**Doctoral research study into Sustainable Supply Chain Management**

**Researcher** Anthony Alexander MBA (Warwick), ESRC Research Fellow for Sustainable Supply Chain Management, Logistics and Operations Management Group, Cardiff Business School.

**Contact:** email: AlexanderA@Cardiff.ac.uk. or tel: 07970-593412

**Sample questions used in the dataset.**

The table below provides examples of questions asked. However, it is important to note that the semi-structured interview format used in this research is resistant to structured display of questions and answers. As described by [Vaughan (2013](#_ENREF_1)),

"*With semi-structured interviews there are generally no set or fixed questions. Instead, the researcher, following a review of relevant literature, generates a list of topics or themes that are to be discussed with the interviewee.*" (ibid. page 107)

The advantage of this approach is its flexibility and responsiveness, enabling the interviewee to introduce themes they regard as of central importance and for the interviewer to further probe the answers given and to lead the conversation back to the key themes as necessary. This approach requires an experienced interviewer, capable of such probing and keeping the answers on track, without distraction whilst allowing novel themes to emerge. The disadvantage is a potential risk that it is hard for other researchers to readily replicate the same data. As the attributes of the interviewer are central to the narrative data produced, the interviewer is essentially the 'scientific tool' of the research. This means that qualitative social scientific method can stand in contrast with quantitative physical or mechanical scientific method, which seeks to establish the universality of observable phenomenon as independent of the perception of the viewer.

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| **Examples of questions asked via semi-structured elite interview technique** | **Theme** |
| How would you describe the company at the moment? What is the structure of your organisation? Describe how you address sustainable and responsible business in your supply chain management. | Descriptions of organisational characteristics |
| Can you describe the decision making bodies that influence company policies on sustainability internally or in the supply chain? Are there particular ways that decision making is done? How are people held accountable for their decisions? Is decision making authority formal or informal? Centralised, or decentralised? | Descriptions of organisational culture relating to decision making |
| What aspects of sustainable and responsible issues in your operations and supply chain are simple to understand, and just need processes to be put in place and followed? | Structured - simple decision contexts |
| What aspects of sustainable and responsible issues in your operations and supply chain involve lots of complicated variables so require expert analysis? | Structured-complicated decision contexts |
| Which ones are too complex to easily understand and control? Is it viable to leave these issues to sort themselves out, or decentralise decision making to suppliers or logistics providers? Can managers act on their own judgement/intuition, or do they need to provide mathematical proofs before they can act? | Unstructured - complex decision contexts |
| Are there some aspects of sustainability and social responsibility in the supply chain that are too uncertain or chaotic to be understandable and controllable? | Unstructured - chaotic decision contexts |
| Was there a particular policy that influenced that investment decision? What do you think about regulations on climate change, are they influencing decision making? Are you involved in influencing forthcoming regulations? | Rules based decision making, impact on climate change |
| Please describe how your company understands or responds to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Do you use particular systems for managing sustainable and responsible issues in your supply chains, e.g. third party systems or bespoke internal systems? What variables / metrics do you identify and use as Key Performance Indicators? | Definitions of sustainable development issues (formal/informal) |
| What do you see as the biggest challenges and biggest successes or opportunities in sustainable and responsible operations and supply chain management? How much visibility or awareness do you have of the wider supply network? Have you looked across all of those suppliers and seen where's the real major impact in terms of the environmental impacts? Or the social impacts? To what extent do you talk to your suppliers about their suppliers?  What is your involvement with or impressions of Scope 1, 2 and 3 measurement? Do you need to guard against double counting if you are reporting on carbon emissions, or do you use it primarily as an internal tool rather than for external disclosure? | Awareness of sustainability impacts in the Supply Chain / different approaches to sustainable supply chain management. |
| To what extent are investors big influences on your decision making, or does influence or pressure come from other places, like customers, regulators, clients? | Other relevant topics emerging from the data, such as stakeholder influences on decision making |

Table: Example questions from semi-structured interviews

All interviews were conducted under conditions of anonymity. This has enabled highly candid insights, but requires that any data enabling a firm to be identified (including general information such as market capitalisation, approximate number of employees, size of market share and more specific facts such as market positioning or product types) has had to be kept from publication in this research.

**Reference**

Vaughan, S. (2013). Elite and Elite-lite Interviewing: Managing Our Industrial Legacy. In A. Franklin & P. Blyton (Eds.), *Researching Sustainability: A Guide to Social Science Methods, Practice and Engagement* (pp. 105-119): Earthscan.