

“i-SITEs and the implementation of authentic sustainable strategies: 100% Pure rhetoric?”

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Abstract

This paper investigates implementing and embedding authentic sustainability strategies. A multiple case-study methodology was employed based on interviews with managers and front-line staff at i-SITEs where tourists interact with the ‘100% Pure’ campaign differentiated on New Zealand’s ‘clean green’ imagery. An examination was made of participant’s understanding of the concepts of sustainability and authenticity in a tourism industry context; the discourse between the participant’s home and workplace sustainability orientation; the physical environment of the i-SITEs; and the relevance of third party accreditation. Thematic analysis identified three themes for further discussion examining the barriers to implementing sustainable strategies: First, the communication of strategy through policies, procedures, and practices at the i-SITEs; Second, the process of bottom-up policy engagement; Third, the strategic vision and commitment to translate the 100% Pure campaign into actions. Findings suggest that a whole organisation approach, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches, is necessary to embed sustainable strategy. (150 words)

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Keywords

Strategic implementation, sustainable strategy, authentic strategy, personal values; multiple case-studies; environmental marketing

Introduction

The focus of this research is to investigate process by which ecological sustainable strategies are implemented and embedded throughout an organisation. This area has not received sufficient attention in the academic literature (Yang *et al.*, 2010; Tang *et al.*, 2012), in particular within the service industries (Wolf, 2013.) A criticism of 'green' strategies is that they may be superficial rather than embedded, and open to accusations of 'greenwash,' and therefore for sustainable business strategies to be successfully implemented and effective they require active participation from management and staff throughout the organisation, and need to be authentic, a concept which has not been adequately researched in the environmental and strategic management literature (McShane & Cunningham, 2012, p. 97).

The tourism industry provides an ideal context to examine these issues when its strategy for competitive advantage is differentiated by adopting a 'green' image and 'authentic' imagery and engagement with the natural environment. As the outcomes of these strategies are dependent not only on high-level planning, but on the active participation and engagement of front-line staff and are observable by consumers, poorly implemented strategies in this area will not be seen as authentic. The key concepts of authenticity and sustainability are explored in relation to the translation of the 100% Pure New Zealand branding campaign into authentic sustainability strategies, within the context of the New Zealand tourism industry. The 100% Pure brand employs imagery of the natural scenery of New Zealand; linking the destination to a 'clean and green' image (Connell *et al.*, 2009; Insch, 2011.) However, in order for this form of brand differentiation to be successful there needs to be commitment and an active involvement by business managers in the implementation of the strategy (Cox & Mowatt, 2012; Heikkurinen & Ketola, 2012; McShane & Cunningham, 2012.) The research question that forms the basis of the research is:

In what ways does Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) translate the 100% Pure 'clean-green' branding campaign into authentic sustainable management strategies. What are the sustainability practices, policies and perceptions of these organisations?

To answer this research question the following will be considered:

1. What are the drives and constraints of the strategic sustainability policies and procedures?
2. How are sustainability strategies implemented from the top-down and the bottom-up to ensure authenticity and embeddedness?
3. What is the influence of management and employee buy-in, attitudes and personal values?
4. What visible evidence indicates authentic sustainability strategies?

Literature review

The literature reviewed for this research is in two parts. First, is an investigation of sustainability from a business perspective, with particular reference to the tourism industry. This section explores the definitions of sustainability: environmental, economic and social, and the integration of these concepts into business organisations.

Second, strategy is explored from the perspectives of top-down and bottom-up implementation, as well investigating the concept of strategic vision and authenticity.

Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is not a new concept, but the Brundtland report entitled “Our Common Future” is often referred to as the basis of modern interest in environmental sustainability as well as giving the most recognised definition for sustainability (Lozada & Mintu-Wimsatt, 1997):

“Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (United Nations, 1987, p. 15)

After the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro “the environmental and social ‘movements’ were bridged into the concept of economic development, thus contributing to the sustainability construct becoming more mainstream.” (Spetic *et al.*, 2012, p. 372), and Yeoman *et al.* (2005) suggest that individuals are moving beyond the goods and services experience towards concern for the wider issues of environment, animal welfare and social justice. The emerging concept of green consumerism has been defined as responsible and empowering (Reijonen, 2011), but even with increased interest in sustainability, Soteriou and Coccossis (2010) rate the integration of sustainability concepts into business strategy as being average. Brammer *et al.* (2012, p. 425) suggest that, particularly in the case of SMEs, managers focus in on the day-to-day running of the business and may believe that their business “has little impact on the environment.” The lack of integration is possibly also due to “the concept of sustainability [being] so vague that it may not translate well into specific policies, actions or indicators.” (McCool *et al.*, 2001, p. 128). Tregida *et al.* (2013, p. 3) suggest that governments, businesses and academics have differing definitions and understanding of what sustainability is, as actors “consider the meaning of the phrase in their own terms.” Added to this there are different levels of awareness of sustainability issues, as well as different levels of willingness to accept responsibility for the actions of an organisation (Dodds *et al.*, 2010.)

Collins *et al.* (2007) state most businesses see environmental regulations as an additional cost, and Freestone and McGoldrick (2008, p. 447) indicate that ‘green’ motives may not always be altruistic. This is evident in the amount of recent research focused on “examining the relationship between the environmental performance and financial returns of businesses,” yet, producing limited insights on “perception of and willingness to support green projects.” (Poudyal *et al.*, 2012, p. 159; Tang *et al.*, 2012.) Mihalic (2000) states that whilst reducing a business environmental impact may increase profits by reducing costs, improving the environmental quality for the business has the ability to create competitive advantage for an organisation. The use of triple bottom line reporting (TBL) has become a way that organisations consider economic profits, as well as environmental and social impacts (Hampl & Look, 2013, p. 203), but TBL is often poorly applied as businesses tend to focus mainly on financial results neglecting the environmental dimension (Collins, Dickie & Weber, 2009; Timur & Getz, 2009.) The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is closely tied to TBL and stakeholder theory. CSR is defined as “any responsible

activity that allows a firm to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, regardless of motive” (Barney *et al.*, 2011). As CSR’s main focus is to “satisfy external audiences” (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 82), rather than strategy development and implementation a full examination of CSR falls outside the scope of this paper.

Tourism and sustainability

As other economic sectors, the tourism industry has difficulty defining sustainability (McCool *et al.*, 2001), and the growing green consumer market may receive contradictory signals. Mihalic (2000, p. 67) identifies “a growing segment of visitors ... willing to pay a premium for attractive, clean and pollution free environments, ” and therefore the environmental management of a destination must be communicated effectively to potential tourists in order to give a clear message. Recent trends in tourism indicate an increased desire for more practical solutions to sustainability and the World Tourism Organization and the Canadian Tourism Commission have identified ecotourism, linking travel to nature while learning about the environment, as the fastest growing sector in travel (Jayawardena *et al.*, 2013, p. 133, 137.) Vellecco and Mancino (2010) suggest there is a need to focus more on information and education; that tourists should be given a list of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ as a way to reduce the tourist’s impact at a destination, but Dodds *et al.* (2010) caution that tourists are not a homogenous group with identical motivations or perceptions. Heikkurinen & Ketola (2012) agree that managers have to grapple with ambiguous or self-contradictory stakeholder values, as well as complex organisational ethical dilemmas.

Regardless of the way an organisation defines sustainability, organisations adopting ecological values must be committed to conservation (Crossman, 2011), and be willing to support environmental concerns in the everyday behaviour and actively controlling its impacts on the environment, clarifying the ethical environmental practices at all levels within the organisation (Martin *et al.*, 2011; Mihalic, 2000; Vellecco & Mancino, 2010). Martin *et al.* (2011) concurs that ethical behaviour can be used as the source of the differentiation, which can result in a positive response from stakeholders, and Jayawardena *et al.* (2013, p. 133-134) emphasize that the tourism industry an organization can embrace sustainability to “build brand image and branding power, to improve corporate reputation and to increase corporate trust.” Hall & Wagner add that this may “produces improvements in their corporate image or similar competitive advantages” (2012, p. 184.) The embedding of strategy in the tourism industry has not been well explored, with one criticism by Kasim (2006) that many studies on sustainability in the tourism industry focus on excessively on hotels and local initiatives rather than a “whole systems approach” (Schianetz *et al.*, 2007, p. 372.) This research aims to investigate not just the development, planning and goal setting elements of strategic management, but more importantly the implementation and embeddedness of organisational sustainability strategies. To do this effectively requires an understanding the fundamentals of organisational strategy.

Strategic Management

Fennell and Butler (2003) suggest successful businesses are less focused on just economic longevity, they also include harmony and sustainability. This echoes Lozada and Mintu-Wimsatt (1997, p. 192) stated “businesses need to conscientiously

include environmental management in their list of top strategic priorities.” However, few organisations have earmarked investment funds for environmental quality; instead they tend to focus on the cost-saving devices (Vellecco & Mancino, 2010). The question is how do businesses approach environmental sustainability in the overall organisational strategy? In many organisations there is still the view of the CEO as the architect of strategy (Goll & Rasheed, 2005; Mintzberg, 1990.) Mintzberg (1990;1994) challenged this view, and suggested states that most successful strategies are visions not plans. Therefore, strategy should be part of an organisation wide philosophy (Balmer *et al.*, 2011) and identity that both shapes and drives the goals and strategies (Martin *et al.*, 2011). Strategic vision must be a holistic approach that taps into the emotions and energy of an organisation, embracing core organisational values (Nutt & Backoff, 1997) to create an “imagined or perceived pattern of communal possibilities to which others can be drawn.” (Morden, 1997, p. 668.) The key to a successful strategic vision is that it has a clear and compelling imagery; it may even be communicated and expressed in a way that resembles a slogan (Nutt & Backoff, 1997). A good example of sustainability specific strategic vision is the concept of a business becoming a ‘zero waste or zero pollution’ business (Lozada & Mintu-Wimsatt, 1997; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1997).

Day and Arnold (1998) suggest that to enhance the bottom line a business must improve its product differentiation, reputation and build trust. Maio (2003, p. 235-236) suggest a business should use a “highly integrated marketing communications and public affairs program [to present] a consistent image of good citizenship.” “Adopting a responsible identity, firms could project/reflect a responsible image and reputation, which in turn could then be a source of competitive advantage.” (Heikkurinen & Ketola, 2012, p. 327) Whilst in many SMEs the personal ethics of the manger and the ethics of the business are more aligned than in the case of larger firms (Williams & Schaefer, 2013), the use of ethical marketing tools can have a positive impact on organisation goals; changing the organisation to becoming more ethical (Martin *et al.*, 2011). Within strategy, green marketing is defined as:

“The application of marketing concept and tools to facilitate exchanges that satisfy organisational and individual goals in such a way that they preserve, protect and conserve the physical environment” (Lozada & Mintu-Wimsatt, 1997, p. 182)

Whilst Wolf (2013, p. 93) suggest “sustainability shields firms from reputational damage by providing legitimacy in the eyes of different stakeholder groups”, Liedtka (2008) suggested that ‘fake it until you make it’ is a commonly held maxim of management. The issue is that a business and management using surface acting can produce emotional dissonance and alienation (Liedtka, 2008). Using marketing strategy to manipulate the perception of an organisation can have negative consequences, specifically, the risk of the marketing being perceived as an “ethical façade” (Martin *et al.*, 2011.) Balmer *et al.* (2011) state that stakeholders can become guarded or even sceptical of marketing material leading to accusations of Greenwash, or hollow core values. Therefore marketing must have a genuine link between what is being marketed and the environmental credentials of the organisation. In this research the use of 100% Pure could be considered a strategic vision, as this identifies an association with clean and green, with the New Zealand specific imagery employed,

attempting to create a trusted differentiated locational strategy through green environmental marketing.

Strategic Implementation

The execution of strategy is just as important as the strategy formulation (Higgins, 2005) as “it doesn’t matter how good the plan is if you can’t make it happen.” Zagotta and Robinson (2002, p. 30) Pugh and Bourgois (2011, p. 172) are in agreement stating, “strategy is not something we have, it is something we do.” A problematic aspect of ecologically sustainable strategies is translating an often poorly understood concept into specific policies (McCool *et al.*, 2001, p. 128), especially as different groups may understand these issues differently (Dodds *et al.*, 2010.) Bramwell (2005) indicates that an organisation should begin with short-term targets that can be raised over time; starting off simple, leaving complex actions and change until a later date. Sustainability strategies can “encompass a wide range of behaviours, ranging from relatively simply implemented workplace recycling and energy reduction initiatives” (Brammer *et al.*, 2012, p. 424). Kashmanian *et al.* (2011) agree stating that key elements are a series of paths with many milestones. The success of even local ecological initiatives requires the understanding and involvement of front-line staff. The academic literature in the area of strategy has a tendency to focus on strategy formation, and elements of successful strategies in terms of development and communication. Williams & Schaefer (2013) suggest there is limited understanding of how values and personal commitment influence managers engagement with environmental issues. Soteriou and Coccossis (2010) conclude that strategic planning is not always done in an exhaustive manner; often it has a focus on budget preparation, vision and goals. There is a lack of academic research that explore the implementation and embedding of strategy, in particular sustainability strategies and also of the involvement of staff in their development and implementation.

Bottom-Up Strategies

“Successful strategy is a living and dynamic process” (Zagotta & Robinson, 2002, p. 34) that needs to continually adapt and change due to: “uncertainty, non-linear activity and unpredictable changes” (Schainetz & Kavanagh, 2008, p. 601.) One issue with top-down strategy is an organisation becomes leader dependent (Kezar, 2012), but Pugh and Bourgois (2011) suggest strategy comes from a variety of sources: from the front line staff comes action oriented strategy as they are the ones who interact with customers, managers have a more analytical and broader view of issues, plus strategic intuition. Bottom-up, grassroots, method of forming strategy can offer more solutions and ideas for issues and organisation direction, it also creates “greater buy-in, increased expertise, energy and enthusiasm” (Kezar, 2012, p. 726). Kezar (2012) identifies that failure of grassroots may be due to either lack of support or resources from the organisation. A distributed or shared leadership may create a “deeper understanding and more transformational change” (Kezar, 2012, p. 727). In either case, the key to successful strategy is a communication channel that is open and accessible, with clear and consistent messages. Bottom-up strategy is not without its critiques, Schainetz and Kavanagh (2008) suggest whilst this is good for creating localised goals, but because it does not view the bigger picture it may miss important aspects, particularly environmental sustainability. Williams & Schaefer (2013, p. 184) state that “future research should also explore how an internal locus of control and

emotions are linked to pro-environmental values and how they might frame behaviours with respect to the environment.”

Authentic Strategies

To avoid the greenwash accusation an organisation must do more than just insist they are sustainable; their actions must match the marketing rhetoric (Freeman & Auster, 2011; Tang *et al.*, 2012). The organisation must implement sustainability strategies in a thorough manner; refraining from “the mere publication of appealing sustainability reports.” (Wolf, 2013, p. 93) The communication of authentic intention is not solely for the involvement and engagement of the employees, but to also to communicate a commitment to other stakeholders by the organisation (Liedtka, 2008.) Morgan *et al.* (2003, p. 351) state that in the tourism industry “what New Zealand affirms is the idea of the authentic experience”, but what is meant by authentic? The concepts of authentic and authenticity are becoming “important concept for business ethics theorizing” (McShane & Cunningham, 2012, p. 97), at the intersection of ethics and management, highlighting the core issues of “moral character, ethical choices, leadership, and corporate social responsibility” (Liedtka, 2008, p. 238.) Maio (2003) states that authenticity is dependent on the integration of values into an organisation’s behaviours. However, authenticity is not well discussed in management literature; particularly how employees perceive authenticity (McShane & Cunningham, 2012.) “Few consumer researchers have defined authenticity, which allows the term to be used in different ways and with varying meanings” (Leigh *et al.*, 2006, p. 482), and “academic work on authenticity remains vague in terms of its definition and in its marketing relevance” (Chronis & Hampton, 2008, p. 112.) Liedtka (2008, p. 238) describes authentic as the “notion of being true to oneself,” and Beverland and Farrelly (1997, p. 839) conclude that, “consumers actively seek authenticity to find meaning in their lives.” In a way the consumer is an active creator of authenticity by negotiating and creating meaning. Yeoman *et al.* (2007, p. 1128) define authentic as, “experiences and products that are original and the real thing, not contaminated by being fake or impure”.

Cox and Mowatt (2012) have examined how highly differentiated firms require the active participation and involvement of staff throughout an organisation to create and deliver strategy. They also suggest the co-creation of other supporting services. Therefore authenticity can be understood both from the expectation of the consumer for authentic products and services, and as a process by which organisations implement strategy. The authenticity of a tourism product should be “ethical, natural, honest, simple, beautiful, rooted and human” (Yeoman *et al.*, 2007, p. 1137), it should avoid tokenism, particularly for sustainable or green products. Creating an authentic sustainability destination brand involves the whole tourism industry, (Timur & Getz, 2009).

This paper examines the process of implementing and embedding the 100% Pure brand by examining both top-down and bottom-up engagement, with an emphasis on the latter. Connell *et al.* (2009) suggest that New Zealand lacks a guiding vision for tourism at the national level; instead it is left up to local bodies to manage in a piecemeal manner. This research investigates if this is true for New Zealand: does TNZ create a sustainability vision for i-SITES to implement 100% Pure, and how do

managers and front-line staff understand, engage with and implement the strategy, and to what extent or they actively engaged.

Methodology

This research employed interpretivist and qualitative data collection and analysis tools and techniques. These techniques were used to capture the viewpoint of the individual management and staff as they make sense of sustainability issues and develop strategy to mitigate negative environmental and social impacts of their organisation, as well as developing strategy to enhance positive organisational impacts. This research data was obtained using two approaches: first a multiple case-studies technique, where information was gathered using semi-structured interviews with managers and front-line employees (Information Consultants) at four i-SITEs. To encourage a discussion the interviews contained many open “grand” questions such as “how would you define sustainability” (McShane & Cunningham, 2012, p. 84-85.) Second an observation of the i-SITE buildings; a place where tourists interact with the 100% Pure brand to examine the physical embodiment of sustainability. A checklist was developed based on a variety of sources including reference to the EECA website (www.eeca.govt.nz) to guide and validate the data collected (Baranchenko & Oglethorpe, 2012). The four i-SITEs were chosen based on the criteria:

1. Are in the top ten regions by tourism expenditure based on data from the Ministry of Economic Development (2011).
2. The i-SITEs have comparable size and styled premises.
3. Are located in areas where the research team have direct experience of: this is to give familiarity with the area, tourism products, level of environmental, cultural, social, and natural and heritage awareness.

Interviews took place between 21st September and 2nd October 2012. A convenience sampling technique was used for front-line workers. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011.) This is technique of analysis particularly relevant technique for semi-structured interviews over multiple case studies as it allows for commonalities and difference to be used for the exploration of existing theory, as well as the identification and elaboration of new unanticipated insights (Baranchenko & Oglethorpe, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006.) Braun & Clarke (2006) also state thematic analysis ”can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development.”

Findings

The concepts of sustainability and the authenticity form the basis of this research. The participants were asked directly and indirectly to define and give examples to both of these concepts, and of practices related to these concepts and in implementing the 100% Pure brand into action. This section explores:

- Participant’s understanding of the concept of sustainability in a tourism industry context
- Participant’s sustainability actions and personal values at home and in the workplace

- Participant's understanding of the concept of authenticity in a tourism industry context
- An examination of the physical environment of the iSites
- The perceptions and relevance of third party accreditation, in particular the Qualmark Enviro Awards

Sustainability and Authenticity: Participant's Concepts and Actions

When asked about the 100% Pure campaign, most of the participants were able to link regional and national images of the natural environment, scenery and nature to this campaign. Manager G said it, "conjures up a picture of green, open space, sheep running, that kind of thing."

Sustainability

As individuals create the definition of sustainability based on their "culture and experience, filtered by their worldview" (Byrch *et al.*, 2007) participants were asked what sustainability meant to them as a concept, and then asked to give examples of their actions in relations to sustainability at home, at work, and in relation to the 100% Pure brand. The following is a sample of the responses given to their understanding of the concept:

- "It means that you can do this thing and carry on without it have an adverse, negatively impact on the environment. So the physical environment as well as the people, living, I suppose." (Information Consultant L)
- "Basically making consideration to the planet." (Information Consultant M)
- "Working in a way that minimises or prevents further damage to the environment. Whether in the town or out in the bush environment." (Information Consultant N)

Only Information Consultant Q linked sustainability to the tourism industry, with, "I think the first thing that comes to mind is trying to keep everything clean and safe for visitors." (Information Consultant Q) The participants' statements were compared and contrasted with academic definitions of sustainability; table 1 is a summary of this analysis.

Table 1 here: Sustainability: a Comparison of Key Words and Phrases

The general consensus is in line with the definition stated in the Brundtland Report (United Nations, 1987), although informants focused more on the environment than social equity (Byrch, *et al.*, 2007.)

Whilst some had difficulty with explaining or defining sustainability as a concept, examples of sustainability or sustainable practices that occur in the i-SITES were more forthcoming. Examples did include the social aspect of sustainability, for example by Manager H and Consultant M supporting fair trade initiatives (Timur & Getz, 2009). Five participants volunteered in their own time: two were involved with sports groups, and two were involved with community groups (Hospice, Citizens Advice Bureau and adult literacy programmes.) Only one mentioned being involved in an environmental volunteering activity: beach replanting. Information Consultant M was the only person to state that the i-SITE and corresponding council gave time for

employees to participate in volunteer work. Creating educational opportunities and community learning projects through environmental education and information sharing can improve the sustainability outcomes (Mihalic, 2000; Schianetz & Kavanagh, 2008), and Manager G stated their i-SITE did support local initiatives that had an environmental message.

Participants described their environmental practices, and the most commonly described action was recycling. This was often the first or only example used by the participants. The next most suggested action was to reduce printing, or to reduce paper wastage. Manager G explained two ways that they reduced waste at their iSite: first, a wormfarm, "... we dispose of our food scraps in it ... and then use [it] to water our plants." Second, "we encourage operators and ourselves to bring in gluts of fruit and veges, and leave them on the counter [for] tourists."

Other sustainable practices at the i-SITEs included:

- Conservation and monitoring of water (Manager G)
- Energy efficiency and electricity monitoring. "Things like turn off the lights and turn off all the computers at night." (Manager E)
- Using eco-friendly cleaning products (Information Consultants N & T and Manager E)

The third part of the three-legged stool definition of sustainability is economic sustainability (Kashmanian *et al.*, 2011). When asked what is the purpose of the i-SITE, many participants indicated as Information Consultant N stated, "The i-SITE is here to provide information and provide a booking service to travellers and local people," acknowledging their revenue collecting function. When asked what was more important the environment or making a profit Information Consultant Q's answer was typical, "If I wasn't in this job then probably preserving the environment. But, I don't know. Because I am in this job..." Information Consultant P agrees saying, "... my employment [is] up here if tourism numbers go down," indicating an awareness of a tension between environmental and economic sustainability.

The interviews asking participants about their personal sustainable values and home habits as "like any other stakeholder group, employees may have a personal interest in sustainability" (Wolf, 2013, p. 105.) Table 2 gives a snapshot of responses to the quick questions about participant's home sustainable actions:

Table 2 here: Participant Responses to Home Action Quick Questions

The majority of the participants either always or mostly: recycle, conserve energy, use reusable container and shopping bags, and conscientiously dispose of durables. This indicates that most of the participants have a desire to implement sustainable and environmental actions. By extension this environmentally ethical behaviour should cross over into a person's place of work. One surprising result that was identified from the interviews was the segmentation between the actions of the participants at home and at work, whereby their workplace behaviour was markedly different, creating a discourse between sustainability actions at home and at work. Some potential reasons for this discourse include, as Information Consultant R suggested, that council's hierarchy blocked the process inside their i-SITE for suggesting,

creating, and implementing sustainable strategic policy. Some participants indicated a sense of apathy and a lack of sense of responsibility at work, some even gave the impression that being more sustainable at work could have the potential to jeopardize their employment. This indicates that not all barriers to sustainability strategies emanate from a lack of suitable high-level strategy, physical building, or budgetary constraint, but from communication and participation.

Overall managers and front-line workers broadly understood the definitions of sustainability as defined in the literature, but their ability to act sustainably was constrained within the organisation by a variety of factors which may limit the organisation's ability to embed sustainable policies.

Authenticity

How we define authenticity relies on an understanding of our society's general values and beliefs, it is a socially constructed concept, based on the norms and ideologies of society (Liedtka, 2008). Participants were asked to define authenticity in their context, and this was compared with the academic literature. Although both shared definitions of real, original, genuine, not fake, copied or an imitation the participants also offered a number of additional definitions related to their own context, including history, consistent, pure unique and raw (table 3.)

Table 3 here: Authentic: a Comparison of Key Words

Participants understood authenticity from the perspective of the consumer, and that an authentic tourist experience can have two sides: first, there could be a desire to explore the untouched and inexperienced (Yeoman *et al.*, 2007, p. 1133); second tourists could expect a business to "walk the talk" (Freeman & Auster, 2011). In terms of "walk the talk", Information Consultant T gave an example of a business running a farm-stay using traditional Maori farming techniques, including cooking in a hangi, traditional medicines, as well as being an eco-friendly organic farm. They described the experience as "authentic, it was real, but with a modern feel." Information Consultant K, suggested when tourists are "looking for something authentic, they are usually looking for something Maori", with Manager E stating, "we can sell Maori products that are authentic, you know, made in the traditional ways by local people, and they have a story behind them." The idea of craft and traditions is not limited to Maori artists and culture. Information Consultant P indicated that once renovations were complete, local artists will be invited to put forward items for sale. The only restriction of the products to be sold is that they were "real", hand crafted by the artists. However, although tourists often "focus on the pure experience and search for the truly authentic tourism product or service which is steeped in culture and history," Yeoman *et al.* (2005, p. 140) suggest that 'staged authenticity' in the tourism industry is common. Manager F explained that in order for a staged event to be authentic it must be a "true presentation" and have "the correct stories, in the right clothes, having the right equipment, so it was true to the history" of the area (Manager H), and local Iwi should be involved, so that the tourism operators "are taking the tourists through an experience that is unique to their people." (Information Consultant L)

This research has shown how the concept of authenticity in this tourism context has adopted cultural and local factors, suggesting that other definitions of authenticity

likewise rely on context-specific (organizational, industrial, cultural, national) elements reliant on the understanding of the actors involved. Further research into authenticity could explore how authenticity is constructed in an industry that, unlike the tourism industry, does not have staged or manufactured authenticity, such as in manufacturing markets.

The Physical Environment and Third-Party Accreditation

Visible evidence of sustainability strategies at the i-SITEs were examined to test whether the physical buildings act as a barrier to sustainability. Whilst it can be costly to retrofit green elements to an existing building (Jayawardena *et al.*, 2013; McDonagh, 2011), there are many sustainable actions that do not require building alterations. Schianetz *et al.* (2007) state that one way an organisation can market their green credentials is through the use of third party ecolabelling. This can ease the concern of 'greenwash' "by providing specific, measurable and trustworthy proof" of these green credentials (Tang *et al.*, 2012, p. 408). Ibanez and Grolleau (2007) agree with, adding that the third party labelling is more trusted than self-regulation or self-labelling by an organisation. Manager G said, "Increasing number of tourists, particularly from overseas, particularly from Europe... who are particularly asking for eco-friendly products or products that have been Qualmark assessed." In New Zealand Qualmark offers Enviro certification at the levels of Gold, Silver and Bronze. When asked of the importance of the Enviro Award, Manager G replied, "it is important to us, and it kind of reaffirms to us that what we are doing on a day-to-day basis is being recognised."

The i-SITE with a Silver Enviro Award was in a leased building, however, it had few features that were easily identifiable and observable as being sustainable, other than recycle bins. When asked which was more important: how the i-SITE looks and comfort levels or energy efficiency, most replied that the presentation of the i-SITE was most important. This was evident in the excessive number of light fixtures, flat-screen TVs, and backlit posters observed at three of the i-SITEs. From this example it can be concluded that the building is not always a barrier to sustainability strategy implementation, but a clear vision and supporting policies for sustainable strategies understood throughout the organisation.

Discussion: Barriers to Implementing and Embedding Authentic Sustainability Strategies

The main focus of this research is to explore the implementation and the embedding of authentic sustainability strategy: the policies, procedures, practice and perceptions of an organisation. Using organisations within the tourism industry allowed for an exploration of organisations that actively promote environmental and sustainability credentials; using the clean and green imagery in particular. Thematic analysis identified a number of barriers to implementing and embedding authentic sustainability strategies which were compared with the literature review to identify areas that warranted further discussion. The themes which emerged were:

1. The communication of strategies, policies, procedures, and practices at the i-SITEs from strategic leaders.
2. The process of bottom-up policy engagement

3. Strategic vision and commitment

The communication of strategies, policies, procedures, and practices at the i-SITES from strategic leaders

Overall, several stakeholders have responsibility for planning overall environmental strategies and the 100% Pure brand, from TNZ to the local councils which administer i-SITE budgets, and i-SITE managers. At the various i-SITES commitment to the organisation's sustainable policies and practices varied across management and staff. Kashmanian *et al.* (2011) suggest that management need to enhance awareness of issues and engage employees through training and information sharing, ensuring strategic goals are understood and aimed for. Information Consultant O indicated that any formal policies were normally communicated through email; however, they added that, "emails are not part of my job." Information Consultant N said "there is probably a piece of paper somewhere in some folder that I haven't read, because I have been super busy." On the surface it appear to be a breakdown in effective communication of policy, however, what it identifies is a lack of sense of responsibility by some employees to identify and follow policy. Interestingly three of the managers felt as Manager H said, "as the manager I think that you should take that on board to make sure that everyone is doing the right thing."

There also appeared to be some confusion as to who was ultimately responsible for the sustainability strategies at the i-SITES. Although TNZ is the brand owner, the local councils control the administration and the budgets of the i-SITES, and three managers identified a sustainability manager at the councils; the remaining manager did not know if the council has a person responsible for sustainability. Schainetz and Kavanagh (2008) state that whilst top-down approach is a useful starting point, it may not include diverse stakeholders perspectives, particularly important for environmental sustainability. Although this highlights the importance of having a clear effective strategy communicated from the top, these will not be as effective if there is no sense of personal responsibility for understanding the strategy, or even acknowledgment that that these strategies exist. Kezar (2012) suggests that regardless of the organisation's motives for the pursuit of sustainability strategies, the key to the success or failure of these is communication. Manager E noted that whilst some actions are embedded well, there is a need to ensure that new employees, as well as existing employees, are made aware of not just the actions but also sustainability policies and strategies. Therefore the following section examines the potential of bottom-up strategy engagement.

The process of bottom-up policy engagement

Using a bottom-up or grassroots management approach potentially offers more solutions and ideas to inform organisation direction, and has the ability to create "greater buy-in, increased expertise, energy and enthusiasm" (Kezar, 2012, p. 726). The advantage of gathering information from front-line staff is often sustainability ideas are more practical, shifting the focus away from just regulatory compliance (Timur & Getz, 2009). Manager G indicated that "sustainability's one of the topics at our monthly staff meeting here," Information Consultant S said, "once a month we get together and it will be on our agenda and we will all put our thoughts in." Manager E stated that staff discuss sustainability "not every meeting, but every now and then at a

staff meeting: what can we do as a team to be more environmentally aware.” At two of the i-SITEs team leaders had been made responsible for sustainability. One of these team leaders created a reference folder for other staff members, and was actively involved with sustainability policy, procedures and practices, in conjunction with the sustainability officer at the council. The other did not mention their position as a team leader in charge of sustainability, and seemed to be out of touch with sustainability issues, council policy on these, or current trends on these issues.

Kezar (2012) identifies that failure of grassroots may be due to either lack of support or resources from the organisation. In this instance actor’s home sustainable orientation indicated a desire to act sustainably at work, but there were a number of incidents and stories told by the participants where the council has refused to consider some of the suggestions and ideas from these staff meetings, or directly from employees. Information Consultant R told the story about a community garden idea and installing a wormfarm. The local council rejected both of these ideas, and as Information Consultant R said, “You would have to be pretty passionate about it to put money out of your own pocket to start up a wormfarm.” Collins *et al.* (2007) cautions that despite rhetoric sustainability may not be seen as important to an organisation in practice. Manager H suggested that there were two main reasons why their i-SITE did not have many sustainability features: first “We just don’t have the money to do anything;” and second “I got the sustainable manager over from council to go through everything that we are doing and there was nothing they thought we should be doing more.” The first issue indicates a lack of financial resources, which is the most common reason given at the i-SITEs for their limited sustainability actions. The second part of Manager H’s quote relates to a lack of a sustainable focus by council. The suggestion here is that if the council does not prioritise sustainability, then the embedding of authentic strategies will fail.

Strategic vision and commitment

A solution to the limitations of either a top-down or bottom-up approach is to create a sustainability philosophy and culture that transcends the values, behaviours and actions of the whole organisation (Balmer *et al.*, 2011) This must be communicated to the members of the organisation as well as stakeholders through the organisation’s vision, mission statement and through the organisation’s actions (Martin *et al.*, 2011.) An issue created by descriptive or prescriptive plans and policy is that they do not allow for variations and elaborations, the employees must do as they are directed, rather than act authentically. To do this effectively Kezar (2012) suggests distributed or shared leadership as a way to create shared visions and goals, empowering all staff members, as well as creating a sense of accountability and responsibility. Although 100% Pure was understood by participants in terms of wider environmental concerns, there appears not to be a strategic vision in translating this into coherent policies throughout the organisations, particularly causing a disconnect between actors home sustainability orientation and that at work. The creation of an organisational strategic vision, in this case linking 100% Pure with sustainability and environmental concern, will lead to more enduring changes in the organisation as management, departments, and ultimately employees, transforming this vision into the shared values and beliefs of the organisation; normalising sustainable behaviour.

A vision must be backed up by action: an organisation must demonstrate commitment to conservation (Crossman, 2011), be actively investing in environmental protection and the reinstatement of degraded environments (Mihalic, 2000), and be willing to support environmental concerns in the every day behaviour (Vellecco & Mancino, 2010). Manager G sums this concept up when they said, “sustainability is kind of part-and-parcel of what we do.” Until this approach is embedded throughout the organisation, strategies experienced by staff or consumers will not be as perceived as authentic and the effectiveness of differentiation strategies could be compromised.

Conclusion: Research Implications and Policy Recommendations

Research Implications

Although a limitation to this research is that it is informed by a specific case-based context, it has shed new light on the understanding of the concepts of sustainability and authenticity in a tourism and differentiation strategy context. Whilst it appears that a common understanding of sustainability, encompassing ecological, social and economic aspects, is becoming prevalent, it suggests authenticity needs further research in the area of strategy and environmental studies. However, it offers a definition of authentic in the New Zealand tourism industry, and suggests a common core of shared concepts which local actors need to input in specific markets, and emphasises the vital participatory aspect of this strategy.

The research has shown that the implementation and the embedding of authentic sustainability strategies is reliant on a strong organizational vision and commitment, and that the whole organisation needs to be involved to implement authentic sustainability strategies. An authentic strategy would represent one where the organization and actors within it were committed to the strategy as active participants, and front-line staff are able to participate in delivery strategic goals. The i-SITE with the most embedded suitability culture had a council sustainability officer that, as Manager G said, “... keeps us informed on a weekly basis, of tips and ideas and local developments and all.” At this i-SITE, the sustainability office at the council not only acted as an information source, they “will come and assist us in doing a sustainability audit, etc.” (Manager G) The sustainability officer mentioned physically travels to the i-SITE to discuss and assess the implementation of sustainability policy, procedures and actions, ensuring consistency between the various i-SITES in this council’s region; communicating a commitment by the council to their sustainability strategic vision.

Policy Recommendations

TNZ are the guardians of the 100% Pure New Zealand brand, and as such have a duty to ensure that the imagery and philosophy of this brand are translated into a strategic vision. As Morden (1997, p. 670) states, “The most effective organisations are based on communities of shared ethical values,” identifiable through the strategic vision. Contradictory signals, such as the Minister for Tourism John Key likening 100% Pure to McDonalds marketing campaign “I’m lovin’ it” (Davidson, 2012) are likely to give staff mixed messages about organisational commitment to environmental concerns, and undermine authentic engagement with green marketing strategies, transforming organisational vision into empty rhetoric.

As budget holders local councils need to have more direct involvement with the management and employees of the i-SITE. This will give the council, as top-down managers, the ability to reinforce the strategic vision and goals, as well as follow up on the implementation of policy. It empowers employees to explore innovative ideas and solutions to sustainability issues, and instantly implement any actions that may be considered, simple and low-cost. This empowerment creates greater buy-in from the staff. Councils should review their mechanism for reviewing staff suggestions in line with the strategic vision of the strategy.

Qualmark and the i-SITE Network both have a duty to educate and disseminate information relating to sustainability to the i-SITES. A good example of disseminating sustainability and energy efficiency information is the EECA website (www.eeca.govt.nz). On this website energy efficient organisation stories are told: what strategies and actions has the organisation implemented. The idea of championing success was mentioned in reference to the i-SITE Network national conference, but it is important to have this information available for further reference, a webpage is ideal for this and could reinforce employee participation, communication, and involvement.

(7299 words)

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Tables and Figures

Key Words	Participants	Literature Reference
Environment and Environmental	Manager: F Information Consultant: L, N, S	Schianetz <i>et al.</i> , 2007, p. 374 Soteriou & Coccossis, 2010, p. 191
Conservation	Manager: E Information Consultant: N, P	Roberts & Tribe, 2008, p. 584
Preservation	Information Consultant: P	Roberts & Tribe, 2008, p. 584
Ecology	Information Consultant: S	Timur & Getz, 2009, p. 221 Brown & Stone, 2007, p. 716 Soteriou & Coccossis, 2010, p. 191
Pollution	Information Consultant: Q	Mackoy <i>et al.</i> , 1997, p. 38
Managing resources	Manager: E, F, H Information Consultant: M, P	Timur & Getz, 2009, p. 221
Natural resources	Manager: E	Schianetz <i>et al.</i> , 2007, p. 374

Table 1: Sustainability: a Comparison of Key Words and Phrases

Action	Participant's Responses				
	Always	Mostly	Often	Sometimes	Never
Conserve Energy	10	0	3	1	0
Use Energy Efficient Light-Bulbs	4	3	0	3	4
Conserve Water	6	0	0	2	6
Recycle	9	2	1	1	1
Compost	6	0	0	2	6
Use Reusable Containers: as opposed to Gladwrap or Tinfoil	7	3	2	0	2
Avoid Excessive Packaging or Use Reusable Bags	5	4	2	1	1
Disposing of Durables	6	4	0	1	3

Table 2: Participant Responses to Home Action Quick Questions

Key Words	Participants	Literature Reference
Real	Managers: E, G, H Information Consultants: P, R, T	Yeoman <i>et al.</i> , 2007 Beverland & Farrelly, 2009 Leigh, Peters & Shelton, 2006
Original	Manager G Information Consultants: M, P, Q, S	Yeoman <i>et al.</i> , 2007
Genuine	Manager E Information Consultants: L, M	Beverland & Farrelly, 2009 Chronis & Hampton, 2008 Gardner <i>et al.</i> , 2011
Not copied, fake or imitation	Manager E Information Consultants: P, T	Yeoman <i>et al.</i> , 2007
Has a History	Managers: F, H Information Consultants: K, R	
Consistent	Information Consultants: K, P	
Pure	Information Consultant T	
Unique	Information Consultant Q	
Raw, rough around the edges	Information Consultant O	

Table 3: Authentic: a Comparison of Key Words