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ACADEMIC PAPER

Using Mode 2 soft systems methodology in the teaching and assessment of the 'practical' content in undergraduate hospitality degrees

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Abstract

This paper seeks to add to the debate surrounding contemporary hospitality management education from the perspective of the 'hospitality systems' school of thought. In particular, it outlines the use of soft systems methodology (SSM) in an innovative educational venue that, at one and the same time, functions as a small catering enterprise and is the facility that delivers a range of learning outcomes. An outline of a teaching strategy based on implementing a Mode 2 SSM in a real-world context that provides students with a working model of a simple catering system is provided. This paper promotes the importance of a practical content within undergraduate programmes and the identification of clear management-focused learning objectives to be achieved by students working in that practical environment.

Keywords: Mode 2 soft systems; Hospitality management education

Introduction

Systems theory constitutes a fascinating, if contested, area of intellectual endeavor and anyone who chooses to write about 'systems' of any kind is asking for trouble. (Brotherton & Wood, 2008, p. 443)

This paper is prompted by the 'ongoing debate' outlined by Jones (2004) on the issue of what exactly is hospitality research and the so-called 'schools of thought'. Jones was responding to the criticisms made by Slattery (2002) about the teaching of hospitality management in UK universities. Slattery states that 'customers buy not only products but facilities and services'. In addition, he identifies the importance of the 'venue context' as a factor in establishing what hospitality actually is. This paper outlines an approach to the teaching of foodservice management that has at its heart the 'venue context' and a set of learning outcomes aimed at producing undergraduates capable of identifying the systems content of a wide range of foodservice operations.

Whilst this paper is not concerned directly with that debate, it is concerned with the final question Jones (2004) poses at the end of his article: What school of thought do you belong

Mike Turner is a lecturer in foodservice systems at Plymouth Business School. His interest in soft systems methodology (SSM) was confirmed after completing an Open University degree in Systems and Managing Change in 1987. Since then he has used SSM on many occasions as a manager in industry and as an educator in both the workplace and further and higher education institutions. In 1991 he authored an HCIMA distance learning pack that set out a systems approach to F&B management. Since joining Plymouth in 2000 he has incorporated the systems approach into the food and drink curriculum on the hospitality undergraduate programmes.

to? Jones identifies five schools of thought: the 'hospitality science' model; the 'hospitality management' school; hospitality studies; hospitality relationships; and hospitality systems.

In his description of the hospitality systems school of thought, Jones identifies some key weaknesses in adherents to this school, as far as published research is concerned – namely, a strong bias towards practice resulting from industry backgrounds, a lack of research experience and a lack of 'critical mass' regarding the numbers of research active academics. The author fits these descriptors like a hand in a comfortable glove!

This being the case, what is the author doing in a university teaching and assessing a subject area, hospitality management, which, according to Brotherton and Wood (2000), does not exist? Quite a lot as it turns out.

The systems approach

A systems approach to hospitality management is not a recent development in hospitality education at undergraduate level. A host of writers – including Levitt (1972), who writes of the 'technocratic hamburger', Turner (1991), who introduces the 4 Ps of people, process, product, and premises and plant, Kirk (1995), who discusses the hard and soft systems paradigm, Pickworth (1988), who describes 'service delivery systems', and Kirk and Pine (1998), who provide an outline of soft systems and technology transfer – have presented a systems-based perspective on the hospitality industry over a number of years. A regular discussion point is that of 'hard' and 'soft' systems and the challenges posed by differentiating them. Ingram (2000) makes a rare and somewhat concise attempt to describe soft systems methodology (SSM) with the Faraway Hotel case study. More recent work by Ball, Jones, Kirk, and Lockwood (2003) is perhaps the most 'holistic' attempt to set out hospitality management from a systems perspective, despite the fact that some of the content is merely older work revisited.

Much of the early work on hospitality systems consisted of attempts to apply the theory of 'hard' systems to the activities of hotel keeping and foodservice. Typical examples were the use of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) symbols to depict food production processes and the application of techniques associated with 'Organisation & Methods' to support discussions on topics such as productivity. Southern (1999) provides an excellent example of this type of application in his paper on performance measurement. Whilst this work had merit, it quite often failed to address the equally important aspect of the 'soft' systems that are at the heart of all hospitality operations. This failure hinders the development of a deeper understanding of what a systems approach to any human activity is really about.

General systems theory (GST) is the generic descriptor of the early work in systems thinking developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968, as cited in Beishon & Peters, 1982), who used his research work in the field of biology to explore the existence of 'system' in other disciplines. Other contributors to the field of GST were Ackoff and Emery (1972), Vickers (1965), and Rappaport and Horvath (1959, as cited in Checkland, 1981).

One contribution to the development of soft systems thinking made by Vickers (1965) was the concept of the 'two-stranded rope' view of the flux of events and ideas that are a significant aspect of effective management. A refined version of the two-stranded rope is shown in Figure 1.

Vickers (1965, p. 35) also identified the distinction between, "the study of problem solving and getting the problem solved". This distinction is also depicted in Figure 1 and it is this diagram, developed by Checkland and Scholes (1990), that lies at the heart of Mode 1 and Mode 2 applications of SSM.

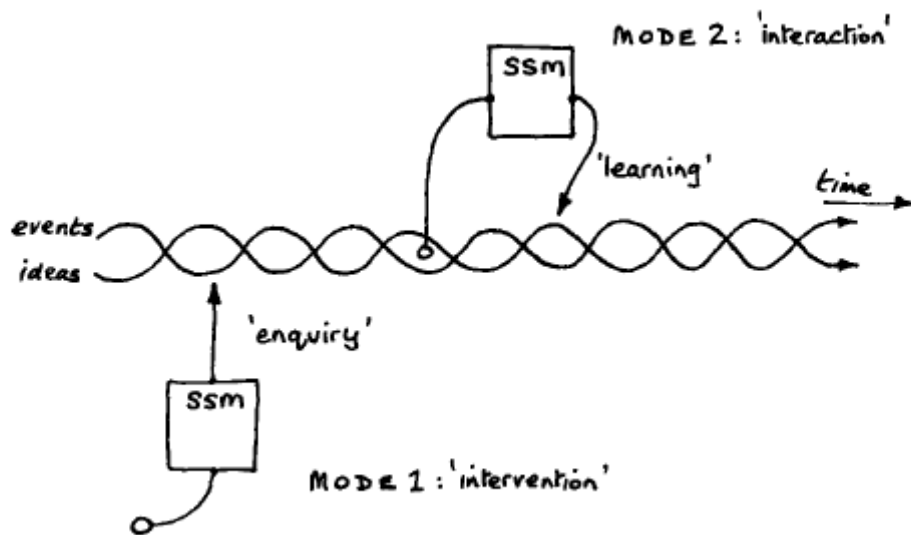


Figure 1: SSM in use in Mode 1 and Mode 2 (source: Checkland and Scholes, 1990)

Rappaport and Horvath (1959, as cited in Checkland, 1981) developed the idea of organisations being viewed in three distinctive states of development: chaotic complexity, organised simplicity, and organised complexity. It is often the case that these three states are descriptions of the perceptions held simultaneously by individuals observing what is, in essence, the same 'socio-technical' system. The novice chef sees the kitchen as a hive of chaotic complexity, a chef de partie sees the 'corner' as an area of organised simplicity and the head chef sees the food and beverage department as a complex but organised operation. The notion of three perceptions of the same 'events' existing at the same time underpins the inclusion of 'worldview' in SSM, in particular the 'W' in a 'customer, actor, transformation, worldview, owner, environment' (CATWOE) analysis.

Kirk (1995) points out that the two major centres for the development of soft systems are Lancaster University and the Open University (OU). A useful tool for teaching a systems approach at undergraduate level is the '4-part definition' of systems developed by the OU (Beishon & Peters, 1982). The 4-part definition of systems consists of the following rhetorical questions: is there an assembly of elements or components put together in an organised way? (*Structure*); does this assembly do something? (*Process or transformation*); if one or more of the elements is missing, is the assembly affected? (*Absence*); and is the organised assembly of interest to one or more parties? (*Worldview*). (Note: the author has added the italics as part of his teaching strategy.)

A team of 'action-researchers' led by Peter Checkland carried out the work at Lancaster. This work generally consisted of masters and doctoral-level 'enquiries' into 'real-world' organisational problems. Most of these 'enquiries' produced the intended dissertation or doctoral thesis for the postgraduate student carrying out the research. Much of the work also made a useful contribution to the overall understanding of SSM. The essence of the work carried out at Lancaster is contained in several textbooks, most notably those produced by Checkland (1981) and Checkland & Scholes (1990). The process of SSM is depicted in Figure 2. Von Bulow (1989, as cited in Checkland & Scholes, p. 28) describes SSM as "a methodology that aims to bring about improvement in areas of social concern by activating in the people involved in the situation a learning cycle which is ideally never ending".

An important feature of SSM is the flexibility it allows the problem solver in tackling soft problems, in particular the notion of a Mode 1 'enquiry' or a Mode 2 'enquiry'. A Mode 1 'enquiry' is a formal application of SSM and is usually undertaken as part of a consultancy into soft problem situations on behalf of a client organisation. Mode 1 is seen as an 'intervention' into the problem situation, and the underlying intentions are to provide those coming from outside the organisation carrying out the 'enquiry' with further insight into SSM

itself and those from within the organisation who own the problem with a good idea of how to go about improving the 'problem situation'.

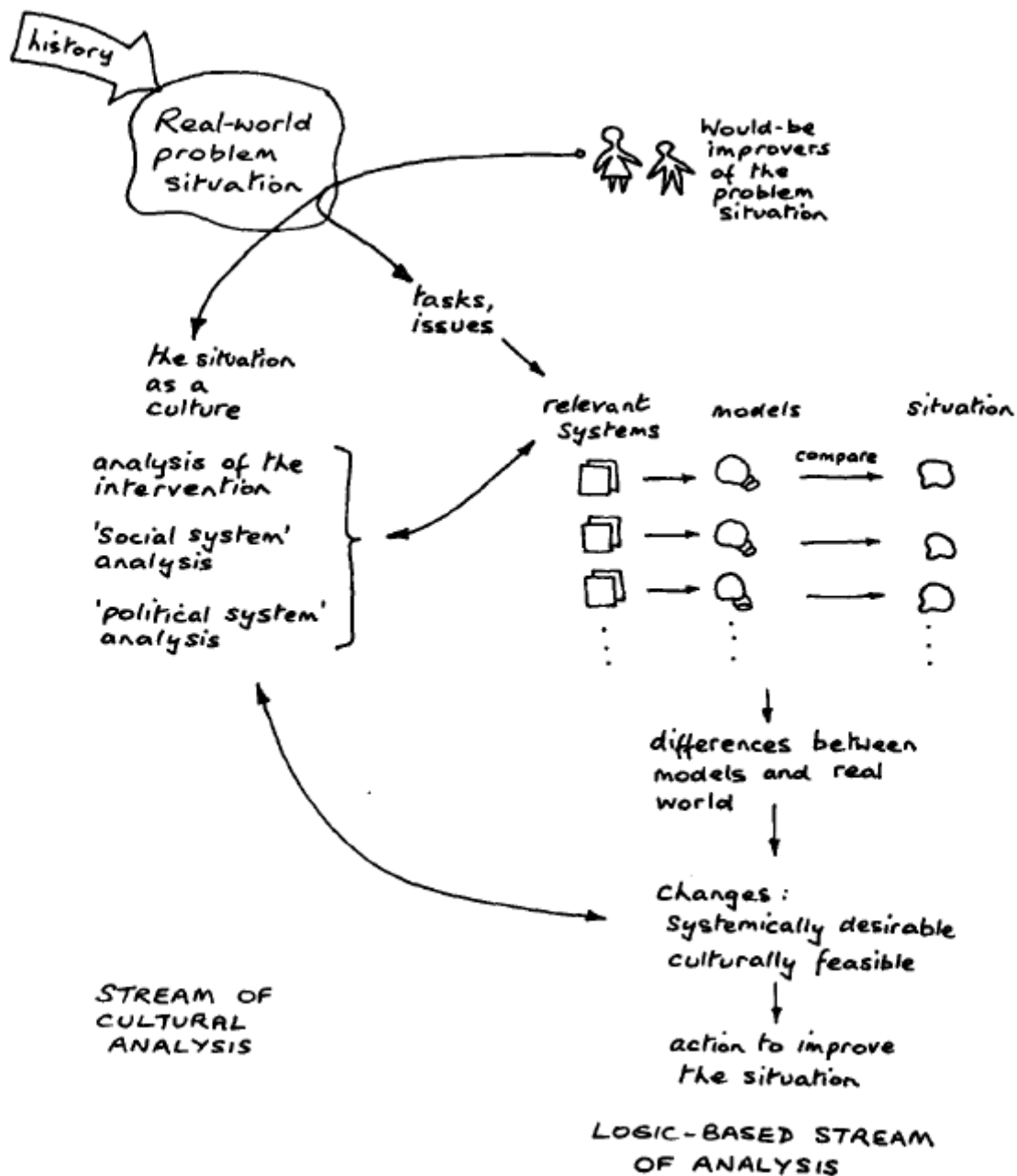


Figure 2: The process of SSM (source: Checkland and Scholes, 1990, p. 29)

A Mode 2 'enquiry' is a much less formal use of SSM that is often carried out by a 'systems practitioner' from within the organisation, with the objective of improving a 'problem situation' by learning more about the root causes of the problem itself. This 'would-be problem solver' would normally have a deep understanding of the organisation's culture and values. In many instances, the driving force behind the 'enquiry' is the need to bring about a significant organisational change in the face of 'events' taking place in the organisation's operating environment. A typical example of such a change would be revisions to human resource management (HRM) policies and procedures in the wake of new legislation such as the Age Discrimination Act 2006 or the Licensing Act 2004.

The Mode 2 'enquiry' is carried out before action is taken. Mode 2 is seen as an 'interactive' process because the learning that is intended to occur is shared by those people working within the organisation. The value of carrying out a 'quick and dirty' Mode 2 'enquiry' before

taking action is that the 'would-be problem solver' has adopted a detached view of the problem and carried out a deeper analysis of the situation than may have occurred ordinarily.

Kreher (1994) sums up Mode 1 as using SSM to do a study and Mode 2 as using SSM to do work in the 'real world', and it is this distinction that has shaped the approach to teaching and assessing practical work in the Plymouth Business School.

Having provided a brief outline of one particular systems methodology, it would be useful to consider where this methodology sits within the hospitality schools of thought paradigm as described by Jones (2004). In his comment on a hospitality science, Jones cites Littelljohn's view in 1990 that this school has a weakness stemming from 'its exclusion of the social dimension of hospitality provision'. A glance at Checkland's diagram, Figure 2, should assure the reader of the central role social analysis plays in SSM.

With regard to the hospitality management school, the most interesting aspect of Jones's outline is his suggestion of the possibility of a sixth, holistic, multidisciplinary school of thought that would attempt to "understand the hospitality phenomenon from a variety of management disciplines" (Jones, 2004, p. 40). This fits well with Checkland and Scholes's (1990, p. 24) description of "human activity systems" in which groups made up of individuals from differing disciplines work together to "pursue the purpose of the whole". Hospitality studies appear to be on the periphery of hospitality management education as a result of its adherents not seeing themselves primarily as hospitality researchers.

We now get to perhaps the most contentious school of thought – hospitality relationships (the three-domain school). The debate surrounding the three-domain approach illustrates a set of circumstances that occurs all too frequently in what systems thinkers call the 'real world'. Such circumstances are those in which strongly held opinions on what and how something should be done are openly aired.

Checkland (1981, p. xii) defines the real world as "the interacting activity which makes up the business of living as opposed to the 'artificial' world of the laboratory experiment". The real world is a messy place unlike the controlled environment of a laboratory. It is in this messy real world that managers have to carry out a variety of tasks. According to Fayol (1916, as cited in Cole, 1996, p. 4), "to manage is to forecast and plan, to organize, to command, to coordinate and to control". Koontz and O'Donnell (1984, as cited in Cole) identify the five essential managerial functions as: planning, organising, staffing, directing, and leading and controlling. Slattery's (2002) worldview, based on his industry context, corporate context and venue classification of hospitality businesses, is an excellent example of a deeply held worldview. Slattery appears to favour a hospitality management education sector that is strongly rooted in operational activities. These operational activities mirror those identified by Fayol, and Koontz and O'Donnell. Slattery (2002) is arguing against an equally deeply held worldview voiced by Brotherton (1999), Lashley (2000) and Lashley and Morrison (2000), who, between them, make the case for the three-domain model. The essence of their argument appears to be that, without an agreed definition of hospitality, it is difficult to carry out meaningful research in the field.

As stated earlier, it is not the intention of this paper to further this debate but, instead, to use its existence to illustrate the nature of 'messy problems' encountered by SSM practitioners. What the debate provides is an example of a 'state of affairs' which can erupt within any organisation at any time. When such a division of opinions occurs, a 'would-be improver' may step in to attempt to improve the situation and it is at such times that SSM has proven to be a useful approach.

The final school of thought identified by Jones (2004) is hospitality systems. Ball et al. (2003) provide a comprehensive introduction to the wide range of systems and sub-systems associated with the hospitality industry. The book's content primarily focuses on 'hard' systems and, in doing so, fails to address fully the existence of the 'soft' systems found in all hospitality operations.

In recent years a number of academics engaged in operational aspects of degree programmes, including Johns and Teare (1995) and Rimmington (1999), have raised the issue of changes to the practical content of those programmes. The essence of this debate is about the continuing value of traditional vocational skills training in degree programmes at a time of increasing pressure on resources within higher education institutions (HEIs) and rapid changes in the hospitality industry itself. An overview of these issues is provided by Alexander (2007) in a paper that sets out the need for changes required to the curriculum content of practical modules so that the content moves away from a focus on technical skills to a more relevant focus on intellectual skills. He provides examples of changes to the operational curriculum introduced at two HEIs – Brighton and Bournemouth universities.

It can be argued that a deeper understanding of 'soft' systems theory, coupled with the established understanding of 'hard' systems techniques found in much of the practical teaching within current undergraduate programmes, would do much to improve the intellectual content of practical modules. The intellectual construct applied to the practical modules in Pilgrims Café is illustrated in Figure 1.

Soft systems as a teaching tool – the pilgrims café experience

Pilgrims Café opened in October 2005 as the facility for teaching and assessing the practical content of the four hospitality-focused management programmes at the University of Plymouth (UoP). For a number of historical reasons the hospitality programmes had never had their own specialist facilities. However, following a strategic decision to relocate the programmes to the Plymouth Business School (PBS) on the city centre campus from a rural campus outside Newton Abbot, the need for a specialist teaching facility was widely acknowledged within the university.

Originally conceived as a student café/refectory, Pilgrims had been 'owned' by UoP hospitality services for six years. On 1 August 2005, after much discussion, Pilgrims was finally handed over to PBS and the hastily assembled Pilgrims Café team began work on getting the café ready for business.

The café was seen as a blank sheet upon which new ideas about teaching and assessing food and drink operations could be initially sketched and over time developed into a fully functioning model of good practice. The core academic discipline taught and assessed in the café is a systems approach to hospitality, in particular to food and drink operations. The café operates as a typical small enterprise that can be found across the South West. The enterprise has three core values: use of local produce; use of Fair Trade products; and use of organic produce where available.

The systems approach is introduced at the start of all the hospitality management programmes through a 20-credit mandatory module – HTM103 Food and Drink Operations. This module covers a curriculum based on the ideas Turner (1991) developed using the notion of the 4 Ps of foodservice management: process, product, people, and premises and plant. Turner later split 'premises' and 'plant' into two distinct categories in a blatant attempt to bring the notion in line with the more widely known 5 Ps of marketing. In Year 2, students follow a Level 2 20-credit module HTM210 Food and Drink Management in which ideas such as gap analysis and menu engineering are applied in the practical sessions.

The first year of operation was a steep learning curve for all involved and entailed many iterative loops through the Mode 2 form of SSM. It really was a case of learning in action with a 'quick and dirty' discussion of the 'events' occurring on a daily basis. The ideas generated by each pass through a day's activity were rapidly incorporated into the overall operational tactical plan. The Pilgrims team had to apply the 5 Ps in a 'real-world' operation whilst at the same time deliver a stated set of learning outcomes to both Stage 1 and Stage 2 students. At the end of that first academic session the team felt that it had developed an effective teaching, learning and assessment strategy for students following the food and drink modules. The team also acknowledged that there was plenty of room for improvement to

both the operational aspects of the café as an enterprise and to its primary function as a teaching and learning facility.

For the start of the second year of Pilgrims Café operations the lessons learned in year one were put into place. The introduction of the Blue Table concept is considered to be the most important development, followed by the installation of a new EPOS system that includes hand-held order pads and a simple menu engineering package. These developments allowed the Pilgrims team to set up and operate three distinctive foodservice sub-systems within a single foodservice venue. These three sub-systems are: the full table service sub-system, the Blue Table sub-system and the snack sub-system. These sub-systems are outlined in Table 1.

Snack sub-system	Blue Table sub-system (BT)	Table service sub-system (TS)
Customer enters café	Customer enters café	Customer enters café
Dining option determined	Dining option determined	Dining option determined
Orders meal at counter	Diner accepts BT offer and sits	Diner accepts TS offer and sits
Pays for meal	Orders beverage and add-ons	Menus and beverage list offered
Takes 'spoon'	Server enters data onto sheet	Bread and water served
Finds table	Diner pays for meal	Server takes meal and beverage order on hand-held pad
Server delivers meal	Dish of the day served	Cutlery place
Diner consumes meal	Beverages served	1st course and beverages served
Diner departs	Add-ons served as ordered	Diner consumes 1st course
Server clears	Server adds final data to sheet and carries out check-back	1st course cleared
	Diner consumes meal	Main course (MC) served
	Diner departs	Server carries out check-back
	Server clears	Diner consumes MC
		Server clears MC
		Server arranges table for sweet
		Sweets and coffee served
		Diner finishes meal
		Diner requests bill
		Server prepares and offers bill
		Diner pays bill
		Diner departs
		Server clears

Table 1: The three foodservice sub-systems in Pilgrims Cafe

The fact that three sub-systems (four if the meal production sub-system is included) are functioning at the same time in the same place creates an 'organised complexity' that provides a rich learning environment for students. The opportunities to compare and contrast are plentiful, and at the end of each service session all of the students have an opportunity over staff lunch to relate what each has done during that service.

The three sub-systems also comply with Checkland and Scholes's (1990, p. 31) requirement of soft systems in that there is "visible in the real world some organized purposeful action" which can then be labelled the 'primary-task system'.

Blue Table: a Pilgrims Café sub-system

Within SSM there are three important elements: root definitions, relevant systems and CATWOE analysis. These are the names Checkland (1981) gave to distinct but closely related activities that should result in the identification of the key change that is to be achieved.

One of several root definitions that were produced for Pilgrims Café was: A Pilgrims team owned and managed system to provide Year 1 students with the opportunity to develop both entry level technical skills in foodservice operations and the skills and knowledge set out in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) subject benchmark for hospitality management. The general benchmark that Blue Table addresses is: "use technical and interpersonal skills and knowledge to propose and evaluate practical and theoretical solutions to complex problems in the core area of hospitality" (QAA, 2007, para 6.6, p. 13). The particular benchmark is: "Analyse and evaluate food, beverage and/or accommodation service systems, their implementation and operation" (QAA, 2007, para 6.6, p. 13).

One of the relevant systems that evolved out of this root definition was the Blue Table system outlined in Table 1. The development of any relevant system model requires the use of verbs in order to reinforce the notion that action is taking place and that the system is designed to bring about transformations. Within the 'organised complexity' that is Pilgrims Café there are many transformations taking place simultaneously. There are the operational transformations such as an empty café transformed into a full café, hungry customers transformed into fed customers and unsafe foodstuffs transformed into safe meals. Given that the primary task of the Pilgrims team is to teach undergraduates food and drink management, that transformation could be contained in a CATWOE analysis of the relevant system.

A simple CATWOE analysis of Blue Table is shown in Table 2.

Customers	University students, staff and visitors, chance customers
Actors	Stage 1 hospitality management students
Transformation	The development of an understanding of a systems approach to foodservice activities
Worldview	Blue Table is the right thing to do
Owners	The Pilgrims team
Environment	The wider Pilgrims Café foodservice system

Table 2: a CATWOE analysis of the Blue Table

Blue Table is presented to Stage 1 students as a sub-system within Pilgrims Café and the learning outcomes they work towards reflect this 'worldview'. The primary purpose of getting students to operate Blue Table is to introduce them to the application of stated theories in a real world activity. Two theories are put to the test: Turner's model of a food service system consisting of the five interdependent components and the OU 4-part definition. The five components found in the Blue Table system can be described as follows:

1. Premises: Blue Table sits within Pilgrims Café and takes up around 5.90 square metres of floor space. Within this floor space there are 12 covers and one item of data collected on a regular basis is revenue per square metre. The café has a service counter, kitchen, toilets, store rooms and manager's office which all interact with the Blue Table sub-system.

2. Plant: the table consists of two fold-up picnic tables and benches covered with blue and white gingham check wipeable tablecloths. The blue motif is carried through with the crockery, cutlery, glasses and other table items. There is a Blue Table plant cost data sheet (see Appendix 1) that contains all the key costs for the items that were purchased specifically for Blue Table. This enables a number of useful activities, such as VAT calculations and payback on capital expenditure, to take place.
3. Product: there is a single 'dish of the day' priced at £1.99. This price includes a main meal, fresh filter coffee or a freshly brewed pot of tea (all Fair Trade), fresh bread and butter (or another appropriate product such as prawn crackers) and a glass of Devonia spring water.
4. Process: there is a target service time of 15 minutes, which requires a no-frills approach to the process. The decision to accept the day's Blue Table offer is made prior to sitting down at the table. Once a customer is seated they are offered bread, tea or coffee and water. At that point they are asked to pay the £1.99 and then, once the money has been taken, the dish of the day is served. The service point is adjacent to the table and consists of one or two chafing dishes on a clothed table. The repertoire of dishes offered on Blue Table is suited to holding in the chafing dishes, and the reason there may be one or two chafing dishes is that some dishes may have rice as a component. As part of the assessment package for the module, students are required to produce a 'service blueprint' for one of the meals they have served.

During every service session, students collect a small range of primary data such as gender, choice of hot drink and purchase of additional items. Each day's data sheet is collected and saved for later analysis. This data sheet is shown in Appendix 2. There are 16 items of 'individual' data and four items of 'daily' data on each sheet. At the end of Term 1, the 40 sheets of data contain a total of 7,840 items that can be analysed by students using SPSS software.

5. People: there are three types of people involved in the activity: experienced catering professionals, novice students and diners. As anticipated, the students tend to be nervous about attempting something new. Even those students with prior experience in food service can be apprehensive. Blue Table has been accepted as part of the Pilgrims Café offer by an increasing number of customers and it is now quite common for all 12 places to be taken up within 30 minutes of the lunch service starting. The encouraging aspect of the Blue Table approach is that it is only taking students one attempt to grasp the fundamentals of the technical requirements needed to operate the sub-system. In addition, it allows for 'real-time' comparisons with three distinct styles of operation from a single focal point.

Having practised the Blue Table sub-system, the students are asked to compare their experience of operating a 'socio-technical' system with the OU 4-part definition. This is presented as a simple 'reflection on practice' exercise outlining what happened during the practical sessions. In an end of session 'hot debrief' activity, the students are asked to provide brief responses to the four rhetorical questions in the definition. Most students are fairly confident about giving a 'yes' answer to parts 1, 2 and 3, with part 4 proving a little more demanding. The concept of 'interest' often requires some further explanation.

Another important aspect of Blue Table is that it has wider uses as an action learning tool. In addition to its primary function of introducing students to systems thinking, it also has the role of being a prototype for larger-scale operations. The 12 covers that make up the sub-system can be the test-bed for a planned, scaled-up version that could be branded as Blue Café. In this role, students use Blue Table to test out the operational problems experienced during the development of a new restaurant operation.

Conclusions

This paper argues that a case can be made for the hospitality systems school of thought and that a predominant feature of this school could be the action-learning approach associated with Mode 2 SSM. In the Mode 2 application of SSM in Pilgrims Café, the activity focus is the attempt to understand more about systems by being actively involved in the operation of a simple foodservice system that exists in the 'real world'.

The paper also identifies an important element in the utilisation of SSM – acceptance of the fact that in any area of human activity there will inevitably be conflicts of opinion. The desired outcome of any application of SSM is that protagonists can agree to disagree, but that in order to move forward they arrive at an accommodation. In arriving at such accommodations, the 'actors' tasked with improving the situation can get on with the task in hand.

There is room in the field of hospitality management education in HEIs for both academic researchers and academic practitioners. SSM provides a framework for both fields of interest to collaborate in a mutually beneficial way.

The 'venue context' is an inherent part of the learning activity and, as such, should go some way to meeting Slattery's (2002) concerns about the relevance of the teaching. By using Blue Table as a test-bed for ideas, students are able to gain valuable insight into the way a foodservice system operates. The 'hard' technical content of a simple system is readily apparent but, more important, it is the need for highly developed 'soft' skills that becomes clearer as students gain in confidence. The move from viewing the activity as chaotically complex to seeing it as organised simplicity takes about two hours. Once the principle of carrying out this transformation has been established, the development of higher-level organisational skills becomes much more straightforward.

Once a student has grasped the idea of there being two modes of investigating any foodservice operation, it allows them to become both 'systems analysts' and 'systems practitioners'. Whenever they are customers in a foodservice operation they can carry out a Mode 1 analysis, and when they are working in their part-time jobs they can carry out a Mode 2 analysis.

The experience gained by the author would suggest that a wider appreciation of Mode 1 and Mode 2 applications of SSM amongst hospitality educators would help overcome the criticisms being levelled at undergraduate programmes by those positioned outside the education system boundary. These criticisms are based on a 'worldview' that believes there is too much theory and not enough practice in undergraduate programmes. This perception will always exist in some quarters no matter how much practical content is introduced into the programmes.

The key issue is not how much 'practice' there is in a programme, but rather what that 'practice' is. This paper sets out a case for 'systems practice' being the core practical activity; whilst students may well appear to be serving a meal in the training restaurant, they are in fact practising the delivery and critical evaluation of a consciously designed foodservice system. Rather than debate what 'school of thought' one happens to belong to, hospitality educators may be better served if the debate centred on whether their work utilised a Mode 1 or Mode 2 approach.

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