**A dialogic reframing of talent management as a lever for hospitableness**

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I**ntroduction**

The concept of hospitableness and its application to commercial settings, notably the tourism and hospitality industry, has recently gained some currency in the literature (e.g. Dekker, 2014; Lashley, 2015; 2017; Van Rheede and Dekker, 2016). The term hospitableness derives from the word ‘hospitable’, Latin *hospitalitas* and Old French *hospitalité*, meaning friendliness of a host towards their guest (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2017). In its purest altruistic form, hospitableness is freely given and entails a moral obligation on the part of the host to care for their guest without any ulterior motive except the genuine pleasure derived from the act itself (Selwyn, 2000; Telfer, 2000).

It is not difficult to see why hospitableness is considered a unique talent within the tourism and hospitality industry – since it is the one industry in which the quality of the host-guest relationship is seen as a key differentiator of customer service and a primary source of competitive advantage (Gibson, 2017). However, transposing hospitableness to commercial settings remains a tall order. For, once hospitableness is treated as part of a product it becomes locked in an economic exchange relationship and transformed into a performance indicator designed to be formally measured. This creates a situation in which hospitableness cannot be freely-given or unconditionally bestowed upon the guest who is in this case the ‘paying customer’ – and which, we argue, can potentially sap its altruistic and moral essence.

This conceptual paper turns on the central question of how hospitableness as a unique talent can be transposed to commercial settings without a wholesale erosion of its altruistic and moral core and how it can be effectively leveraged within the talent management (TM) process. In grappling with this question, we begin by unpacking the concept of hospitableness from both a religious and philosophical perspective. The discussion leads to our endorsement of a form of *reciprocal altruistic hospitableness* which warrants altruistic sentiments and moral obligations in both the host and the guest and which we see as the necessary condition for a for a more protective, mutually-beneficial and enduring host-guest relationship (Brotherton, 1999; O’Gorman, 2007; Stephens, 1996). Against the backdrop of the tourism and hospitality industry, we then consider the challenges of transposing hospitableness to commercial settings – arguing how it inevitably loses its altruistic and moral character and is robbed of the possibility for any reciprocal exchange within the host-guest relationship. We posit that what is needed is a reframing of TM as a dialogic process which is more amenable to the nature of hospitableness as endorsed in this paper and through which it can be effectively leveraged as a unique talent.

To do this, we first consider the meaning of talentand TM as they are currently conceptualised in the literature – drawing attention to an understanding of talent as both a natural aptitude and a learned skill (Ariffin *et al*. 2013; Lashley, 2017; O’Connor, 2005) and to TM as predominantly inscribed in a discourse of performance and an imagery of warfare which, we argue, sit uneasily with the nature of hospitableness (Brown, *et al*. 2004; Hughes and Rog, 2008; Michaels *et al*., 2001). We also register an ongoing confusion with regard to the scope and overall goals of TM (Collings *et al*., 2009) and a shared sense amongst stakeholders of the need for further clarifying and enlarging its conceptual boundaries (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*., 2013; Horner, 2017).

In response to this, we draw primarily on the work of Habermas (1987) and Baktin (1981) to recast TM as a dialogic process. In so doing, we bring TM process under the overarching principle of free dialogue between key stakeholders and recalibrate the HR-related activities falling under each of its key stages towards a softer, people-oriented and more inclusive approach to the employment relationship – which, we argue, departs from the imagery of warfare and the discourse of performance within which TM is currently circumscribed, and which we see as a necessary condition for leveraging hospitableness as a unique talent and a generator of unique customer value and competitive advantage within the hospitality industry. We synthesise the outcomes of this exercise in a conceptual framework which we present in the final section of this paper before considering its implications for practice, training and further research.

**The religious and philosophical roots of hospitableness**

The concept of hospitableness can be traced back to ancient civilisations and dominant religious belief systems. Whether it be in Ancient Greece, Judaism, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism, hospitableness is manifest in many forms which however, share a common theme: the sacred duty or moral obligation of *welcoming and turning the stranger into a friend* (Selwyn, 2000). In Ancient Greece, Zeus was also called *Zeus Xenios* which emphasises his role as the protector of the stranger (xenos) and being hospitable to strangers was a common social practice. In Judaism and Christianity, the demonstration of hospitableness is often praised with reference to the case of Abraham in the Old Testament who played host to three angels or to Jesus’s teaching in the New Testament on offering hospitality to the needy and the poor as an act of faith done unto God Himself (Casselberry, 2009; Lashley, 2017). In Islam hospitableness is based on the notion of *adab al-diyafa* (hospitality towards guests) which places a responsibility on the true believer to offer hospitality to the traveller or stranger without any expectation of material rewards (Siddiqui, 2017). In Hinduism, an enduring readiness to show reverence and graciousness towards a guest is also considered a religious duty – where the host-guest relationship is based on the principle of *atithi devo bhava*: the guest is viewed as equal to God (*devo bhava*) and can turn up unexpectedly at any time, without giving prior notice (*atithi* meaning without any specific date or set time) (Sanskriti Magazine Online, 2016; See also Khan, 2009; Lashley, 2017).

Thus, from a religious perspective, hospitableness can be construed as an inter-faith, inter-cultural and universal concept that is considered a divine command and a moral obligation. It requires a form of *pure altruism* in the host – i.e. an unconditional disposition in the host to welcome, befriend and entertain the stranger as a guest and demonstrate a heartfelt concern for their physical and mental well-being. In this respect, hospitableness goes beyond a reciprocal exchange relationship between the host and their guest. It is freely given without any ulterior motive or expectation of material gain apart from the genuine pleasure of the host for having excelled in their role and seized the opportunity to bestow their generosity and benevolence upon their guest – in which case, the act of *being* hospitable is its own reward (Telfer, 2000).

From a philosophical perspective, attempts have been made to cast a more critical light on the motives and moral values underlying hospitableness. Drawing on Wagner’s celebrated opera *Die Walkure*, Lashley, (2017) provides an example of a form of hospitableness rooted in the *fear of the stranger*. In this opera, Hunding, one of the main protagonists, offers hospitality to his enemy in order to size up their weaknesses and anticipate their next move, betraying a hidden motive to contain and control his ‘guest’. Another hidden motive of the host can be of the *calculating type*,where their actions are motivated by the pursuit of personal interests – as in the case of the individual who treats their boss to a lavish dinner in the hope of getting a much-coveted promotion or perk. *Prejudiced assumptions* about the nature of human beings can also place limits on hospitableness. For example, Hinduism’s laudable tradition of hospitableness is tarnished by the ill-treatment of the so-called ‘untouchables’ – a supposedly lower caste of human beings who are still denied access to certain areas of public life whether it be temples, village wells or the neighbourhood of those considered to be of a higher social rank. As pointed out by Melwani (2009), it is remarkable that Hinduism, a loving religion which entertains the thought of God as existing in all living things would brand a whole class of human beings as untouchables – unworthy of one’s compassion and respect, let alone hospitableness.

Dwelling on the dark side of hospitableness, the risks and dangers are not restricted to guests but are very real for the hosts too. This can involve guests disrespecting, dispossessing or in some extreme cases even murdering their hosts. The Glencoe massacre, one of the most notorious episodes in Scottish history, is a prime example. In early 1692, 38 men of the Clan MacDonald in Glencoe were murdered in their homes by a regiment led by Captain Robert Campbell. It is reported that Captain Campbell and his men had enjoyed the hospitality of the MacDonalds, won the trust of their unsuspecting hosts, and even wished them a good night before massacring them – a typical case of ‘murder under trust’, devoid of any moral content and often perceived as even more heinous than any other murderous acts (Buchan, 1991).

Although most cases of ‘hospitableness gone wrong’ would not lead to such tragic outcomes, the Glencoe massacre points to the vulnerable and risky position of the host when the true identity and motives of the guest remain unknown. It also calls into question the unconditional nature of hospitableness which is freely given without any expectation of reciprocity. The work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida has gone a long way in promoting such an unconditional view of hospitableness as something which is ‘due’ to the stranger whose identity and motives should not have any bearing on the disposition and behaviour of the host (Borradori, 2003). However, the logic behind unconditional hospitableness is open to challenge. If the host has to be hospitable ‘no matter what’*,* this can become the very basis for the selfish motives or harmful intentions of their guests – for guests can take advantage of the hospitableness of their host only if there are no conditions attached to it.

There is also a moral dilemma which lies at the core of unconditional hospitableness and pure altruism as the sole responsibility of the host. Dufourmantelle and Derrida (2000) recall the biblical story of Lot in Sodom who invited two strangers to stay under his roof. When the people of Sodom wanted Lot to hand over his guests so that they could sexually abuse them, Lot refused to do so. Placing his moral obligation to protect his guests above everything else, he offered the people of Sodom his two virgin daughters and told them they could treat the latter ‘as they pleased’. Lot’s story is a telling example of the moral contradiction that lies at the core of unconditional hospitableness – where one morally laudable act leads to another morally reprehensible one; and where the host becomes a ‘hostage to hospitableness’, victim of their own graciousness towards the stranger whilst putting their own lives and household in harm’s way.

**Trending towards reciprocal altruistic hospitableness**

We argue that hospitableness is untenable if it places altruistic and moral obligations *only* on the host. If hospitableness is to be sustainable and inviting of ‘repeat behaviour’, it has to be based on some form of *reciprocity* between the host and the guest and involve altruistic sentiments and moral obligations in both parties (Stephens, 1996) – which we refer to as *reciprocal altruistic hospitableness*. On the one hand, the host can expect their guest to display the same hospitable and altruistic behaviours should the situation arise in which the roles are reversed. On the other hand, reciprocal sentiments in the guest involves adherence to a proper etiquette through which they can show respect for the host and their living space, demonstrate a genuine appreciation of the costs incurred by the host to welcome and accommodate them, and develop a sensitivity to know when they are overstaying their welcome. The guest also has the moral obligation to ensure that they do not take advantage of their host and that they do not cause any harm to the latter throughout the duration of their stay. In this respect, reciprocal altruism portrays the host and the guest as locked in a processof *giving-and-receiving* – leading to trusting relationships and a shared sense of reward.

As such, reciprocal altruistic hospitableness can be viewed as the necessary condition for a more protective, mutually-beneficial and enduring host-guest relationship (See also Brotherton, 1999; O’Gorman, 2007). As is the case for all human activity, we also acknowledge the fact that reciprocal altruistic hospitableness is context-dependent – where it is influenced by multiple situational influences such as individual natural disposition, cultural and religious traditions, prevailing legal systems and social norms and importantly, the outcome of reciprocal exchanges between the guest and the host over time (Ariffin *et al*., 2013; Lugosi, 2009; O’Connor, 2005).

**Hospitableness in commercial settings**

There is considerable doubt about whether is at all possible to transpose hospitableness to commercial settings (Ritzer, 2007; Warde and Martens, 2000). This might prove even more difficult with reciprocal altruistic hospitableness. Unlike the domestic sphere in which reciprocity between host and guest is a real possibility, this can be a real challenge in a commercial setting. Customers who are paying for a service (more often than not, for a very limited period of time) cannot be expected to be in a reverse situation in which they can step into the role of the host and treat the service provider as their guest (O’Gorman, 2007). Moreover, whilst domestic settings are removed from business interests and therefore more conducive to genuine altruism and reciprocity, commercial settings are primarily driven by economic imperatives and not so amenable to hospitableness, which is actually incorporated into hospitality management as a service delivered in exchange for money.

Hospitableness has actually been conceptualised in the hospitality management literature as the outermost layer of hospitality that surrounds the inner layers of basic needs (accommodation, security, food and drink), entertainment (sports, social events, excursions, etc.) and service (housekeeping, maintenance, front office, etc.) (Tasci and Semrad, 2016) – where the outermost layer of hospitableness transcends and augments the overall quality of hospitality, with the premise that when this outermost ‘hospitableness layer is not in place, true hospitality is questionable’ (*ibid*., p.31). Whilst this multi-layered conception of hospitality serves the valuable purpose of establishing hospitableness as a key differentiator of customer service, it also contributes to the *commodification* of hospitableness (i.e. its transformation into a commodity designed for sale). For, once it is integrated into hospitality as a product and offered in exchange for money, hospitableness cannot, as in the domestic sphere, be freely given. It becomes part of the exchange value between the service provider and the customer. Thepriceless experience of guests with regard to hospitableness is already included in the price*,* an integral part of the ‘package deal’. Thus, what is in essence an altruistic and morally-based set of attitudes and behaviours becomes monetised and absorbed into an economic exchange relationship in the pursuit of customer satisfaction and the maximisation of organisational performance and profit. And once hospitableness is associated with performance and profit, it is tempting for management to turn it into a key performance indicator against which employees are formally assessed but, all too often, poorly rewarded. Quite worryingly, this can serve to perpetuate a potentially exploitive employment relationship through which employers can extract surplus value from employees at ‘very little cost’ (Osborne, 2005).

The perception of the need to assess hospitableness-as-performance almost naturally leads to attempts to pin it down into a neat definition, operationalise its key dimensions and elements and measure it (primarily from the vantage point of the customer) as a selfless, enduring and undeviating desire in employees to deliver an ‘unforgettable’ guest experience (Blain and Lashley, 2014). Hemmington (2007) draws on the metaphor of the *theatre* to explain how, within the tourism and hospitality industry, hospitableness is ‘stage-managed’ and unravels within a designed-for-purpose ‘servicescape’ (comprising the physical environment, lighting, décor, table settings, ambiance, etc.). In this narrative employees are cast as organisational actors who are expected to excel in their role as ‘performers-in-hospitableness’. However, employees as ‘performers-in-hospitableness’ can become trapped under the spotlight and subjected to constant scrutiny and appraisal and at times to harsh criticism as are stage actors who often have to bear the brunt of their critics’ searing reviews.

Therein lies the problem: when turned into a formal performance indicator, hospitableness loses its altruistic and moral character and is robbed of the possibility for any reciprocal exchange within the host-guest relationship in that it can no longer be freely given but is imposed upon, paid for, formally measured and subject to criticism and control. Such a ‘performative distortion’ of hospitableness can have a significant demotivating effect on employees and lead to the very opposite of its intended outcomes: the erosion of an altruistic disposition and moral obligation in employees and their disengagement from and indifference towards fellow workers and customers. This begs the question:

*How does one transpose hospitableness to commercial settings without eroding its altruistic and moral core and annulling the possibility for reciprocal exchanges within the host-guest relationship?*

In addressing the above question, we posit that what is needed is a dialogic reframing of the TM process through which hospitableness as endorsed in this paper can be effectively leveraged as a unique talent. But before doing so, we need to consider the notions of talentand TM as they are currently conceptualised in the literature.

**The meaning of talent as a psycho-social construct**

The Oxford Dictionary (2017) defines talent as a *natural aptitude* or *skill*. Following this definition, hospitableness can be regarded as a talent in that it derives in a large measure from a *natural* disposition or tendency (i.e. aptitude) of a particular individual to act in a certain way. One school of thought goes so far as to say that genuine hospitableness is completely innate and that it ‘cannot be developed or grown over time, but is instead printed out into our character or personality at birth, almost genetically’ (O’Connor, 2005, p.269). But a talent is also described as a skill. As such, it refers to an ability to do something well or an expertise that can be learned, developed and applied in particular tasks and contexts. This is also in line with another school of thought that sees hospitableness as culturally induced, socially transmitted and reflected in observable attitudes and behaviours (Ariffin *et al*. 2013; Lashley, 2017). This distinction resonates with the work of Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*. (2013) who consider the approach to talent as either an object (a natural ability or disposition) or a subject (people possessing special skills). We favour a synthesis of both schools of thought in which the talent of hospitableness is construed as a psycho-social construct which accounts for both its innate and learned dimensions whilst allowing for a dynamic view of the phenomenon as an evolving disposition and a skill that can be nurtured and continuously developed.

**TM: An elastic and context-sensitive concept**

According to Hughes and Rog (2008, p.748), TM ‘is a multi-faceted concept that has been championed by HR practitioners, fuelled by the war for talent and built on the foundations of HRM [and] may be viewed as … an effectively integrated and enterprise-wide set of sophisticated, technology-enabled, evidence-based HRM policies and practices’ (See also Michaels *et al*., 2001). Whilst this definition lays claim to the HRM roots and responsibilities underlying TM, it also conveys the image of a fierce and frantic battle between organisations to capture the right talent and consolidate their skills base as a primary source of competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Brown *et al*., 2004). This image of TM-as-warfare seems to have gained renewed legitimacy following Brexit which has brought in its wake a general sense of economic uncertainty, a political will to exercise stricter control on immigration and a fear of a talent drain within the UK hospitality sector which relies heavily on migrant workers (Calnan, 2017a/b; KPMG, 2017).

Hughes and Rog’s (2008) definition also points to the conception of TM as a well-integrated process, the key stages of which are underpinned by the traditional functional areas of HRM. These key stages have been identified in the academic literature as the ‘attraction, selection, development, [career progression] and retention of talented individuals’ (Horner, 2017, p.3; See also Kichuk *et al*., 2014; Watson, 2008). In the practitioner-oriented literature, the same emphasis is placed on the need for a processed-based and well-integrated approach to TM. For example, the CIPD (2017) defines TM as an endeavour to ‘… attract, identify, develop, engage, retain and deploy individuals who are considered particularly valuable to an organisation’; while Deloitte (2017) underlines the integrated nature of TM as a set of interconnected activities such as performance management, career management, succession management, leadership development, learning and capability development, total rewards and talent acquisition… designed to attract, manage, develop, motivate and retain key people’. Hughes and Rog (*op. cit*.) themselves conceive of TM as the sourcing, recruiting, developing, retaining and engaging of talented employees – providing yet another example of the variation in the sequencing and labelling of the key stages of the TM process that one might find across definitions. Notwithstanding such variation, all definitions of TM contain an ‘overhead narrative’ highlighting the crucial role that HR professionals and line managers (D’Annunzio-Green, 2008; Bratton *et al*., 2017) are called to play in leveraging the talent pool of an organisation in the pursuit of higher performance and sustainable business success.

Whilst, as evidenced above, the ‘strategic value’ of TM is beyond question, there is also the prevailing view in the literature that the phenomenon remains ambiguous and that there is still a ‘disturbing lack of clarity regarding [its] definition, scope and overall goals’ (Lewis and Heckman, 2006, p.139; see also Collings *et al*., 2009). This has drawn attention to the need to clarify the conceptual boundaries of TM and dispel the ambiguity surrounding it through more consistent theory development and evidence-based research. However, this ongoing task is not meant to ‘pin down’ or fix once-and-for-all the conceptual boundaries of TM. For, another important concern that emerges from the literature is that TM is meant to remain an open, elastic concept that is in tune with the social realities in which it unravels. For example, Horner (2017, p.7) draws attention to the fact that there is ‘no one right way of approaching or studying [TM]’. Gallardo-Gallardo *et al*., (2013) also refer to the chameleonic nature of TM to make the point that it can mean different things to different people across different contexts, depending on the specific concerns and interests of stakeholders and on the particular spin they want to put on the term.

We contend that transposing hospitableness to commercial settings puts the elasticity of TM to the test and requires a ‘critical stretch’ of its existing conceptual boundaries. What we propose is a dialogic reframing of the TM process as a means of attenuating the effects of the potential commodification and performative distortion of hospitableness transposed to commercial settings; and importantly, as a way of preserving (at least to some degree) its altruistic and moral core and opening up the possibility for reciprocal exchanges in the host-guest relationship. We present the outcome of this exercise in the next and final section.

***A dialogic reframing of the TM process as a lever for hospitableness in commercial settings***

Figure 1 below presents a conceptual framework which recasts the TM process as dialogic practice and integrates the key issues arising from our preceding discussion. It is largely descriptive and self-explanatory in terms of its proposed courses of action and intended outcomes. An analysis of its key features and of its implications for training, practice and further research follows.

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| **Talent management process**  **Leveraging hospitableness in commercial settings: TM as dialogic practice** | **Recommendations for dialogic practice**  **(Integrated dialogic acts)** | **Intended Outcomes** |
| **Sourcing** | Clearly communicating the organisation’s value commitment to hospitableness in branding and promotional activities. Including hospitableness as a key element of both the formal employment contract and the psychological contract.  Reaching consensus around the choice of selection criteria to identify and gauge degree of hospitableness in individual applicants. These can include authentic disposition for hospitableness, genuine care for people, concern for the well-being of others, respect for diversity, responsiveness to others’ kindness, engaging communication skills, etc.  Using meaning-rich assessment techniques such as open-ended, probing and hypothetical questions, role plays, critical incidents, situational judgement tests, etc. to allow for a reliable first evaluation of the personal attributes, dispositions, motives and moral values of applicants – in line with the chosen selection criteria. | Raised profile of organisation across industry, target markets, potential talent pools and the wider community.  Shared understanding and responsibility amongst recruiters in identifying and sourcing hospitableness-as-talent.  Increased probability of talent-person fit in line with the view of hospitableness as a natural aptitude or disposition. |
| **Nurturing** | Designing formal training content focused on the development of a critical understanding of hospitableness as a psycho-social construct, the various forms it can take, its contradictory tensions and moral dilemmas, and the enablers of and barriers to its translation into practice.  Adopting an interactive mode of delivery and learning activities such as case-based discussion groups to allow for both individual and collective input to the meanings attached to hospitableness 'in context’ and to clarify the terms and conditions of its application to the workplace.  Placing an emphasis on developing employees’ confidence to engage in discretionary behaviours and reciprocal exchanges with guests to improve hospitableness. Alerting employees to their protective rights when exercising hospitableness. Tapping into customer views and opinions regarding ways to demonstrate hospitableness within the host-guest relationship via market-sensing techniques such as focus groups or online forums and integrating these into training content. | Highly knowledgeable, skilled and reflective employees – in line with the view of hospitableness as a learned, socially transmitted pattern of attitudes and behaviours.  Situated and negotiated employee knowledge of their responsibilities, moral obligations, protective rights, and expectations of reciprocity in the exercise of hospitableness towards guests/customers. |
| **Rewarding** | Recognising hospitableness as freely-given and an intrinsic motivator. Fostering hospitable attitudes and behaviours through ‘developmental conversations’ between employees, team members and line managers alongside baseline performance indicators as an expression of guest appreciation and a form of reciprocal exchange between customers and employees-as-guests.  Mapping hospitableness as a threshold competence for all career pathways and a critical success factor for customer satisfaction and sustainable organisational growth and success. | Hospitableness duly rewarded but decoupled from formal performance measures as a way of preserving part of its altruistic and moral core.  A shared sense of reward and a mutuality of gains between employees, customers and organisation. |
| **Embedding** | Setting up communicative structures and enabling mechanisms to complement formal training and establish hospitableness within day-to-day organisational practices. This can include action learning sets, mentoring circles, shadowing and online forums to discuss service encounters, real examples and responses relating to hospitableness.  Developing a culture of service that promotes an ethos of hospitableness and reciprocal exchanges in the host-guest relationship reflected in the organisation’s discursive practices in the form of mission statements, policies, reports, artefacts, online postings, service delivery, events and entertainment activities, etc. | An enabling network of trusting and supportive relationships to sustain hospitableness in the workplace.  The institutionalisation of hospitableness as integral to the organisation’s brand strategy and cultural value system and as a key differentiator of customer service. |

Multiple levels of experience, analysis and impact: Individual – Team – Organisation – Industry – Society

**Figure 1**: Leveraging hospitableness through TM as dialogic practice

In reframing the TM process as a lever for hospitableness, we first and foremost treat it as *dialogic practice*. In so doing, we bring the whole TM process under the overarching and binding principle of free dialogue to promote the free exchange of views and ideas amongst key stakeholders and enable a continuous and cooperative process of interpretation and negotiation around the meaning of hospitableness ‘in context’ and courses of action that can preserve its altruistic and moral essence and entertain the possibility for some reciprocity within the host-guest relationship when applied to commercial settings (Bakhtin, 1981; Habermas, 1987). We argue that recasting TM as dialogic practice allows for a sharp break from the mainstream imagery of TM as ‘war-for-talent’ that invokes the destructive act of using the talent base of the organisation for the sole purpose of outperforming or eliminating competitors and maximising productivity and profit. As aptly argued by Michael Porter, such a hard-nosed and instrumental approach to business betrays a flawed way of thinking about the nature of competition as a merciless warfare or a ‘zero-sum battle for dominance in which the alphas prevail’ (Magretta, 2012, p.17). As Porter’s extensive work in the area has shown, business success has more to do with the creation of unique value to meet the diverse needs of customers and there are many ways of winning and achieving business success without demolishing one’s rival or driving one’s employees to the ground (*ibid*.).

It is in line with Porter’s refreshing conception of competitive advantage and business success that we recast the TM process as dialogic practice. In contrast with the notion of TM as a ‘war-for-talent’, we map out the whole TM process as a creative act of building discursive bridges and a chain of communication between organisational stakeholders (Bakhtin, 1981) – which, we argue, can preserve to a certain degree the altruistic and moral core of hospitableness and open up the possibility for reciprocal exchanges within the host-guest relationship even when transposed to commercial settings. Importantly, our framework can facilitate an organisational move towards a more equitable and mutually-rewarding employment relationship, a greater balance between employee and organisational needs and interests, and a healthy psychological contract (Guest and Conway, 2002; Wellin, 2007). Thus, we see a dialogic approach to TM as a steering device for a new democratic approach to work and a necessary condition for a non-managerialist yet highly effective approach to leveraginghospitableness which, in purest form, is undeniably a generator of employee engagement, unique customer value and a primary source of competitive advantage within the hospitality industry (D’Annunzio-Green and Francis, 2005).

The second salient feature of the framework involves a re-labelling of the key stages of the TM process and a recalibration of the HR-related activities falling under each stage to: (i) emphasise the ‘softer’ and enabling approach to TM that is needed to engage with hospitableness as a human-centred, emotionally-intensive and morally-grounded phenomenon, and (ii) provide broad yet concrete guidelines on the key elements (including the communicative structures, relational networks, policies and procedures, agentive roles, consideration of real-life examples and the cultural value system) that have to be accounted for to enable a dialogical approach to TM as a lever for hospitableness. We refer to our recommendations as *integrated* *dialogic acts* – interconnected and mutually-reinforcing units of communication, courses of action and events that form part of the wider and continuous process of TM. This echoes the discourse in extant literature around the need for an integrated approach to TM – where the HR-related activities underpinning it should not be viewed as isolated events or islands of practice but as interconnected parts of a synergistic whole whose combined effect is far greater than the sum of its separate effects (*op.cit*. CIPD, 2017; Deloitte; 2017; Hughes and Rog, 2008). These integrated dialogic acts are geared towards maximising the potential benefits of hospitableness in its purest form and creating the conditions for its sustainable development – which are factored in the framework as ‘intended outcomes’ (Bakhtin, 1991).

As such, the framework can be of considerable practical value. Although it is not meant to be a rigid blueprint for best practice, it can be used by change agents as a broad canvas to inform the development of more detailed and context-specific action plans for practical experimentation in managing the talent of hospitableness as dialogic practice. As previously explained in this paper, hospitableness can be influenced by a multiplicity of situational influences (Ariffin *et al*., 2013; Lugosi, 2009; O’Connor, 2005). The practical application of the framework can be extended to effectively address such influences – where it can be employed as a sensitising and steering device to detect and accommodate individual, generational and socio-cultural differences which can prove critical to the sourcing and sustainable development of hospitableness as a key determinant of long-term employee engagement, customer satisfaction and business success. For example, businesses worldwide – and even more so those located within the hospitality industry – have now to compete for the best available talent amongst the Millennial Generation who will account for around 50% of the global workforce by 2020 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). Employers within the hospitality industry therefore increasingly have to scout out the talent of hospitableness amongst Millennials who will be stepping into most of the front-line guest roles in the near future. The ‘softer’ and human-centred nature of the framework will be particularly appealing to Millennials. As research suggests, Millennials are generally more responsive than older generations to a communicative and participative approach to the employment relationship, strong diversity policies, enhanced developmental opportunities for self-fulfilment and the exercise of discretionary behaviours, and the possibility for timely recognition and reward (Gursoy *et al*., 2008). All these characteristics are in synch with the dialogic principles that underpin the framework developed in this paper – thus pointing to its high relevance and applicability to the modern workforce of the 21st Century.

The framework can also serve as a guide for training purposes where it can inform the content, mode of delivery and evaluative tools of training programmes designed to leverage hospitableness in the workplace. This can prove to be a most valuable exercise as our current empirical research into the nature of hospitableness within luxury beach hotels and resorts suggests that it accounts for more than 70% of training content which points to the increasing importance attached to the phenomenon at the ‘top-end’ of the tourism and hospitality industry.

The third salient feature of the framework is that its key elements arising from multiple levels of experience, analysis and impact can be regarded as potential empirical referents – i.e. what the effective management of hospitableness ‘might look like in practice’ (Sambrook, 2009, p.63). As such, it can also be used as a multi-dimensional analytical lens for conducting empirical research of an essentially qualitative nature or to complement survey-based investigations as a means to further research and knowledge development in the area.

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this conceptual paper was to consider how the talent of hospitableness can be transposed to commercial settings without eroding its altruistic and moral character and how it can be effectively leveraged within the talent management (TM) process. A number of key issues arise from it. First, in unpacking the concept of hospitableness from both a religious and philosophical perspective, we drilled down to its altruistic and moral core. In so doing, we explained how it entails an unconditional disposition and a moral obligation in the host to care for their guest without any ulterior motives or expectation of immediate material rewards, apart from the pleasure derived from the very act of being hospitable. Importantly, we exposed the moral dilemmas and challenges that hospitableness in its purest form throws up whilst drawing attention to the risks and dangers it presents for both the host and the guest. We argued that hospitableness is untenable if it places altruistic and moral obligations on the host only. We contended that if hospitableness is to be sustainable, it has to be based on some form of reciprocity between the host and the guest and involve altruistic sentiments and moral obligations in both partiesas the necessary condition for a more protective, mutually-beneficial and enduring host-guest relationship. We referred to this particular form of hospitableness as *reciprocal altruistic hospitableness.*

Second, against the backdrop of the tourism and hospitality industry, we critically examined the challenges of transposing hospitableness of the type endorsed in this paper to commercial settings. We argued how the application of hospitableness to commercial settings inevitably leads to its commodification and performative distortion (i.e. its transformation into a commodity and a formal performance measure) – robbing it of its moral character whilst frustrating the possibility for any reciprocal exchange within the host-guest relationship. We extended the argument to draw attention to how this can in turn result in the very opposite of the intended outcomes of hospitableness: the erosion of an altruistic disposition and moral obligation in employees and their disengagement from and indifference towards fellow workers and customers. We posited that what is needed is a *reframing of TM as a dialogic process* which is more amenable to the altruistic and moral character of hospitableness and through which it can be effectively leveraged as a unique talent.

Third, in carrying out this exercise, we produced a conceptual framework that takes a tangent from the discourse of performance and imagery of warfare in which TM is currently inscribed and we brought the whole TM process under the overarching principle of free dialogue between key stakeholders – which we see as a necessary condition for preserving to a certain degree the altruistic and moral core of hospitableness and opening up the possibility for reciprocal exchanges within the host-guest relationship even when transposed to commercial settings. The other salient features of our framework include a *softening* of the key stages and activities of the TM process which encourages a more relational approach to manager-employee interactions and is more amenable to a degree of reciprocity within the host-guest relationship; and a set of recommendations in the form of *integrated dialogic acts* geared towards the maximisation of the potential benefits of hospitableness for all key stakeholders.

Fourth, we considered the practical value of our framework as a broad canvas for experimentation in managing the talent of hospitableness whilst highlighting its high relevance to the workforce of the 21st Century. We also underlined the value of our framework for training purposes and further research.

As concluding remarks, we want to underline the fact that our aim in writing this paper was to gently stretch the existing conceptual boundaries of hospitableness and attempt an early exploration of its linkages with TM and the principles of dialogic practice. In critical tradition, we have no interest in fixing the meanings that we have attached to it. Our hope is that our paper can trigger further rounds of theoretical exploration, stimulate practical experimentation and serve as a platform for empirical research to deepen our understanding of hospitableness and its application to commercial settings.

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