



# The Role of Spirituality in Moderating Hospitality Industry Conflict Management and Promoting Sustainability

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analytically explore the underlying assumptions and rationale of the main trends of spirituality in the workplace and to investigate conflict management in the hospitality industry while considering the role of spirituality as a mitigating aspect. It also offers an overview of the field and makes recommendations for hotel managers on the importance of a spiritual and humanistic workplace. Conflict management in a hospitality operation is a problem which every employee of a hotel has to contend with at some or other time. Any conflict is viewed as disruptive in nature. Sometimes, conflicts are valuable for enhancing work performance and lead to careful analyses of the goals of the business, and this is always a beneficial exercise. However, when conflict is at a high level for a comparatively long period of time, it is destructive and it impacts a business in a negative way as strategic business objectives in both the long and short-term are not met. How well hotel employees are able to impact on the sustainability of their workplace is determined by the degree to which spirituality exists and the way in which it promotes productivity and innovation. Workplace spirituality affects the manner in which employees view themselves when they are under the influence of their work environment. The imperative aspect is to manage conflict by improved communication skills and by developing an *esprit d'corps* amongst the employees across each of the departments in an operation, and more especially by driving spirituality in the workplace. Spirituality is thus viewed as something which gives meaning or purpose to one's life and minimizes the potential for conflict.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, conflict resolution, hospitality, communication skills, sustainability

## Clarification of key terms

**Spirituality** in this article refers to Furman, Benson, Canda and Grimwood's (2005) characterization of spirituality as an attitude or approach to including an exploration for deeper meaning and purpose in life.

**Conflict** is understood in terms of the definition of Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (1998) and is "the process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party".

## Methodology

A conceptual analysis and review of a preponderance of relevant literature was undertaken and analysis was based on a review of refereed articles, discussion papers and short papers in key academic hospitality and general management journals.

## Introduction

In the rapidly changing world of the 21st century, mega deviations are occurring in a wide range of economic, technological, political, social and cultural levels. Each of these impacts the world of work and diminishes spirituality. The poor state of the global economy exacerbates the problem a hundredfold as hotels vie for business with many competitors (Pryor & Bright, 2009; Greenhaus & Callanan, 2013).



The hospitality industry and more particularly hotels, find themselves in environments that are challenging due to increasing levels of competition amongst diverse brands with all that they have to offer. The catchword for any business is sustainability and this invariably depends on the level of productivity of the workforce which in turn is dependent on levels of employee happiness and a sense of spiritual well-being. One's creativity at work is a spiritual progression that encompasses the complete person, and not merely their intellect or manual skills and knowledge obtained from institutions of higher learning and vocational training establishments. It is increasingly the case that workers are prepared to devote more of their time to their work because they are finding deeper meaning and a sense of purpose while on the job.

The notion of work is associated with earning money in exchange for vital provisions and also with the opportunity to drive one's personal growth. Work priorities mirror dynamic cultural values and are subject to regular change (Whitbourne, 2007). A person's spirit is the dynamic enlivening force which is traditionally perceived to be a life-affirming force within all human beings. It is considered to be a state of intimate affiliation with one's core of higher values and ethicality based on moral virtue as well as recognition of the reality of the inner nature of fellow human beings. Hotels require employees to provide service quality excellence and in order to do this people should be bringing their entire being to work rather than just their physical being or skills (Sparrow & Knight, 2006).

It is however not yet universally the case that this realisation exists and so conflicts in the workplace are a common occurrence in hotels and should be avoided because they disrupt the day-to-day operation of business and prevent optimal performance by involved employees, while being negative for them spiritually speaking. Managing and responding to conflicts can be a highly challenging issue because inherent in all conflicts in the workplace is uncertainty. In addition the question of what appropriate course of action a manager should take to resolve the cause of the conflict is difficult to address. Conflict is, however, sometimes viewed as being healthy to a degree.

### **Conflict as a problem**

When conflict becomes problematic, a systematic approach to solving it is highly desirable. In this article, types of conflict are identified and sources of conflict in hotels are analyzed. Various approaches and techniques to use in solving conflict in the workplace have been investigated and a technique to resolve conflict in hotels is suggested. Existing conflict management research is thus supported and extended. Conflicts in the workplace affect not only guests but also the hotel staff, culture, and overall success in delivering service quality excellence. Ignoring the underlying system or structure that may have caused a conflict is indeed a great mistake (Nelson, 2007).

Given that there are very high and unacceptable rates of employee turnover in the hospitality industry, it is imperative to minimize the role of conflict as a causal effect (Sparrow & Knight, 2006). Although conflict does and in some cases should occur, it should not lead to an employee seeking to terminate his or her employment. Employee turnover in hotels is a major problem on a global scale (Lucas, 2004) and this is why conflict management is vital. In the United States, the Marriot Corporation reported in 2000 that a 1% increase in employee turnover would at a conservative estimate, cost the group between 5 and 15 million US dollars (Pizam & Thornburg, 2000). Conflict does tend to impact on performance but managers need to be careful not to allow deep conflict to de-motivate employees who are in any event already stressed by the very nature and demands of the hospitality industry. Each case of conflict is unique and has its own situation, dimensions and behaviours.

The hospitality management development process needs to be conceptualized as an ongoing and highly dynamic process which should be designed to maximize both the potential of



employees and the business, in terms of competence and capability. However conflict in the workplace is a major obstacle to this objective. Conflict management in the workplace is an issue that every manager or employee has to deal with at some or other time. It is highly unlikely that effective customer service will be provided by a hotel if all of the employees do not work in concert and in harmony. The general manager in particular, needs to harness and pull the workforce in the same direction, and not allow conflict in the workplace, no matter how seemingly insignificant, to affect service quality provision to guests.

### **What is spirituality in the workplace?**

First and foremost, spirituality in the workplace should not be viewed from a religious vantage point. Companies now increasingly recognize that engaging the employees through reimbursement, and understanding are not enough (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). What is needed is stronger engagement with the souls of employees as human beings. A supreme vision of service to others needs to be engendered in which work becomes almost a vocation. Once this happens, employees tend to be loyal and committed, and often to the extreme, which leads to enhanced performance and sustainability and creates a sense of employee empowerment. Organizational cultural design is then critical in such endeavours where true service quality excellence abounds. The primary need is however, a spiritually oriented leadership group who create such a vision which leads to superior individual and organizational outcomes (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013).

Harrington et al. (2001), state that since the year 2000, employees have been experiencing a fundamental change of work values. This theory shift has been to all intents and purposes as philosophical as the information age and within this transformation, has been the further exploration of spirituality and spiritual feelings emanating from the workplace. These aspects are collectively referred to as “workplace spirituality”. How hotel employees impact on the sustainability of their workplace is determined by the extent to which spirituality exists and the way in which it promotes productivity and innovation.

One’s relationship to work is an essential part of one’s self-concept, and impacts on the quality of life in the workplace and beyond and consequently spirituality in the workplace is assuming a greater consideration by employers (Carroll, 2013; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Fry & Kriger, 2009). Workplace spirituality affects the way in which employees view themselves when they are under the influence of the work environment. It impacts how employees view themselves and the manner in which they deal with others in a work environment which demands teamwork. It is evident from a wider reading of popular media as well as academic journals that people are increasingly concerned about human existence and what it comprises of. Many authors such as of the Jurkiewicz and Giacalone of (2004) and Klenke (2005), have interrogated this issue and there have also been intensive studies of how spirituality impacts management (Marschke, 2007). Workplace spirituality is interpreted as employee experiences of spirituality in their day to day work. Milliman et al. (2003, 429-30) suggest that workplace spirituality invariably involves the manner in which employees’ experience their sense of meaning while working. Duchon and Plowman (2005) assert that leaders need to guide and help employees fulfil their spiritual needs while at work. Organization development seeks to promote the effectiveness of an organization (Cummings and Worley, 2002). In this context, employees generally seek a sense of connectedness with other employees and desire that their personal objectives and experiences should be aligned with the employer is mission and vision. Ashmos and Duchon (2000:137) note that:

“ . . . a workplace where people experience joy and meaning in their work is a place where spirituality is more observable than a place where people do not experience joy and meaning in their work . . . a workplace in which people see themselves as part of a trusting community, where they experience



personal growth as a part of their work community, where they feel valued and supported, would be a workplace in which spirituality thrives.”

There is a far greater focus is on a spiritual archetype for workplaces today than ever before. One's spirituality is the essence of who he or she is. It defines the inner self, separate from the body, but including the physical and intellectual self (Neal, 1998). Spirituality is an intrinsic attribute of all human beings. It includes what is considered to be sacred in almost everything and it is in terms of one school of thought, not bound to any religious denomination. It is all encompassing and is espoused by all people and in essence entails how one experiences or is able to promote the image of a god through association (Smith & Rayment, 2007). While many see no link between religion and spirituality in the workplace, there are a number of articles which demonstrate that many people tend to identify workplace spirituality with religion (Kriger & Seng, 2005). Today's workplace requires an emphasis on intelligence and also spirituality (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011).

The foremost factors of spirituality are significant work, focused work, a sense of community and interconnectedness and transcendence (Petchsawanga & Duchon, 2012). Dent et al. (2005) suggest that the inclusion as a core, of spirituality in the workplace, is indeed the new paradigm in leadership theory. It is apparent in the current workplaces that there is an increasing interest in the issue of spirituality in the workplace. Fourie, (2014:8) asserts that:

“Although spirituality in the workplace is difficult to define, it is clear that organisations that accommodate spirituality in the workplace are rewarded with an upward spiral of positive outcomes. Workplace spirituality plays itself out on two levels. Firstly, commitment in that the employee wants to bring his or her 'whole self' to the workplace, and secondly, a need for interconnectedness and belonging - interaction with other and to be able to reach out to people. Perhaps public practical theology has a bigger role to play than currently understood.”

The literature suggests that many employees would like to experience more spirituality in their place of employ. Research conducted by Mitroff and Denton (1999) to ascertain the extent of spirituality in specifically the United States uncovered that employees do not have widely differing interpretations of spirituality. Many employees believe that spirituality will indeed have a positive effect in a workplace and would like to have open lives as opposed to being „pigeon-holed“ in the workplace. Interaction is important for them and religion and spirituality were generally viewed as being distinct from one another. The former was considered to be incongruous with the workplace. When employees perceive their work to be part of their spiritual walk, as a place where they can experience diverse opportunities to grow personally and to contribute to society in a more meaningful way, they become energised. Work which encompasses demonstrating genuine care and compassion for other employees of all ranks and indeed all stakeholders and is discernible by employees abiding by the truth in a sense of higher values and morality and acting with integrity in all their dealings (Nicolaidis, 2006). It also refers to the ways in which organisations are structured so as to effectively support the spiritual development of employees (Fairholm, 1997). Neck and Milliman (1994, 10) maintain that “the goal of spirituality in work is seen as being able to reach one's full potential.” There is thus an implied relationship between human potential development as an aspect of Organisational Development and the notion of workplace spirituality.

The term workplace spirituality has been described in general terms as "a framework of organisational values evidenced in the culture that promote employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy" (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). There are however researchers who accentuate the need for all to be incorporated into the psychological contract between an organisation and its employees, and other stakeholders in



a spirit of corporate social responsibility, sustainability and ethical practice (Burr and Thomson, 2002). It is also intended that spirituality in the workplace promotes a strong sense of individual significance and unity (Geroy, 2005). From a social learning theory perspective (Bandura 1986), it is reasonable to expect that the ethical climate / culture as well as spirituality in the work place would play an influential role in the person-organisation fit, including unity between employees, specifically in terms of modelling. The research findings of Sims and Keon (1997) in their investigation into the effects of an ethical climate / culture on the person-organisational fit concluded that persons whose ideal preferences of ethical climate / culture matched with the actual ethical climate / culture in their organisations were more likely to be committed to their organisations, resulting in positive organisational behaviour.

There are clearly many diverse definitions of what spirituality entails. In certain philosophical schools, the notion of spirituality is directly understood to be a relationship between an individual and God. A contrast in view on spirituality is devoid of any linkages with God or any higher authority. In this latter view spirituality is viewed as something which gives meaning or purpose to one's life (Crisp, 2008). Driscoll and Wiebe (2007) state that 'authentic' spirituality in which employees are by nature spiritually inclined, is far more critical than 'technical' spirituality. The inference is thus that the term "spirituality" is then clearly more important than the term "workplace" in the phrase "workplace spirituality."

Karakas (2010) has maintained that spirituality may be understood as something separate from institutionalized religion. He states that spirituality can be regarded as something which is very private, non-denominational, fully inclusive and in essence it refers to a universal human sentiments rather than being something which observes traditional beliefs practices and rituals as found in organised religion. Furman, Benson, Canda and Grimwood (2005) characterize spirituality as an attitude or approach to including an exploration for deeper meaning and purpose in life. It embraces a desire by one to indulge in morally fulfilling relations with the self, others in society and the entire universe, and thus with what is considered to be ultimate reality. Workplace spirituality facilitates organizational value which is also an important aspect in Organisational Development.

Instability in the employee-employer relationship results when the trust between employers and employees is broken due to the number of staff being reduced because of the nature of the hotel industry's seasonality and vexing economic downturns. This leads to the undermining of trust between managers and hotel employees and it negatively impacts loyalty and employees' expectations of their organisations which are perceived as insensitive to them as human beings with families and commitments.

When hotels downsize their employee component, this leaves the residual workers in a devastating overwork condition within which it becomes difficult to foster harmonious relationships and obtain quality service delivery, irrespective of which hotel department is involved. In this milieu, employees are stressed and feel insecure and their spiritual well-being is diminished given that spirituality includes a unique inner-looking search for total personal development in the course of participation in transcendent get-togethers such as at work (Delbecq, 1999). Duchon and Plowman (2005) state that how individual employee's experience workplace spirituality has a strong positive or negative association with work performance. This strongly suggests a close relationship between the effectiveness of an organization and workplace spirituality issues. People have a longing for spiritual fulfilment on both personal and collective levels. They realise that they are connected with others and interdependent beings. The older people become the more they seek to tune in to the universe as a whole and their spiritual intensity increases. Spiritual sentiments are equally important in work place settings and employees look for opportunities to seek themselves and their own realities and truth. They look for what is true for themselves and seek to intensify their own experiences at work (Champoux, 2000).



Konz and Ryan (1999) maintain that organizations are shifting to a structure in which spiritual development is a pertinent characteristic. The workplace is thus not merely a place one goes to in order to make money to survive but rather a place where one's spirit can express itself while nurturing others and empowering them to also thrive. Where spirituality exists in the workplace people are able to be more productive, creative and innovative. Spirituality is thus critical to the sustainability of a business, for without it, creativity simply does not manifest in a meaningful way that would impact positively on organisational sustainability. This is primarily due to its ability to allow employees to make a more meaningful contribution (Konz & Ryan, 1999).

### **Workplace spirituality versus spirituality in the workplace**

An enhanced sense of spirituality in the workplace is advantageous since this will bring spirit, life and livelihood back together (Van Ness, 1996). When one speaks of spirit it also implies life. All people seek to live a life of excellence with purpose and significance and where they are able to make a meaningful contribution to society at large. When we speak of spirituality in the workplace, it is important to consider how daily life and making a decent living can be enhanced in terms of the human spirit (Fox, 1994). There are two elements which create spirituality in a workplace. These include the humanistic facet in which relationships and associations with others in the workplace are valued and there is also a transcendent facet of valuing a supreme creator being or God (Neal, Lichtenstein & Banner, 1999).

Religion per se, is a very important cause of spirituality for most people it is not the only starting place. While religion as generally institutionalized and founded on agreed sets of dogmas and beliefs, and a collective notion, spirituality tends to be far more highly personal in orientation (Hawley, 1993). There has recently been a marked increase in the writings on spirituality and leadership and on the issue of what is termed the 'corporate soul' and spirituality in the workplace (inter alia, Graves and Addington, 2002; Kim, 2002; Batstone, 2003; Mitroff and Denton, 1999). This construct is strongly related to an ethical organisational climate and culture. Climate is defined locally, in other words, the climate of an organisation is what the people inside the organisation say it is, rather than what people outside the organisation say or think it is, or wish it would be (Dickson, Smith, Grojean and Ehrhart, 2001). It is therefore the actual experience and perceptions of the employees of an organisation. The close relationship with spirituality is apparent in the definition of the insightful scholars on ethical climate, namely Victor and Cullen (1987). They define ethical climate as "the shared perceptions of what is regarded ethically correct behaviours and how ethical situations should be handled in an organisation" (Victor and Cullen, 1987: 51).

Spirituality in the workplace is an expression occasionally used by religious people to describe their own faith which is acknowledged in their workplace in the way in which the organisation operates and its mission and vision statements. It also summarizes the notions that for example, the workplace recognizes and facilitates their own religious or spiritual beliefs and that there is certainly some measure of alignment between their personal religious beliefs and the purposes of the organisation in which they are employed (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). Gibbons offers a definition of spirituality in the workplace as a "journey toward integration of work and spirituality, for individuals and organisations, which provides direction, wholeness and connectedness at work" (Gibbons, 1999).

By inspiring spirituality in a hotel, a manager may lead it to the consolidation of inventiveness, innovation, honesty, trust, personal fulfilment and commitment, and ultimately to an increased prospect for sustainability. Spiritual behaviour enhances employee personal commitment and involvement, and an all-inclusive approach to the working individual (Dhiman & Marques 2011). The organisation therefore plays a colossal role in the attitude, experiences, sense of security and contentment of the individuals that serve in it. Spirituality in the workplace also then impacts on the employees' perspectives of work as a place where they can live their



spirituality and be motivated. It is also the place where they can create meaningful relationships and can, for a few, also only be a place where they simply make a living. Where there is spirituality in the workplace this has also been closely associated with ethics and values (Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002). Values are trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in peoples' lives (Schwartz 1992). Individuals use their personal values as criteria to decide on and justify their actions and to evaluate people and events (Schwartz, 1992).

Workplace spirituality then typically refers to the intention of types of work or to the apparently intrinsic sense of a spiritual ambience, which almost mimic a religious site that are exuded in certain workplaces. It includes in this sense the quality of the inter-employee relationships and those between employees and all the stakeholders of the organisation. Where spirituality in the workplace exists, it often affords employees the opportunity to align their values and philosophical and religious backgrounds with the values of the organisation (Weston, 2002) and this leads to a greater sense of partnership and collaboration.

### **The hotel industry**

The hotel industry is one in which employees are of necessity required to be more productive, creative, innovative and quality service provision driven. Invariably a hotels and human resources need to be treated very differently to financial resources. The hospitality industry is very dynamic and is constantly called upon to meet the expectations of the crease in the demanding customers. Employees are required to be technically competent and above all have excellent human relations skills. Hotel manager desires tubal employees into productive team members will need to carefully consider the issue of spirituality in the workplace since this will empower them to better lead their employees and function in a more productive manner. In hotels, most employees have an innate desire to be of service to other people. This is clearly demonstrated by their commitment and strong sense of service orientation and above all by their often deep concern for colleagues. In spiritually inclined workplaces and workspaces, employees tend to demonstrate deep concern towards their colleagues and there are usually elevated quality interpersonal work relationships and higher worker job satisfaction levels. This means that there will also be lower employee turnover and thus huge savings in training of new employees. There is also a greater sense of teamwork and enhanced group solidity, work performance and hyper- efficiency (Champoux, 2000). It is critical that managers develop and motivate the staff by forging a work climate in which employees look forward to going to work with the management rather than against them. A good manager must understand the interests, needs and objectives of the employees. When managers are tuned in to the source of creativity of their employees, new life is brought into the business and a spirit of resilience abounds. A superior hotel manager will make an effort to know the employees and their background, intellect, personality and attitudes towards different things. Klenke (2003) stresses that spirituality is regarded as a source of productivity and thus requires attention. Fernando and Jackson (2006), conducted research in interfaith studies of spirituality in the workplace amongst miscellaneous cultures, and in a range of vocations. They discovered that the notion of 'connection' is a universal and fundamental concept in the idea of spirituality. In this he is supported by many others inter alia Burkhart (2001) and Rose (2001).

Employees look for ways and means by which they can connect to each other. They also desire to be unified with fellow employees in line with the mission and vision of the organization that surpasses purely materialistic aims (Miller, 1998). Where there is no spirituality in the workplace, human nature is deficient. It is important for people to 'know themselves' and to be given recognition by employers for who they are. Unfortunately many workplaces harbour the belief that emotional factors should be disqualified if the organization is to operate efficiently. In such an environment only rationality matters and spirituality is considered to be unimportant (Robbins, 2002). By contrast, Mitroff and Denton (1999) ascertained that many interviewed



employees pointed out that their 'souls' have been damaged by the workplace due to reliance on rationality. Consequently, any facets of a sense of community and connectedness in spiritual experiences are considered to be of paramount importance for them. Employees need to feel they have equal opportunity, especially in gender issues and they desire effective and transparent communication. Employees are spiritually stifled when there is a lack of effective communication. They need to be able to express themselves without any fear of reprisal. An esprit de corps should exist in which employees should feel free to state their feelings. It is our only in this way that a strong teamwork ethos can be created which is conducive to the hospitality industry. Staude (2005), views spirituality as somewhat of a transformational process via which the diverse aspects of life are integrated such as the physical, emotional, occupational, intellectual and rational. Spirituality thus incorporates a connectedness to oneself, and others in the workplace and beyond, as well as to nature and to greater power. When a spiritual approach is taken by management and supervisors in a hotel there will be a recognition that employees, whether they be chefs, front desk employees or cleaners, work not only with their hands but also with their hearts or spirit (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Hotels are desirous of developing their human potential, and seek vital and effective organizational change (Harvey and Brown, 1996). A lack of spirituality in the workplace causes employees to feel a sense of spiritual emptiness. It also leads to morally deficient behaviours their social values tend to fall. Essentially, their lives become unbalanced and this undoubtedly impacts negatively on their work values and organizational sustainability. Consequently, spirituality in the workplace cannot be ignored.

Spirituality will soon become a human resource best practice that is the most likely to improve operations. The spirituality that is desired will encompass issues such as the empowering of line employees to make decisions that directly or indirectly lead to greater guest satisfaction. When employees are empowered their morale increases and they believe they are making a far greater contribution to the hotel in which they are serving. An aspect of spirituality in the workplace will be the need to pay greater attention to issues of cultural diversity. What employees desired to see in the workplace was a model of spirituality that would not in any way offend co-employees (Staude, 2005).

Employees tend to model the behaviour of their supervisor and other employees to ensure that their behaviour is in line with accepted behavioural norms within the organisation (West & Wicklund 1980). Schaefer and Darling (1997) uncovered that contemplative spiritual practices in the workplace creating a sense of positivity in the employees and encouraged them to serve with more commitment and thus to greater effect. If organisations embrace these values and seek to meet the expectations of employees as realistically as possible, then the organization is strengthened and is also likely to be far more successful in its endeavours.

The wellbeing of hospitality employees is in the best interest of the industry given that most employees spend the major portion of their lives in the workplace (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002). For many, the hotel in which they serve is the very foundation of their community and it is within the context of the hotel that many thus create friendships and tend to make the greatest contribution to society (Fairholm, 1996). The nature of hospitality work is such that employees become severely stressed especially during peak seasons and often suffer burnout due to growing workaholicism. This invariably engenders a loss of spirituality in employees and many thus become afflicted by chronic illnesses, pain, fatigue and even fear (Killinger, 2006). Very often, the employees' spontaneous behaviours that are based on their personal attitudes, values, and beliefs, tend to lose their natural characteristics under the usually excessive demands of the workplace (Lord and DeZoort, 2001). A workplace that is devoid of spirituality is almost always more stressed and experiences higher absenteeism, lower levels of productivity and an increase in expenditure in form of health compensation claims (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997). Being cognizant of the varied spiritual and also psychological needs of people employed in an organisation is fundamental to the issue of



lower staff turnover and also in providing optimal working conditions thus promoting the general spiritual and psychological welfare employees.

However even if there are organisational socialization practices, and there is to an extent spirituality in the workplace, if there is apparent incongruence between an employee's spiritual beliefs and the apparent spiritual climate of an organisation, there will be heightened cognitive dissonance. It is clear that organisations need to adjust their strategies vis-à-vis employees if they are to meet the needs of the modern workforce. Where there is a good spiritual base in place and it is one in which there is transparency, mutual appreciation and understanding between employer and employees, an organisation is likely to be more effective. The employees' morale, and commitment is likely to be stronger where spirituality is factored into the culture of the workplace (Duxburg & Higgins, 2002; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). An environment in which spirituality is evident has the effect of bolstering employee performance. Dehler and Welsh (1994) argue that that organizations should be providing physical, mental, emotional, as well as spiritual supports to their employees.

### **Addressing conflict in the workplace**

Person–environment (PE) fit theory is important for any organisation and it is based on the premise that employees flourish in work settings that are compatible with their spiritual inclinations, ethical and moral stances, skills, interests and values (Milliman, Gatling & Bradley-Geist, 2017). A study by Clark, Harline and Jones (2008) demonstrated that the leadership styles of managers have a great influence on the behaviour and commitment of employees. Managers are required to be spiritually inclined in their stance and then an ambience of care will pervade the workplace resulting in greater employee receptivity. Addressing conflict in the workplace demands a great investment of time and tends to place undue stress on all staff, whether directly or indirectly involved. There are also financial implications for the hotel when conflict emerges, as valuable time is spent on unplanned activities linked to the resolution of conflict. Little is known about the costs of conflict in the hotel workplace for two reasons. Firstly, any analysis of costs associated with conflict is complex and does not have a clear framework that is specific to the hospitality industry. Secondly, the costs of seeking to resolve conflict has generally been thought of as trivial or was simply deemed to be an accepted part of the overall costs of delivering service quality excellence; thus, any analysis was not considered worthy of the much required effort.

In a hospitality enterprise, as indeed in most businesses, conflict is a result of natural competition between two or more individuals or between various departments'. It may be used to prevent stagnation by focusing on problems which need to be resolved. Furthermore, conflict helps both individuals and groups to define and perpetuate their distinctiveness and promotes unity, cohesion and common purpose. It may be very healthy as it enables individuals and groups to establish norms to regulate and define the balance of power which prevails in an enterprise. In essence the roles individuals play in a business also impacts on conflict management.

Clark et al. (2008:1), state that frontline staff are critical to the hotel industry since the service they provide 'cannot be overstated' because they are directly responsible for 'face-to-face customer service, service quality, and customer satisfaction'. Thus the basic means of conflict management in a hospitality enterprise could include improving communication, a greater emphasis on teamwork, and a systematic means of resolving sticking points which are contributors to the problem and of course promoting spirituality through a humanistic approach to work.

Hellriegel et al (1998), define conflict as a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or adversely affected by another party. According to Spreitzer (1995), employees tend to feel psychologically empowered when they are able to an extent,



to shape their work role and context. A hotel Food and Beverage manager therefore, who informs kitchen employees that they must do something totally different to what they were told to do a short while earlier, feel that they are losing power and may believe that they are being exploited and manipulated to serve the manager's interest. Conflict thus results about who is correct and what strategy should have been pursued. The work relationship is thus tainted and in the hospitality business this is a huge problem as what is called for is close and harmonious cooperation. Conflict in the workplace can account for significant unforeseen operational, marketing, legal and public relations costs which may greatly impede the hotel's ability to increase the bottom-line, and as such cannot be ignored. There is adequate proof that spirituality in the workplace is vital in crafting a desirable organisational culture with happier workers who are motivated to deliver better outputs. An employee's significance of work as a happy experience is invariably increased (Garcia-Zamor 2003).

Line managers have to constantly be ready to handle a wide range of conflicts in the workplace and must do so without alienating the employees concerned. In a kitchen environment, 'too many cooks may indeed spoil the proverbial broth'. It is not uncommon for pent up employee frustrations to spill over into verbal abuse slinging matches and even fist fights. This type of activity can certainly tarnish a guest's perceptions of a hotel. Although much time and effort may have gone into "creating" the right customer, he will certainly not be retained.

#### Suggestions:

- Ongoing interaction with all employees in a climate of mutual human respect.
- Matching leadership style with the group of employees.
- Putting employees in charge as well as in control – giving them latitude to make decisions independently.
- Constantly striving to motivate employees from a spiritual basis.
- Striking a balance between genuine concern for individuals and groups and the accomplishment of tasks.
- Giving employees realistic workloads and considering their private lives.
- Including the employees in the implementation of current plans as well as in future plans.
- Involving employees in the communication process.
- Including conflict management in the employee relations planning and identifying instances of conflict and developing procedures to resolve them.
- Valuing employees and giving praise where praise is due.
- Regular consultation and communication.
- Providing unambiguous situations and guiding and mentoring employees.

At times, conflict is a positive force in a business, while at other times it is totally destructive and has a negative impact. Managers from various hotel departments including Food and Beverage, Housekeeping and the Front Office departments of five different hotels state in blogs that the behaviour exhibited by employees differs considerably from situation to situation. Some employees attempt to ignore the conflict and deny that there is in fact a problem looming. Others tend to co-operate with their line-managers to resolve issues which are disrupting their performance in the workplace. Yet others compete through participation in various other structures and in so doing undermine their line-manager. In each of the hotel Food and Beverage departments staff blogs, a major conflict area was the tension which lies between the value placed on certain food items on menus and the established norms and standards, set by industry, which are in place to achieve them.

Groups are generally regarded as highly effective in influencing and socializing individuals. In each of the hotels, not much effort went into the development of effective working groups. Research has demonstrated that groups do in fact greatly limit variance in the behaviour of their members through the development and maintenance of explicit and implicit norms



(Feldman, 1984). In the average kitchen, this could be a challenge as chefs are generally very innovative and creative individuals and like things to be done their way and they will thus tend to express views which are contrary to those expressed by their immediate supervisor (Nemeth, 1986).

An essential skill for line-managers and supervisors in a kitchen, for example, is thus to understand and practice good interpersonal communication. This is after all the foundation for all actions in the workplace. It is also the ideal opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with each kitchen employee without alienating anyone. Especially in a country such as South Africa, where there is great cultural diversity, huge amounts of time should be spent on positive interaction with employees. It is this interaction which invariably creates a good workplace climate and nurtures respect and understanding and tolerance, and this in turn leads to favourable behaviour on the part of employees, to the benefit of the enterprise. Managers therefore need to focus on their employees and also on processes (Mullins, 2005).

### **Concluding remarks**

Conflict is to an extent, a part of individual relationships and organizational development, and no organization can hope to mature productively and be successful without the ability to resolve conflicts in the workplace when they arise (Cottringer, 1997). Often, conflict is beneficial as conflicting views may lead to an in depth analysis of the mission and vision of the entire operation and after discussion, employees could have a better idea of where the business is headed and how it intends to get there. Based on a literature review, it appears that the best style to resolve conflict is the collaborative style as proposed by Hellriegel et al (1998). As conflicts are part and parcel of individual relationships and affect organizational development, no enterprise can be fully productive without being able to resolve workplace conflicts effectively (Cottringer, 1997).

Fry (2003) suggests that workplace spirituality must be included as a part of organizational change that is needed to make a transition to an organizational form that is suitably considerate of both current and future organizational and employee needs. The majority of organizations today tend to focus on purely observable, external and highly materialistic outcomes which invariably lead to a world of work which is increasingly devoid of spirituality. There is far more to work than purely materialistic gain. Organizations need to recognise that they produce considerable social values and results for society in general and not simply for themselves (Walsh, Weber & Margolis, 2003). Issues about spirituality in the workplace and its value have obliged managers and leaders to be excellent role-models for their employees and to engender work environments in which there is sound ethical decision-making. Workplace spirituality involves devotion to a particular modality of contemplation regarding the self, work, and the organization (Hicks, 2003). Wheatley (1999) refers to the ideas of self-organizing and self-creating systems in nature as examples of how organizations should function when assuming natural changes aimed at stability and reinvigoration. The natural cycles as it were, are guides for the creation of spiritual workplaces in which there is growth and sustainability.

There is clearly a need to broaden the training that all managers and especially line managers receive, in the area of conflict management. It is proposed that more intense studies are required to further explore the dynamics of South African hotel employees' interactions with their managers and the levels to which spirituality is promoted and nurtured in workplaces. This is especially necessary given the diverse nature of the workforce and the fact that hotels are increasingly changing places of work. Perhaps a major task for further investigation is to ascertain appropriate models for the recruitment and selection of employees in hotels as well as a deeper analysis of the organizational structure and spiritually oriented job design in hotels, and how this may impact on conflict and its management.



The fundamental nature of the hospitality industry in South Africa is undergoing extensive change. Hotels are responding by reviewing their internal structures and the conduct of management and other employees within the business and conflict resolution is apparently high on the agenda (Spreitzer, 1995).

A more informed and well-developed understanding of the nature of conflict in the hotel workplace, and how it can be managed for the effectiveness of employees and hotels, is long overdue. Where there is spirituality in the workplace, the organization enjoys a greater market value and is thus more able to attract investment. The spiritual organization considers the strategic long-term implications of their actions and they value the inputs from a wide range of stakeholders. It seeks to develop society by considering the triple bottom line including people, planet and profits. Employees in spiritually inclined organizations consider themselves to be servants of the community. It is within spiritual organizations that employees are able to express their creativity and unpack innovative ways in which the organization's sustainability can be enhanced. These organizations provide employees with the necessary resources to do their jobs well. They value cultural diversity and respect the culture, religion, language and values of all employees and other stakeholders. They also seek to infuse a spirit of lifelong learning in their employees and make concerted efforts to upskill employees as they build a spirit of community to support the organization's mission and vision. More importantly, spiritual organizations have less need of conflict resolution and are more productive.

Managers and leaders in spiritual organizations work on a strong ethical foundation and then is the desire the promotion of individual employees' growth. Employees are treated as human beings and are not merely a 'staff number' on the payroll. Spiritual managers and leaders support their staff in their endeavors to develop a strong feeling of connectedness with the organization. Employees' skills are utilized to the full and they are valued and respected for the contributions to the organization. In essence the 'whole person' is considered in whatever is undertaken in the workplace. Spirituality in the workplace is directly focused on the construction of a sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of employees. It thus enhances human well-being which in turn promotes the nurturing of a caring society in which people feel a sense of fulfilment in the workplace. Hotels cannot thus be lacking in being values driven but rather provide employees with greater meaning, direction and provide a work-life balance in which spirituality reigns supreme.

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