or impacts of that change or of the strategies required by businesses to adapt and thrive.

Climate change has had a very high profile within the media, but the level of debate about the likely impacts has been a deterrent to action. Many businesses have taken measures to reduce their carbon emissions (this is known as mitigation in the jargon and these are described in Principle 1), but fewer have recognised that there is a need to adapt current business operations to continue to thrive throughout the period of change (this is known as adaptation).

Information about business adaptation strategies is lacking

We need to open up the 'black box' of what the private sector is doing ... We know things are happening, but we need to pull them into the debate, before the world meets to determine its climatic fate ...

Kallhaug (2009)

Food security

Food security has emerged as a significant issue on the agendas of countries from China to the UK over the last decade or so. Headlines such as 'Africa – China's new rice bowl' demonstrate the seriousness with which some governments take this issue. It has also recently become an issue of concern for many food service businesses and the major contract caterers in particular.

Food security and food wastage

As food security rises up the agenda, so does the issue of food waste. Within the profit outlets in the UK hospitality sector, it is estimated that 400,000 tonnes of avoidable food waste were disposed of. That food had an estimated value of £722 million. Much of it could have been avoided by improvements in food storage, preparation and portion control systems.

Source: WRAP (2011)

Food security concerns are driven by a range of factors, including: population growth (and the significant increase in the number of middle class who are able to afford to include meat regularly into their diet), biodiversity decline, soil degradation, desertification, water shortages and competition for land – including areas that

Chapter extract

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