

# MANAGING CONFLICTS IN SMALL SCALE ENTERPRISES IN THE TANZANIAN TOURIST INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study attempts to demonstrate insights into conflicts and their management in Small Scale Enterprises (SSEs) in the Tanzanian tourist industry. It aims at increasing the understanding of these complexities from an emic perspective, thereby providing in-depth information which can lead to the development of managerial training tools for improving diversity- and conflict management skills in the Tanzanian tourist industry. Qualitative data were selected from a comprehensive case study carried out in multiple governmental, educational, ecclesiastical and economic organisations. Research findings demonstrate how managers in SSEs in the Tanzanian tourist industry perceive and manage conflicts with customers.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Cross-cultural Interaction, Hotels, Tanzania, Small Scale Enterprises, Customer Relationship Management, Small Scale Enterprises, Emic Perspective

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## INTRODUCTION

Managers in large, medium and small enterprises and organizations (LSEs, MSEs and SSEs) experience the challenges of rapid changes within the organizations and an increase in complexity and diversity. This growing complexity and the increase in international and intercultural contacts require new management competencies in managers coping with organizational changes, a diverse workforce and diverse customers.

The international tourist industry is highly affected by these changes and is at the same time one of the most important vehicles of such global change is tourism (Reid 2003). Tourism has become one of the most significant economic sectors with regard to worldwide employment

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and investment and accounts for more than 80 per cent of global employment (World 2005a, World 2005b). In Tanzania, tourism has also grown during the past years and contributes nearly triple the GDP of Agriculture (Tanzania Tourism Board 2008). Tourism in Tanzania is not only bound to international organizations, LSE and MSE, but also to SSE and thereby plays a vital role in the country's economic development, as well as in the national and international peace and understanding (Tourism 2004).

According to the National Tourism Policy from 1991 (U.R.T. 1999) objectives were promoted and strategies discussed to develop sustainable tourism in Tanzania to assist poverty alleviation and promoting private investments. Tourism in Tanzania is linked to socio-economic development (Salazar 2009). However, the Tourism Master Plan (U.R.T. 2002) points out that 5000 of the 12 000 rooms required per "foreign bed night" are not yet of the required standards. Particularly in SSE in Tanzania's tourist industry a lack of service delivery skills and knowledge as well as international tourist standards has been ascertained (Tourism 2004), also with regard to the hotel industry. In this paper, it is assumed that this lack of skills, professionalism and standards might lead to conflicts between (international) tourists and the hotel management. Currently there is no existing data on such aspects of the SSE hotel industry in Tanzania.

This research is therefore to investigate conflicts with tourists and their management from the perspective of Tanzanian SSE hotel managers in Tanzania experience with tourists. It thereby contributes to the research on Human Resource Management in the Tanzanian hotel tourist industry with focus on conflict and its management. The need to focus on HRM with this special focus is self-evident: "Given the importance of the quality aspect of the tourism product and its labour intensity, the pool of human resources available for tourism in a given country is a fundamental factor in the successful development of this industry" (UCTAD 1998, p. 10). One can therefore argue that the perspective, the skills and the professionalism of hotel managers in SSE in Tanzania are mainly important to develop the country's small scale industry to create a growing, flourishing and sustainable tourist industry in Tanzania. Particularly HR and conflict management is important in the tourist industry which "involves the complex interaction of people and institutions within the tourism development process" (Dieke 2001).

By investigating the emic<sup>1</sup> perspectives of managers in the sector, their attitudes and conflict management skills "the training of the different personnel of the tourism sector" (ECA, 1996, pp. 94-95) can be developed.

The aim of this article is to provide new emic insights into conflict and its management in the SSE tourist industry in Tanzania from managers' perspectives. These new insights are supposed to provide new information about attitudes, skills and professional management of conflicts in this sector to being able to develop training programmes for managers working in this field to manage their business successfully and thereby contribute to the sustainable development of the Tanzanian tourist industry.

In the following, the context of the study will be described and a literature review will be given to establish a pre-understanding of the issue in the hermeneutic tradition of qualitative research as far as it is possible with regard to the current literature base.

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<sup>1</sup> The emic perspective is here defined as culture-bound, "subjective, ideographic, qualitative and as an insider" perspective (Morey & Luthans (1984:27).

## **SSE IN THE TANZANIAN HOTEL BUSINESS TOURIST INDUSTRY**

Tanzania is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society which is often held up as a “success story”, having “forged a national identity” based on accommodation and tolerance (Tripp 1999, p. 37). Most of the Tanzanian citizens, consisting of 120 different ethnic groups, are of Bantu extraction. There are three major religious traditions in the Tanzanian society, namely indigenous, Christian and Islamic. Jews, Buddhists and Hindus form a small minority in Tanzania (Wijsen & Mfumbusa 2004, pp. 13-14).

Conflict potentials within the Tanzanian society result from differences in religion (Tripp 1999; Vanhanen 1999; Wijsen & Mfumbusa 2004, p. 15), language, socio-political and economic position and access to education (Rubagumya 2004) and violence due to lack of health (Wubs *et al.*, 2009, p. 75). The high degree of diversity in the Tanzanian society also leads to conflicts (Boness 2002; Mayer & Boness 2004; Mayer *et al.* 2003; Young 1999). There is evidence that diversity, if not well managed, can lead to conflict (Boness & Mayer 2003, Church 1995). Additionally, issues of population growth, internal migration coupled with land tenure, poverty, alienation from land and resources, drought and lack of local participation, as well as social and class belonging, also cause conflicts in Tanzania (Mwamfupe 1998, p. 3).

Tourism is not only viewed as an ensemble of economic practices, but also as a complex and dynamic socio-cultural phenomenon (Meethan 2001; Salazar 2009). The tourist industry is expected to contribute to the improvement of the Tanzanian economy and thereby the societal challenges (UNCTAD 1998). During the past decades, Tanzania has recognised the importance of SSEs in creating employment and generating income in Tanzania (Bagachwa *et al.* 1991). SSEs are easily developed in Tanzania since capital, technology, management and utility requirements are less demanding than those for LSEs. SSEs, therefore, present an attractive option for equitable distribution of income toward poverty alleviation (United Republic of Tanzania 2002, p. v), particularly with regard to the growing tourist sector. Small tourist hotels cater mainly to “upper income tourists (United Republic of Tanzania 2001, p.5).

International visitors to Tanzania primarily come from the United Kingdom (11 per cent), United States of America (9 per cent), Scandinavia (7 per cent) and Germany (5 per cent) and increasingly from East Asia, especially Japan. The average length of stay in the country is seven nights and the main purposes for visit include leisure (62 per cent), business and conferences (27 per cent) and other (11 per cent). Tanzania receives a large number of regional visitors, primarily from Kenya (Tanzania Coastal Management Partnership 2001, p. 2).

Research on tourism in Tanzania has mainly focused on tourists and customers and their behaviour (Douglas & Wind 1987; Kean 2003; Meethan 2001) as well as on supply and demand (Assael 1995) and tourist concerns such as safety, security and health (Jamieson 2001; Klanarongran 2001), changing customer traditions (Munt 1994) and an increase in cross-cultural encounters and diversity experiences (Boness 2002) whilst travelling through Tanzania. Increased conflict potentials in the tourist industry occur with regard to natural resources, time, access to tourist areas, investments, community management and transferable skills (Ashley 2000).

The major research with regard to SSE focuses on economics and development politics (Mfaume & Leonard 2004; Sharma *et al.* 2007), financial services and credits (Tuni 1995), tourism development (De Jong 1999) and conflict amongst stakeholders in Tanzanian tourist SSE (Nelson 2003). There is no existing data focusing on HRM in Tanzanian SSE – particularly hotels in the tourist sector – and the conflict experienced by Tanzanian managers with tourist and their ways to managing these conflicts. There are a few studies which focus on conflict in the Tanzanian context (e.g. Horowitz 2000). However, these studies mainly focus on religious and ethnic differences and their conflict potentials. As a consequence this research study is needed to primarily explore the conflict potentials from a Tanzanian managerial perspective in the SSE hotel tourist industry.

## **CONFLICTS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT**

Research into conflict has increased during the past decades (Galtung 1996; Mayer 2008), particularly with regard to management research and organisational studies (Applefield *et al.* 2000). Conflict is viewed as being a reality construct that is created by the mutual inter-relationships between individuals and the environment (Aggestan, 1999; Applefield *et al.* 2000; Coy & Woehrlé 2000; Lederach 2000). Conflict can, thus, be defined as “a feeling, a disagreement, a real or perceived incompatibility of interests, inconsistent worldviews, or a set of behaviours” (Mayer 2000, p. 3).

Inter-personal conflict often begins when an individual perceives differences and opposition between the self and the other about interests, beliefs, needs and values (De Dreu *et al.* 1999). Conflicts are shaped by individual and cultural meanings (Augsburger, 1992; Avruch, 1998; Lederach 2000) which are again constructed by “perceptions, interpretations, expressions and intentions” of a person (Lederach 1996, p. 9). They are, therefore, linked to the inner processes of individuals and their relationship with the environment and are an inevitable part of organizational life (Jones & George 2003, p. 549). In diverse environments, differences in cultural orientations can increase the potential for conflict (Brislin & Kim 2003) and, therefore, require conflict and diversity management skills and practices which include the effective and successful management of cultural values and differences (Cox & Blake 1991).

Managing conflicts within organisations can be defined as the art of appropriate intervention to achieve conflict settlement (Nye 2005). It is the positive and constructive management of difference and divergence. Rather than advocating methods for removing conflict, conflict management “addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict, namely how to deal with it in a constructive way; how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process; and how to design a practical, achievable and cooperative system for the constructive management of difference” (Ghai *et al.* 1998, p. 18). Accordingly, conflict management does not necessarily imply the avoidance, reduction or termination of conflict. Rather, it helps to design effective strategies to both minimise dysfunctions and enhance the constructive functions of conflict, thereby enhancing learning and effectiveness (Rahim 2002, p. 208).

The need for assessing and understanding experiences of and views on conflict and the management thereof has increased globally (Kriesberg 2003). Conflicts and its management have rarely been discussed with regard to the African management context, particularly that of Tanzania, and the topic is underrepresented in scientific research (Mayer 2008; Mayer & Louw 2007). This article contributes toward augmenting the literature body on conflict and

its management particularly in the hotel business in SSE in Tanzania, as referred to and argued above.

In the following, the methodology of research will be outlined.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The phenomenological and interpretative paradigms were considered the most relevant approaches in this case study (Collis & Hussey 2003) by referring to the epistemological tradition of constructivism (Berger & Luckmann 2000) and interpretative hermeneutics (Habermas 1999). It is asserted that human beings inhabit different realities that are socially and culturally constituted and which may, therefore, vary across cultures, time and context (Gonzalez *et al.* 1994). This implies that all narrations and interpretations are equally valid and that no single way of interpreting data exists (Dickerson & Zimmerman 1996).

### **Research method**

This explanatory case study was used to understand and explain the “issue of research” (Cheldelin *et al.* 2003), namely conflicts and their management from a Tanzanian manager perspective in SSE in the hotel business in Tanzania, creating “thick description” (Geertz 1987). The research method used in this case study approach is explained in this section by considering the setting, the sample, the data collection and analysis methods.

### **Research setting**

The SSEs identified and used for this research are based in the three most important urban centres in Tanzania: Arusha, Moshi and Dar-Es-Salaam which are also of main interest with regard to the Tanzanian tourist industry in Northern Tanzania. The SSEs studied in this research were chosen due to results of pre-studies conducted in Tanzania (Boness 2002; Mayer *et al.* 2008) and according to the following criteria:

- importance of the SSEs to the Tanzanian tourist industry;
- entrepreneurial structures in the selected urban Tanzanian centres;
- permissible access to the SSE; and
- representability of SSE in tourist business in Tanzanian society.

### **Sample**

Data were collected from a randomized sample, including 18 interviewees from the three different urban centres. The interviews were conducted by a German-Tanzanian research team. The sample comprised 12 male and six female managers in top and middle management positions in the selected SSE. All interviewees are Tanzanian citizens from different ethnic backgrounds. All interviewees could speak English and Kiswahili fluently.

### **Data collection methods**

Triangulation of methods was used: The research methods used in this study comprise in-depth interviews, field notes and observations, as well as the collection and analysis of secondary literature and organizational documents.

In-depth interviews were used to achieve a deeper understanding of conflict and its management of the selected SSEs in the tourist industry. The interviews were conducted in English and Kiswahili – according to the competencies of interviewees - and were guided by using predetermined research questions which focused on the subjective experiences of interviewees; thereafter, useful explanations and interpretations were developed.

The interview structure was developed containing ten questions, referring to (managing) conflicts in the SSE tourist business setting. The interviews were recorded in full to ensure precise transcription, verbatim. The transcripts were viewed as selective constructions that reproduced aspects of the conversation and which were transcribed, according to Von Steinke (2000, p. 327), in a “manageable” way which is “simple to write, easy to read, easy to learn and to interpret”.

The qualitative methodology used in this study included ethnographic approach, involving several months of fieldwork and several years background of enculturation in Tanzania.. The research took place at the height of the tourism season, as there were multiple opportunities to engage in participatory observation and interviewing.

In parallel to the interviews and observations, organizational documents and secondary literature were gathered and analysed through content analysis to guarantee triangulation of data.

### **Data analysis methods**

Data analysis was conducted according to the five-step process of content analysis of Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006, pp. 322-326) to ensure a transparent process of data analysis and reconstruction: Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion, Step 2: Inducing themes, Step 3: Coding, Step 4: Elaboration and Step 5: Interpretation and checking. Following these steps enhances the “thick description” (Geertz 1973).

With regard to quality criteria, four major concepts – conformability, credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness (Hippo 1993) – were defined as criteria for judging this qualitative research, including. “inter- and intra-individual verification” procedures (Yin 2002, p. 45). For the inter-individual verification procedures, the German-Tanzanian research team discussed the data and the findings and their possible interpretations to guarantee credibility from different cultural view points as well as trustworthiness.

In the following, the findings will be reported by presenting selected aspects in a qualitative reporting style according to the research methods used in this case study research.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Interviewees view conflicts – mainly caused through international customers and tourists – as impacting on their work and on the management of their enterprises. Interviewed managers see conflict and their management as a major part of their competences and skills needed in Human Resource management within their SSE as well as with regard to their customers (e.g. I4<sup>2</sup>, I11, I13).

Findings on conflicts and their management in SSEs in the tourist industry will next be presented and selected examples and their analysis will be introduced.

### **Conflicts in Tanzanian SSE in the hotel tourist industry**

The six managers in SSE narrated 10 conflicts scenarios in interactions with tourist customers in three of Tanzania's urban centres Arusha, Moshi and Dar-Es-Salaam. Some linguistic statements were assessed to indicate semantic intersections and differences regarding key terms in Kiswahili and English.

The English term conflict was translated by the interviewees to “mapigano” in Swahili which means “hitting each other”. Interviewees translated conflict also to the term “vita” which means “war” (Johnson 1995, p. 108). The interviewees' perception of conflict is not only bound to verbal (conflictual) interaction, but rather to violence and physical interaction. Managers highlight that negatively co-notated communication situations are perceived as “violent communication” (I4). The official translation for the English word “conflict” in Tanzanian Government publications, however, is “mgogoro” in Swahili which means “obstacle” or “difficulty” and was also used by two managers in the interview situations to describe their conflict experiences with customers (I13, I11).

Ten in-depth conflicts were narrated by the interviewed managers out of which four of these referred to service issues. Tourists complained about the service at the hotel and submitted grievances to the managers. Managers highlighted that international tourists particularly complain about service delivery in African contexts which often leads to conflicts with the hotel staff and the hotel management, even though it might not be perceived as a conflict by the tourist themselves, but rather as a service complaint.

Financial management is another field of conflict between managers and customers, whereby conflicts often related to the issue of membership fees, negotiation of hotel rates and private training sessions.

Two cross-cultural conflicts narrated were based on external impacts where customers experienced conflicts due to situations which occurred independent of their stay at the hotel. The customers attempted to resolve their experienced conflicts by talking to the management of the hotel, thereby creating conflict between themselves and the SSEs manager and/or the staff. These conflicts related to electricity disruptions caused by the national electricity supplier which affected the hotel's electricity supply and/or the hotel's electricity back-up system. Additionally, conflicts occurred due to a tourist company in another city overbooking

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<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation of I4 stands for interview number 4, I11 for interview number 11 etc.

tourist tours to Kilimanjaro. Angry tourists then expect hotel managers to arrange other tours or to resolve the issue.

Finally, several narrations related to possession: Tourists experienced theft of passports or other personal belongings, either at the hotel itself or on the street. Managers of tourist SSEs were asked to resolve such conflict; support the tourists in regaining their passports and belongings; and were required to sometimes address theft with hotel staff. All of these situations were defined as conflicts by the interviewees.

**Table 1: Conflicts in SSEs**

<b>Field of conflict</b>	<b>Type of conflict</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• service delivery in hotel (I1.1)</li> <li>• impatient service (I4.3)</li> <li>• dissatisfaction with service (I14.2)</li> <li>• dissatisfaction with standard (I14.1)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rates (I2.2)</li> <li>• membership fees (I4.2)</li> <li>• private training sessions (I4.4)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shortcut (I9.1)</li> <li>• Kilimanjaro overbooked (I9.2)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• theft of passport (I2.1)</li> <li>• theft of cell phone (I14)</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' own construction

In the following, selected examples (I4, finances and I14, possession) of conflict in SSE in the tourist industry will be outlined.

### **Selected examples of managerial conflicts in SSEs in the tourist industry**

An open-minded and dynamic manager of a SSE in Arusha (I4) speaks frankly and humorously and puts a strong emphasis on honesty. He is the sports manager at a big international hotel and runs his own SSE which caters for the sporting needs of the guests at the large hotel in Arusha, a big city in the Northern parts of Tanzania. He runs a well-equipped gym in the hotel park and an adjacent spacious pool area and supervises several employees. The leisure facilities are mainly used by local and international hotel guests. International guests are mostly development aid experts, businessmen and women, expatriates working in business industries, as well as high-standard tourists. Besides these guests, local schools also book the sports and swim venues and external visitors use the sports and swimming facilities, subject to an entrance fee. The most irritating conflicts he experienced were about the rules, payment of fees and the service at the facilities (I4.2).

#### **Finances**

I4 views himself as a professional manager of conflict who abides by his values of non-violent conflict resolution and professionalism. He talks about a tourist who paid a Tshs. 4000 entrance fee to the pool area. One of his subordinates had reduced the official entrance fee by Tshs. 1000 because he wanted to do the tourist a favour, but did not discuss this with his manager before doing so. The following day the subordinate charged the tourist the full fee of Tshs. 5000. The tourist complained about the changing price system and did not understand the phenomenon of changeable daily rates. The tourist demanded to talk to the manager who explained to him in a nice and positive way that the entrance fee of Tshs. 5000

was determined by management and that the price reduction the previous day was just a “nice gesture” from the subordinate towards the tourist.

*For example, the small conflicts, misunderstanding, let's say I told you you paid 4000 and it's supposed to be 5000, there is [emphasis] a misunderstanding, but if you're patient and you listen to that person he'll tell you, I thought it was 4000 so I came with 4000 or I thought it was 4000 that's why I paid 4000 but I have a 1000, I can add it. Because you're patient and you've explained to that person with patience. Yeah.*

*So if you don't come on the same level, you know, in everything not everybody has to win. There is someone who has to lose. Now it depends [...] how the [...] size of loss, how it's going to be. Is it going to affect you [question] so much or is it understandable, for example if somebody pays 4000 instead of 5000 and doesn't want to pay 1000 I can let it go because it won't cause a major loss to me. Yeah [question]. It's just 1000. So I wouldn't like somebody to get into a fight with me because of a 1000 shillings. So if you get to a fight into a 1000 shillings and maybe hits you with a bottle or something like that, you spend more money on treatment and time than he will have let go of 1000.*

I4 believes in explanation of the situation and patience, as well as mutual understanding. He continues by ascertaining that win-win situations require a common management and shared value base. Otherwise conflicts result in win-loose or loose-loose processes. This consideration shows that the manager is prepared to accept a loss instead of fighting over the membership fees. To him, it is more important to resolve the conflict with patience and to accept minor losses to maintain harmony and keep the relationship intact.

*Yeah, because if you're patient you give the other person time to explain why he or she did this or wants to do this and, ah [...] no matter what he or she does or the other party does, maybe it's wrong to you, but to them they think it's right. So first you need to be patient. Yeah [question]. Patience is a value. If you don't have that value, then I don't think you would be able to resolve anything, because if you're patient it means it will take you as much time as it can until that thing is resolved. The resolution for me, ah, the first thing is satisfaction. [...]. You might say you've resolved something but then one party is not satisfied with the resolution, but because he or she thinks you're not going to give up, yeah. So, he decides to agree with what you're saying but then, inside, he or she is not satisfied or the second party is not satisfied. So the first thing I do to solve a problem is I listen [emphasis] to what someone has to say first, whether it's wrong or not. So, I listen [emphasis]. Yeah. [...] First is patience. Then he has to be understanding. Yeah. Those are the characteristics... whenever there's a conflict, first there has to be [...] understanding, then forgiveness.,... You might understand me but then you haven't forgiven me so the conflict is not solved, it is not solved. Yeah [question].*

Particularly in situations with individuals from different backgrounds, conflicts need to be resolved through patience, mutual understanding and, finally, forgiveness. As long as the conflicting parties do not forgive each other, the conflict will not be resolved. Forgiveness, irrespective of mutual understanding, is crucial to conflict resolution. The concept of forgiveness is strongly bound to the spiritual and religious concept of forgiveness which leads to relationships which are in harmony.

Another manager holding a middle management position in a SSE in the tourist industry in Dar-es-Salaam has been confronted with various situations and complaints from tourists regarding dissatisfaction with service (I14.1) or the standard thereof (I14.2) in the hotel. This manager experienced conflicts not only with regard to service delivery, but also with regard to possession and theft (I14):

### Possession

*You know, it happened like, ah, there were those tourists from, it was, they were from Kenya and then they said that their phone was stolen from their room.... Yeah. Stolen from their room. And, ah, we asked them if, ah, they, we, we didn't know if they had that phone or whatever, and then we asked them if we, because we always tell them like if they have goods, valuable things, they shouldn't leave them in the rooms. And so, they came to us and said that they've lost their phone and they need to be paid for that phone. Then I was like, no [exclamation], how sure am I that you have lost your phone [question]. Maybe you should go to the police and then they said no, they don't want to go to, they just want to be paid. And then we started arguing and arguing and then they refused and want to see the boss and all those things. They had to go to the Human Resource Officer and then when we went there he told them the same [emphasis] thing. Like we are not sure if you, you had the phone and they were saying like the phone is very expensive. They wanted something like 900 US dollars, yeah.... Yes [exclamation] and we told them to go to the police and they didn't want. You know it was, yeah, I can say it was, it was very difficult for me, because they were shouting, arguing, coming in my office, going downstairs, then they didn't want to go to the police and later on they said, no we want to go to the police but we want to go with you [emphasis]. I told them no [emphasis], you, you are the, the one who had the phone. You should go to the police and report and then the police will come to me. So if I'll go, am I going to tell the police that my tourists, ah, my tourists' phone got stolen in their room [question], yeah. So yeah, it was a problem. They stayed here for two or three days and then they refused to pay, don't want to pay, but at the end of the day they paid. I had to talk to them so that they can pay. But we are not sure if they had the phone or not. Yeah, so.*

The manager narrated a conflict with tourists from Kenya who claimed their cell phone was stolen from their room. They did not want to go to the police, but rather wanted the hotel to refund them for the cell phone. This situation was very difficult for the manager to resolve and the tourists demanded to see the owner of the SSE who agreed with the manager that the hotel was not liable for the theft. The tourists refused to pay for their accommodation, but the manager resolved the conflict, the tourists paid for the room and the manager was glad that the conflict could be resolved through extensive talks. The manager was, however, left with uncertainty regarding the truth. To her and the conflict was not resolved completely, but rather managed in terms of all parties saving face and maintaining respect.

Different ways of conflict resolution were tried in the previously narrated conflict between the manager, owner and tourists. Firstly, the manager talked to the tourists; then the owner - a third party at the top of the hotel hierarchy - was asked to resolve the theft issue; and finally, the manager advised the tourists during subsequent discussion to contact the police - another third party, representing the law. She explained her ways of resolving conflicts in detail, as follows:

*Ah, no, what I can say is, ah [...] let's say if he gave his complaint [...] what I'd have to do is to listen to him care, very careful and then after that you have to come up with a solution. Like if he is complaining maybe about the room I have to come up with a solution, the quick [emphasis] one, so that the tourist can be satisfied and, ah, to make sure that it won't happen in future that, that last part, to make sure [emphasis], in any means, that it won't happen*

*... Yeah, all I can say here is, ah [...] okay, first of all I'm in a, I'm in a, like we say in, in the hotel, we say like the customer is always right, it's what we can say. So the value is like, we, we, we always talk to, I mean, to our staff and tell them how to and when to interact with the tourists and, ah, you see sometimes the, the, you find there are tourists who are, no [...] they've got a, I can say, a lot of problems. If you try to help them you basically you get shouted to and all those things. So we always talk to our staff, tell them that to, to calm down, whenever the tourist is maybe angry or something. You need to talk to them in a very quiet way, to be calm, not to argue with them and, ah, if they feel like they can't solve the problem they have to come to us and then we will try to talk to that tourist. So we always tell our staff like they must not [emphasis] argue with the tourists, they must listen to them, talk to them and negotiate, try to understand what is their point of view, yeah.*

The manager highlighted that one has to listen carefully during conflict resolution processes and that this should be followed by quick and sustainable resolution which supports the concept of “the customer is always right”. Staff are trained to interact with the tourists in a calm, patient and understanding manner without negotiating or arguing. The superior is called in when staff fail to manage conflict in the prescribed manner.

### **Managing conflicts in SSEs in Tanzania**

Focusing on techniques and instruments of managing conflicts in SSEs, it can be stated that managing conflict is related to the four different fields of conflict, as shown in the following:

#### *Service*

- Prevent the conflict by changing the resources necessary to meet tourist requirements, such as building a new hotel according to higher standards ( I14.1) or offering the tourists another room with a functioning air-conditioner (I14.2);
- negotiating hotel fees and reducing the prices; and
- understanding the problem.

#### *Finances*

- Accept that conflict management often results in a win-lose situation which requires compromise from one party;
- consider the loss in a conflict situation and act accordingly;
- explain yourself and listen to the explanation of the others;
- be patient and calm and satisfy your and the other parties' needs; and
- listen and forgive.

#### *External impact*

- Provide conflict parties with necessary resources (torch, I9.1);
- calm down;

- consider the spiritual side of the situation; and
- use pastors, reverends and other professionals to support the conflict resolution process.

### *Possession*

- Listen carefully, calm down and employ the approach that “the customer is always right”;
- satisfy tourists with quick and sustainable solutions;
- talk and understand the other’s point of view;
- talk to the supervisor; and
- do not argue or negotiate.

Generally, conflict resolution is often connected to the aim of maintaining harmony and good relationships and weighing the question of maximizing / minimizing profit. Usually, managers in SSEs avoid fights and open conflicts, which are interlinked with negative feelings and disturbed relationships. Harmony, providing a safe and secure environment for the tourists and customers involved, satisfying the needs and desires of conflict partners, achieving consensus and contentment, mediating and understanding, being patient and forgiving, as well as accepting the circumstances if they are beyond control, are important aspects in managing conflicts in human interactions.

Values which are important in conflicts and their management in SSEs, according to the interviewees, include: Appreciation of tourists and customers and their needs, unity, sharing, safety, mutual trust, patience and forgiveness. The values of unity, sharing and forgiveness are related to a specific behaviour and attitude which expresses these values, such as being calm and speaking calmly in conflicts and the resolution processes. These values aim at building and maintaining strong relationships throughout the process of conflict management. Interviewees agreed that conflict management processes always include:

- actively listening to each other and understanding the other’s point of view;
- managing problems without judging;
- co-operating directly; and
- “win or lose to a small extent” and the ability to compromise.

Problems should be managed in a practical way to avoid embarrassment. Different views, perceptions and attitudes should not be judged, even if they are not understood, and should be accepted and respected. The fundamental attitude underlying the process should be co-operative. Managing conflicts professionally is considered to require an understanding and guiding attitude, honesty, patience, a sense of humour and care for the other person and responsibility, but also authoritativeness, when necessary. All of these successful conflict management attributes are based on the “concept of man” which relates to the African philosophy of “utu” which highlights the importance of good mutual relationships, humour and joy of life. Interviewees stated that, as a last resort, the police could be approached to resolve the problem.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings demonstrate that conflict is seen as disagreement or a difference in interest or behaviours, as an inner process of individuals, as well as a relationship with the environment

(Jones & George 2003); however, managers did not identify the cultural or ethnic background of the conflict partners as a major cause of conflict. The diverse backgrounds are not a major contributor to the conflict and tourists were viewed as individuals, rather than representatives of a particular (national or ethnic) culture. Managers tended to find the appropriate intervention for achieving conflict settlement (Nye 2005) and maintaining harmony within the relationship. As asserted by Rahim (2002), interviewees also highlighted that managing conflicts resulted in reducing dysfunctions and enhancing learning and effectiveness, thereby preventing a reoccurrence of the conflict.

Diversity was not highlighted by the interviewees, even though they were asked to relate conflict experiences arising from diversity aspects, such as religion, ethnic origin, culture and nationality. This is corroborated by Francesco and Gold (2005) and illustrates that the awareness of diversity aspects and their impacts on business communication are rather unimportant to the interviewees and that awareness could be raised (Horwitz *et al.* 1996). The individual aspect seems to be more important to interviewees than the cultural or ethnic background.

The context of SSEs in the tourist industry is influenced by societal conflict potentials with regard to religion, differences in language, economic positions, health, poverty and fight for resources (Mwamfupe 1998). In this study, conflicts between hosts and tourists were related to service, finances, external impacts (resources) and possession (resources) and were not related to natural resources (Nelson 2003) or conflicts with the environment around the SSE (Maganga 2003), as indicated in literature.

The study proves the importance of focusing on the conflicts occurring in SSEs in the tourist industry from the emic perspectives of the hosts which are based on many different determining factors of the environment. As assumed in literature (Jamieson 2001; Klanarongran 2001), conflicts may arise from concern for tourists (safety, security and health) and this study shows that conflicts are experienced when tourists feel a certain degree of unsafety and uncertainty (stolen cell phone and passport, electricity cuts, interrupted services, etcetera). Conflicts do not appear to arise from cultural diversity, but rather from differences between services rendered and service expectations, negotiation styles, external service delivery, tour operations and small scale crime.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Tourism is currently the most important income generating industries in Tanzania; however, managers working in SSEs in the tourist industry experience significant conflicts which need to be managed with tourists from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of this article was to present selected research findings from a more comprehensive qualitative case study on managers' perceptions of conflict and its management in the interaction with tourists. The aim was to provide new insights into these topics, thereby contributing to in-depth understanding of the research issue. This may serve as the foundation for developing training and coaching for managers to prepare them for interaction with tourists and conflict management in Tanzanian SSEs.

Managers viewed conflicts with tourists as impacting on their work; however, diversity aspects were less relevant to them than the individual behaviour and attitude of the tourists. Managers experienced a variety of conflicts with regard to service delivery, financial issues,

external impacts and possession. Managers developed different strategies to cope with the experienced conflicts (listening, negotiation, understanding, explaining, calm down), aimed at maintaining harmony and good relationships and avoided open conflicts and negative feelings.

Harmony, providing a safe and secure environment for tourists, satisfying the needs and desires of conflict partners, achieving consensus and contentment, mediating and understanding, being patient and forgiving and accepting the circumstances if they are beyond control were considered important aspects in managing conflicts.

These findings should be used to improve training programs in management, specifically with regard to hotel management. Students at colleges', universities and other training institutions could be trained on the base of these findings to improve their cross-cultural communication and international management perspective. The findings could also be used by hotels to train their staff with regard to the improvement of cross-cultural competencies, culture sensitivity, cross-cultural business communication and conflict management. Although the findings would need to be replicated in different management settings and by using qualitative and quantitative data, the tourism management industry, as well as the Tanzanian management research could take these findings as a starting point to follow-up studies.

The findings and conclusion lead to the following recommendations for management practices and further research in the described setting:

- Managers need to be prepared to cope effectively and successfully with the demands of, and conflicts experienced by tourists in the Tanzanian context.
- Managers should be trained in professional conflict management skills, as well as how to adjust these to a given situation.
- Managers should become more self-reflective with regard to their personal and, business interests and the optimal way of resolving conflicts to reach a win-win situation which impacts positively on the business.
- Managers should receive awareness-training to increase cultural sensitivity with regard to tourists' culture-specific behaviour and attitudes, perceptions, expectations and ways of communication.
- With regard to scientific research, Tanzanian and international researchers are required to further analyse management practices in SSEs with regard to managing customer relations and human resources by using quantitative and qualitative research methods. Research on conflict management practices should be further embedded in cross-cultural management research in Tanzania's SSEs. Cross-cultural research teams could explicitly present in detail their culture-specific perspectives on the subject.
- To explore conflict management from a Tanzanian business environment perspective in more depth, value and identity concepts should be explored to focus on the connection of values, identity and the managerial development of self, as well as cross-cultural competences from the researcher's point of view.
- Further research should include the evaluation of managerial, as well as tourist perspectives on conflicts and their management to obtain multiple perspectives (including values and identity concepts) on a conflictual situation. This research could help to improve (cross-cultural) conflict management practices in short-term interactions in Tanzanian business contexts and, thereby, contribute to managing SSEs even more successfully and effectively.

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