



## **The Influence of the Bahá'í Principles on Employment Relations**

By:  
Legha Momtazian

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Management School

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## Abstract

This research explores how the principles of the Bahá'í Faith influence employment relations, and whether it is possible to maintain these principles in practice. The Bahá'í Faith is a contemporary world religion originating in 1863 in Iran. This research focuses on power relations, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement (Fox, 1966). The theoretical lenses used for this research are aspects of power (Lukes, 2005), participation (Vroom, 2003), justice and fairness (Rawls, 1971), and Equity theory (Adams, 1963).

In order to explore the research question, case-study methodology (Yin , 2003; Robson, 2011) was employed, exploring three organisations based in the USA and UK, that aimed to apply Bahá'í principles; with the use of multiple methods (interviews, focus group discussions and archival study). This was coupled with a scriptural study to explore the underpinnings of the perceptions and behaviours related to Bahá'í principles.

The outcomes relate the concept of '*work in the spirit of service*' with justice, moderation, responsibility, and participation; and the three cases displayed parallels with various aspects of this approach. However, while all three cases emphasised reduced power relations and increased employee involvement, they varied in the extent and depth of practice. This is explained by the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to individual understanding and practice of the religion and absence of a clerical role.

This study makes several new contributions including the proposing a 'consultative/collaborative' approach to employment relations, with distributed power, supporting the interest of the employees, and decision-making with a consultative approach; a novel methodology conjoining the case-study method with scriptural study in exploring the influence of religious beliefs on employment relations; and the conceptualisation of '*work in the spirit of service*' as a justice-centric approach, which could have potential policy implications as well as highlighting areas for future research.

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# 1 Formulation of the Research Question

## 1.1 Introduction

This research explores the Bahá'í approach to work and its characteristics, both in the Bahá'í scriptures and in everyday organisational practice. The Bahá'í Faith is a contemporary world religion, with followers from a wide range of socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, which proposes a distinctive approach to work and principles of employment relations. The central theme motivating this research is how the founders of the Bahá'í Faith have recognised work to be the highest form of worship if done “*in the spirit of service*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). This research explores what this spirit of service entails, whether it is possible to maintain these principles in practice, how they are applied, and how they impact upon an organisation and its employment relations.

To explain the drivers of this research, it is worth mentioning the journey the researcher had undergone. As a holder of a master’s degree in finance and accounting, the researcher worked in a few organisations in Iran and, sadly, found the ethical bases of the practices she came across challenged her values. She observed tax aversion, expectations to display accounts unrealistically, and unfair practices towards employees. Being a believer in the Bahá'í Faith and familiar with some of its principles in relation to work and employment relations, she understood the potential to address the ethical problems she observed at these workplaces. This motivated her to start a PhD to explore these principles, and their practicality and influence in resolving the issues that troubled her.

The approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and specifically employment relations has not been previously studied academically, and more importantly empirically, although the large volume of Bahá'í scripture addressing economic relations indicates a potential area for research. Hence, this project aims to contribute to knowledge by exploring work and employment relations based on the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith with its specific characteristics, the variety of its practices due to its nature (i.e. having no clergy and its dependence on individuals’ understanding of the scripture along with their consultation with others), and its limitations in commercial and business settings.

To do so, the research is divided into two parts: scriptural studying the large volume of Bahá'í scripture, and case-study research, studying the perceptions and the practices of the managers and employees of some of the organisations that attempt to apply these precepts, as well as their limitations and barriers.

This thesis starts with a review of literature on how work is addressed from the perspective of other religions, examining the relationship between religion and economic relations in the literature. It then focuses on organisations, exploring how employment relations are addressed from religious points of view, focusing on power, dealing with conflict, and participation, and how religions have impacted upon organisations in these aspects.

The research focuses on the Bahá'í Faith; exploring Bahá'í scripture to identify the attributes of '*work in the spirit of service*' as a particular approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and employment relations in order to construct a framework of employment relations based on Bahá'í scripture. The reason this part is approached as novel research rather than a literature review is that Bahá'í scripture has not been interpreted or formulised in a scientific or experimental context in employment relations in a written document before, by clergy or other academic researchers. Therefore, to develop a conceptual understanding of its approach to work and employment relations, careful study and analysis of a large volume of scripture has been essential, the results of which are presented in Chapter 3. It is notable that there have been few studies on the Bahá'í approach to economics, spirituality, or the spiritual nature of human beings linked to its impact on business; those already published in English are referred to where relevant in this research.

Next, through primary research, this study explores the perceptions and experiences of the managers and employees through case study research in three organisations, in relation to the application of the Bahá'í principles to their employment relations, the problems they experienced and the impacts they observed.

Finally, the initial framework of work and employment relations developed through the scriptural study is revised and updated based on the results of the fieldwork. As a result, it presents an approach to work that includes the interpretation and observation of the

researcher of the Bahá'í precepts, as well as their practice and limitations from the perspective of the members of organisations under study.

## **1.2 Identifying the gap in knowledge and the significance of this research in addressing this gap**

The approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and employment relations has not been studied empirically and in an academic framework before, and this research aims to explore this approach. It begins by exploring the relationship between religion and business/management and examines this relationship from the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith.

The existing research on the relationship between religions and economic relations is mainly developed from Max Weber's thesis - *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. In this, Weber argued that employees' religious motive to work is connected to their worship of God, or their 'calling' (Weber, 2003). He believed that this 'calling' or priestly value of work (the Calvinist approach) had resulted in industriousness among believers: a desire to work hard and gain the worldly success that they believed could demonstrate God's grace. This, he believed, influenced the formation of capitalism (Weber, 2003). Weber's argument on the roots of capitalism has received a wide range of critiques and still generates ongoing arguments that are at the heart of the discussions about the relationship between religion and business.

The centrality of Weber's thesis on the relationship between religion and business was one of the main reasons my exploration of this relationship is primarily linked to Christianity. In addition, the influence of Christianity on business has been widely articulated and formulated, whereas the influence of other religions such as Islam have not been widely discussed and debated as an economic dynamism (Hall, 1985). Another reason was that the research on the influence of Christianity displayed more similarities to the Bahá'í principles (e.g. Quaker businesses, and values promoted by the Industrial Chaplains, as discussed in the next section). Moreover, the case studies were chosen from

Christian dominated countries (USA and the UK), as opposed to Islamic countries, thus the study of the influence of Christian principles was most relevant to this research.

Therefore, based on the centrality of the argument of Weber in the discourse of religion and business, the Godly value of work has been explored in Bahá'í scripture to identify the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and employment relations; this has informed some of the main questions of the primary research. In Bahá'í scripture work is considered the “*highest form of worship*”, but only if “*done in the spirit of service*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). What ‘*work in the spirit of service*’ entails, its characteristics, and limitations, both in the scripture and in practice, have been at the heart of this research.

From a methodological point of view, the studies exploring the relationship between religion and business often examine the *behaviour of the actors* in response to religious authority, to study the impact of religion on economic relations. For instance, Protestants have been conceived as being more focused on industriousness and economic gain, and being comparatively wealthier than other Christian sects, and thus it has been argued that Protestant ethics resulted in Capitalism (Söderlund, 1958). Similarly, Tawney (1961) discussed four different stances of ‘religion’ (in Christianity) towards economic relations based on the behaviours of the actors over time; from keeping away from economic relations and considering it ungodly, to ignoring it as a matter of indifference, to trying to partially reform it, to appreciating it and finding it the material expression of God. He (Tawney, 1961) identified these as the stances of religion based on how different priests had led the thoughts of their followers at each point in history, and how, accordingly, the followers reacted and formed the stances of the ‘religion’. Larson (1975, p. 654) called this divorce the dichotomy between “*text and context*”, where either the ancient texts had been studied alone, as by the Indologists and Humanists, or within the context, such as “*village studies, urban modernisation, analysis of the cases*”, by anthropologists, sociologists, and economists.

This research, however, needs to take a different approach in studying the Bahá'í principles and their impact on economic relations due to the nature of



leadership/management in the Bahá'í Faith. To explain the approach of this research, a brief introduction to the Bahá'í Faith is essential here.

The Bahá'í Faith is a contemporary world religion (a monotheistic religion founded in 1863 by Bahá'u'lláh) with over seven million followers (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011), spread into almost all countries and ethnicities in the world. It is the second most geographically widespread religion after Christianity (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002) with followers from different ages, ethnicities, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Bahá'u'lláh (a title meaning the Glory of God), the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, was born in Iran into a well-known and wealthy family and was educated through the common tutorship of the time. In his youth he was asked to take a senior government post after his father, but he declined and devoted his life to the Faith (Cole, 1996).

The Bahá'í principles propose a different management approach from that studied in the Western literature on the impact of religion, as it focuses on collective decision-making (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1994) and sharing the earnings of the wealthy/owners of the business (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1976, pp. 281-282; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1990, pp. 273-275), as opposed to authoritative hierarchical structures and accumulation of wealth as mentioned earlier. The focus of its principles is on 'unity in diversity' (e.g. Bahá'u'lláh, 1990, p. 215; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, p. 28) and 'service' (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, p. 109<sup>1</sup>; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1980, p. 1), which links to spiritual 'servant leadership' (e.g. Fry, Matherly, Whittington, & Winston, 2007). Its approach to work has similarities to Judaism, Christianity and Islam in that it considers work to be holy ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1972, p. 176); it is however different in attaching a 'condition' to the godly value of work, which is to be "*done in the spirit of service*"<sup>2</sup> ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1972, p. 176), without

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<sup>1</sup> 'Service' has a significant position in Bahá'í scripture. For instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá the son and successor of the founder of the religion (Bahá'u'lláh) says: "My reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and service to the entire human race is my perpetual religion". ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p.109)

<sup>2</sup> It is notable here that service has a central theme in the Bible, where there are several references to

<sup>2</sup> It is notable here that service has a central theme in the Bible, where there are several references to 'serving'. Even Jesus Christ is the 'servant of all' (Mark 10:45). However, in conceptualising work, no clear identification can be found to attribute service to paid work. The main principles in this respect are the concept of sharing one's gift (Peter 4:10) and looking after the poor (Isaiah 58:10; Psalm 42:1-3), neither of

which it is not considered holy. This statement therefore forms the main question of this research. However, the impact of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith (such as service of the society, reduction of poverty, fairness and equality, profit-sharing, participation and consultation, fair laws and government) on employment relations has not been studied academically, and so this theoretical and empirical gap is also a focus of this study.

To choose the methodological approach of this research, the large volume of Bahá'í scripture, the removal of the role of clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and the significance of discussion in understanding the Faith have been most influential. From the day of the origin of the Bahá'í Faith (i.e. the revelation of The Báb, who was the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh and heralded His coming) on 22 May 1844, the writings considered as scripture have been written under the prophetic figures' supervision. From then onwards, Bahá'u'lláh's words, his son's words and then his successor, and great-grandson, Shoghi Effendi's words have been written down as those words have been revealed. These numerous Bahá'í scriptures address the spiritual development of individuals as well as the matters of social life. Every Bahá'í is required to study them, discuss them with their fellow Bahá'ís, develop their individual understanding, and behave accordingly.

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are the only individual sources of authoritative Bahá'í scripture, and they are seen to have laid the structures and the principles of the Faith. After them there is no individual authoritative figure or clergy to guide Bahá'ís in their practice of their religion. However, Bahá'ís are urged to take their (unsolved) questions or uncertainties about the Faith to the Universal House of Justice ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 446), which is an international elective body that addresses issues (specifically rules and protocols) that have not been addressed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and now guides the Bahá'í world.

Hence, to study the impact of the Bahá'í principles on employment relations it is not enough to take the approach taken in the previous studies of religion and economic relation and only study the behaviour of the individuals (i.e. managers and employees of

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which has been textually associated with paid work and serving. Similarly, legitimisation of profit is still under debate (e.g. Keister, 2008; Kornhauser, 1994)).

certain organisations that attempt to apply the Bahá'í precepts in their organisations). Rather, it is necessary to study the liturgical inspiration underlying their behaviour, and to observe and make sense of their conduct and the variety of interpretations and behaviours adopted according to any believer's personal understanding of the religion. Therefore, this research initially involves scriptural study focused on those areas of Bahá'í scripture that pertain to work and economic relations, in order to develop a conceptual framework of '*work in the spirit of service*'.

Next, the practice of the actors (employers and employees of certain organisations that aim to apply such principles) is studied to understand their conception of work based on the Bahá'í principles, the characteristics of their practice, and the challenges they face. This stage then sheds light on how work is perceived and practised based on the Bahá'í principles in its early development (it has not yet been practised for long and has only been applied in a few organisations). The results of the case-study research further elaborate the framework developed through the scriptural study and highlight the potential characteristics of an organisation where such approach might be more applicable, and the challenges that might arise in action.

It is notable here that the framework developed in this thesis and the approach described based on the Bahá'í scripture and organisational study, covers '*work in the spirit of service*' based on the interpretation of the researcher, and it is in no way claimed to be the only possible interpretation or framework that could develop from Bahá'í scripture in this context. It is however an interpretation justified through this scriptural study and the case study research.

Therefore, the main question of this research is how the Bahá'í principles impact upon work and employment relations, and whether it is possible to maintain these principles in practice. This research focuses on how these precepts influence the way employers and employees operate and behave. Thus, it focuses on employment relations' aspects of work, and explores the existing approaches of employment relations as well as the approach of the Bahá'í principles to employment relations, where the spirit of service is explored in an internal (organisational) context. The research explores different interests

of employees and employers, the potential and practical conflicts of interests and how they are addressed, and policies and practices concerning employee participation.

Conflict of interest has long been a focus of organisational research and practice (e.g. Jensen, 1983; Budd & Bhavé, 2008; Damadoran, 2005). Employees' motives to work might differ from the employers' objectives and this has often created a conflict in organisations. There are many theoretical perspectives and they have categorised these motives and challenges in different frames of reference. The three frames of reference that are most often discussed are the Unitarist approach, the Pluralist approach, and finally the Critical/Radical approach which in a few studies has been termed a Marxist approach although this title does not fully cover the wide range of theories that are associated with this perspective. The Unitarist approach argues that management is the only legitimate source of authority at the workplace and denies the inevitability of conflicts between managers and employees (Fox, 1966). The Pluralist perspective, in contrast, considers managers and trade unions to be competing and equally legitimate sources of authority and argues that conflicts are inevitable given differences of interests between employers and employees and the distributed nature of power (Fox, 1966). The Critical approach "sees the employment relationship as a struggle for power and control" (Budd & Bhavé, 2008, p. 5); critical perspective refers to theories that disagree with the unitarist and the pluralist approaches, neither viewing labour as commodity (unitarist) nor recognizing that the conflict is confined to employment relations (pluralist); although Marxists refer to labour as commodity (Marx, 2008, p. 61). In contrast, this perspective argues that conflict in employment relations is part of a broader social clash between competing groups (e.g. Marxists argue that the conflict is a result of unequal power relations between capitalists and working classes, while feminists focus on unequal power relations between men and women) (Budd & Bhavé, 2008, p. 6).

The main aspects of the theories of ideology are 'power and authority', 'dealing with conflict' and 'participation and employee involvement' (Fox, 1966; Abbott, 2006; Budd & Bhavé, 2008; Geare, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2006). The present research explores these concepts and questions in its empirical phase in relation to Bahá'í principles and their practice.

To explore the impact of religions on the employment relations in an organisation, several studies have explored the attitudes of ‘religious’ employees and employers towards work (e.g. Abbott, 2006; Jeremy, 1990; Marx & Engels, 2012), and they often explain the organisation under the influence of religion as a system of ‘hierarchical control’ with ‘exertion of authority’. Many organisational studies follow the same pattern and argue that religions have naturalised hierarchical, authoritative management structures; where conflict is presented as destructive and unnatural and therefore it should be eradicated (e.g. Coopman & Meidlinger, 2000; Beyer & Nutzinger, 1993; McCann, 1997). However, it should be noted that these studies consider only the impact of Christianity on organisations. In these studies (e.g. Beyer & Nutzinger, 1993; Jeremy, 1990), the organisations under the influence of religion are considered to have a unitarist structure, attempting to align the interests of the employees with the ones of the employers and eliminating any expression of conflict.

However, while the majority of the research on the influence of Christian principles point to a hierarchical exertion of control, the case of Mondragon co-operatives indicated a "*democratic corporative self-management*" founded upon "*revolutionary capacity of workers education*" (Molina & Miguez, 2008, p. 284). They operated originally according to Catholic social principles, freedom, solidarity and democracy (Molina & Miguez, 2008), and focused on co-operation, participation, social responsibility and innovation (Heales, Hodgson, & Rich, 2017, p. 7). However, while Mondragon was established by a Roman Catholic priest (Don Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta), the founder had gradually moved away from the orthodox Catholic principles with an "*unspoken opposition to traditional Catholic theology*" (Whyte & Whyte, 1991, p. 247), and promoted Catholic social doctrine according to '*social priesthood*' (Molina & Miguez, 2008, p. 288).

Through looking into Bahá'í scripture, this research studies the stance of the Bahá'í Faith towards employment relations with a focus on the ‘spirit of service’ as a condition for its ideal of work-as-worship, and initially explores the concept of work in relation to the spirit of service. Then, in the context of employment relations, it examines the approach of the Bahá'í principles to power and authority, conflict, and employee involvement in order to locate the stance of the Bahá'í principles with regards to the power, conflict, and

participation, and to further explain the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and employment relations.

Bahá'í scripture proposes a collective system for exploring the principles as well as a collective system of decision-making as opposed to the authoritative hierarchical structures portrayed in the literature reviewed here. It exhibits a 'collective' approach with centrality of inclusive consultation while recognising the understanding and opinions of every individual. But whether it reflects any authority of the employees in the workplace is a question that needs empirical research. Therefore, the present research explores this collective approach and the autonomy of employees in the daily experiences of selected organisations that aimed to apply these precepts.

This argument also brings in the discussion of power, participation and democracy and the examination of where the Bahá'í principles stand in that respect, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

This research initially explored the *application* of the 'spirit of service' to business, and more specifically to employee relations in a single qualitative case study. This entailed interviews with managers and employees of an organisation that endeavoured to apply the 'spirit of service'; where the owner believed in the Bahá'í Faith but majority of the managers and employees were not Bahá'ís. But after the initial analysis of the data it seemed essential to explore more than one organisation in order to enable observation of a variety of interpretations and behaviours, for better informed, broader-based results.

Therefore, another two organisations that aimed to apply Bahá'í precepts were explored with the same focus. The same sets of interviews were conducted in those organisations as well; in order improve the analysis of various aspects of the phenomenon and its characteristics and limitations. The research, therefore, presents the analysis of three case studies.

### **1.3 Summary and the objectives**

In light of the research gaps identified in the previous section, this research initially explores the approach of the Bahá'í scripture to work in order to describe '*work in the*

*spirit of service*’ from the Bahá’í perspective. Then it focuses on the aspects of employment relations and explores how these principles influence the way employees are managed. Thus, it aims to address the question of ‘*How do Bahá’í principles influence employment relations, and is it possible to maintain these principles in practice?*’.

To do so, the research starts with the initial statement of the Bahá’í principles towards work: “*Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). In doing so, it explores Bahá’í scripture to articulate this perspective in organisational terms based on concepts directly associated with work and service. It then focuses on authority and power, conflict, and participation, as aspects of employment relations. It investigates where Bahá’í scripture stands with regards to these factors in order to form a conceptual framework, which is further reviewed based on the results of the case study research.

Due to the centrality of the principle of collective decision-making in Bahá’í scripture along with ‘unity in diversity’ and ‘service’ and ‘justice’, in its administrative system, in business, in politics, and in personal lives, this study also explores this concept in detail in Bahá’í scripture as well as through the fieldwork. It explores characteristics of the collective/collaborative decision-making in scripture, its implementation in different organisational contexts, and the limitations, requirements, and the extent to which the employees and employers benefited or suffered from the application in different environments.

In the empirical stage, the aim is certainly not to test an existing theory; rather the purpose of the empirical research is to answer the following questions.

***How do Bahá’í principles influence employment relations, and is it possible to maintain these principles in practice?***

*Scriptural study*

1. ***Work in the spirit of service:*** How is work identified in Bahá’í scripture, and what are the specific characteristics of ‘*work in the spirit of service*’?
2. ***Employment relations - power, conflict, and participation:*** Where do the Bahá’í principles stand with regard to authority, conflict, and involvement? What are the

characteristics of the ‘collective decision-making’ addressed in the Bahá’í principles? To what extent is this ‘collective decision-making’ similar to and different from the existing theories of participation/decision-making?

*Primary research (Organisational study)*

1. ***Work in the spirit of service***: How do the managers and employees of the organisations that aim to apply Bahá’í precepts perceive work, perceive the ‘*spirit of service*’, and translate their perception of ‘*work in the spirit of service*’ into their objectives and employment relations? Are there any common characteristics between the organisations that intend to apply these principles? Are there any significant differences in their sizes, their operational requirements, their management styles, and their organisational cultures, and do these differences point to significant differences in their perceptions and practices of ‘*work in the spirit of service*’?
2. ***Power and authority***: What do the power structures look like in the organisations that apply the principles of the Bahá’í Faith, how do these organisations legitimise authority, and how is the power distributed?
3. ***Dealing with conflict***: To what extent are the interests of the employees and the employers aligned in the organisations under study? Can they pursue their interests and/or how do they pursue their interests? How are conflicts dealt with?
4. ***Employee involvement***: What are the policies and practices through which these organisations involve their employees in decision-making? To what extent are the employees involved and have control over those decisions and their application? Are there any systems in place to mobilise employee participation? If so, what are their characteristics and their limitations?

To answer these questions, this research takes a neo-positivist epistemological approach, which recognises the importance of “*inter-subjectivities*” in human action (of those being researched) and the need to access that subjective domain in order to describe and explain behaviour (Johnson & Dubereley, 2015, p. 761). Accordingly, this research explores the perceptions and practices of ‘*work in the spirit of service*’ through the variety of meanings and practices that different individuals perceive and employ.



Furthermore, through an interpretivist approach this research explores how the Bahá'í precepts are perceived and practised in different organisational environments, how actors build their meanings and practices depending on their organisational context, and how those meanings and practices might be similar or different across the cases.

This research, therefore, employs a qualitative methodological approach using interviews (with the managers) and focus group discussions (with the employees) to collect the data at an individual level, to enable a deeper understanding of the requirements of the organisation of work “*in the spirit of service*”, the nature and the characteristics of such practice, how it influences employment relations, and its limitations in an organisational context.

Thus, this research studies the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and employment relations, and explores the application and limitations of its principles in organisational environments, in order to contribute to the analysis of the relationship between religion and business, using a different approach (employing the scriptural study as well as analysis of perceptions and practices of the actors as individuals, as opposed to study of collective behaviour in response to clerical guidance), i.e. from the standpoint of the Bahá'í Faith.

## **1.4 Outline**

This thesis is composed of ten chapters, where Chapter 2 covers the literature review, exploring the relationship between religion and the business, and then focusing on the theories of management ideology and how institutions under the influence of religion have managed their employees in terms of power relations, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement.

Chapter 3 is focused on presenting the results of the research on Bahá'í scripture in two sections: identification of work in the spirit of service in the scripture and formulation of a framework that explains characteristics of ‘*work in the spirit of service*’; and then the approach of Bahá'í scripture to aspects of employment relations: power and authority,

conflict, and employee involvement. Chapter 4 then explains the methodological approach of this research and relates this to the scriptural study and the primary research.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 present the results of the analysis of the multiple case-study research examining the conceptualisation of work in the spirit of service among the managers and the employees, the legitimisation of authority and exercise of power, space for employees to pursue their interests and organisations' approaches to dealing with conflict, and employee involvement respectively.

Chapter 9 then discusses the results of the four chapters of analysis of the primary data in relation to the relevant literature. Finally, Chapter 10 presents the summary of the results, discusses all the findings in relation to the results of the scriptural study and draws conclusions in relation to the concept of work in the spirit of service, the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to employment relations, and the potential requirements and limitations such approach may entail.

Accordingly, the next chapter presents the review of literature, explores the gaps in knowledge, and provides a description of the methodology, which this research employs to expand this knowledge.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This thesis explores the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to work and employment relations based on Bahá'í scripture and the practices of three organisations that aim to apply Bahá'í principles. To inform the research, the review of literature initially explores how work is defined and addressed in a religious context. It then moves on to explore how religious precepts and practices impact upon employment relations and management practices.

The present chapter is composed of three sections. It starts by exploring the relationship between religion and economic relations. Here, it explores how religions have impacted upon how work has been identified and addressed, starting with the theory of capitalism by Weber (as the most cited and explored theory examining this relationship) and its critics, before moving onto other studies that explore the impact of religion on work ethics, leading to an exploration of how managers' and employees' behaviour is impacted by religion.

The second section focuses on the influence of religion on employment relations and introduces the theories of management ideology and frames of reference that inform the aspects of employment relations, which this research explores in detail in the empirical phase. Therefore, it explores power relations, conflict of interest and employee involvement in organisations, and how religious precepts and authorities have influenced these.

The third section explores in detail how employee participation and industrial democracy has been addressed in the literature, and if religion has impacted upon them. Here it identifies a gap in this area of knowledge (i.e. rare empirical research), which this research aims to address from the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith, based on the interpretation of the researcher.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and sets the background to the scriptural study and the case-study research that follows.

## **2.2 Religions and business**

This section starts by exploring the relationship between religion and economic relations. It considers the theory of capitalism by Weber, as the mainstream theory in this ongoing debate, and its critics.

It further explores theories of control through the literature that attributes hierarchical control and authority to religious organisational structures before moving on to other studies that cover the influence of religions on business ethics. At the end, this section identifies the gap in knowledge of this relationship, which this research attempts to address from the standpoint of the Bahá'í Faith, as explored and interpreted by the researcher.

### **2.2.1 Capitalism based on Protestant ethics?**

Relationships between religion and business have a long history. For example, Judaism has outlined measurements in commerce and stressed accurate weighting along with prohibitions on monetary deception and misrepresentation (Scheinman, 1995), Certain food, drinks or actions are prohibited in Islam, which also prohibits related transactions (Quran Surat Al-Ma'idah (5:3)), and there is Islamic Banking, based on the prohibition of Ribaa (interest) in the Quran (Surat Al-Baqarah (2:275)).

However, theorisation of this relationship has mostly developed around Max Weber's thesis - *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. In this, Weber argued that employees' religious motive to work is connected to their worship of God, or 'calling' (Weber, 2003). He believed that this 'calling' or priestly value of work (a Calvinist approach, with an emphasis on hard work, modest lifestyle and reinvestment of profit as essential elements to material success) had resulted in 'industriousness' among believers: a desire to work hard and gain the worldly success that they believed could secure God's

‘grace’ and consequently the believers’ station in heaven<sup>3</sup> (Miller & Timothy, 2010). This, Weber believed, influenced the formation of capitalism (Weber, 2003).

Nevertheless, Weber’s theory did not only describe Protestant ethics and capitalism. He (Weber, 2003) criticised materialism and individualism surrounding the marketplace and emphasised that an escape from this ‘iron cage’ was essential, which required articulating a new non-conventional moral-point-of-view of management based on ‘entirely new prophets’ (Dyck & Schroeder, 2005, pp. 705-706). This is described as the ‘spirit of capitalism’, which has been claimed to be influenced by other religious traditions such as Catholicism (Novac, 1990) as well.

Different aspects of Weber’s theory of capitalism have been criticised by many scholars (e.g. Lehmann & Roth, 1995; Cohen, 1980; Cohen, 2002; Hudson & Coukos, 2005). For instance<sup>4</sup>, Cohen (2002; 1980) questions Weber’s hypotheses in formulating his thesis<sup>5</sup> such as basing his theory on church dogma<sup>6</sup> and on advice in devotional manuals by Puritan divines, the ambiguity in the concept of the ‘spirit of capitalism’, and poor relationship between rational firm and organisation of labour and capitalism, empirical

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<sup>3</sup> Luther attributed religious meaning to daily work and Calvin, building upon that, viewed work as a calling. Weber built on Calvinism and argued “*hard work, sober and modest lifestyles, and reinvestment of profits into business led to material success. Commercial success was deemed a sign of God’s pleasure and an indicator of eternal rewards, often known as the doctrine of predestination*” (Miller & Timothy, 2010, p. 50).

<sup>4</sup> Another critic of Weber’s theory was Stark (1968), who criticising Weber’s accounts on Catholicism, went further and argued that it was far from reality and lacked a close study. He (Stark, 1968, p. 202) argued that Weber “*asserted that Catholic theology was a form of polytheism and the Catholic cult a form of magic, and that both constituted a survival of, if not indeed a return to, primitive modes of thought and action*”.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen (2002; 1980) questions Weber’s hypotheses in formulating his thesis such as: basing his theory on church dogma and on advice in devotional manuals by Puritan divines, especially Richard Baxter (Wells, 2002), whereas there is no knowledge of how well that advice was received and applied. Therefore, to test this hypothesis, Cohen examines the diaries of two 17th century Puritan merchants that exemplify the ethical qualities of Weber’s new type of entrepreneur. Cohen finds that evidence fails to prove Weber’s work convincingly and he concludes that Puritan ethics are quite different from the spirit of capitalism (Wells, 2002). Cohen (2002) also refers to the ambiguity in the concept of the ‘spirit of capitalism’ – poor relationship between rational firm and organisation of labour, and capitalism – which he (Cohen, 2002) claims can make the causal relationship originate either way (i.e. capitalism may as well have resulted in rational firms and such organisation of labour, not necessarily the other way around as Weber claimed). Cohen (2002) also criticises empirical inaccuracy and problems with ideal types in Weber’s thesis (referring to the distinction between behavioural and cultural mechanisms of influence).

<sup>6</sup> Church dogma such as the Westminster Confession (Wells, 2002).

inaccuracy and problems with ideal types in Weber's thesis (referring to the distinction between behavioural and cultural mechanisms of influence)<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Collins (1986) criticised Weber's argument about the roots of capitalism, connecting it to Catholicism. He (Collins R. , 1986, p. 45) argued that it was following the institutional revolution of the Middle Ages that "*the basis of Capitalism was laid*" and "*at its heart was the organisation of the Catholic Church itself*".

Despite all the critiques, Weber's thesis has received most attention and has been cited widely (Gundolf & Filser, 2013). Tawney (1961, pp. 312-313) in his widely referenced book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, called Weber's thesis "*one of the most fruitful examinations of the relationship between religion and social theory*" although he also disagreed with parts of Weber's argument<sup>8</sup>. For instance, Tawney (1961, pp. 173-174) argued that: capitalism was a result of economic movement and discoveries of the time rather than Protestant power; Weber ignored the role of intellectual movements

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<sup>7</sup> Cohen points to the behavioural impact of Puritan ethics on an individual level. He argues that the cultural mechanism could have had an influence on the masses once capitalism had become a dominant force, not before (Cohen, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Some of Tawney's disagreements with Weber's thesis included:

- i) Tawney (1961, p. 173) argued that the development of capitalism in Holland and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not necessarily the result of religious changes (Protestant powers) but largely due to economic movements of the time (Discoveries in sixteenth and seventeenth century and their results).
- ii) Tawney (1961, pp. 173-174) wrote that Weber ignored the role of intellectual movements favourable to growth of economic enterprise and an individualistic attitude toward economic relations. Some examples of such forces as he (Tawney, 1961) explained were political thought in the Renaissance (e.g. Machiavelli's) and speculations of businessmen on money, prices and foreign exchange. He (Tawney, 1961) argued that such forces had also contributed to concentration of pecuniary gain, in addition to what Weber called 'the capitalist spirit'.
- iii) Tawney (1961) argued that Weber over-simplified Calvinism by describing the English Puritans of the seventeenth century as 'Calvinists' as if they all held the same view. Here, Tawney (1961) argued that all Calvinists did not hold the same views all the time. He explained that Calvinists of the sixteenth century believed in rigorous disciplines, and the individualist approach in its later phases would horrify them in earlier stages. Besides, within the seventeenth century Puritanism, there were widely differentiated views (held by "*Puritan aristocrats and Levellers, landowners and Diggers, merchants and artisans, buff-coat and his general*") that would not gather into a single social theory (Tawney, 1961, p. 174).

Tawney (1961) mainly agreed with Weber in the statement that "*commercial classes in seventeenth-century England were the standard bearers of a particular conception of social expediency, ... and that conception found expression in religion, in politics, and not least, in social and economic conduct and policy*" (Tawney, 1961, p. 313).

favourable to growth of economic enterprise and an individualistic attitude toward economic relations; Weber over-simplified Calvinism by ascribing the English Puritans of the seventeenth century as Calvinists and that they all held the same view, while they did not.

Söderlund (1958, p. 95) summarised these arguments concerning the connection between religious beliefs and economic activity in three main categories of opinion: (1) Weber's theory, stating that Protestantism (especially in its Calvinistic form) "*created a climate in which the 'spirit of capitalism' could flourish*"; (2) inverted Weberian theory, argued by H. M. Robertson, arguing that "*the spirit of capitalism is not the creator but the creation of businessmen*"; and finally (3) an intermediate theory, mainly presented by R. H. Tawney, stating that "*economic change can affect religious teaching, but that also religious teaching can in turn intensify and enhance the spirit of capitalism*" (Söderlund, 1958, p. 95).

In exploring Tawney and other researchers' arguments related to the third opinion, Söderlund (1958) explored Kurk Samuelsson's argument and stated that while Samuelsson agreed with Tawney about the significance of salvation to industriousness in Protestantism, and the failure of Protestant preachers in directing merchants to "*observe the demands of Christian morality*" (Söderlund, 1958, p. 96), he disagreed with Tawney's argument in considering an indirect relationship between Protestant ethics and capitalism<sup>9</sup>. Samuelsson believed that Puritans were not influenced by their religious beliefs, but they tried to "*rationalise*" their economic behaviour with their religion<sup>10</sup> (Söderlund, 1958).

But why does the relationship between religion and economic relations majorly concern capitalism and mainly Christian (basically Protestant) ideology to work?

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<sup>9</sup> Samuelsson explained that Tawney considered the Protestant encouragement of diligence, thrift, and the Calvinist attitude to usury, had an indirect influence on the emergence of capitalism (Söderlund, 1958).

<sup>10</sup> One of his reasons for this argument was 'observation'. Samuelsson referred to a study of regions of Germany with mixed religious beliefs, and states that Protestant children were sent to schools where their mode of instruction was aimed at future merchants and industrialists more usually than Catholic children. Thus, the attitudes in discussion were built in schools rather than through religious values. (Söderlund, 1958)

Hall (1985) addresses this question by discussing why it is believed that mainly Christian Europe created an economic dynamism – capitalism – but not other world civilizations. He argues that in India, China and Islamic ruled countries, intellectuals (referring to religious leaders and clergy) were “at odds” with other sources of social power (e.g. Kings) within the elite. For instance, in Islam a ruling house would not turn against Islam, because if they did so the clergy would declare them impious and invite the tribes to fight against them, based on the political theory of *Umma* – Islamic community, as codified by the clergy. So, this conflict within the elite prevented the creation of an economic dynamism of capitalist character. In contrast, Christianity as Hall (1985, p. 210) argues, enabled other sources of power to flourish where the Church’s organisational form was modelled on that of the secular state, borrowing its hierarchy of bishop, deacon and presbyter, it owned one-third of the land, and led the way in agriculture improvement as the first organisation to systematically keep records.

To address the question of why Christianity is the centre of this argument thus, Hall (1985) refers to ‘elective affinity’ between social position and the belief system, as addressed by Weber. Here, Hall refers to the power that the intellectuals gain based on their capability for producing ideologies that articulate the needs of those in social position. Therefore, Hall concludes that Christianity has successfully articulated the needs of literate traders and craftsmen of Roman cities, and hence, has been capable of affecting human history. Hall, however, acknowledges that his argument has been criticised as characterising ideology only in negative terms (Hall, 1985).

In summary, while Weber argued that Protestant ethics resulted in capitalism, other researchers argued that it only influenced capitalism, or that there is no influence and believers mainly rationalised their economic actions through their beliefs. It was also argued that based on elective affinity, Christianity successfully articulated the needs of the traders and thus they employed those principles in their trade.

In order to explore this argument, the Bible was explored for its references to work and industriousness, the results of which are summarised here.



### 2.2.1.1 Work in the Bible

The study of the Bible, and searching for the concept of work and how it is addressed and characterised, confirms that work bears high value in Jewish and Christian scripture. It starts with the principle of work in six days and the seventh day of rest, the Sabbath, and the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament.

The principle that signifies work as worship is mainly 1Timothy 5:8 stating, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* Also, James 2:14-26 refers to the necessity to work as well as having faith, and states that: “man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Based on these principles along with a repeated emphasis on hard work and discouragement of idleness (e.g. Proverbs 10:4; Proverbs 12:11; Proverbs 14:23-24; Proverbs 20:13; Proverbs 28:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9; Psalm 128:2; Titus 3:14; Acts 20:35), there has been a generalization that work is holy and is a sign of grace and salvation, industriousness is holy, profit and wealth are holy, and thus as Weber (2003) concludes, capitalism flourished as a result of Protestant work ethics.

It is however stated in the same reference, 1Timothy 6:1, *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”* Furthermore, in Ecclesiastes 5:12 it is stated: *“Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.”*

1Timothy 6:1 even considers the chance that money and wealth might risk one’s Faith, thus it cannot necessarily be considered as God’s grace, nor the wealthy can be necessarily be observed as ‘saved’.

Furthermore, in characterising work, Proverbs significantly emphasizes hard work and discourages laziness and idleness (Proverbs 10:4; Proverbs 12:11; Proverbs 14:23-24; Proverbs 20:13; Proverbs 28:19). This is addressed in various parts of the Bible in addition to Proverbs, such as: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9; Psalm 128:2; Titus 3:14 and Acts 20:35. Moreover, work is advised to be done ‘honestly’ (Ephesians 4:28), ‘heartily’ (Colossians 3:23) and for the sake of God (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:23). Additionally, it is signified sharing the result of worker’s labour (profit) with the

workmen: *“The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops”* (2 Timothy 2:6). These arguments discredit capitalism by discrediting accumulation of wealth and advising of sharing the profit and capital with the workmen. Thus, exploring Christian scripture, the relationship Weber theorised as his theory of Protestant work ethic and how it contributed to capitalism cannot be reconciled. These scriptures directly refer to hard work and earning for one’s family and not depending on others’ bread, but do not sanctify ownership of capital by a small number of wealthy and do not prioritise the wealthy as ‘saved’ in the eyes of God (salvation), solely due to their wealth.

Work is considered holy in other Abrahamic religions as well. There are similar references to work in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá’í Faith. In the Book of Genesis 1-3, the Hebrew word ‘Avodah’ is used for both work and worship, where Adam has been called to work in the Garden-Temple (Paulsen & Walker, 2014). Similarly, 1 Timothy 5:8 states, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* The Quran also states: *“That man can have nothing but what he strives (works) for; That (the fruit of) his striving will soon come in sight: Then will he be rewarded with a reward complete.”* (Surat An-Najm 53:39-41). This is emphasised in the religious stories of Jesus and in Hadith from Muhammad as well.

Work is regarded as holy in the Bahá’í principles as well; however, it is the highest form of worship if *“done in the spirit of service”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1998, p. 83; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1972, p. 176).

Since the characteristics of work based on the Bahá’í principles have not been studied before, this approach to work as worship, *“in the spirit of service”*, is a gap in knowledge this research aims to contribute to. The concept of work and work ethics is explored in more detail in section 2.2.3 in order to develop the background for the empirical research on this phenomenon.

### 2.2.2 Religions as a means of control or vehicle for business ethics

In another perspective, the relationship between religion and management has been identified with control and authority. Marx (1978, p. 53) called religion ‘*the opium of the people*’ and a source of illusionary happiness or false consciousness. Marx argued that if the suffering, which was caused by economic and social conditions that divided the society, was removed then there would be no need for religion. Marx (2008, p. 41) stated that man was the “*world of man, the state, society*”, and, “*this state, this society produce religion, a reversed world consciousness, because they are a reversed world*”. So, he described religion as a consciousness of the world made by the state and the society, which was not real and created illusionary happiness. The reason Marx wrote this is that he believed religion created a halo around humans that prevented them from exploring their true reality; thus, in the absence of religion man could think, act and shape his own reality. In that case, philosophy would replace religion, which is ‘in the service of history’, and would unmask the saintly form of human alienation as well as his unholy alienations in the absence of religious authority. Thus, Marx (2008) found Luther’s movement only first step in freeing man, by freeing him from religious authority, as an outer religiosity and making the religiosity the inner man. So, Marx believed that the next step would be to free man from that ‘bondage of conviction’ (with which Luther had replaced the bondage of devotion) as well, so man could find reality (2008, p. 51)<sup>11</sup>.

Other studies also attribute control, hierarchy and bureaucracy to the relationship between religion and business (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Shah, Largi, & Batley, 2007; Underkuffler, 1989; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2001). Jeremy (1990) in a survey among the 100 largest firms in Britain found religion a source of control, paternalism, and cultural hegemony except among Quaker organisations (such as Cadbury and Bourneville). Shah, Largi and Batley

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<sup>11</sup> Many scholars disagree with the Marxist view against religion for various reasons. For instance, Hitchens (2008) wrote that Marx only argued for dismissing religion as a source of *illusionary* happiness in search for real happiness<sup>11</sup>. Conard (2007) argues that religion cannot be dismissed as mere false consciousness, and it needs to be viewed as reflecting something of the real and at the same time have impact on people’s surroundings. Similarly, Pine and Gilmore (1998) believe that economic progress having passed through the four stages of agrarian, industrialisation, service, and experience economy, has experienced separation of spirituality from the workplace as a by-product of the industrial era. This spirituality, they believe, is again called for, and the contribution of religious ethics to the economy in increasing (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

(2007, p. 13) argue that characteristics of bureaucracy such as “*notions of hierarchy, regularity, checks and balances, record-keeping, etc. are at least partly derived from ecclesiastical institutions*”. In addition, they state that another influence of religion, specifically Catholicism, has been on patterns of leadership “*including hierarchy, councils and perceptions of authority*” (Shah, Largi, & Batley, 2007, p. 13), which they find essential in creating management systems in some faith-based organisations they studied (e.g. in housing services).

In a more negative view, Underkuffler (1989) and Wagner-Tsukamoto (2001) criticise the authoritative hierarchy of faith-based organisations due to their single source of authority (normative and prescriptive authority of religious leader or the manager), and prevention or suppression of conflict. These studies (Underkuffler, 1989; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2001) find such structures to be unjust because they result in the exclusion of the members of other religions from participating in the organisation or accessing its benefits and promotions, and thus causing discrimination and unfair practices.

Whether this control and hierarchy is beneficial or harmful to organisations is still under debate.

Other studies exploring the relationship between religion and business often focus on individuals – i.e. managers or employees, they are relatively old studies (1990-2000), and they are mostly conceptual rather than empirical (Gundolf & Filser, 2013). Gundolf and Filser (2013, p. 183) in a citation review of publications on management and religion/spirituality analysed 215 articles and they find 20 most influential publications (most cited), among which 17 are conceptual, and only three are empirical. Thus, they (Gundolf & Filser, 2013) state that if we aim to analyse the relationship between religion/spirituality and management then further empirical research needs to be undertaken.

Moreover, these studies concerned with the relationship between religion and management mainly focus primarily upon ‘business ethics’, but they often lack an empirical approach. These are discussed in the next section.

This research therefore aims to address this gap in rare empirical research in the influence of religion on organisational practice, employment relations and ethical behaviour, by

exploring the relationship between religion and business/management, from the standpoint of the Bahá'í Faith, through an empirical research. Here it considers employees' choice in application of these principles as moral standards as well.

The next section explores the concept of work and work ethics in the literature, before moving onto the aspects of employment relations as a focus of the research.

### **2.2.3 Work, ethics and spirituality**

The concept of work has gone through changes over time, and the approach of people to work has changed accordingly, while it is argued that religious beliefs have been influential in the ethical perceptions of work (1987). For the Romans, work was to be done by the slaves; and the freemen would only get involved in agriculture and big business (Maywood, 1982, p. 9). Similarly, Hill (1996) argues that work has been degrading in much of the ancient history, and that considering a positive moral value about doing a good job and the intrinsic value of work, are developments of the twentieth century. Maywood (1982) states that the moral duty of man to work was mainly developed through Protestant work ethics.

About the contemporary value of work, Smith (2013, p. 12) argues that work for some people is a source of “*meaning, reward, dignity, identity, and community*”, and for others “*merely a means to an end, sites of alienation and discouragement*” that one must endure to earn the payback. Accordingly, work has a central role in modern society and its organisation influences human experience, as Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim argued (Smith V. , 2013). For instance, as Smith (2013) argues, Durkheim believed industrial organisations, if well regulated, could create new efficiencies and solidarity between people. Similarly, industriousness and Godly value of work as Weber (2003) and Tawney (1961) argued, made Protestants more successful in their business and wealth creation. However, neither of these argumentations found moral or ethical bases as an essential component of work and employment relations.

Business ethics, as De George (1987) argues, while having existed as long as the concept of business existed, has emerged as an interdisciplinary field in the 1960s and 1970s

primarily as a result of a theological and religious process. He argues that it was the questions of just wages and morality in business, in Protestant work ethics and then Catholic social ethics, that gave rise to the discussion of ethics in business.

Exploring the relationship between religion and business/management, most studies primarily focus upon 'business ethics', but they often lack an empirical approach. Often they explore the impact of religion either on leadership and management performance (e.g. Chappell, 1994; Fry, 2003; Burns, 1978) or on personal ethics such as employees' ethical behaviour, commitment and motivation (e.g. Weaver & Agle, 2002; Kennedy & Lawton, 1998; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Among the well-known studies, only the final one here has subjected these questions to empirical analysis. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003, p. 85) find that individual's level of spirituality influences whether an individual perceives a questionable business practice as ethical or unethical. They state that leaders have limited influence on whether employees actually employ a moral framework and ethical standards, but it rather remains an individual's choice.

However, Torrington, Hall and Taylor (2008, p. 756) state "*ethical standards vary between different national cultures, making international standards difficult*". They argue that ethical codes are only valid if the majority of those to whom those codes and principles apply, appreciate and willingly implement them. This variety of the standards and practices, due to the differences between national culture, have been highlighted by Hofstede (2017; 1997) as well and have also been explored by other researchers (e.g. Pugh & Hickson, 1976); which appear as an influential factor in application of business ethics.

Moreover, based on the failure of business ethics in 2000 and 2008 due to the scandals (e.g. Enron, Lehman Brothers, Bernie Madoff), the trust in business ethics declined, which resulted in exploration of a different type of business ethics, one more rooted in spiritual foundations and moral values (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). Thus, researchers have become more interested about spirituality in business. Bouckaert and Zsolnai (2012, pp. 491,495) define spirituality as "*a search for inner identity, connectedness and transcendence*", which through interactions of "*personal factors in the form of moral thought and self-evaluative reactions, moral conduct and environmental influences*"

guides the decisions of the managers as a ‘moral agency’.

For the purpose of this research, the concept of work, as identified in Bahá’í scripture and as perceived and experienced in the organisations, has been studied through the scriptural study and the case-study research respectively, and is presented in Chapters 3 and 5. In the analysis of the results of the primary research, the variances and relevance of national cultures have been considered and explored.

The next section focuses on employment relations and explores the literature on the main aspects of the theories of management ideology, in order to inform the empirical stage of this research.

### **2.3 Theories of ideology in management**

The previous section explored the theories describing the relationship between religion and economic behaviour. To further explore these influences on the behaviour of managers and employees, this section focuses on employment relations and how various aspects of the employer–employee relationship are identified and legitimised based on different ideologies.

This section, therefore, reviews the theories of management ideology and their specific factors as legitimisation of authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement, which informed the empirical phase of this research. Accordingly, through the scriptural study, these concepts will be explored in Bahá’í scripture, and in the empirical research they will be explored through multiple case studies on three organisations that attempt to apply Bahá’í principles, in order to identify the approach of the Bahá’í Faith to work and employment relations.

This section then introduces the three main frames of reference addressed in the literature: the unitarist approach, pluralist approach and the critical/radical approach (e.g. Fox, 1966; Abbott, 2006; Budd & Bhawe, 2008; Geare, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2006). It explores the three factors of management ideology/frames of reference and how religions have influenced exercise and legitimisation of power in organisations, considered employees’ interests or suppressed conflict, and facilitated/prevented employee

participation. These aspects are explored in detail here and inform the empirical phase of this research.

This section starts by reviewing the interests of employers and employees as discussed in literature in order to explain conflict of interest. It then moves on to the argument of power and authority and how it has been addressed in the literature, as well as to how the legitimisation of power in organisations recognises or ignores the interests of the employees. Then the last factor, employee involvement, is briefly introduced at the end of this section and will be explored in more detail in the next section.

### **2.3.1 Definitions of ideology and frames of reference**

Management ideology is concerned with beliefs and values associated with employment relations. (Geare, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2006). Bénabou (2008, p. 322) refers to Enlightenment philosopher and economist Destutt de Tracy, who defined ideology as a “*new ‘science of ideas’ that would unify the social, political, and moral sciences, starting from a common foundation in psychology*”. He (Bénabou, 2008) argues that the definition of ideology changes over time through the works of Marx and Engels (becoming more in favour of managers as masters), and it currently refers to a system of beliefs that some group *collectively* upholds and maintains rigidly, even though it involves a substantial degree of reality denial or “*false consciousness*” (a term Marx and Engels use in their reference to religion as well). Budd and Bhave (2008) argue that false consciousness enables the dominant class to use ideology to exert their control over the dominated class (legitimisation of authority).

Dunlop’s widely cited *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958, p. 16) refers to ideology as a “set of beliefs commonly held by the actors that helps to bind or integrate the system together as an entity”. Whereas Fox (1966) takes a more practical approach in addressing ideology, which he calls a ‘frame of reference’, and argues that it determines “(a) how we expect people to behave, (b) how we react to people’s behavior, and (c) the methods we choose when we change people’s behavior”.



'Ideologies' and 'frames of reference' have been used interchangeably in some studies (e.g. Geare, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2006). However, Budd and Bhavé (2008, p. 4) distinguish ideology from frames of reference by attributing "*public exposition rather than private evaluation*" to ideology; where 'frame of reference' is a theory to "*guide and evaluate behaviors, outcomes, and institutions*" while 'ideology' is a theory used to "*advocate and justify behaviors, outcomes and institutions*". They (Budd & Bhavé, 2008) summarise the difference between the two by stating a "*frame of reference is how one sees the world*" while "*an ideology is how one wants others to see the world*". They (Budd & Bhavé, 2008, p. 5) draw this distinction to "*allow for the possibility that individuals might preach from one ideology while practicing another*". Similarly, Geare, Edgar and McAndrew (2006) observe that many managers in their study, advocate pluralism when it comes to considering society as a whole but are unitarist in their workplace. This distinction can have a methodological application, allowing and making sense of observation of different (if not opposing) perceptions and behaviours of managers.

The main concern of both ideology and frames of reference is on authority and its legitimisation in organisations. For instance, Bendix (1956, p. 2) designates the term "*ideology of management*" for "*all ideas which are espoused by or for those who exercise authority in economic enterprises, and which seek to explain and justify that authority*". Similarly, Fox (1966) explains organisation as a 'disputed ground', where the individuals and groups seek to capture for their own purposes. There, "*order is preserved, by shared values which support normative agreement or which enable normative conflict to be regulated and resolved with the minimum of disruption to the collaborative process*" (Fox, 1971, p. 89). Fox argues that norms, as rules or standard for action, are in operation in organisations, and the social relationship within organisational structure exists because of the normative or legitimate sanctions and accessibility of something that the employees value and depend upon. Therefore, the obedience of employees to authority is partially explained by this acceptance of an over-riding managerial ideology. Therefore, 'normative conflict' may occur when individuals develop their own norms. "*The frame of reference through which the parties perceive normative conflict*" is thus crucial in determining the individuals' behaviour and its outcome in his opinion (Fox, 1971, p. 89).

Conversely Abbott (2006) addresses the legitimisation of authority from the employees' point of view, and discusses how the willingness of employees to subject themselves to someone's authority has been the key in employees' 'productivity'. She (Abbott, 2006) mentions that in the Middle Ages employees may have adhered to authority due to custom, legal obligation or religious belief (as the cultural and social value system of the time). 'Masters' on the other hand were considered as those who had been born to direct and coordinate the work effort. She (Abbott, 2006) then discusses a shift in employment relations from 'status' where the authority of the managers were unquestionably legitimised, and employees had no power, to 'contract' in the nineteenth century, which gave employees a negotiation power and led to pluralist approaches.

Therefore, identifying the aspects of management ideology in organisations influenced by their religious beliefs or religious institutions enables understanding of the aspects of employment relations in organisations, their exercises and challenges, and their underlying causes and rationales.

The frames of reference that are most commonly discussed in empirical research often carry a reference to the works of Alan Fox (e.g. 1974; 1966) pointing to the Unitarist approach, the Pluralist approach and the Critical/Radical approach, which in a few studies has been termed as Marxist approach but this title does not fully cover the wide range of theories that are associated with this perspective (e.g. Fox, 1974; Fox, 1966; Budd & Bhawe, 2008). Also a few studies (e.g. Budd & Bhawe, 2008) refer to an Egoist approach as an independent approach (focused on pursuit of individual self-interest and the role of markets), although it is generally considered as part of the other approaches.

The Unitarist approach argues that management is the only legitimate source of authority at the workplace and denies the inevitability of conflicts between managers and employees, and thus suppresses conflict (1966). The Pluralist perspective, in contrast, considers managers and trade unions to be competing and equally legitimate sources of authority and argues that conflicts are inevitable given different interests between employers and employees, and the distributed nature of power which can enable employees to organise and counter-balance the power of managers when negotiating workplace contracts towards fairer outcomes (Fox, 1966). The Critical approach

meanwhile “*sees the employment relationship as a struggle for power and control*” (Budd & Bhava, 2008, p. 5). Critical perspective refers to theories that disagree with the Unitarist and the Pluralist approaches, in neither viewing labour as commodity (Unitarist) nor recognising the conflict to be confined to the employment relations (Pluralist) (although Marxists refer to labour as commodity (Marx, 2008, p. 61)). In contrast, this perspective argues that conflict in employment relations is part of a broader social clash and unequal power relations between competing groups (e.g. Marxists argue that the conflict is a result of unequal power relations between capitalists and working classes, while feminists focus on unequal power relations between men and women) (Budd & Bhava, 2008, p. 6). Therefore, critical employment relations scholars argue that, because of the existing structural inequalities at the workplace and the greater socio-political context, relying on bargaining power to advance workers interest is inadequate (Budd & Bhava, 2008). However, there is ambiguity in labelling and characterising this approach since it involves a wide range of varying theories, except for their arguments against the unitarist or pluralist perspectives.

To inform the empirical research on employment relations, the main factors of these theories, conflict of interest, power relations and employee involvement are explored in detail in the following sections. This discussion starts with the conflict of interest to enable realisation of who is in power and how this power is legitimised. It then moves onto the examining the extent to which employees have a say in negotiating their rights, organising their work, and the decisions of the organisation.

### **2.3.2 Employers’ and employees’ interests and legitimacy of conflict**

An aspect of the theories of ideology is how management perceives conflict of interest; whose interest is prioritised; and if the interests of the employees are unified with the company’s interest, pluralistically accepted, or employees’ interests are recognised and flourished.

The literature in this field often takes a unitarist or pluralist approach, discussing employees’ interests in line with the interests of the company or as competing/opposing interests (e.g. Damadoran, 2005; Geare, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2006; Conchon, 2013).

During the fieldwork, specific attention has been given to exploring the interests of employees (i.e. their rationale for work and their motivating factors) as well as how managers articulate employees' interests, whether there are any mechanisms in the organisations that allow employees to pursue their interests, and when the conflict of interests arise, how they are dealt with.

How the employees' and the employers' interests have been identified is summarised to inform the probe questions for the fieldwork.

### **Employees' interests**

The theories identifying employees' interest often focus on pay as one of the main reasons why employees work, but its significance varies in different motivational theories; from being the sole motivator (scientific management theory), to a stimulus (behaviourism), to the first level in the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), to a factor, which its absence demotivates (Herzberg, 1966), a point of comparison for self-achievements and position based on Adam's equity theory (Adams, 1963), reward depending on expectancy (Vroom, 2003), indicator of status and working identity (social theories), or dependant on individual's orientation to work (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, & Platt, 1970), as King and Lawley (2013, p. 299) summarise. Motivation theories therefore searched for intrinsic awards as well as pay (e.g. Maslow, 1943; McGregor, 1960; Herzberg, 1966).

Following Rousseau's work (which views human as naturally kind and altruistic, who mainly require more equitable social contract), psychological studies such as works of Maslow, Deman and Jahoda examined psychological fulfilment of work as employees' interests; and Marx, Durkeim and Weber emphasised the importance of individual fulfilment and dignity, and their significance in creating social identities and spiritual fulfilment (Budd & Bhave, 2008). On the spiritual aspect, as articulated by Weber (2003), work has had a Godly value and is regarded as 'calling' in the Protestant work ethic, based on Martin Luther's concept of work; it is also mentioned in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism (Budd & Bhave, 2008) and Judaism.

Budd and Bhave (2008) summarise the literature on employees' reasons to work, in four categories as follows:

- ***Survival and Income*** – Most people need to work to survive.<sup>12</sup>
- ***Equity and Voice*** – Employees not only want income, but they also require fairness and organisational justice. Here, ‘equity’ refers to employment standards (both material outcomes and personal treatment) and ‘voice’ refers to employees’ meaningful input into decisions.<sup>13</sup>
- ***Fulfilment and Social Identity*** – Individuals use work to provide psychological fulfilment and social identity; based on intrinsic work rewards over extrinsic rewards<sup>14</sup>.
- ***Power and Control*** – Workers seek power and control in the workplace; workers lack sufficient power and control in a capitalist society, thus socialism and syndicalism are preferred here<sup>15</sup>.

Alternatively, employers have been identified with certain interests in the literature (e.g. Damadoran, 2005; Budd & Bhava, 2008; King & Lawley, 2013; Albin & Alcaly, 1976), which has provided a platform for realisation of potentials for conflict, consideration of managers’ and employees’ rights and interests, and in some cases development of an

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<sup>12</sup> The employees’ need for survival and income is addressed in Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs, Wheeler’s Model of workplace conflict, Adam Smith and Karl Marx’s wage structure and division of labour, Varian’s Utility function, as well as income and consumption by Killingsworth, and Kaufman (Budd & Bhava, 2008)

<sup>13</sup> The need for equity and room for their voice has been addressed in Adam’s equity theory, Folger and Cropanzano’s industrial-organisational psychology work, International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) declaration 1944 on human dignity, religious related studies of Budd and Peccoud, ethical theories discussed by Bowies, Budd, and Solomon, human rights by Adams, Gross, and Wheeler, Barbash’s Equity and Budd’s Equity and Voice, distributive and procedural justice by Folger and Cropanzano (Budd & Bhava, 2008)

<sup>14</sup> The need for fulfilment and social identity has been addressed by Maslow, Donova, and Latham and Pinder, Deman’s joy in work, Freud’s idea of work as a link to reality and Jahoda’s psychological fulfilment, Ciulla, Leidner, and Muirhead based on Karl Marx and Emile Durkeim and Weber’s work on social identities and spiritual fulfilment, occupational groupings to create social identity by Tajfel, Turner, Ashforth and Mael, and work as a path to salvation by Ali, Schumacher, and Nord et al. (Budd & Bhava, 2008)

<sup>15</sup> Employees’ need for power and control over their work has been addressed in Hodson, and Marx’s criticism of capitalism that prevents work from being a social activity, workers’ ability to control their physical and social environment and influence decisions by Hyman, craft unions’ work rules and their influence on workers’ behaviour and situation by Perlman, and Montgomery, workers’ solidarity and resistance by Edwards, Hodson, and Kelly, gender and racial conflicts by Amott and Matthaei, Delgado and Stefancic, Gottfried, and Lusting (Budd & Bhava, 2008)

environment for dialogue and contribution. Employers' interests are thus examined in the following section.

### **Employer's interest**

Employers can be viewed as shareholders, executives and managers, or the organisation as an entity. Here, the word 'employer' is used to refer to the entity as a whole, therefore the conflict of interest of executives and managers with the one of shareholders is considered as employees' interest.

Budd and Bhawe (2008) summarise the literature on employers' interests in the following three primary categories:

- ***Profit Maximisation*** – Firms are assumed to maximize profit, labour markets are considered competitive (so if a labourer loses their job, they can get another one with no cost), transaction costs have a specific significance, and principal-agent problems are accounted for (shareholder bears the risk, so corporate needs to maximize shareholder's value). Profit maximisation thus resulted in scientific management for greater efficiency, and Weber's articulation of bureaucratic organisational form, and the 'iron cage'.
- ***Stakeholder Value*** – All stakeholders – shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, local communities, and others – are sufficiently affected by corporate action; so they deserve to be considered in corporate decision-making. Focused on: fair rate of return for stakeholders, considering interests beyond those of shareholders, and employee representation on board of directors.
- ***Power and Control*** – Seeking power and control over employees. It values profit increase, capital accumulation, the amassing of wealth and socio-political control by owners of capital. To Marx it is an integral feature of capitalism, where employers control and dominate labour and conflict is channelled into tightly regulated channels. This objective is also a critique of Taylor's division of labour and managers' power without checks and balances, and it considers bureaucracy as a strategy to consolidate power and control. Thus, in labour process theory for

instance, control mechanisms are implemented. Furthermore, control can expand across gender and ethnic lines.

According to these different interests of the employees and the employers that this unitary, or sometimes pluralistic, literature identifies, the theories of ideology explore how the resultant conflict is dealt with, in whose favour, and to what extent are they recognised as legitimate. Therefore, they explore power relations in organisations and their legitimisation of authority, which is summarised in the next section.

### **2.3.3 Power relations and organisational culture**

This section explores power and legitimisation of authority, how power is legitimised and exercised in an organisation and what its implications are in employment relations as a result (i.e. the extent to which employees get a say in their work conditions or in the organisational decisions). In addition, it explores how religions have influenced power relations and legitimisation of the authority of the managers in organisations.

In this section, power is first explored conceptually, considering the mainstream argument in its formulation, as raised by Lukes (2005) and advocated or criticised by researchers from behavioural, social, and political points of view. Having discussed the argument of power, this section then explores power and authority in the organisational context and employment relations in order to inform the empirical research.

#### **2.3.3.1 Power and authority**

Power, authority, and their legitimation are among the main concerns of managerial ideology and employee relations. As discussed previously, in a Unitarist approach there is a single source of authority and the power is enforced in a top-down manner. In a Pluralist approach, there are competitive sources of power, which mainly include representatives of the both sides, the organisation/employer, and the employees. Employee relations and motivations are valued and there is room for negotiation and preservation of the rights of both parties through a contract of employment. In a critical approach however, communal authority and employee participation are very involved,

and a flatter structure of power is intended.

In this respect, a philosophical argumentation of the discourse of power can help set the scene for identification and articulation of power structures in organisations, their foundations, and possible implications. This argument in most research refers to the three-dimensional power addressed by Lukes (2005, initially published in 1974) and its critiques. Lukes (2005), in his frequently cited book *Power: A radical view*, reviews the discourse of power historically and categorises the existing theories as either one-dimensional or two-dimensional approaches, and then he proposes a three-dimensional perspective to overcome the limitations of these. The summary of the three perspectives follows (Lukes, 2005, p. 29):

#### One-Dimensional View of Power

Focus on:

- a) Behaviour
- b) Decision-making
- c) (key) Issues
- d) Observable (overt) conflict
- e) (Subjective) interests, seen as policy preferences revealed by political participation

#### Two-Dimensional View of Power

(Qualified) Critique of behavioural focus;

Focus on:

- a) Decision-making and non-decision-making
- b) Issues and potential issues
- c) Observable (overt and covert) conflict
- d) (Subjective) interests, seen as policy preferences or grievances

#### Three-Dimensional View of Power

Critique of behavioural focus;

Focus on:

- a) Decision-making and control over the political agenda (not necessarily through decisions)



- b) Issues and potential issues
- c) Observable (overt or covert) and latent conflict
- d) Subjective and real interests.

The focus of all three approaches is on the extent of the impact on and control over decisions, and they are observed and studied from different perspectives. As Lukes (2005) argues, the one-dimensional view focuses on empirical identification of actors who participate in decision-making (a behavioural view). In the two-dimensional perspective, other than decision-making, control over the (political) 'agenda' (and what to exclude from the agenda) is also considered as an indicator of power. However, Lukes, in his 'radical critique' argues that the effects of power are not limited to decision-making and agenda construction but at a deeper level it can be rooted in "*socially constructed and culturally patterned behaviour of groups*" or institutions, through "*shaping or determining their very wants*" (Power as domination), where there may be no observable conflict but that may be because the conflict had been prevented from arising in the first place (Lukes, 2005, pp. 26-27). Thus, individuals or groups may follow the dictates of power even if not in their '*real interest*' without grievance because of false or manipulated consensus (Lukes, 2005, p. 28). So, he (Lukes, 2005) asks: how do the powerful secure the compliance (unwilling or willing) of those they dominate?

Here, Lukes (2005) criticises other approaches to the examination of power, such as Dahl's (1961) examination of power, as only focused on decision-making and thus being one-dimensional, and Bachrach and Baratz's (1970) focus on observable conflict for articulating a two-dimensional power.

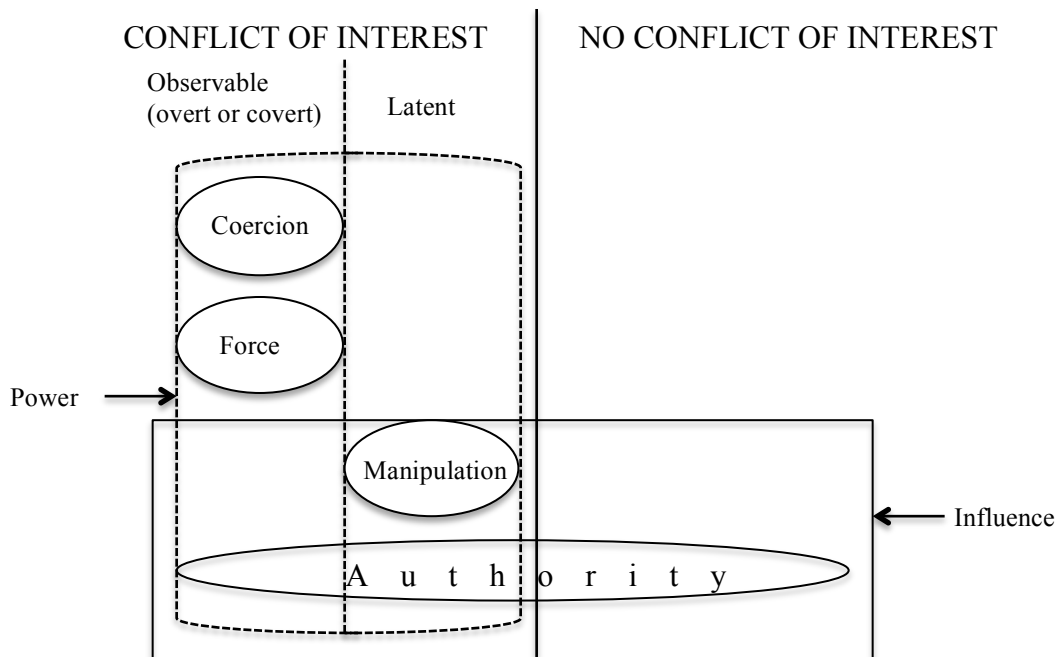
Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power was influenced by the notion of 'hegemony' introduced by Gramsci (2006) in response to several questions. How was consent to capitalist exploitation secured under a contemporary democratic condition? Why has capitalism, not being democratic, persisted? Where were the limits of consent beyond which crises could occur? If ordinary domination hurt the interests of subordinate groups why did subordinates comply?

His (Gramsci, 2006) response in the form of the notion of 'hegemony' has been interpreted in several ways. In one interpretation, when it is referred to as 'culture' and

‘ideology’, it states that consent is created through internalised culture and ideology (Psychological state), such as the process of bourgeois relations and reduction of revolutionary possibilities (Femia, 1981). Another non-cultural interpretation of Gramsci’s hegemony is describing ‘consent’ as cognitive and behavioural, where it considers that a few individuals can be mistaken, but not the mass (Lukes, 2005). In this context, social relations constitute ‘structures of choices within which people perceive, evaluate and act’ (cognitive and behavioural state). Consent here corresponds to the interests of those consenting, and beyond its limits there will be crisis (Lukes, 2005).

Thus, Lukes (2005) considers power as consensual and so it would need legitimation. He believes that consensual authority with no ‘conflict of interest’ is not a form of power. He defines power as: “*A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interests*” (Lukes, 2005, p. 37). He thus plots the relationship between conflict of interest and power as follows:

**Figure 2-1 Conceptual map of power and its cognates (Lukes, 2005, p. 36)**



As Lukes (2005) writes, power may or may not be a form of influence depending on whether some sanctions are involved, and influence and authority may or may not be a

form of power depending on whether a conflict of interest is involved. That is why consensual authority (influence) without 'conflict of interest' is not a form of power in Luke's (2005) opinion, whereas if influence is not in the followers' real interest, it is considered as power (even without observed or obvious latent conflict). Lukes (2005) explains that if A exercises power over B in B's real interest, in the case of conflict, two scenarios may occur, it may be either a short-term exercise of power over B with observable conflict because the power relation gradually ends as B gradually learns about his interests; or B resists, and A exerts control over B, that is a violation of B's autonomy, because B knows his/ her real interest. Lukes (2005) chooses the former while recognising the quarrel over what is the real interest, rather than accepting the latter idea, which totally rejects the connections between influence and power.

Lukes however has changed some of his propositions over time (between the 1974 edition and 2005 edition) under the influence of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu (Swartz, 2007). In his recent edition, he focuses on the 'capacity' of the 'agents' in having compliance, which includes both resources and the exercise of power, and he considers some forms of power (and domination) to be positive, productive and transformative – for instance in relations of dependency such as a teacher-student relationship (Swartz, 2007).

However, critics of Lukes' three-dimensional view of power argue against generalisability of all power relations in this perspective. For instance, Dowding (2006) writes that Lukes' three-dimensional view denies agents access to their own reason for actions (based on the argument of domination) and sees all social relations based on intentional dominance where they all fall under the same moral responsibility, whereas in some relations the dominant does not dominate knowingly.

Bradshaw (1976) criticises the discussion of 'real interest' (as Lukes expounded), where B's independence of A's power does not rule out other sources of power that B is subject to and which may re-compromise B's 'relative autonomy'. He (Bradshaw, 1976) further criticises Lukes' argument of democratic participation constituting relative autonomy and independence of A's power, whereas the rest of his argument and the case studies he (Lukes, 2005) refers to state otherwise and indicate situations where decisions are

imposed to them.

Despite all these critiques, Lukes' theory of power remains among the most cited argument informing this area of research. The current research uses the framework and the conceptual argumentation of power and authority, examining the power in decision-making, and non-decision scenarios, based on the third dimension of power, domination (e.g. through organisational culture and internalised values), examination of who influences the agenda, who knowingly exerts power, whether employees identify themselves as having actual choice and say in their organisation, whether there is observable conflict, and how it is addressed.

The next section focuses on the authority and power in an organisational context and its implications for the empirical research.

### **2.3.3.2 Power and authority in organisational context**

Power as discussed in the previous section involves the argument of influence on the decisions or on agenda, access to information, and recognition of the conflict of interests of those in power with their subordinates.

Similarly, in formal organisations power is associated with status and authority (Bass & Bass, 2009). Bass and Bass (2009, p. 257) identify the system of power in an organisation through the interplay of the organisation's 'system of authority', its 'system of ideology', its 'system of expertise' and the 'political system' of informal authority. An organisation's 'system of authority' involves the way legitimate power is distributed and enhanced in goals, rewards, sanctions, and division of labour (Bass & Bass, 2009). The organisation's 'system of ideology' involves the beliefs shared by the members of an organisation (Bass & Bass, 2009). The organisation's 'system of expertise', on the other hand, is the way information and knowledge are distributed among its position holders, which in certain circumstances could result in managers being less influential than their subordinates, although the system of authority may dictate otherwise (Bass & Bass, 2009). There might also be a 'political system' (informal system) outside the system of formal authority to benefit some constituents at the expense of others in the organisation.

The interplay of these is what Bass and Bass (2009) call power systems.

Bass and Bass's system of power identifies exertion and legitimisation of power through authority (whether formal or informal) and information. It explores legitimised as well as illegitimate power relations, and like Lukes' argument it considers power benefitting some at the cost of others, so they (Bass & Bass, 2009) find conflict of interest to play a key role in the exercise of power.

Moreover, the literature on power in organisations relates to social systems and leadership, and it reflects frequent references to the works of Etzioni (1961; 1975), and French and Raven (1959). Etzioni (1975, pp. 5-6) defines power as *coercive power* (through application or threat of physical sanction), *remuneration power* (control of material resources and rewards) and *normative power* (through allocation or manipulation of symbolic rewards and deprivation). Two types of normative power are addressed here. One is through "*manipulation of esteem, prestige and ritualistic symbols*" and the other is through "*allocation and manipulation of acceptance and positive response*" (Etzioni, 1975, p. 6). Normative power in recent organisational studies has been connected to the concept of organisational culture (e.g. Kunda, 2009), which will be discussed further. Also, as Bass and Bass (2009) argue, followers would be most likely to consider normative power as legitimate, and they are least likely to consider coercive power as legitimate.

Similarly, French and Raven's (1959) model<sup>16</sup> recognises power based on rewards, penalties (coercive power), and internalised values (legitimate power), but it considers *expert power* and *referent power* as well. Based on French and Raven's (1959) model, Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) developed and validated a scale<sup>17</sup> to measure these five

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<sup>16</sup> It identifies five kinds of power as expert power, referent power, reward power, coercive power, and legitimate power (French Jr. & Raven, 1959).

<sup>17</sup> Hinkin and Schriesheim's (1989) scale to measure power in organisations:

1. Expert Power (based on B's perception of A's competence)
  - Give me good technical suggestions.
  - Share with me his/her considerable experience and/or training.
  - Provide me with sound job-related advice.
  - Provide me with needed technical knowledge.
2. Referent Power (based on B's liking or identification with A)
  - Make me feel valued.

types of power: *Expert Power* (based on B's perception of A's competence), *Referent Power* (based on B's liking or identification with A), *Reward Power* (depends on A's ability to provide rewards for B), *Coercive Power* (based on B's perception that A can impose penalties for non-compliance), *Legitimate Power* (based on internalization of common norms and values). Here, legitimate power resembles the power through influence or mainly manipulation as Lukes (2005) identifies. This scale has been widely referred to and tested for its validity by other researchers (e.g. Borchgrevink & Susskind, 1996). Although some studies question the results of power relations in organisations and advocate shared-management or shared-leadership (e.g. Barnes , Humphreys, Oyler, Pane Haden, & Novicevic, 2013) these categorisations of power have informed the analysis of the power relations in this research where relevant.

In all this literature about power and authority 'accountability' is a frequently ignored factor, while it has been more widely addressed in other disciplines such as leadership studies (particularly democratic leadership). Existence of accountability of leaders, i.e. to whom they are accountable, and the extent of its practice can influence exercise of power and authority in organisations (e.g. Robinson S. , 2008; Gastil, 1994). Robinson (2008) argues that accountability might be towards a higher position with rewards and punishments (external force), or it might be out of love and care for a higher source such as God or a person. Robinson (2008) explains that this love and accountability can create

- 
- Make me feel like he/she approves of me.
  - Make me feel personally accepted.
  - Make me feel important.
  - 3. Reward Power (depends on A's ability to provide rewards for B)
    - Increase my pay level.
    - Influence my getting a pay raise.
    - Provide me with special benefits.
    - Influence my getting a promotion.
  - 4. Coercive Power (based on B's perception that A can impose penalties for non-compliance)
    - Give me undesirable job assignments.
    - Make my work difficult for me.
    - Make things unpleasant here.
    - Make being at work distasteful.
  - 5. Legitimate Power (based on internalization of common norms and values)
    - Make me feel that I have commitments to meet.
    - Make me feel like I should satisfy my job requirements.
    - Give me the feeling I have responsibilities to fulfil.
    - Make me recognize that I have tasks to accomplish. (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989)

internal responsibility in the members to desire to fulfil their tasks in order to achieve or maintain that love or satisfaction of that source. This is further explored in the discussion of analysis on the results of this research.

In contemporary organisations, '*organisational culture*' has also been hypothesised as a form of control and exertion of power, similar to the third dimension of power as Lukes (2005) argues, relating to power through manipulation. Kunda (2009) through his case study research characterises the contemporary high-tech organisations with flexible structure, even vague at some points, and flexible working environment. He says that flexible work environments and strong cultures in organisations are contemporary means of control. He (Kunda, 2009) refers to Etzioni's claim for the use of culture as *normative control*, in directing required efforts of members by controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, feelings and their actions. Kunda (2009) explains that a strong corporate culture shapes employees' selves in the corporate image, where hard work is no longer enough and the corporation requires people's soul, or at least identity; which is observable as the employees in such organisations express a sense of 'family' at the workplace. Thus Kunda (2009) argues that *normative control* manipulates individuals' personal and emotional life in the same way as Bureaucracy seizes freedom and rationality of individuals (Kunda, 2009).

Similarly, in research on bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy, Grey (2007) examines the impact of power and hierarchy on organisations. In bureaucratic management Grey (2007) suggests a highly hierarchal structure is in place, with commands and control to be asserted top-down. There is conflict of interest and the organisation tries to minimise it (Unitarist approach). In post-modern organisations however, control is not the main concern, and motivation, trust, empowerment, and shared responsibility are valued (Grey, 2007).

Both bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy have been criticised by the critical approach. Bureaucracy has been questioned for being dehumanising, and post-bureaucracy has been criticised for being an extension of control (e.g. King & Lawley, 2013). Here, post-bureaucratic organisations have been accused of using flexibility in order to (assert influence and) promote creativity, innovation, and rapid response from their workers

(King & Lawley, 2013, p. 95). This refers to the normative power as addressed by Kunda (2009) or legitimate power as Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) expound.

Furthermore, this normative power resembles Lukes' (2005) exertion of 'influence on people', as shown in his map of power (Figure 2-1). There, Lukes (2005) magnifies the role of 'conflict of interest' arguing that if influence is in the form of encouragement, inducement, and persuasion, but 'without conflict of interest', then it is not an exercise of power, but he finds manipulation as power.

In addition, Kunda (2009) argues that this influence through culture is in favour of employers, so it is an exercise of power. Thus, it could be concluded that if it is not only in the interest of the employers then it is not necessarily exertion of power.

On the other hand, Kunda (2009) magnifies the role of subordinates. He states that employees are not passive observers and they may 'rethink' and react. Kunda argues that the employees in his case study show acceptance and at the same time wariness and cynicism about the company's expectations. Thus, there may arise observable conflict, which is similar to Luke's (2005) argument about influence, that an individual could be mistaken but not the mass.

Here, in his study of culture as normative control Kunda (2009) investigates ideas and actions of managers as well as the response of members. This informs the empirical research of this thesis and why it employs interviews with managers as well as the employees in the selected organisations.

In his book *Engineering Culture*, Kunda (2009, pp. 50-88) analyses three sources of inscription for the organisational ideology (culture). He identifies them as direct voice of managerial ideology (leadership), the voice of expert authority (staff) and the voice of objective authority (watchers, which refers to the documents produced by outsiders about the company). He investigates articulation of corporate values, objectives, and culture to formulate organisational ideology. Similarly, for the purpose of this research, along with the interviews with the managers and the employees, the organisational values as addressed in their websites and in their documents are also explored, as well as their organisational chart, documents about their employee assessment. These documents are explored in order to analyse the perceptions and practices of the organisation in their



employment relations.

Furthermore, in the study of power relations, Hofstede (1997) introduces a 'power distance factor', which is also influenced by national cultures, to the discussion of power relations. Based on a large-scale survey in 50 countries, Hofstede (1997) argues that large power distances could result in acceptance but also resistance, which could result in resentment and apathy. On the other hand, he explains that smaller power-distance encourages consultation and participation. This result is similar to Gastil's (1994) democratic leadership, with a reduction of authority and spread of responsibilities, delegation, and employee involvement. In Hofstede's (2017) scales, power distance in UK is 35 and in USA is 40, which indicate "*the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally*". This means that in Britain a larger proportion of people believe that inequalities should be minimised, and power should be distributed. Hofstede (2017) explores other scales such as *individualism* (the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members), *masculinity* (the fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Masculine) or liking what you do (Feminine)), *uncertainty avoidance* (the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these), *long-term orientation* (how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future), and *indulgence* (the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses) as well. For the purpose of this research the power relations as well as individualism, which were the most relevant issues in the organisational study, have been explored further. Here the scale of individualism is 89 in UK and 91 in USA. Hofstede argues that these factors of national culture influence the perceptions and behaviour of managers and employees in organisations. This was explored in the analysis of the cases for this research, two of which operated in the UK and one in USA, in order to explore whether national culture caused variations in the perceptions and practices of the participants.

This discussion of power distance and distribution of power leads to the discussion to the third factor of managerial ideology, employee involvement and participation. This topic,

having a significant role in Bahá'í scripture, is discussed in detail in the next section.

However, before discussing employee involvement, the impact of religion on the legitimisation of authority and power relations is discussed here, to inform the empirical research for this thesis and an exploration of the aspects of religion-generated power in organisations.

### **2.3.3.3 Impact of religions on legitimisation of power and approach to conflict in organisations**

Concerning the role of religions in legitimisation of authority and power relations in organisations, various studies often identify authoritative management practices and power relations. For instance, Abbott (2006) argues religious beliefs as one of the factors through which servants were expected to provide faithful service to their masters. Similarly, Jeremy (1990) explores the relationship between churches and business leaders during 1900-1960 and argues that church membership was used in order to create more obedience and commitment in workers. Non-church membership at the same time would deprive employees from certain benefits according to Jeremy (1990). Likewise, Smith (1996, p. 20) attributes “*privileged legitimacy*” (i.e. authority, legitimacy, and protection) as a resource that mainly religious organisations benefit from.

However, Bell (2006) in a study of British Industrial Mission (IM) during 1944-2004, during a period when work has been more secular, argues the role of Christian chaplains is not necessarily in the interests of the owners but as a mediator in employment relations, and often in favour of the workers. Bell explains that Industrial Mission (IM) was established in Sheffield (and later expanded globally) in 1944 under the direction of Ted Wickham, in order to, informally but regularly, visit the workplaces and evangelise workers after World War I, since after industrialisation workers' attendance at churches had declined; some of their visits were funded by the employers and some by the church (Bell, 2006). As Bell (2006, p. 332) explains, the chaplains got involved in “*technical, social and spiritual problems of the organisations*” in addition to pastoral care, and although they claimed that they were neutral, in practice they needed to take sides. The chaplains gradually found themselves as “*advocates of the working population,*

*promoting a model of industrial democracy characterised by optimistic radicalism*” (Bell, 2006, p. 336). This position resulted in major tensions between the industrial chaplains and the churches, and their access to funding declined as the churches accused IM of “*having betrayed itself to a secular culture*” (Bell, 2006, p. 336). The IMs even made use of management theories of the time to find the sources of conflict between managers and employees in order to help resolve them, but they were often not well received by the managers nor by the churches. In the 1990s, with the process of deindustrialisation and a shift from production to consumption, Bell (2006) explains that their role changed even more, and some chaplains adopted a secular professional role as counsellor or ethicist. However, this proved difficult since managers expected them to play an equivalent role to a company welfare officer in favour of the company.

The industrial missions were not involved in management of the company nor did they influence it, but they played the role of a mediator between managers and employees. They took a pluralist approach in realising the conflict of interests and attempting to address them with collaboration with unions and the involved parties. However, this role was objected to by the churches, which expected the chaplains to preach and evangelise, not to engage in employment relations in favour of working people (Bell, 2006). Industrial missions are still operating in the UK through the Industrial Mission Association (Workplace Chaplaincy, 2018).

Another influence of religion, which more directly involved in management of the companies, is the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) approach. The Quaker approach does not legitimise authority and advocates participation. It dislikes conflict, but not in terms of aligning the interests of the employees with the interests of the employers but rather to establish a democratic relationship, according to Child (1964).

Quakerism was founded by George Fox in 1652 as a reform movement that broke away from the mainstream Christianity, signifying every individual’s inner light and their capacity to understand the word of God (Cope J. , 1956). Child (1964, p. 294) considered four main facets to Quakerism: (i) a dislike of the exploitation and profit of one man at the expense of another, (ii) a traditionally puritan view of the ‘stewardship of talents’, stressing the value of hard work, lack of waste, the careful organisation of resources, and

a personal renunciation, all for the service of others, (iii) a tradition of egalitarianism and democratic relationships, and (iv) an abhorrence of conflict between men.

In its principles of business, as Child (1964, p.295) explained, Quakerism emphasised the efficient use of personal resources in service of others: “*Service, not private gain, should be the motive of all work*”. Also, specifically after World War I and the extended command and authority in large-scale factories, the question of democratic leadership significantly rose among Quakers. This was coupled with the precept of abhorrence of any conflict, and instead spread a message of brotherhood and peace (based on the individuals’ inner Light), that called for management based on kindness rather than authoritarianism. Thus Child (1964) concluded that the proper state of organisation in the Quaker approach was one of mutual goodwill and absence of conflict, and differences of authority in organisations needed to become converted into differences of function with a similarity of status.

Cadbury and Rowntree were among the organisations that established their businesses as Quaker industrial organisations. It is argued that (e.g. Dellheim, 1987; George, Okanlawon, & Owoyemi, 2012) Cadbury’s specific employment relation style made them well known as ‘*good employer*’ and created a company culture different from most companies at the time. George, Okanlawon and Owoyemi (2012, p. 145) argue that John Cadbury established the cocoa and chocolate drinks’ business partly because as a Quaker he believed that alcohol was a major cause of poverty and other social ills.

In his human relations, Bryson and Lowe (2002) say that John Cadbury would go to the factory before everyone else to turn the heaters on for the workers, and he stood out in the rain to stop the train for the workers so they could stay out of rain. Also, as chocolate factories produced a lot of dust, he built a swimming pool for the workers (George, Okanlawon, & Owoyemi, 2012). In 1900, he established the Bourneville village to accommodate workers in good housing conditions with sanitary facilities; the mortality rate there was lower than the rest of Birmingham. The firm established women’s committees to improve working conditions for women (e.g. their working hours) and the overall working hours reduced for all to 44 hours a week in 1911, when, as a norm, workers were treated a little better than slaves elsewhere (Gardiner, 1923).

However, Cadbury showed a great interest in efficiency, for instance they developed personnel management policies in 1912 for the treatment of ‘slow workers’ (Rowlinson, 1988), and they gradually employed their refined version of Taylor’s views of scientific management. Having well-established employee management policies in place, Edward Cadbury objected to the ‘task idea’ and ‘different bonus scheme’, which reduced the workers to ‘living tools’ (Rowlinson, 1988). Cadbury also objected to hostility towards trade unions and continued to support them (Rowlinson, 1988). Thus, at Cadbury the employee welfare system and a refined scientific management operated. There were certain disputes as a result of scientific management between workers and the managers, but they were resolved through unions as well as by a series of lectures for workers about efficiency (Rowlinson, 1988).

Smith, Child and Rowlinson (1990, p. 178) stated that Cadbury operated based on an ideology they called ‘Cadburysim’, “*based in part, on loose Quaker principles*” and was thus malleable, unlike Taylorism. However, how malleable it was in relation to employment relations was not clear, and the practices changed over time with the influence of new managers. For instance, based on the Security of Employment Agreement, the contracts changed, giving managers greater control over labour utilisation while the employees’ job security reduced. It also affected the seasonal workers and those without permanent contracts and created an environment of ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ workers (Smith, Child, & Rowlinson, 1990, p. 216).

In the exploration of power relations and dealing with conflict, the Quaker style in Cadbury, generally exhibited a pluralist approach, though at times a unitarist one. Although they employed scientific management, they coupled it with their employee welfare scheme, union support and their worker committees; however, they were strongly focused on efficiency, which impacted their employment relations. In addition, they often provided spaces for workers’ voice (Smith, Child, & Rowlinson, 1990), such as through the women’s committees, to influence their working conditions. Accordingly, the overall structure of Cadbury employment relations points to a pluralist approach.

However, Wagner-Tsukamoto (2008) argues that the Quaker’s attempts to implement business ethics have often failed (although it has sometimes succeeded) due to being

based on a behavioural approach to corporate morality and excluding non-Quakers. He (Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2008) argues, for the ethical behaviour to work it needs to be based on institutional business ethics informed by economics (and mainly in economic terms not moral terms).

In summary, the power relations in organisations are mostly authorised and exercised based on the rewards system, expertise, physical power relations, and the systems of values and beliefs in organisations. The power of influence and manipulation has also been discussed, which is the manipulation of people when it is not in their interest. Moreover, it was mentioned that religions have often been discussed as a source of control and legitimisation of authority of the owners, while in the attempts of the Industrial Missions, as mediators in employment relations, and in the Quaker's style of management the influence of religion was not authoritative as it was often in support of the workers; However, non-believers would be excluded from some opportunities.

The next section focuses on employee involvement as the resultant aspect of power relations in organisations, and explores the methods and approaches in employee participation, where some levels of employee involvement are accounted for.

## **2.4 Employee involvement and participation**

In the previous section, the first two aspects of the theories of management ideology, power, and authority, and dealing with conflict of interest were explored, where it pointed to policies and practices of employee involvement and the organisations displayed some extent of decentralised power relations.

This section summarises industrial democracy and different levels of employee involvement, and explores how religions have influenced employee involvement in organisations as a result of their power relations.

Accordingly, in the empirical phase, this thesis explores Bahá'í scripture in relation to work, employment relations, and the three factors of managerial ideology through scriptural study (Chapter 3), and then the perceptions and practices of the managers and employees (who explicitly or implicitly employed Bahá'í principles), of work and aspects

of employment relations, such as power relations, the potential areas of conflict and the spaces and styles of employee involvement in organisations, through empirical (case-study) research.

This section has been dealt with more extensively and in greater detail since collective decision-making appeared to be a significant aspect of both Bahá'í scripture and practice in the three cases. Since a variety of practices, environmental requirements, challenges, and outcomes in relation to collective decision-making were identified in the scriptural study and empirical research, this section provides more details in this area of knowledge in order to inform the analysis of the results of this research.

#### **2.4.1 Industrial democracy**

The discussion of employee participation starts with the theories of industrial democracy, but a brief introduction to the background democracy is required.

Democracy has been defined in various ways, with different domains for the term and its practice. The word “Democracy” in Greek is a composite of *demos*, meaning people, and *kratos*, meaning force or power. Thus, democracy in ancient Greek terminology refers to ‘the power of the people’ (Ober, 2008). Ehrenberg (1950, p. 525) concerned democracy with ‘equality’ and referred to democracy as the “*equal opportunity of having in turn a share in the government*”, for every citizen. Equality in this sense is a characteristic that has often been attributed to the concept of democracy. However, Ober (2008) argues that the term democracy in the classical terminology of fifth and fourth centuries B.C. refers to the power in the sense of ‘capacity to do things’, rather than the ‘rule of the majority’. He says “*Majority rule was an intentionally pejorative diminution, urged by democracy’s Greek critics*” (Ober, 2008, p. 2).

Ober (2008) here refers to the historical origin considered for democracy in the ancient Greece in late sixth century or early fifth century B.C. through the participation of ‘free Athens-born men’ at the ‘general assembly’ with political and administrative responsibilities, where they would freely vote on the matters that had been raised and presented before the assembly (McWhorter, 1951). However, while this general assembly

was based on equality, the equality was partial since it excluded women, freemen born anywhere other than Athens, and slaves. Thus, the general assembly only included 1/10 to 1/5 of the population of Athens at the time (Rothchild, 2007).

Also, Christ (2008) argues that Solon did not perceive the demos (people – referring to the whole population) as fit to rule and did not consider any position of power or control for them. Similarly, Sartori (1987, p. 206) focused on how power was legitimised and did not necessitate majority rule for democracy. He described democracy as “*a system that hinges on the principle that no one can proclaim himself a ruler; that no one can hold power irrevocably in his own name*”; and “*the democratic axiom is that man’s power over man can only be granted by others – and this always and only on a revocable basis*”. In this definition of democracy, a sole source of authority is considered legitimate provided that this power is granted by the general public<sup>18</sup>.

This type of democracy has been labelled as indirect or representative democracy and is presumed to overcome the fallacies of direct democracy. For instance, Urbinati (2011) believes that representative democracy conveys the complexity and richness of the political order of the modern age.

Similarly, most of the literature about industrial democracy focuses on representative democracy through union representation and shop stewards (and is often pluralistic). However, in practice, despite what is commonly assumed, industrial democracy in countries such as the United States did not start with Union movements and representation but started with direct democracy. In the 1860s William Sylvis, of the Iron Molders Union (in the United States), advocated worker ownership of factories. Workers purchased shares of stock, had the right to vote, selected management, and determined major policies through group discussion (Summers, 1979, p. 29). Similarly, cooperative institutions were established and advocated by scholars and social reformers (Summers, 1979).

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<sup>18</sup> Sartori (1987) calls this type of democracy as “polyarchy”, where he introduces electoral polyarchy on one hand and selective polyarchy or meritocracy on the other. By electoral polyarchy he refers to free, recurrent, and competitive elections to select the competent leaders based on selective polyarchy. He then defines meritocracy as equal recognition to equal merit.



Sylvia's approaches were ultimately discarded, and the American Federation of Labour chose unionisation and labour collective bargaining power through representation. Owners, as expected, objected to it, claiming workers' voice in management to be a violation of the property right of owners, and courts enforced owners' claims and thus striking and picketing were declared illegal (Summers, 1979).

It was in 1935 then, that the National Labour Relations Act declared the employees' right to joining or self-organisation of labour organisations and/or concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection; however, it was widely rejected in practice by the employers (Summers, 1979).

In Britain, Timperley (1969) suggested, the idea of worker participation in management started with the ideas of early socialists. Robert Owen set up a co-operative production unit, with employees' partnership, and published his views in the 'New view of Society' in 1818. This, and similar attempts, developed into the formulation of the idea of workers' control and self-governance, but it gradually moved away from 'worker control' to 'joint participation or joint consultation' (Timperley, 1969, p. 85).

In 1917, in a more formal manner, the Whitley Committee recommended establishment of National Joint Councils, District Councils and Joint Works Committees in each industry; these flourished just after the World War II in the form of Joint Consultative Councils in nationalised industries with the presence of Board representatives and Trade Union representatives. However, by the mid-1970s joint consultation was mainly of interest in terms of negotiation power rather than joint consultation (e.g. Armstrong, 1983; Langan-Fox, Code, Gray, & Langfield-Smith, 2002).

Beyond negotiation power, Glacier Metal's attempted a legislative system of councils made up of representatives of management and groups of employees: the shop committees, the work committees, and the work council (Timperley, 1969). John Lewis Partnership was another version of this, with the employees all partners in trust, having a share on the profits and with committee and representative bodies, and three trustees (nominated by representatives of the chairman and the employees) to have voting control; although in practice, autocratic rule could be acceptable (Timperley, 1969). Another attempt was 'Worker directors' in British Steel Corporation, with four Group Boards in

addition to the main Board, with six part-time directors each, three of which were employees drawn from all levels from shop floor and middle management, appointed by the chairman (Timpereley, 1969).

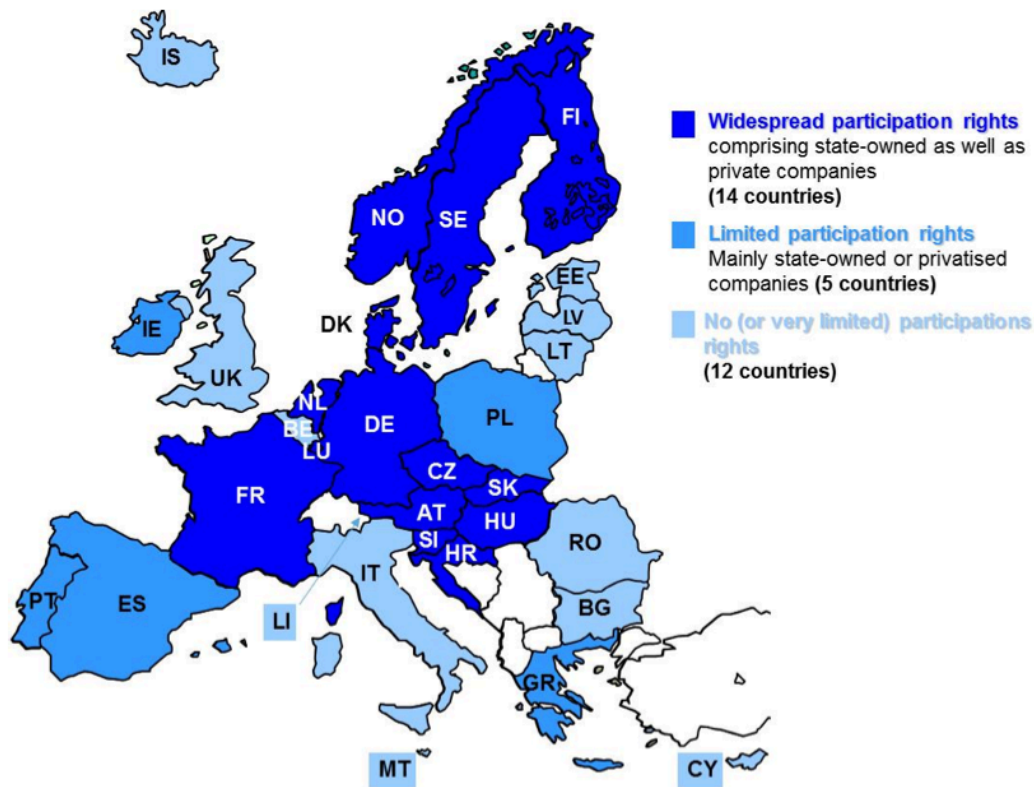
McGaughey (2014) argues that in Britain codetermination has had strong opposition, and although pushed forward by Bullock Report it has struggled to be translated into action, although Britain was probably the first country to introduce a law on some form of codetermination in 1896 or 1908. But why it has not been widely practised in Britain, McGaughey (2014, p. 2) argues, is due to considerations of efficiency by business owners, and late recognition of potential benefits of codetermination. McGaughey (2014) also raises the issue of intellectual property rights, where anything developed in the course of work belongs to the employers and labour has had no rights to its profit, even when bargaining power was at its strongest in the labour movement in UK.<sup>19</sup>

So, the attempts towards joined consultation, or ‘co-determination’ as it is called in Germany, and ‘works committees’ in France, have not been very successful in Britain. The following map based on the Trade Union Congress (TUC) report in 2013 indicates that UK is among the countries with rare participation, and industrial democracy is kept to its minimum; negotiation power, union representation and the (limited) right to strike.

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<sup>19</sup> McGaughey (2014) refers to the Workmen Act 1825 and the common law when strike was illegal, until Trade Union Act 1871 gave unions freedom from criminal law liability; and again in 1901 when House of Lords attempted to suppress strike. It was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the labour law started to form through organisation of Labour party and publication of the first labour law book by Webbs, and its education in London School of Economics. Even then after, although unions kept their legitimacy and gained more strength, the review of changes in different Acts in the British law indicate that mainly collective bargaining power survived, but not codetermination.

**Figure 2-2 Rights to worker representation at board level in the European Economic Area**  
 (Conchon, 2013, p. 14)



Thus, TUC, in their 2014 report, make recommendations for the improvement of Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) regulations in the UK (such as improving the minimum number of employees required for the information and consultation procedures to become implemented in law), as well as establishing new constitutions for works councils in law (Trade Union Congress, 2014).

In relation to theories of management ideology, industrial democracy has been practised in a pluralist approach, focused on negotiation of working conditions, as well as in a critical approach, focused on employees' rights to participation, but also at some points (e.g. British Steel Industry) with a unitarist approach, focused on employee control and commitment with introduction of flexibility and increased use of HRM techniques (Bacon, Blyton, & Morris, 1996). The variety of practices of industrial democracy have

been categorised differently<sup>20</sup>. Albrecht (1983) summarises these efforts into six major categories, as one of the most inclusive forms of categorisation: (1) *Collective Bargaining* (focused on negotiating the terms of employment); (2) *Workers' Representation on Board – Codetermination* (inclusion of representatives of labour on the board of directors); (3) *Joint Consultation and Information – Work Councils* (joint labour management committees at the enterprise level, 'consulting' about productivity, security of employment, and working conditions (employees providing input and manager making the decision)); (4) *Humanization of Work* (focused on improving working conditions at the shop floor level through new forms of work organisation as well as work environment reforms); (5) *Self-Management and Workers' Ownership* (workers control and their authority in decision-making, either directly or through their representatives); and (6) *Economic Democracy* (focused on increasing employees' decision-making power in the economy as a whole, through employees' control over capital and how it is used within the society, and the decision-making power it generates, rather than purely distribution of company profit (profit sharing schemes)).

*Self-Management and Workers' Ownership* as stated is different from Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs). In Britain, as Oliver (1990) argues, often employee ownership programs have been implemented in the form of share ownership; such as: *direct employee ownership* (using tax advantaged share plans, where employees become individual shareholders of a majority of the shares of the company, without personal rights (due to the membership to the company as is the case in co-operatives); *shares held in a Trust* (which makes it more difficult to sell to third parties, such as in John Lewis); and *a hybrid structure* (where some shares are held in a Trust and some are distributed directly to employees).

*A Co-operative* (where the company runs for the benefit of its members, employees and the customers) is a structure of shared ownership where, employees' rights are non-transferable because they are part of the benefits of working in the company. Oliver (1990) argues that democracy in co-operatives is exercised directly or through

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<sup>20</sup> McGaughey (2014, p. 5) for instance, categorizes them into three participation strategies – Shares, Bargaining and Codetermination – lying between the two poles of influence shared between 'capital' and 'labour'.

representatives. *Social enterprise* is another form of shared ownership, mostly adopted by non-for-profit organisations, in order to serve the community.

However, McGaughey (2014) argues that often the shared ownership programs do not secure employee participation rights. He (McGaughey, 2014) describes the share scheme as a strategy that aims for aligning the interests of the employees and shareholders to promote productivity and reduce conflict of interest (a unitarist approach). The UK's Nuttall review of employee ownership (in 2012) calls it a 'sharing success' but, as McGaughey (2014) argues, it does not leave room for diversification to hedge against risk of investment for employees and if the company goes bankrupt then employees will lose everything, as was the case for Enron. Also, it increases systematic economic risk for the company, since the losses become concentrated in local communities and workforces, whereas otherwise employees' funds could be a rescue option in times of trouble (McGaughey, 2014). Another argument is, Albrecht (1983), that often employee shares carried no voice or even if they did they would not result in any significant voice. Thus, McGaughey (2014) argues that employee shareholding schemes should not be treated as workplace participation but employees becoming third class shareholders with no real voice and no diversification.

In summary, a historical review of the practice of industrial democracy shows variations between employee share ownership (mostly with no voice) and employee participation (influence, control) in decision-making (McGaughey, 2014). However, prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century the decision-making mostly refers to 'negotiation power' over terms of employment, then it entered the spheres of decision-making in a larger scale (Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995; Langan-Fox, Code, Gray, & Langfield-Smith, 2002), and employee participation was more effectively exploited.

#### **2.4.2 Employee participation in decision-making**

Employee participation is the third aspect of theories of management ideology, which explores how the power relations in organisations allow for employees' pursuit of their interests and participation in the decisions of organisation. This factor is a significant aspect of this research since it forms an emphasised aspect of '*work in the spirit of*

*service*’ based on Bahá’í scripture, and it has been frequently mentioned and elaborated in the interviews and focus group discussions in the empirical research. Accordingly, it has been reviewed more extensively in this literature review.

Glew et al. (1995) say that the argument for ‘employee participation’ started in 1913 in Hugo Musterberg’s *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency*, where he stressed the benefits of collaboration between management and labour, and it expanded thereafter through other researchers. The debates on, and practices of, “*empowerment, work teams and flattened organisation design*” in the 1990s expanded the scope of participation (Glew, O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995, p. 396).

The HRM literature explores industrial democracy and employee participation separately. For instance, Beardwell and Claydon (2007), discussing the various exercises of industrial democracy such as worker directors and co-determination, argue that participation in decision-making is different from industrial democracy and variably defined ‘consultation’.

Marchington, et. al. (2016, p. 312) refer to ‘employee involvement’ and participation (EIP) as a more recent concern following the “*reduced union power and an anti-corporatist Thatcher government*” in 1980s. They highlight the role of HR managers in the choice of EIP practices. Their choice of whether or not give workers a say and which EIP mechanisms to utilise might be influenced by employee expectations, “*particularly when faced with tight labour market*”, or their own understanding of corporate objectives. “*In smaller family-run enterprises*” their choices “*often relates to personal styles and characteristics of owner-managers*” (Marchington, Wilkinson, Donnel, & Kynighou, 2016, p. 314).

Glew et al. (1995, p. 402) on the other hand, define ‘participation’ as: “*a conscious and intended effort by individuals at a higher level in an organisation to provide visible extra-role or role expanding opportunities (not the ordinary expected cooperative behavior within a job) for individuals or groups at a lower level in the organisation to have a greater voice in one or more areas of organisational performance*”. They refer to a higher level as a hierarchical level of influence (vertical), but also expand it to individuals’ legitimising power and authority over one another (horizontal). This

definition focuses on the effort of managers to provide opportunities for participation for the employees and inclusion of their voice. Beardwell and Claydon (2007) describe 'participation' as employee (or unions) led as opposed to being employer led (as is employee 'involvement'), and as opposed to employee involvement, is focused on increasing employees' (or unions') influence, such as joint decision-making or co-determination. However, the HRM literature does not focus on direct participation, but it recognises indirect participation through unions or board membership as a form of participation as well (e.g. Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

Bass and Bass (2009) consider a stronger role for the employees and articulate participation in terms of employees' 'control' over their jobs. They state that in bureaucratic organisations, hierarchical structures are considered as organisation's biological solution and natural distribution of power, and therefore discourage power generated by motivation of employees (i.e. organisational bases rather than personal ones)<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, post-bureaucratic organisations valuing human relations recognise the importance of informal trusting relationships, rather than a formal structure; thus, consider that the more control workers have over their jobs, the more interested, proud and innovation-concerned they are about their jobs (Bass & Bass, 2009; Patchen, 1970; McCurdy & Eber, 1953); and in absence of participation and control over their job, individuals motivated by autonomy and self-actualisation show frustration with bureaucratic management (e.g. Argyris, 1957; McGregor, 1960).

Cotton et al. (1988), in their widely-quoted research, focused on participation in decision-making and its impact on 'satisfaction' and 'performance'. However, they (Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988) stated that involvement may differ depending on the content of the decisions: Routine personnel function (e.g. hiring, performance); Work itself (e.g. task assignment, job design); Working condition (e.g. hours of work, placement of equipment); and company policies (e.g. profit sharing. Capital investment and general company policies).

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<sup>21</sup> In a similar account, Weber (2003) discussed the hierarchical ordering of authority relations and stated that in bureaucratic organisations, responsibility and authority resided in the office rather than in the person.

They (Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988) also discussed the duration of the studies as a significant parameter in determination of the impact of PDM practices. Cotton et al. (1988) in their review of the empirical studies in the field of participation and satisfaction argue that short-term studies suffer from often non-existent or negative results (which might otherwise be positive), such as less commitment, which is a determinant of short-term employment and might be identified in a short-term study. This research by Cotton et al. (1988) has been widely cited, and Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin and Van Fleet (1995) argue that the employee participation debate actually started with this review of participation literature. This is one of the two theoretical frameworks that are employed during the analysis of employee involvement in Chapter 8.

Cotton et al. (1988, p. 10) identify six forms of employee participation:

- (a) *Participation in work decisions* (formal, direct, long-term, high influence with veto right, focused on the work, how it is organized, etc., positive impact on productivity);
- (b) *Consultative participation* (long-term, formal, direct participation, focused on job issues, lesser level of employee influence-no veto or complete decision-making power, e.g. 'Scanlon plans' with monetary bonuses for productivity-enhancing suggestions and 'quality circles' focused on small groups, evidences of increased productivity);
- (c) *Short-term participation* (formal, direct, and concerned with work itself, with complete influence in the decision-making process, in the form of single laboratory sessions to few days training sessions, no significant impacts observed);
- (d) *Informal participation* (through the interpersonal relationships between managers and the subordinates, increased productivity, and job satisfaction in the few studies conducted);
- (e) *Employee ownership* (formal ownership rights, indirect participation-often run controversially, although owned by employees, managers make both daily and strategic decisions and employees influence on managerial decisions is through election of the board and stockholder meetings, decisions can cover any area, positive impact on performance, satisfaction, and motivation); and



(f) *Representative participation* – rather than the dimensions from the taxonomy (formal, indirect, and medium to low influence, participation through representatives on the work councils or board of directors, covers all areas, the power of representatives ranges from having a vote – on the board – to an advisory voice – on the work councils –, not much research on its impact on performance, mainly focused on employee control which has in fact been evidenced to be lower).

The rest of the literature recognises several types of participation on a spectrum from where employees are only informed with no say, to having some level of participation, to employees' active participation and ownership. For instance, Gifford, Neathey and Loukas (2006) identify the levels of involvement as: **Information** (downward communication); **Consultation** (upward communication); **Joint decision-making**; and **Employee control** (where manager control is considered to be minimal and there is a transfer of management duties to employees in a flexible environment).

In a similar account, Vroom (2003), in his 'Normative' model of decision-making, considers five types of decision-making processes where the leader may: **Decide** (with just getting information from employees); **Consult** (individuals) or **Consult** (groups); **Facilitate** (the discussion and decision of the groups); and **Delegate** (the problem and the decision to the employees while supporting them.). Vroom's (2003) examination of decision-making presents clear distinctions between ideal-types of decision-making, which directly relate to the purpose of this research in exploring employee involvement in decision-making. This is another framework that is employed in the analysis of employee involvement presented in Chapter 8.

There are however, some limitations attributed to group decision-making such as: 'groupthink' (where members might become more concerned with concurrence than coming to realistic carefully considered decisions according to Hensley & Griffin, 1986); lack of communication skills or biases and errors of communication (misuse or inappropriate use of existing information; overlooking of useful information; and relying on heuristics based on Forsyth, 2006).

Gastil (1994) realises the challenges of group decision-making and he explains a democratic decision-making process with an emphasis on distributing responsibility,

empowerment, and aiding deliberation to overcome these challenges. It requires education in the skills of constructive participation and deliberation. Gastil (1994) also argues that deliberation needs facilitation, maintaining healthy emotional settings and member relationships.

There is an ongoing debate on the overall impact of education on democracy and participation (e.g. Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shleifer, 2007; Acemoglu, Hohnson, Robinson, & Yared, 2005; Heyneman, 2000) where some researchers have observed a positive impact and some other have not found a meaningful correlation. However, Callan (1997, p. 172) approaches the phenomenon of education and democracy from the perspective of the citizens, where some would be indifferent to the “*questions of good or evil*” and simply concerned with the satisfaction of their desires and others would be so rigidly committed to a particular doctrine which would not allow for any dialogues with those who think differently. In other words, he (Callan, 1997, p. 172) refers to the lack of a “*shared public morality*” or what he calls political virtues, which are required to embed the core of liberal democracy in creating a “Brave New World”. Callan’s (1997) idea requires justice care, intimacy, purity, and trust among citizens as well as the political institutions, and he highlights the role of education and schooling in creating respect and tolerance.

Callan (1997) refers to the Rawls’ A Theory of Justice in 1971 and identifies ‘justice as fairness’ and necessitates ‘morality of association’. There, Rawls (1971) introduced ‘social contract theory’ and argued for justice with two main principles: firstly, equal rights for all people to enjoying the same liberties; and secondly rearrangement of certain inequalities (for instance for those in vulnerable situations) in order to provide everyone with the same advantages. The latter refers to those born with fewer assets into less favourable social positions. An example of such arrangements is considering fair preferential rights for women (e.g. flexible hours) in order to create fair and equal opportunities for them (Radical Feminist theory) (Abbott, 2006). There are arguments against Rawls’ theory of justice, for instance by Pettit (1974), where he questioned the ability of this theory to establish a universal justice being based on socially specific mentalities (a Western democracy as he calls it). Despite the critics however, Rawls’ theory has been widely referred to in research concerning justice and democracy (Callan, 1997).

As stated earlier, the empirical phase of this research explores in detail, the motives of the managers, their approach to and practice of employee involvement, the extent and type of decisions the employees are involved in, and the environment and characteristics of their involvement, including the moral aspects of their participation, arguments of justice, and discussions of equality.

## **2.5 Summary and conclusion**

This Chapter explored how religious precepts have influenced work and, more specifically, employment relations.

It started with a review of literature on the relationship between religion and economic relations, exploring the theory of Protestant ethics and capitalism by Weber (2003) and its critics, the theories of control characterising organisations under the influence of religion with authority, hierarchical control, and illusionary happiness for the followers/employees (e.g., Jeremy, 1990; Marx & Engels, 2008), as well as the behavioural impacts of religion on business ethics (e.g. Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Chappell, 1994; Burns, 1978; Fry, 2003; Kennedy & Lawton, 1998; Weaver & Agle, 2002; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003) or its failure in creating prevailing and perdurable business ethics (Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2008).

However, the majority of this research is theoretical, and there is little empirical research on how religions influence economic relations, and more specifically employment relations. Moreover, the impact of Bahá'í principles on employment relations have not been studied before in an academic setting, which is the main gap the present thesis focuses on addressing through empirical research.

Accordingly, this review focused on the influence of the religious precepts on the factors of employment relations, and how they influence the managers, the employees, and the environment and mechanisms they operate in. To do so, it explored different theories of ideology and how organisations might take different approaches in legitimising authority and exercising power, dealing with conflict of interest, and involving employees in decision-making.

The argument of power involved the three dimensional theory of power by Lukes (2005) and its critics, along with power relations in an organisational context in particular, such as different types of power exercised through having expertise, information or the through the common norms and organisational culture (e.g. Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989; Kunda, 2009). Moreover, it reviewed the literature exploring how religions have influenced the legitimisation of authority and dealing with conflict of interest, and how they mainly referred to hierarchy and control, (e.g., (Smith C.,1996; Jeremy, 1990; Marx & Engels, 2008), Industrial Missions (Bell, 2006) and Quaker businesses were discussed as exercises in favour of the employees (e.g. Child, 1964; Rowlinson, 1988), while there were arguments against them as well (e.g. Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2008).

How employers and employees are characterised with different interests was explored and the potential conflict of interest and the way legitimisation of authority and power would result in dealing with the latent or observable conflict (e.g. Budd & Bhave, 2008; Damadoran, 2005). Similar to the discussion of religions and power structures in organisations, many studies argue that religions have naturalised hierarchical, authoritative, management structures, where conflict has been presented as destructive and unnatural and therefore must be eradicated (e.g. Coopman & Meidlinger, 2000; Beyer & Nutzinger, 1993; McCann, 1997).

It then focused more specifically on how employees are involved in the decisions of the organisations. It explored several types of industrial democracy including union representation, and workers' representation on the board, work councils, and employee ownership; and concluded that based on the empirical research, often employees have been involved only in negotiating their working conditions rather than actually participating in decision-making in organisations. Then, based on the literature on employee participation in decision-making this chapter highlighted that employee involvement in decision-making varies from providing input to taking ownership of the decisions.

The aim of this thesis is to explore work and employment relations from the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith, through scriptural study of Bahá'í scripture and an empirical case study research exploring the practice of those precepts. This research aims to explore the

approach of the Bahá'í Faith, which has not been studied before, exploring how business owners and the employees perceive and practice such principles, what limitations and challenges they face, and what outcomes they attribute to their practice.

Moreover, this chapter informs the themes for the scriptural study and the empirical research, which are based on the aspects of the managerial ideology (i.e. power, conflict, and participation). Therefore, in the chapters that follow, various frames of reference or managerial ideologies are not examined any further, but they merely inform the main aspects of employment relations to be focused on. Accordingly, at the next stage of this research, power, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement are explored and findings related to these issues are presented.

The chapter that follows presents the results of the scriptural study and the concepts and the approach developed based on interpretation of Bahá'í scripture.

Then it elaborates the methodology that this research employs to fulfil its objectives and introduces the companies that are explored during the fieldwork. This thesis will then present the primary research and its findings in the chapters that follow.

### 3 Scriptural study – Study of Bahá'í Scripture

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the approach of Bahá'í scripture to work and employment relations. It aims to answer the following questions from the standpoint of Bahá'í scriptures in order to carry out research in the field of employment relations that has not been conducted before.

It explores:

- *How is work identified in Bahá'í scripture, and what are the specific characteristics of 'work in the spirit of service'?*
- *Where do the Bahá'í principles stand with regard to authority, conflict and involvement? What are the characteristics of the 'collective decision-making' addressed in the Bahá'í principles? To what extent is this 'collective decision-making' similar to and different from the existing theories of participation/decision-making?*

In the view of the fact that the Bahá'í Faith is a contemporary religion, there has been a large volume of scripture written down by the founder of the Faith, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), his son and successor 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), and 'Abdu'l-Bahá 's grandson and successor Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957). They are the only authoritative scriptural figures in the Bahá'í Faith; after them there is an elective international body, the Universal House of Justice, which is the point of reference for the unwritten issues that the Faith faces and is in charge of its administrative system and guiding the Bahá'í community.

In this chapter the approach of the Bahá'í Faith, based on the writings of these figures, is explored and the results are interpreted and discussed based on the understanding of the researcher. It starts with the overall approach of Bahá'í scripture to work and the specific principles that are related to work or service, and then explores those scriptures in relation to power, conflict, and participation.

Initially six themes generated in the study of Bahá'í scripture as the characteristics of 'work in the spirit of service' are presented in relation to existing theory where relevant. The factors of managerial ideology as legitimising authority, dealing with conflict and employee involvement, are used as the main themes for interpreting the approach of the Bahá'í precepts in the context of employment relations. This chapter concludes with a description of work in the spirit of service interpreted from the Bahá'í precepts, and the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to employment relations in terms of power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement.

It is notable here that in exploring the approach of the Bahá'í scriptures to work, the following quotation appeared to form the key question of this research: "*Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). Thus, a critical objective of this research is to describe work in the spirit of service, based on the scriptures, perceptions and practices, that relate to this phrase.

Accordingly, Chapter 5 explores how these precepts are employed in organisations that strived to apply these principles, the challenges they faced and the results they observed.

### **3.2 Work in Bahá'í scripture**

Work in Bahá'í scripture is regarded as a form of worship, similar to Christianity, Islam and Judaism (e.g. 1 Timothy 5:8, Quran 62:10). 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to work as the highest form of worship, if "*done in the spirit of service*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the main holy book of the Bahá'ís, individuals even if 'handicapped', are obliged to engage in some form of 'profession' (Baha'u'llah, 1992, p. 192), in the spirit of service. This, Bahá'u'lláh (1992, p. 192) says, is not solely for earning the financial gain and the "*utilitarian purpose but has a value in itself*" because it draws one nearer to God and the realisation of the purpose of one's existence. Therefore, inheritance of wealth does not reduce the significance of work (Baha'u'llah, 1992, p. 192).

In another quotation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1972, p. 172) elaborates on the station and characteristics of work in the Bahá'í approach and says:

*“In the Bahá’í Cause arts, sciences and **all crafts** are (counted as) worship. The man who makes a piece of notepaper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, **concentrating all his forces on perfecting it**, is giving praise to God. Briefly, **all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart** is worship, **if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity**. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, **gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race**, he is giving praise.”*

Here he (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1972, p. 172) considers arts and crafts done ‘to the best of one’s ability, ‘from the fullness of their heart’, “*prompted by the highest motives*”, ‘tenderly’, “*free from prejudice and believing in solidarity of human race*”, and ‘for the service of humanity’, as worship. This concept of work thus considers paid and unpaid work, and focuses on ‘service’ as the condition to meet the holy station of work, stating that “*this is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1972, p. 172). Considering this condition to work is specific to Bahá’í scripture, indicating that it is not work alone that is holy, but “*work done in the spirit of service*”.

In exploration of what is meant by the ‘spirit of service’ in the Bahá’í literature, there have been indications and explanations relating it to serving society and reduction of poverty, sharing profit, fairness and equality of humankind (including the equality of men and women), participation and consultation (less of a hierarchical structure) and unity. There has been also specific guidance for employees, translating the spirit of service into justice and sincerity at work. These concepts (themes) are the attributes that describe ‘work in the spirit of service’ as interpreted by the researcher. These attributes are discussed in the following sections with reference to the relevant managerial literature, in order to generate concepts that further contribute to articulation of the approach of the Bahá’í Faith to work and employment relations.



### 3.2.1 Service to society and reduction of poverty

Service plays a significant role in Bahá'í scripture in different contexts. 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls it the highest righteousness and says:

*“The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good.”* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 103)

Work in the spirit of service in this context refers to serving the general good with a pure motive, aiming to reduce poverty, ignorance and abasement. It attaches a sense of responsibility to work (not only upon the wealthy but to all who work), in serving the general good and reducing poverty. Here, 'poverty' is not seen as an isolated condition but is also connected to ignorance and abasement, which are related to social conditions rather than financial. This way of viewing poverty is not unique to the Bahá'í Faith. With a similar approach, Nolan and Whelan (1996) define poverty with material income as well as living standards and activities. Atkinson (1989) links it with living standards and citizens' right to a minimum level of resources, and Lister (2004, p. 166) summarises the two factors in an individual's 'ability to participate in society'. Amartya Sen (2001, p. 75) introduces a 'capability approach to poverty' identifying poverty with 'functionings' (referring to what one *may value doing* ranging from elementary nourishment to participation in the life of community) and 'capabilities' (referring to what one *can do*, and the range of choices open to one), which raises the issue of access and rights, and the choices people may have. Therefore, Lister (2004, p. 36) concludes that poverty needs to be understood within a wider social scientific framework concerning 'well-being', 'capabilities', 'human flourishing', 'quality of life' and 'social quality'.

Thus, in characterising work, this principle based on Bahá'í scripture has similarities with these discussions of poverty: expanding the economic context of work to social contexts and quality of life, and extending work to efforts towards improving human knowledge and understanding, dignity, and well-being (against *ignorance, abasement, and poverty*).

Moreover, Lips-Wiersma, (2011, p. 180) refers to the concept of service of the society as a consequent of the spiritual nature of human being, and argues that in the Bahá'í scripture, human beings and the entire civilisation are considered to have a spiritual nature (not purely material). Therefore he argues that the application of the wide range of principles of unity and the spiritual nature of human beings in Bahá'í scripture has implications for business and organisations in three main aspects: (1) any form of organising needs to enable individuals to take personal responsibility for their spiritual growth; (2) any form of organising needs to contribute to the prosperity of humanity as a whole; and (3) any form of organising needs to support the unity of mankind. He explores these three aspects in detail and concludes that considering the spiritual nature of human beings in management theorisation changes both the system of the organisation in the business and the role it can play in the society.

The following sections complement and elaborate the argument of service and reduction of poverty discussed here. Thus, this section has been kept brief.

### **3.2.2 Fairness and equality**

The spirit of service in the Bahá'í perspective of work also refers to fairness and equality. Here, it identifies equality with the equality of humankind ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25), and the equality of men and women ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, pp. 29-35). In terms of equality of humankind, Bahá'í scripture advocates equality while recognising the differences between people. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1998, p. 25) likens humanity to "*vari-colored flowers of one garden*", where "*each sets off and enhances the other's beauty*". Using this metaphor, he ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25) argues that differences are essential in society and he necessitates "*unity in diversity*". Equality of men and women is discussed in section 3.2.2.2.

At work the Bahá'í scripture identifies equality through access to opportunities and wellbeing for all ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 29), equal opportunities for men and women ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 249), their say in the decisions of the organisation (participation in decision-making) ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 98), and 'willingness to share' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979, pp. 43-44), in order to develop sustainable equality.

Participation in decision-making as well as the willingness to share have been discussed in connection to the context of fairness in Bahá'í scripture, and also they have been discussed independently and repeatedly in different resources. Thus, they will be explored further in detail as independent points. These discussions of equality and fairness are addressed under the following headings: Equality and fairness in distribution of wealth and in pay mechanism; Equality of men and women; Fairness through having a say - Participation in decision-making; and Ready willingness to share.

### **3.2.2.1 Equality and fairness in distribution of wealth and in pay mechanisms**

As the initial characteristic, equality in Bahá'í scripture has been addressed along with 'brotherhood' (Abdu'l-Baha, 1982). 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 29) argues that, according to 'justice' the rights of all humankind must be preserved, and this equality "*is inherent in the very nature of humanity*". This is similar to Rawls' (1971) theory of justice (independently from the Bahá'í Faith), where he identified justice with fairness, and argued that access to and distribution of wealth should be based on equality or in favour of those less advantaged in the society.

Associating equality with 'morality' is a debate that has been approached in different disciplines but has received relatively limited interest in practice. For instance, from the perspective of social policy, Rowlingson and Connor (2011) discuss inequality as an issue of deservingness. They (Rowlingson & Connor, 2011, p. 437) argue that as opposed to poverty, wealth has not often been approached as a problem, and 'deservingness' is a valuable question to be considered in social policy in assessing the wealthy. There are also arguments for a positive relationship between economic inequality and self-interested values, and the level of crime in a country (e.g. Halpern, 2001), while advocates of equality argue against such statements (e.g. Reich, 2010). For instance, Reigh (2010) argues that while in 1980s in the USA, the CEOs were paid about 40 times more than the typical workers, in 2007 they earned 350 times more. Wilkinson and Peckett (2010) argue that it is materialism that is causing social failure, an evidence of which is an increase in the wealth of the countries while there is no increase in their level of happiness and wellbeing. Thus, since increase in the wealth can no longer contribute to the quality of life they (Wilkinson & Peckett, 2010) argue that economic growth is

reaching its end. However, they argue that inequality affects peoples' mental and physical health, and their wellbeing. Thus, they (Wilkinson & Peckett, 2010, p. 232) argue "*more equal societies do better*" as "*they are more socially cohesive and have higher levels of trust which foster public-spiritedness*". Here, 'spiritedness' or equality are not connected to moral values, but to social values such as cohesiveness and trust.

Among the literature on morality is the discussion of 'moral economy', which was first highlighted by Thompson (1991), where he traced its roots to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the arguments against capitalism (Edelman, 2005). The research on moral economy has focused on various aspects such as food riots in the English countryside and market forces (Thompson, 1991), the question of security and just prices (Scott, 1976), the free rider problem and the pro-social norms (i.e. *reputation, retaliation, and segmentation*) (Bowles & Gintis, 1998), interdependence (Robertson, 1997), social goods (Arnold, 2001), and the debate over the influence of individualism in improving or eroding the ethical bases of work in cultural organisations (i.e. those that produce symbolic goods and services which gain their value from the meanings they carry (Banks, 2006). However, Götz (2015) argues that the previous studies of moral economy have been limited in their approach to assessing 'morality' and 'economy', and he calls for a focus on the construction of altruistic meaning for economic transactions as a key concept of civil society research. Accordingly, the literature of moral economy does not often deal with morality or moral values, such as equality or brotherhood discussed here, but, as Götz (2015) argues, are mainly focused on functions of economy in society and emotions that accompany this.

In Bahá'í scripture 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 29) argues that equality must function as a moral responsibility to eliminate poverty and he says: "*The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, and that everyone as far as possible, according to his position and rank, shall be comfortable*". He (Abdu'l-Baha, 1982) further elaborates that while the wealthy have their ease and comfort, the poor must have a certain level of comfort as well, as a result of the concern and efforts of the wealthy as well as just laws and just institutions (see section 3.2.5 for more detail). In this argument, the existence of different economic conditions has been considered, and

equality does not refer to equal pay or equal social condition, but it refers to preservation of every individual's right and entitlement to a comfortable and decent life. Badee, (2015) in his study of economics in a Bahá'í perspective, states that the Bahá'í scripture suggest a progressive taxation method to moderate inequality. This is similar to the tax system in many countries such as the one in Britain.

Frankfurt (1987) objects to the principles of equality, but his overall message agrees with this statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, focusing on the equality of rights and access as opposed to having equal amounts. Frankfurt (1987) argues that in distribution of economic assets morality does not mean that everyone should have *the same* but that each should have *enough*. What this concept of 'enough' entails raises a question for consideration. The concept of enough has been explored in economy, for instance by Schumacher (2011, p. 12) where, in the context of global prosperity, he asks, "*What is enough? Who can tell us?*"; and he replies certainly not economists who seek economic growth, because that is led by greed and envy, as opposed to frugality. He (2011, p. 13) elaborates that there are poor societies, which have too little, and rich societies which never say, "We have enough!" He argues that wealth generally puts great demands on limited resources and make prosperity more accessible and valuable to rich, not the poor; thus, education is required to transmit the ideas of values. Similarly, Daly (2013, p. 78) asks, "*Is there such a thing as enough in the material realm, and is 'enough' better than 'more than enough'?*" He argues that economic theory is mostly based on 'maximisation', whereas 'satisficing' should play a larger role. 'Satisficing', he states, "*means to seek enough rather than the most. The concept of enough is difficult to define*" (2013, p. 79). Daly discusses that individuals' wants are often guided by the desire to be superior to their neighbours, to have a larger income. Thus, he discusses the concept of Steady-State-Economy (SSE) as an alternative approach, which focuses on economic activities and its outcomes. However, the concept of 'enough' by both Schumacher and Daly mainly applies to the rich; whereas in the discussion of enough as a fair pay, it is the question of enough for the employees, who are often not rich. Here, enough is mostly connected to 'needs', more than 'wants' which Daly explores. However, how the pay is decided as enough, is further explored in the results of the case studies, specifically in one organisation, 'AP' (See Chapter 5).

Concerning the concept of wealth, Badee (2015) argues that Bahá'ú'lláh does not condemn wealth, based on the quote where He says: *“Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy* (Baha'u'llah, 1988, p. 35). So, in exploring what the stage of maturity means Badee argues that it is spiritual and intellectual maturity, so that the individual is able to take responsibility for himself /herself and others. However, in the same section just before mentioning attaining fulfilment and maturity Bahá'ú'lláh says: *“man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty”*. This is then what Bahá'ú'lláh calls the stage of maturity, this stage of recognition and discerning awareness when the individual distinguishes ‘good’ from ‘bad’; Bahá'ú'lláh continues that it is praiseworthy since the wealthy in that condition brings people the water of knowledge guiding to the ideal way, and to *“the straight path, and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation”*. The latter is what Badee mentions as maturity, referring to taking responsibility for serving others.

So, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá argues against accumulation of wealth in a capitalist structure while the majority live in poverty, and calls it unjust. He (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 282) writes:

*“It is, then, clear and evident that the repartition of excessive fortunes amongst a small number of individuals, while the masses are in misery, is an iniquity and an injustice. In the same way, absolute equality would be an obstacle to life, to welfare, to order and to the peace of humanity. In such a question a just medium is preferable. It lies in the capitalists being moderate in the acquisition of their profits, and in their having a consideration for the welfare of the poor and needy; that is to say, that the workmen and artisans receive a fixed and established daily wage, and have a share in the general profits of the factory.”*

In addition, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) argues that it is the role (responsibility) of laws and regulation to eliminate excessive wealth and excessive poverty and establish moderation. He (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277) then explains that, with the establishment of these

laws, either the workers should receive wages high enough that enable them to save, in order to provide them with adequate support in their days of need, or workers should receive wages that adequately support them when they are working and then receive sufficient benefits from the income of the industry when they cease work. However, this approach, while specifying the criteria for fair wage as enabling the workers to save, or to pay the workers later when they stop working (a concept similar to a pension or insurance), it does not specify, how much would be considered sufficient, or 'high enough'. This keeps it open to the employers' judgement, which could consequently result in a variety of incomes that workers may or may not find fair. The approach of the organisations to pay and fairness is explored in analysis of the case-study data to find out what practices had been employed and whether the employees found them fair. On the other hand, this quotation ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277) directs the employers to be fair, and moderate in 'their acquisition of their profit' as well. Not focusing only on the payment of salaries but also on the withdrawal of profit of the employers (involving their fair practice about themselves as well) can have an influence on the way this principle is treated. This is considered and explored in the analysis of the case-study results.

In the literature on equality and fairness, inequality in the distribution of income and wealth and the impacts on individuals and the society has been widely studied. For instance, Hyman and Brough (1975, p. 2), discussed inequality in wealth distribution and stated that by 1975 five percent of the population of Britain owned well over half of the wealth of the country, and they called for a redistribution of wealth between rich and poor. Forty years later, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) report of 2015 examined household wealth and indicated that the wealthiest 10 percent of households in England owned 45 Percent of total aggregate household wealth. The report (ONS, 2015) added that **half of households** owned only nine percent of the total aggregate household wealth. Keeping in mind that the former statistics considered individuals and the latter examined household wealth, the gap in wealth distribution reported in the past and in the present is still considerable.

Similarly, statistics regarding distribution of income indicated that the average income of the 20 percent richest households in UK in 2015 was £83,800, which is 14 times greater

than an average income of the poorest 20 percent households, being £6,100 (ONS, 2016). This statistic indicates a significant income inequality.

Moreover, Atkinson (1990; 1987) finds poverty and inequality interwoven and argues for measures in the context of justice and social welfare. Hyman and Brough (Hyman & Brough, 1975) also discussed inequality as not only in the distribution of income but also in working conditions. For instance, they (Hyman & Brough, 1975) argued that managerial or other high salary employees enjoyed greater job security and stability of earnings, more flexible hours of work, longer holidays, and more congenial working conditions. They called these ‘fringe’ benefits and ‘income hierarchies’, which they claimed were the result of variations of institutionalised power within the workplace (specifically as a result of a capitalist economy). Stanworth and Druker (2006) also referred to increased use of temporary workers from seven percent in 1990 to 16 percent in 2001, with no job security and their exclusion from pension schemes, bonuses, and company sick pay. Such fringe benefits and differences in pay, as Hyman and Brough (1975) stated, could cause conflict. Conflict and whether pay mechanisms caused conflict, are an aspect of this research that are further explored in the case-study research.

In summary, equality based on spirituality and as a moral value has been discussed as an essential aspect of justice. According to this discussion, equality as fairness does not mean absolute equality, but it might entail preferential treatment of those deprived of certain benefits. It is different from an avocation of inequality, which is often preferential towards those with greater access, benefits, social status and financial resources. Equality here is connected to consciousness and care, and the willingness to share resulted from noble human characteristics, a sense of responsibility, and the spirit of service.

### **3.2.2.2 Equality of Men and Women**

In Bahá'í scripture there is a strong emphasis on the equality of men and women. For instance, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 288) refers to men and women as two wings of humanity, where both need to be developed to enable the bird to fly. He (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 288) says: *“Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they*



*ought to be.*” Furthermore, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá elaborates on what such equality entails, as “*their equal sharing in all rights*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 249).

This concept of equality concerns equality of men and women for their rights and in opportunities for ‘acquisition of virtues and perfection’. In management research, while inequality has been mostly discussed in the context of pay, there are also references to discrimination in the selection process (e.g. Nacoste, 1987), flexible working conditions (e.g. Scandura & Lankau, 1997; Rogier & Padgett, 2004), women occupying lower level management positions (Powell G. N., 2019) and their underrepresentation in senior leadership positions due to the embedded mechanism in organisational structures that does not find women as suitable for senior leadership positions as men (Seo, Huang, & Han, 2017), and inadequacy of the Equal Opportunities (EO) model, which may exclude characteristics, values, goals and concerns more typically associated with women through gender-neutral organisational practices; instead of moving away from evaluating ‘sameness’ or ‘differences’ of women from men and focusing on understanding the ‘gendered nature of organisational positions, structures and practices’ (Rubin, 1997, p. 24).

The gender pay gap, as the most commonly discussed issue of gender equality, has been measured since the 1970s in the UK, and the recent time series is available from 1997, when the gender pay gap was recorded at 27.5 percent (ONS, 2016). In 2015, however, it has decreased to 19.2 percent (ONS, 2016), although this still indicates a large gap between men’s and women’s income.

In exploration of the reasons for this gap, employment discrimination and their different productivity levels have been mentioned. For instance, it has been argued that the pay gap is due to women being the primary carer, which has limited their work experience and progression (e.g. Lips, 2013; Anderson, Forth, Metcalf, & Kirby, 2001). Some studies also differentiate between the triggers for the demand and supply sides of the gap, where the demand side of the gap is caused by discrimination in occupational sex segregation, and the supply side of the gap is caused by perceived and actual characteristics of men and women, where women exhibit lower self-pay expectations than men (e.g. Jackson, Gardner, & Sullivan, 1992; Jackson & Grabski, 1988). Some studies also claim that there

are productivity differences between the sexes, caused by differences in their human capital, and argue that these differences represent a rational cause of the pay gap (e.g. Polachek, 1981; Blau, 1996).

Discrimination against women at work is still persistent (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009) and goes beyond the employment and pay gap, and expands to discriminatory firing, promotional discrimination (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009), autonomy at work (Sangappa & Kavle, 2010), conditional discrimination based on perceptions (such as less hiring opportunities for women with motorcycle driving licence) (Duguet, Parquet, & L'Horty, 2018) or lower demand for women in 'masculine' jobs (Zellner, 1972), and social benefits (Mansouri, 2012). There has been some effort to reduce discrimination against women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 by the General Assembly of the United Nations through in order to prohibit discrimination against women; or the UN human rights treaties but the enforcement mechanisms for CEDAW are considered weak (Meron, 1990). However, Englehart and Miller (2011) argue that despite the weak enforcement, CEDAW has displayed positive effects on women's rights, but it must also be taken to account that women's rights are deeply ingrained in cultural systems that are difficult to change, and thus domestic dynamics are required to effectively eliminate discrimination against women.

Accordingly, Rubin (1997) argues that the discourse of gender equality is mostly based on the argument of the 'sameness' of men and women and dominance of the liberal model of EO (Equal Opportunities), which promotes removal of biases and prejudices from rational organisational processes in order to create fair competition among individuals. This has resulted in formalised selection and other organisational processes, which, for instance, refrain from sex-differentiated treatment in the selection process. Similarly, organisational structures are considered as objective and neutral and management positions are considered as 'objectively specifiable categories of work', which has resulted in women being considered as suitable for lower pay and lower levels of management due to their domestic responsibilities. Rubin (1997) argues that the main problem of equal opportunities model in gender equality is in idealising how men and

women may compete equally. Because the organisational structures are implicitly gendered and male, women may need to avoid presenting themselves as different or “*to express interests or concerns, which diverge from existing occupational norms in order to avoid bringing gender into what is otherwise viewed (incorrectly) as a gender-neutral environment*” (Rubin, 1997, p. 31). Therefore, Rubin (1997) argues that in order to improve women’s chances in life it is not enough to acknowledge their differences with men (whether those that are socially accepted, such as their role towards children, or their physical and emotional differences), but also to recognise the differences between women. Consequently she argues that it is essential to recognise the existing processes of gender and power in the everyday life in organisations and move “*away from a superficial attempt to banish gender in pursuit of sameness, towards an acceptance of diversity*” (Rubin, 1997, p. 32).

Similarly, Valdez (2017, p. 19) in her research on Bahá’í history and principles about equality of men and women argues that inequality is rooted in current cultural and social systems, and suggests that “*equality must be manifested as a social reality and as an indispensable element in the creation of a peaceful world*”. Here, she extends the scope of equality of men and women to the world peace, as a force the absence of which has had a negative influence on the structures and attempts towards world peace.

### **3.2.2.3 Fairness through having a say - participation in decision-making**

Here, equality and fairness are addressed through participation of all in making decisions. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá calls upon “*the members of each profession*” and “*those in industry*”, to consult upon all matters, similar to members of a village consulting and making the decisions together (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1991, p. 98), as opposed to limiting decision-making to the elders of the village or to the managers of a business. The aspects of participation in decision-making in relation to the relevant literature are explored in detail in sections 3.2.3 and 3.3.3.

#### 3.2.2.4 Equality through ready willingness to share

‘Abdu'l-Bahá further explains that equality requires a willingness to share. He (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979, pp. 43-44) says:

*“But in the divine teachings equality is brought about through a ready willingness to share. It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor. This equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind.”*

Here, equality is dependent on the consciousness and willingness of individuals, and especially the rich, to share and care for those in need. In this sense equality is expected to generate from translation of noble attributes of human being in their action. Morality has been discussed in business ethics’ research and leadership studies such as: virtue ethics (Mellahi, Morrell, & Wood, 2010, p. 21); corporate morality (Hoffman, Frederick, & Schwartz, 2014); corporate social responsibility (Joyner & Payne, 2002; Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Carrol, 1991); servant leadership (Russell, 2001); values in leadership (Snyder, Dowd, & Houghton, 2010); and ethical leadership (Sama & Shoaf, 2008). However, many other scholars argue against the discussion of morality in corporate context for reasons such as impracticality (e.g. Lambert, 2016), or immeasurability (e.g. Korhenon, 2003).

On the other hand, some researchers discuss the interplay between morality and self-interest in individual’s moral choices, and even including the wider public good (e.g. Jordan, 1989; Scheffler, 1992). For instance, Scheffler (1992) argues that although conflict may arise between morality and self-interest, but effective moral motivations have sources deep within the self, through which morally motivated individuals try to shape their own interest in a way that avoids conflict with their morality. Therefore, he (Scheffler, 1992) states that morality motivated choices and behaviours are quite practical. However, in management literature morality has not been discussed as a component of sharing (e.g. in the employee share ownership plans, or in the context of profit-sharing), equality, or employment relations.

To summarise the discussion of fairness and equality in Bahá'í scripture, work in the spirit of service has been connected to the incorporation of 'equality and fairness'. Equality and fairness have been addressed through fair access to wealth for all, equal rights of men and women, having a say in decisions of the organisation and through willingness of the wealthy to share and care for the poor.

### 3.2.3 Participation and consultation

Consultation has a special position in Bahá'í scripture and it has been widely written about and debated, (e.g. Bahá'u'lláh, 1991, p. 93; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 97; ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, pp. 72-73). Due to its significance to this thesis and the fieldwork that follows, this theme has been discussed extensively here. However, since the literature on employee involvement and participation will be explored in the next section, this section mainly addresses Bahá'í scripture in this field and will leave the relevant literature to the next section.

In Bahá'í literature consultation is strongly emphasised. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh states that divine wisdom depends on "*consultation and compassion*", and "*no welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation*" (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 93). Establishing consultation with compassion stresses a concern for a particular environment for consultation. This will be elaborated further in this section.

Regarding the areas for consultation, Bahá'ís are advised to consult on all matters ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982) "*whether major or minor*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 97). Consultation is regarded as a way to bring forth the light of awareness and certitude (Baha'u'llah, 1991), the shining spark of truth<sup>22 23</sup> (e.g. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87) ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, pp. 72-73)), unity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976) and wellbeing (Bahá'u'lláh, 1991).

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<sup>22</sup> "*The shining spark of truth comes forth after the clash of differing opinions.*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p.87)

<sup>23</sup> "*The purpose is to emphasize the statement that consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth.*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of the Universal Peace, 1982, p.73)

Unity plays a significant role in the process of consultation. Bahá'í scripture extols 'Unity in diversity' and compares it to the variety of flowers in a garden, that each one "*sets off and enhances the other's beauty*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25).

Furthermore, unity and harmony in carrying out the decision of the group, plays a central role in the process of Bahá'í consultation, because it is believed that unity can provide the fertile environment for leading to the right decision ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976). It is even preferred for a group to agree on a decision that some think might be wrong while unity and concord is preserved, than if they come to a 'right' decision in "*dissension*" and ruin ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 95). It is because the unity "*will offset any deficiency, and will eventually lead to the righting of the wrong*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 95), and "*it is in unity the truth will be revealed*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 411).

To create such environment, some qualities or pre-requisites have been mentioned for the participants in the process of consultation. Among the primary pre-requisites to Bahá'í consultation are: utmost love, harmony and sincerity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 97), serenity, calmness and composure ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 72), utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 88), and purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment, attraction, humility, patience, servitude ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87). Such an environment has not been studied much in other types of group decision-making. Exploring consultation and group decision-making constitutes a major part of the empirical phase of this study.

### **Participation and consultation in its own administration**

The administrative structure of the Bahá'í Faith is based on representation, and comprises local Spiritual Assemblies (in every locality), national Spiritual Assemblies (one in each country), and the Universal House of Justice as the highest body of Bahá'í administration in an international level (Effendi, 1983). All three bodies come into place through election, the first two elected by Bahá'ís annually and the Universal House of Justice elected every five years by the members of all National Assemblies (Effendi, 2000). The Bahá'ís freely elect nine members for each above-mentioned institute from among all the Bahá'ís in that relevant jurisdiction, with no nominations (as this is considered to be

detrimental to the spiritual characteristics of Bahá'í consultation and would lead to corruption and partisanship (Effendi, 1983, p. 10)), no campaigning (Effendi, 1983, p. 445), and no voting coalitions or parties (Effendi, 2000).

In 'representation', the members of these bodies are required to consult the members of the community in the matters they decide about and reflect the opinions of their community in their consultations. Shoghi Effendi (Effendi, 1991, p. 52) addresses the members of the spiritual assemblies and says: "*Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent*".

On the other hand, the Bahá'ís' direct participation in decision-making is exercised through the 'consultation section' of their regular meeting, 'the Feast' (once in every 19 days), where all members of the community may share their opinions and make recommendations for their community and share their concerns and suggestions about the wider community, with their local Spiritual Assembly (The Universal House of Justice, 1992, p. 202).

In brief, work in the spirit of service as described in Bahá'í scripture requires both 'consultation' and participation. In its own administrative system both direct and indirect participation in decision-making are addressed, in a frank, loving and humble environment.

### **3.2.4 Profit sharing**

In Bahá'í scripture one of the methods to utilise fair pay to workers will be through sharing part of the profit of the company with workers ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 282). 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1990) highlights the significant role of laws and regulations in securing profits and advantages for the employees in order to provide for their future in retirement, or when they are unable to work.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 282) says:

*"Therefore, laws and regulations should be established which would permit the workmen to receive from the factory owner their wages and a share in*

*the fourth or the fifth part of the profits, according to the wants of the factory; or in some other way the body of workmen and the manufacturers should share equitably the profits and advantages”*

Here, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1976) further argues that, in the same way that the owners have a right to direction and administration of the factory, the workers provide the work and they have the right to receive adequate wages along with pensions when they can no longer work.

Moreover, this sharing requires the ‘willingness’ of employers rather than an obligation in order to establish equality. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1979, pp. 43-44) signifies this ‘willingness’ as a requirement in establishing equality.

In management literature, there has been a growing interest in research on profit sharing and related pay structures. Profit sharing has often been discussed in terms of increasing productivity (e.g. Weitzman & Kruse, 1996; Fitzroy & Kornelius, 1987; Cable & Wilson, 1989; Ohkusa & Ohtake, 1997). Some other studies discuss profit sharing in relation to economic stability and decrease of unemployment (through wages being a responsive to economic conditions (e.g. Weitzman M. L., 1987; Fung, 1989).

There are also arguments concerning profit sharing with partnership and employee share ownership (e.g. Levin & Tadelis, 2005; Farooq, 2007; Estrin, Grout, & Wadhvani, 1987; Bradley & Estrin, 1992), that expands the argument to employee share ownership and its impact. However, share ownership does not necessarily involve rights to organisation’s decisions for the employees and could still be in favour of the managers in this respect (Cathcart, 2014).

In summary, another concept related to work in the spirit of service is sharing the profit with the employees out of care and willingness, and with the purpose of developing justice and equality. However, sharing the profit as ‘Abdul-Baha (1976, p. 282) recommends is as high as a fourth or fifth of the profit of the company (whether this will be on gross or net profit is unclear), although it mentions according to the wants of the company), as well as the necessity of the ‘willingness’ and ‘lofty characteristics’ of the owners of capital to result in sharing the profit with the workers. This raises the question as how widely this principle would be applicable? Would it be only the believers in the



Bahá'í principles who would apply it? Would all the believers apply this or is it voluntary?

Although it is worth considering that this principle is part of the attributes of work in the spirit of service, and, as explained further, represents one aspect of a system that these principles suggest that could potentially improve the condition of workers if applied in practice.

### **3.2.5 Government and the law - The Role of the State**

In the Bahá'í precepts, there is a wide discussion concerning just (fair) laws and regulations. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh in *The Summons of The Lord of Hosts (Suriy-i-Muluk)* has written certain letters addressed to the monarch and leaders of the world addressing principles of justice and social welfare. An example of which is Bahá'u'lláh's letter to Queen Victoria (of Great Britain), commending the British government for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, as well as having '*entrusted the reins of counsel into the hands of the people*' (parliamentary governance) (Baha'u'llah, 2002, pp. 131-141). Then, He (Baha'u'llah, 2002, pp. 131-141) called upon members of parliament in Britain and other countries to undertake the reform of world society in order to cure its various ills.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 283) further elaborates the role of "*just and impartial laws*" in securing the mutual rights of associated parties in employment relations.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 283) argues that, if one of the two parties would violate these laws, the "*the courts of justice*" would have to judge the situation and fine the party in violation. Regarding the intervention of the government, he ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 283) further elaborates that employer-employee conflict is not purely the matter of private parties; rather it involves public rights and benefits, and in the case of conflict, the general mass could be affected.

Moreover, he ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 283) raises the issue of strikes, which are often a result of "*the excessive vexations of the workmen*", and cause troubles in the country; and therefore require extensive consideration.

There, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982) necessitates the effective role of just law as well as courts of justice in order to secure the rights of the masses. Furthermore, he (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 238) states that the Bahá’í approach towards a better social order necessitates allegiance to just legislation and just governments, and excludes force and violence. He (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 238) also states that regulations are essential for protection of administration, rights, and welfare of the commonwealth. Here, he (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 238) argues that each aspect of the institution of the society has its own role in establishing a just system. There, laws are required to be “*just and impartial*”, and thus when required, “*the socialists may justly demand human rights but without resort to force and violence*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 238). The role of the governments is to “*enact these laws, establishing just legislation and economics in order that all humanity may enjoy a full measure of welfare and privilege*” through “*legal protection and procedure*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 238). He (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 238) further emphasizes the essential role of just laws in sustainably establishing the rights of individuals as opposed to the limited effect of strikes, and he concludes that “*Rightful privilege and demand must be set forth in laws and regulations*”.

To have just regulations, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argues the need for a collective approach, and calls for a united effort by all the governments of the world to gather in an assembly and set or refine the regulations in order to create moderation and sustainability in social order (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1991). He (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1991, p. 343) says:

*“The question of socialization is very important. It will not be solved by strikes for wages. All the governments of the world must be united and organize an assembly the members of which should be elected from the parliaments and the nobles of the nations. These must plan with utmost wisdom and power so that neither the capitalist suffer from enormous losses nor the laborers become needy. In the utmost moderation they should make the law; then announce to the public that the rights of the working people are to be strongly preserved.”* (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Compilations, Bahá’í Scriptures*, p. 343)

This quotation calls for the establishment of an institution having members from all the nations, with equal rights, with their members elected from the ‘nobles’ from their nations, united together to set the laws that all of them (all the nations) would follow; which while it strongly preserves the rights of the workers, is moderate and fair toward owners of the capital as well.

However, considering that strikes are legal in Britain, the British National Spiritual Assembly (the national level administration body of the Bahá’í Faith) wrote to Shoghi Effendi (‘Abdu’l-Bahá successor and his grandson), asking whether the Bahá’ís of Britain could participate in strikes, as they are legal when called by Trade Unions. They further explain that, although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discourages strikes, in such circumstances the Bahá’í teachings neither requires nor forbids an individual to strike but leaves him free to decide for himself in the circumstances of his case. Thus, they enquire what the proper course of action would be. Shoghi Effendi’s secretary replied on his behalf in a letter dated July 11, 1956, as follows:

*“As regard strikes, the Guardian (Shoghi Effendi) feels that your own understanding of the matter as expressed in your letter is quite correct (the researcher: that it is left to the decision of individuals as it is legal in England), and he does not see the necessity of adding anything to it. We should avoid becoming rigid and laying down any more rules and regulations of conduct.”*  
(Effendi, 1983, p. 626)

Here, Shoghi Effendi, although an authoritative Bahá’í figure, avoids setting rigid regulations of conduct and leaves it to the collective understanding and decision, which further follows the pattern of decision making as discussed earlier. However, whether leaving it to collective understanding and judgment of people could result in misuse of their liberation or not, is a question that only the passage of time can unfold.

In brief, the concept of work in the spirit of service involves the role of just and impartial laws and regulation, the role of the governments to enact those laws and safeguard the rights of all individuals, and the courts of justice to resolve the disputes justly.

### 3.2.6 Justice and sincerity at work – Workers’ Role

Here the spirit of service is addressed from the standpoint of the employees. It is not only the responsibility of managers to work in the spirit of service, but employees are also advised to operate in the same manner. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (Abdu'l-Baha, 1923, p. 168) elaborating on the concept of work-as-worship, discusses the responsibility of the workers and argues, *“that a laborer who works with justice and sincerity is as though engaged in prayer.”*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1976, p. 283) further explains that while managers are advised to be fair and considerate of the employees’ welfare, and the customs and laws are required to be just and impartial, the workers are advised against striking and are directed to be ‘obedient’.

Evaluating the causes of strikes, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1990) argues that they appear to mostly occur due to two causes: either the greed of the manufacturers and industrialists, or the greed of the workers; and these both need to be remedied. However, he (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277) continues on to say that the principal problem rests beyond these two causes:

*“But the principal cause of these difficulties lies in the laws of the present civilization; for they lead to a small number of individuals accumulating incomparable fortunes, beyond their needs, while the greater number remain destitute, stripped and in the greatest misery. This is contrary to justice, to humanity, to equity; it is the height of iniquity, the opposite to what causes divine satisfaction.”*

Thus, to solve the conflict among the employers and the employees, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1976, p. 282) discusses the fair distribution of wealth, where employees receive either a share from the profit of the company or they are paid high enough that they can save for their time of need. In addition, he calls upon the owners of capital to be fair and moderate in withdrawing from profit of the company, out of noble characteristics and responsibility and a willingness to share (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976, p. 282), and advises refinement to the

laws and regulations that would give “*moderate profits to manufacturers, and to workmen the necessary means of existence and security for the future*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277). Then, if the conflict arises ‘Abdu’l-Bahá considers a role for the government to interfere and resolve the issue (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976, p. 282).

Moreover, another aspect of the role of the workers is to perform with excellence. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that work as worship means that individual works “*from the fullness of his heart*”, and “*it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity*”. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1972, p. 172). This indicates the significance of excellence and the motive to serve humanity for the workers as well. Badee (2015) highlights the role of spiritual, intellectual and physical education in Bahá’í scripture in attaining such excellence according to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1909, p. 129).

In brief, another aspect of work in the spirit of service, is workers’ sincerity and justice at work, their efforts towards excellence and their motive to serve humanity, while the laws are just, and the system is moderate and considerate of the benefits of employees and their well-being.

### **3.2.7 Developing the conceptual framework of “Work in the spirit of service” as a justice-centric approach**

To sum up, the Bahá’í precepts signify work with the “spirit of service”. To elaborate on what ‘work in the spirit of service’ entails, Bahá’í scripture address the service of the society, not only with regards to poverty, but also concerning for their knowledge and understanding, dignity, and wellbeing.

Bahá’í scripture also identifies work-in-the-spirit-of service with equality and fairness. In this context it necessitates the just distribution of wealth and pay as well as access to opportunities for all, including for men and women alike. Equality and fairness also include the employees’ right to participation in organisation’s decisions.

Furthermore, the scripture emphasises ‘consultation’, with different purposes including making decisions, expanding knowledge and understanding, and solving problems. The scripture, however, considers specific criteria for such

‘consultation’, including love, respect, harmony, and sincerity, in order to lead to any truth. In addition, there is a discussion of sharing the profit with the employees, not in the context of increasing productivity but as the responsibility of the employers in fair distribution of wealth and establishing justice. Thus, Bahá’í scripture requires the employers to actively approach the issue of profit sharing, i.e. with a willingness to share on their part and receiving a moderate share from the profit of the company.

These principles also argue the need for just laws and regulations, a just legal system to safeguard the mutual rights of employers and the employees, and just governments that intervene when conflict occurs in order to secure the rights and wellbeing of all. Here, how wellbeing of ‘all’ is secured, and how to ensure some parties’ interests are not prioritised over others, are questions that require further exploration.

In the context of government systems, Bahá’u’lláh wrote to the leaders of the world (rulers and ecclesiastical leaders including Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz and Nasiri’d-Din Shah) between 1867 and 1873, requiring them to listen to the voice of God and to be just to the people as their responsibility. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá further identifies just government with a variety of characteristics such as: ‘well-wishing’, ‘compliance’, ‘occupancy in constant service’, ‘honesty’ and justice’, and the avoidance of ‘breaching the trust’, ‘performing in a slack or desultory fashion’ or ‘seeking to further his own selfish interests’ (Abdu’l-Baha, 1991). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá further addresses those who are appointed to a role in the government and says: “*Anyone who entereth the employ of the government should show forth in all his deeds and actions the highest degree of rectitude and honesty, of temperance and self-discipline, of purity and sanctity, of justice and equity*” (1991, p. 342). Similar quotations by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assert that “*utmost fidelity, trustworthiness, rectitude, uprightness, integrity and high-mindedness*”, the “*highest standard of trustworthiness and honesty, to a degree of sincerity that is altogether above suspicion, and to an integrity that is immune to the promptings of self-interest*” are required (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1987, pp. 11-13). Moreover, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praises a system of government like a parliament, where

collective decision-making is utilised, and the role of king or queen is a figurehead there to bring unity, as opposed to the role of a single ruler (similar to the system in place in Britain). He further addresses a global view and says that strife among nations should end and all the nations should live together as brothers, *'Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind'* (Abdu'l-Baha, 1982, p. 55). Shoghi Effendi further suggests *"the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded"*. This world commonwealth, Shoghi Effendi suggests would *"consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples"*, *"a world executive backed by an international force"*, which enforces these legislations and safeguards *"the organic unity of the commonwealth"* (Effendi, 1991, p. 203) , and *'a supreme tribunal'* or an *'international court of justice'*, *'a world federal system'* representative of *'all'* countries, which eliminate injustice and strife among nations (*'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 283*). Shoghi Effendi further suggests a mechanism of inter-communication in this commonwealth, with a world metropolis, a world language, and a universal system of currency, weights and measures to be selected/developed through representatives of all nation; where there would be no more need of armies, and the huge resources currently consumed in war would be used for welfare and development of nations.

This commonwealth and the system of just government discussed in Bahá'í scripture has some similarities to the concept of the European Union, while it has some differences as well. For instance, it is similar in a unified system of currency and measures, however, it is not quite representative of all the nations in the European Union, with equal power of participation, and it is not inclusive of *'all'* the nations. This discussion suffices here, as more is beyond the scope of this

research, and this was just intended to point to the system of just government mentioned.

Thus, back to the discussion of the intervention of government in conflicts between the employers and the employees, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá calls the government the ‘courts of justice’, which, with the requirements and the system of values and elections discussed before, if achieved, would be fair in their judgment for securing the rights of ‘all’, and accordingly “*the courts of justice would have to give judgment, and by an efficacious fine put an end to the transgression; thus order will be re-established, and the difficulties settled*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976, p. 283) .

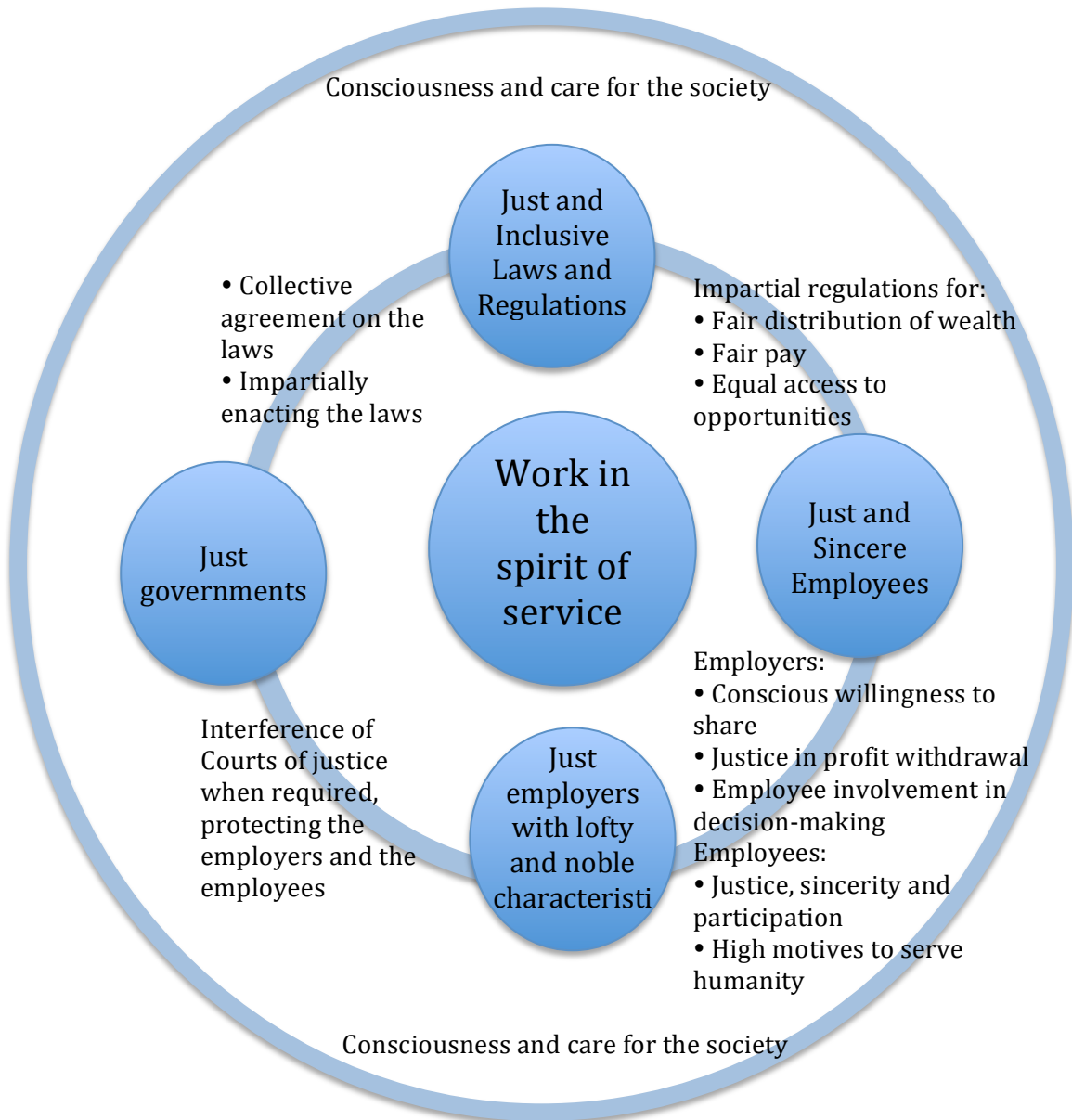
Bahá’í scripture then argues for the employees to also be fair and sincere at their work, while the just laws protect their rights, to refrain from strikes. However, it is recognised that an excessive accumulation of wealth by a few while the mass live in need is a cause of present economic problems. Thus, the scripture argues that awareness and responsibility of the wealthy population for a fair distribution of wealth and genuine concern for the society is essential for establishment of equality and justice.

Badee (2015) states that the justice in the Bahá’í approach to work is compatible with distributive justice in its focus on distribution of wealth (based on equity of opportunities rather than equality of wealth and income, and emphasis of universal education), and with John Rawl’s concept of justice as fairness. However, based on the findings of this research (presented in Chapter 5) it can be argued that it is also connected to procedural justice, where the process in which something is decided just and how it is implemented also matters (Greenberg, 1990).

The following diagram summarizes different themes and concepts discussed in Bahá’í scripture addressing work in the spirit of service, as interpreted in this research.



**Figure 3-1 Work in the spirit of Service - Based on the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture – Initial interpretation**



Joining the concepts together in a diagram is helpful in enabling an understanding of the broader concept. As is now evident from the diagram, the common component of different aspects and actors of ‘work in the spirit of service’ as addressed in Bahá’í scripture is the word “just”. Based on this diagram, which summarises these concepts, work in the spirit of service includes the conscious, responsible and ‘just’ involvement of all the actors, (laws, government system, employers and employees) or, as it called in management literature, the different stakeholders, in an environment which reflects and enables the exercise of nobility and justice of those actors. The emphasis on ‘justice’<sup>24</sup> for different components of work-in-the-spirit-of-service highlights the significance of this value in social and economic relations in Bahá’í scripture. In this regard, Bahá’u’lláh (1985, p. 3) says: *“The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee”*.

Furthermore, the overall relationships between these actors of ‘work in the spirit of service’, and the broader environment they operate in, has been characterised in Bahá’í scripture, as presented in the diagram. One aspect of this relationship is the relationship between laws and the government, where governments must collectively set or refine just laws and regulations, and then they need to enforce those laws. In the relationship between laws and employees the just laws need to protect equality in access to opportunities, and establishment of mechanisms for a fair distribution of wealth and just pay.

In the environment/relationship between employers and employees, employers are required to have a conscious and caring willingness to share the fortunes of the company with their employees and be just in their withdrawal of company profit as opposed to excessive consumption of that wealth. Here, based on the diagram, a

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<sup>24</sup> The argument of ‘justice’ here has similarities with Rawls’ (1971) theory of justice, where he identified justice as fairness; such as considering justice based on a universal agreement, and rejecting the utilitarian perspective of justice (i.e. loss of freedom of some for a greater good shared by others). However, this argument of justice in the Bahá’í approach has a more individual-based focus, arguing it in different statuses and responsibilities of actors according to their roles and positions, (while Rawls’ (1971) argument mainly concerned the governments/institutions and the structures of society). Furthermore, it accompanies the concept of justice with care and service, which Rawls (1971) did not discuss.

‘just’ withdrawal of the profit is connected to the condition where the profit of the company is shared with the employees (‘Abdu'l-Bahá suggests a fourth or fifth of the profit) with a conscious ‘willingness’ to share; and the employees to benefit from a decent life, and their wellbeing secured; and also the society around them is looked after and sincere efforts are made for reduction of poverty, abasement and ignorance. Thus, the just and moderate withdrawal of profit is not a static state, but a progressive concept which involves, awareness, willingness and responsibility and a focus beyond one’s self.

Furthermore, the employers are required to involve employees in the decision-making processes of the organisation, in a frank, loving and responsible environment. Employees on the other hand, are required to be just and sincere at their work and provide participation.

In the relationship between employers and the governments, which applies to the relationship between employees and the governments as well, the governments are responsible to safeguard the rights of both the parties, and the courts of justice are expected to interfere in the conflicts between the employers and the employees when required.

Moreover, these actors do not work in isolation, or simply through the direct relationship displayed above. Each of these actors is required to operate in a status of consciousness of and care for the environment that surrounds them. For instance, employees are required to care for and aim to serve the society around them, their employers, their co-workers, their customers, etc., ‘from the fullness of their heart’, *‘prompted by the highest motives’*, *“and the will to do service to humanity”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1972, p. 172). Similarly, employers motivated by the spirit of service, are expected to work with *“lofty characteristics and noble attributes”* for the welfare of their employees, for betterment of the society around them, and out of care for those in need (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979, p. 43). Here, the just and impartial laws and regulations are expected to be refined based on equality of humankind, and just governments are called to enforce these laws universally and safeguard the

rights of all, including the rights of those less fortunate of the society (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976).

Thus, overall, based on this perspective, work in the spirit of service is a justice-centric approach and applies to the employers and the employees, as well as the governments and the rule of law. Furthermore, although it entails different roles and responsibilities for each actor in this framework, it requires them all to be just and conscious and responsible for a wider population than them.

This diagram will further be refined based on the results of the empirical research and the concepts generated from analysis of the case-study data.

The next section focuses on employment relations and explores the Bahá’í scripture in the context of employment relations in detail: legitimisation of power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement and participation. In the end, it further elaborates this framework and adds to the concepts generated from this part of the research.

### **3.3 Bahá’í scripture and aspects of employment relations**

After study of the Bahá’í scripture to describe work in the spirit of service, a deductive approach was also taken. Here, in order to focus on employment relations based on the literature review, legitimisation of power, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement have been considered as the main themes for this study.

This section, therefore, explores in detail how these factors have been approached in Bahá’í scripture. Here, it explores how the scripture identifies power and how it legitimises authority. It then explores how conflict, and in particular conflict of interest, is addressed. It then moves on to employee involvement and participation, and the specific characteristics of the environment, which allows for collective decision-making to be an exploration of ‘truth’.

It is notable here that Bahá’í scripture exhibits a major concern for ‘unity in diversity’ in all social relations. The main purpose of religion has been emphasised as the ‘unity of humankind’ ( (Baha'u'llah, 1990, p. 215), (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25). Hence, its moral

and behavioural as well as administrative and social principles are articulated around the same theme.

The sections that follow present the result of the detailed study of Bahá'í scripture in terms of the above aspects of employment relations. In the end, this presents a summary of the approach in relation to power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement, along with further explanation of the concept of work in the spirit of service based on the results of this research.

### **3.3.1 Power and authority**

In Bahá'í scripture discussion of power is mainly addressed in two levels. In one sense, it attributes power to God, where God's power is infinite, similar to many other theological stances towards the power of God – God the “Almighty” (e.g. Exodus 5:22-6:8; Revelation 11:17; Genesis 17:1; Psalm 19:1; Quran 36:82, 35:44, 7:54). There, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is said to be based on “*justice, fairness, mercy, sympathy and kindness*” and therefore individuals are advised to be kind and merciful to others (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 412). In the other sense, the attribution of power to people, individual power is reduced by emphasising the equality of all humankind and the elimination of superiority (Abdu'l-Baha, 1982, p. 19). Individuals are required to treat each other with kindness and sympathy and not to prioritise their own interest over others (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 288).

In addition, there is no clerical role in the Bahá'í Faith<sup>25</sup> (Effendi, 1991, pp. 153-154). So,

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<sup>25</sup> Shoghi Effendi (Effendi, 1991, pp. 153-154) says: “Nor can the Bahá'í Administrative Order be dismissed as a hard and rigid system of unmitigated autocracy or as an idle imitation of any form of absolutistic ecclesiastical government, whether it be the Papacy, the Imamate or any other similar institution, for the obvious reason that upon the international elected representatives of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í writings. Neither the Guardian of the Faith nor any institution apart from the International House of Justice can ever usurp this vital and essential power or encroach upon that sacred right. The abolition of professional priesthood with its accompanying sacraments of baptism, of communion and of confession of sins, the laws requiring the election by universal suffrage of all local, national, and international Houses of Justice, the total absence of episcopal authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions and bureaucratic tendencies, are further evidences of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs.”

it does not allow for exertion of power by any individual (e.g. clergy or elites) over others. However, there are the administrative bodies (local and national Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice) that are the bodies to exercise power over the members of the Bahá'í community.

The administrative bodies of the Bahá'í Faith are elected ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979, p. 32), with secret votes by every individual Bahá'í over the age of 21 in the community and without any campaigning, nominations, or propaganda. Individuals are expected to vote at liberty for whomever they see as suitable, without any external pressure. As discussed earlier, the administrative body, when elected is required to consult with the members of the community in their decisions (Effendi, 1974, p. 63). This can make the elective administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith pluralistic and inclined to democratic methods of administration (Effendi, 1991). This body's (i.e. the Spiritual Assembly's) role is to protect the community, keep it united and guide it through their religious plans of service and expansion.

Here, Shoghi Effendi (1974, pp. 63-64) addressing the responsibilities of the Spiritual Assemblies says: "*They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel.*" He (Effendi, 1974, p. 64) then continues (paraphrased) when the members of the Spiritual Assembly want to make a decision, they need to further consult together in a 'dispassionate' and 'cordial' environment, then pray to God, and "*with earnestness and conviction and courage*" cast their vote and go with the voice of the majority.

Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi refers to the argument of power in particular in addressing the Spiritual Assemblies, he (Effendi, 1974, p. 63) says: "*Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation*". He (Effendi, 1974, pp. 63-64) then discusses the following qualities as essential characteristics of this consultation: mercy and justice; freedom and submission; the sanctity of the right of the individual and self-surrender; and vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand with fellowship, candour, and courage on the other.

Shoghi Effendi then continues to explain the duties of the elected representatives of the Spiritual Assemblies. Here, he (Effendi, 1974, p. 64) states that the main part of their responsibility is “to consult”. Shoghi Effendi’s (1974) words in this respect are presented in full, since they point out different aspects of the responsibilities of the elected body, and at the same time he discusses the characteristics and the context of this type of participative consultation. He (Effendi, 1974, p. 64) says:

*“The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations... And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced.”*

Here Shoghi Effendi (1974) argues that the main responsibility of the elected members is to discuss among themselves and with the members of the community. He (Effendi, 1974) argues that they are not superior to the members of the community, and they need to approach their tasks with humility, open-mindedness, devotion, and justice, avoid

secrecy and domineering attitude, and work for the welfare and interest of the community. Furthermore, he (Effendi, 1974) tells them to be impartial, and avoid passions and prejudice in their deliberations.

However, this body (not its individual members) has the authority to suspend one's membership of the community, due to certain actions not being in the interest of the Faith and sometimes not in the person's own interest, as identified in the scripture. This resembles the third dimension of power discussed by Lukes (2005), where B (an institution of the Faith) dominates the interest of an individual, in protection of the interests of a larger community or in his/her own 'real interest'.

Additionally, with regards to the second phase of power, i.e. setting the agenda, the body that makes the decisions, whether it is at local, national, or international level, has the power to decide the assembly's agenda, and it is not imposed to them from a higher level. They set their own agenda and they make the decisions with consultation with the members of the community. Also, the members of the community can add to the agenda through the 'consultation' part of their monthly (every 19 days) gathering called the "Feast" (Effendi, 1981, p. 450).

Regarding the third face of power, influencing the interests of the individuals, the Universal House of Justice (the international body, also elected by members) sends letters to believers at the beginning of every year that set the guidelines and overall plans. Local communities and followers then plan their acts of service accordingly. In this respect it can be said that it complies with the third face of power.

It is notable here that this research does not intend to articulate a Bahá'í perspective on power in full, because that is a careful task needing a wide range of other sources of knowledge that is not in domain of this research. A very preliminary discussion of the immediate principles has been addressed here to enable the discussion of power relations in an organisation in the empirical part of this research. Thus, what follows is an exploration of authority and power in organisational context.

Subsequently, the overall argument of power and authority in Bahá'í scripture as addressed by Bahá'u'lláh (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 93), identifies 'power' through 'unity'. Bahá'u'lláh (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 93) says:



*“No man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.”*

To sum up, Bahá'í scripture does not consider a place for clergy (no individual religious leader). It specifies election of an administrative system (the religious institutions), which is responsible for administration of the Faith and to contribute to its expansion. In this system, individuals are responsible for their spiritual growth ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1909, pp. 165-166) and are advised to understand the principles through consultation (and also to make their decisions and to solve their problems) (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 94). Therefore, the hierarchical authoritative structure of decision-making is not legitimised in this school of thought, and all are advised to consult in all matters (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 93)

### **3.3.2 Dealing with Conflict**

To identify the approach of Bahá'í scripture to dealing with conflict, it will be helpful to explore how Bahá'í scripture recognises humans, e.g. whether it describes them as naturally greedy and aggressive as Hobbes suggested, or naturally peaceful and altruistic as Rousseau stated (McGregor, 1960). Bahá'u'lláh says: *“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”* (Baha'u'llah, 1990, p. 260)

In the Bahá'í perspective then, the individual is created noble, and education (physical, intellectual and spiritual) as Shoghi Effendi (1983, p. 210) addresses, can release the potentialities latent within each human being.

Furthermore, the Bahá'í scriptures widely promote agreement, peace and unity and discourage enmity, war and conflict (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, pp. 61-62; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1998, p. 176). This is considered a responsibility of the leaders and the rulers as well as the general public. For instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a document addressed to the king of

Persia and its peoples, directly calls upon ‘unitarists’ to come together and remove religious strife, and calls it “a great and mighty matter”<sup>26</sup> (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1980, p. 42).

Moreover, he (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1980, p. 42) addresses the general public and says:

*“O people of the world, ye are all the fruit of one tree and the leaves of one branch. Walk with perfect charity, concord, affection, and agreement.... Endeavor to attain to this high supreme station, which is the station of protection and preservation of mankind.”*

In a different account, however, he welcomes differing opinions, beliefs and actions and states that it enhances the overall qualities, as do multi-coloured flowers enhance each other’s beauty in a garden (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25). Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls this the principle of “unity in diversity” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25).

Similarly, conflict of opinions is welcomed and found necessary in discovery of truth. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982, p. 87) says: “*The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions*”. At the same time, in consultation, a spirit of unity is encouraged, and the purpose of consultation has been mentioned to be ‘unity’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1991). Elaborating this unity, it is emphasised that once individuals raise their opinion, they must be detached from that opinion, and view it as their contribution to the discovery of truth. Moreover, when a decision is made, all are required to commit to its accomplishment with agreement and unity, not attachment to their old opinion and disconnection to the result of consultation. Accordingly, this approach to decision-making while encouraging conflicting opinions necessitates detachment from one’s opinion and commitment to the outcome of the decision by the group.

Consultation is also advised in “all matters” (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 93), which makes the decision-making structure of Bahá’í administration quite pluralistic. Bahá’í scripture does

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1980, p. 42) says: “*O unitarians, make firm the girdle of endeavor, that perchance religious strife and conflict may be removed from amongst the people of the world and be annulled. For love of God and His servants engage in this great and mighty matter. Religious hatred and rancor is a world-consuming fire, and the quenching thereof most arduous, unless the hand of Divine Might give men deliverance from this unfruitful calamity. Consider a war which happeneth between two states: both sides have foregone wealth and life: how many villages were beheld as though they' were not! This precept is in the position of the light in the lamp of utterance.*”

not discuss authority or hierarchy with regards to management or administration of organisations, but emphasise on collective decision-making in all matters including ‘business and commerce’. This is accordingly interpreted here as the desired method of management and decision-making based on this scripture.

Thus, the approach of the Bahá’í principles to conflict is twofold. On the one hand it discourages conflict and strife, and on the other it encourages discussion, differing opinions and unity in diversity. This leads to the discussion of employee participation, which is discussed in the next section.

### **3.3.3 Employee participation**

‘Consultation’ is a term that has been frequently repeated and is highly valued in Bahá’í scripture. Bahá’u’lláh says: *“For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.”* (Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 94)

The literature on employee participation, as discussed in Chapter 2, often involves two main styles of employee participation i.e. representation (through unions and shop stewards) or direct participation (e.g. Beardwell & Claydon, 2007; Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988; McGaughey, 2014), while prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century it mostly referred to ‘negotiation power’ over terms of employment, then it entered the spheres of decision-making in a larger scale (Glew, O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995; Langan-Fox, Code, Gray, & Langfield-Smith, 2002).

Bahá’í scripture does not discuss unions and workers’ representation in particular, but in its own administrative structure there is an elective representative system at local, national and international levels. It calls for selfless representatives elected by the member of the community to represent them at the respective administrative level (e.g. Effendi, 1974, p. 79; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1976, p. 410). Applying this to an organisational system, it is similar to shop stewards being representatives from among the population they represent. However, the elected members in Bahá’í scripture do not necessarily represent the benefits of their people against others, but they are required to consider the

wellbeing of all. This is the distinction that Shoghi Effendi makes, as the difference between the Bahá'í approach and the present democracy. The full quotation is presented here in order to identify different aspects of his argument in its context in relation to democracy. Shoghi Effendi (1991, p. 153) says:

*“The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. **They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision.** “God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth,” is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. **They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.** Moreover, he who symbolizes the hereditary principle in this Dispensation has been made the interpreter of the words of its Author, and ceases consequently, by virtue of the actual authority vested in him, to be the figurehead invariably associated with the prevailing systems of constitutional monarchies.”*

Here, Shoghi Effendi (1991, p. 153) writes that the elected bodies of the Bahá'í administration are required to consider the greater good and the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and “*are not the body of those who directly or indirectly elected them*”. He (Effendi, 1991) then continues, that this administrative system is neither a “*hard and*

*rigid system of unmitigated autocracy” or “an idle imitation of any form of absolutistic ecclesiastical government, whether it be the Papacy, the Imamate or any other similar institution”*. The reason he (Effendi, 1991) argues it is not autocracy is that only the international elected ‘body’ (the Universal House of Justice) has a legislative role, and that only in the matters not addressed by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, and only as a body not its individual members. In addition, he (Effendi, 1974) says Bahá’í administrative system is not autocratic because of the abolition of priesthood and their authority in the Bahá’í Faith. Shoghi Effendi says (1991, p. 154):

*“The abolition of professional priesthood with its accompanying sacraments of baptism, of communion and of confession of sins, the laws requiring the election by universal suffrage of all local, national, and international Houses of Justice, the total absence of episcopal authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions and bureaucratic tendencies, are further evidences of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs.”*

It can thus be said that the Bahá’í approach represents a combination of a representative system of administration in managing itself, along with individual involvement in understanding the Faith (Baha'u'llah, 1991) as well as participation in decision-making through involvement in the election and in the consultations of their local Spiritual Assemblies, (Effendi, 1974) and consulting in their ‘Feasts’ held once every nineteen days (The Universal House of Justice, 1992).

On their direct participation, there is an extensive discussion in Bahá’í scripture on the purpose, characteristics, and requirements of collective decision-making. These are addressed in detail in the next section.

### **3.3.3.1 Participative decision-making in the Bahá’í Faith**

This section explores in detail, characteristics of the decision-making as addressed in Bahá’í scripture. In particular, it aims to address part of the second question of the scriptural study, exploring the decision-making in Bahá’í scripture in relation to the

existing theories of participation and decision-making.

In Bahá'í scripture, consultation is highly emphasised. Bahá'ís are advised to consult in all matters ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982). Consultation is regarded as a way to bring forth the light of awareness and certitude (Baha'u'llah, 1991), the shining spark of truth (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, pp. 72-73), unity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976) and wellbeing (Baha'u'llah, 1991).

In the scripture related to consultation, unity and harmony when carrying out a decision once it has been made has received specific attention. It is believed that even if a group comes to a wrong decision in the spirit of unity and fellowship, the unity "*will offset any deficiency, and will eventually lead to the righting of the wrong*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 95), and "*it is in unity the truth will be revealed*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 411).

To create such an environment, some qualities or pre-requisites have been mentioned for the participants in the process of consultation. Among the primary pre-requisites to Bahá'í consultation are: utmost love, harmony and sincerity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 97), serenity, calmness and composure ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 72), utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation in expressing their views ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 88), and purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment, attraction, humility, patience, servitude ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87).

Some of these principles have similarities with democratic leadership as described by Gastil (1994). In this section, when relevant, Gastil's statements are discussed in relation to Bahá'í principles, since he elaborates 'group decision-making' in detail, which are very helpful to explain some of the results of this research, but are often not spoken about in other research.

Here, Gastil (1994) identifies a characteristic of the environment of decision-making as well, calling it a 'prevailing spirit of congeniality' and finds it necessary for maintaining the healthy emotional setting required for participation.

Such characteristic has not been studied much in other literature related to group decision-making. This constitutes a major part of the empirical phase of this study, the results of which are presented in Chapter 8.

In the Bahá'í principles it is also mentioned that when one expresses their opinion, they must not voice it as absolutely right, but must “*set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion; for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide*”, like flint and steel that produce a spark (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 99).

‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1991, p. 99) says:

*“Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own.”*

Karlberg (2004), a Bahá'í scholar, states that this detachment does not come easily and consultation is not an easy skill to learn, therefore, Bahá'ís view consultation as a learning process in their own community as well individually.

Writing about skills for consultation in democratic leadership Gastil (1994) argues that careful listening and respectful acknowledgement of others' views are key to moving the discussion forward. He (Gastil, 1994, p. 96) refers to a specific form of listening called ‘discernment’, consisting of “*carefully listening to members' ideas and values, then tentatively attempting to identify the 'public voice' or the solution that best represents the group's collective interests*”.

If during consultation, as addressed in the Bahá'í scripture, opposing opinions are raised, it is advised that discussion shall carry on in an environment of respect and ‘well-wishing’ in order to enable a conclusion of the consultation in agreement and unity. Here, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 406) says;

*“So they (members) must confer and consult in such a way that neither disagreement nor abhorrence may occur. When meeting for consultation, each must use perfect liberty in stating his views and unveiling the proof of his demonstration. If another contradicts him, he must not become excited because if there be no investigation or verification of questions and matters, the agreeable view will not be discovered neither understood. The brilliant light which comes from the collision of thoughts is the "lightener" of facts.”*

He ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982) also states that it is preferable for the discussions to result in unanimous decisions. However, if differences of opinion still exist, then "*a majority of voices must prevail*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87). Thus, another question for this fieldwork was how the participants came to an agreement and how they resolved conflicts, should they occur.

Here, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, separating conflict of opinions from conflict and strife (while the former is welcomed and the latter is discouraged), writes: "*Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1972, p. 54).

This style of participation, as addressed by Shoghi Effendi, is not pure democracy and holds certain differences with its basic theories. However, three main aspects of Gastil's (1994) argument of democratic leadership have some similarities and differences to the leadership style of the Bahá'í Faith. These aspects, distributing responsibilities, aiding deliberation, and multiple leaders, are discussed here, then follows a comparison of similar approaches in the Bahá'í principles, as well as highlighting the differences of the Bahá'í collective decision-making with industrial democracy.

Firstly, Gastil (1994) argues that employee involvement in decision-making requires distributing responsibilities. To distribute responsibilities effectively, Robinson (2008) studying spirituality in relation to responsibilities argues that responsibilities need to be accompanied by accountability. Accountability as Robinson (2008) states, might be towards a higher position with rewards and punishments (i.e. external force), or it might be out of love and care for a higher source such as God or a person, etc. (i.e. internal force). He (Robinson, 2008) argues that this love and accountability can create internal responsibility in the members to desire to fulfil their tasks in order to achieve or maintain that love or satisfaction from that source.

This is very similar to the requirement for following the principles in the Bahá'í Faith, where followers are required to follow God's commandment out of 'love' and joy.

Bahá'u'lláh says: "*Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty*" (Baha'u'llah, 1990, p. 332). He (Baha'u'llah, 1990, p. 332) then continues: "*Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine*



*with the fingers of might and power.*” Accordingly, the evaluation of one’s Faith is not extrinsic and through the clergy, but every individual is responsible for their spiritual growth (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1909, pp. 165-166).

Secondly, Gastil (1994) necessitates aiding the deliberations through a facilitating role. Similarly, in the Bahá’í literature there is a discussion of facilitation in Bahá’í local/national Spiritual Assemblies (part of the administrative structure of the Bahá’í Faith) through the role of the chairperson to facilitate the consultation, the secretary to take notes and provide reports, and the ‘treasurer’ to manage the funds of the community they serve<sup>27</sup> (Effendi, 1991, pp. 117-119).

In the scripture, consultation is addressed as discovery of ‘*truth through the clash of differing opinions*’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87). This ‘truth’ is supposed to be independent of a facilitator’s opinion and could be different from what the facilitator thinks is right or identifies in the discussion based on his/her judgement; because it is supposed to be generated from a discussion of differing opinions (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982). In Bahá’í scripture, for the Spiritual Assemblies, a chairperson is elected (by the group) to facilitate the consultation (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 88). The members then “*lay down guide-lines and by-laws for their meetings and discussions*” and the chairperson is responsible for protecting and enforcing those guidelines (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982, p. 88). Here, the elected ‘facilitator’ of the consultation is required to maintain the smooth flow of the discussions according to the guidelines they collectively developed, with the support of the members of the group.

Thirdly, Gastil (1994) argues for the role of multiple leaders instead of one (not a leadership group, but multiple individual leaders). In Bahá’í scripture, the members of the Spiritual Assembly are directed that leadership is not a position of their superiority but an opportunity to serve, and that they are guided to develop certain attributes. However, the Assemblies are treated as the administrative body not individual leaders, and individual leadership or multiple leaders are not mentioned in Bahá’í scripture. Moreover, the members of the Assembly are required to consult with the members of the community

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<sup>27</sup> The funding system in the Bahá’í faith is based on individual donations to the Bahá’í community funds (Effendi, 1991, p.530).

and among themselves, without any trace of superiority, exclusiveness, secrecy, domineering attitude, or prejudice and passion in their deliberations, but rather with extreme humility, open-mindedness, high sense of justice and duty, candour, modesty, entire devotion to the welfare and interest of the friends, the ‘Cause’, and humanity. (Effendi, 1974, p. 64)

Regarding participating in deliberation without ‘prejudice’ and ‘passion’ as stated here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argues that both the prejudice and passion can prevent one from thinking and judging objectively (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 68) and can cause separation and hatred among people instead of helping them to work together for a common good (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1972, p. 28).

On the other hand, in democratic leadership Gastil (1994) discusses the **role of democratic followers**. He (Gastil, 1994, p. 963) discusses five functions for democratic followers: *Responsibility* (willingness of followers to take responsibility for the well-being of the demos); *Accountability* (followers being accountable for their actions and decisions, for instance, if members of a community disagree with a decision, they continue to raise their views but do not violate the democratically established policy unless it is a conscientious objection); *Maintaining autonomy* (responsibility of followers to maintain their autonomy); *Function as leaders* (followers’ realisation of the ways they can function as leaders); and *Members’ cooperation with leaders* (members of the ‘demo’, the public, must be willing to work with those who are leading). Undemocratic behaviour of a leader or his/her incompetence as Gastil (1994) states can result in rejection by followers, but not entire rejection of democratic leadership. It does not allow exploitation of democratic leaders either, and expects the demos to be appreciative and supportive of leaders with valuable contributions. It also calls for demos being “the watchdog of its own leadership” (Gastil, 1994, p. 964).

In Bahá’í scripture, the followers are similarly advised to actively participate in the election and the consultation with the assembly, but when their representatives make a decision they are asked to commit to its fulfilment in the spirit of unity. If they have any disputes, they are advised to take it to their local Assembly, or national Assembly or even

the international body (the Universal House of Justice), but still commit to carrying out the current decision, while it is being discussed and reconsidered ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991).

In addition to this appeal process, it is also stated that even if the decision is wrong, in the spirit of unity there will be an open environment to see the wrong and a chance to rectify it; whereas in a competitive and divided environment faults may remain hidden for the fear of a blame or loss of personal opportunities. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991)

In addition, Bahá'í scripture does not encourage the demos being 'the watchdog of its leadership'; on the contrary it encourages supporting their representatives and wise participation in the annual elections (Effendi, 1974).

Furthermore, Gastil's (1994) argument of democracy focuses on deliberation but does not discuss what happens after a decision is made. This issue has remained silent in participative/democratic decision-making literature.

As addressed earlier, in Bahá'í scripture there are guidelines stating that when one voices his/her opinion, it must not be put forward as absolutely right, but as a contribution to the consensus of opinions ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982) and with detachment from their opinion. Individuals are then required to devote themselves to carry out the decision, even if one (whether or not involved in deliberation) finds it wrong, while they can still raise their opinion again ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991). This is studied in the empirical phase of this research, as how the managers and employees carry out the collective decisions, and if they have been participative.

### **3.3.4 The Bahá'í approach to employment relations**

In this section, the results of the study of Bahá'í scripture in relation to power and authority, conflict, and employee involvement based on the interpretations of the researcher have been discussed.

In summary, in the Bahá'í approach, authority is not singular, but is based on representation, which includes the believers in decision-making and a shared responsibility toward welfare of the community. However, legitimisation of authority is not the primary concern in Bahá'í scripture (especially with the elimination of

priesthood), and there is a focus on work based on ‘the spirit of service’. This approach while allowing for different individual and organisational objectives (interests) adds a characteristic: the desire and effort to serve.

How this principle (work in the spirit of service with shared authority) may work in practice is a question of this research. Does it really provide space for discussion and agreement? Does it benefit organisations; and at what cost? Do organisations find it worth practising?

Bahá’í scripture also encourages discussion and consultation along with representation, which is further explored in the empirical research. Considering conflict, while this scripture finds conflict of opinion to be beneficial to identifying the solutions, it discourages conflict and strife among individuals (e.g. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1982, pp. 61-62; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1998, p. 176). Moreover, in addition to representation it stresses the significance of individual involvement in decision-making. It further promotes equality of opportunity for men and women (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976, p. 288), policy reforms (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277) and inclusive decision-making and responsibility (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1991, pp. 94-95), but in an environment of consultation with specific characteristics, pre-requisites, and objectives. Thus, it is formulated as a specific approach in this research, which will be called the collective approach, as explored in the following chapters.

However, the main question of this research is whether it remains a collective approach in practice, how it is implemented, to what extent, why some aspects may not be implemented, and what its overall limitations and requirements are in practice. These questions are further explored in the empirical stage of this research.

It is worth noting here, that the following diagram (Figure 3-2) articulating ‘work in the spirit of service’ has incorporated findings from the study of Bahá’í scripture in relation to power, conflict, and employee involvement as well. For instance, the rationale for the figure being circular rather than hierarchical (e.g. in a pyramid) is to incorporate lack of hierarchical power in the arguments of management and administration in Bahá’í scripture.

Furthermore, the environment in which the whole system operates has been updated here,

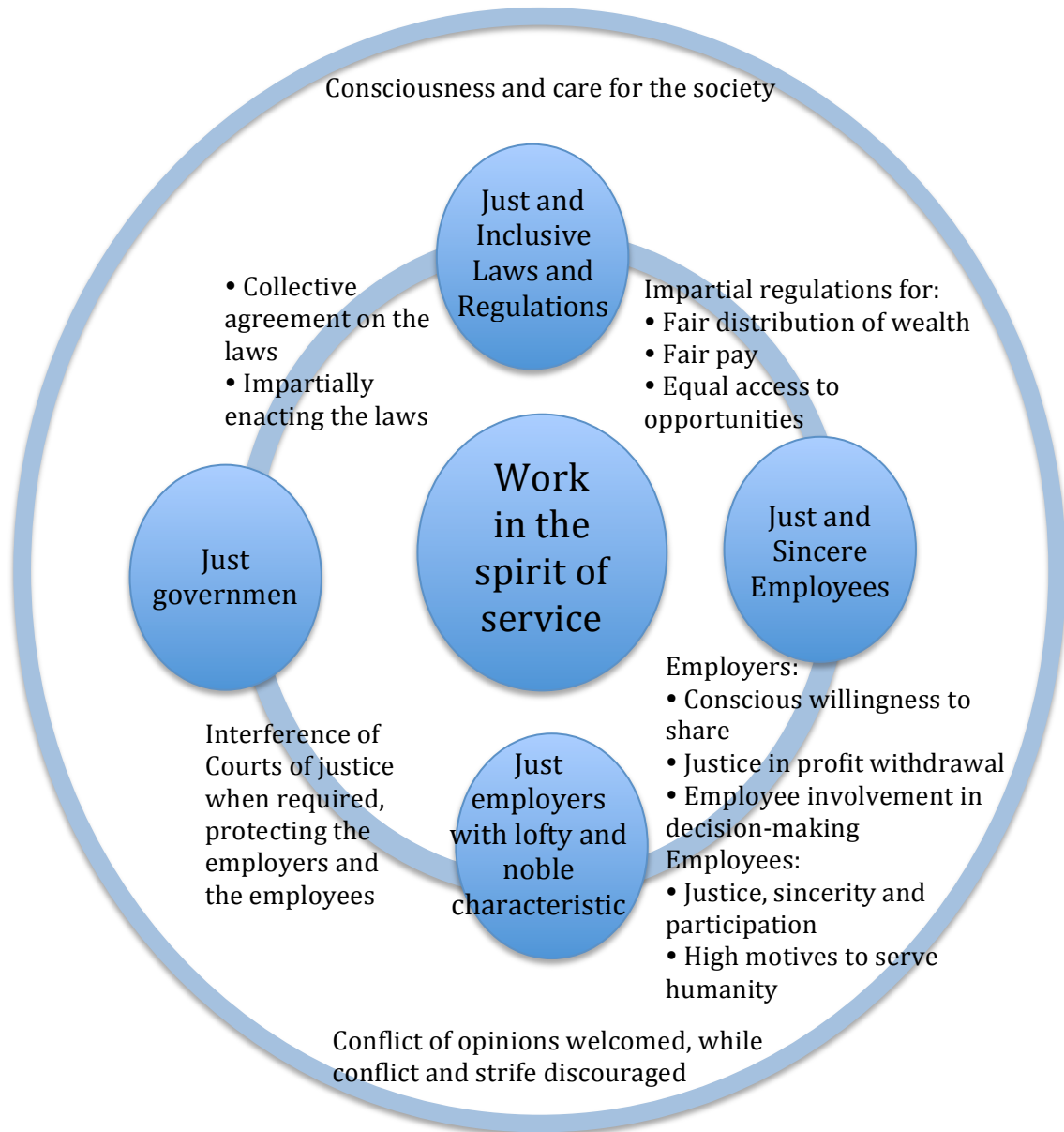
indicating that in all the relations, conflict of opinions has been welcomed, but conflict and strife has been discouraged. It presents a justice-centric approach, which is based on consciousness and care, and which requires all participants/stakeholders' responsible and just behaviour, in any role they are; being a just employee who works from the wholeness of their heart, an employer who is responsible towards his employees and the society and withdraws from the profit of the company moderately based on consciousness and responsibility, a just member of the government in any capacity or influence in improving the rule of law. In this approach hierarchical power relations are not legitimised, and employees' interests and their varying opinions are welcomed and utilised. This approach does not focus on maximisation of a particular stakeholders' gain but recognises the organisation as a responsible mechanism created to serve humanity, including its employees, stockholders, and the society.

Therefore, Bahá'í scripture presents a justice-centric approach to work in the spirit of service, which can be summarised as:

“A justice-centric approach with emphasised focus on service for the society, and conscious and lofty concerns and practices of the employers and the employees, active involvement of the employees in the decisions of the company, and just and effective laws and institutions.”

This diagram will be further updated in Chapter 9 with the results of primary research.

**Figure 3-2 Work in the spirit of Service - Based on the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture**



### 3.4 Summary and Conclusion

In this Chapter the Bahá'í scripture has been explored to answer the questions of “What work with the spirit of service entails?” and “How work in the Bahá'í approach influences employment relations?”

To this end, the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Faith, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, his son and successor, and Shoghi Effendi, Abdul-Baha's grandson and successor, have been explored in detail. The reason for covering the writings from these three figures is that they are the only individual authoritative figures in the Faith.

It indicated that work in the spirit of service is identified by service to society and reduction of poverty, ignorance, and abasement, as every individual's responsibility. It also requires justice and equality; equality in access to welfare and comfort for everyone, equality of the rights of men and women and everyone's right to participation in the decisions that involve them. As essential pre-requisites to participation in decision-making it addressed utmost love, calmness, purity of motive, respect for other's opinion, and detachment from one's own opinion, to name but a few. Also, it requires devotion and unity in carrying out the decision.

In addition, this work in the spirit of service requires profit sharing, with employers' ‘free will’ and ‘ready willingness to share’, along with their moderate withdrawal of profit for themselves. It argued, “*this equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind*” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979, pp. 43-44). At the same time, it requires refinement of laws and regulations, in order to be just and based on equality, and to preserve the rights of all. It also requires the employees to be just and sincere at their work, participate in decision-making and carrying out the decisions, and to avoid conflict and strike. It emphasizes an environment of unity while welcoming the conflict of opinions and discussions to develop the understanding and certitude, solve the problems, and make the decisions.

This chapter then focused on employment relations and explored the Bahá'í scripture in relation to power and authority, dealing with conflict of interest and participation. It identified that Bahá'í scripture eliminates any priesthood in this Faith, and that it employs an elective administrative body, but it does not consider the members to be in any

position of power. It refers to the functions of the Assemblies (the administrative bodies) and says: “*Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent*” (Effendi, 1991, p. 52). However, they have the power to suspend an individual’s right to membership of the Bahá’í community if it endangers the Faith or the majority. This is similar to the second face of power, as Lukes (2005) addresses.

The participation of Bahá’ís in decision-making is done through consultation in their gatherings every nineteen days, as well as their participation in the annual election of their administrative body. They are advised to consult on all matters, be it their business, their profession, the matters of their village, etc. At work, ‘consultation’ includes participation (of the employees and other stakeholders) in decision-making along with sharing in the profit of the company and in the service of the society.

This research further aims to explore these precepts in practice in three organisations that seek to apply the Bahá’í principles to their daily operations. The following chapters thus discuss the research methodology, and then the data from the fieldwork followed by the discussion of the results.



## 4 Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology employed during this research in order to achieve the objectives identified in the first chapter. The Chapter starts with introduction of the research question and the philosophy informing this research. It then introduces the research design, and the methods of data collection and analysis. It then covers the discussion of reliability and validity and the measures taken to ensure the quality of this research.

### 4.1 Research Questions

This thesis addresses the following question, *‘How do Bahá’í principles influence employment relations, and is it possible to maintain these principles in practice?’* The thesis explores the approach of the Bahá’í Faith to ‘work’, where the *‘spirit of service’* is stated as the condition to work being ‘holy’, or regarded as ‘worship’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83) and is associated with specific attributes and mechanisms in Bahá’í scripture. This thesis thus studies the concept and characteristics of *‘work in the spirit of service’* in Bahá’í scripture. It explores what the *‘spirit of service’* entails in organisational daily practice, what its implications are for work and employment relations, and whether these principles are applicable to variety of settings and organisations. It also explores in what ways such an approach could be different from other management approaches already in place, specifically other approaches and management practices under the influence of religions, as discussed in the literature review.

To describe the rationale behind the choice of methodology for this research, it is worth elaborating on what was briefly introduced in Chapter 1, which stated that there were only three authoritative figures in the Bahá’í Faith, namely Bahá’u’lláh (founder of the Bahá’í Faith), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Bahá’u’lláh’s son and his successor), and Shoghi Effendi (‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s grandson and his successor). They laid the structures and the principles of the Bahá’í Faith, and after them there is no individual authoritative figure or clergy to guide Bahá’ís in their practice of the religion. Thus, every Bahá’í is directed to study the writings of these three figures, discuss them with their fellow Bahá’ís, develop their

individual understandings and interpretations, and behave accordingly (e.g. Bahá'u'lláh, 1991; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982; Effendi, 1991). However, there is an international elective body called the Universal House of Justice that guides the Bahá'ís if they have questions or if there is confusion, and lays the protocols, when necessary, for those issues that have not been addressed by the above-mentioned figures ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 446).

Therefore, to explore '**how work is done** in the spirit of service', it is not enough to only study the behaviour of the participants as the previous studies of the influence of religion on organisations and economic relations have done (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Shah, Largi, & Batley, 2007; Weber, 2003; Tawney, 1961). Rather, it is necessary to study the liturgical inspiration potentially underlying the behaviour of participants, and to observe and make sense of their conduct and the variety of interpretations and behaviours adopted according to every believer's personal understanding of the religion.

Consequently, this research employs scriptural study as well as organisational research in order to develop a broader perspective of work in the spirit of service and its variety of meanings, practices, implications and challenges. This use of different research strategies is called triangulation (e.g. Scandura & Williams, 2006; Yin, 2003) or methodological pluralism (e.g. Gill & Johnson, 1991; Mingers, 2001). It refers to different data collection and methodologies, accessing different sources of data, or different data strategies (Scandura & Williams, 2006). Triangulation in social sciences is often used with the purpose of accessing larger sources of data, providing a broader perspective and covering different aspects of the phenomenon in question, and/or examining validity of the methods and the collected data, and to enable generalisation of the more robust findings (Scandura & Williams, 2006). The present research employs triangulation, with the use of different methods in an organisational study, in order to gain a broader understanding of the conceptual constructs as well as the practices of 'work in the spirit of service' and its impact on employment relations, along with a scriptural study in order to understand the underpinnings of employers and employees' behaviours and their challenges.

Accordingly, this research aims to explore what 'work in the spirit of service' entails in Bahá'í scripture (through scriptural study), and then how it is perceived and practised in

daily operations in organisations, with its challenges and attributed impacts (through primary research).

To summarise, this research aims to answer the following questions:

***How can work be done in the spirit of service?***

*Scriptural study:*

- ***Work in the spirit of service:*** What is the approach of Bahá'í scripture to work and employment relations, and how is work characterised in Bahá'í scripture in relation to the '*spirit of service*'?
- ***Power, Conflict, and Participation:*** How does Bahá'í scripture approach power relations and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement? What are the characteristics of the 'collective decision-making' addressed in Bahá'í scripture? How is this 'collective decision-making' similar to and different from the existing theories of participation/decision-making?

*Primary Research (Organisational study):*

1. ***Work in the spirit of service:*** How do organisations that attempt to apply Bahá'í precepts perceive and explain their work and their workplace? How do they perceive the 'spirit of service' and translate this into their objectives and employment relations? Are there any common characteristics between the organisations that try to apply Bahá'í principles? Are there any significant differences, which may be related to their size, their operational requirements, their management style. and their organisational culture?
2. ***Power and authority:*** What are the power structures in the organisations that apply the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, how do they legitimise authority, and how is the power distributed?
3. ***Dealing with conflict:*** To what extent are the interests of the employees and the employers aligned in the organisations under study? Can they pursue their interests and/or how do they pursue their interests? How are conflicts dealt with?

4. **Employee involvement:** What are the policies and practices through which these organisations involve their employees in decision-making? To what extent are the employees involved and do they have control over those decisions and their application? Are there any systems in place to mobilise employee participation? If so, what are their characteristics and limitations?

The purpose of the scriptural and organisational research is not to compare one with the other, but to broaden an understanding on the aspects of ‘work in the spirit of service’, its concepts and practices, its potentials and limitations, its organisational requirements, and its possible impacts. Accordingly, the concepts developed through scriptural study will be reviewed based on the results of the case-study research, and the overall approach of the Bahá’í Faith to work and employment relations is articulated and described based on the interpretation of the results of this research and in relation to power, conflict, and participation, and the influence of religions.

The sections that follow elaborate the research philosophy and the strategies and methods employed to achieve the objectives of this research.

## 4.2 Research Philosophy

To conduct high-quality field research in organisations a *methodological fit* is required, which refers to “*internal consistency among elements of a research project - research question, prior work, research design, and theoretical contribution*” (Edmonson & McManus, 2007, p. 1155). Therefore, the present research initially elaborates its philosophical standpoint, which identifies “*the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge*” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, p. 107). This informs the research design and the methods used for the research (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006).

To identify the philosophical standpoint of this research it is necessary to note that the abolition of the role of professional clergy in the Bahá’í principles (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1909, pp. 165-166), along with the responsibility of every individual Bahá’í to read the scriptures, discuss them with others, develop understanding, and behave accordingly

(Baha'u'llah, 1991, p. 94), result in a range of understanding of the religious principles of the Bahá'í Faith. Furthermore, the large volume of written Bahá'í scripture poses the possibility that some of those scriptures remain unread by the actors. This further adds to the variety of knowledge about and practices of economic behaviours and employment relations that would explicitly or implicitly reflect the Bahá'í precepts.

Accordingly, this research takes a subjective/constructive ontological stance concerning the 'nature of reality', recognising that although the state of 'work in the spirit of service' is introduced through religious scripture, its concepts and domain require conceptualisation and interpretation, which the researcher engages in, to develop meaning and understanding (Vrasidas, 2000).

Therefore, to identify the epistemological approach of this research as the '*nature of knowledge*' and "*the criteria by which we can know what does, and does not, constitute warranted, or scientific, knowledge*" (Johnson & Cassell, 2001, p. 127), which guides the choice of methods to collect the appropriate data that suits its ontological assumptions, this research takes an interpretivist approach. So, in order to answer its questions, this research does not focus on what is "*unproblematically observable*" (positivist approach) (Gill & Johnson, 2010, p. 193), nor is it constantly sceptical of all the assumptions, methods and interpretations, focusing on "*problematizing the answers*" rather than "*finding answers to the problems*" (Post-modernists approach) (Johnson & Cassell, 2001, p. 137). Rather, through an interpretive approach, this research realises the significance of applying interpretation to meaningful behaviour of the organisational members under study, as well as the researcher herself (Gill & Johnson, 2010) in exploring how the Bahá'í precepts are perceived and practised in different organisational environments and how organisational members (employers and the employees) build their meanings and practices depending on their personal understandings and organisational contexts. Johnson and Duberey (2015, p. 761) explain the variety of meanings and practices that different individuals perceive and employ, as a 'neo positivist' empirical stance, which recognises the importance of "*inter-subjectivities*" in human action (of those being researched) and the need to access that subjective domain in order to describe and explain behaviour.

Consequently, to understand ‘how’ work is done in the spirit of service, this research gathers descriptive data concerning how the managers and employees operate and behave in organisations that attempt to apply Bahá’í precepts, the challenges they face, and the characteristics or requirements they identify for such practices. As a result, qualitative research is considered to be more suitable here than quantitative research.

Moreover, this research recognises that different realities might exist (Vrasidas, 2000) in relation to the conceptualisation and practice of work based on Bahá’í principles, founded on understanding and interpretations of the participants in each organisation. Therefore, the variety of meanings and practices identified in this research, through the scriptural study and interpretation of the researchers, as well as through the conceptualisation, interpretation and practice of the participants in different cases, are used to develop a broader and deeper understanding on the concepts in study, and to evaluate whether they are applicable in different settings and environments, what are the characteristics of the organisations that can benefit from these principles, and what are the challenges that need to be considered.

Thus, according to the objectives and the ontological and epistemological positions of this thesis, which necessitate qualitative research, this research explores the following questions in detail: Why do the employers choose to behave based on certain precepts? How do they perceive and interpret those precepts? How are those perceptions put to practice? Are those principles maintained in organisational operations or mainly appear in the statements and documentations? How are power relations defined and justified? How are conflicts dealt with? How is participation practised and what challenges does it generate? How are those challenges addressed?

To explore these questions the researcher has taken different measures to remain as objective as possible, through reflexivity and ensuring the validity and reliability of the results (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006) as further discussed in section 4.9.

In the following sections the scriptural study, the empirical research, and the research design are introduced, and the methods of data collection and analysis are elaborated

### 4.3 Scriptural study

Study of scriptures was a significant aspect of this research in making sense of the perceptions and practices that underlined the participants' behaviour in the case studies, as well as in conceptualising and interpreting the approach of the Bahá'í scripture to work and employment relations, with its specific characteristics and focus.

The modern scriptural studies, as Sugirthharajah (2015, p. 114) states, are often grouped in three main approaches: *historical critical approach* focused on history of the text, its author and the text's original audience (meaning of the text identified by the meaning identified by the author), *literary approaches* focused on the text and its underlying structure (meaning emerges from the decoding and the encounter between the reader and the text), and the *contextual approach*, focused on context of the reader in relation to the text (reader's context as a factor in making meaning of the text).

This study takes the literary approach, studying the scriptures written by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi for specific terms that relate to the purpose of this research, the context in which those phrases have been identified, and the relationship those phrases indicate with the phenomena in study (presented in Chapter 3). Then, in relation to the results of the empirical research, it broadens the scope in meaning making in the organisational context, considering the organisations' special environments, circumstances, requirements and limitations.

As listed in section 4.1, the questions the scriptural study explored in detail were:

1. ***Work in the spirit of service***: What is the approach of the Bahá'í scripture to work and employment relations, and how is work characterised in Bahá'í scripture in relation to the '*spirit of service*'?
2. ***Power, Conflict, and Participation***: How do Bahá'í scripture approach power relations and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement? What are the characteristics of the 'collective decision-making' addressed in Bahá'í scripture? How is this 'collective decision-making' similar to and different from the existing theories of participation/decision-making?

For this purpose, the key words ‘work’, ‘service’, ‘power’, ‘conflict’ and ‘consultation’ were searched through available Bahá’í literature. This research was confined to literature accessible electronically and available in English. The rationale for these key words was that in exploring the approach of the Bahá’í scriptures to work, the following quote appeared to form the key question of this research: “*Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1998, p. 83). Thus, the main key words extracted from this quote were ‘work’ and ‘service’. The terms ‘power’ and ‘conflict’ were the aspects of managerial ideology generated from the literature review. The term ‘consultation’ was then generated through the search for the previous phrases (work and service) in Bahá’í scripture and the contextual study of those passages.

#### **4.4 Primary Research**

Primary research refers to the type of research where data are collected by the researcher (Scandura & Williams, 2006). The broad categories of primary research in management are qualitative and quantitative research, where quantitative research often involves surveys, laboratory experiments, and numerical methods, and qualitative methods often include (Littler, 2006), action research, case study and ethnography (Myers, 1997). The sources of data for qualitative research are often observations, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and some projective techniques (Myers, 1997).

Qualitative research is mostly used for the purposes of “*description, interpretation, and explanation*” (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999, p. 164). There are arguments against generalisability of qualitative research, specifically with a single-case study method (e.g., Kennedy, 1979; Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984). However, Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (1999) argue that there is wider exercise of theory building based on qualitative research.

Lee et al. (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999) in a review of literature on qualitative articles during 1979-1999, identify four main characteristics of qualitative research methods as: benefiting from natural settings (rather than conducted in laboratory), driving from participants’ perspectives (without imposing any particular interpretation), flexibility and reflexivity (and thus making changes in methods or questions to match the



dynamic demands of the immediate research situation), and qualitative instrumentations, methods, and modes of analysis (which are not necessarily standardised).

Furthermore, Bluhm, et al (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell , 2010), based on a similar review of the literature of qualitative research in management for the following decade (1999-2008), add another two characteristics to qualitative research as: a generally accepted research bias (referring to the data interpreted based on the experiences and social position of the researcher, which although concerned about the bias, states that this non-objectivity is generally accepted), and reduction of data to produce meaning from the data.

The most common purposes of qualitative research are to generate, elaborate and test theories (e.g. Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999; Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell , 2010). Lee et al. (1999, p. 164) explain: *“Theory generation occurs when the inquiry’s design produces formal and testable research propositions. Theory elaboration occurs when preexisting conceptual ideas or a preliminary model drives the study’s design... Theory testing occurs when formal hypotheses or a formal theory determines the study’s design”*.

The present research takes a qualitative approach and initially aimed to elaborate the pre-existing conceptual ideas of the Bahá’í scripture. However, since these concepts are quite broad and highly subject to interpretation, and also considering that in its own structure, interpretation of the scripture of the Bahá’í Faith is subject to individuals’ understanding of the scripture and their consultation with one another (and therefore a unified pre-interpretation of the clergy is not available for the researcher to draw upon), the present research aimed to build novel concepts based on Bahá’í scripture as well as the perceptions and practices of the actors at the workplace, such as ‘work in the spirit of service’.

In order to contextualise this research, during the fieldwork, the documents of the organisations such as their employee assessment forms, their wage structures and their organisational charts, as well as their employee related documents that were available, were also analysed (see Chapter 5) in order to broaden the understanding of the employment relations as was practised and documented in the organisation, and as a

source of comparison for the data generated through interview and focus group discussions. This research also employed both interviews (with the founders and the managers) and focus group discussions (with the employees) in order to access different aspects of data on the same phenomenon (the employment relations and its characteristics in these organisations).

Moreover, field study or qualitative research as Gummesson (2006, p. 170) argues, can address complexity in management research, which quantitative research cannot necessarily deal with, such as the complexity of the “*non-linear dynamics and the phenomenon of emergence*”. Furthermore, Gummesson (2006, p. 173) argues that the qualitative research such as case studies can put variables and categories into context (although probably with less rigour than quantitative research but) creating more realism and relevance. Although, what Gummesson (2006) might have missed here is that it provides a different kind of rigour, a non-quantitative one (see Section 4.9) (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006).

As another characteristic of qualitative research, Gummesson (2006, p. 173) mentions ‘persona’, adding “*human aspects, individual personalities, collective consciousness, roles, and research environment*” to the research. He (Gummesson, 2006, p. 175) argues that “*excluding subjectivity from science is the same as excluding the personalities of scientists, their personal motives and social behaviour*”, and consequently science would “*battle with self-imposed and unrealistic inhibitions*”. He (Gummesson, 2006, p. 175) argues that “*in the end, all research is interpretive, and all interpretation is a combination of the systematic and objective as well as the intuitive, emotional and subjective*” arguments.

In this research, with a neo-positivist frame of reference, an ‘audit trail’ was employed in order to demonstrate objectivity and develop rigour (Johnson & Dubereley, 2015), as further explained in Section 4.9.

Moreover, these characteristics, capturing complexity, context, and persona, are among the characteristics that confirmed the choice of qualitative methods for this research, enabling an understanding and description of the characteristics of ‘work’ – ‘in the spirit of service’ – and the power relations and employee involvement as addressed in Bahá’í

scripture and practised at the case studies (the organisations aiming to apply Bahá'í precepts), and their characteristics, challenges, and requirements. Further details about qualitative research and the case study research method will be discussed in the next section.

Therefore, this research aimed to explore the questions listed in section 4.1 in its empirical research, under the following themes:

1. *Work in the spirit of service*
2. *Power and authority*
3. *Dealing with conflict*
4. *Employee involvement*

To explore these questions, this research employed a case study method to explore the perceptions, behaviours, practices, requirements and limitations of such approaches in an empirical organisational context, and to describe 'work in the spirit of service' based on both the scriptural study and the case-study research. The next section discusses the case study method, its rationale, and requirements in detail.

#### **4.4.1 Case Study Research Method**

The choice of methodology that would satisfy the objectives of this research has been informed by the philosophy of this research and the detailed questions that explore the research objectives. Hence, as explained earlier the present research employs a case study research method.

Case study research is one of the commonly used approaches in qualitative research (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999). Yin (2003) argues that case study methods ask 'how' or 'why' questions; do not require control for behavioural events; and are focused on contemporary events. The case study method as Yin (2003, p. 13) argues is preferred in study of contemporary events, "*especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*". This research employs semi-structured interviews, asking broad questions and allowing the interviewees' insights to guide the

conversations. Furthermore, to ensure that the data did not cover only the managers' side of the phenomena, this research employed focus group discussions with the employees along with the interviews with managers, as well as observing four meetings and recoding the interactions and discussions outside of interview settings. Additionally, this research explored the documents of the organisations concerning their broad approach to work and their specific approach to employment relations, the messages that the founders of the organisations sent, the evidences of their success as they highlighted, and documents such as employee evaluations' forms or employment criteria and the information they provided.

Yin (2003) identified five types of cases as: the critical case (clearly specified hypothesis and the case chosen on the grounds that it allows better understanding of circumstances where the hypotheses will or will not hold); the unique case or extreme case (often the focus of clinical studies); the revelatory case (when a case has not been studied before due to lack of access, however Bryman and Bell (2011) extend it to other research with the use of an inductive approach); the representative or typical case (a case that exemplifies everyday situations or forms of organisations); and the longitudinal case (concerned with how the situation changes over time).

The cases for the purpose of this research could be considered as critical cases on the grounds that there were particular criteria for choosing those cases (attempting to apply the Bahá'í precepts). However, there was not a particular hypothesis that underlied the fieldwork, but this research rather focused on exploration of what the spirit of service entailed in perceptions and practices of the actors (based on their individual understanding of the term and their behaviour). It could also fit the criteria for revelatory case where certain novel themes and practices are explored in an organisational setting for the first time.

Other researchers such as Lee, Collier and Cullen (2007), Yin (2003), and Tellis (Tellis , 1997) consider three types of case studies as: exploratory case studies (often conducted preliminary to large scale surveys in order to map out the themes); descriptive case studies (often to expand the themes already shown through a survey); and explanatory case studies that seek to derive a detailed understanding of a particular phenomenon). Yin

(1981, p. 61) argues that an explanatory case study consists of: rendition of the facts of the case, some consideration of alternative explanation of these facts, and conclusions based on the single explanation, which appears most congruent with the facts. According to the questions of this research and the objectives of the fieldwork, this research took an explanatory approach to case study research.

The current research explored multiple cases, two in the UK and one in the USA (the choice of the countries as a result of the companies that the researcher could gain access to), with different sizes and types of business, which could provide further details about the potentials and limitations of the practices under study and identify whether these factors could influence the practice of work based on Bahá'í principles. For the purpose of the analysis, this research employed both 'within' case analysis as well as cross-case analysis in order to broaden the scope of the explanation of the phenomena and their characteristics and requirements, as well as enabling a degree of generalisation and conclusion (Eisenhardt, 1989). To achieve the latter, external validity was ensured through using replication of the questions and methods in multi-case studies, and cross-case data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The method of analysis and its considerations are further discussed in the analysis section. The generalisability mentioned here was achieved for this research in the cross-case analysis, analysing the extendibility of the results to business environments that share similar concerns for employee well-being and the betterment of the society.

For the purpose of interviews, certain constructs, generated from the review of the literature on employment relations and managerial ideology, as well as the significant concepts from the scriptural study, were explored. Details of the research design and its methods are explained below.

## **4.5 Research Design**

Research design refers to “*a framework for collection and analysis of data*” as well as the “*criteria that are employed when evaluating business research*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 40). Criteria as Bryman and Bell (2011) explain refer to reliability, replication, and

validity (i.e. measurement validity, internal validity, external validity, ecological validity). These criteria will be elaborated further in the next section.

As a framework, a research design is chosen based on the priority being given to a range of dimensions of a project including: expressing causal connections between variables, generalising to larger groups of individuals than those actually forming part of the investigation, understanding behaviour and the meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context, having a temporal (i.e. overtime) appreciation of social phenomena and their interconnections (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 40). This research explores behaviour and meaning of that behaviour subjective to actors and compares these meanings and behaviours across the three cases.

Thus, of the common research designs that Bryman and Bell explain<sup>28</sup> (2011) this research employs case study research design with a qualitative approach. It employs both scriptural study and primary research in order to enable understanding of the behaviour and perceptions of the actors as well as the underlying beliefs and values that drive the actors to behave in certain ways.

It also employs a multi-case study method, which is known to be an effective method for a revelatory case in which a novel phenomenon is to be scientifically investigated (or in a critical case in order to rest the theory) (Whitworth & Cheatham, 1988). Multiple case studies can be used to explore and understand similarities and differences between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995), enable analysis of the data within each situation and across situations (Yin, 2003), and enable wider exploration of research questions and theoretical evolution (Eisenhardt, 1989). According to Dyer and Wilkins (1991) the number of the cases or the length of the research are not as material as the ability of the researcher to describe and understand the context in question well enough to be understandable to the reader and to produce relationships and theory based on the data.

Accordingly, the research design for this project was initially based on an in-depth single case study: PHX was visited (in USA), the managers and employees were interviewed

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<sup>28</sup> Research designs as Bryman and Bell (2011, p.40) argue include: “Experimental and related designs (such as quasi-experiment), cross-sectional designs (e.g. social survey research), longitudinal design (often to map a change in business and management research, e.g. panel study and cohort study), Case study design, comparative design.”

through one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions respectively, some meetings were attended, and observation and field notes were recorded for six weeks. It was intended to follow this up by sending questionnaires to all the employees and managers, to combine qualitative and quantitative methods for more holistic and reliable results. However, after the initial analysis of the results, it was decided that, in order to broaden the understanding of the concepts and their relation to Bahá'í principles, it was essential to explore multiple cases since there were no frames of reference or previous studies on Bahá'í inspired organisations that this research could draw upon. Therefore, another two companies (in the UK) were contacted and interviewed similarly, but without the period of observation and recording of their meetings. This was because the amount of data already generated was quite large and additional in-depth, focused data was required instead.

#### **4.5.1 The cases of this research**

This research explores '*How Bahá'í principles influence employment relations, and whether it is possible to maintain these principles in practice*', and it enquires into the perceptions and practices of "*work in the spirit of service*" in three organisations. These are organisations that attempt to apply Bahá'í precepts to their daily operations, explicitly or implicitly, vary in size, and their businesses provide different contexts to the analysis of the results.

Furthermore, the founders of the organisations in all the three cases believed in the Bahá'í Faith, whereas their employees (managers and employees) were from different religious or spiritual backgrounds. Having participants from a variety of backgrounds provided additional detail on the applicability of the Bahá'í principles to organisations that employ people who do not believe in the Bahá'í Faith, and its challenges and requirements, and therefore improved the generalisability of the results. The three cases and their sources of data are introduced in section 4.6.3.

## 4.6 Data Collection in Primary research

The empirical data for the purpose of this study were collected in two phases. The first phase was from December 2013 to January 2014, and the second phase was from November to December 2016. During the first phase an extensive set of interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at the first case study along with constant reflections on the data, following which the recorded data were transcribed and analysed. However, after the initial analysis it was decided that multiple case studies (organisations in different countries – USA and UK, with various businesses, sizes and number of employees, and various organisational structures, a multinational corporation, a social enterprise, and a consultancy) would better suit the purpose of this research, enabling access to a wider context and a variety of perceptions and practices. Consequently, another two cases were selected and contacted during the second phase of data collection, and interviews and focus group discussions were conducted there as well. However, one of the two latter cases had changed in their organisational structure and employment relations (from being contract-based to operating based on a ‘network of individuals’ who would get involved in various projects based on their interests) by the time of the interviews, and thus the available employees/ex-employees were individually interviewed.

### 4.6.1 Gaining Access

The three organisations were accessed through a non-profit organisation called ebbf – from ‘Ethical Business Building Future’. Ebbf, based on their website, is “*a Bahá’í inspired learning community that accompanies mindful individuals and groups through daily work and discourse to transform business and the economy thereby contributing to a prosperous, just and sustainable civilization*” (ebbf, 2017). They work as a forum, sharing ethical practices of the organisations based on the themes inspired by the Bahá’í principles. ebbf was approached to introduce the researcher to organisations that applied Bahá’í precepts and overall six companies were contacted. One of those organisations worked on specific projects and did not have employees, which did not fit the criteria for this research, which focused on employment relations. Another company was contacted



and briefly interviewed over Skype, but did not focus on application of Bahá'í principles, and accordingly did not answer the questions of this research . A third company did not respond. However, the other three organisations responded positively and were very helpful in agreeing to the interviews and focus group discussions during the time span requested by the researcher.

#### **4.6.2 Data Collection methods for the purpose of the primary research**

This research employed multiple methods in its primary research in order to: gain a variety of information; look at different aspects of the phenomenon; avoid any biases; and enable accessing a broader picture of the phenomenon (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Cowan (2009, p. 149) describes three techniques for mixing methods: the nested strategy (choosing a main framework and then adding a technique from another methodology), the sequential strategy (using different methods as sequential steps of gathering data), and the parallel strategy (using different methods at the same time in order to illuminate the topic from all sides). These three methods are widely discussed by different authors, while some of them have categorised them into more detailed techniques (e.g. Holloway & Galvin, 2017), but all basically incorporating these three categories. This research employed a parallel strategy, with a variety of methods at the same time.

These strategies for mixed methods or triangulation mostly use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie , & Turner, 2007). However, Brannen (2005, p. 4) argues that mixed methods research refers to “*adapting a research strategy employing more than one type of research method*”. She (Brannen, 2005) argues that the methods could be a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, a mix of qualitative methods, or a mix of quantitative methods. It could also include working with different types of data, thus Brannen (2005) calls it multi-strategy research.

The present research uses mixed methods employing a variety of qualitative research methods including interviews with the managers, focus group discussions with the employees, observation where possible, and archival study of companies' documents. Furthermore, it uses scriptural study by exploring Bahá'í scripture in order to develop the contexts and meanings underlying the perceptions and behaviours of the individual

actors. Here, it employs the parallel strategy, conducting interviews along with the focus group discussions, as well as observation, and archival study of the companies' websites, their documents and forms. All the data have been collected at the same time in order to enable a broader picture of the phenomenon from different sides of the employment relations. The summary of sources of data and the methods for the three case studies are presented in section 4.6.3.

#### **4.6.2.1 Primary data – Interviews and focus group discussions**

Interviews are one of the main sources for qualitative research and a basic mode of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). The purpose of in-depth interviewing for this study was not to test a hypothesis or evaluate, but to “*understand the living experiences of other people*” and “*the meaning they make of that experience*” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9).

Interviews can take different forms (e.g. Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alsaawi, 2014) such as: structured interview, standardised interview, semi-structured interview, unstructured interview, intensive interview, qualitative interview, focused interview, focus group, group interview, oral history interview, or life history interview. They all have their own advantages and drawbacks, which make them suitable to different research objectives (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The present research employed semi-structured interviews, where the broad open-ended questions were planned prior to the interview, and the interviewer was interested in how the participants would elaborate and discuss their perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon in question (Bryman & Bell, 2011), as well as how they would address the sources of their beliefs and conduct (why they believe or behave in certain way). The use of semi-structured interviews preserved the depth and richness of responses while particularly addressing specific phenomenon, allowing the researcher to generate more questions in response to the interviewees' answers and cover a wide range of instances (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

For this research, all the founders, and in the first case, all of the top managers (managers from all departments) who could be involved in the development and implementation of

the policies and organisational culture as well as a number of team leaders, in the second case, the manager at the facility that was approached, at in the third case all the employees (they did not have managers) were interviewed, in order to trace the perceptions and practices of the research objectives throughout the management structure of the organisations. Having taken measures to ensure confidentiality (see section 4.10) all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview questions and how they related to research questions along with the information sheet and consent form are presented in Appendix 1.

#### **4.6.2.2 Primary data – Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

Powell and Single (1996, p. 449) define focus groups as “*a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research*”. They (Powell & Single, 1996) argue that focus group discussion is a technique that employs guided, interactional discussion as a means of generating “*the rich details of complex experiences and the reasoning behind actions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes*” (Powell & Single, 1996, p. 499)

Kitzinger (1995) argues that although focus groups are often employed as a quick and convenient research method to collect data from several people simultaneously, they can provide different types of results in comparison to one-to-one interviews. Focus groups explicitly use ‘*group interaction*’ as part of the method, where participants “*are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view*” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299).

Berg (2007, p. 45) states that a particular strength of interviewing through focus groups is that participants may “*...develop ideas collectively, bringing forward their own priorities and perspectives, to create theory grounded in the actual experience*”.

Accordingly, for the purpose of this research, focus group discussions were not employed in order to aggregate the opinions of the participants or to measure their attitudes (Barbour & Schostak, 2005, p. 43), but rather to enable hearing the opinions and experiences of employees from different departments/positions and with different levels

of engagement, where they would ‘*co-produce an account of their perceptions and practices*’ (Barbour & Schostak, 2005, p. 43). Such focus group discussions with open-ended questions could enable the researcher to capture unexpected issues and information, which would unfold further aspect of the phenomenon (Barbour & Schostak, 2005).

However, while such a group dynamic is among the main advantages of focus group discussion, there are some downsides where, “*the articulation of group norms may silence individual voices of dissent*” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 302), and result in a bias through domination of a particular participant or the interviewer (Wong, 2008), or the presence of other participants could compromise the confidentiality of the research session, which could discourage participants from sharing their opinions (Kitzinger, 1995).

The issue of domination could be the main potential threat to the present research specifically in the first case, which was an organisation with different departments, over 700 employees, and offices in 15 countries (about 450 employees at the head office where was the case of this research). The reason for the potential risk of domination of some participants or the organisational norms was that the focus groups in this research brought together participants from different ranks (and different departments) in order to enable the presence of potentially varying opinions and experiences (for instance grasping potentially different levels of engagement in decisions of the organisation due to differences in their ranks). This method of sampling, called ‘*purposive sampling*’ (Barbour & Schostak, 2005, p. 43) or ‘*theoretical sampling*’ (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 303) was employed in order to reflect a range of the total study population.

In this research, after the first focus group discussion, domination of some participants was noticeable. Therefore, for the following discussion, in order to reduce the risk of domination and to enable a free discussion, two specific measures were taken. On the one hand, the number of focus group discussions was increased (from the initial plan) with a smaller number of participants, in order to create a more comfortable and friendly environment while enabling the collection of a larger volume of data that would cover a broader range of opinions from different sides of the arguments. This resulted in having quite positive discussions, quite negative ones, and some groups with both types of

arguments. Having all these types of arguments uncovered several aspects of the organisational practice, which effectively broadened the understanding of the phenomenon.

On the other hand, the principle of heterogeneity was employed, according to which participants were selected from different departments (i.e. working in different buildings at the complex) so that their familiarity with each other was at a minimum, and thus domination of seniority or position was reduced. At the same time, all the groups were homogenous in the sense that they were all employees (no managers) and shared a similar level of control over organisational policies and their application.

Concerning heterogeneity or homogeneity, Clader (1977) argues that heterogeneous groups can yield rich information, while homogeneity facilitates rapport. Thus she (Calder, 1977) argues that the purpose of the research identifies the level of homogeneity required. For the purpose of this research, since grasping the range of experiences of different people from different departments and different ranks was intended, it required a higher level of heterogeneity. Therefore, the moderator (researcher) needed to employ policies to “*establish rapport with the participants, make them relax, and promote free discussion*” (Tynan & Drayton, 1988, p. 7) and “*offer a supportive environment, conducive to open discussion and, thus, credible research*” (McLafferty, 2004, p. 190). To do so, the following measures have been suggested: listening attentively (so that the participants could recount their experiences as fully as possible), adopting open and emotionally neutral body language, nodding, smiling, looking interested and making encouraging noises (e.g. Mmmm) during the interview. Furthermore, strategic use of silence to encourage participants to talk and elaborate more, reflecting on remarks made by participants as well as seeking clarification when required, while avoiding any use of leading or loaded questions (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, pp. 292-293). In addition, managing the dominating respondents while encouraging the passive members to participate is significant in maintaining a smooth and rich discussion, which is often done with the use of “*body language, gesture and non-directive questioning*” (Tynan & Drayton, 1988, p. 7). Furthermore, some researchers (e.g. Stewart & Shamdassani, 2014, pp. 32-34; Basch, 1987) suggest forming groups of strangers, since

groups of acquaintances are more likely to focus on narrow set of concerns, or they do so in order to represent larger population segments.

For the purpose of the present research, the researcher employed the above policies as follows. The focus groups started with a smile and a brief introduction to the research objectives in a neutral manner (explaining that the purpose was to learn about their organisational culture, practices, and challenges), in order to initially build acquaintance (Stewart & Shamdassani, 2014). The researcher then asked the participants to describe what they did in (their tasks) in order to get everybody to start to speak and improve the level of familiarity among the members. Furthermore, the facilitator assured them of complete confidentiality and anonymity. During the discussions minimum interruptions would take place and if anybody was quiet, their opinion was sought with probing questions like “*what do you think?*”, “*how about in your department?*”, etc. It often helped to establish rapport and trust and in several focus groups, as well as in several interviews, participants shared their concerns and criticisms as well, which mainly happens once trust is secured (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus group questions and their relation to research questions are presented in Appendix 1.

The acronym ‘FGD’, short ‘for focus group discussion’ will be used from now on in the discussion of the results. This refers to the data collected from the employees.

#### **4.6.2.3 Secondary data – company website, reports, forms, etc.**

Secondary research refers to the data collected or produced by someone other than the researcher, and not for the purpose of the project at hand (Schmit & Hollensen, 2006). Saunders et al. (2009, pp. 258-263) argue that within business and management research secondary data are used most frequently as part of a case study or survey research strategy and they include: *Documentary secondary data* (i.e. ‘written material’ such as correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports to shareholders, diaries, journal; and ‘unwritten material’ such as voice and video recordings, pictures); *Survey-based secondary data* (i.e. data collected through surveys such as Governments’ censuses, hoc surveys); and *Multiple surveys* (i.e. area-based data such as Financial Times’ country reports).

This research explored documentary secondary data, written and unwritten, including companies' organisational charts, employee assessment forms, company website, and publicly available video files. They helped to analyse the companies' overall approach and their mission and vision. This enabled identifying how well the company matched the criteria for this research as well as identifying what aspects of the spirit of service in particular each company focused on. Furthermore, the organisational chart and employment assessment forms provided additional details of the employment relations' policies of the organisations under study.

### **4.6.3 The three cases and their sources of data**

The three cases for this research were different in size, number of employees, type of business, their organisational structure, and the country they were located; which could result in a variety of experiences in each company, as explored further in Chapters 5-8.

#### **4.6.3.1 First Case Study - PHX**

PHX was a multinational organisation in the chemical industry, privately owned by its founder. It had branches in 22 countries (based on their website information on 20 May 2017) and over 700 employees worldwide, 500 of whom worked at the head office in the USA. It was a high-tech organisation, which produced specific chemical products in the purification and separation industry. Therefore, PHX had a strong R&D team along with its production teams. The head office was in the United States, where the interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) took place.

The company had won the International Spirit at Work Award (2004), been selected as an 'Exceptional Workplace' by the Wall Street Journal (2008), and won the Ethical company prize (2013), and it had been awarded several industry-related or community impact related accreditations and awards such as:

- Scientists' Choice Award (2009, 2010)
- R&D 100 Award (2005-2010)
- American Red Cross Platinum Award (2008-2011)

- Torrance Advantage Award (2009)
- Deloitte's Prestigious Technology Fast 50 Program (2007)
- The Los Angeles Venture Association (LAVA) Conscious Capitalism Award (2011)
- Their New Website Wins Best-of-Industry Award (2011)

These awards and accreditations, which recognized the company's working environment, its technological advancements, and the company's impact on the community welfare, were the aspects that the company (the founder and the manager) explained as the signs of the success of the company. The success they described here was focused on their technology, but also their working environment and employee welfare, as well as wider community welfare.

The sources of the data that were collected and analysed for this case are presented in the table below.

**Table 4-1 Sources of Data for PHX**

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Interviews</b>	15 Semi-structured interviews with different levels of management, with open ended questions, between 27-79 minutes each, with: the founder of the organisation, 5 top-level managers, and 9 second-level managers (M1,2, etc). All interviews have been recorded and transcribed.
<b>Focus Group Discussions</b>	10 Focus Group Discussions (FGD1, 2, etc.) with the employees, chosen from different departments, 2-6 participants in each group, 32 in total, 25-59 minutes each.
<b>Documents</b>	Company website and their publicly available video, the company's House Rules booklet, the documents regarding their value system shared with the researcher, and the company's internal journal

To form the focus group discussions, every third employee from each department (from the list of the employees and their contact e-mails), was chosen, and then every sixth, every ninth, and so on (as needed based on their acceptance/rejection). This step created a potential participants' list. In order to include employees from different departments in every FGD electronic invitations were then sent to the employees from various



departments (from the list) each time; and those who accepted the invitation took part at the study.

Other than this data, general information regarding PHX, their operations and culture was collected through a tour of the organisation, introduction to their different buildings, facilities, departments, production and packaging processes, etc. Furthermore, the researcher attended the following meetings, recording their discussion and consultation styles, participation (who participated and how they participated), and the concerns raised during the consultations: a meeting with a national level NGO with which PHX had been heavily involved for several years; a meeting regarding the recruitment policies and criteria for sales department at PHX; and a Sales' team meeting. The field notes taken during these observations, were also incorporated in the data analysis of this case.

#### **4.6.3.2 Second Case Study – AP**

AP was a small organisation in the supported housing industry, privately owned by its founder. It had two different complexes in England, each having their own team of skilled staff. They provided professional support to clients with specific health needs. They had about 11 professional staff in total for both the premises, excluding any administrative staff (in 2016). For the purpose of this research, the founder, the managers from both the sites, and the staff from one site were interviewed.

The company was growing rapidly and in the five years of their operation prior to the interviews, they had expanded from one accommodation complex to two, and they were about to acquire a third one. The participants all described their company as successful, based on the impact they had on the recovery of their clients according to the clients' feedback and the feedback and accreditations they had received from an external institution, such as Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) Level A (2014, 2017). The sources of the data that were collected and analysed for this case are presented in Table 4-2.

**Table 4-2 Sources of Data for AP**

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Interviews</b>	3 Semi-structured interviews with managers, with open ended questions, between 33-52 minutes each, with 1 founder of the organisation, and 2 managers (M1, etc.). All interviews have been recorded and transcribed.
<b>Focus Group Discussions</b>	1 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the employees on one complex, with three participants, 50 minutes.
<b>Documents</b>	Company website and their publicly available documents, the documents regarding their value system shared with the researcher

It is noted here that the second and third case studies were studied at the second stage of data collection in 2016, with the purpose of providing a broader understanding of the phenomena and the contexts under study, and to enable comparison and generalisation where appropriate.

#### **4.6.3.3 Third Case Study - THEL**

THEL was a small-sized consultancy organisation that helped businesses to find meaning in what they did and their role in society, and revise their objectives and strategies accordingly, through creating conversation spaces and involving different parties, etc. It was privately owned by its founder, and at the time of interviews it had one employee and a network of associates who engaged in different projects according to their expertise and interests. This organisation had changed quite a lot in structure and purpose between 2015, when they were initially contacted and the pilot interview took place, and 2016 where the actual interviews were conducted. In 2015, they had four full-time employees and their business mainly focused on improving internal communication through creating thinking and conversation spaces. As stated at the interviews, gradually the purpose of the organisation and accordingly its structure changed. These changes were explored in the interviews and are reflected in the analysis of the results.

For the purpose of this research, the founder, the employee (who had been with the company for a few years), and two previous employees (the two out of the three ex-employees who were contacted) were individually interviewed. Due to the circumstances, a focus group discussion among employees was not possible; it did not make sense either, since these employees work/ed quite independently, not in the traditional manager-employee relationship.

The company had worked with a variety of small as well as high profile organisations such as a multinational bank in the UK (the name kept anonymous), which the employees mentioned as a special aspect of working in THEL, as they were in touch with high-influence companies.

The sources of the data that were collected and analysed for this case are presented in Table 4-3.

**Table 4-3 Sources of Data for THEL**

Data Source	Details
<b>Interviews</b>	4 Semi-structured interviews with manager and the employees, with open-ended questions, between 32-57 minutes each, with 1 founder of the organisation, and 3 employees (E1, etc.). All interviews have been recorded and transcribed.
<b>Documents</b>	Company website and their publicly available documents, the documents regarding their value system shared with the researcher.

## 4.7 Data analysis and building concepts

Prior to explaining the analysis of data, here, the objective of this research in terms of contribution to theory will be explained. This informed the method of analysis employed.

Discussion of the theoretical contribution of research often involves the argument of ‘generalisability’ of qualitative research and in particular case studies. While some

researchers believe that the results generated from case studies are not generalisable (e.g. Gerring, 2007; Stoecker, 1991; Mohr, 1985), others argue that they can even be preferable in certain contexts and they offer specific measures to ensure the *rigour* of the findings (e.g. Tsang E. W., 2014; Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). The arguments of validity and reliability and their relevance to this research are discussed in section 4.9.

Here, Yin (2003, p. 10) argues that case studies “*are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes*”. He (Yin, 2003, p. 10) argues that the goal of case study research will be “*to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)*”. Washlam (1995, p. 79) further expands this argument and articulates four types of generalisation from interpretive case studies as: development of concepts, generation of theory, drawing of specific implications, and contribution of rich insight. Similarly, Eisenhardt (1989) argues that the output of inductive case study research includes concepts, a conceptual framework, propositions, or mid-range theory which can be considered similar to Washlam’s (1995) articulation, except for ‘propositions’ while Washlam’s (1995) considers ‘rich insight’, even if not in the form of propositions.

This research, as the first step in academic research on the Bahá’í precepts and their applications to economic relations and organisational environments, aimed to develop concepts and their meanings in the course of its analysis, and explore the applicability of those concepts and frameworks to organisational settings. This was the first step in the process of building theory through further research. In this research, initially Bahá’í scripture was studied. At the next stage, extensive within case analysis was conducted as well as cross-case analysis on the three organisations as discussed below. Subsequently the results of the scriptural study complemented the results of the primary research in developing themes and concepts, through triangulation.

It is worth mentioning here that the review of literature in employment relations helped in developing sensitising concepts (Johnson & Dubereley, 2015) in relation to ‘power’, ‘dealing with conflict’ and ‘employee involvement’. This is further explained in identifying the methods of analysis.

For analysing qualitative data, often an inductive approach is employed although it can also be informed by theory. Yin (2003) argues that a pure inductive approach bears the risk of failing to generate any knowledge by an inexperienced researcher. To overcome this risk, an inductive approach can be commenced through a theoretical perspective, which can inspire the research questions, link the research to an existing body of knowledge, help the researcher to get started, and provide an initial analytical framework (e.g. Yin, 2003; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). However, having a hypothesis or a strict analytical framework leads to a deductive approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). To explain how theory can inform inductive research, Bryan and Burgess (1994, p. 2) argue: *“The research process, then, is not a clear cut sequence of procedures following a neat pattern, but a messy interaction between the conceptual and empirical world, deduction and induction occurring at the same time.”*

Similarly, this research employed an inductive approach in the scriptural study and the empirical research. Initially, induction was employed exploring the approach of the Bahá’í scripture to work – how work is identified, and how ‘work in the spirit of service’ is articulated, characterised, and elaborated connecting to other characteristics. Similarly, in the primary research the actors’ approach to work and employment relations, the meanings they associated to their work and to the precepts they employed, and the practices they associated with them, were explored with open ended questions and detailed exploration of the phenomenon from interviewees’ point of view. In addition, the literature in management ideology and employment relations informed the direction to focus on, and contributed to sensitising the concepts (Johnson & Dubereley, 2015), therefore the Bahá’í scripture and the participants’ perceptions and practices were explored in relation to power, conflict, and authority as broad topics/themes for investigation and analysis.

Furthermore, ongoing reflection during the field research and analysis contributed to detailed findings and a broader understanding. Without such reflection it was not possible. To elaborate, firstly, there was a wide range of principles identified in Bahá’í scripture that the founders could have studied or knew about variably, favoured variably, or understood variably, in applying them to their organisations. During the fieldwork, there was a constant reflection on the principles and concepts from the scriptural study

and the applications the actors (employers and the employees) spoke about in interviews and FGDs, in order to make sense of their statements, their underlying values and principles, and the challenges they faced. Additionally, there was revisioning of the interviews with managers in connection to the FGDs among employees as well as the organisational archived documents, in order to further understand the environment, the phenomenon and the varying, or at points - opposing approaches, their contexts, and potential or mentioned underlying reasons. At all stages, including during interviews, after each interview, or later on during the extensive analysis, notes were taken by the researcher that reflected the emotions of participants, the discussions they continued after the interview officially ended and the recording was stopped, or the relationships between the arguments, whether in agreement or opposing, that the researcher came across (similarly mentioned by Eisenhardt, 1989; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Furthermore, the researcher constantly reflected on whether her understanding was based on what she had heard in the interviews, or was biased by her knowledge or understanding of the scripture. Thus, the recordings of interviews were listened to several times, at different settings. They were listened to while still at the organisational setting; then after some time with a fresh eye; and another time along with all other interviews in an extensive period of focused analysis. Through these reflections the researcher consciously tried to take a critical position towards the data, not through isolating herself from the scripture or the organisations, but through constantly reflecting on the findings, going through them several times, and discussing different parts of the arguments with those who had no knowledge of the data or the research. There, these reflections were noted separately, and then were compared with the understanding of the researcher. Similarly, the questions that the interviewees raised were noted and considered carefully. An example of that was when in one of the interviews, an employee asked a question that the researcher found valuable and later on, in a follow up interview, all of the founders were asked this question (i.e. those who were in the position to answer it), which added to the richness of the data.

Explaining methods of qualitative analysis, Robson (2011, p. 467), identifies three commonly employed approaches: *quasi- statistical approach* (using word or phrase frequencies and inter-correlations), *thematic coding approach*, and *grounded theory*

*approach*; among which, the thematic coding approach is the most commonly employed in social research (Alsaawi, 2014).

Here, while grounded theory generates the codes purely from reviewing the data and researcher's interpretation, the thematic approach cannot be considered the opposite and is not necessarily linked to a theoretical perspective (Robson, 2011). In thematic coding, part or all of the data are coded and labelled, and codes with the same labels are grouped together as a theme. However, in this approach codes and themes occurring in the data can be inductively determined from reviewing the data, or from relevance to research questions, previous research, or theoretical considerations. The themes then serve as a basis for further analysis and interpretation. This method generates substantial summaries of the themes, along with matrices, network maps, flow-charts, and diagrams (2011, p. 467). This method can be used as purely descriptive, exploratory, or within a variety of theoretical frameworks (Robson, 2011).

This research employed the thematic coding approach with inductive analysis of the data (the interviews and the FGDs) as well as its link to previous research (aspects of organisational ideology) and the scriptural data (Bahá'í scripture). Here, some themes and some sub-themes were purely generated from the data, while some broad themes (i.e. 'work in the spirit of service', 'power and authority', conflict of interest', and 'employee involvement') were used in connection to scriptural study and previous theory.

Robson (2011, p. 476) summarises the thematic approach in five stages as:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
2. Generating the initial codes
3. Identifying themes
4. Constructing thematic networks
5. Integration and interpretation

Different researchers explain the same steps in a variety of ways, such as *Ryan and Bernard* (2003, p. 85): (1) discovering themes and subthemes, (2) winnowing themes to a manageable few (i.e., deciding which themes are important in any project), (3) building hierarchies of themes or codebooks, and (4) linking themes into theoretical models;

*Ritchie and Spencer* (1994, p. 176): familiarization, identifying a thematic framework,

indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation.

The final stage that Ritchie and Spencer (1994, pp. 174-180) call ‘mapping and interpretation’ is very similar to Robson’s (2011) and includes: defining concepts; mapping the range, nature and dynamics of phenomena; creating typologies (e.g. different types of attitudes); finding associations (e.g. between experiences and attitudes); seeking explanations; or developing new ideas, theories or strategies. All these stages involve very similar tasks in developing a network of themes, which would further serve the objective of the research based on the researchers’ choice of theoretical contribution (e.g. Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Walsham, 1995; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Moreover, Robson (2011, pp. 479-485) referring to different researchers discusses these steps in details such as: what to code (e.g. specific acts and behaviours, events, activities, strategies and practices, states, meanings etc.), how to mark the coding, how to identify themes (e.g. repetitions, indigenous categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, etc.), constructing thematic networks, and finally integration and interpretation. These steps (Robson, 2011) will not be further discussed here, but during the analysis they have been highly incorporated, along with the details addressed by Ryan and Bernard (2003), which explicitly describes different codes and themes.

Furthermore, for the analysis of FGDs in particular, it was taken into account that the results needed to be presented “*in the context of the discussion within the groups, from a series of sessions rather than from a single focus group session*” (Wong, 2008, p. 259). Moreover, “*the intensity of respondents’ comments, as well as the specificity of probe responses*” were considered during the analysis of the data (Wong, 2008, p. 259).

A specific objective of focus groups is identifying the areas of agreement and disagreement in order to understand how perspectives and meanings develop and are modified in a group (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). However, while identifying disagreements is more straightforward, for identifying agreement “*the analyst must evaluate whether apparent agreement resulted from coercion or self-censoring of members with alternative viewpoints*” (Kidd & Parshall, 2000, p. 300). This could represent a meaningful discourse unit or a group perspective generating from multiple or even conflicting statements raised during the discussion, while the former would come to an agreement since no counter



arguments were raised (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). In this research, both agreement types were identified in the course of analysis of the results and they are discussed in the relevant chapters.

Furthermore, in the cross-case analysis the similarities and differences across cases, were examined and cross-case propositions were tentatively inducted (Eisenhardt, 1989).

These propositions were tested for 'fit' through randomly picking some discussions (both among interviews and among FGDs) and checking the contents presented in those recordings. This is called '*replication logic*', where cases that confirm the emergent meanings or relationships enhance the confidence of the generalisation, and those that disconfirm can provide an opportunity to extend or refine the concepts or the theory (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 542). For this research, for instance, most of the managers in PHX had highlighted performance-based pay as a method of taking care of their employees, however, some employees argued against the pay mechanism in PHX; managers spoke about involving their employees and the open door policy, while a few employees spoke otherwise, and hard work was among organisational values mainly highlighted by the employees, not the managers. These variations are discussed in the chapters of analysis.

Moreover, as part of the triangulation process, the constructs were built mainly based on two different sets of data, the interviews with managers and the focus group discussions with the employees. In addition, the documents relevant to employment relations and organisational charts as well as publicly available statements were studied to understand the concepts and falsify the generalisations made. For instance, in PHX, their website stated their mission statement as service of customers, employees and the humanity, while the discussions pointed to the welfare of the customers first, then humanity and then the employees. Moreover, the perceptions of success in the three cases were mostly derived from the archival study of their documents.

Also, after the manual development of codes and themes, computer software called NVivo was further employed in order to assure capturing of different aspects of the constructs and with a 'second eye' in a sense. Specifically, the use of computer programs such as NVivo are advised when there is a large amount of transcribed material to be analysed (Cameron, 2005)

The following section describes the implementation of the data analysis as part of an ‘audit trail’, through which the researcher reviewed the analysis process at each stage to maintain ‘reflexivity’ and ‘quality of the results’ (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 109; Johnson & Dubereley, 2015, p. 265). This is further discussed in section 4.9.

#### **4.8 The Implementation of Data Analysis Strategies**

In this research, initially each case was analysed independently and the interview transcription files were explored for the values and principles that the participants attributed to their work and their workplace, along with the examples, events, activities, practices and meanings that they employed in addressing the question (Robson, 2011, pp. 479-485). To identify participants’ perceptions and experiences of their corporate values and organisational culture, types and categories of identifications repeatedly mentioned by employees and the managers, along with those mentioned by the founders of each organisation (all three of which believed in the Bahá’í Faith) were highlighted and explored. This part of the analysis described the concept of work and the participant’s work environment in each case study. Furthermore, at the cross-case analysis, these findings were compared and at points integrated, to develop the concept and characteristics of work based on the themes, meanings and experiences that went across the cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) and formed shared perceptions and experiences in all three cases. This included the meaning, the practices, states, or strategies they mentioned in describing their work (Robson, 2011, pp. 479-485). These results are presented in Chapter 5.

The same strategy was employed in exploring the data for each case and across the cases in the participants’ references to power and authority, conflict and how it was dealt with, and employee involvement (presented in Chapters 6,7, and 8 respectively). The combination of single and cross case analysis resulted in development of a deeper understanding and explanations specifically in the context of employee involvement presented in chapter 7.

At the end of each chapter of analysis (Chapters 6-8), the shared concepts and characteristics resulting from the cross-case analysis are discussed in relation to the

attributes of work in the spirit of service and approaches to employment relations based on Bahá'í scripture (Chapter 3), and the similarities and differences are discussed.

Furthermore, the organisational documents relating to the corporate values, the relevant certificates and prizes, and the publicly available documents on the websites of each organisation were studied against the themes generated in the analysis of the interviews and FGDs, in order to complement the understanding of how they characterised their work and employment relations in their organisations. The results of this analysis have been integrated in the findings from the interviews and FGDs.

These analyses were initially done manually adopting case-oriented strategy through reading each transcription file and the relevant documents and highlighting and signposting (coding) the specific parts in each document that shared certain configuration (Yin , 2003; Forman & Damschroder, 2008; Schreier, 2014). These codes were repeatedly revised in order to integrate them into broader concepts to develop the themes that each group of codes commonly related to.

After the manual reading, coding, recoding, categorising, and creating the network of themes, the computer software Nvivo was employed for within case analysis as well as cross-case analysis through which, the data were summarised and categorised according to the different 'nodes' or codes allocated to each aspect of the argument mentioned by the participants. These different nodes or points were further put together based on their contextual similarities, to form broader themes.

This process in forming themes was done manually as well as with the use of Nvivo in a continuous process, in order to result in more reliable and inclusive outcomes. These themes are presented as the main headings of each chapter of analysis. The Nvivo analysis was done based on the 'framework analysis', which summarised and categorised the large volume of information in a manageable format enabling the researcher to see the patterns, similarities and differences discussed by different participants on each individual topic. Framework analysis is "*a matrix based method for analysing qualitative data. It facilitates data management such that all the stages involved in the analytic hierarchy can be conducted*" (Ritchie & Lewis , 2003, p. 262). It is similar to thematic analysis, while further adding transparency to the researcher's interpretation of the

participants experiences, and a clear description of the processes that guide the systematic analysis (through its interconnected stages), it enables capture of different aspects of the phenomena (Ritchie & Lewis , 2003; Smith & Firth, 2011).

For the purpose of this research, the indices produced through the framework analysis in Nvivo included the codes and nodes within each theme, in relation to the most relevant demographic information of the participants, such as their position (founder, manager or the employee), the case reference (the organisation the participant belongs to), their religious beliefs and gender. This demographic information in relation to the codes and nodes facilitated understanding of the context of the discussion and enabled seeing the bigger picture. Furthermore, in summarising the parts of the interviews presented in the indices, the participants' wording was used, in order to improve the accuracy of the interpretations.

Although the thematic/framework analysis initially started with the main themes and codes (work in the spirit of service, power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement) developed in relation to the review of the literature and the scriptural study, in analysing the primary data, an open coding process was employed where all the codes (concepts and sub-themes) were purely generated from the interviews and FGDs. This is the reason sub-codes may vary between the cases in the chapters of analysis.

#### **4.8.1 The Implementation of Coding Process**

The coding process started while doing the fieldwork. Notes were taken during the interviews, identifying the themes and topics that were discussed, which also prompted further questions for further elaborations.

In the process of coding, the stages discussed by Robson (2011) and detailed by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson and Lowe (2008, pp. 178-179) were employed. These stages included familiarisation, reflection, conceptualisation, cataloguing concepts, re-coding, linking, and re-evaluation. The transcripts were read many times and the relevant lines or paragraphs were highlighted or given a title such as 'managers' approach to

decision-making', 'organisational values', 'benefits and rewards', 'assessment and feedback process', and 'fairness', etc. based on the questions asked. Then, to reflect, these codes were evaluated through considering the following questions: (1) 'Does it support existing knowledge?' (2) 'Does it challenge it?' (3) 'Does it answer previously unanswered questions?' (4) 'What is different?' and (5) 'Is it different?' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, & Lowe, 2008, p. 178). The answer was that the present data answered some unanswered questions from before (being the first research on 'work in the spirit of service' based on the Bahá'í principles), and provided some evidence different from the existing knowledge, as presented in the following chapters. In order to build concepts, the initially identified codes were re-examined several times in order to evaluate meanings and relationships, which led to the concepts. For instance, 'managers' approach to decision-making' were explored for the types of power that were exercised at each organisation, the conflicts that possibly were mentioned, and the employee participation strategies spoken about. Different aspects and detailed attributes relevant to each of these topics were individually coded at each case as nodes, such as 'power of seniority', 'manager's power of decision-making', etc. in the context of power.

Then at the stage of cataloguing the concepts, these concepts or codes were reviewed more analytically, to generate broader concepts or sub-themes that these codes related to or explained. Therefore, the subthemes that were initially generated based on the questions, and contributed to understanding and identifying the nodes, were faded and replaced by the sub-themes generated from conceptualising and cataloguing the data. This resulted in generation of the map of themes and sub-themes, which further informed each of the four chapters of analysis. Here, the use of Nvivo software helped to make the process of coding more interactive and visual, which resulted in some re-coding to best capture the whole picture. For the purpose of this research, linking did not happen as a stage to follow the previous ones, but instead it happened through the process of reflection, cataloguing and recoding. The reason was that many concepts used in the interview questions, previously been generated from the review of the literature as well as the research on the Bahá'í scriptures. Therefore, certain theoretical coding and relations existed between the codes. However, the patterns and links became clearer, some of them changed, and deeper concepts emerged that had not been perceived before, specifically in

the area of employee involvement. Re-evaluation happened further down the road with the feedbacks received from the PhD supervisors and the expert friends, and the links and concepts were further developed. The expert friends included academic friends in social sciences, who were familiar with the methodology but did not know about the Bahá'í principles, a few friends who owned their businesses (both adherents and non-adherents of the Bahá'í Faith), who provided practitioners' point of view according to their experiences, and a few members of the Bahá'í community who related with the discussions from a Bahá'í perspective.

For the purpose of the first theme, work in the spirit of service, a large volume of codes were generated which identified individuals' perceptions of their work and their practices being impacted by the organisational culture and values. In order to develop meanings from this large list of codes, reflecting and cataloguing was done several times in order to further integrate those codes into broader sub-themes that they represented.

The map of themes as identified for the four chapters of analysis is as follows:

1. Work in the spirit of service
  - Objective – Why the Bahá'í principles
  - Participants' concept of their work and their organisation influenced by the Bahá'í principles:
    - Employee orientation
    - Customer orientation
    - Society orientation
2. Power and Authority
  - Managers' approach to management
  - The concept of 'flat organisation'
  - Aspects of power and authority (types of power)
  - Exercise and legitimisation of authority (This sub-theme further merged with other sub-themes, since the arguments had to be raised as part of other sub-themes in this chapter)
3. Dealing with Conflict
  - Challenges – Latent conflict

- Observed conflict
  - Dealing with conflict and space for employees to pursue their interests
4. Employee involvement
- Employees' participation in decision-making
  - Mechanisms and procedures for participation

These themes and sub-themes are presented in the four chapters of analysis (i.e. Chapters 5-8).

## 4.9 Reliability and Validity

As discussed earlier, part of the objective of a research design is to specify the “*criteria that are employed when evaluating business research*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 40). Criteria here assess the *reliability* of the findings (whether the results of the study are repeatable), as well as their *replication* (how well the results of the research replicates other researchers' findings), and *validity* (concerned with integrity of conclusions, i.e. measurement validity, internal validity external validity, ecological validity) (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 41).

However, these criteria have been commonly discussed for quantitative research. To apply such criteria to qualitative research some researchers mainly focus on the issues of validity and reliability (e.g. LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Kirk & Miller, 1986). However, Lincoln and Guba (2013; 1985) argue that limiting the criteria to reliability and validity reassumes the feasibility of a single absolute account of social reality (a positivist approach), while it does not apply to many types of qualitative research. Thus, they (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, pp. 104-105) propose two main criteria and further detailed criteria for each, which have been widely cited in qualitative research. These main criteria are ‘*trustworthiness*’ (examining the rigour of the inquiry) and ‘*authenticity*’ (concerning the ethics, the epistemological bases and the impacts of the inquiry, i.e. “*the issues of the new paradigm*”) (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 104).

Here, ‘*trustworthiness*’ includes four detailed criteria as: *credibility* (i.e. internal validity), *transferability* (i.e. external validity), *dependability* (i.e. reliability), *confirmability* (i.e.

objectivity) (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 104). Then, ‘*authenticity*’ concerns the wider political impacts of the research such as *fairness* (does the research fairly represent different viewpoints), *ontological authenticity* (does the research help members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu), *educative authenticity* (does the research help members to better appreciate other members’ perspectives), *catalyst authenticity* (has the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances), and *tactical authenticity* (has the research empowered the members to take the step necessary for engaging in action). However, Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that these criteria have not been very influential in qualitative research and the impacts they discuss can be controversial. However, Johnson et al. (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006, p. 146) value these criteria and argue that they are components of reflexivity and sensitivity that are part of the main concerns of quality of social research. They (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006, p. 146) propose “*contingent criteriology*” as a “*heuristic device*” which aims to help sensitise management researchers to the issues of quality and “*how these issues are ‘social products created by human beings in the course of evolving a set of practices’*”. Thus Johnson et al., (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006) argue that researchers must simultaneously articulate and reflect upon their particular philosophical commitments, and their resultant epistemology and methodologies, and thus further explore the criteriological consequences of their research design. In summary they argue that an awareness and constant reflection is required by the researchers on the philosophical assumptions of their research, their possible alternatives, and possible consequences, and at the same time a transparency on the criteria they have considered and met throughout their research (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006).

The researcher undertaking this study maintained ‘reflexivity’ (e.g. Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999) and reviewed their assumptions and questions throughout the research process. As a result, they refined their questions; shifted from a single case study to multiple case study design; and the researcher has reviewed her stance during the fieldwork and during noting the observations and emotions, as well as throughout the analysis.



Firstly, in terms of *credibility* or *internal validity* (establishing confidence in the findings and interpretations) this research employed scriptural study as well as case-study research, in order to enable interpretation of the actors' behaviour based on their sources of conduct, in addition to the data from the interviews and the archival studies of the organisational documents (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This enabled the process of meaning-making to be based on both sets of data, where through cycling between the data sets, the concepts and variations were identified, and the consistent patterns reaffirmed the validity of the findings and the generated concepts.

Secondly, regarding *transferability* or *external validity* (concerned with generalisability of the findings) in an interpretivist approach, as Lincoln and Guba (2013) argue, the researcher does not intend to ensure the findings apply to different contexts and subjects. Rather, the researcher provides 'thick description' of the concepts or the phenomena and the conditions in which, these concepts have developed and been exercised, and it is the reader who decides the applicability of those findings and interpretations to their issues (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This researcher has, on the one hand, used the interviews to record the 'daily life' experiences and opinion of the participants in the organisations (Bryman & Bell, 2011), and on the other hand has incorporated multiple case studies, in order to capture a wide range of opinions, perspectives and practices for an enriched description. Furthermore, as explained earlier, this research aims to develop concepts based on the scriptural study and the empirical data as the first step in this area of research that has not been studied before.

The third criterion is the *dependability* or *reliability* of the findings and interpretations as an outcome of a consistent and dependable process. Here, Lincoln and Guba (2013) suggest that a designated person could audit the process. This has been done for this research through the supervision and feedback by the supervisors as much as possible while taking account of confidentiality. Furthermore, interviewing both the managers and the employees contributed to assessment of different sides of the same phenomenon in order to generate consistent data (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The fourth criterion is *confirmability* or *objectivity*, and it concerns how the findings and interpretations result from the dependability of the inquiry and data collection. Here,

Lincoln and Guba (2013) suggest audit trails (as a key method), triangulation, and reflexive journals, which were all employed in this research with different methods of data collection (interviews, FGDs; archival study of the organisational documents, as well as secondary research); different methods of analysis (manual and computer-based NVivo); and notes during the data collection, after the interviews, and further on after analysing each case reflecting on the comparisons between the cases.

In addition, it has been taken into account that, as this researcher is part of the Bahá'í community, there could be a risk of losing 'objectivity'. Therefore, extra measures were taken to maintain objectivity. These measures are listed here:

One method was to frequently share the results with other people, both believers and others, including contacts involved in different businesses. For instance, the process of consultation employed by AP was discussed with a fellow PhD researcher who believes in the Bahá'í Faith but was from a different background and with a fellow PhD researcher with management background who did not believe in the Bahá'í Faith, both of whom shared similar understandings of the process and had similar views about how it was articulated and practised. However, the wording of the discussion caught the 'non-Bahá'í' colleague's attention, and their reaction confirmed the concern of the researcher; this is highlighted in the analysis presented in Chapter 5.

Another method was extending the audit trail to notes during the analysis. To this end, during the analysis notes were taken and compared with the notes from the period of data collection and analysis as part of the audit trail to examine the findings and ensure the conclusions were not biased.

Another step, aiming to maintain objectivity through reflexivity, was revising the data several times to evaluate the objectivity of the findings. For this purpose, in the first round the interviews and FGDs were studied separately, and at the next round the combination of both were studied randomly, in order to enable capturing different aspects of the phenomena (from the standpoint of the managers as well as the employees) and stay as objective as possible.

Yet another measure was that after a period of analysis, the researcher took some time off from the research and distanced herself from the research and its findings, and revised the

analysis later with a fresh eye, which made a noticeable difference, and some results of the analysis were changed as a result. For instance, the managers' perspectives about participation in PHX and looking after the employees were revisited. After being disconnected from the data and the companies, some contradictions were highlighted, such as the context of 'fair' pay.

Lastly, at the start of the research the methodology and objective of the research was decided in a way that would not cause any potential conflict of interest. It did not aim to examine credibility of the principles or their operations, but it explored the approach of the Bahá'í scripture, formulated them as a particular approach in relation to theory, and explored the perceptions and practices of the participants independently of the results of the scriptural study, and combined the results of the analysis of the primary research and the scriptural study at a later stage to make sense of the individuals' perceptions and practices. The only influence of the scriptural study on the case-study research was informing the first question of the research as the participants' approach to their work and whether they mentioned references to the phrase 'work in the spirit of service'.

Moreover, concerning *authenticity* or *ethical criteria*, this research has taken careful considerations of the issue of *fairness*, exploring the opinions and experiences of different stakeholders, the employers as well as the employees, and examined the researchers' position frequently (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Similar to Bell's (2006) research, where she explores 'on whose side the chaplains' are, for the purpose of this research the researcher constantly considered, during the interviews and analysis, with what concerns employers practised precepts. In addition, the researcher constantly reflected on whether the researcher was sympathising with either side, with an argument, etc., which could result in a bias or building a bigger picture with all its sides.

Finally, Bryman and Bell (2011) explain ecological validity, which Lincoln and Guba (2013) do not discuss. They consider whether social scientific findings are applicable to peoples' everyday natural social settings. This criterion has been examined for this research through multiple-case analysis, where one of the cases is a multi-national organisation and the other two are small businesses, which can result in different articulation and experiences of Bahá'í principles in different social contexts.

Accordingly, the concepts were assessed across the cases in order to identify whether characteristics of the environment (e.g. size of the organisation, nature of its business, etc.) make an evident difference in the perceptions and practices of the participants.

As a final point, Lee, Collier and Cullen (2007) argue that particularisation and uniqueness is the main advantage of case studies, rather than generalisation.

Particularisation and in-depth study of specific cases enables development of concepts and their meanings (Lee, Collier, & Cullen, 2007), which was the main reason behind choosing the case study method for this research. Exploring concepts and practices based on the Bahá'í Faith for the first time required depth and detail.

#### **4.10 Ethical considerations**

Ethical principles were considered and respected at all stages of this research. The University of Sheffield Ethical Review Committee approved this research within the second year of study. In this section, issues relating to the safety of the participants and the researcher, confidentiality, and informed consent (Bulmer, 2001) are discussed.

The participants in this research were all adults, and the face-to-face research took place in their organisational settings, ensuring the safety of the participants. The questions were not personal or particularly sensitive, and the researcher posed the questions with respect and appreciating their participation. They were assured of the confidentiality of the data and their discussions; each participant's details were coded, and the relevant codes were used during the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the results. The code sheets were paper-based, and the anonymised data with the codes was then saved on a password-protected laptop. The original interview files have been only in the possession of the interviewer and the professional transcriber, who has a confidentiality agreement and who deleted their copy of the recordings after the process of transcription. The recordings have not been shared with anybody else, and only coded data has been shared with the supervisors.

Prior to the interviews, the purpose of the interview was explained, and all respondents were given an information sheet, confidentiality was assured, and permission was sought

to record the interviews. The participants were asked to sign a consent form (Bulmer, 2001) that permitted the researcher to record and use the data in the course of the academic research and publish anonymised results. All the participants were informed that they could choose not to participate, without any consequences, and at the start of a focus group discussion one member decided to leave, and this was respected. Copies of the information sheet and the consent form are in Appendix 1.

#### **4.11 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the methodology of this research. It started with the philosophical stance of this research and its objectives. It was argued here, that the objectives of this research and the nature of the Bahá'í Faith, with abolition of priesthood, necessitated study of the Bahá'í scripture along with the primary research. Accordingly, this research was taken from an interpretivist approach in exploring the perceptions and the practices of '*work in the spirit of service*' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998).

Furthermore, the research design was explained, including the case-study (empirical) research and scriptural study, each aiming to answer their specific questions. For the purpose of the case-study research, qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions and archival study of the organisational documents were incorporated in collecting the data, and qualitative data analysis (thematic analysis) complemented by the use of Nvivo computer assisted techniques generated the results of the primary analysis.

Moreover, this research employed multiple case study research in order to explore in detail, the perceptions and practices of different participants, of '*work in the spirit of service*' along with the limitations they faced or the impacts they identified.

The concerns of '*trustworthiness*' (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) and '*authenticity*' (fairness, and ontological authenticity) of the results were discussed as well, with the measures taken by the researcher to improve the rigour and the ethics of the findings and interpretations.

The following Chapters therefore, present the results of the analysis of the case studies research, and the discussion of those results in relation to literature. The next chapter

presents the results in relation to work in the spirit of service based on the Bahá'í scripture. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 then present the results of the research in relation to legitimisation of power, dealing with conflict, and employee participation.

## 5 Work in the Spirit of Service

As discussed in previous chapters, this research explores “*How Bahá'í principles influence employment relations, and whether it is possible to maintain these principles in practice*”.

The purpose of this chapter, and Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, is to analyse the data that were collected during 2014-2016 from three different companies in the USA and the UK, and to present the results. This chapter analyses work in the spirit of service, while the three subsequent chapters analyse power and authority, dealing with conflict and employee involvement. This chapter answers the first questions of the empirical research:

*‘Work in the spirit of service’*: How do the managers and employees of the organisations that aim to apply Bahá'í precepts perceive work, perceive the *‘spirit of service’*, and translate their perception of *‘work in the spirit of service’* into their objectives and employment relations? Are there any common characteristics between the practices of organisations in relation to their application of these principles? Are there any differences in their sizes, their operational requirements, their management styles, and their organisational cultures; and do these differences point to significant differences in their perceptions and practices of *‘work in the spirit of service’*?

The reason the first chapter of analysis is devoted to the conceptualisation of work in each organisation is to explore the participants’ perception of work and further analyse these conceptualisations in relation to the concept of work in the spirit of service based on Chapter 3.

This chapter answers these questions through analysing the perceptions of the managers and the employees in the three cases, their work, their organisational values and organisational culture, and their work practices and identifying how they characterised their work and their organisation. It aims to further understand how the participants’ concepts of work related to the concept of work in the spirit of service, based on the results of Chapter 3 (the identification of work in Bahá'í scripture) because the founders at the three organisations stated that they tried to apply the Bahá'í precepts in their organisations.

The phrase ‘values’ in this chapter refers to organisational values, the characteristics of the work ethics, or the morals and principles that the participants perceived or had experienced as part of their organisational culture or through their daily operations. The values that the participants attributed to their work or their organisations have been analysed to identify their perception of work in their organisations. The three cases displayed specific concerns for taking care of their employees, customers, and the society, and thus the participants’ perceptions of their work is presented through these three categories.

Since this chapter aims to develop the company-specific concepts of their work (to be compared with other cases and with the results of Chapter 3 later), the analysis process for this chapter was purely inductive, and the concepts were generated from repeatedly reviewing the data, conceptualisation, cataloguing concepts, re-coding, linking, and re-evaluation, and finally generating the network of codes (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, & Lowe, 2008; Robson, 2011) that are presented here. Therefore, the themes and headings do not necessarily connect to any theory and the sub-themes are different between the cases.

In the sections that follow, each of the three cases is briefly introduced and the results of the analysis of their data are presented. The presentation of the results begins with single case analyses that focuses on each organisation’s approach to work; with exploring managers’ and employees’ feelings and experiences related to the nature and the organisation of their work. Then, the results of cross-case analysis are presented, exploring these concepts across the companies and looking for shared meanings and practices or significant differences. Finally, these findings are discussed in relation to the results of the scriptural study on Bahá’í scripture.

All three cases were chosen because the owners claimed to apply the Bahá’í precepts at their organisations. However, two of the founders stated that they did not communicate those principles as explicit ‘Bahá’í principles’, in order to avoid divisions or any sense of exclusion among the employees. Similarly, during the interviews and the focus group discussions, some managers and employees mentioned that they had heard of the Bahá’í Faith but did not know much about it, while some had some familiarity with the Bahá’í



principles, and others had never heard of it; which supported the founders' statement against domination of religion and advocacy of diversity of religions/beliefs in their organisation. Moreover, the fact that most of the participants were not adherents of the Bahá'í faith should result in applicability of the results of this research to other organisations that share similar concerns for 'service' and employee welfare and participation, as is discussed in this and the following chapters, but which do not necessarily have Bahá'í employees.

## **5.1 First Case Study- PHX**

Participants at PHX were asked about their personal values related to work and their organisational values in order to develop an understanding of their personal and organisational drivers to work, and to investigate whether the Bahá'í principles had influenced their approach to work, if so how, and the similarities and differences in their articulations. It was notable that the employees often did not separate their organisational values from their personal values and spoke about them all with reference to organisational cultures.

### **5.1.1 Objective – Why the Bahá'í principles?**

To begin exploring their perception of work, the founders of the organisations were asked why they chose to apply Bahá'í principles at their organisation. The founder of PHX responded that they made “*good logical sense*”. He said that he had never pushed the principles of the Bahá'í Faith to the staff, but the employees appreciated their organisational values across the world and that the values made sense to them. This was explored during the interviews with the staff, and many employees particularly referred to their appreciation of the principles applied by the founder and the rest of the family (who also worked there), even if they had spoken about conflict in their departments.

The founder further claimed that those principles made their organisation “*far better, more productive, unique and more progressive*”. ‘Productivity’ has been discussed in management literature, generally and in relation to the influence of religious beliefs (e.g.

Dehaghi, Goodarzi, & Arazi, 2012; Jeremy, 1990). However, in these studies productivity has been achieved through control over the operations and employees' behaviour due to sharing the same beliefs. In PHX, information about productivity was not collected but, as shown in Chapter 6 in the discussion of power, control through religious beliefs was not an aspect of management in PHX and therefore it was not a means of productivity in this respect.

The values that the founder referred to in this discussion, as the values extracted from the Bahá'í principles<sup>29</sup>, and the values that the employees and the managers spoke about (e.g. FGD2, M1,3,34,41,63,72), are discussed in detail in this section. Among the 15 managers interviewed at PHX, only three managers and the founder believed in the Bahá'í Faith, all the other managers and the employees held different beliefs.

The process of analysis included manual analysis of the data as well as the use of the Nvivo software. Initially, as stated earlier, the review of the literature resulted in broad themes, which informed the questions of the interviews. They included the concepts of work, power relation, conflict of interest, and employee involvement (as presented in Chapters 5 to 9). These themes were explored through asking the managers and the employees about their personal and organisational values, and their approach to work, how the employees were looked after in the company and how they described their employment relations; and if/how the employees were involved in the decisions of the company. Further prompt questions investigated the various aspects of the research questions in detail. In the process of the analysis these themes formed the first step of the analysis. For instance, through searching the data for aspects of organisational value or employees' and managers' approach to work, the data for analysis of the concept of work in each organisation were generated.

Therefore, as the second step, the data was manually analysed and codes/nodes that described or related to any of the above themes, were highlighted in the texts. Then the data was introduced to Nvivo software, and these nodes were assigned to the relevant sections in Nvivo (i.e. coding) in order to explore density of each node/code to help

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<sup>29</sup> The founders were all asked if they tried to apply them implicitly or explicitly, and the founder of PHX preferred them made explicit, in order to avoid confusion about their meaning and intent.

understanding of the various aspects of each theme. This resulted in figures 5-1, 5-3, and 5-5 in this chapter. The size of the cells in these figures represents the results based on the density of each topic, i.e. how often they were mentioned. The shading reflects the number of interviews/FGDs they were discussed in, therefore the paler tints indicate fewer interviews. So, a large cell with the darkest shading would show a theme that was discussed more within and across groups/interviews.

At the next step, these nodes/codes were manually analysed, in order to make sense of the data. They were reviewed several times, and in the contexts they were discussed, and based on the understanding they generated, they were categorised into various groups such as employee-orientation, customer orientation, and society orientation in this chapter, as presented in figures 5-2, 5-4, and 5-6 for the three cases. These sub-themes are used to present the results of the analysis for the three cases in this chapter.

**Figure 5-1 Nodes, compared by the number of items coded – PHX**

Values Organizational									
Philanthropy, humanity	Respect, appreciation, communication	Convert practice of Bahá'í values	Honesty and accountability	Fun and humour	Excellence	Personal relationships, like a family			
	No hierarchy, flat organisation - structural and behavioural								
Customer service	Team work, cooperation, no competition	Hard work	Cleanliness and organisation	Tenure, no firing	Support	Quality			
	No typical day								
Looking after and valuing the employees	No typical day	Fairness, justice, comparison	Participation and delegation of responsibility	Employee empowerment	Versioning	Integrity and trust	Facilities		
			Make money, Make profit						
Open door policy, being heard	Make a difference, Service	Diversity, inclusion, unity	Feedback and training	Exciting, engaging and inspiring environment	Spirituality at work	Sharing the wealth	Punctuality	No politics	
				Win-win environment					

As shown in Figure 5-1 (with 37 nodes), the 20 most frequently discussed organisational values (in the order of density) are as follows:

- Philanthropy and humanity (service for the society)
- Customer service
- Looking after and valuing the employees
- Open-door policy and being heard
- Respect, appreciation and communication

- No hierarchy, flat organisation – both structural and behavioural
- Teamwork, co-operation, no competition
- No typical day for managers
- Making a difference and service of humanity
- Covert practice of the Bahá'í principles
- Honesty and accountability
- Fun and humour
- Excellence
- Personal relations, like a family
- Innovation, breaking with tradition, being different,
- Hard work
- Fairness, Justice, compassion,
- Diversity, inclusion, unity
- Cleanliness and organisation
- Support

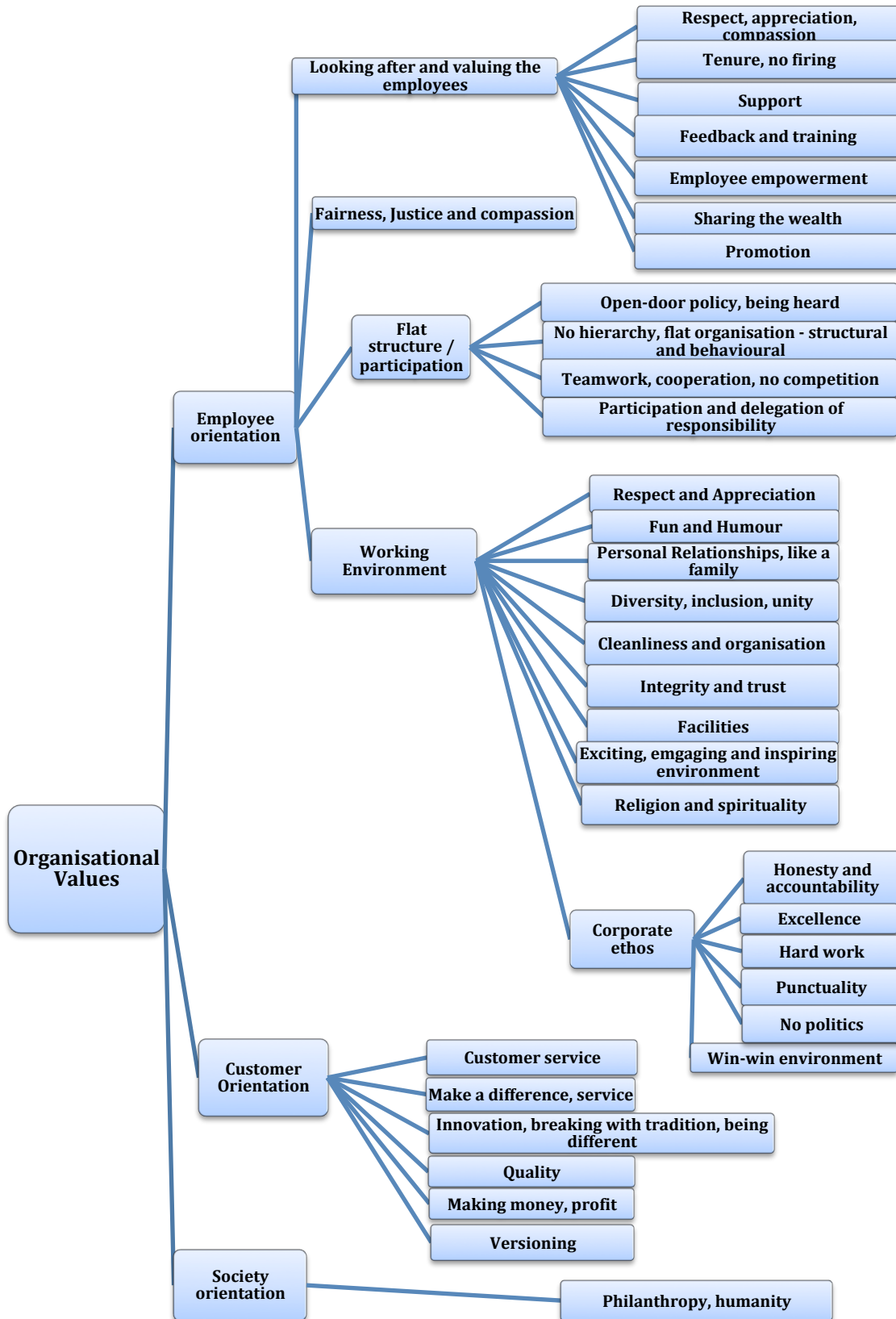
These values and attributes describe the organisational focuses, the working environment, and the perceptions and practices that the managers and the employees most appreciated about their corporate culture. At the same time, some of these values were discussed in a contrary manner, explored later in the chapter.

The most commonly discussed values by the participants were philanthropy and humanity (service to the society), customer service, and looking after and valuing the employees (13, 12 and 10 references respectively); some managers said that these were closely linked to one another. These three attributes were also parts of the company's mission statement as presented on PHX website, in the order of serving customers, employees, and then humanity; the employees most commonly articulated customers first. This indicates that the employees did not find the practices of the organisation prioritising their welfare, despite managers stating this.

These characteristics were revised several times, then clustered under the following three main themes: 'employee orientation'; 'customer orientation'; and the 'society orientation'. These three broad clusters/themes were identified in the analysis of the other

two case studies as well. These clusters along with their relevant sub-clusters are further explained in the following sections in order to articulate the participants' perception of work in their organisation.

Figure 5-2 Nodes clustered by concept – PHX



## **5.1.2 Approach – Work as a space for employees**

In order to articulate participants' approach to work, the nodes and characteristics that were attributed to their work are discussed in this and the following sections. This section mainly focuses on the attributes, policies, and practices related to employment relations at PHX.

The approach of the organisation to work as a space for the employees has been discussed first because the key focus of this research is on employment relations. Additionally, the points related to this approach cover over half of the nodes under the main and marginal clusters. These nodes are explored below, and how they contribute to development of the concept of work in PHX are identified.

### **5.1.2.1 Looking after the employees**

Most managers and employees mentioned 'taking care of the employees' as an aspect of working at PHX. For instance, M5 pointed out that the employees realised that they were cared for, and that was the reason they stayed at PHX. These aspects of care are discussed in this section, however, some employees said they were not taken care of enough (e.g. in the discussion of pay and annual awards, as presented in Chapter 7), which could point to lack of effective uniform policies for employee welfare or a distance between intentions and practices.

To begin, managers' statements were analysed for their intentions for taking care of their employees. These were articulated in different ways: for the benefit of the company (M31); to drive down costs and increase the revenue through "*happy and satisfied and comfortable and fulfilled*" employees (M6); and to support the culture of service as M7 said, "*I think that everybody has this inherent sense of personal commitment to the idea of service*". These views indicate a focus on the interest of the company, along with a stress of 'the culture of service' that some employees pointed to as well.

The following sub-topics present various aspects of taking care of the employees at PHX.



**Different benefits:** Raised by managers and the employees, such as: Performance-based pay system; 4-1 K program<sup>30</sup>; profit-sharing<sup>31</sup>; possibility of taking a nap, playing a game, or using the on-site gym; flexibility in scheduling the working hours and time off; engaging with and appreciating the employees; involving employees in community service; and the employees being heard. Most of these benefits are common employee benefits, however, involving employees in the decisions and in community service can be considered as particular aspects that PHX offered, as highlighted by participants. These aspects are further examined in Chapters 6-8, to analyse to what extent they were applied. Profit-sharing was repeatedly mentioned, by managers and the employees, as one of the advantages of working at PHX, being proportionate to the years of service rather than to the salary (e.g. M34, 36, 41). However, a few employees pointed out that in the recent years (i.e. before the interviews in 2014) it had not happened due to the economic conditions (e.g. M31). The profit-sharing sounded like an ideal to the managers, but one that they had not consistently complied with.

**Service through particular employee welfare teams and philanthropic activities:**

Participants referred to the HR focus group, philanthropy committee, and the safety committee, with their members taken from different departments; these organised different events and facilities for the employees. Employee welfare teams exist in other organisations as well, but the philanthropy team and activities (such as involving employees in providing help in environmental disasters) (FGD1,10) as an aspect of employee welfare is not commonly mentioned in organisational praxis.

**High ‘tenure’ and the hesitation to fire employees:** For instance, M34, referring to her experience, explained that the managers went out of their way to not fire people and try to find the right place for them, in a different position or department. Employees’ statements and the statistics supported this In FGD4, the employees mentioned this along with the value of seniority; and based on the report from HR the average years of service was 6.5 years in 2014 (based on 692 employees in total, 500 of whom were in the USA),

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<sup>30</sup> 4-1 K program: Employees save part of their salary in a savings account or through some investment and the company adds 25 percent to it.

<sup>31</sup> Profit divided based on the number of years with the company not based on the salary.

which was above the average in 2014 in the USA, at 4.6 years (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2016). However, the report from HR did not provide any further information about how frequently employees were fired.

However, M41 said that when somebody kept making the same mistake it was mostly because of training, though he also mentioned that there were times that it was because the employees did not feel accountable, in which case people would either leave or they were encouraged to leave. This could contradict their claim about hesitation to fire staff, as encouraging them to leave has the same effect as letting the employees go. While most managers and employees discussed the hesitation to fire, a few stated that they just looked for the right people to hire, therefore this cannot be considered as a uniform practice at the organisation (M3, 36, FGD1,4,6).

**Appreciation and respect:** Participants highlighted that ‘appreciation’ was a specific characteristic of working in PHX. They articulated various ways of ‘appreciation’ including: Shout outs (i.e. a large volume of thanking and positive enforcement emails that were distributed during a day (e.g. M1,2,5,21, FGD4,7,10)); achievements shared with the whole company (FGD1); promoting from within (M5); bonuses (e.g. M2,3,72, FGD7); trip packages (M5, FGD1,7); and/or annual awards<sup>32</sup> (M3,36, FGD1,4,6).

However, the use of annual awards had contradictory comments. While many appreciated the annual awards ceremony (e.g. M3,36, FGD1,4,6), a few employees argued against them, pointing to some employees’ low salaries, and unfairness of appreciation criteria. Regarding low salaries, the employees (FGD5, mainly from production, packaging, and R&D departments) argued that rewards could be financially distributed among all instead of awards for a few; this is an approach concerned with more equitable distribution of wealth (Dye & Zeigler, 1988). It can also indicate that some employees struggled with their pay from the company, which contradicts the discussions of looking after the employees in PHX’s mission statement. This discussion is further analysed in the following chapters.

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<sup>32</sup> Annual awards such as: Unsung hero; Sales person of the year; Rookie of the year (among new comers in that year); Star of the year; Task manager of the year.

The other issue referred to the appreciation criteria. While some argued that the variety of awards covered different criteria (e.g. M3,36, FGD1,4,6), an employee said the company did not appreciate hard work but only rewarded innovation (FGD5), and another said they recognised hard work and long hours and did not consider the specific conditions such as limitations of a single mother (FGD8). However, the latter employee stated that the company was quite flexible with her working hours, she left early to pick up her child, and she could work weekends and bring her child along. This argument about criteria for appreciation thus could refer to individual differences and preferences; but it can also refer to the individualist reward system as a dominant aspect (with an index of 91) of US culture (Hofstede, 2017). This is considered again in the following chapters and in more depth in the Discussion Chapter.

Another aspect of appreciation was ‘appreciating people as they were’, ‘trying to understand them, and challenging them and having high expectations to enable them to grow’ (M5). In this regard, M34 referred to the culture of ‘not blaming’ and said: *“There’s also a culture of not blaming people, it’s the process not the person.”* However, this was also among the practices that was discussed by only a few managers and did not seem to be a unified culture and at the organisation.

**Appreciating diversity:** As a characteristic of working in PHX, several participants stressed welcoming diversity and understanding that people, cultures and values were different, *“and you don’t have to agree with it but you must respect it”* (FGD1). There were also mentions of activities such as their international food celebration, which promoted this culture. Here, diversity was referred to as the aspects of gender, culture and ethnicity, and religions/beliefs. However, there were no references to other aspects of diversity such as age, marital status, social status, disability, sexual orientation, personality (Shen, Chanda, D’netto, & Monga, 2009), and language (Rodriguez, 2006).

To explore gender and ethnicity distributions, the following demographic table provides more detailed information.

**Table 5-1 The demographic distribution of gender, nationalities, and religion at PHX (2013)**

	<b>No. of employees</b>	<b>Gender: Male/female</b>	<b>Ethnicities/ Nationalities</b>	<b>Religion: No of Bahá'ís</b>
<b>Worldwide</b>	700	65/35 %	42	N/A
<b>Headquarter (USA)</b>	400	55/45 %	58	N/A
<b>Interviewed (Managers)</b>	15	12/3	Mixed	4
<b>Interviewed (FGD among employees)</b>	33	16/17	Mixed	0

In this table, since the religious beliefs of all employees were not disclosed to the researcher, they have not been examined. However, the participants in the research were asked about their religious beliefs, but in order to maintain confidentiality only the total numbers that related to ‘believing in the Bahá’í Faith’ have been included in this table in order to assess the potential for religious discrimination. However, the numbers did not indicate a chance for discrimination as only 8 percent of the participants believed in the Bahá’í Faith.

Furthermore, since some participants preferred not to answer the question, the table does not provide precise information about nationalities, but it indicates that based on the received responses they were quite mixed.

Assessing aspects of diversity of the company, PHX can be considered quite diverse in terms of ethnicity (based on the variety of the nationalities of its employees), and the gender distribution was close to the average of the top 50 US companies in 2014 (the closest year available to when the interviews took place at the end of 2013), according to the Guardian, with the male/female ratio of 54/46 (McCandless, 2014). However, the majority of the top managers were men, which is an issue of gender inequality (Powell G.

N., 2019, p. 3), where men largely occupy top executive positions, and female managers are “*concentrated in lower management levels, and hold positions with less status, power, and authority than men*”.

Moreover, according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, in 2014 women formed 20 percent of executive positions in high-tech organisations, and about 29 percent of executive positions in the overall private sector employment (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). In PHX women occupied 20 percent of top-level management, which is very similar to the U.S. average and does not display diversity or gender equality in employment at management positions.

**Support in hard times:** Participants mentioned many examples of support as a characteristic of their working at PHX (e.g. M42, FGD9), including time off during a tragic loss, sending them essentials during trouble, support for new comers, and flexible schedules, as well as ‘supporting each other when they needed’, as the culture among employees; which is considered as a persistent characteristic of work at PHX since many employees and managers referred to it.

**Support to improve performance:** Different aspects of support here included: supporting the employees to improve their weaknesses (e.g. an employee with a lot of drive, skills and gifts, but weak grammar skills, where the manager took away the responsibilities that she struggled with and supported her to improve (M34)); supporting young and new starters and providing them with opportunities according to their characteristics (e.g. a young bright employee who quickly got bored, M34 provided him with additional support, books to read and encouraged him to work on his degree, and an employee in FGD3 who started with working at the kitchen, gradually received additional training, encouragement and support to do the schooling, and eventually worked in the accounting department); support among the employees (e.g. “any time anyone needs help, it’s very much like there are all hands on deck!” (FGD1)); support through the feedback system and annual review (e.g. M34).; and giving the employees more responsibilities and promoting them when they exhibited potential (e.g. M34). These aspects of support mainly refer to performance enhancement and productivity, which is a common focus among many organisations.

Regarding more responsibilities and opportunities for promotion an employee in FGD3 said: *“I think it gives you that freedom to be yourself, and at the same time like the others were saying, PHX is always willing to help you out.”* Another employee said that *“they also expect a lot from you, and they expect you to contribute too, they expect you to excel, but they help you, they support you in that, they don’t just throw you out on an island”* (FGD3). This is similar to the discussion of freedom as opportunity in post-bureaucracy, which sometimes pushed the employees *“into vicious circles of ‘opportunisms’”* (Maravelias, 2007, p. 559).

Regarding support through the feedback system, M41 spoke about supporting employees by listening to them, encouraging them, providing them with the right tools, and encouraging them to come up with solutions. In this context, an employee also referred to providing on-going development and *solution enhanced employee performance* (FGD9). A tool for assessment and feedback was the annual review; the participants said that both managers and the employees filled in the forms, they met and discussed any disagreements, and then planned for the following year accordingly. However, an employee mentioned that they had not had annual reviews regularly at their division and thus they had not had any raise in their salary (FGD5), while it was mentioned more positively in other departments. This inconsistency between the departments is further explored in Chapter 7.

Employees also referred to training, conferences and courses the company provided or paid for, based on suggestions by the managers or the employees, for employees to attend and improve their capacities (e.g. FGD7,8,10, M3,21, 31,41,72).

Yet, all the above-mentioned aspects of support refer to performance enhancement and promotion, which are common among high tech organisations (e.g. Kunda, 2009).

**Employee empowerment and promotions:** Empowerment was discussed in different contexts such as: clarity and improving employees’ understanding of their job description, the goals, strategies, and the systems and guidelines involved in their tasks, which enabled them to engage (e.g. M3); training and ‘talent development’ plans along with reward mechanisms and bonus structures, enabling employees’ promotion to become leaders (e.g. M51); supportive physical environment (including safety features,

pleasant temperature, tea and coffee, etc.) and minimised distractions (e.g. M3); and promotions (e.g. FGD3).

Regarding promotions, while there was mention of promotion opportunities and even sometimes creation of new positions to utilise employees' capabilities (e.g. FGD3), an employee argued that due to the high employee retention rate promotion at their department was very slow (FGD1). This indicated that although promotions were among the opportunities for employees, they were not available in all departments. This was a challenge that demotivated some employees (FGD1), not knowing if they would ever be promoted.

In summary, most of the participants identified their work at PHX in terms of the company caring for its employees (while some argued that other staff were not taken care enough). Different aspects of care for employees included a variety of benefits such as: the employee welfare teams and their services; involvement in philanthropic activities; hesitation to fire; appreciation of what employees did; appreciation of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity; support in hard times; support and training to improve performance; and employee empowerment with opportunities and expectations. These aspects of care are not unique to this organisation, but indicated a diverse working environment, where employees were often supported to improve their performance (and perhaps consequently their productivity) but also through their involvement in philanthropic activities and the support they received in their personal difficulties (through the very many stories they spoke about). Involvement of employees in philanthropic activities, along with funding the employees to attend the disaster sites and offer their help, are not common practices. This could be due to the considerations of public image, but at the same time the consideration for public image could be achieved through the packages they sent (e.g. food and care packages to children in need, or hurricane victims), so funding the employees to be there and help as well does not seem financially sound for the purpose of the image since it included the cost of the travel and their stay at the disaster sites, as well as the days of work the employees missed. Thus, the reason the managers mentioned, and the employees stressed, i.e. the 'experience and the values' the employees gained (e.g. M1,21, FGD1,3,10), could be considered a genuine concern for employees' involvement

in humanitarian activities in PHX. However, this was an inconsistent characteristic, since a few employees argued they were not taken care enough (FGD5,8).

### 5.1.2.2 Fairness, justice, and compassion

Different managers and employees identified fairness and justice as part of their values at work; however, when they referred to ‘fairness’ or ‘justice’ they spoke about a variety of actions and interpretations.

M1 described justice as treating the employees fairly, as a necessary means to the success of the company: *“Sustainable success could start with a good leader, but it will only continue if the employees of the companies are treated fairly, nicely, decently, honourably, and their welfare, the employer has looked after them well, fairly and all that.”* In this sense, justice was employed in the interest of the company.

In another sense, fairness was spoken about as understanding the reasons behind what the employees did, instead of a rushed reaction (e.g. M1 shared a story of an on-going problem with an employee having cheated the company, and how they were trying to understand his reasons and condition, etc.), compassion and understanding different peoples’ circumstances and their needs (M21) and compassion among employees (a collective application of compassion). These aspects of justice centred on employees’ welfare.

Another aspect of fairness was equality and the company’s flat structure. M63 quoted from the founder of the company and said that although they had titles, managers were not ‘bosses’, but rather they were there to help, and *“I think if we are honest with each other, don’t look at titles, we’re all the same at the end of the day!”* Justice as equality could be in the interest of the employees and the company. The details of discussion about the flat structure are explained in the next section.

Furthermore, M1 stated that fairness required having a consistent structure in place, and *“to be fair towards everybody”*. Regarding treating everybody the same, managers were asked if they had priorities or preferences in terms of the employees’ religious beliefs, nationality, gender, etc. They replied that there were no such preferences and they



referred to the dominant culture of diversity at their organisation. Similarly, employees spoke about diversity in PHX, and existence of meditation room for prayer or meditation by different believers. Here again, diversity mainly referred to variety in religious/spiritual beliefs and practices, gender, and cultures.

However, there were also arguments about unfairness in recognition of the employees, specifically for the particular awards. A few employees (FGD5,8) mentioned about a concern about their pay; they did not find it 'unfair', but spoke about not being cared for enough. This related to the discussion of 'high enough pay' for the employees so they could live comfortably and save for their time of need, based on the Bahá'í scripture (see Chapter 3); so, these employees did not find their pay high enough. This is further explored in Chapter 7.

An employee (FGD5) also mentioned that it was not fair to measure all employees with the same scale. Another employee (FGD8) supported this statement and believed that because she could not work long hours she did not receive rewards and recognitions. In other focus group discussions, the employees were asked whether they believed they were treated fairly at PHX and they said they did (e.g. FGD1,3,4,6,7). Some employees also referred to the flat structure and trying to treat everybody the same (e.g. FGD1,6,7).

This argument of equal treatment as fairness is similar to arguments of equity theory (Adams, 1963), which focuses on perceptions of the employees of fair pay and finds equal pay (outputs) for equal job (inputs) as fair. This argument will be further covered in the Discussion Chapter.

Overall, the participants identified their organisation with justice through religious and cultural diversity, a softened hierarchy and equality, although some employees did not find the equitable treatment as fair. It was however notable that justice, while mentioned several times, was not a central aspect of working in PHX based on how it was stressed and elaborated, while it is a significant aspect of 'work in the spirit of service' based on Chapter 3.

### 5.1.2.3 Flat Structure/participation

The participants repeatedly identified PHX with a flat structure and employee participation. They discussed it within the context of the company's open-door policy, no hierarchy, teamwork and co-operation, and participation and delegation of responsibility.

#### **Open-door policy and a flat structure**

The founder and the employees said the open-door policy meant 'not needing to make an appointment to meet with any manager (including the founder), and their approachability (e.g. M1,21,34, FGD1,3,6,10). Here the participants described approachability of the managers as equivalent with a flat structure.

Furthermore, the participants (e.g. M72, FGD1,3,6,10) referred to different stories of being heard and the consequent changes as a result of the open-door policy (e.g. changes to the employee's working conditions (e.g. the chair, screen, etc.) as an employee requested (FGD1), the committee for the award ceremony consisting of managers and employees so everybody's voice would be heard (FGD1)). Some employees said that the policy applied to the customers too (FGD1,8). Being heard as an aspect of open-door policy was repeatedly stressed, however, the examples that were mentioned mainly included employees' working conditions and did not involve any aspect of organisational or strategic changes, which indicate a limited level of participation.

Examining the PHX organisational chart in Chapter 3, it had two levels of management below the CEO, which did not exhibit a very flat structure. Exploring what the participants meant in discussing flat structures then, it was apparent that they referred to two separate senses, the structural and behavioural concepts of a flat structure. In the structural context, the participants stated that they did not have too many layers of management (e.g. FGD1,10), thus they articulated the flat structure in a relative manner. In a behavioural context they referred to the non-hierarchical behaviour of the managers through: their approachable and friendly behaviour (e.g. M36 said: "*Again we're in it together, there's no difference between, there's no class to some extent*") (e.g. M21,36,41); the existence of friendship at PHX (M6); and having an equal opportunity to approach the top management level of the organisation and be heard (e.g. FGD1,3,6,10).

The latter, with “*minimum formal processes*” and “*little bureaucracy*”, Kunda (2009, p. 70) attributes to high-tech organisations.

In summary, the participants identified the organisation as a flat organisation both structurally (relatively flat) and in the behaviour of the managers, based on the opportunities to be heard. These characteristics exist in many organisations, but whether they result in any strategic or organisational changes is uncertain. The participants here mentioned many examples of the changes that had happened, but some also said that the managers made most of the decisions. Decision-making will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

### **Teamwork, co-operation and participation**

The employees talked about teamwork and co-operation based on different examples (e.g. FGD1) and between the departments (e.g. FGD3). M21, for instance, explained that they were a ‘profit business’ trying to make money and grow, but that they had “*never lost sight of caring and taking care of others, never!*” Similarly, an employee (FGD3) associated teamwork with the culture of the organisation and said:

“*...you want to do more, you want to do more not just because somebody’s telling you, it’s just you want to do more.*” (FGD3)

This sense of commitment and belonging to the company is another aspect of enforcement of culture in high-tech organisations as Kunda (2009) argues, where employees are “*really considered to be important to the company*”.

Employees discussed teamwork and co-operation in various aspects of PHX work as well, as a culture that extended outside of PHX too (e.g. FGD3,10), where for instance an employee said of their philanthropic activities, “*helping others I think is right there at the core of it*” (FGD3). This further confirmed the culture of teamwork and belonging to the company.

In the context of cooperation, the concept of competition was also raised. Some participants strongly argued that there was no competition at PHX, and they “*work(ed) as a group*” (FGD6). For instance, employees mentioned that, in the Sales department, one “*does not compete with others*”, “*the amount of money you can make doesn’t depend on*

*beating someone else on your team*”, or “*you compete with yourself to try to strive more*” (FGD6). However, some employees spoke of evidence of competition, for instance: in FGD4, an employee from the Sales department stated that most of their team had a problem with a particular employee, which she did not find ‘right’; and another employee had observed competition and withholding information in his team (all from China), which he attributed to the Chinese culture. So, he preferred to work in other teams.

In summary, participants attributed teamwork and co-operation to their work at PHX, although there were also examples of competition and lack of cooperation in some teams. Existence of such contradictory experiences in the company regarding co-operation and competition, lack of universal involvement in the company, and some pay inequalities, could be a result of the autonomy of the managers as an aspect of new-liberalism, with the decline of welfare state and reliance of the market forces, which further increases powerlessness of ordinary people, since they do not have the means to compete, and thus inequalities increase (e.g. Coburn, 2000; Wilkinson, 1996). This inconsistency could also be the result of lack of a ‘strong’ organisational culture, which could enforce cooperation universally in the organisation (O’Reilly, 1989). This will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

### **Participation and delegation of responsibility**

Several managers explained how they involved employees in the decisions or responsibilities of their team/department. They mentioned different reasons for delegation including trust in the work and decisions of the employees (M36) and the value of learning through experience and being engaged instead of being told (M41). Similarly, an employee mentioned that part of her responsibilities was to make sure that people engaged with each other (FGD1). Employee involvement was an aspect of work at PHX that was repeatedly highlighted in various ways; this is considered as an attribute of work in PHX, the details of which are discussed in Chapter 8, exploring the aspects of employee involvement.

In summary, this section explored participants’ identification of their workplace with a softened hierarchy, where managers were approachable and employees were heard, and

employees were trusted and involved in some departments. Furthermore, they identified their work with cooperation and teamwork, while there was a discussion of competition in some departments affecting cooperation. It could be said that, although in an overall sense the company was identified as flat and based on teamwork by the majority, there were few mentions of exclusion, competition and inequality that questions the universality or effectiveness of the flat/non-hierarchical structure of the company.

#### 5.1.2.4 Working environment

The participants at PHX identified their work and employment relations with a fun, diverse, engaging and respectful environment, and having particular facilities and clean and well-decorated buildings.

Different aspects that the participants attributed to their working environment included: respect and appreciation (e.g. M5, FGD1); honesty, hard work, excellence (FGD2,5,6, M1,12,2,21,3,36,6,63,7); fun activities and humour in personal relationships (e.g. M1,2,5,31 FGD4,5,9)<sup>33</sup>; diversity, inclusion and unity (e.g. M2,3,36, FGD1,2,3)<sup>34</sup>; cleanliness and organisation (M1, FGD7,8)<sup>35</sup>; particular facilities (e.g. M2,21, FGD4,5)<sup>36</sup>; integrity and trust (e.g. M31)<sup>37</sup>; exciting, engaging and inspiring environment (e.g.

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<sup>33</sup> Examples of fun and humour included: Christmas cards activity; thanksgiving activity; flying kites in the parking lot; celebration of achievement of goals; river rafting; dress like the founder day; barbecue outside; going to the town for a breakfast; visiting the Science Centre' lunch together; celebrating birthdays; movie nights; and fishing trips (e.g. M1,2,5,31 FGD4,5,9).

<sup>34</sup> Diversity, inclusion and unity were discussed through the overall culture and environment as well as in specific events such as international potlucks and distributors' events (where they bring distributors from different countries to the head office, and they provided a room for prayer and meditation, a place to smoke, etc. to respect their cultural or religious requirements) (e.g. M2,3,36, FGD1,2,3).

<sup>35</sup> Cleanliness and organisation were applied through an "*extremely organised, clean, hygienic, efficient environment*", and 'organization and cleanliness days' (M1). M21 stated that in difficult and long days it made them comfortable that they were working in a clean and organised environment. Employees also discussed a clean desk as a 'rule' and part of the culture (FGD7,8).

<sup>36</sup> Facilities include: the well-designed premises, with glass doors, gym, games room, silent room, cafeteria, break areas, etc. which the participants found encouraging, relaxing and refreshing; and computers, comfortable chairs, etc. as part of the facilities for their work (e.g. M2,21, FGD4,5).

<sup>37</sup> Integrity was discussed in terms of valuing the employees and engaging and inspiring them. For instance, M31 said that the employees and managers needed to be trusted, to be able to engage, and to

M3,31)<sup>38</sup>; and existence of personal relationships and a family culture (e.g. FGD1,3,6,9,10)<sup>39</sup>.

For instance, regarding personal relationships, one manager who parted from the company for over 10 years and returned to the company a few years prior to the interviews stated that his main reason for returning was the relationship with and the support from the founder. He (M42) added:

*“It would be more of a struggle to live up to the set of values that I have in extending it to my people if those sets of values weren’t extended to me.”*

Personal Relationship and a family-like culture are among the characteristics that Kunda (2009) attributes to high-tech organisations as a means of commitment and control. At PHX, while control was not highlighted in the interviews or FGDs, this could be an explanation for the softened hierarchy and friendly relationship in the organisation since some characteristics of work in PHX display similarities with how Kunda (2009) characterises work in high-tech organisations.

In summary, managers and employees identified various aspects of their environment as attributes of their workplace including respect, diversity (of cultures, religions, and gender) and unity, personal and friendly relationships, and a fun environment with clean, well-designed buildings with several facilities. The participants particularly highlighted these aspects of the environment as the attributes of their work that they explained as part of company’s care for employees’ welfare, although they could just be the means of control and commitment as Kunda (2009) argues.

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know that their integrity was important, and *“their personal life that they take into the organization, not just their business life”*.

<sup>38</sup> Exciting, engaging and inspiring environment: participants discussed their concern for creating an environment where employees wanted to come to work on a Monday morning (e.g. M3). M31, from HR, said that this created a positive environment because managers at PHX genuinely cared for the employees’ integrity, and their trust and engagement.

<sup>39</sup> Personal relationships and a family culture: Participants discussed their stories of when they have been in any sort of personal difficulty, and how the company had supported them with flexibility, providing financial support, providing assistance, creating a fundraising cause in order to solve a medical need for a member of staff, etc. (e.g. FGD1,3,6,9,10).

### **5.1.2.5 Employee orientation in PHX in summary**

In the preceding sections, the work at PHX has been identified with an employee orientation. The employee orientation was characterised as looking after the employees, fairness and justice, and a diverse, fun, and friendly working environment. The participants described the aspects of taking care of employees as respect and appreciation, providing the employees with training and feedback, providing them with support for the personal circumstances, as well as improving their capabilities, promotion opportunities and a hesitation to fire, sharing the wealth and other benefits, and employee involvement in philanthropic activities.

Furthermore, they discussed 'fairness and justice' as an attribute of their working environment, and a structure for that justice which included treating everybody the same, whereas some employees found the uniform treatment as unfair and perceived case-based treatment as just.

The participant also talked about the open-door policy, being heard, and involved at the decisions as another aspect of their work at PHX. They further discussed their working environment as a diverse and united working place, with clean and well-decorated, well-equipped buildings, with fun activities, and an engaging and friendly environment.

However, while some employees appreciated the spirit of co-operation at the company, some others discussed some competition. As discussed in this section, the inconsistency was a result of lack of uniform management policies and autonomy of the managers to operate based on their own people-management style, which, according to the managers personalities and experiences, resulted in varied practices (Salimi, Karaminia, & Esmaeili, 2011). As M1 mentioned, the managers were advised by the founder to consult with their employees, but it was applied variably.

These arguments indicate that while many values were evident in the practices and behaviours that were widespread across the company and were attributed to the organisational culture, there were some teams or departments that had different experiences, such as intense disruptive competition, which was explained as a result of autonomy of the managers and their choice of management policies and lack of a strong organisational culture. Organisational culture is further analysed in Chapters 6 and 9.

### **5.1.3 Approach – Work as service of the customers and the society**

Here the customer-orientation and society orientation as the other two main approaches of PHX at work as discussed.

#### **5.1.3.1 Customer orientation**

Another dimension that the participants identified with their work was the value of the customers, in terms of the quality of service offered to them and the objective to make a difference in the customers' lives.

Concerning customer service, the participants from PHX stressed that they strived for customer satisfaction as part of their philosophy; through innovation (FGD5,6,8, M1,3,41,51); high quality products and services (FGD2,3,5,6,9 M1,21,3,34,36,5,6,63,7); their website which was customised for different languages (ten by the time of the interviews) and their marketing material (FGD1); and to be profitable (FGD1, 41). This is similar to the customer satisfaction concern of many customer-oriented companies (Nwankwo, 1995).

Furthermore, many participants referred to their work as making a difference in the world and in the lives of the users of their products (FGD1,2,3,8,10, M3,51). However, a few participants said that this objective was not communicated enough (FGD8).

The discussion between the business objective being 'service of the society' and 'making profit' is among the debates between stakeholder theory and most corporate social responsibility theories, while some researchers in CSR represent a business case as well (e.g. Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). At PHX, while several participants discussed their work in terms of service, a few employees mentioned that the business objective of making profit was more dominantly communicated (FGD8). It pointed to the potential tension between seeking profits and seeking to 'serve'. The founder and his family members who held different managerial positions at the company (and were interviewed) highlighted their passion to serve the society through philanthropic activities, as an aspect of their up-bringing and the habits of their parents as



Bahá'is (section 5.1.3.2), and through their products, which were aimed at health and well-being of the customers. However, some employees did not find the huge amount of finances spent on the philanthropic activities fair, because they were not paid enough. Here, the cost considerations in paying the employees and thus increasing the profit, in relation to the desire to serve seemed a potential challenge in the application of work in the spirit of service in PHX.

Moreover, according to the analysis of the Bahá'í scripture, 'service' for the society is among the desirable objectives but making profit is not particularly discredited, but the owners are directed to be 'moderate' and considerate in withdrawing from the profit, as covered in Chapter 3, and share part of the profit with the employees. In PHX, profit-sharing was spoken about as an aspect of benefits in PHX, but it had not been exercised in the two/three years prior to the interviews as a result of the economic crisis the participants mentioned (e.g. M72). There was also no mention of how much or with what considerations the founder withdrew from the profit, but he did not mention that as a concern either. So, whether this aspect of justice based on Chapter 3 was practised in PHX was not clear.

### **5.1.3.2 Society orientation**

Participants widely discussed philanthropy and deep humanitarian concerns as a major attribute of their work at PHX. For instance, an employee (FGD10) mentioned that, as opposed to other companies, they really cared, "*because we really do, we really want to impact community and each other*". Many stories were shared of the variety of activities that the company provided and involved employees in to support the society such as: the staff and funds the company offered society to help with natural disasters; company-wide blood donations; packing food or care packages for children or people in need; and a bone-marrow drive for an employee with cancer (FGD1,3, 4,6,7,8,10, M1,2,31,4,42,5,51,63,72) . However, a few employees (FGD8) also argued that the company needed to improve the financial status of its employees first. This is discussed in detail in the context of fairness in Chapter 7.

#### **5.1.4 The concept of work in PHX**

As stated earlier, the purpose of this chapter has been to identify the concept of work as perceived and practised within each case study and then to compare this across the three cases to further contribute to the understanding of the overall concept of work developed in the scriptural study (Chapter 3), elaborate and broaden its scope, and highlight its challenges based on the perceptions and experiences of the participants.

In PHX, the most frequent aspects of work raised during the interviews and FGDs were serving customers, serving the society, and looking after the employees respectively, which have been discussed with detailed characteristics that explained each of these aspects.

The concept of work in PHX can be summarised as:

A customer-centric approach with emphasised humanitarian values and practices, which provided employees with a diverse (in nationalities and beliefs), family-like, fun, innovative and hard-working environment, where the employees were heard, appreciated/rewarded, and had opportunities to progress.

In relation to the description of ‘work in the spirit of service’ based on Chapter 3, PHX displayed similarity in its active concern, among the managers as well as the employees, for service of the society and the involvement of employees in such services, as well as its stress on diversity and support. This concept of work will be compared to the results of the other two cases in relation to the description of ‘work in the spirit of service’, in the following sections.

In relation to the literature in organisational studies, this identification of work does not provide a very different explanation of work from many organisations, such as characteristics of organisations is post-bureaucracy (Maravelias, 2007), or high-tech organisations (Kunda, 2009). However, these studies, such as Kunda (2009), have not mentioned any stress on humanitarian activities, with involvement of employees, or their concern for philanthropy in other high-tech organisations. Moreover, fairness, support, and diversity were not highlighted in those organisations (Kunda, 2009); these could be considered as particular attributes of work in PHX. But to answer how this description of

work is related to Bahá'í principles and not necessarily to organisational or industrial norms, or national culture, it can be argued that: 1) the founder stated that he aimed to apply Bahá'í principles in PHX; 2) some managers and employees stated that the founders' philosophy at work was influenced by his religious beliefs; 3) some managers had attended a few Bahá'í inspired conferences and referred to some of the aspects of Bahá'í principles in relation to work; and 4) the concept of work as perceived and practised at PHX indicated some differences from similar organisations; those differences are related to key principles in Bahá'í scripture. However, the tension between making profit and service, the small number of managers believing in the Bahá'í Faith among the 500 employees in PHX head office, the variety of management styles and practices employed in the company which were divorced from the management approach on the Bahá'í Faith based on Chapter 3, and the few similarities between the concept of work in PHX in comparison to the concept of work in Chapter 3, it could be said that the results from PHX did not display strong relations to the Bahá'í principles, although the founder intended to operate based on these principles.

This could be due to the size of PHX, the limited number of employees and managers who shared the same beliefs about work in the spirit of service, or lack of a strong organisational culture that focused on the culture of service. On the other hand, the elements of national culture showed an influence on the practice of the company as well. For instance, the individualistic reward system in PHX, may have been influenced by the individualistic national culture as Hofstede (2017) argues. To elaborate, in PHX managers had autonomy over their decisions and their employment relations (e.g. M1,2,3,5,6,7). Accordingly a variety of practices and perceptions were spoken about, and discussed in this section, which were different from the intentions of the founder as he discussed, and some managers and employees referred to (while the founders' intentions and principles displayed more similarities to the results of Chapter 3 based on Bahá'í scripture); but as Hofstede (2017) argues these practices could be influenced by a national culture with high influence of individualism (with index of 91 in USA (89 in the UK), the USA is among the highest countries), and masculinity (with the index of 62 (66 in UK) which indicates the persistence of competition, achievements and success as dominant drivers in the society). Both individuality and masculinity may explain some of

the differences between the observed practice and best practice as explained in Bahá'í scripture.

However, it is worth asking here, if it is possible to maintain the Bahá'í principles related to work and employment relations in practice. This question is revisited after the presentation of the rest of the analysis (Chapters 6-8), in Chapter 9.

## **5.2 Second Case Study - AP**

The six participants at AP repeatedly emphasised aspects of their organisational values and stressed their appreciation and connection with those values. They all mentioned that they knew their organisational values were based on the founder's religious belief (in the Bahá'í faith) and the application of those values was what made their efforts and their environment different from other organisations. The details of the discussions are presented in the following sections.

### **5.2.1 Objective – Why the Bahá'í principles**

The founder of AP was asked why he chose to apply the Bahá'í principles. He explained that his choice was a result of his commitment to the Bahá'í principles. He referred to a specific quotation from Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, part of which says:

*“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” (Bahá'u'lláh)*

He further explained that the systematic method he had learned from the Bahá'í community as the process of “*study, planning, action, reflection, consultation*”, and other principles had been very effective at their business, in empowering the employees, maintaining their growth and happiness, and the heightened quality of services they provided to the clients. M1 further explained the impact of applying these values, as resulting in a ‘much happier workplace’, and he said that they had received feedback from the local institutions and authorities that they were the best provider of the services they offered in the area they operated in.

So, the way the founder in AP highlighted applying Bahá'í principles, and the details of the principles that the founder and the rest of the participants referred to, were quite explicitly linked to the Bahá'í principles, while in PHX and THEL the participants spoke about their practices based on the Bahá'í principles implicitly, avoiding making direct mention to the Bahá'í principles in their practices, in order to avoid unnecessary conflict. Another manager (not a Bahá'í), said that one of the keys to their success was being a Bahá'í inspired organisation (M11). He said:

*“One of the keys of our organisation is in why we are an inspired organisation; and in this case the director and some of the employees are, (they believe in Bahá'i) The Bahá'i faith is a religion that has certain ways to do things, certain beliefs; so we base, not almost everything but we certainly have our structure. For example, the consultation is very strong in the Bahá'i faith, everything has to be consulted; nobody can decide things, it's a group of people can decide. So, there is certain things that I think, one of the advantages of our organisation is that it's based on this faith.”*

M11 further explained that they believed their way of operating ‘made them special’, they were ‘growing fast, receiving good recognition from local authorities, and they were making a difference’ to their clients’ lives in the short period of time that they were operating (five years by the time of the interview). This level of agreement with the organisational values indicates the intensity and consensus on the organisational culture/values among the managers/employees as measures of strong culture (e.g. O'Reilly, 1989; Schein, 1984).

Furthermore, the founder explained that, for most of the principles they employed, they applied them explicitly such as ‘no backbiting’, as Bahá'u'lláh<sup>40</sup> said this would quench the light of the heart and would not allow the person to care for others. He mentioned that they had training for when an employee joined the company, so they knew they could not speak negatively about an employee to another one, but if there was a problem they needed to resolve it through conversation with that employee or through their manager.

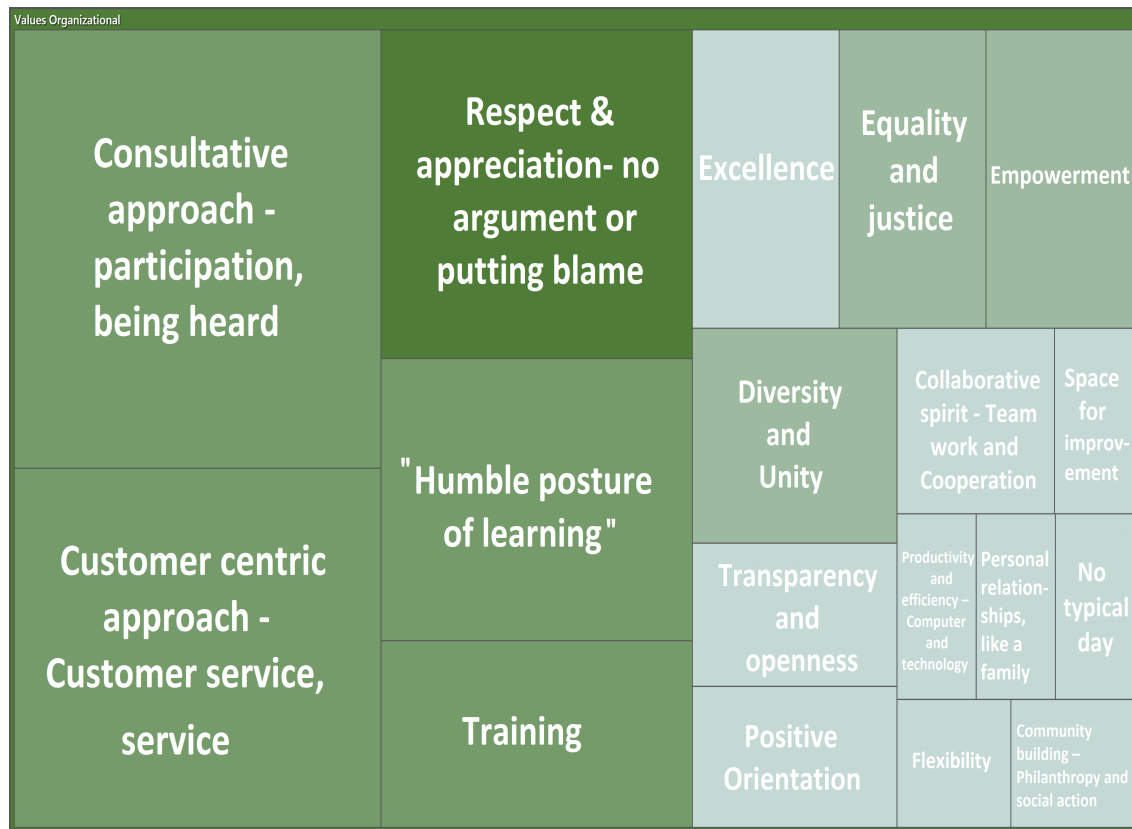
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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from Bahá'u'lláh: “*Backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul*”.

He then explained that some other principles were applied implicitly, due to their complexity, such as the ‘two-fold moral purpose’<sup>41</sup>.

The following chart exhibits how the participants at AP identified their work and their workplace, based on its specific attributes, values or characteristics (nodes), in the order of density (the number of times they have been mentioned and elaborated).

**Figure 5-3 Nodes, compared by the number of coding references – AP**



Based on Figure 5-3, the eighteen most frequently discussed organisational values (in the order of density) are as follows:

- Consultative approach – participation, being heard
- Customer-centric approach – Customer service, Service

<sup>41</sup> The twofold moral purpose, the founder said, referred to the personal spiritual development and advancement of society as addressed in the Bahá'í community.

- Respect, appreciation and trust – no argument or blame
- ‘Humble approach to learning’
- Training
- Excellence
- Equality and justice
- Empowerment
- Diversity and unity
- Transparency and openness
- Positive orientation
- Collaborative spirit – Teamwork and cooperation
- Space for improvement
- Productivity and efficiency – Computers and technology
- Personal relationships, like a family
- No typical day
- Flexibility
- Community building – Philanthropy and social action

The size of the cells in the figure represents the results based on the density of each topic, i.e. how often they were mentioned. Darkness of the shading is based on the number of interviews/FGDs they were discussed in. Here, the most frequently discussed attributes are consultative approach, customer-centric approach, respect and appreciation, trust (with no argument or blame), ‘humble posture of learning’, and training. Among these characteristics, respect and appreciation and trust (with no arguing or blaming) have been mentioned in all three interviews and the focus group discussions, whereas consultation as well as caring for customers were discussed more frequently at the interviews and with more details.

The clusters of values and their sub-clusters, based on the context of discussions, are presented and discussed in detail.

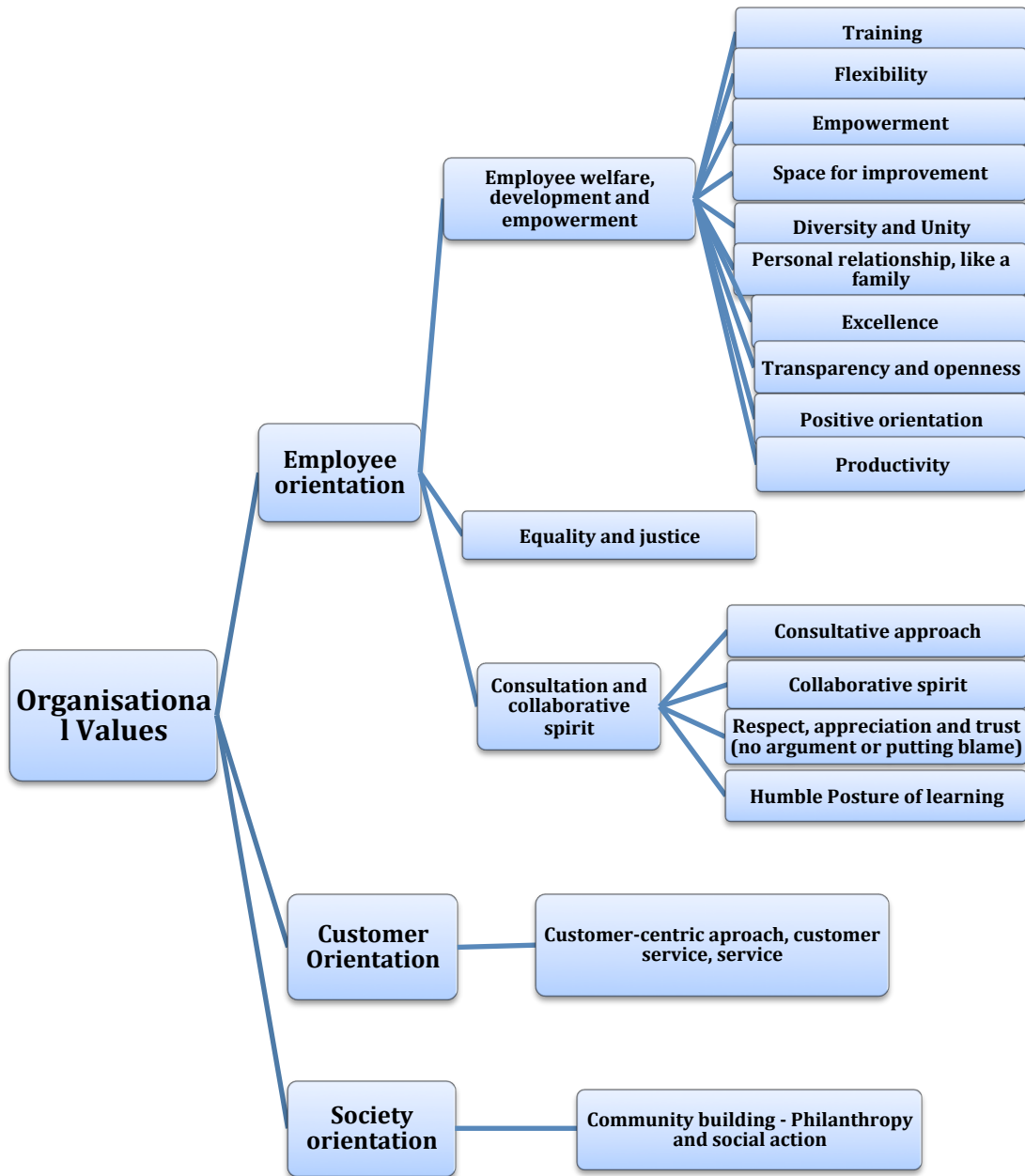
It was noted that in the interviews and the focus group discussion the language (words and phrases) that were used caught the attention of the interviewer. The participants used words and phrases that carried particular meanings in relation to the Bahá’í faith in

relation to the way they articulated their values, approaches and methods. Examples of such phrases included ‘two-fold moral purpose’, ‘unified action and diversity’, ‘culture of consultation’, ‘no backbiting’, ‘community building and social action’. These are not unique phrases, but they are a focus in training materials produced by FUNDAEC (The Foundation for the application and Teaching of the Sciences) and ISGP (Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity) – both Bahá’í inspired non-profit organisations, which M1 mentioned some managers and employees attended.

Considering that this organisation had operated for only five years prior to the interview (and only the founder was a Bahá’í), existence of a strong organisational culture (O’Reilly, 1989; Schein, 1984) seemed surprising. This could indicate exertion of power by imposing organisational values onto the employees (as Kunda (2009) argues), if there were notions of disagreement in the expressions of the participants. However, the managers and the employees expressed clear connections with these values and had deeply engaged with them, which Lukes (2005) does not consider as power if it is not in conflict with the employees’ interest. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.



Figure 5-4 Nodes clustered by concept – AP



## 5.2.2 Approach – Work as a space for employees

In the following sections the aspects of work at AP focused on the employees, as identified by the participants, are analysed.

### 5.2.2.1 Employee welfare, development and empowerment

In this section different aspects of employee welfare and development as attributes of work at AP are explored.

**Training and flexibility:** All participants identified their work at AP with the opportunities for training and improvement. The founder explained, with different examples, that they had a big budget for different types of training such as: “*Continuous Professional Development programme, degrees, vocational training, skills training, competency training, capacity training, and... virtues development programme*<sup>42</sup>”.

Similarly, managers and employees discussed some examples of training and support such as: rescheduling an employee to part-time who had decided to study (M11); a particular training developed in the Bahá'í community available to staff called ‘a discourse on social action’ focused on ‘helping people to see the humanity in a united way’<sup>43</sup>(M11); training as the employees joined the company (on company policies, risk assessment, reporting and paperwork, organisational values, first aid training, etc.) (FGD); and paying for training that employees requested to enable them to progress their own interests (M11).

Furthermore, the employees said that ‘support’ was commonly offered throughout the company, including when managers needed to be away and employees would cover their shift, (since the managers offered care to the customers as well) (FGD). It is not a

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<sup>42</sup> The founder explained the virtues development programme as training “*where people try to develop a set of virtues, you know how to be more kind, how to be more honest, more truthful, more sincere, polite, courteous, genuine and so on*”.

<sup>43</sup> ‘A discourse on social action’ was material about social action developed by the Bahá'í community, focused on “*helping people to see society, community, humanity in a different way, in a united way*” (M11).

customary practice for the employees to cover for the managers in most organisations. However, this was part of the style of decision-making at AP, which was based on participation and collective decision-making as opposed to decisions being made and imposed to the employees. The involvement of the employees along with the large amount of training provided the environment for the employees to provide the level of care similar to the service the managers offered to their clients, so they could alternate in providing care to their clients when required.

**Empowerment and Space for improvement:** Empowerment was identified as a characteristic of work at AP in terms of empowering both the clients and the employees. The founder explained they (the managers) tried to create a safe environment within which no one was judged and thus they (employees and the clients) could all feel empowered, be themselves and say what they wanted, without the fear of discrimination of any kind. He said that this enabled the employees to engage in their work and the operations of the company, and take ownership of their future; and it enabled the clients to engage in and support their own recovery programmes. He explained that they used ‘encouragement’ and ‘no blaming’.

Employees similarly discussed different examples of empowering the clients as well as the positive atmosphere of learning with ‘no blaming’ for the employees. For instance, an employee said (FGD):

*“Here I have the feeling that I can get things wrong and that people will come up to me and tell me if they’re wrong, but just for me to improve, and I think there’s a lot of space for growth in this way.”*

Employee empowerment is among the subjects that have received more interest in the past few decades (after 1990) as an independent topic (Honold , 1997), in terms of engagement, trust, job satisfaction, etc. (e.g. Menon, 2001; Gomez & Rosen, 2001; Ugboro & Obeng, 2000). Empowerment is widely discussed in terms of autonomy and control by employees over the decisions at their work, as well as in collaborative work (Honold , 1997). These aspects will further be discussed in Chapters 6 and 9. However, it is worth exploring the intentions behind employee empowerment. The most widely reported intention, as empowerment literature indicates, is performance enhancement,

which can result in increased productivity (Honold , 1997). While this could have been a possible intention at AP, this was not observed in the interviews as either the intention of the managers or how the employees found them. Moreover, the founder highlighted that they employed empowerment as an aspect of employment relations based on his Bahá'í perspective of work, and thus as a responsibility he recognised; and thus, it was also motivated by the founder's religious beliefs.

**Diversity and unity:** The participants considered 'diversity and unity' as an attribute to their work; having employees from seven different countries, and with letting go of personal gains and self-exaltation and instead focusing on betterment of the clients and the organisation. The founder explained:

*“...and this means not being apathetic or passive and inactive towards each other and towards the organisation, but basically being active participants in engaging in working towards the betterment of the organisation and the health of our clients using pure motive, pure intention and whilst avoiding personal gain and self-exaltation.”*

This statement is focused on the interest of the organisation and can indicate a singular focus on the company if employees are not given any freedom to grow and fulfil their interests at the organisation, or if managers control the agenda and the decisions (Lukes, 2005; Fox, 1966). Whether or not employees have any space to pursue their interests and how any conflict of interest is dealt with are discussed in the following sections and in Chapter 7. However, in all references to the interest of the company in this statement, the employees or the clients were mentioned along with the company, and it indicates spaces for them to pursue their interests as well.

On the other hand, the references to diversity here mainly pointed to religion, ethnicity/nationality and gender, and, similar to PHX, other aspects of diversity were not mentioned. One particular reference to diversity, however, was consideration of the betterment of others (the clients and the organisation). Here, diversity and inclusion were reflected in a responsibility towards benefiting others not just the members of the organisation and can be considered as an extension to the concept of organisational

diversity with an outwardly focus, which is not among the commonly studied aspects of diversity in management literature.

Table 5-2 provides more details about the gender, ethnicity and nationality distributions in AP.

**Table 5-2 The demographic distribution of gender, nationalities, and religion at AP (2016)**

	No. of employees	Gender: male/female	Ethnicity	Religion: No of Bahá'ís
AP (UK)	22	35/65 %	15	N/A
Interviewed Managers	3	2/1	3	1
Interviewed Employees	3	3	3	0

Similar to PHX, the demographic data about religious diversity mainly refers to whether the participants believed in the Bahá'í Faith, in order to check for potentiality of religious discrimination, the chance of which was unlikely according to the table (since only the founder was a believer in the Bahá'í Faith). At AP the number of female employees was almost double the number of male employees, quite higher than the average percentage of women at work in the UK at 47% (GOV.UK, 2016).

**Friendly environment:** The participants said that their work environment was like a family, and when they needed something, or they had an opinion they were comfortable to take it to their manager or to the founder and they did not feel like they were going to their boss<sup>44</sup> (FGD).

A family-like working environment is considered as exercise of power through influencing employees' emotions as Kunda (2009) argues, while others such as Lukes

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<sup>44</sup> The participants at the focus group said that at their team meetings they freely reflected on different things, they tried to do something social together, if they had an opinion they freely approached whom they thought was relevant at any position and shared with them what they thought (FGD).

(2005) do not consider it as employment of power. This will be further discussed in the Discussion Chapter.

**Other attributes** the participants mentioned included: striving for excellence while avoiding competition; transparency and openness in their communications; and a positive attitude and language (e.g. M1, FGD). These attributes are among common characteristics described in various organisations.

In summary, employee empowerment through training, flexibility to continue their studies, safe and blameless space for improvement, diversity of nationalities, religions, and gender along with unity, and a friendly environment were explained as attributes of work in AP.

#### **5.2.2.2 Equality and justice**

Another characteristic of work in AP, as discussed by the participants, was equality and justice. They talked about equality in terms of gender equality, equality of people irrespective of background, faith, religion, etc., and being listened to with a just and fair approach, the latter is discussed in the next section. M1 also added that in AP there were no differences in the salary for people doing the same job. The salaries, as the founder and the employees explained, were decided through a process where employees did benchmarking research, submitted their proposal and the salary was decided upon in a consultation meeting involving the employees, and it resulted in satisfaction of the managers and the employees. The manager said that not once “*did anyone overestimate what they should get paid, in some aspects they underestimated it*”. So, he said since the employees’ contributions were taken into account and they had been fair, they had always received what they had asked for. Employees and M11 said the same, and also mentioned that their salaries were higher than the market rate for the same job.

Here, fairness was discussed in terms of equality, as equal pay for equal jobs (including gender equality), being heard, and using discussions and benchmarking in deciding the salaries. The concept of fairness in AP is related to equity theory (Greenberg, 1990) in organisational justice, which is different from the concept of fairness in PHX, where

salaries were performance based. It also has similarities with the concept of justices as fairness (Rawls, 1971), where even the most ordinary employees were given a chance to do a research and propose a fair wage for themselves and receive their salaries accordingly. The two approaches are based on two different theories of justice, each having their own advocates. However, at AP all the employees found their pay to be fair while at PHX there were employees who did not find their pay mechanism as fair, i.e. those at the low-income range, or not able to rise up the promotion scales, finding them too focused on innovation or long hours of work. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

### **5.2.2.3 Consultation and a collaborative spirit**

Consultation, including its methods, its environment and the attitude of the managers and the employees during consultation, has been the major point raised by all the participants in AP. The details of their discussions are covered below.

#### ***Consultative approach and a collaborative spirit***

The participants attributed a consultative approach to all their work at AP. They called it a ‘non-adversarial decision making, built on consensus’<sup>45</sup>. To explain, they said they did not argue, have an offensive or defensive dynamic, push personal agendas, or have interdepartmental competition; that through ‘collaboration’ and ‘teamwork’ they tried to further the interests of everyone concerned, all the departments and all the stakeholders, which would ultimately benefit the organisation (M1,11, FGD).

This could indicate that the ultimate/hidden objective here was to increase the profit as Friedman (1970) argued through his agency theory. However, the participants emphasised that AP was a social enterprise<sup>46</sup> focused on helping its clients to improve their condition, to be able to move to independent living. Accordingly, a social enterprise is not focused on profit-making by its nature (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010, p. 42).

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<sup>45</sup> They included an example from working on their projects, where instead of senior management making the decisions and informing the teams, the individuals on that project worked together, all discussed their ideas, all the ideas were taken into consideration, they came to a consensus or a vote and took the project forward. Then the managers supported the staff working on that project (M1,12).

<sup>46</sup> Social enterprise is mainly focused on creating and sustaining a social value with a heightened sense of accountability (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010, p. 42).

As an example of consultation from the founder, there was a decision about automation of their revenues and benefits department. He explained that the finance manager, the senior manager, and other stakeholders (employees from accounting and finance) with himself discussed the project in a meeting and came to an agreement, and then implemented the agreed plan. He emphasised that the decisions the group made were not overridden by anybody. If there was not a consensus they would go with the majority (M1,12).

The participants also said that consultations took place between the managers and staff, and between the staff and their clients; and as managers did not decide for the employees, the employees did not decide for the client. But rather they met, discussed and planned the clients' personal development programmes together<sup>47</sup> (M11, FGD).

These statements by managers regarding participation are common among many organisations that utilise employee participation. However, they do not necessarily indicate 'visible extra-role or role expanding opportunities' (Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995), meaning that they do not necessarily indicate if the employees have autonomy over their decisions or an influence on the strategic decisions of the company. Furthermore, involving clients in decisions has been mentioned in other literature as well, such as supply chain management (e.g. Briscoe, Dainty, Millett, & Neale, 2004; Fincham, 1999), accounting literature (Lambert & Sponem, 212), and occupational therapy (Clark, Scott, & Krupa, 1993). It is also gaining more attention in the planning, delivery and evaluation of mental health services (similar to AP) (Nordén, Eriksson, Kjellgren, & Norlander, 212; Deegan & Drake, 2006). However, such involvement is at its initial stages in the UK, while it has been more widely practised and studied in the USA (Simpson & House, 2002). While clients' involvement in health services is not very widespread, the existing studies indicate positive effects (Nordén, Eriksson, Kjellgren, & Norlander, 212; Deegan & Drake, 2006).

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<sup>47</sup> The staff met with the clients, consulted with them about their needs, preferences, the training they wanted to attend, their interests, etc. and planned their personal development programmes together (M11, FGD).



Exploring employees' experience in AP, they explained the following points (FGD): the openness and willingness of managers to hear suggestions (an employee spoke about her experience from her job interview where she was asked what she thought needed improvement at AP, as the beginning of her experience in AP of being heard); employees' autonomy to manage their work in their own way, so there were no rigid ways that everybody would have to follow; managers' approachability and the freedom for the employees to share their opinions and concerns freely; the supportive atmosphere at their team meetings, where they freely talked about what went right or wrong and what they thought was best to do next, and suggesting some changes to the organisational processes; and participating in the decisions and implementation of such changes.

The above discussions of the consultative approach at AP by the managers and the employees refer to autonomy of the employees in their own work and their influence in the bigger decisions of the company, with sharing opinions and not blaming staff. The specific characteristics of the consultative approach at AP are not among the most common practices of participation, and so this consultation is further explored in the following chapters.

### ***Respect and support – no argument or blame***

Here the participants attributed respect and support to their working environment. They further stated that they did not take offensive or defensive positions in their team meetings, nor pushed any agendas or fought for their ideas. They said that once the ideas were shared, all took ownership of them and took the responsibility to make them happen. It was said that they did not put blame on anyone if the ideas did not work or if any mistakes happened, but tried to learn from them (M1, FGD). They also highlighted using the right language and polite words in an environment of trust in order to have better communication (e.g. M11).

M12 discussed an example from her experience, saying if they made a mistake they knew that they were supported. They turned to their manager and, in a supportive environment, dealt with it together. She also spoke about the time when she had an issue with her English skills and how it was treated with support. Employees in the FGD discussed similar experiences.

This use of the right language in communication and decision-making has been mentioned in other research as well (e.g. Forsyth , 2006; Gastil, 1994), which along with support, no blame and collective ownership of ideas can potentially create a fertile environment for consultation. The many detailed examples the participants offered indicated the effectiveness of this approach in action (more examples are discussed in Chapters 6-8).

### ***Humble posture of learning***

Participants attributed the ‘humble posture of learning’ to their organisational relationships. M11 explained it as follows:

*“so what we want is not people where the manager’s talking to staff, or vice versa,... we don’t want an attitude of I know, I know, I know, what we want is people to be able to say oh thank you, or thank you for letting me know, and to be able to be open to accept constructive criticisms to their role or the way that they do things.”*

M11 explained that, at their regular quarterly meetings among supervisors and employees, they discussed what had been going well and not well in the past quarter and identified areas for improvement, including the areas of improvement for management. Similarly, employees in the FGD shared their experiences of the founder and managers being open to their suggestions, listening to their opinions, and listening to the new articles the employees shared (e.g. in clinical psychology as one of their professional areas).

This attribute (‘humble posture of learning’) has not been discussed in the literature of employee involvement; inclusion of this could contribute to the theories of employee involvement and collective decision-making, which refers to the active role of the managers and their receptivity of new ideas or suggestions. Considering an environment of learning, support and no blaming, and autonomy and participation in decision-making, along with the examples provided, it can be said that a particular consultative approach was exercised at AP, which together with the rest of its characteristics discussed in the following chapters, could contribute to this body of knowledge.

#### **5.2.2.4 Employee orientation at AP in summary**

In summary, the participants characterised their work in AP with religious, nationalities, and gender diversity and unity, equality and justice, training and empowerment, and space for the employees to pursue their interests.

They further attributed a consultative approach to their work, with respect and trust, using the right language without blaming, and a humble posture of learning. They discussed that, in such environment, they could express their opinions and make the decisions together, including their clients.

#### **5.2.3 Approach - Work as service of the customers and the society**

The participants said that they placed customer's needs, requirements, and preferences at the centre of their decision-making with genuine care for the recovery of the clients. They also expressed a respectful attitude towards them (M11, FGD).

Participants also spoke about community and social action as part of the characteristics of their work, such as their neighbourhood projects, with a long-term preventive approach towards mental health and building a better society (e.g. M1).

These statements are consistent with AP being a social enterprise and having a central concern for the welfare of the society, however, involving the clients in the decisions related to them, are not commonly covered in the literature of social entrepreneurship; and the employees said they had not experienced it in their previous jobs in that sector.

#### **5.2.4 The concept of work in AP**

In summary, the participants at AP identified their work with fairness and equality, support and space for employees' development (including training, no blaming and autonomy) and a consultative and collaborative approach. This consultative, collaborative approach was strongly evidenced (by all the participants) including consultation in

different matters among managers, employees and the clients, with no arguing or blaming and with an attitude of learning.

Furthermore, they described a genuine care for their clients' recovery and involving them in the planning for the activities and recovery programmes, as well as a concern for the wider society and its well-being. This provides a particular participative approach to work and clients' well-being, which is not highlighted in the customer involvement literature. Most of the literature considering customer involvement is not empirical, and it often focuses on the development of new products/services (Carbonell, Rodríguez-Escudero, & Pujari, 2009), and is often limited to obtaining information from them (1990) rather than involvement in decisions concerning them.

In summary, the work in AP was conceptualised as

A consultation-centric approach, in an environment of religious and cultural diversity and unity, respect and trust, without blaming, and with a humble posture of learning, where employees had space to pursue their interests through training, support, and empowerment, and exercise of equality and justice; and the decisions were made collectively between managers, employees, and the clients (the clients were involved in decisions about them).

In relation to the characteristics of '*work in the spirit of service*', based on the results of Chapter 3, work at AP has 'consultation and employee involvement', and 'fairness and justice', as particular similarities with work in the spirit of service based on Bahá'í scripture, where these were both strongly emphasised in AP. This will be further discussed in the comparison with the other two cases at the end of this chapter.

### **5.3 Third Case Study – THEL**

The founder, a current employee, as well as the two ex-employees of THEL were asked about their organisational values; they highlighted the inquisitive nature of the organisation, where everything was subject to their discussion and exploration, and they found 'nothing to be pre-defined'. The details of their organisational approach are

explained in the following sections. To set the background, the demographic information concerning employees' nationalities and gender distribution is presented here.

**Table 5-3 The demographic distribution of gender, nationalities, and religion at THEL (2015 - 2016)**

	<b>No. of employees</b>	<b>Gender: Male/female</b>	<b>Ethnicities/ Nationalities</b>	<b>Religion: No of Bahá'ís</b>
<b>2015 before the structural change</b>	20	35/65 %	5	N/A
<b>2016 (at the time of interview)</b>	1	50/50 % (The founder & 1 employee)	1	1
<b>Interviewed Managers</b>	1 (founder)	1/0	1	1
<b>Interviewed Employees</b>	3 (including 2 former employees)	2/1	2	0

As stated earlier, the religious beliefs of the managers and employees have been mentioned only in terms of their relation to the Bahá'í Faith in the interest of confidentiality, and only in order to assess potentiality of religious discrimination, which seemed very unlikely because only the founder believed in the Bahá'í Faith.

In 2015 the company had a larger number of female than male employees (65%). In 2016 the company underwent a structural change and accordingly the number of employees dropped. This change and the opinion of the employees about the impact are elaborated in the next section.

### 5.3.1 Objective – Why the Bahá'í principles

The Founder of THEL was asked why he chose to apply the Bahá'í principles at his organisation. He said that partly the reason was that those principles were innate in his way of thinking and operation, and they were accordingly reflected in his conversations with their client companies, such as 'what was a good contribution', 'what did it mean to be a good human being', etc. He clarified that he did not 'actively choose' to apply these principles, but they 'came naturally'.

He added that they employed the Bahá'í principles not necessarily in the name of a religious belief. So, this organisation, similarly to PHX, had chosen the implicit practice of the Bahá'í principles. The reason the founder explained was that he:

*“...did not necessarily find the situation in which referring to them as Bahá'í principles was going to help the situation as opposed to hinder it, if you know what I mean So it's, to have a conversation about equality was a lot easier to have, rather than say I believe in this Bahá'í concept of equality and therefore we're going to have a chat about it.”*

When asked why he thought so, he said that it could unnecessarily prejudice the conversation if raised as Bahá'í, or any, religious principle. He then further stated that the hesitation about discussing religion had changed lately in the UK, and in different conversations he even frequently heard from colleagues that 'religion was not talked about enough in business'. He went on to say that in THEL a mostly faith-based approach to business was employed, and he did not find his life divided between Bahá'í values in the Bahá'í community and a different mindset at business.

This could create an issue if the founder was imposing the Bahá'í principles on the employees. However, he explained that they (the founder and the employees) had conversations about the virtues, and they did not take a particular understanding of a principle to rule the behaviour of others.

Similarly, he was asked if he preferred that the person working with him believed in the Bahá'í Faith. He completely rejected the idea that he would prioritise someone just because they had 'signed up', but he said he would be inclined to prefer a person if they

displayed those principles because those were the principles that he believed were true. He explained:

*“If we shared language and shared understanding, so I’d probably be naturally very subliminally biased towards those kind of things you know. If that makes sense, so if somebody came in and showed absolute love to everyone around them, didn’t happen to be labelled with something, then if that’s something I value then I’d probably be attracted to that, as opposed to someone who comes in and says I believe in love but doesn’t actually do anything about it.”*

It is notable here that none of the three employees interviewed at this research were adherents of the Bahá’í Faith, and they highlighted the founders’ open and non-discriminative behaviour, which further suggests the absence of religious discrimination. This inclination in prioritising the employees with particular virtues/characteristics could impose the principles on them by default. However, this is different from the assumed influence of religions on businesses, where non-believers in a particular religion would be discriminated against (e.g. Underkuffler, 1989; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2001), since here the principles/characteristics drove the criteria, rather than the religion, as the employees at THEL were believers in different religions.

The founder further explained his view of work in the spirit of service as *“doing something, which benefits the society as a whole, as opposed to wanting to fulfil your own satisfaction – selflessly for others, rather than for your own rewards”*. He explained that it was accordingly reflected in the purpose of their business where they helped organisations to understand their purpose towards society.

Similarly, E12 explained that her understanding of work in the spirit of service came from the behaviour of the founder and the environment he had created as well as her communication with ebbf (a Bahá’í inspired business forum). She explained her understanding of work in the spirit of service as: *“being altruistic, it’s about serving others, and thinking about others’ needs rather than putting yourself and your benefits before others’ benefits; and so being selfless”*. She said that the values she had talked about as their organisational values were connected to this principle.

In both of the above descriptions, service of the society and selflessness were the central aspects of their concepts of work, which could be a result from their contact with ebbf, as a common link between them to the Bahá'í Faith.

The following chart exhibits how the participants at THEL identified their work and their workplace, based on its specific attributes, values or characteristics. It reflects the density of each organisational value or characteristic (nodes), discussed by the founder and the employees, based on the number times they had been mentioned and elaborated.

**Figure 5-5 Nodes, compared by the number of items coded – THEL**

Values Organizational				
Room for learning, intellectually stimulating	Involvement of customer, partnership with customers	System of values, not just one	Reflection with love, interpret with best intention	Principles in action
Honesty, integrity, respect, and trust	Freedom of ideas and freedom of expression	No traditional structure, no hierarchy	No Compromise	Humane and family environment
Help other businesses to understand their role in society	Enabling culture	Health and happiness of employees		Comfortable with uncertainty
		Constructive to society		

As the **Figure 5-5** exhibits, all fifteen discussed organisational values (in the order of density) are as follows:

- Room for learning, intellectually stimulating
- Honesty, integrity, respect and trust
- Help other businesses to understand their role in society
- Involvement of customers, partnership with customers



- Freedom of ideas and freedom of expression
- Enabling culture
- System of values, not just one
- Reflection with love, interpret with best intention
- Principles in action
- No traditional structure, no hierarchy
- No compromise
- Humane and family-like environment
- Health and happiness of the employees
- Constructive to society
- Comfortable with uncertainty

Again, the cells present the results based on the density of the characteristics or values by the number of participants addressing them. The darkness of the shading shows the levels of density.

According to **Figure 5-5** space for learning, respect and trust, and helping other businesses to understand their roles in the society were discussed the most. At the next level, nearly as frequent, were collaborative thinking with the customers, freedom of ideas and freedom of expression among the employees, and the enabling culture. These characteristics are discussed in the following sections.

It is worth initially discussing the context of change at THEL. As stated earlier, the organisation had undergone a change in its business focus, its structure, and the number of its employees. As a result, two of the three employees who were interviewed no longer worked at THEL, but they were interviewed based on their experience there, as well as to analyse the reasons why they left. As a result, part of conversations with the interviewees focused on that change, which contributes to the context of this research.

The change heavily involved the shift of focus of the business from helping organisations to develop their internal communication to being mainly focused on helping businesses rethink their purpose and their roles in society. The founder discussed this shift as part of the process of maturity of the organisation, which was impacted by the Bahá'í principles. This shift resulted in a change in the organisational structure from *'having a whole bunch*

*of people and then finding work to do* to *'assembling people around an idea'* (M1). For instance, in one of their current projects they had a few people 'in house' and some academics from LSE.

The researcher thought that the new structure might have been put in place in order to avoid contracts with employees, although the founder mentioned it was due to requests from the employees to enable them to engage in various projects; so, employees were asked further about it. They explained that it had emerged due to the changes in company purpose, and the employees' interest in working on different projects or not wanting to be employed by a single institution. For instance, the two ex-employees interviewed voluntarily left the organisation to open their own business together.

The employees also discussed their experience with the changes. E11 for instance compared different stages of THEL life and said at one point there were 16 employees, and their type of roles and responsibilities had been quite flexible around each project; at some point they (the founder and the employees) were wondering whether they needed to develop the business. After discussion, they decided together that they did so they started to broaden their client base. E11 explained that later, with the change of heart of the founder<sup>48</sup> about what was meaningful, and shift of corporate purpose, it required a *'much looser organisation and fewer people'*.

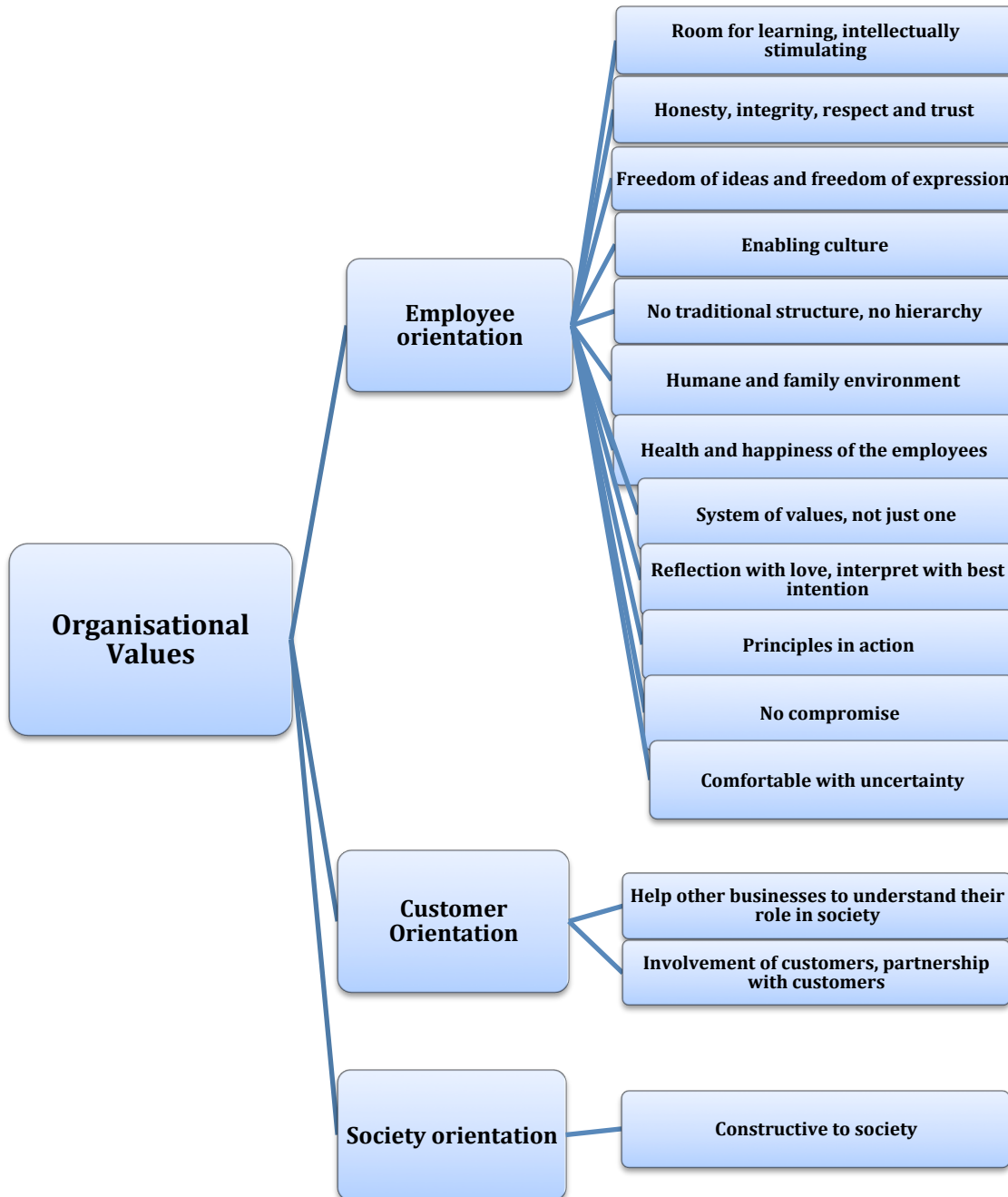
E13 discussed the changes in a similar way. However, both these employees left the organisation after the change, partially because of less sense of stability and not knowing where they were going as this new approach necessitated a much more open and autonomous thinking (E11,13). Thus, based on the discussions of the employees, the change of the structure of the company was not to avoid contracts or other employee costs. The visions and operations of the company and the challenges that the employees

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<sup>48</sup> E11 discussed the founder's perspective and explained that the founder felt that the world of business had changed a lot and the world's needs had changed, and that businesses were slow to recognise their societal role; and the founder wanted to play a part in changing the thought process of the leaders, through which those changes could take place. E11 mentioned an example of their project with a well-known bank, in contrast to many banks, i.e. selling their complex financial instruments to the elderly, utilising money laundering, enabling accounts to be used for trafficking by providing great secrecy, etc. because the whole infrastructure of the bank had been solely designed to make money, not, for instance, for enabling economies to prosper or be healthy and sustainable. Accordingly, THEL's role was to help businesses find their role and meaning in society.

explained in relation to this level of autonomy and free thinking are discussed here and in the following chapters as part of the discussions on employment relations.

**Figure 5-6 Nodes clustered by concept – THEL**



### **5.3.2 Approach – Work as a space for employees to learn and grow**

Here, the characteristics of work as perceived by the participants at THEL are explored. Work at THEL has been mainly identified as a supportive environment for learning and growth, with trust, freedom and encouragement. Characteristics of this environment are analysed here.

#### **Space for learning**

All the employees identified their work at THEL as intellectually stimulating and having space for learning. E13 explained it as the ‘power of good questions’, including the founder asking the employees good questions or employees asking the clients; and then exploring ‘all the possible answers’. Other employees discussed their work philosophy as: nobody knows, you will “*just find out about it as you go along, it’s not a science you know*”, and ‘such a humane and intellectually stimulating environment’ that one did not think it would be possible (E13,12).

This characteristic will be further explored in following chapters. However, such uncertainty can cause anxiety (Gentes & Ruscio, 2011) and a sense of insecurity, as happened to some of these employees (e.g. E11). At the same time, it can empower employees to search for their interests and grow, as happened to other employees (e.g. E12). Maravelias (2007) discusses freedom as autonomy and freedom as opportunities, and explains that such freedom in post-bureaucracy took employees’ identity away from them as the borders of work and life faded for them. So, how to identify the level of autonomy to be beneficial to the employees rather than harmful requires further research.

#### **Honesty, respect and trust**

Another attribute of work at THEL was ‘integrity, honesty, respect and trust’, as participants said they critically explored the concepts and applications of these attributes in the work environment. The founder explained that they openly discussed honesty and other principles<sup>49</sup> and also had conversations about how hard it was to be honest and occasions when they were not sure about being honest (M1, E11).

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<sup>49</sup> Other characteristics that participants attributed to work at THEL were: a system of connected values not just one, reflections on all matters and decisions with love and best intentions, applying

Explaining the trust they received, an employee quoted from the founder, who told them: “*you can deliver, you can think, you can contribute, so yeah so it’s trust and ability to be yourself at work*”. They said that the founder was more interested in asking big questions, not in the details of how they were delivered, and he put complete trust in the staff to get on with it. (E12,13)

Having the principles open to conversation and exploring the difficulty in their application was not mentioned in other two cases and indicates that the principles were not imposed to the employees. However, the founder had said earlier that he looked for interest in principles such as love and honesty in people when recruiting them, which was assumed as imposing those principles; but coupled with having conversations about these and leaving them to the employees to employ, in an environment of trust, can indicate that he could have meant that he looked for people who shared similar concerns, not necessarily being connected to a religion. However, since the principles he spoke about were his religious beliefs, it was not clear that they were objective job requirements. What was clear was that he did not require them to be adherents of the Bahá’í Faith, and neither of them were. This trust is also consistent with the previous attribute, space for learning, which can enable employees to grow, knowing that they are trusted to do the job.

### **Freedom and an enabling culture**

Another characteristic attributed to work at THEL was freedom and its empowering culture through ‘motivating, influencing and enabling people’ (M1), in an ‘unstructured way’.

Explaining freedom, employees said that their ideas had always been welcomed, and they had not had to “*operate within a kind of a strait jacket*” as in traditional businesses (E11) and they were fully trusted (E12).

One employee explained that some people would not probably enjoy it as they would rather ‘know exactly where they stand’, ‘to have a job description that was mapped out’,

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principles in action not just on paper, making no compromise in their values and their objectives, and being comfortable with uncertainty and open to new ideas and intellectual rigour (M1, E12,13).

‘to have a process’. Whereas, as he explained, THEL’s culture and philosophy was “*creating the right conditions for people to express themselves, come up with ideas and so on, ... enabling people to succeed for themselves as opposed to trying to performance manage them*” (E11).

This articulation of different approaches to this freedom and enabling culture, from an employee who left the company because he was at the first category (and preferred to have a process and job description), indicates self-awareness and “*the right condition for people to express themselves*” as a result of being enabled. However, he expressed that this lack of structure and broad autonomy, along with less stressed financial objectives, resulted in his decision to leave the company, so this freedom and open structure presents a dichotomy between the space for employees to pursue their interests (employee empowerment) versus fear of too much freedom, and where the balance rests.

### **No traditional structure or hierarchy**

Another characteristic that complemented the previous attributes was the lack of hierarchical structure and working through emerging teams instead.

One of the employees (E12) said that with their non-conventional way of operation people were given freedom and had “*more kind of emerging teams rather than static and fixed teams*”. She further explained that they did not have a hierarchical organisational chart, and the human interactions shaped the structure and the relationships in the organisation.

While some theorists advocate hierarchies, some others discuss non-hierarchical associations of workers (without subordination) (e.g. Williamson, 1973). However, there are some disadvantages to non-hierarchical associations, such as difficulty in agreeing on certain rules (while imposing the rule would be much easier), vulnerability of peer groups to free-rider abuse (due to opportunism, such as conflict due to productivity-based rewards of individuals part of a group), and some moral hazards such as malingering (Williamson, 1973). These disadvantages have not been discussed at THEL, which could be due to its small size and absence of productivity-based awards and the resultant lack of competition that Williamson (1973) described. To elaborate, the participants highlighted that the reward mechanism in THEL was not a specific competition-based reward and

they operated with a different philosophy, owning what they did. They were not motivated by the pay in THEL but by the elements of their work, such as involvement with high-impact organisations, their autonomy at their work, their cooperation on various projects without clash of power, and the influence they had on the organisations they served; while they received standard pay and benefits such as pension and insurance. (E11,12,13)

### **Humane and family-like environment**

Another attribute of work at THEL was its ‘humane and family like environment’. The employees explained how they could be themselves and connect in a human level with others, not like a machine. An employee (E12) said that at THEL, *“it’s about humanity, human attitudes, but also it’s about developing yourself and being yourself”*, where if they had difficulties in their personal lives, they would be listened to and supported, if they had concerns, they talked about them, and if they thought anything should or should not be done in a certain way they discussed this together.

These attributes are similar to those discussed in the other cases, but also include a stress on being themselves and developing themselves. This is a particular characteristic that the critiques of Unitarism look for, i.e. a space for employees to develop themselves (e.g. Budd & Bhava, 2008). This is further discussed in Chapters 7 and 9.

#### **5.3.2.1 Employee orientation in THEL in summary**

The participants attributed their work at THEL with a humane and friendly environment, with freedom, space for learning, and empowerment of employees, and lack of structural hierarchy, which were both enabling and challenging.

#### **5.3.3 Approach – Work as service of the customers and the society**

Customer partnership was another attribute of work at THEL. They discussed a significant part of the meaning of their work in helping other companies to understand their role in society (as their organisational objective). They characterised their relationship with their clients through collective thinking, co-creation and partnership with customers as other attributes of working at THEL (M1, E11,12,13).

Furthermore, the employees described their work as being ‘constructive to society’, through which they ‘found meaning in their work’ and as a result, were “*happier and healthier employees*” (e.g. E11).

This stress on serving the society is similar to the other two cases; in addition, THEL business’ objective was focused on the service of society to begin with, which is similar to the characteristics of a social enterprise (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). However, it is not structurally registered as a social enterprise, but operates with deemphasised financial objectives similar to social enterprise as a participant mentioned (E13), which made it challenging to some employees who needed a clearer business approach. This highlighted the potential tension between focus on service and on profit or financial gain. To expound further, while the employees received their wages and were happy about them, and often making profit is more of a concern of the founder, the autonomy and sense of ownership of the employees made them uncomfortable with the stronger focus of the company on service, in comparison to financial gain. Here, financial gain was considered as a result of the service not a strong objective. Thus, another challenge between the focus of the spirit of service and making profit, is the perceptions and motivations of the employees (in addition to the challenge to the owners of the business). How this impacts upon applicability of Bahá’í principles is further discussed in Chapter 9.

On the other hand, the founder mentioned that he was conscious in how much he withdrew from the profit of the company, and made sure it was less than the norm in the market. In explaining, he said that the norm in the market was excessive withdrawal from the profit and a focus on accumulation of wealth by the owners, but he tried to be moderate and withdraw much less than the norm. This was consistent with the ‘moderate withdrawal of profit’ as mentioned in Chapter 3, but he did not provide any more information about ‘moderate’ in his opinion, as how much, or in what proportion to the employees’ pay.



### **5.3.4 The concept of work in THEL**

In summary, at THEL the participants articulated their work as:

A freedom-oriented approach with trust, lack of hierarchy and no job descriptions, space and support for learning, development and decision-making, and a humane and friendly environment, aiming to serve the society by collaboratively helping organisations find their role in society.

They further explained that their work in service of the society was a reflection of what they believed; and the values that they tried to maintain, discuss and live by with no compromises. In addition, their work required being comfortable with uncertainty in order to co-create the answers instead of just predefining and following them.

In relation to the results of Chapter 3, the concept of work in THEL has similarities with ‘work in the spirit of service’ in its focus on the service of society and the stress on employee involvement in decision-making. These results are compared across the three cases in the next section.

## **5.4 Findings from the three case studies – Cross-case analysis**

Before starting to present a cross-case analysis, it is notable that the amount of information discussed above varied between the three cases. The main reason is the size of the companies and the number of interviews and focus group discussions that took place in each case and the variety of the topics that came up. Accordingly, since in PHX 15 interviews and 10 focus group discussions were conducted, a huge volume of data was collected and presented here. In AP, three managers and one focus group discussions were conducted (all the staff in one of the complexes that were approached), which provided less data. Then in THEL, since there was no focus group discussion because two employees had already left the company, all three employees were interviewed individually; and thus, the potential information which would result from group interaction was missed. Therefore, it resulted in the smallest amount of data from THEL.

To present the results it is worth reviewing the purpose of this chapter, which was to identify the concept of work as perceived and practised at each case study, and then to

compare them across the cases. These concepts further contribute to the concept of ‘work in the spirit of service’ based on the scriptural study (Chapter 3), elaborating and broadening its scope as well as understanding its challenges based on the perceptions and experiences of the participants through the analysis of the case-studies.

Work in PHX was conceptualised as:

A customer-centric approach with emphasised humanitarian values and practices, which provided employees with a diverse (in nationalities and beliefs), family-like, fun, innovative and hard-working environment, where the employees were heard, appreciated/rewarded, and had opportunities to progress.

While the common perceptions and practices above were spoken about by most of the participants, some participants raised some challenges including the concept of fairness (in pay and in other recognitions), where they argued the need for better taking care of the employees with low salaries and more personalised scales in recognising employees’ performance. The reasons some employees experienced challenges were mentioned as a result of lack of uniform management policies and the autonomy of managers in their employment relations, so some involved their employees in the decisions and some did not, some treated everybody the same but some prioritised, and some employees were recognised for their work, but some were not. However, the issue of low salary for employees in production and R&D was discussed as an issue of organisational justice, which was not fair based on equity theory (Adams, 1963), although according to Greenberg (1990), in Leventhal’s proactive approach the performance-based pay is considered fair. Nevertheless, it was not fair based on Bahá’í scripture according to the results of Chapter 3.

Work in AP was conceptualised as:

A consultation-centric approach, in an environment of religious and cultural diversity and unity, respect and trust, without blaming, and with a humble posture of learning, where employees had space to pursue their interests through training, support, and empowerment, and exercise of equality and justice; and the decisions were made collectively between managers, employees, and the clients (the clients were involved in decisions about them).

At AP, all the participants spoke about these different aspects of this consultative/collaborative approach to work. Consultation was performed in different matters among managers, employees and the clients, with no arguing or blaming and with an attitude of learning.

Work in THEL was conceptualised as:

A freedom-oriented approach with trust, lack of hierarchy and job description, space and support for learning, development, and decision-making, and a humane and friendly environment, aimed to serve the society by collaboratively helping organisations find their role in society.

However, the broad autonomy, lack of a clear structure and way forward, as well as a less profit-oriented business approach appeared challenging to some employees (while others appreciated them) and they stressed they required structure and clear job descriptions to know where they were going. Uncertainty and the resultant anxiety were discussed as pitfalls of autonomy (Gentes & Ruscio, 2011) and, therefore, it was identified that further research was required to find the level of autonomy that would empower the employees to grow, rather than demotivate them.

In the three concepts of work here, service for the customers and service for the society have been central to identification of work. Then, in identification of work in relation to the employees, the concepts of fairness and cultural and religious diversity were commonly discussed, but fairness was discussed from different perspectives. Fairness in PHX was raised in the context of performance-based pay while at AP there was the discussion of equal pay for the same job, as the equity theory suggests (Greenberg, 1990). However, some employees at PHX did not find their pay mechanism fair for the low pay employees, while at AP all participants found their pay mechanism fair. It is worth mentioning again that the pay mechanism at AP involved the employees' opinions and their benchmarking exercise in deciding their wage, which could have been influential in their perception of fair pay. In other words, the employees' perception of fair pay and the fact that all were happy with their pay could result from their participation in deciding their salary. However, they mentioned that their salaries were also higher than the average in their sector and in the organisations that they had worked prior to AP, which could

indicate a genuine concern in the employment relations' policies in AP concerning their salaries.

Furthermore, there was a discussion of space for employees to develop and grow in the three cases, however, employees' autonomy in PHX was mostly limited to few employees and to certain departments where the managers appreciated employees' autonomy; AP exhibited a wider level of autonomy and included an emphasis on a consultative approach; while THEL exhibited a very broad autonomy and uncertainty for employees, where they could decide and shape their work which, as mentioned here, while enabling for some employees, was troubling for others.

Moreover, the main aspect of the concept of work varied in each case. It was a customer-centric approach with an emphasis on service of humanity in PHX, where the quality of the products and services to the customers, their impact on peoples' lives, and humanitarian activities were emphasised more strongly; while in AP it was a consultation-centric approach, where collective decision-making and its characteristics and environment were most strongly emphasised; and in THEL it was a freedom-oriented concept of work, where freedom of employees in defining their tasks, making the decisions and pursuing their interests were most strongly emphasised. The focus on all three approaches had similarities with the concept of 'work in the spirit of service' based on Bahá'í scripture (Chapter 3), as they demonstrated service for humanity, consultation, and freedom and value of employees, but the details of their approaches varied.

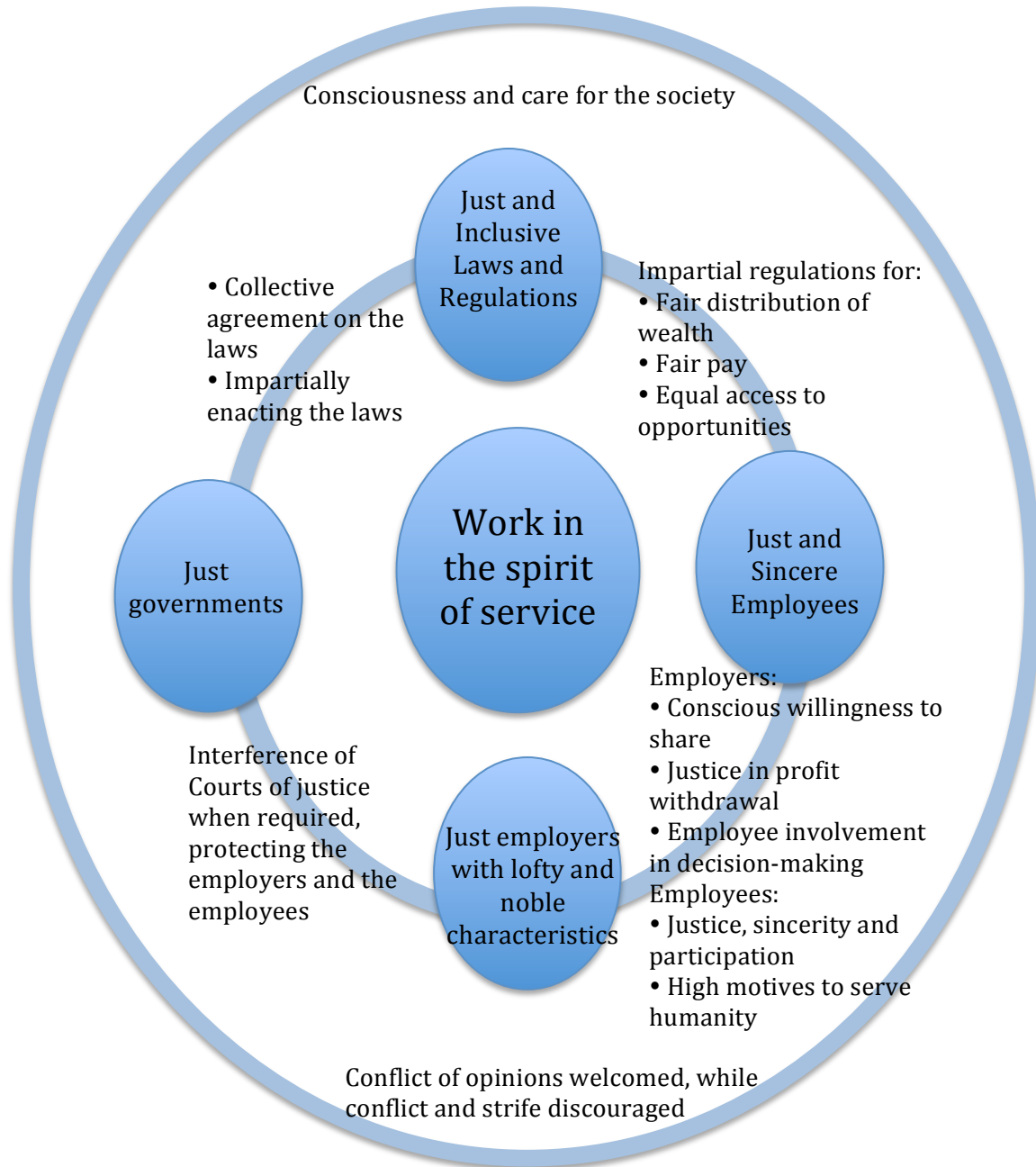
Moreover, the way the three companies addressed the Bahá'í principles varied; while in AP the participants referred to the Bahá'í principles in their communications widely, in PHX and THEL they were applied implicitly, through the principles rather than any reference to the religion. Accordingly, in AP similarities to the articulation of work in the spirit of service based on Bahá'í scripture were most widely observed.

In the next section the findings through the cross-case analysis are discussed in relation to the findings from Chapter 3, and the conclusions of the analysis in this chapter are presented.

#### **5.4.1 Work in the spirit of service in relation to Bahá'í scripture**

At the beginning of this chapter, the three case studies were introduced and the first part of the results of the analysis of the data was presented. The purpose of this chapter was to explore how the participants in the three cases identified their work and working environment. Here, these articulations are discussed in relation to the description of 'work in the spirit of service' based on the interpretation of the Bahá'í scriptures, presented through the scriptural study in Chapter 3 which is the source of the following diagram.

**Figure 5-7 Work in the spirit of service - Based on the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture and case-study research**



The summary of the results of the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture as presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** indicates the main aspects of the characteristics of work in the spirit of service as just and inclusive laws and regulations, just governments, just and sincere employees, and just employers with lofty and noble characteristics. Therefore, the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture resulted in conceptualisation of 'work in the spirit of service' as

“A justice-centric approach with emphasised focus on service of the society and conscious and lofty concerns and practices of the employers and the employees and active involvement of the employees in the decisions of the company, and just and effective laws and institutions.”

This approach, as described in Chapter 3, stressed service for the society, and the reduction of poverty, ignorance and abasement. In employer-employee relationships, based on **Error! Reference source not found.**, this approach covered a conscious 'willingness' of employers to share the wealth, justice in their withdrawal from profit, and involvement of the employees in the decisions of the organisation (collective decision-making).

While many of these characteristics were mentioned in the three cases, the main focus here on justice was not mentioned as the main focus in any of the conceptions of work in the three cases. However, in the three cases the employee orientation approach included fairness and justice, diversity and inclusion, compassion and friendship, and non-hierarchical structures and attitudes, which are similar to attributes of the employee-employer aspect of 'work in the spirit of service' based on Figure 5-7. Here, diversity often referred to cultural, religious, and gender diversity but did not focus on other aspects of diversity. With regard to gender, the references mainly involved male/female inclusion and equal pay, but did not involve references to other gender groups.

Another aspect of 'work in the spirit of service' as 'conscious willingness to share' was mentioned in PHX in terms of profit-sharing, but not in the other two cases. At THEL the founder stressed his concern about conscious withdrawal of profit, and to withdraw less than the norm in the market, but he did not provide any clearer information and employees did not speak about that either. In AP there was no mention of sharing profit

or founder's withdrawal of profit but there was mention of fair and generous pay for employees (above the average for the job as the employees mentioned, based on their benchmarking and previous experience). From Chapter 3, if the pay enabled the employees to save for their time of need then the pay was considered fair based on Bahá'í scripture. Nevertheless, since different people have different needs and abilities to save, it is not certain how this principle can result in fair practices in organisations. In PHX, while most employees were happy with the pay, some employees mentioned that they were not paid enough, specifically due to inflation as a result of a financial crisis. Here, it was evident that at least one criterion for 'enough pay' was not achieved since the employees found themselves in financial discomfort. On the other hand, the example of the practice in AP could help with the practice of deciding 'high enough pay', where through benchmarking and discussion in a consultation meeting the amount of pay was decided through a collective decision-making process and the employees said they found it fair, and they benefited from insurance and pension as well, which was another aspect of fair pay in Bahá'í scripture.

Furthermore, 'involvement of the employees' as mentioned in Figure 5-7, was strongly emphasised in all three cases. However, the type of involvement and the level of involvement varied between the three organisations. In PHX, the majority of the respondents discussed the decisions at the management level but with obtaining input and suggestions from employees. In AP and THEL, full involvement was described as a dominant part of the culture, including the decisions made concerning the clients. At AP, while employees were in charge of their relationship with their clients, the consultative approach was more frequently raised. At THEL, there was a very wide level of autonomy and there were no definite answers, but big questions were discussed and there were inspirational meetings. Involvement is discussed in detail in Chapter 8, thus here it is sufficient to conclude that involvement was discussed as a significant attribute of work in the three cases, and most effectively expressed in AP and THEL.

'Service for the society' based on Figure 5-7, has been discussed as another particular aspect of work in all three organisations: as philanthropy and humanitarian activities in PHX in the service of the clients and community-development context, and in their structure and objectives as a social enterprise in AP; and integrated in the overall business



objective of helping organisations to find their constructive role towards society in THEL.

Furthermore, in all three cases there was a great emphasis on care for the customers, where it was reflected in service of the customers, and therefore humanity, through their work; as well as involvement of the customers in the decisions they made ‘with’ them (not for them), (in AP and THEL). The latter aspect has not been raised directly in relation to ‘work in the spirit of service’ in Figure 5-7.

Accordingly, the results of the empirical study (cases that aim to apply the Bahá’í principles) complement the results of the scriptural study.

In summary, ‘work in the spirit of service’ can be identified by:

- Care for the employees, with fairness and justice, conscious ‘willingness’ to share, justice in owners’ withdrawal from profit, and involvement of the employees at the decisions of the organisation (collective decision-making)
- Care for society through a constructive role in reduction of poverty, abasement and despair
- Care for the customers, through a sense of service to humanity, and their involvement in decisions related to them

As well as:

- Just laws and regulations, and just institutions and governments
- Just employees with noble characteristics

However, such an approach may result in challenges for employees and managers who prefer a stronger financial focus, are not concerned with the service of society or humanitarian activities, and are not comfortable with autonomy or participation of employees in decision-making. It can also result in unfair employee rewards since it is not very clear about ‘fair’ salaries other than requiring a pension/insurance system for covering employees when they are not able to work, or salaries high enough that they may save for their times of need; in the latter, it is not clear how to decide how much would be enough, or whether the employees would be able to save based on their needs

and abilities. The alternative of paying the employees in their time of need as well (similar to the concepts of insurance and pensions) based on Chapter 3, would create a clearer guideline. Moreover, as presented in Chapter 8, the consultative mechanism for deciding the pay based on the exercise of AP could be one application of this principle of deciding the ‘high enough pay’.

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter the concept of work, and specifically work in the spirit of service, has been explored in the three cases. It was evident that, while all three displayed a strong focus on employees, customers and the society, the characteristics of work and the practices relevant to each of these stakeholders varied across the cases.

After exploring each case, a concept of ‘work’ was defined based on the perceptions of the participants and the practices they spoke about, and each case was summarised and compared in relation to the concept of ‘work in the spirit of service’. Accordingly, the concept of ‘*work in the spirit of service*’ was refined using the results of this cross-case analysis and the scriptural study from Chapter 3.

The next three chapters will focus on employment relations. The results of the analysis from the three cases will be presented in terms of the aspects of employment relations based on Chapter 2: that is authority and power, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement respectively.



## 6 Power and Authority

### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the results of the analysis of the three cases in relation to the concept of ‘work in the spirit of service’ have been presented, identifying how the participants perceived and experienced their work where the Bahá’í principles were applied.

In this chapter and the next two, the results of the analysis of the rest of the data are presented, exploring the approach of the organisations to power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement based on the review of literature in Chapter 2.

This chapter answers the second question of the primary research:

***Power and authority:*** What are the power structures in the organisations that apply the principles of the Bahá’í Faith, how do they legitimise authority, and how is the power distributed?

During the interviews, the employees and the managers were asked about different aspects of their employment relations, such as the company’s approach to taking care of the employees, whether it allowed the employees to pursue their interests, and how they dealt with conflict of any kind when it arose. The responses to these questions by both the managers and the employees have been analysed and presented in these three chapters. This chapter focuses on power and authority, and Chapters 7 and 8 focus on dealing with conflict, and involvement and participation respectively.

It is worth mentioning here, that the reason these practices have been explored in relation to the influence of Bahá’í principles is that the founders explained they aimed to apply Bahá’í principles in their organisations, some managers and employees had made references to the principles of the Bahá’í Faith that their founders followed, and some managers and employees had attended the conferences by ebbf (which is an institution that provides a forum, conferences and support to organisations to work more ethically, based on its learning from the Bahá’í principles). However, other than the founders, most of the managers and all the interviewed employees in PHX, and all the interviewed

managers and employees in AP and THEL held different beliefs (i.e. not adherents of the Bahá'í Faith), which could account for a variety of practices and perceptions as discussed in Chapters 6-9.

In this chapter, exercise of power and authority in an organisation, and how the power is legitimised, is explored through the questions asked in the interviews and the focus group discussions, such as who was in charge of the decisions at the organisation, what was the role of the employees in decision-making, how involved did the employees see themselves, how they articulated their relationship with the person in power or in charge of the decisions, and if they pointed to any conflict in accepting the power they described (exploring legitimisation of power). These responses are analysed here in the context of the legitimisation of authority and exercise of power.

In the sections that follow, initially, these results are discussed for each case independently; and then they are compared and discussed across the cases and the overall understanding is analysed in relation to the relevant concepts from Chapter 4, based on Bahá'í scriptures. The study of Bahá'í scripture indicated that the administrative structure of the Bahá'í Faith was based on representation, where the elected members of the institutions were directed to consult with the members of the community, and membership of institutions were stressed as non-power bearing positions. The results of the power relations in the three cases are further discussed in relation to the findings from Chapter 4 at the end of this chapter.

## **6.2 First Case Study – PHX**

Participants at the headquarters of PHX (a privately-owned multinational organisation) located in the USA were interviewed, the results of which along with the analysis of the documents and observations are presented here in order to identify how power was legitimised and exercised there.

Here, to identify various aspects of power based on the interviews at PHX, initially discussions with some managers who specifically articulated their approaches to management are analysed and presented. Next, the concept of flat structure, which was

repeatedly discussed by participants and elaborates the power relations at PHX, is presented. Then, different types/aspects of power, as identified by the managers and employees, are analysed and presented; this explores who had the power and influence, in what matters, and to what extent, and how the employees reacted to that power, in order to enable identification of power relations and legitimisation of authority in PHX.

### **6.2.1 Managers' approach to management**

Managers were asked about what they did and in what manner, and how they managed their employees. The managers' approach to management varied between the managers in different departments and with different levels of seniority at PHX. Their different views are presented below.

In one sense, the managers identified employee management in terms of human relations, listening to the employees, and recognising and appreciating them differently<sup>50</sup>, similar to theories of human resource management (HRM) (e.g. MacGregor, 2003). In PHX, managers also discussed how they challenged the employees, with high expectations for them to grow, as well as motivating them through both monetary (e.g. bonuses) (e.g. M1,2,21,3,31,41,5,51,72) and non-monetary awards (e.g. M2,21,31,36,5). This approach was more commonly spoken about, but there were a few managers who articulated different approaches to employment relations.

For instance, one manager articulated her approach of 'management as getting the jobs done' and helping "*the other person sees why they should do something because it's in their best interest*" (M34). This statement is similar to the context of influence in relation to the exercise of power and the discussion of real interest as Lukes (2005) argues, where 'influence' is not a form of exertion of power if it is in the real interest of the followers. Lukes (2005) argues that if the followers come to the recognition that it is in their best interest and comply, there is no exertion of power, but if they resist, which results in conflict, then it would be an exertion of power of A over B.

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<sup>50</sup> For instance, they said that they: treated employees in a way so that they were motivated to go to work on a Monday morning, empowered them in their job, gave them guidance, collaborated with them, came to an agreed plan and helped them execute them. (e.g. M5).

Another manager articulated her approach to employment relations as using delegation and trust, and she explained that she did not check the employees' work, but she trusted them<sup>51</sup>. Delegation was not commonly discussed in PHX and the meetings that other managers referred to often involved checking if the employees had any problems (M36), checking the status of their work and priorities of the day, and monitoring the operations, recognising and encouraging strengths, and solving the problems (M51).

These articulations of managers about their employment relations approach display similarities with HRM practices, but they were not expressed as standard practices across the organisation. Therefore, the interviews and FGDs were explored for any aspects of power and authority to identify the common practices in the organisation. The results of this analysis are discussed below as different aspects of managers' power and employees' power. In these discussions however, there were frequent references to the 'flat structure' of the organisation, which is presented before discussion of the aspects of power in order to clarify the description of the organisational structure and provide the background for discussion of power relations in PHX.

## **6.2.2 Concept of the flat organisation**

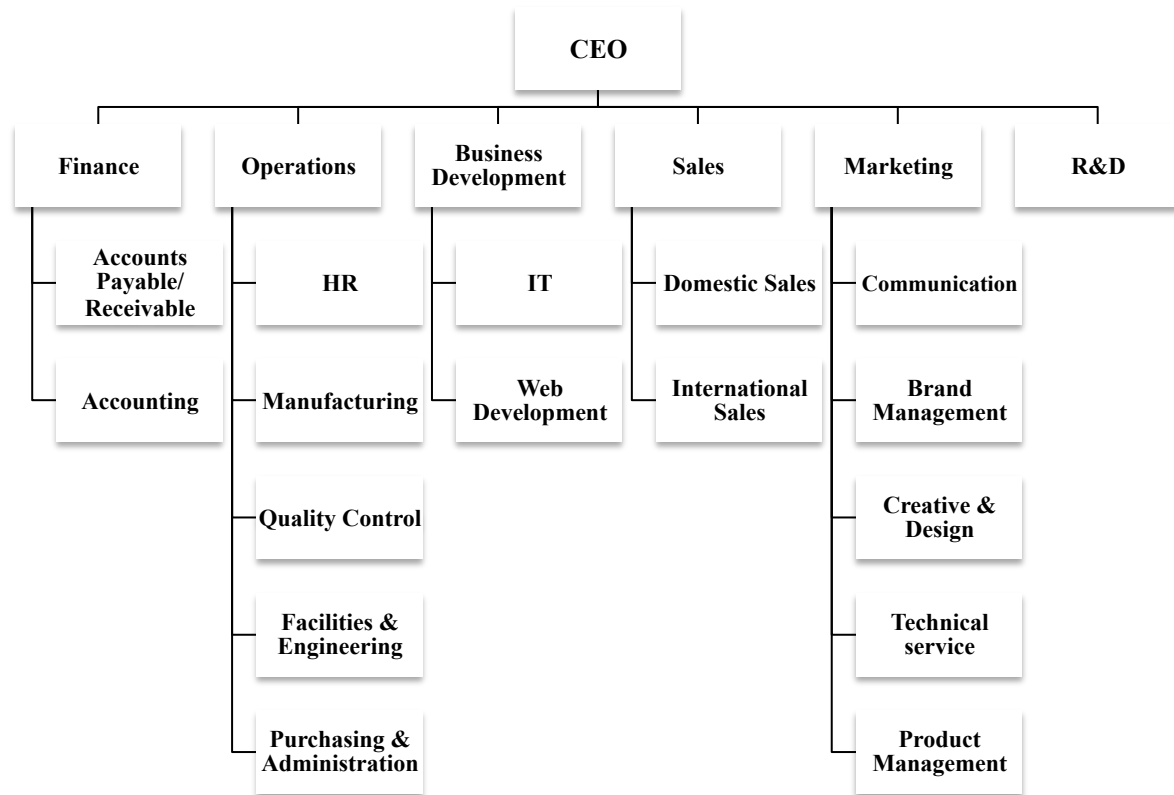
Different participants repeatedly referred to the phrase 'flat organisation', despite the existence of some levels of management. The concepts associated with this phrase are discussed here.

PHX was founded in mid 1980s as a family-based company, and most of its expansion had happened in the decade prior to 2014 (M1). Their organisational chart at the time of interview is shown in Figure 6-1.

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<sup>51</sup> A manager said that in her daily routine, she did not check the results or the amounts, but she checked if the processes and procedure were done correctly and she trusted that the employees had done their job well. She said that her employees had been working for her for 15-18 years and that was the reason she did not go through details but trusted them with their work (M2).

**Figure 6-1 Organisational Chart - PHX**



Some of these departments had supervisors and teams of staff, and some bigger departments had yet another managerial level before the supervisors and their teams. Therefore, the flat structure the participants mentioned did not refer to no levels of management, but mainly referred to managers’ accessibility and aspects of employees’ participation.

Regarding accessibility, managers mentioned ‘no hierarchical behaviour’ and the existence of ‘titles but not hierarchical positions’ through being “*accessible to people, to have an open-door policy, and not just to have a policy, but to live it*” (M3), and ‘not having too many tiers’ (M42); the ‘*culture*’ of a flat organisation through managers not sitting at the top of the tables (M1), and considering that ‘*at the end of the day we are all the same*’ (M63); as well as open door-policy through which the employees were heard.



For instance, about accessibility of the managers and employees being heard M3 said:

*“...so that people do not feel that they have to follow a sense of hierarchy, to have their voices and opinions heard. And so, part of the challenge of managing teams through layers of managers is to make sure how do your managers (middle-managers) do that respectively, because you know, no two leaders are the same.”*

Similarly, some managers mentioned that some decisions were made by the ‘*subject matter experts*’, who were not necessarily managers (e.g. M6). This is similar to the arguments of an ‘horizontal structure’ with decentralised power and employee empowerment in the context of post-bureaucracy or modern bureaucracy (e.g. Johnson, Wood, Brewster, & Brookes, 2009; Clegg, 2011). Clegg (2011) argues that in some settings such as call centres the hierarchical structures of post bureaucracy still prevail, but the power is decentralised and employees have some level of autonomy.

These statements by the managers highlighted that the flat structure referred to being accessible, not having a boss-subordinate relationship, and space for employees’ opinion and suggestions. To explore how employees articulated the flat structure, the FGDs were accordingly analysed.

Employees spoke about the flat organisation in terms of the open-door policy as well, referring to accessibility of the managers, as well as the participation of the employees in some decisions such as on how to achieve the targets, how to make the department better, or carrying out an initiative (e.g. FGD1,3,6,10). Moreover, while the managers often made the final decisions or decided the targets, as most of the employees mentioned, the decisions would not need to go through layers of management. This is consistent with the way managers explained the flat structure, and similar to horizontal structures of post bureaucracy as Clegg (2011) states; in these structures not all decisions are meant to be made democratically.

However, M6 explained that on the other hand flat organisation did not mean that everybody got the same salary, as it was merit-based or as they called it ‘performance-based’. Thus, people with the same job title would not be necessarily paid the same, but they were rewarded based on their performance (e.g. M3,5,6, FGD1,4). This argument is similar to the claim on the Co-operative (Co-op) website about equal pay, as they state

that they commonly employ scales and pay differentials and decide the amount of pay based on the 'years of service' and 'the responsibilities' (Co-operantics, 2013). This has been discussed in Chapter 5 as aspects of fairness in pay mechanisms.

Therefore, in brief, a flat organisation in PHX did not refer to the lack of hierarchies of management, as there were some levels of management at PHX, but they were spoken about in terms of non-hierarchical behaviour of the managers and their accessibility, and opportunities for the employees to be heard and to participate in some decisions of the company. To what extent, the opportunities to participate resulted in decentralisation of power at PHX is further explored in the next section.

### **6.2.3 Aspects of Power and Authority in PHX**

In this section various aspects of power as mentioned by the participants in PHX are discussed. It includes the type of power exercised by managers, aspects of employees' power, and the power of organisational culture.

#### **6.2.3.1 Managers' power of decision-making**

This section explores the aspects of employment relations where managers had control over the decisions or the agenda or, in other words, managers' power of decision-making.

One aspect of managers' power was the power of the founder over the decisions and the company's dominant culture. Examples of these decisions included major changes to the organisation, approval of who received the annual rewards or used the corporate properties, serious employment or other issues that arose (e.g. M1,2,41,6,7). At the same time, in all focus groups, there was mention and appreciation of the principles that the founder exercised and how they had become part of the company culture.

Regarding this aspect of power, there was no mention of conflict, whether observable or latent. This could be out of the fear of the founder in case he came to know about the interviews. However, the participants had been assured of confidentiality of the discussions, and accordingly had raised some critiques about their working environment

and the company, which indicates the participants' trust in the interviewer. Thus, it is not very probable that they did not raise issues with the founder and his decisions out of fear.

Another aspect of power was the power of managers through:

- Setting the goals, targets and deadlines (e.g. M21), although in some departments such as Sales district managers set the targets and presented them to their senior sales manager for approval (M5), which while displaying some level of participation did not indicate delegation since the district manager basically made the proposals.
- Strategic decisions, such as deciding the life cycle of a product, pricing adjustments, etc. (while the non-strategic decisions were made by the middle managers) (M6). Here M6 mentioned that in strategic decision-making he often had veto power and he would go against the recommendations of the majority if need be, in order to keep the company on the direction he knew the founder would prefer. This clearly highlights the power of managers over strategic decisions.
- 'Particular' non-strategic decisions, such as recruitment decisions for each project (e.g. M3), resource allocations and the amount of support each team/department offered (e.g. M72).
- 'Helping people see the right decision' or influencing the employees' decisions. Manager 34 explained her approach to employee management and said that she tried to "*reason out with people*" when she did not think the right decision was made. This approach has been addressed as power and manipulation, for instance by Lukes (2005) when the power is exercised but there might not necessarily be an observable conflict.

Managers' power of decision-making here does not mean that the employees were not involved, but it refers to the decisions that mainly managers made. For instance, M3 stated that he made some decisions on his own, "*sometimes that means people that you hire, sometimes that means the people you promote*"; however, he believed that the power of four minds was bigger than two, etc. and therefore he made most of his decisions through collaboration.

Moreover, regarding the control over the agenda, which is an aspect of power (Lukes, 2005), there was a discussion of the open-door policy as an aspect of organisational culture, where the employees could raise any suggestions or ideas or have input in the decisions that their superiors made. So, the employees could influence the agenda (being able to add to the agenda the areas that they had concerns or suggestions about) (e.g. FGD1). Therefore, it can be said that managers did not have ‘full’ control over the agenda and it could be influenced by the employees’ suggestions and opinions. However, in effect, since often the strategic decisions or the targets were decided by the managers, employees’ power of influence on the agenda was minimal.

In summary, managers had the power of decision-making including setting goals, making strategic decisions, or making particular decisions such as allocation of resources. These aspects of managers’ power limit the level of employee involvement mostly to providing input, suggestions and feedback, but not having a final say or the ownership of the decisions (e.g. Vroom, 2003; Gifford, Loukas, & Neathey, 2006). Different levels of employee involvement will further be discussed in the following chapters.

### **6.2.3.2 Managers’ power through monitoring and control**

Another aspect of exercise of power of managers is their monitoring and control over the performance of the employees.

#### **Micro management**

Some participants referred to the founder’s old practice (five years prior to the interviews) of micromanagement. The founder was asked what the micromanagement entailed. He explained that he used to micromanage and be aware of all the processes and practices of the organisation, randomly visit different departments and different employees, and be involved at different aspects of the business. He said he followed Steve Job’s perfectionism<sup>52</sup>, and said: “*You should delegate but go back, verify, test, check, see and learn and know what is going on*”. The Founder discussed his high

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<sup>52</sup> Regarding perfectionism, the founder of PHX referred to the high standards of the company regarding the quality of their products, services, cleanliness and organisation.

standards and the high standards of the company, regarding the quality of their products, services, cleanliness, and organisation.

The employees who raised criticisms and concerns also discussed the intervening five years prior to the interview, the period when the founder did not micromanage, which could indicate that some employees were happier with an authoritative management style, but it can also point to the expansion of the company to a multinational business (in the past decade) and the issues and conflicts related to expansion, as some employees highlighted (FGD5). Nevertheless, micromanagement had been discussed as an out-dated practice.

### **Checks and controls**

Another aspect of control was the checks and controls that some managers mentioned, designed to ‘ensure the stability of the company’, to rectify problems in a timely manner, and to make sure that *“there is a business case for the projects... that there is... a measurable outcome, that there are plans of how to achieve them”* (M3).

In some departments the checks and controls were mentioned as a role for manager’s/supervisor’s approval and control; such as purchase orders being confirmed by the supervisors (M36,41) and supervisors’ approval to unlock the orders after they were placed (M36). In another department, control mainly referred to monitoring, such as the use of a real time tool for recording and monitoring the sales activities in order to find any problems quickly and come up with a suitable ‘game plan’ along with the employees (M51).

In summary, the power of monitoring and control was mentioned as the founder’s old micromanagement and involvement in all the activities of the company and in terms of managers’ control, monitoring and approval of the quality of operations and their results. Although the participants mentioned that they would come up with solutions together with the employees, the checks and controls can be considered as an aspect of the power of the managers.

### **6.2.3.3 Employees' power of participation through input and feedback**

Participants mentioned different levels of involvement exercised throughout the company. These levels of involvement, and different mechanisms and experiences are discussed in Chapter 8. However, here their involvement in terms of power is discussed.

Some participants mentioned that the employees oversaw certain decisions (e.g. M31,36,41,42, FGD3). For instance, buyers made the decisions and they involved the managers when they needed them (M36); in marketing campaigns the employees from different departments decided together on how to launch a new product and what type of advertising they would use (FGD3). Employee involvement in the decisions however was not mentioned in all departments though most of the interviews and FGDs, it was mentioned that the employees' input and feedback were sought, and the final decisions were made by the managers/supervisors (e.g. M34,7,6, FGD1,3,6).

Therefore, employees did not have power in most departments over the decisions made in their department, except for a few, which does not indicate power as control but only power as influence. Power of influence is discussed more in the next section.

### **6.2.3.4 Employees' power of influence through ideas and suggestions**

In PHX, there was repeated mention of the open-door policy as an aspect of the organisational culture, referring to the policy of the organisation through which the employees could raise their suggestions, new ideas or concerns to any management position they needed. In these scenarios the employees explained they were heard and their opinions were taken into consideration, even if not acted upon. (e.g. FGD10, FGD1, FGD3, FGD6, M1,2,21,3,31,36,41,5). Here, the employees and the managers who discussed the open-door policy all articulated it in the same way emphasising that they were all heard, but the ideas would or would not result in a change, depending on the availability of the budgets, practicality of the suggestions, and the expected results of the change (e.g. FGD1,7,9, M31). This uniformity of description can refer to influence of the organisational culture, through which such a characteristic was spoken about subconsciously, without examining whether it happened (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

However, the employees discussed several examples of the changes that had happened due to their suggestions such as an onsite gym, changes to their working circumstances, etc., which can also relate to the policy being implemented.

The open-door policy and company's receptivity to suggestions can be interpreted as the employees' power of influence on the agenda of the discussions, (including about work, improvements, complaints, etc.). This aspect is discussed by Lukes (2005) as the second dimension of power, where the leaders/managers have 'control over the agenda' and what to be excluded. However, here as the participants said that their opinions were taken into consideration and they would hear about their results, such as the gym that was approved and built, or the additional holidays which were not approved but the employees were informed about the results and the reasons (e.g. FGD1, M31), it can be said that the employees had the 'power of influence' at PHX, which is different from control and the power of independent decision-making.

#### **6.2.3.5 Power of seniority**

The other aspect of power that the employees discussed was the power that the employees with 'high tenure' with the company had earned. For instance, there were discussions of those with high tenure having more freedom to make their own decisions (e.g. M36, FGD1,3,4)

There were also discussions of other benefits of seniority such as the profit sharing based on the number of years the employees had been with the company. However, there were also discussions of a 'cap' on the employees' raise, above which their pay would not increase (M2). Here, limited promotion can negate the value of seniority, which might encourage the employees to leave after they reach their highest level of promotion.

In the discussion of power however, seniority was mainly discussed as providing employees with greater autonomy and freedom, which can be considered as an aspect of power in PHX.

### 6.2.3.6 Merit-based power and the earned trust

Participants discussed that, while those with high tenure with the company often had autonomy over their decisions, they could also gain autonomy by proving themselves in different situations and gaining trust, even in short periods of time (e.g. FGD1, M1,31,42,51,6).

For instance, an employee (FGD1) said that as opposed to when he started, and he was told what to do, he gained the trust in his abilities and judgements until he was in charge of decisions that some more senior employees were not. Another employee (FGD3) explained a similar example and said: *“In my case, I think... I’m kind of independent and you just cannot have independence unless you’re trusted to do whatever you are doing.”* Similarly, M6 stated that if person x made the decision on a certain matter it was not because he had been told to, but because he had *“built up the credibility”* and the *“trust”*.

It was further explained that it was not only earning the trust of the managers that mattered, but also the trust of the colleagues because making and implementing the decisions was not in the form of a hierarchy but took the respect and support of the colleagues to work (FGD1).

It was also mentioned that some decisions were made by the *‘subject matter experts’* who were not necessarily managers (e.g. M6). In the literature, this is mentioned as expert power (e.g. Etzioni, 1975; Bass & Bass, 2009; French Jr. & Raven, 1959; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989) or expert authority (Kunda, 2009), which is a more common type of employee involvement as this literature indicates.

Here, the participants discussed a merit-based power through the capabilities they exhibited and the trust they earned, which is called an expert power in the literature as well. The merit-based/expert power is quite the opposite of seniority-based power in the sense that it does not depend on time and seniority. This can mean that there were different sources of power for the employees at PHX. However, most interviewed employees had stated that the managers made the final decision, which indicates that both the power of seniority and the merit-based power were earned while the relevant autonomy was exercised by a few.



### **6.2.3.7 Power of close relationship**

One last aspect of power that the participants discussed was the close relationship between employees and the managers (e.g. FGD8) and among the employees working in teams (e.g. FGD6). For instance, an employee (FGD2) said that their manager constantly got a lot of input from them and when she made the decision it was in fact the voice of the employees. She further said:

*“Usually we don’t have meetings, she just comes down and says ‘hey, this is the thing’, and if it’s something about procedure she has two supervisors in that department and they’re pretty involved with us, so it’s basically like they’re speaking for us”.*

There was however an employee in FGD5 who said his manager never asked his opinion even regarding the equipment that he worked with. This ‘zero involvement’ as the employee mentioned, was not discussed by any other employees, but it reflects the existence of the condition of no involvement at the company, which will be further explored in Chapter 8.

Overall, those employees working closely together in teams or in close relationship with their managers referred to their power of influence, which was most commonly mentioned in PHX.

### **6.2.4 Legitimisation of power through organisational culture**

Participants widely referred to different aspects of the organisational culture. The repeated mention of these aspects can indicate a strong culture, which possibly had shaped or influenced the thoughts and behaviour of the participants (O’Reilly C. , 1989). Examples of these aspects included: cooperation; the open-door policy; philanthropy and concern for humanity; being different and innovative; having a fun environment; concern for the customers; caring for and cooperating with the fellow employees; cleanliness and organisation; an inclusive and diverse culture, the, culture of not blaming; a family-like culture; hard work and high expectations/ excellence; and a culture of service

(FGD1,10,3,8, M1, 2, 21, 3, 31, 34, 36, 42, 5, 7). There was also a mention of the scenario where if people did not fit to the organisational culture, they would leave, or they would be encouraged to leave (M5).

Here, domination of organisational culture can be a form of power. Gramsci considers culture and ideology as a form of exertion of power, through influencing peoples' wants and behaviour (Femia, 1981). Similarly, Kunda (2009) finds organisational culture a contemporary method of exertion of power, control and manipulation of people's thoughts and emotions. However, Lukes (2005) argues that this is not necessarily exercise of power, because a few individuals can be mistaken but not a mass, and thus domination of organisational culture if in employees' interest, is not exertion of power against people's will or their awareness.

In PHX, while the persistence of organisational culture can be considered an exercise of power based on Kunda (2009), the way the participants referred to almost all policies of the organisation as aspects of their culture can also indicate that the culture operated as a means of legitimising power. For instance, hard work, which is considered as an aspect of working environment in high-tech organisations (Kunda, 2009), or a characteristic of control of employees' life in post-bureaucracy (Maravelias, 2007), was mentioned with agreement by the employees as an aspect of culture (FGD1,3,5,6,7,M1,2,21,31,6 ). Similarly, the participants spoke about the open-door policy, through which they raised their suggestions and concerns, and these were heard but were not necessarily utilised (as mentioned earlier), and employees were fine with that and spoke about it as an aspect of their organisational culture (e.g. FGD1,7,9, M31).

Therefore, it can be said that the strong organisational culture in PHX was a major means of legitimising authority there.

### **6.2.5 Power and authority in PHX in summary**

Based on the discussion of the participants it can be concluded that different types of power were exercised and legitimised in PHX. The interviews and discussions highlighted that managers basically exercised the power of decision-making and

monitoring and control. On the other hand, employees held some level of the ‘power of influence’ on the decisions and the agenda for decision-making through their input, suggestions and feedback, seniority, or the trust they had earned, and working closely together with their colleagues or their managers. Still, the employees’ power in PHX seemed minimal.

However, since there was no mention of exercise of religious beliefs, influence of any religious institutions, or any discrimination towards those not believing in the Bahá’í Faith, while the founder aimed to apply some of the Bahá’í principles at work (e.g. service of the society, profit-sharing, looking after the employees, honesty, and cleanliness), and at the same time, there was repeated mention of religious, gender, and nationality diversity (based on Chapter 5), it can be said that the legitimisation of power and authority in PHX did not take place through beliefs and religious obligations, but rather through the aspects of organisational culture and its instilment and agreement among the employees.

### **6.3 Second case study – AP**

The participants at AP were interviewed to explore the approach of the organisation to power and authority, and how power was legitimised. The founder in AP explained their approach to decision-making based on his beliefs and the writings of the Bahá’í Faith. The results are presented below.

Here, the participants were asked who was in charge of the decisions and how were the employees involved. These responses are analysed here in terms of legitimisation of authority and exercise of power, while employee involvement is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

### **6.3.1 Managers' approach to management and the Concept of the flat organisation**

In order to identify the approaches of the managers to 'management' they were asked to explain their role and what they did in daily operations. M11 and M12 both explained their role as 'supporting' the staff (support workers) and their clients to achieve their goal, which was to help their clients to recover and be able to get back to society. Neither of them referred to any aspects of classic management such as 'getting the job done' (e.g. Schein, 2003) but they stressed the role of support and collaboration and discussed examples such as scenarios where they made the decisions together with the employees, or when they did not blame the employees when something went wrong (M12, FGD).

Moreover, as in PHX, there was mention of a flat structure and open-door policy. The flat structure was explained as opposed to a hierarchical structure, where the decisions were not made unilaterally and then communicated to the employees, but made along with the employees (M1, FGD). The employees and the managers discussed different examples of making the decisions together, which are explored in Chapter 8.

Regarding the open-door policy M1 explained:

*“(it) means that the information never gets filtered out and people don't hold information and intelligence to themselves in order to protect their job or their role. Information is shared with everybody and that way everybody benefits.”*

Here, the open-door policy refers to transparency and sharing information and intelligence. This is different from the way the open-door policy was discussed in PHX, where it referred to the employees' suggestions and feedback being heard by managers.

Overall, it can be said that, based on the explanation of 'management' in AP with support, cooperation, and openly shared information, the power relations in AP seemed to be a more horizontal rather than a vertical structure (where power is only exercised by managers). To examine whether the power relations were horizontal, employees and managers were asked several questions in order to explore their experiences. Different aspects of power based on those experiences are discussed below.

### **6.3.2 Managers' power of decision-making and employees' power of participation**

In answering the questions about authority and conflict, the participants at AP heavily focused on consultation and making the decisions together, making changes to procedures or working conditions together, and collectively supporting their clients. Basically, the employees or managers did not point to a source of power at the organisation. M1 for instance explained an example of launching a particular service, that everybody related to that project was involved in and collaborated on, in which no one had "*superiority or power of decision making*". Similarly, employees in the FGD spoke about their decision-making experiences in the same way (without referencing this particular project) and stressed that they made the decisions together, not with superiority or imposing any decisions (FGD). In particular, the employees and the managers were asked who made the final decisions in the different experiences that they spoke about, and every time their answer was that they made the decisions together (FGD, M11, M12). This highlighted that they did not legitimise a source of authoritative power at their organisation. Details of how the employees were involved and how they made the decisions together are discussed in Chapter 8, which is focused on employee participation.

The founder was asked about the decisions that he made unilaterally. He said he decided about "*business development or strategy*", such as automation of their revenues and benefits and finance system, launching new accommodation (supported housing) services, and their public relations project. M1 then explained an example of deciding on a new software, where all the managers were involved in the decision process, and M11 (as one of those managers) spoke about the same example too.

According to these examples, it can be said that the power of making the business development and strategic decisions in AP rested with the founder, but the power of making decisions about procedures and processes rested with the 'group' of managers and employees as they stressed that they made those decisions together. This indicates that while most decisions were made collectively in AP, some level of authority was exercised in the strategic and business development decisions. However, since the

managers and the employees mentioned about deciding together with no ‘superiority of power’ in those decisions, it can be said that it resulted in actual power for the employees, as the power of participation in the procedural or process-related decisions.

### **6.3.3 Clients’ and other parties’ power of participation**

The participants spoke about the collaborative decision-making not only among themselves, but also among all relevant parties, including the clients and other institutions involved in the clients’ wellbeing. For instance, the employees discussed how the clients were involved in setting their development goals and how they wanted to achieve them.

A participant said:

*“It’s as much client led as possible, so whatever we can do **with** them we do it. Obviously, there’s some clients that won’t want to be involved, maybe they struggle a bit with engagement so they need a bit more encouragement.”*

The employees (FGD) explained that in other organisations in which they had worked, clinicians made all the decisions but in AP the clients were involved. For instance, if they needed to produce some documents for the clients because they were struggling, they sat down with the client and did it with them. They discussed that the clients needed to agree on their development plans, they could decide on their training or suggest the training they required<sup>53</sup>, and sometimes they attended training together, such as first aid training (FGD). An employee also suggested that the researcher interviewed the clients as well to hear about their participation directly from them (FGD). However, that was beyond the focus of this research and was not consistent with the interviews in other cases; so it was not included.

Furthermore, the employees discussed that in planning the clients’ improvement plan the participants involved the client, the community psychiatric nurse or care coordinators, and the social workers. Also, to decide when the clients were ready to get back to the

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<sup>53</sup> Regarding involvement in training, the employees further explained that every year they decided on a calendar of training that each one of them delivered. They said that in the year of the interview, they decided to do a focus group with the clients so that the clients could suggest some topics. (FGD)

society, they came to the conclusion as a team, or the managers would suggest that, and then they discussed together whether the individual was ready. (FGD)

Here, it can be said that the power of participation extended to the clients at AP, regarding their own development plans or training requirements. This is consistent with the power of participation as an aspect of the organisational culture, but to what extent it provided the clients with power was not examined in this research.

### **6.3.4 Requirements of the power of participation**

The participants explained the power of participation of employees, clients and external institutions in the decisions about the clients. To this end, they spoke about certain characteristics of AP, which they explained made their participation and ‘culture of consultation’ possible, such as the humble posture of learning, and flexibility and support, as explained below.

#### **6.3.4.1 Humble posture of learning and no blaming**

The participants explained that they employed a ‘humble posture of learning’ in their discussions and their performance. For instance, M1 explained that they did not “*say oh I know I know I know best*”, but they always tried to learn, which ensured that they did not ‘argue, point fingers or create a blame culture’.

Similarly, the employees in FGD mentioned that the founder was interested in their expertise, read a lot in the area of mental health, listened very carefully when they shared their new knowledge or the articles they had recently read, and was always open to suggestions to make any changes in the procedures or processes they employed.

Similarly, M11 and M12 explained that the managers at AP did not want an environment where managers talked and employees listened, but they tried to create a space where everybody would say “*thank you for letting me know*” and was open to improving and learning. For instance, M12 discussed her experience and how she improved and became

a manager, through the feedback and criticisms that she received, because they were “*constructive not judgemental*”, and nobody pointed fingers. She continued:

*“Also, if you do mistake, I feel supported, so this kind of the sense of community, of consultation, the fact that I can turn to my manager and be open and also if there is a difficult situation to deal with, it’s very important.”*

Here, humility and no blaming were among the characteristics of a participative power relation, where employees were able to share their expertise, participate in making decisions, and were not blamed for mistakes. ‘Humility’ has been discussed in the literature of leadership as a desired characteristic of religious leaders (Standish, 2007), and of servant leadership in the occupational psychology literature (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017; Waddell, 2006; Hale & Fields, 2007), and also as a neglected virtue in mainstream social and psychological sciences (e.g. Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005; Tangney, 2000). There are however few empirical studies that explore leader humility and employee involvement (e.g. Aarons, Ehrhart, Torres, Finn, & Beidas, 2016; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

#### **6.3.4.2 Flexibility and mutual support**

Another characteristic that the employees spoke about was the mutual support and flexibility between the employees and the managers. For instance, an employee mentioned that their manager scheduled the rota and checked if they suited the employees. The employees also freely shared their commitments with the manager and he accommodated them. Similarly, the employees covered for the manager if he had difficulty with his rota (FGD). This discussion indicates that when the managers were not available, they were in the same situation as the employees and needed cover for their shift.

Furthermore, the managers characterised their role, as supporters of the employees. M11 for example said:

*“Senior support worker is not about taking decisions, senior support worker is usually one of the support workers who is more experienced, so that person will*



*advise and will tell how to improve to the support workers, how to do certain things that he or she has done before, and maybe the support worker hasn't done before. It's about advice, it's more a team leader than a manager, support them, encourage them, show other ways to do."*

Here, the participants discussed support as a characteristic of participative power, but the manager referred to advising and 'telling the employees how to do things', which could point to exercise of power by the managers. However, the employees said that they shared opinions but the employees (support workers) were ultimately in charge of the cases of their clients. Thus, they supported a participative power environment.

### **6.3.5 Legitimation of power through the culture of consultation**

The discussion of how employees legitimised authority and the exercise of power, or decision-making in AP mainly involved the culture of consultation and how the managers and employees made the decisions together, while the employees were in charge of their cases (M11,12, FGD). They also highlighted the requirements for their consultations (M1,11,12), its characteristics and how it influenced their operations (FGD, M11,12). Based on the centrality of aspects of the 'culture of consultation' in answering the questions about decision-making, the day-to-day operations of the participants, and who was in charge of the decisions, it can be concluded that they legitimised the decisions as being collectively made, and they recognised the shared power. Moreover, as further examples in Chapter 8 highlight, if the managers made a decision (the strategic decisions) but the employees found this problematic, they could raise the issue for consultation, and the decision could change (FGD).

Therefore, legitimisation of authority in AP was through the instilment of the culture of consultation and recognition of collective decision-making.

### **6.3.6 Power and authority in AP in summary**

In this section different aspects of power and authority in AP were explored. It was discussed that managers, mostly the founder, had the power of deciding the strategy and

development of the business, and employees had the power of participation, along with the clients and the external institutions.

The participants also highlighted specific characteristics in the power of participation such as humility, not blaming, and mutual support. Thus, the participants did not indicate that the power was absolutely shared between the managers and the employees, but highlighted their participation, their freedom to lead the decisions related to their clients, and their impact on the procedural and process-related decisions of the organisation.

It can be concluded that the legitimisation of authority happened through the instilment of the culture of consultation since the employees and the managers all stated that the decisions were made based on consultation, and no areas of observed or latent conflict<sup>54</sup> were discussed, so that, as Lukes (2005) argues, it does not indicate any exertion of power imposed by managers.

#### **6.4 Third Case Study – THEL**

THEL was a privately-owned consultancy which helped other businesses to find meaning in what they did and define their roles in relation to society. The founder and the three employees, as in 2015 (when the company was contacted), were interviewed in 2016.

The structure and the purpose of THEL changed between 2015 and 2016 (when the interviews took place). They used to work as a consultancy helping other businesses to develop their internal communication and had a more formal structure with many employees (E11). However, it gradually “*got smaller in employees but grew in friends. You know the friends of THEL, partners and associates...*” (E13). Their recent objective was to help other businesses find their role and meaning in the society with a less formal structure, fewer employees, and operating with a group of friends and associates involved in different projects. The associates would be involved depending on their expertise (M1,13). This change the founder said evolved naturally as the employees preferred to work on different areas of their interest and thus their type of contracts with the organisation changed.

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<sup>54</sup> Observed and latent conflicts are discussed in Chapter 7.

Participants' opinion about legitimisation of authority and exercise of power is presented in the next section.

#### **6.4.1 The founder's power over strategic decisions**

As the participants explained, the founder had the power of deciding the purpose and direction of their organisation, basically to define their business and setting the principles of the company, after which the employees had autonomy over the rest of the decisions (E11,12,13).

E13 mentioned that the founder would be happy to be challenged about the purpose of THEL, but that decision would be ultimately his. Moreover, about the corporate values, E13 further explained that the founder had set the principles of the company and how it was going to work, although everybody had their own values that would influence each person.

So here, the founder had the power to set the direction of the company and its values, which is often the case since the founder sets up the business and its direction in the first place and his/her experiences and beliefs influence the organisational culture that strengthens over time (Schein, 1983). However, since the founder in THEL had exercised this power over the direction of the company later in the lifetime of the business as well, this can be considered as an area of exercise of power over the employees in setting/changing the direction of the company.

Moreover, the founder said that he decided about "*interventions on the projects*", such as the people to include. He described that before, when the staff worked as employees, the skills that every individual had and the sectors that they had worked with were clear, so the decision was obvious. But with the recent structure, mostly based on freelancing, he had to decide whom to bring into each project, and he mostly did it through consultation with the current employee. The employee also stated that they made such decisions together (E12). This therefore cannot be considered as exercise of management power, since the decision is not made and imposed on the employees, but it is agreed depending on the best team for each project.

#### 6.4.2 Manager's and employees' power over the agenda and job description

Another aspect of power based on the literature, is control over the agenda for decision-making (three dimensional power (Lukes, 2005)). The discussion about agenda in THEL, as the participants particularly pointed out, referred to the lack of agenda for discussions and decision-making, lack of a formal structure, and lack of formal job descriptions, where they were open for the employees to decide.

For instance, M1 referred to one of their projects and said that in the process of planning they met to develop the plan, but not with a particular agenda. He said:

*“I'm not sure at any point we sat down and went OK let's decide these five things, but we did sit down and go well how best do we serve this institution, what's the best thing that we can do to serve these people and serve what they're trying to do. As a consequence of that, five decisions were made”.*

M1 further mentioned that his role was to create conditions in which the employees could speak. Similarly, E13 explained that the founder always focused on big questions, and he wanted the employees to create answers to them in their own ways. Whether this is also an aspect of exercise of power ‘to expect the employees to be innovative and opportunistic’, is another question for further exploration. This is related to the literature of freedom and employee involvement, where Maravelias (2007, p. 559) argues that in post-bureaucracy “freedom as potential means freedom to seize on opportunities via distributed power”. However, he (Maravelias, 2007, p. 567) states that post-bureaucratic organisations provide employees with freedom in the form of “*opportunities and independence, but with no protection and no guarantees*”, which can push some individuals “*into vicious circles of ‘opportunisms’*” (Maravelias, 2007, p. 557). Therefore, this freedom can indicate power, but it can also limit the power of those individuals with less access to opportunities.

Regarding the structure, employees said that they did not “*have rules or norms*”, a sense of hierarchy, or a structure in the traditional sense and they freely went to the founder when they needed his opinion (E11, E12). Moreover, after the change in the purpose of

the organisation, the original flat structure faded, and they operated through a network of friends and associates, which enabled them to operate broadly and more freely without the conventional boundaries (M1, E12).

Furthermore, E11 and E12 mentioned that they did not have a clear job description when they joined the company. Here the challenge of freedom appeared, as not all the employees were comfortable with this level of freedom and autonomy. While E12 admired the opportunity to be creative and define their job within the limits of the company purpose, E11 felt uncomfortable and explained that he preferred to have a job description and work within some level of structure. Maravelias (2007, p. 565) explains this dichotomy and argues that some researchers believe post-bureaucracy traps the employees in “*boundary-less responsibilities*” and the “*autonomy which is so wide that it is no longer defined by its opposite – the heteronomy that gives it its direction and limits – but is instead completely absorbed by it*”. However, he (Maravelias, 2007, p. 567) also offers an alternative interpretation identifying freedom with opportunities and says: “*post-bureaucracy provides individuals with access to opportunities on the basis of judgments of their will and power to use their potential to transform their selves in ways that enable them to make productive use of these opportunities*”. He (Maravelias, 2007, pp. 567-8) therefore argues that those who lack potential may not be given opportunities, or might not be able to use them, and as such, freedom “*becomes the mark of an elite and the privilege of those who already have it*”. Furthermore, he (Maravelias, 2007, p. 569) argues that, if out of the fear of losing privileges or anxiety of being left behind, individuals lose initiative, the post-bureaucratic work takes on a “*threatening rather than enabling character*”, especially in the long run. This can potentially be the reason some employees in THEL felt uncomfortable and insecure, and gradually left the organisation. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

### **6.4.3 Employees’ power of decision making**

In the interviews with the three employees, they mentioned that they made most of the decisions. The founder decided on which projects to accept or reject, based on the other criteria they had rather than the finances brought in, and then the rest of the decisions

rested with the employees (E13). E11 mentioned that the founder had somehow ‘removed’ himself from the decisions. He said that they did not feel very comfortable, because they wanted to make sure the owner of the business was happy with the direction they were heading, especially because it was his money that they were spending. He said that when they talked to him, he said “*whatever you think*”. So, they made the decisions, were trusted with them, and were not blamed for the consequences (E11,12); but they found it overwhelming.

E12 said that their decisions were very intuitive, and they knew each other and the founder well, and thus the direction the founder was heading in. She further said that in the past, when they had a more formal structure, everyone was very approachable and helpful, so the decisions were a combination of their “*individual and collective decisions*”. She stated that gradually, along with the changes at the organisation, their autonomy increased even more. E12 said: “*Yeah we were all given a lot of freedom, which was I guess based on trust... we were self-organised in a way, we were deciding what to do, what’s the best for the clients, because I guess we were all sharing the same path as helping our clients to do best*”.

Here, based on the statements of the employees, they had the power of decision-making in delivering the services in each project, but not which projects to accept. This could be considered as lack of control of the employees over the agenda, which Lukes (2005) argues is the second dimension of power, and indicates in this sense employees did not have power. However, it can also be considered that since the projects were accepted or rejected based on the criteria defined according to the business objective, then the employees’ control over the agenda would relate to any solution or decision they came up with to serve their clients. The reason E13 explained was that they sometimes rejected the projects that financially made sense but did not meet the criteria based on the organisational objective; in such cases employees often preferred to take the projects but the founder believed if they did, it would engage their resources and they would not be able to take on more relevant projects, thus they rejected them. This is an example where the founder can be considered in power, while it can also be considered that the criteria (which were based on the business objective) drew the line, and thus the employees’ power was secured in each project. According to points the employees repeatedly

mentioned, they had a broad autonomy (E11,12,13) which could make them uncomfortable but can also indicate the power of decision-making of the employees, rather than the power of manager.

#### **6.4.4 Legitimation of power in THEL**

Exploring the points, the employees and the founder spoke about in relation to power and decision-making the legitimisation of authority was not discussed in general terms.

The main area of exercise of power was through the change of the organisational purpose, which some employees were not comfortable with, but they legitimised the founder's right (as the owner of the business) to decide the organisational purpose.

Therefore, it can be said that the authority of the founder to set the direction of the company was legitimised as the owner's right; and the rest of the decisions were in the autonomy of the owners.

#### **6.4.5 Power and authority in THEL in summary**

In summary, at THEL the power of decision-making about the purpose of the company and its principles as well as accepting or rejecting the projects rested with the founder. The rest of the decisions were delegated to the employees, including development of the service, communications with the clients and delivery of the service, which can be considered as the power of the employees.

Furthermore, there did not exist a clear structure, or job description, or clear agenda for discussions other than the overall purpose or question. This can indicate the power of employees over the agenda and the decisions regarding their job descriptions. However, some employees did not feel comfortable with this level of autonomy and required some greater level of structure and job descriptions. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

## **6.5 Findings from the three case studies – Cross Case analysis**

In this section, the three organisations are compared and analysed together through a cross-case analysis, and the relationships between their results are identified; this will be further discussed and connected to the literature in the Discussion Chapter.

It is notable here that PHX was a multinational company and the headquarters in the USA (with about 500 employees), while the other two were small businesses in the UK. AP had around 26 employees at the time of the interviews and THEL had only one employee at the time of interviews, and many associates, after a change of objective and structure. This background facilitates making sense of the results that follow.

### **6.5.1 Power relations versus a flat structure**

In all three cases there was mention of a flat organisation, although they did not necessarily refer to a flat structure as not having any layers of management, but mainly referred to the managers' attitudes as being approachable, open to suggestions, and not having a boss-subordinate relationship. In PHX, some hierarchy was highlighted where some decisions were referred to the founder for approval or a final say. In the other two cases a less hierarchical structure was expounded, but there still were some decisions that were referred up to the founders (particularly strategic decisions). This confirms that, as the managers and the employees in the three cases highlighted, the concept of flat organisation in all three cases mostly referred to the non-hierarchical behaviour and relationships rather than a flat structure.

Furthermore, in PHX, the founder broached his old pattern of 'micromanagement' and a regret that he could not employ that anymore. Micromanagement as defined by Marian Webster refers to "*to manage especially with excessive control or attention to details*" (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Micromanagement has been a pattern of management among many well-known managers in American companies, such as Steve Jobs (Apple), Sam Walton (Walmart Stores), Bill Marriott (Marriott International), and William Rosenberg (Dunkin' Donuts) (Popelka, 2012). However, the excessive attention to details and control is in contradiction with the concept of a flat organisation and promotion of



employee participation. The founder in PHX explained that he used to employ this method, but he could not do that anymore, which could indicate that it did not fit the rest of the aspects of work and organisational culture such as the flat structure in that organisation. On the other hand, founders in AP and THEL widely talked about trust and autonomy, and the founder in THEL was described as having “*divorced himself from the decisions*” of the organisation, which indicates the least level of control.

Overall, it can be concluded that having a flat structure and softened power relations was a particular concern in all three cases, and can be considered as one of the characteristics of organisations that try to apply the Bahá’í principles (while it is not specific to such organisations). Displaying this characteristic is consistent with the aspect of ‘work in the spirit of service’ based on Chapter 4, which will be further discussed in Chapters 8 and 9.

In the next section different aspects of the exercise of power are discussed across the three cases.

### **6.5.2 Aspects of power**

In the three cases, power was discussed in different ways. Overall, the three cases did not indicate an authoritative style with excessive power relations, but they did exhibit different types of power of managers and employees.

In PHX, power was discussed as the power of managers in making the decisions or setting goals in most of the departments, the exercise of managers’ power through monitoring and control, and then employees’ power of participation through input and feedback in day-to-day decisions, employees’ power to influence the agenda through encouraged and heard suggestions and feedbacks, power of seniority, merit-based power (and earned trust), power of close relationships, and power and influence through organisational culture. PHX here indicated some levels of power for the managers and some levels of power for the employees, however, the managers seemed to have greater power over setting the goals, and making the final decisions, while employees had some level power to influence the decisions or bring about some changes.

In AP on the other hand, there was a wide discussion of the power of participation, where managers, employees, clients and the relevant external institutions were involved. There, while the founder had the power of making strategic decisions, it was emphasised that the rest of the decisions were made collectively, and the employees were in charge of the decisions about their own clients. The participants highlighted a humble posture of learning and a culture of no blaming as requirements of the collective decision-making. In AP, freedom was discussed in the form of both autonomy and opportunities (Maravelias, 2007), and all the interviewed employees admired their level of autonomy. In THEL however, the least power was attributed to the manager from among the three cases. Although the founder decided the purpose of the company and which projects to accept, the employees discussed his role as having ‘distanced himself’ from the decisions, where employees made most of the decisions and would involve him as needed. This approach enabled some employees, while it discouraged some others who needed more communication and directions from the founder. The anxiety and insecurity caused by such freedom and existence of opportunities has been discussed by Maravelias (2007) as a side effect of post-bureaucratic freedom and distribution of power.

### **6.5.3 Legitimisation of authority**

As an aspect of assessing power relations, legitimisation of authority is explored to identify the stance of the subordinates to power (Budd & Bhave, 2008).

As opposed to the review of literature, the three cases did not display legitimisation of power and authority through religious beliefs and commitments (e.g. Kunda, 2009; Abbott, 2006), as there was no mention of it, the participants held different beliefs, and religious diversity of beliefs and religions was encouraged in those organisations.

In PHX, the power and authority seemed to be legitimised through the influence of the strong organisational culture, where the employees shared the same organisational values such as excellence and hard work, focus on service of the customers, an open-door policy, and lack of hierarchy as well as the value of employees’ input, and participation in philanthropy and service to the society. Through these instilled organisational values,

the employees recognised the managers' power to make the final decisions while their input was accepted and their ideas were heard. Legitimisation of authority through values and beliefs has been widely mentioned in different studies (e.g. Etzioni, 1975; French Jr. & Raven, 1959; Bass & Bass, 2009). Here, if the employees' wants were manipulated, it would have been an exercise of power, based on Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power, and Etzioni's (1975) normative power. However, Lukes (2005) argues that if conflict of interest is not involved, it is not exercise of power. The influence of organisational culture is further discussed in the Discussion Chapter.

In AP, the discussions were mainly focused on the culture of 'consultation', and it could be said that they legitimised authority through the culture of consultation. The managers and the employees spoke about, with different examples<sup>55</sup> of how they were often involved in the decisions, but if they were not those decisions (often made through consultation among managers) were open to further review, discussion and change by the employees if needed. Thus, the participants did not legitimise or articulate exercise of power as accepting what they 'had to do'. But the decisions were legitimised because the employees had either made those decisions together or had the right to bring them to discussion and change if they had problems with them in practice.

In THEL, legitimisation of authority was not discussed in general terms since the exercise of power was not discussed in its general sense. The main area of exercise of power was through the change of the organisational purpose, which some employees were not comfortable with, but they legitimised the founder's right (as the owner of the business) to decide on organisational purpose. They left as a result, not through an observed conflict, but through a latent conflict where they could not adjust themselves to the new purpose, structure, and the weakened business approach (where profit was not a strong motive).

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<sup>55</sup> The participants discussed examples such as phone calls that had been diverted to the employees' mobile phones, which decision was then changed due to the objection of employees and the consultation after the trial (M11).

#### 6.5.4 Power and authority in relation to Bahá'í scripture

In this section the results from the three cases are discussed in relation to the argument of power and authority based on the secondary research on Bahá'í scripture (Chapter 4). In Bahá'í scripture, individuals (such as a clergy) have not been given the authority to exercise power over other members of the community (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1976, p. 412; Effendi, 1991, pp. 153-154). The Bahá'í administrative system operates through an elected body, which is guided to consult among themselves, as well as with the members of the community before making their decisions (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1979, p. 32; Effendi, 1974, p. 63). In relation to power in particular, it has been written that “*the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation*” (Effendi, 1974, p. 63).

Here, the similarity between the three organisations in their emphasis on and efforts to employ consultation in particular is explained as an attempt to apply Bahá'í principles in their organisations. One concept that has been highlighted in the three cases was the softened hierarchy and lack of a sense of superiority, which was exercised at different levels in the cases.

Another aspect mentioned here is the Bahá'í elective body as a group of people who make some decisions on behalf of a greater number of people, while they consult with the members as well as among themselves and make their decisions based on unanimity or majority votes (e.g. Effendi, 1974, p. 64). In AP this aspect was particularly emphasised, as for certain decisions the managers made decision in discussion, rather than unilateral decisions. In the other cases, a consultative management body was not highlighted as strongly.

Therefore, in Bahá'í scripture, power and authority is aimed to be replaced by “*frank and loving consultation*” (based on Chapter 4), which was observed as an emphasised concern and attempted practice in all three organisations to different extents.

## 6.6 Summary

In this chapter the data from the three cases have been analysed in relation to the concept of power and legitimisation of authority. It started with single case analysis for each case, and then continued by a cross case analysis and discussion of the results in relation to the secondary research on Bahá'í scripture.

The three cases exhibited different types of the exercise of power and different ways of legitimising authority, such as through managers' power to make the final decisions, employees' power to participate through inputs and suggestions, controls and checks, a humble posture of learning, and the exercise of consultation.

These perceptions and practices were explored in two different countries (USA and UK) and in different size organisations (a multinational organisation in comparison to small local businesses). The question about how well they work as the organisations expand in their size and the number of employees is open for further research. In this research, the multinational organisation struggled with participation while emphasising consultation and involvement. However, this could be due to reasons such as the founder's initial style of micromanagement, the impact of national culture, or that it may not necessarily work in multinational organisations. Regarding the impact of national culture, as Hofstede (2017) explains, in 2017 the index of 'acceptance of power distance' in the USA was 40 while it was 35 in the UK and their index of individualism was very close (91 and 89 respectively). So, although there was a cultural difference in acceptance of power distance between the two countries, the index did not indicate a significant difference to explain differences in their perceptions and practices.

The concept of power and authority is better explained when analysed in relation to dealing with conflict of interest and employee participation. The following chapters are dedicated to these two aspects respectively.

## 7 Dealing with Conflict

### 7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6 the results of the data analysis in relation to power and authority, and how authority was legitimised were discussed. After exploring the power relations in the three cases, the analysis focused on exploring what happened in each organisation when conflict occurred, whether conflicts were recognised as legitimate, whether there were spaces for the employees to participate in resolving the conflict, and whether there were spaces for the employees to pursue their interests. In Chapter 7 the results of the analysis of the three cases are presented in relation to conflict of interest and how they were dealt with when they arose.

This chapter answers the third question of the primary research:

***Dealing with conflict.*** To what extent are the interests of the employees and the employers aligned in the organisations under study? Can they pursue their interests and/or how do they pursue their interests? How are conflicts dealt with?

To identify how the organisations dealt with conflict, an extensive analysis was conducted to derive employees' rights and opportunities in the three cases, and what spaces existed for them to pursue their interests. This resulted in a refined dataset about the interests of the employees, as highlighted by the managers and the employees. Then, in order to keep this chapter focused on conflict, there was another round of analysis to explore the areas of potential or 'latent' conflict as Lukes (2005) calls it, plus the observed conflict that the participants spoke directly about. Through the process of reflection and re-categorisation, the main areas of conflict and the relevant practices and examples have been extracted and the results of this process are presented here. However, the areas of employees' interests and spaces to pursue them are not presented in detail, instead mainly the areas in which conflict was discussed are included in this Chapter, in order to keep the thesis focused.

Similar to Chapter 6, these results are presented in single case analyses, and then the cross-case analysis and discussion of the results in relation to the approach of the Bahá'í scripture to conflict, based on Chapter 3.

## 7.2 First Case Study - PHX

There were several types of challenges and conflicts that the managers and the employees in PHX mentioned. Based on Lukes (2005) some of these issues can be considered as observed conflict, since they were articulated by the participants as conflict (e.g. pay); and some as latent conflict since they were not referred to as conflict but it is assumed they would result in conflict once the employees become aware of their interests and desires (e.g. lack of clear promotion opportunities in some departments, which were spoken as some areas of concern but had not resulted in any conflict among them and the managers). This is what Lukes (2005) calls the third dimension of power, where if influence is followed by conflict of interest it is considered as exercise of power, otherwise it is not.

Exploring the areas of employees' interests, there was mention of the variety of recognition in the company, the opportunities to improve and be promoted, the fun and spirited environment, and the open-door policy through which the employees could share their concerns and suggestions (e.g. M2,3,36,41,72, FGD1,4,6,7,9). However, as to what extent could the employees pursue their interests, M51 for instance said:

*“And then I let them know if they are in line with what the company is trying to accomplish too, then I'll let them know that I'm going to be a big part of that and helping, coaching, directing, teaching them to accomplish those goals”.*

As an example of such goals, M51 referred to an employee whose objective was to send his son to college. After sharing his objective, he received training and coaching, he improved in his job and earned enough to send his son to college, and they then observed his son successfully gain qualifications for university. Another example was the bone marrow drive for a colleague with cancer, when several colleagues travelled to different cities in the UK handing out fliers so that they could find a match for their colleague.

However, this statement by M51 suggests that if the interests of the employees and the company did not match then the employees would not be supported to pursue their interests, and accordingly conflict of interests could occur mainly if the interests of the

employees were not aligned with the interests of the company. In sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 these areas of conflict are explored in detail.

### **7.2.1 Challenges – Latent conflict**

Here, the areas of latent conflict are analysed; this refers to the areas that have not resulted in conflict yet, but which can be against the interest of the employees, and once they realise the conflicts, they may object.

Participants at PHX spoke about various issues at their organisation, some of which are not considered as latent conflict, since they did not appear to be against the interest of the employees, or they were resolved through motivation policies and listening to the employees (e.g. FGD7), and thus did not point to conflict in future. Some examples of these issues included: having many good employees and thus it was hard to be noticed, called the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ (FGD8); using the new software (FGD1); difficult task of graphic artists to make their designs interesting (FGD7); challenge in working with other departments while maintaining their schedules and tasks (M34, FGD1); need for more space and more staff to develop new products, and improve the company website (FGD3); and use of emails instead of face-to-face communication (FGD3).

The areas that are considered as latent conflict are presented now.

#### **Promotion opportunities**

Although opportunities to progress were mentioned as an aspect of employees’ interest, such as internal and external training and support for progress (e.g. M21,31,42,FGD1), in some departments employees did not have promotion opportunities due to low employee turnover; they had to wait for someone to leave so they could get promoted (FGD1).

Another employee (FGD10) said it was the culture at PHX that when the employees were confident that they had learnt and progressed in their job, they asked their managers for more responsibilities and promotion, and “*then now your management says let’s just look into what your options are and then it opens the doors for you*”, which included creating some positions. However, since promotion was not a clear career path in all departments,



lack of promotion opportunities in some departments is considered as latent conflict because it could gradually lead to employees' demotivation and conflict.

### **Lack of employment relations' structure and uniform policies**

Another issue concerned employment relations; as the company had grown in size, both its territory, and the number of employees worldwide, it required an adequate structure and infrastructure for its employment relations, but it did not have one (M31). This issue, raised by a manager, could explain some of the employment relations issues at the company. For instance, an employee (FGD8) spoke about how in the past, when they were a smaller company, the management style of the founder and his family prevailed, and all the employees were heard and taken care of; but some issues had arisen at the department the employee worked in as they grew bigger and new managers brought in their own management styles. This is considered as latent conflict since the inconsistencies in employment relations can result in conflict between managers and employees in the future.

### **Scheduling and allocation of employees**

Some managers spoke about the challenges of scheduling and the balance of the number of employees in work, for instance to cover for maternity leave (M21) or to assign employees to the new projects, which were very competitive (M41). Since covering maternity leave often was done through other employees taking on more responsibilities, this could create stress and conflict among the employees with additional responsibilities. However, the employees spoke about covering for each other as an accepted culture and about their discretion to accept/reject additional responsibilities which could have avoided conflict (e.g. FGD3,7). The issue of assigning employees to new projects, and the competition as it involved additional income for the employees, however, could be considered as latent conflict since it could result in conflict in future for the employees who did not get assigned to any projects.

### **Communication issues**

Some participants spoke about inconsistency in processes when a manager left and another manager replaced them (FGD10) or when employees were promoted or moved to

another department and the deals they made with the customers would sometimes get lost (FGD9), as well as the need for additional staff for dealing with communication with customers (FGD9). The inconsistency of processes (FGD9,10) could be a result of managers' autonomy or employees' partial autonomy as opposed to a unified structure and hierarchies, but it can also be due to poor reporting or other communication problems, which could potentially result in conflict. Thus, it is considered as a latent conflict. The issue regarding communications with customers and the extra work it caused the employees (since PHX's products were complicated), and the need for additional staff (FGD9) could also lead to a conflict if there were not enough resources and the job was too much for one person.

### **Power of domination**

The participants spoke about a stress on hard work, and they mentioned there were always elevated goals (FGD6) and yet it seemed to be never enough (FGD2); many participants spoke about 'hard work' as part of their organisation's values/organisational culture. At the same time, it was mentioned that while the company expected a lot from the employees, the managers were quite flexible with employees' schedules and made accommodations for their needs and personal problems (FGD2, M63). An employee mentioned one example, that if she could not stay until the evening she could work on the weekend and bring her child along, and if she needed to leave early or take days off this was accommodated. She also said that she knew she would not get an award but she was always appreciated (FGD2).

Here, high expectations and flexibility are among the characteristics that Kunda (2009) attributes to high-tech organisations, with individual commitment and a high level of expectations from employees. Kunda (2009) argues that this is exertion of power through organisational culture. Lukes (2005) refers to this as power of domination, where employees 'follow the dictates of power' even if against their best interests; this could eventually result in conflict when the employees recognise their interest or get frustrated with the pressure of the stress on hard work. It is therefore considered as latent conflict.

## **Logistics**

The employees spoke about some issues with their environment such as a need for more parking spaces (FGD1,10), and more ladies' bathrooms in their building (FGD2), which are considered as latent conflict. A manager (M63) spoke about punctuality as an issue as well, where the managers expected the employees to communicate if they were going to be late, but if it became a pattern then the managers approached it as an issue, talked to the employee to find the reason, and change their schedule to help solve the problem; but if the problem still persisted they fired the employee (M63 had two cases of firing employees in 15 years, both due to persistent unpunctuality). This was clearly an area of latent conflict as well, since there was mention of cases where unpunctuality resulted in conflict and disciplinary action.

## **Latent conflict in PHX in summary**

In this section different challenges that the participants discussed at PHX are analysed and those that could lead to a conflict or presented a conflict of interest have been identified as latent conflict as Luke (2005) discusses.

These areas include: limited promotion opportunities; lack of uniform employment relations' structure and policies; competitive allocation of employees to projects; lost processes or deals with the change of management or promotion of employees; the need for additional employees for customer relations; power of domination and stress on hard work; and logistical issues such as parking and facilities.

Most of these issues result from lack of processes and policies in place that could make communication and operations smoother and clearer to employees. However, a need for additional employees and additional facilities, and the stress on hard work can point to a company's financial concerns and a focus on productivity, mostly through individualist measures which is quite high in USA (Hofstede, 2017). This contradicts the culture some participants spoke about when discussing covering for each other, such as for maternity leave, or supporting each other in personal difficult times (FGD3,4,6,9,10,M42), and a struggle between 'I' and 'We' as Hofstede (2017) mentions. This struggle can be a result

of existence of various cultures in the organisation as opposed to one strong culture, or the struggle between the values that the founder intended to implement (the care mentioned by the founder and various employees (e.g. FGD5, M1,3), and the challenges of maintaining those values in practice; particularly with the influence of a strong national culture of individualism (with the index of 91 in USA based on Hofstede (2017)). This raises the question as whether such values are possible to maintain in practice when a dominant national culture imposes values against them? If so, how, and how successful these efforts would be? This question is further explored when examining the data from the other two cases from the UK.

### **7.2.2 Conflicts – Observed conflict**

In this section the issues that the participants had articulated as conflict, some of which seemed ongoing, and the company's processes to deal with conflict are discussed. They have been summarised in four categories: conflict about participation; lack of expertise; pay; and conflict among employees.

#### **Conflict about participation**

Despite most employees stating that they were involved in the decisions through their input, feedback, participation in decision-making or autonomy over their decisions, an employee (FGD5) argued that he had no say in his department and his manager never involved him in the decisions they made, even regarding the equipment that he worked with. Furthermore, another employee (FGD10) said that employees in the production department did not have email access and were disconnected from the company culture and activities that were going on in the company.

The fact that some employees were isolated from communications and participation, and articulated their frustration, points to observable conflict based on Lukes (2005), which can indicate that the organisation did not have a uniform participatory structure; although there were various levels of participation depending on the individual managers' preferences, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

### **Lack of expertise**

Some managers referred to lack of expertise in some employees as an area of conflict they had experienced (M36,72). They said that they tried to overcome this problem “*by training, or trying to bring in other people who have the expertise that we don’t*” (M72). Managers spoke about the training for employees upon hire and plans for them to improve, as well as other training to prepare them for promotion (M36,31,41), and M72 said that they had “*not turned down anybody’s request to pursue further training and education when that was recognised as important for the company*”. This statement highlights that the training that the employees received or were supported for, was mainly focused on the benefit of the company, which does not necessarily point to space for employees to pursue their interests, i.e. if the employees decided to undergo training that did not directly benefit the company they would not be supported. Therefore, here, lack of expertise of the employees and the training that focused on benefit of the company is considered as an area of conflict.

### **Pay and rewards**

An area of conflict, as highlighted in Chapter 5, was about pay and rewards. In FGD8 there was a discussion about the lower salary employees in production, packaging and R&D departments, where the employees expected the company to provide better pay for these staff. Similarly, M72 stated that he did not think PHX was very generous to every employee, although he and many others had been treated very generously in many ways. He said: “*it is very well possible that this company is just not simply capable, it doesn’t have the resources as some of the big, flashy companies in this country, you know, to extend the lavish packages that one hears about once in a while.*” In explaining about the ‘not so generous’ phrase, M72 said that he had to justify raises and bonuses for his employees to his manager, but there were times that due to the financial limitations of the company they were not approved.

This is an area of concern about fair pay in organisational justice, as in equal pay versus performance-based pay (e.g. Greenberg, 1990), and among the common issues in different industries since pay is among the main motivators for employees to work (King & Lawley, 2013). According to Rawls’ (1971) theory of justice as fairness, access to and

distribution of wealth should be based on equality or in favour of those less advantaged in the society. Thus, here the low-paid employees as the less-advantage employees are not treated fairly. Furthermore, as shown in Chapter 3, while Bahá'í scripture does not point to equal pay *per se* and it recognises different levels of expertise and efforts, but it stresses the responsibility of the wealthy in removing 'extremes' of poverty and maintaining a level of comfort for everybody; thus it require employers to pay their employees 'high enough' wages to maintain such level of comfort or to save for their time of need, or to pay them adequate wages in addition to sufficient benefits from the income of the industry when they cease work (which is similar to the concept of insurance and pension) (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1990, p. 103; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, p. 29); which in PHX some employees expressed they were not paid enough (in Productions and R&D). The issue of fair pay is accordingly considered as observed conflict here.

### **Conflict between the employees**

Some participants spoke about conflict among the employees, such as: competition among the new hires (FGD4); conflict over unfinished jobs that caused trouble for those working on the product at the next stage (FGD7); some cultural issues such as competition, lack of transparency, and limited communication in Chinese culture in that team (FGD4); and communication issues between the departments (FGD7). In these situations, the employees said that their managers supported employees, spoke with the employees in conflict, listened to them and resolved the issues.

These issues, although causing conflict among the employees, are not considered as a conflict of interest since they do not involve a clash of the company's interests with the interests of employees.

### **Observed Conflicts in PHX in summary**

Participants spoke about the areas that they struggled with, or had problems with, which are considered as observed conflict. These areas included: conflict about participation; lack of desired expertise of some employees; and fair pay for employees with lower salaries. Here, the issues of low pay and lack of participation in some departments were

mentioned as areas of conflict by employees, and lack of expertise was mentioned by the managers. The types of conflicts that were mentioned also point to conflict of interest where managers seemed to be more concerned about the expertise they expected from the employees and the employees were more concerned about their pay and participation. This further points to the environment in the organisation where managers and employees are considered to have opposing interests (Budd & Bhawe, 2008). How these conflicts are dealt with sheds more light in the discussion about conflict.

### **7.2.3 Dealing with conflict**

In exploring the methods of dealing with conflict, and whether employees had any space to pursue their interests especially in the event of conflict, a variety of opinions and practices were spoken about. Some of these mainly focused on the interest of the company and some approaches were considerate of the interests of the employees as well.

To begin with, the priority of the company was to prevent conflict. For instance, M72 said that he tried to:

*“involve all parties at different stages of a project, to make sure that they don’t feel left out, that they understand each other, they understand why sometimes we don’t do what they would like to see, don’t do it their way but we choose to do it another way, that’s a big part of harmony.”*

Similarly, M5 said: *“I think if you’re honest and you tell people the boundaries, and you make sure you give people their expectations, as long as you’re fair, I think it’s important to not wait for a problem to come to you.”*

Here, speaking about harmony and prevention of conflict can point to an environment where conflict of interest is considered destructive and is prevented. However, the approach of the company in ‘dealing with conflict’ sheds more light on this analysis.

The participants explained that, when conflict occurred, the organisation had a mechanism to deal with it through meetings with the employees, then involving the top manager, and finally HR if the conflict was not resolved (e.g. M2,31,36).

As an example, M36 mentioned disputes over the results of annual review, which affected the employees' potential pay rises. However, on this issue the employees could go straight to HR if they preferred to, because it involved the employees' monetary benefits.

M31 from HR said that they generally got involved when the issues were very serious. But if an employee had an issue that needed to be dealt with confidentially, then they could go straight to HR and HR would try to resolve it in confidence. M31 said:

*“It can also be one that, if it depends on the ramifications of the issue or the severity of it, it may involve other people, and so that’s where HR steps in to do the investigations and then everything from corrective action, from a verbal warning, to a written warning, up to suspension, even termination if it needs to be, if we continue having employee relations issues.”*

Meeting and discussing with the employees, and employees' chance to participate in resolving the disputes, or to go to HR to raise their concern when it involved their pay, could potentially enable the interests of the employees in the conflicts as well. This was the standard pattern of conflict resolution, as frequently mentioned in the interviews. However, the approach employed by each manager varied, with some mostly focused on the interest of company and others including the interests of the employees as well.

For instance, M72 said that when there was a problem often the managers analysed the situation and chose what was best for the company based on the guidelines. If people disagreed, then the manager would have to justify his decisions as to why they had to do things in that way. He said that if matters were not resolved they had to discipline people, and in extreme cases to let them go when they could not “see any hope to remedy” the situation. Also, if there was incompatibility between employees, which was very rare, they either separated the employees or had to let one go in extreme cases. M72 also referred to differences of opinion on the annual review and said that they sat together with the employee and discussed the areas of improvement, and though the employees did not always accept all the comments they got the point. He was then asked if, as a result of the discussions, the managers' opinions had ever changed. He said the process was that the employees had to attach a letter with the reasons and evidence for their



disagreement, but they rarely did. He said he had to consider whether the reason was that the employees came to a new realisation or just said yes to their manager.

Based on this, the manager (M72) prioritised the interests of the company, and if the employees disagreed it was not resolved by a discussion, as the manager justified his decision to them while his opinion hardly changed. This approach further points to the focus of the manager on the interest of the company, not necessarily the interest of the employees or other stakeholders (e.g. Fox, 1966; Abbott, 2006; Budd & Bhawe, 2008; Geare, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2006).

However, this was not the only approach that was raised. Some managers (e.g. M6, 21,42) took a more democratic approach to dealing with conflict through regular meetings, listening to the employees or making some changes to improve the situation. M21 said that they had weekly and monthly meetings where they discussed their issues and worked with them on an ongoing basis. He said he believed there was always a reason behind every issue, which had to be talked about; such as 'monetary problems, scheduling problems, environmental problems, position problems' or a simpler problem like an issue with an employee texting at work because of her daughter's doctor's appointment, and the manager went back and apologised when he realised the reason. He added that the employees sometimes had criticisms, which could be because the managers were not communicating their intentions correctly or, sometimes, they were correct. The managers in such situations tried to communicate, improve, and make arrangements, with 'fairness and compassion'. For instance, in situations of conflict between the employees, the managers sometimes let the employees work alone (instead of together) or let them work with people that they were more compatible with, if it was 'a valuable employee'. M6 referred to how letting the employees know the manager was disappointed with them usually worked, as the employees felt accountable and fixed the problem. Some employees mentioned being involved in resolving the issues as well, and referred to the open-door policy where their suggestions were heard and considered, and some changes were applied accordingly (FGD1,3,6,10).

These managers said that sometimes the employee would not perform well despite all the support (i.e. a conflict about lacking the expertise, or conflict between the employees that

would not resolve). M21 said that if after all the efforts it turned into ‘a bad apple’ situation, which was very rare, it was best for them and for the company that they ‘moved on’. M3 said that they tried really hard to solve the problems, and instead of tackling the person the managers tackled the process, providing the employees with clear understanding of their role, their impact and how they were making a difference. He said to prevent some conflicts they tried to have consistency in their products and processes, make sure the job was not boring, was suited to their skills, and the teams were working in alignment to one another. But if, after “*coaching, feedback, then a verbal warning, ... and performance improvement plan*”, the problem in employee’s performance persisted some managers would conclude that the employee was in a wrong role, so they tried to find the right role for them; as a result, sometimes employees were moved between departments (e.g. M2,3, FGD1).

The persistence of the managers in finding a way to solve the problems, as mentioned by the participants, indicates that the interests of the employees were considered to some extent, and efforts were made to avoid firing employees (e.g. FGD7,M2). However, they also point to the focus on the interest of the company and utilising the interests of the employees if they aligned with the interest of the company. Accordingly, it was not necessarily the ‘interests’ of the employees that were considered, but the clarity or the support they needed to do the job well.

Moreover, there was mention of the feedback mechanisms in PHX, where not only managers provided feedback to employees, the employees also provided feedback on the performance of a recently promoted fellow employee and this influenced whether they stayed in the new role or not (M3). The feedback from employees on other employees’ work as well as employees’ feedback on managers’ work were also mentioned as ‘360 degrees feedback’, which would include an all-inclusive feedback system. However, as London and Beatty (1993) argue, it is often 270 degrees, missing the feedback on the work of the managers by their ‘customers’, which are the employees. Although M21 said that they asked for employees’ feedback, most managers and employees did not mention acquiring employees’ feedback; therefore, the feedback system in PHX was 270 or even 180 degrees (not 360), mainly involving feedback from managers to employees, and employees to employees, but not from employees to managers nor from managers to

managers. In addition, having the employees' promotion open to feedback and change could result in conflict as well, not only between the manager and relegated employee, but also between the employee and their subordinates and colleagues who caused the relegation.

In summary, the approach to conflict in PHX was preventative in the first place. They tried to employ clear communication, job descriptions and sharing information through meetings and updates, to ensure there were no miscommunication or confusion to result in conflict. Then, if the conflict occurred, the process was to meet with the employee, find the sources of the problem, and solve it through communication, training, employee development plans, or changes to schedule or working conditions. If the problem persisted the managers transferred the employee to a different department where his/her skills matched better. If the problem still persisted, then the managers would terminate the employee's contract. In all this, while the managers attempted to utilise the circumstances and needs of the employees, the focus was on the interest of the company, on how the employees would perform better in their jobs, and how they could best benefit the company. For instance, in the disagreement over the annual reviews the stance of the managers 'rarely' changed.

There were also examples of conflict that had not been resolved such as conflict over pay for low paid employees, and the issue of more parking spaces and more service rooms. While the latter issues were logistical issues the issue with pay as an aspect of organisational justice requires further attention. Though the managers explained the issue as a financial constraint that the company was suffering from as a result of financial crisis and accordingly the company had not increased the salaries (e.g. M72), yet the company had been spending some funds on annual awards ceremonies and on philanthropic activities, which indicates that some level of additional financial resources were available which the company could have used to provide a better level of comfort for low paid employees (e.g. FGD8). This indicates that while employees with more visible performance were appreciated the low salary employees were not among the main concerns of the company, which raises questions about the practice of fairness in PHX.

#### **7.2.4 Employees' interest and dealing with conflict of interest at PHX in summary**

In exploring the areas of conflict, dealing with conflict and whether interests of the employees were utilised, various aspects of latent and observable conflict based on Lukes (2005) were explored. Three areas of conflict were most strongly highlighted. One was about the low salary for employees from production, packaging and R&D; another was about the staff assessments and the annual awards; and the third was about the degree of employee participation.

In the discussion of pay, while most employees mentioned that they were happy with their pay and benefits, there were concerns about the low pay for employees from production, packaging and R&D departments. The argument of fairness as part of organisational justice (Greenberg, 1990) has been discussed and will be further covered in the Discussion Chapter. However, based on fairness according to the scriptural study on Bahá'í scripture, it is not fair for employees to struggle and not receive sufficient pay to have a level of comfort ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277). At PHX, this conflict was not resolved, and although the managers spoke about financial limitations of the company as the reason, there were other expenses that the employees argued could be avoided to increase the level of pay for low paid employees such as annual awards and philanthropic activities. These appeared to be flashy activities that the company spent money on, perhaps for the company image (although there were discussions by managers and employees about genuine care of the company for the society as opposed to the concern for image).

Moreover, this is connected to the rise of wage inequality and reduced demand for skilled workers in the USA (e.g. Goldin & Katz, 2018; Western, & Rosenfeld, 2011; Autor, Katz, & Kearney, 2008; Juhn, Murphy, & Pierce, 1993). For instance, as Goldin and Katz (2018) report, the inequality for low-skilled workers have risen in the USA in the past twenty-five years, as a result of technological advancements and increased demand for skilled workers as well as the change in the supply of skilled workers, as they attempt to undergo various trainings to match job requirements. Furthermore, Western and Rosenfeld state that since unions declined from 1973 to 2007 in the USA, the inequality

on hourly wages increased for about 40 percent. Elsby, Shin and Solon (2016) however, argue that based on their analysis, the recessions during 1979-2012 affected wages and employability in the USA more than in the UK, which they state requires further research.

The conflict about pay was further explored in the discussion of the scales for assessment, which in annual reviews could result in rises in employees' salaries, and could also result in employees' recognition and annual award. While most employees found their assessments fair, some employees argued against using equal scales of assessment for recognition and annual awards since all employees were not in the same situation (e.g. single mother, etc.). This is another aspect of organisational justice, which is based on procedural justice where the method of deciding the rewards also needs to be just (Greenberg, 1990). In relation to the results of Chapter 3 Bahá'í scripture does not point to equal pay and rewards *per se*, and it recognises different levels of expertise and efforts but stresses the responsibility of the wealthy in removing extreme poverty, and maintaining a level of comfort for everybody (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1990, p. 103; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, p. 29).

Another aspect of conflict was the lack of participation of some employees due to some managers' preferences, which included the employees from production and R&D again: the 'low-skilled' employees. They did not have access to emails, while most communication took place through emails, were not included in company culture or the recognition and appreciation systems, were not involved in making decisions, and did not receive enough salary for some level of comfortable life. This also highlights them as employees with the least or no power in the company, and since there were no representation or union membership, their interests were neglected. This lack of participation also highlighted a lack of a uniform participation policy in the company, so the autonomy of the managers resulted in some employees' exclusion from participation, which negated the interests of those employees.

These discussions of conflict often involved observed conflict, since they were articulated as conflict, but lack of communication and participation of employees from production, packaging and R&D is considered as latent conflict, since although they did not mention

it other employees did, and it is assumed that when the employees realise their interests they will resist. Other areas of latent conflict were: the stress on hard work as an aspect of company culture, so efforts were ‘never enough’; lack of promotion opportunities in some departments with low employee turnover; and allocation of employees to specific projects; since it was considered that while they did not appear as conflict yet, they would when the employees realised their interests.

In the discussion on dealing with conflict, the participants mentioned the mechanism was discussing with the employees, liaising with the top manager when required, and finally referring to HR. There was mention of room for the employees to participate and have their say in a conflict. However, often the managers’ say carried a much greater weight, and the company’s interest was prioritised.

Overall, in PHX, the policies and procedures to deal with conflict seemed focused on the interest of the company, while there was also some space for employees to pursue their interests, to participate in resolving the conflict, or to raise their opinion and suggestions about managerial or organisational issues through the open-door policy.

### **7.3 Second Case Study – AP**

The founder, two managers, and the employees from one of the AP’s complexes in the UK were interviewed. The interviews and FGDs were analysed for the aspects of employees’ interests and spaces for them to pursue their interests. The employees (FGD) highlighted their pay mechanisms, the culture of ‘no blame’, support to grow, and training and support for education.

About the pay mechanism, the participants (FGD, M1) explained that pay was decided in a consultative manner in AP, where the employees conducted a benchmarking research and proposed an amount of pay based on the responsibilities in AP. Then, in a consultative meeting, the managers and employees discussed and made a collective decision. Also, they allocated the same amount of pay for the same position (based on equity theory utilising the perceptions of employees from their job and its relation to their pay (Greenberg, 1990) as opposed to performance-based pay). The employees said they

were paid generously and found it fair. The founder said that employees always made a fair proposal and their proposals for their pay had always been accepted in all the years they had operated. The employees highlighted this process and said that they had always been paid what they asked for. Here, this method of fair pay supported the procedural justice, where not just the amount of pay but how to come to that decision was also considered as important in the concept of fairness (Greenberg, 1990).

The areas of conflict are explored in the following sections.

### **7.3.1 Challenges – Latent conflict**

#### **Difficulty of collective decision-making**

Collective decision-making was a particular aspect of working in AP, as reported in Chapter 5. However, M11 explained that this took “*a lot of time, a lot of energy, a lot of patience, a lot of listening*” so that everybody would get a chance to discuss his or her opinions. However, M11 said that they were all becoming better at how they consulted. He said that at the beginning they used to say ‘one was wrong’, and the discussion would become argumentative, but they developed the skills of listening and saying, “*thank you, what I want to say is this*”, so their discussions were becoming faster and more fruitful. He said it took longer than if one person made the decision, but “*it’s worth it because everybody feels encouraged, feels empowered*”. M11 was further asked if he thought their method would still work if they grew bigger, and he said that he thought so, they just needed to find the right way to do it.

This could be considered as a latent conflict, which might result in conflict in the future, but since it focused on utilising employees’ participation, it is not; because employee participation was in their own interest, as the employees specifically highlighted. Therefore, this is considered as a difficulty but not a latent conflict; however, this difficulty was taken into account in assessment of potential and observed areas of conflict in AP.

## **Power of domination**

The main area of latent conflict here can be considered as the power of domination through organisational culture based on Bahá'í principles. Here, managers spoke about operating based on the Bahá'í principles (M1,11), and employees (FGD) spoke about the principles in their organisations as their organisational culture, with clear articulation of those principles in action such as the culture of consultation, the principles of respect, no blame, raising opinions with detachment, in the interest of solving the problems not in a particular department's interest, and carrying out the decisions together as the decision of the group; which stressed the specific principles of the Bahá'í Faith in the area of consultation and collective decision-making based on Chapter 3. While only the founder was an adherent of the Bahá'í Faith, such clear articulation of those values as the organisational values highlights the strength of the organisational culture (Schein, 1984; O'Reilly, 1989).

It could also be considered as domination of religious principles since, as opposed to the other two cases for this research, the principles in AP were applied explicitly and with reference to Bahá'í scripture. Thus, it was important to explore whether they imposed the religious values and thus exerted power through religious values. To explore that, Lukes (2005) discussion of latent conflict was used as the analytical lens. Lukes' (2005) theory of latent conflict states that the employees may not be aware of their interests at present, but when they realise their interests they will resist and there will be observable conflict. Also, he raises the discussion of real interest, and says that the influence of the managers could be in the individuals' best interest; if that is the case they will gradually realise their best interest but if it is not in their best interest then that is manipulation and exertion of power.

To explore this context, M1's statements were initially explored. For instance, he spoke about the challenge they could face in the future in hiring individuals who did not adhere to their corporate values or their way of working. He said it was not very likely though, because these were 'high principles', 'higher ethical practices', and it was just 'righteous'. So, everybody would find them logical to adhere to. Here, although the manager explained the corporate values as logical and 'righteous', this can still point to



the dominance of these principles, which does not consider the right for individuals not to find them 'logical'. Kunda (2009) explains this as exertion of power through the influence of organisational culture. The statements of other managers (not adherents of the Bahá'í faith) and the employees were also explored to examine this further. Both the managers (M11,12) and the employees (FGD) spoke about the aspects of their organisational culture based on Bahá'í principles positively and with pride, such as 'this is what makes working in AP special', 'the consultation, employee involvement and clients involvement is unique in AP and I had not experienced it before in other mental health related organisations I worked in', 'we are never blamed for a mistake we make and we are trusted with our decisions, and we ask for help and consult with others when matters arise and know we are supported' (FGD). Here, since the employees were aware of the principles and their relation to the Bahá'í Faith but did not find them loaded with religious obligations; spoke about them as in their interest and what they valued about AP; and found them as the way of operation that made them more successful than others because of receiving recognitions and rewards due to their service to clients, involving the clients in deciding their improvement plans, providing the clients with spiritual training and support (which they mentioned was inspired by Bahá'í principles), and helping them to move to independent living in an effective way; it can be concluded that the employment of these principles did not refer to exertion of power or latent conflict. As Lukes (2005) states, an individual can be mistaken, but not a mass; thus, he states that it is not considered as latent conflict if the group of individuals do not find it against their interest.

### **7.3.2 Conflicts – Observed conflict**

In this section the areas of observed conflict as the participants at AP mentioned are reviewed. How these areas of conflict were dealt with are discussed in the next section. Despite the interviewer's probing questions, the participants did not mention any ongoing conflict or issues they were struggling with, but they spoke about examples that had happened in the past. They said that if any conflict occurred, they met together, spoke about them, and resolved the issues without putting any blame (M11,12,FGD).

One example of conflict involved a new employee who was leading a project and was not yet accustomed to the consultative decision making in AP, which resulted in a few weeks delay in the project. This could be connected to the latent conflict as mentioned in section 7.3.1. M1 said it was not that the new employee did not want to conform, but he was not used to the consultative approach at AP; according to this it does not point to a latent conflict but an issue of the training in new processes for new employees and the period of adjustment. However, M1 did not mention which employee it was, and there was no way to ascertain whether the employee found it just as a new process to learn or as an approach he did not quite agree with (in the latter case it would point to latent conflict). How this issue was handled, whether in the interest of the company or considering the interest of the employee as well, sheds more light on this discussion, and is covered in section 7.3.3.

Other examples of conflict were a miscommunication between two employees and a mistake an employee had made with regards to a client.

About miscommunication, M11 said that before he was a manager, he had said something to a member of the administrative team that caused misunderstanding and made the person upset. Since that employee raised the issue with M11, it is considered as an observed conflict among employees. M12 also mentioned another communication issue she had, where coming from a different culture her comments were ‘more energetic and strong’, which ‘did not suit the British culture’ and had caused misunderstanding. In both of these issues, the participants spoke about the conflict as their fault/responsibility in their relationship with another employee, which accordingly does not point to an exertion of power of managers, and thus is not considered as conflict of interest.

Another area of conflict was a ‘mistake’ in dealing with a client. An employee (FGD) said that she made a mistake and after that the client did not want to work with her. This is an area that could result in conflict of interest between the employer and the employee. How it was handled is covered in the next section.

### 7.3.3 Dealing with conflict

In AP, the method of dealing with conflict and of making decisions were spoken about as through a consultative approach. Regarding conflict in particular, they said that they sat together in an environment of friendship, honesty and respect, discussed the matters and resolved the issues (M1, FGD).

For instance, regarding the conflict with the employee who did not involve others, the manager arranged a meeting involving all the parties and they discussed the process and realised that it needed more communication. M1 said that at the meeting the individual was not 'blamed' or 'demoralised' in any way, but they discussed what they had learnt and planned for the rest of the project, using the word 'we' instead of 'you' or 'I'. The employee was anonymous; therefore he/she was not interviewed, but this approach in dealing with similar conflict was spoken about by the interviewed employees and their examples are discussed next.

Regarding the communication issue where an employee had been upset with M11, He said that they sat together and discussed the situation and he tried to clarify his intent, apologised to her, and the problem was solved. Similarly, M12 with a cultural difference in her communication style said that she was working on her communication skills, and that she found it a good challenge since she was living and working in the UK. M12 was asked about her experience and how she felt. She mentioned that her English skills were not very good, and she was told (by her manager) that she needed to improve her skills, and she was provided with additional support, such as resources to study, and checking documents before being sent when she needed and asked for it. She said that it had been brought up to her nicely and through a good relationship, so she knew that it was intended for her 'to improve and grow', and she easily accepted it and started to improve. She said that similarly, if she had any concerns she raised them with her managers and they easily accepted those as well as their relationship was not hierarchical.

This latter example seemed in the interest of the employee and the company for the employee to improve. It did not end in conflict, as the employee was happy with the result. Lukes (2005) does not consider such situations as exertion of power if it is in the interest of the employee and it does not involve conflict.

M12 also spoke about her experience in resolving a conflict between two employees through bringing them together, where they spoke about it and resolved the issue. She said that since they had ‘a peaceful environment, conflict tended to be sorted out in a quiet way and with reflection’.

This way of resolving conflicts in a quiet way can point to an environment where conflict would be suppressed (Abbott, 2006). Furthermore, with the dominance of an organisational culture, it can indicate exertion of power through influence. However, since the employees spoke about a variety of areas through which they pursued their interests in resolving conflict, developed themselves, and were supported, this consultative approach can be seen as a method which did not suppress conflict but resolved it in the interest of the different parties involved.

Moreover, regarding the conflict between the employee and the client as a result of employee’s mistake, the employee (FGD) said that the client’s point of view was taken into consideration but “*there was no finger-pointing like you made this mistake or you shouldn’t have done it*”, rather managers understood why she had done the job in that way and helped her. This supports the evidence for the existence of support and resolving conflict in a collaborative manner in AP.

To further explore this collaborative approach managers were further asked about the examples of conflict when the employees disagreed with a decision the managers made. They said that they did not make the decisions and inform the employees. M11 suggested doing something in a certain way and the employees commented on it, for instance they highlighted if it did not work, and would suggest finding another way. M11 said that they discussed it in the team and they decided what to do. M11 mentioned an example of a decision by top manager that he had asked his employees to try diverting the desk phones to the employees’ mobile phones so they would be available when the clients needed them. However, there were issues when they were on a break or had finished their shift and went home. The employees tried it and showed it did not work. Therefore, M11 brought it to his manager’s attention at their next monthly meeting; they all discussed it and decided to remove the divert. M11 said that the company was not hierarchical, and even if there were times that a particular decision came from the top management, it was

open to discussion and change. Employees shared similar examples and spoke about the managers' openness to discussion and change as well (FGD).

This example further supports the collaborative approach of AP to decision-making and dealing with conflict, as well as considering space for employees to pursue their interests when some decisions were made in advance. However, it also points to the fact that some decisions were made without employees' participation, as was mentioned in the discussion of power in Chapter 6, although the employees had the space to question the decision in a meeting and change it.

In summary, participants spoke about AP's method of dealing with conflict as a collaborative method where they all discussed the issues in a friendly and respectful environment and resolved the issues. Decisions were mostly made collaboratively, and when not, they were open to discussion and change after a 'trial'.

#### **7.3.4 Employees' interests and dealing with conflict of interest at AP in summary**

The interviews and the FGD were analysed for aspects of employees' interests, areas of conflict, and how the company dealt with conflict.

Here, as part of the employees' interest, a consultative pay mechanism, equal pay for equal position, pay rises and pension, an encouraging and empowering culture with no blame, internal and external training and support with encouragement for furthering education, mutual support among all staff and teambuilding activities were mentioned as areas of employees' interest (M1,11,12, FGD). The employees highlighted spaces for pursuing their interests such as: their autonomy towards their work; collective decision-making and making suggestions in improving their workplace and methods; and space for further growth and improvement. However, the areas of the interests the employees highlighted mostly focused on the training and autonomy that would benefit the organisation as well. On further exploring whether employees could pursue their interests if not in the interest of the company M11 referred to an example of an employee who said he wanted to study law; the company supported him and scheduled his work around his

study schedule, and agreed his contract change to part time so he could study and continue working there even though he had decided that he wanted to continue his career in law afterwards (he left the company after graduation). This could point to spaces for employees to pursue their interests while not in the interest of the company, but this was the only example mentioned in this aspect so whether this was a consistent approach of the company to support employees even if not in the interest of the company is not clear. Furthermore, the participants mentioned some areas of observed conflict such as conflict with their clients, communication issues among the staff, and disagreement about a decision. They spoke about the method to resolve the conflict through consultation in a supportive and peaceful environment, without blame. They mentioned that, if a decision was announced from the top manager and it did not work, they took it to discussion and it could be changed.

In addition, the issue of conflict under the influence of religious principles or organisational culture was explored as an area of latent conflict, but due to the employees' awareness of the principles based on the Bahá'í Faith, their stressed appreciation of those principles, and no references to conflict about them, it was not considered as latent conflict based on Lukes (2005).

Overall, the policies and procedures to make decisions and deal with conflict in AP pointed to a collaborative approach that will be further explored in Chapter 8.

#### **7.4 Third Case Study – THEL**

The founder, the current employee at THEL, and the two former employees were interviewed in 2016. The participants explained that the organisation provided the employees with space to pursue their interests and develop their capacities even if it was not in the interest of the company (such as having a flexible structure to pursue other areas of activities as well) (M1, E11,12).

The founder and the employees did not speak about the pay mechanism, but when they were asked about it the employees stated that it was fair and said that they decided the pay together, based on benchmarking (similar to AP). E13 however, said that pay was not

the reason they stayed at THEL as they could possibly receive higher wage in a bigger organisation, but they stayed there because of the opportunities to grow, the autonomy they had, and their working environment. All employees spoke about their work as an environment that inspired them, prompted their thinking, provided them with opportunities to work within high impact organisations, and encouraged them to pursue and fulfil their own purpose (E11,12,13). Here, the employees spoke about various areas of their interests and highlighted that if their interests did not align with the interest of the company they were still supported (M1, E11,12,13). M1 spoke about the change in their organisational structure from having permanent employees to working through freelancing, because some employees preferred to work on a variety of the projects as they chose, or to undertake doctoral education. M1 said: *“most people had an opportunity to do something outside of what they were trying to do, so to build their own capacity as they saw fit.”*

However, the same aspects that the employees highlighted as strengths of THEL, such as high level of autonomy and the variety of opportunities, were mentioned areas of conflict as well. These are discussed in the next section.

#### **7.4.1 Challenges – Latent conflict**

The challenges or the areas of potential conflict discussed here mostly referred to the high level of autonomy and the uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity it entailed. There was also one mention of a recent non-commercial approach of the organisation, which appeared as a challenge to one employee.

Some employees found it difficult to have such a high level of autonomy. E11 said that they had too much autonomy, and the founder had *“divorced himself from the practical elements of liaising with clients and deciding what work we would do”*. He explained that the founder was so ‘hands off everything’, which *“was partly to do with people growing up and learning”* but he felt a bit unsupported and on his own. The employee said that he did not feel that he was working closely with the founder anymore but rather as he was working in a *“mini organisation”* within that organisation. The employee related this level of autonomy with the lack of structure and said that empowering when taken to an

extreme became a weakness, because everybody needed a bit of structure and commercial reality to feel secure. So, he and another colleague decided to leave the organisation and set up their own small consultancy and run their organisation in the direction they wanted. M11 said that they had a good conversation with the founder and they left with “*enormous aspirations for him*”. M11 said that despite this, he found THEL a very interesting and inspiring place to be and he very much respected that. While E11 had difficulty with the level of autonomy at THEL, E12 found it a desirable workplace, which she had always looked for, and had enjoyed in the five years that she had been working there.

Here, while the discussion focused on autonomy, it also involved support and security. Some employees felt that they were on their own, and the lack of structure caused them to feel unsupported and insecure. Thus, while autonomy is listed among the sought after characteristics of workplaces in studies of employment relations (e.g. Maravelias, 2007; Honold, 1997; De Lissovoy, 2015), it leaves questions such as: what level of autonomy is beneficial to the employees; what are the characteristics of the working environment where autonomy works; and when does autonomy fail to benefit the employees or the company? These questions require further exploration that is beyond the scope of this research, but worth considering. For the purpose of this research, the high level of autonomy and ambiguity with minimum direct support (since the employees mentioned that the founder asked broad questions, empowered them through helping them to find the answers and trusted that the variety of the answers they developed were right, but did not directly involve himself in the projects (E11,12,13), and employees’ difficulty in dealing with such autonomy is considered a latent conflict.

Moreover, E13 pointed to “*uncertainty*” at THEL and said that the employees would never get a clear answer or a plan from the founder, but they would instead get “*good questions*” that they were to answer. He said that while he appreciated this method because it developed one’s skills to deal with uncertainty and make them strong, it was also difficult. He also mentioned that the high level of thinking that existed at the organisation failed to translate into strategy and details, which were needed to do the job, and there was no classical organisation with HR, finance, etc. anymore.



Similarly, E12 mentioned “ambiguity and complexity” as a challenge for her at the beginning, when she did not have clear responsibilities, and she was given the “*freedom to create*” her job by herself, “*within the limits of the purpose of the company*”. So, initially she was very overwhelmed, but despite this she was very happy that she started off that way, and she believed that one needed “*to be exposed to complexity and ambiguity, in order to make sense of it*”, and find what they were really passionate about. She said that she realised it was difficult for some people who needed a clear structure, clear responsibilities, Monday meetings to plan the week, etc. She said that one needed to be in that mind-set or to give themselves time to get used to it.

The statements of the two employees about uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity are aspects that characterise the balance between freedom and autonomy (Cordery, Morrison, Wright, & Wall, 2010). Cordery et. al. (2010) in their field study found that while team autonomy improved performance, task uncertainty had a negative impact on task performance. In their study, Cordery et. al. (2010, pp. 241-242) referred to task uncertainty as “*lack of predictability associated with inputs, processes and outputs of the broader technical system within which the work is performed*”, and team autonomy as “*the extent to which team members are able to exert direct control over the management and execution of an interdependent set of primary work tasks assigned to it by the organisation*”. Employees’ direct control over each project assigned to them was the type of autonomy employees in THEL experienced. Therefore, based on this study (Cordery, Morrison, Wright, & Wall, 2010), for a positive relationship between autonomy and performance they needed a balance between organisation and structure and task certainty, through which the broader aspects of the team’s work would be identified, not the individual employees’ particular roles. But task uncertainty and lack of a clear structure had demotivated some employees in THEL, and two out of the three employees left as a result. Here, to complement the previous discussion about the latent conflict in practising this level of autonomy, the latent conflict was due to the lack of some level of structure along with autonomy, such as task/job description and clarity.

On the other hand, E13 mentioned that the founder predominantly made the decisions regarding which project to accept or reject, and he rejected projects that were not in line with the purpose of the company, in order to not engage any resources on those projects

and then have to reject new projects that did fall within the criteria due to engagement of resources. However, one employee (E11) said that when they spoke about the projects they all agreed with them, but he also believed that sometimes other projects could bring in more financial resources. Accordingly, another challenge that this employee mentioned was the recent non-commercial approach of the company (weekend focus on profitability), which was more focused on the service of society than generating income. E11 explained that, since the company switched from an advisory role in internal communication to a corporate purpose, their commercial purpose was lost to him. He said he suggested to the founder they pursue this aspect through a social enterprise, where they would not charge the clients for the service. E11 said he felt confused when he was helping the clients (other organisations) find how they could influence the future, while thinking about how they would pay THEL for the service provided. Thus, he found their recent line of business more suitable for a social enterprise, not a profit-based business. Here, since the company was not a social enterprise, the employee had challenges with the purpose and approach of the company. This could be considered as a latent conflict since the employee said this issue was one of the reasons he left the company. Moreover, this can be an indicator that a society-oriented purpose and approach may not be acceptable to all, and thus it could only work in organisations where the employer and the employee share similar concerns about society.

In summary, the main areas of challenge at THEL referred to autonomy of the employees without clear plans and steps or a clear structure, and the uncertainty and ambiguity it entailed (task uncertainty). The employees also mentioned the recent less commercial corporate purpose of the organisation as another challenge, which is considered as latent conflict, since these factors made it difficult for the employees to work there although they appreciated the system as one that empowered them to grow.

#### **7.4.2 Conflicts - Observed conflict**

As areas of conflict, employees spoke about communication issues among the employees and how this created conflict among them. M1 explained an example of a personal conflict between two employees. He said that a married man and an unmarried woman

started a relationship, and everybody was silent about it, but he said that everything became challenging between them and one of them decided to leave the company. M1 mentioned another conflict, saying that an employee's personal life had 'crumbled around him' and impacted his work. E12 mentioned another example of conflict with a colleague, which involved some 'negative emotions' but she said that they spoke about it and solved it.

These were the only areas that the participants spoke about as conflicts, and mainly concern the relationships between employees. They do not indicate any areas of conflict between the interests of the employees and the company. The next section presents the way the company dealt with conflict.

### **7.4.3 Dealing with conflict**

The participants spoke about the way the company dealt with conflict through an honest and respectful discussion.

Regarding the conflict between the two employees where everyone was silent, M1 said that they learnt from that experience that they should have talked about it and resolved the problem. Similarly, about the employee whose personal life had disturbed his work M1 said they talked about it and helped him through, and the problem was resolved. In the same manner, E12 mentioned that in her conflict with another employee they spoke about it and solved it. Therefore, resolving conflict through meeting and conversation among the involved parties was THEL's way of dealing with conflict.

### **7.4.4 Employees' interests and dealing with conflict of interest at THEL in summary**

Here, the employees described the organisation as a place for them to think, be inspired and empowered, and to grow, and pursue their own interests. The employees also mentioned that they had access to other organisations that could impact the world and they found this part of their opportunities. The participants further mentioned that the

employees could pursue their interests even if not in line with the interest of the company.

However, the main challenges and area of latent conflict the employees spoke about were their freedom in doing their job with the uncertainty and ambiguity it entailed and autonomy with lack of structure. This was a latent conflict, which although did not result in observed conflict, involved a conflict between employees and the founder, even if an unspoken one. This did not involve arguments, involved respect and appreciation, but led to frustration of employees due to uncertainties in their tasks and job decisions.

Comparing the areas of employees' interests and the areas of the latent conflict, it is evident that both refer to the same characteristic of the company. While the employees spoke about the freedom and autonomy as their space to grow and why they admired the organisation, they also faced their greatest challenges with this autonomy, uncertainty and lack of structure as well.

This is a dichotomy with delegation, a dichotomy between autonomy, freedom, and employee empowerment on the one side, and the feeling of being unsupported and lost on the other. This could raise further questions such as: What level of autonomy would be beneficial to the employees and to the company? Can the autonomy be structured and defined? How can the balance be found and decided in different organisations?

## **7.5 Findings from the three case studies – Cross Case analysis**

In this chapter the interests of the employees and the spaces for them to pursue their interests, the areas of latent and observed conflict, and the companies' ways of dealing with them have been discussed. In this section the three cases are analysed in a cross-case analysis in order to develop a broader understanding to dealing with conflicts of interest across these cases.

It is notable here that the main themes in the areas of employees' interests, have been identified purely based on the inductive analysis of the data. The sub-themes that initially emerged have been revised a few times, and based on their conceptual relationship they have been further merged together to form broader themes. These main themes have been

quite similar across the three cases, with similar sub-themes, while the approaches and extent of each has varied as will be further discussed.

These results are also discussed in relation to Bahá'í scripture.

### **7.5.1 Employees' interest, and dealing with latent and observed conflict**

Participants from the three cases spoke about the employees' interests and spaces to pursue them. However, to what extent they could pursue their interests varied across the cases. In PHX it was mentioned that the employees were supported to pursue their interests as long as some of those interests were in line with the interests of the company. In AP they spoke about spaces to pursue their interests and progress, even if it did not necessarily benefit the company (such as the employee who wanted to study law and then left to continue his career in that field); and in THEL they all spoke about vast opportunities to define their tasks, pursue their interests, and even decide their type of participation even if not through permanent employment contracts with the company. The level of support for pursuing employees' interests was greater in AP and THEL; in THEL there were no limits that the employees highlighted. However, this resulted in company's change of structure from employment contracts to working through a 'network of freelancing colleagues', so that the former employees could pursue their interests in other areas as well, such as pursuing their education or working on a variety of projects not related to the context of THEL. This level of freedom in pursuing employees' interest raised the question of where the balance would be between space for employees to pursue their interests and the interest of the company, so both the company and the employees would benefit. The reasoning is that if the company does not exist, the employees would not benefit either.

Among the main areas of interest that the employees in the three cases spoke about was the discussion of fair pay, opportunities and support, and their working environment. The observed and latent areas of conflict mostly referred to fair pay, participation and autonomy, and domination of religious values and organisational culture, which carries across the cases in varying ways. These aspects are discussed across the three cases in more detail.

There were some areas of conflict that were only found in PHX, such as: the shortage of enough parking spaces or female toilets, the push for excellence and constantly elevated goals, changes of management and lack of a uniform style, competency and skills issues, and conflicts among the employees. Some of these are environmental and process related issues (such as lack of uniform management policies or competencies) and these are not covered as they were discussed in section 7.2.

#### **7.5.1.1 Fair pay and rewards**

In the discussion of fair pay and benefits, the three companies exhibited different opinions concerning fair pay. At PHX there was performance-based pay, noting that in most departments their pay reflected the merits of their performance. The wages at PHX were decided based on the benchmarks that HR held, the employees' performance, their communications with others, and the departmental budget (e.g. M2,3,36,5,6, FGD1,9). Similarly, their pay rises depended on their annual review and other quantitative and qualitative factors about their performance (e.g. M2,31, FGD6,9). Here, while most participants discussed their pay as fair and just, there were some concerns about employees at certain departments where wages were low (FGD5,8).

On the other hand, the participants spoke about profit-sharing as well as different types of recognition and rewards, such as public 'shout outs' and annual awards (e.g. M1,2,21,5,31,63, FGD1,4,6,7,9), which generated mixed reactions. The participants argued that for the awards they were all measured on the same scale (mostly innovation and hard work with long hours), which the employees did not find fair (e.g. this disadvantaged a single mother with personal responsibilities and commitments) (FGD4,8).

Here, in PHX, the concept of fairness in pay and rewards had two different aspects. On one hand, the performance-based pay (as opposed to equal pay), which some employees found unfair particularly to low-salary employees. On the other hand, a few employees who were not in the same situation as others considered the equal treatment in assessment for rewards unfair. This can indicate the dichotomy between equal pay and performance-based pay (variable pay), or equal treatment versus preferential treatment for those in

more vulnerable situations (e.g. Fineman, 2011). Considering that both approaches existed, and based on the emphasis of the managers and the company website on innovation, and the point a few employees raised about the emphasis on innovation and hard work, it can be concluded that at PHX, the focus of organisational values in employment relations was on innovation and hard work in rewarding the employees more than fairness.

In AP the participants emphasised the policy of equal pay, where the same responsibilities and positions received the same wage, and they described it as ‘fair pay’ (M1, FGD). The participants explained that they decided their salaries based on the research the employees did about their level of salary with the additional comments added in the form of a salary proposal. Then the employees and the managers met altogether, discussed the proposal, and decided the pay. The managers and the employees said that they always decided on salaries set over the norm in the market, and they all found it fair (M1,12, FGD).

At THEL the participants said that that their salaries were decided based on benchmarking, and then they tried to pay higher than average. The employees said that they did not work there because of the salary but because of the other factors such as the autonomy and opportunities to grow. The employees basically did not mention pay at the interviews until asked, and did not emphasise it even then, as opposed to the other two cases. It can indicate that while pay was an aspect of employees’ interest, it was not a great motivation for the employees in THEL. Moreover, the founder spoke about his concern in withdrawing from the profit to ensure that he was fair and withdrew less than the norm in the market. This point was not mentioned in other two cases either, and it may connect with the founder’s approach to social responsibility, which was a concern of his business. This approach is also similar to the principle in Bahá’í scripture, which requires employers to be “*moderate in the acquisition of their profits, and in their having a consideration for the welfare of the poor and needy*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976, p. 282).

In the context of fair pay, the discussion of fairness of performance-based pay versus equal pay is one of the concerns of distributive justice theory (where the focus is on the fairness of outcome of distribution in organisations) in comparison to procedural justice

theory (where the focus is on how the decisions are made and how the disputes are handled) (Greenberg, 1990). Theories of distributive justice compare the performance-related pay with equalised pay (equity theory), where the former finds performance-related pay as fair, and the latter emphasises equal pay (Greenberg, 1990). The concept of fair pay in AP followed the equity theory of distributive justice, as well as procedural justice, where the process of coming to the decision was of importance. These theories and their relevance will be further explored in the Discussion Chapter.

In summary, most of the participants from the three companies described the overall pay mechanisms of the companies as fair, while a few employees at PHX found equity theory unfair and few others found performance-based pay unfair. Moreover, the participants at AP exhibited particular concerns about fairness of pay through employee involvement in deciding their level of pay and equal treatment, and all the participants emphasised the importance of the fairness of the outcome and the procedure of their pay mechanism.

In Bahá'í scripture, the employers are required to pay their employees 'high enough' that they can live comfortably and save for their times of need ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277) or to receive additional pay when they cannot work (similar to the concept of insurance and pensions). However, this scripture does not identify how much is high enough, and it has not been expanded to consider that the saving abilities of individuals vary. It provides an overall guideline for the employees to pay their employees a high enough wage that the employees would find them fair. Thus, with this scripture's emphasis on collective decision-making where "*the shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87), it can be concluded that the Bahá'í scripture also takes a distributive approach to fair pay, where through participative decision-making, in which employees can influence how much is 'enough' for them for a decent life, the pay can be decided. Accordingly, in the three companies, the participants in AP and THEL spoke about their pay which they found enough, and in AP higher than average as the employees stated, but in PHX, there were a variety of opinions where while some were paid high wages, some did not believe they were paid enough. On the other hand, the founder in PHX had stated that based on the Bahá'í principles he distributed part of the profit of the company among the employees when they reached their target (he did not specify how much), and he designed a



mechanism to pay it based on the employees' years of service not based on their salary level, in order to distribute the profit justly. However, as some managers and employees mentioned due to the financial crisis a few years before the interviews, the company had not been able to distribute profits recently. It displayed the founder's efforts to employ the principles he believed in, but he struggled to apply them in practice based on his circumstances. So here, to answer whether it was possible to maintain the Bahá'í principles in practice, in terms of fair pay, AP and THEL seemed to be able to apply them, while PHX had struggled.

### **7.5.1.2 Participation and autonomy**

The participants in the three cases spoke about the spaces that they could participate in or influence on the decisions of the companies, through suggestions, input, participation in decision-making, or autonomy over their decisions. In PHX, while most employees said that they were involved in various ways including managing their work, being able to work on the projects they were passionate about, making suggestions and raising concerns through the open-door policy, and having input and influence on the decisions that the managers made, there were a few employees that spoke about being excluded from the decisions, even if related to them.

This was identified as an area of conflict in PHX, as some employees could not influence the decisions of the company in any way. Moreover, autonomy of the employees over their decisions was rarely mentioned in PHX, it was only there for those employees with seniority with the company.

Conversely, the high level of autonomy, uncertainty and lack of structure resulted in latent conflict in THEL; so, while it provided the employees with opportunities to grow and form their work as they decided, it also challenged some of them and they felt unsupported due to the uncertainties.

This was not an area of conflict in AP, but lack of autonomy resulted in conflict in PHX, and broad task and job autonomy resulted in conflict in THEL. Therefore, a question for further research was posed, as to what level of autonomy would be beneficial to the

employees and the company; and what are its requirements (for instance considering the insistence of the employees on some structure and stronger support, whether these are influential characteristics)?

In Bahá'í scripture, autonomy has not been specifically mentioned, but it was found that it strongly emphasised collective decision-making. Since participation in decision-making is the topic for the next chapter, this is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

### **7.5.1.3 Latent conflict due to dominance of organisational culture/religious values**

In the three cases, aspects of organisational culture had been highlighted and the employees specified characteristics of their culture that made their organisation different and was the reason why they enjoyed working in the company. This also encouraged and empowered them and created a friendly and supportive environment, where they could make mistakes and were supported to overcome these and improve, they covered for each other at times of need, and helped each other in difficulties.

However, the strength of organisational culture varied in the three companies. In AP the participants articulated different aspects of their organisational culture in similar terms, and spoke about a variety of examples about these. This can relate to a strong organisational culture based on intensity and consensus on aspects of culture (O'Reilly, 1989; Schein, 1984). In PHX there were disagreements about some of the aspects of culture, and in THEL the organisational culture was not stressed and articulated as much; thus, PHX and THEL did not indicate strong organisational cultures.

However, this could also relate to dominance of religious values in AP, which was strongly featured in relation to Bahá'í principles. In AP, the participants, while not being adherents of the Bahá'í Faith, strongly supported the values in their organisation and how this made their organisation different and successful. They characterised this success with the quality of the care they provided, the results in client wellbeing, and the recognition they had received from local institutions in mental health in such short period of time (five years operation by the time of interview). This could indicate that the principles had been imposed on the employees and that they had been internalised. It indicates the

power of domination (Kunda, 2009). However, based on Lukes, domination is exertion of power if it is against the real interest of the individuals, and the employees will later on realise their interest and resist. Here, based on the awareness of the employees in expressing and articulation of those values; the examples they shared in which they stated they had benefited from the values such as the culture of ‘no blame’, support and collective decision-making; and how they explained the values with positive and passionate expressions, it will refer to influence rather than dominance, as Lukes (2005) distinguishes (i.e. influence is not against the individual’s interest, but domination is). Therefore, it was concluded that the religious principles were not imposed on the employees.

### **7.5.2 Dealing with conflict**

Dealing with conflict was spoken about with a common overall approach in the three cases of discussing the issue among the members in conflict and resolving the issue. In PHX, however, the employees had less influence in resolving conflict. The participants in PHX mentioned a mechanism for dealing with conflict through discussion with the employees, then discussing it with the top manager, and finally referring the case to HR if required. They said that employees had a participative role in resolving the conflict, however, regarding the disputes over the annual reviews, the managers’ say would bear a greater weight and the employees were required to back their points with a letter and evidence, which they rarely did. Therefore, the employees’ voice did not bear much weight in resolving the conflicts in annual reviews, which ultimately influenced the pay rises they could receive. This further expands on the question of fair pay in PHX, where the employees had little influence on their rises and they were mainly decided by the managers (as opposed to procedural justice (Greenberg, 1990)).

In AP, the examples of conflict included an issue with an employee who did not involve others and caused a delay in the project, a misunderstanding among employees, a mistake towards a client, and disagreement of employees with a decision that the founder had made. The participants mentioned that they were examples of conflict in the past, but they had resolved these through meetings among those in conflict and discussing the

situation in a respectful, supportive environment without blaming. For instance, in the disagreement with the decision of the founder about diverting the clients' calls to employees' mobile phones, the employees tested it and found issues with the decision, therefore they called for a meeting and together discussed it and changed the decision. This method of resolving conflict pointed to the consultative/collaborative approach in AP, as further explored in Chapter 8, and indicated space for employees to pursue their interest or influence the decisions in the company.

In THEL, the participants mentioned some areas of latent conflict, the uncertainty and ambiguity, lack of structure, clear plans or steps forward, the less commercial organisational objective, and the extended autonomy of the employees. These were the same areas that the participants had mentioned as the strength of the company as they admired and their space to grow. This was considered as the dichotomy of autonomy and delegation, where autonomy possibly required some level of structure such as task certainty (Cordery, Morrison, Wright, & Wall, 2010) in order to be beneficial to the employees and company. The participants at THEL mentioned that they resolved their conflicts through sitting together and speaking about them, which in this case of latent conflict resulted in the employees' (the two employees who were interviewed in this research) decision to leave the company since they were not comfortable with the level of autonomy. However, this posed the question as why the process of the company did not change to utilise the interest of the employees, it was then realised by the researcher that another reason that the employees left was that they preferred to pursue their own interest further and set up their own business as they saw themselves capable and ready.

In summary, in PHX employees had some spaces to pursue their interests and they often resolved the conflict through meetings and discussion; however, there were some unresolved conflicts such as the low salaries of employees in production and R&D. Moreover, some conflicts, for instance about the annual reviews, were often resolved with the opinion of the managers taking precedence. Here, although the managers did not force their opinion, the employees needed to provide additional evidence to support their point, which they would not do. Thus, employees' interests were not strongly utilised in resolving the conflicts. In AP, they resolved the conflicts in discussion among the employees in a supportive and blameless environment; and there were no unresolved

conflicts. In THEL, they emphasised conversations for resolving the conflicts, however, the level of uncertainty and autonomy of the employees resulted in the change of structure of the company from employment to freelancing relationship, so that the employees could pursue their other interests as well.

In exploring the question raised at the end of section 7.2.1, about whether the Bahá'í principles are possible to maintain when a dominant national culture may influence them in other directions, it was evident that the index of individualism in UK, at 89, was close to the index in US (91), however, the conflict resolution and the spaces to pursue their interests in the UK companies (AP and THEL) did not point to an individualist system and considered spaces for the employees' interest, their welfare and participation and influence in contrast with PHX. Therefore, it can be concluded that it was possible to operate based on these principles even with the influence of a different national culture.

In Bahá'í scripture, conflict has been greatly discouraged and all have been advised to live in peace and unity while appreciating and supporting diversity (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, pp. 61-62; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1998, p. 176). However, differing opinion has been welcomed and has been considered as necessary in discovering the “*shining spark of truth*” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87). There, discussion and consultation has been highly advised and encouraged (e.g. Bahá'u'lláh, 1991, p. 93).

The method of dealing with conflict at the three organisations based on discussing the issues with the employees or other relevant parties showed similarities to the method discussed through the scriptural study; however, the approach by AP which involved discussion and consultation, in unity while maintaining diversity (of religions, nationalities, and gender), and welcoming 'differing opinions', showed the most similarities with Bahá'í scripture.

## **7.6 Summary**

This chapter has focused on the spaces for employees to pursue their interests, the areas of conflict, and how the organisations dealt with conflict. These areas have been initially

analysed and presented here through single case analysis, and then through cross-case analysis, and their relation to the results of the scriptural study on Bahá'í scripture.

In the three cases, some areas of employees' interests and space for them to pursue their interests have been identified, such as different pay mechanisms and rewards, training and spaces for development and growth, support and flexibility, and an empowering and encouraging working environment. These spaces for employees to pursue their interests were mentioned in different scales in the three cases, and the employees mentioned different levels of autonomy and control over their work and in pursuit of their interests.

Furthermore, some areas of conflict have been identified at the three organisations including issues of pay, lack of or extended autonomy and uncertainty, and latent conflict through organisational culture. The organisations discussed their ways of dealing with conflict through discussion and support.

Moreover, in Bahá'í scripture, based on the scriptural study, it was noted that conflict among people has been discouraged while conflict of opinion has been encouraged. Therefore, discussion and consultation to deal with conflict shows similarity to those results.

In the next chapter, employee involvement as another aspect of employment relations is discussed and the results of the analysis of the three organisations are presented.

## **8 Employee involvement**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, the data relevant to power and authority and dealing with conflict, were discussed. In this chapter the data in relation to employee involvement are presented and analysed. In line with the previous chapters, this chapter is composed of the analysis of the three cases separately, followed by a cross-case analysis.

This chapters answers the fourth question of the primary research:

***Employee involvement:*** What are the policies and practices through which these organisations involve their employees in decision-making? To what extent are the employees involved and do they have control over those decisions and their application? Are there any systems in place to mobilise employee participation? If so, what are their characteristics and limitations?

The results of the analysis were generated from a qualitative and Nvivo-assisted analysis of the data rather than a framework, and therefore some subthemes and aspects vary between the cases. These differences are more evident in this chapter since the three companies, while all valuing and employing involvement and consultation, utilised quite different levels and styles of employee involvement, which resulted in a higher-level cross-case analysis.

Since the results of the analyses showed similarities to some theories of involvement, those theories were employed here to form the subheadings for each case. The results, and the similarities and the differences, are presented at the end of the chapter.

### **8.2 First Case Study - PHX**

At PHX, the participants from different departments spoke about employee involvement and participation in different ways. In this section, the types of involvement that the participants mentioned, the processes and the mechanisms for employee participation, and the policies that would support or limit employee participation are covered.

### 8.2.1 Participation in decision making

Participants referred to different levels of involvement in the decisions of the organisation. In discussion of employee involvement, a variety of management styles were mentioned, including a more authoritative style, some levels of participatory styles, and an empowering approach (e.g. FGD2,5,8). Some managers seemed to be more flexible, while others appeared to be stricter, focused on checks and controls, revisions and rectifications. This shows a lack of uniform management policy and practice, although having a standardised management policy is generally a characteristic of multinational organisations (e.g. Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Christmann, 2004).

The types of involvement discussed by the participants resembled the ‘normative’ model of decision-making described by Vroom<sup>56</sup> (2003), as well as having some similarities to the participation model as Cotton et al.<sup>57</sup> (1988, p. 10) described. These levels of involvement are listed below based on their similarity with Vroom’s (2003) theory, starting from ‘no involvement’ as the lowest level of involvement, and continuing to ‘delegation’ as the highest level of involvement.

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<sup>56</sup> Vroom (2003) in his ‘Normative’ model of decision-making considers five types of decision-making processes where the leader may: **Decide** (with just getting information from employees); **Consult** (individuals); **Consult** (groups); **Facilitate** (the discussion and decision of the groups); and **Delegate** (the problem and the decision to the employees while supporting them).

<sup>57</sup> Cotton et al. (1988, p. 10) , at the centre of the debate of employee participation, considered six forms of practice: a) **Participation in work decisions** (formal, direct, long-term, high influence with veto right, focused on the work, how it is organized, etc., positive impact on productivity); b) **Consultative participation** (long-term, formal, direct participation, focused on job issues, lesser level of employee influence-no veto or complete decision-making power); c) **Short-term participation** (formal, direct and concerned with work itself, with complete influence in the decision-making process, in the form of single laboratory sessions to few days training sessions, no significant impacts observed); d) **Informal participation** (through the interpersonal relationships between managers and the subordinates, increased productivity and job satisfaction in the few studies conducted); e) **Employee ownership** (formal ownership rights, indirect participation-often run controversially: although owned by employees, managers make both daily and strategic decisions; employees influence on managerial decisions through election of the board and stockholder meetings, decisions can cover any area, positive impact on performance, satisfaction and motivation); and f) **Representative participation** – rather than the dimensions from the taxonomy- (formal, indirect and medium to low influence, participation through representatives on the work councils or board of directors, covers all areas).



### **8.2.1.1 No involvement**

This aspect indicates no involvement of the employees at any stage of the process of decision-making. There were two employees that said they were not involved in any decisions at their department. In FGD5, an employee said that, despite his relevant education, several years of experience and the scientists' trust in his opinions, his manager did not include him in any decisions. Another employee in FGD2 said:

*“They never tell us. I mean the supervisors; those are the ones that decide what to do. I mean even if you have to tell them, they're going to do whatever is better for the company not for us, I mean that's from my opinion in the department.”*

Some managers (e.g. M1,3,6) also said that they made some decisions unilaterally, such as strategic decisions about the life cycle of a product or decisions regarding allocating the resources to different projects.

So here some employees were not involved in any decision-making in their departments, and strategic decisions were made solely by managers.

### **8.2.1.2 Decide**

One of the managers (M7) explained that his decision-making was based on acquiring facts. So, he initially gathered all the facts from the employees and then he verified them to make sure he had all the right information. Next, he asked the opinions of the subject matter experts (which would not necessarily be the same employees). He then assessed the obstacles and made the decision.

In this case, the employees were only involved to the extent of providing information, which does not indicate involvement in decision-making.

### **8.2.1.3 Consult (individuals or groups)**

Another form of involvement mentioned at PHX was through inputs and suggestions. The participants said that the managers asked for employees' input, their suggestions, and

feedback, and then they made the decisions accordingly (e.g. M34,7,6, FGD1). This included asking for employees' input as a group or individually. Furthermore, the participants said that they freely shared their opinions, suggestions and concerns with any manager without any limitations (e.g. FGD10,1,3,6, M1,2,21,3,31,36,41,5). Cotton et al. (1988, p. 10) call this type of participation *consultative participation*, where it involves long-term formal direct participation by the employees, is focused on the job issues, and has lesser level of employee influence, and no veto power or complete decision-making power by the employees.

An example of this type of participation was eliminating paperwork of invoices, as staff suggested at a monthly meeting (M21). M21 said that they had additional meetings to discuss the suggestion and he challenged the employees to make sure they had thought everything through, then when they were sure, they made the change.

Another example about 'consulting a group', was about validating a product and the direction of the project, where supervisors, the manager and a few employees met and discussed the credibility of the data, reviewed the concept, checked if it was an outlier or within the expectations, whether they needed to change the direction of the project, etc., and then, through individual and team assignments, they executed the new plan (M72).

Similarly, an employee in FGD5 explained the process of making a decision and said:

*"I will definitely go to you... I'll also give you my own opinion, I'm sure if it's say price wise I will make sure that I do my work with diligence and look at what options are, and I may propose to you this is what I think we ought to do. But as my manager you would give me the ultimate word."*

In these examples, the managers made the final decisions, while they employed the employees' input, suggestions and opinions in the decisions they made.

Another example was that the manager made the decisions with the employees and in close communication with them, so at the end the decision was not necessarily the manager's decision but the voice of the team, although the manager took responsibility for the final decision (e.g. FGD2, M5). Cotton et al. (1988, p. 10) call this type of participation *informal participation* where the involvement happens through the

interpersonal relationships between managers and the employees and they are both involved at different stages of the work.

In summary however, in these decisions often the managers made the final decisions, and employees' involvement was limited to providing input and opinions.

#### **8.2.1.4 Facilitate**

Another level of employee involvement is when the manager creates the environment for the employees to discuss, and the manager provides support. For instance, M63 mentioned an example when they needed to do the graphic design of a campaign cover, where his employees approached him with a conflict of opinion on the cover; he brought them together, asked them to present their ideas, offered his advice, and encouraged them to come to an agreed solution for the layout of the product. He said that he believed in the power of consultation and he tried to encourage his employees to employ consultation.

In this example, the manager did not make the decision but brought employees together in order for them to come to an agreement, which indicates a high level of involvement.

#### **8.2.1.5 Delegate**

Another type of involvement that the several participants mentioned was that employees had autonomy and freedom to make their own decisions (e.g. M31,36,41,42, FGD3). However, it was not the case in all departments. Some examples of the autonomy included: the employees with longer tenure at the company had more freedom in making their decisions (e.g. M36, FGD1,3,4); and, also, employees who had proven their capabilities and had earned trust (e.g. FGD1, M1,31,42,51,6). However, this ownership of decisions applied only to certain decisions, and did not carry any veto rights by the employees. Cotton et al. (1988) described this as '*consultative participation*'.

More examples of autonomy and trust included the employees who had been given "*the leeway to make the decisions*" but would go to the manager when they needed a second opinion or if the issue was very important (M31). M31 said that he had similarly been trusted by the founder, but he would also go to the founder and ask for his input when

needed. Similarly, M36 said that her employees generally made their own decisions, but they also knew when to involve the supervisors, for instance if they had a problem. M41 also explained that they had specialised computer-based tools that helped the employees to make decisions as well. Similarly, in FGD3 the employees said that they made most of their decisions individually or as a team.

So, the exercise of delegation in AP was through the employees' autonomy to make some decisions, however, they did not have full autonomy to decide the goals or the deadlines; and their decisions were limited to achieving the objectives set by the managers. This type of exercise of autonomy and delegation is similar to autonomy in post-modernist theories according to Grey (2007).

#### **8.2.1.6 *Employees' participation in decision-making, summary***

In brief, in PHX there were different practices of employee involvement ranging from no involvement, to providing information, providing input and suggestions, participating in decision-making, and some level of autonomy and ownership; this varied even within departments. The discussions did not present involvement as a company strategy, but overall as a culture of participation that was variably present from the participants' perceptions and practices. However, participation to the extent of 'consult' as Vroom (2003) explains prevailed, where managers were often in charge of the decisions and employees only provided input, opinions and suggestions.

#### **8.2.2 *Managers' autonomy in relation to the founder***

Another aspect of participation was the managers' autonomy in relation to their superiors or the founder. Managers spoke widely about their decision-making processes and the autonomy over their decisions and operations, which resulted in a variety of management styles at the company (e.g. M2,3,5,6,7,21,36,41, 51,63,72, FGD2,5,8). However, there were also some references to involvement of the founder as well, such as: in the problems that the managers considered important (e.g. M1, FGD3); high-value financial decisions

(e.g. M2); deciding on particular procedures and policies (e.g. M2,6,7); and the award winners at the annual awards ceremony (e.g. FGD7).

This can indicate that while managers generally had a high level of autonomy in their decisions, for high-value decisions or financial problems they sought the founders' opinion or approval. This has some similarities with '*employee ownership*' (managers as employees to the founder) as in Cotton et al. (1988), where the founder mostly made the strategic decisions. However, there was no employees/managers power through election of a board as Cotton et al. (1988) indicated.

On the other hand, the dominant characteristics of organisational culture, introduced and emphasised by the founder over the years, seemed to have had an impact on some aspects of employment relations. Among the particular characteristics of employment relations that were often referred to were: involving others (managers or employees connected to the matter) at the decision-making (e.g. M1,41, FGD1) and a softened hierarchy (e.g. M6,21,36,41); hard work, high expectations, and excellence (e.g. M1, FGD7,8,9); philanthropy and service (e.g. M1,21,72, FGD2,3); and customer value (M1, 51,63,7, FGD1,7).

The influence of organisational culture has been considered as normative power by some researchers (e.g. Kunda, 2009; Bass & Bass, 2009), while it is not considered as an exercise of power by other researchers (e.g. Lukes, 2005) if there is no indication of conflict. At PHX, all managers who spoke about aspects of the organisational culture spoke in agreement with them, and therefore it is not considered as exercise of power of the founder over managers, most importantly because the managers often had their own styles, processes and practice, and agreed with the organisational culture in their own way and with their own interpretations.

In summary, managers had a high level of autonomy, but they needed the founder's opinion or approval on some matters (i.e. not absolute autonomy), and they were also influenced by some aspects of organisational culture. This level of autonomy is similar to characteristics of freedom in post-bureaucracy as well, and this will be further discussed in the Discussion Chapter.

### **8.2.3 Mechanisms and procedures**

Participants mentioned certain mechanisms and procedures in place in PHX, further expanding the discussions on participation and involvement. These mechanisms mainly included meetings, the open-door policy, and employees' feedback mechanisms.

#### **8.2.3.1 Meetings**

Participants frequently mentioned different types of meetings in different departments, including regular or subject-based meetings. These different types, with the level of employee involvement they entailed, were explored.

Some employees spoke about regular – daily, weekly or monthly – team meetings to review progress and priorities, solve issues and problems, and improve communications within and between departments (e.g. M2,41,42, FGD1). Some of these meetings were focused on information sharing and some others were more collaborative, where employees shared their suggestions and feedback.

Another example of the regular meetings were monthly or annual summits for reviewing the procedures and the status of the work of the head office and subsidiaries and preparing the reports as well as planning for the following year, including individuals' reports of their success, challenges, expected changes, the new resources needed, and plans for the next year (e.g. M2, FGD1). These meetings involved less decision-making but more employee involvement in sharing the reports and suggestions.

Alternatively, the occasional meetings included: meetings among the entire department to share success and the failure (FGD1); meetings with staff for validating a product or the direction of the research, or sharing ideas for changes in procedure (M2,72); and a casual meeting at a manager's house to discuss customer service, new philosophies, etc. (M5). Here the participants said that the employees' ideas were carefully considered, and they were informed of the resulted actions/changes (e.g. M2,72, FGD1,3,6,10).

In brief, PHX utilised meetings as a means of gaining information, opinions and feedback, solving problems, and making plans and deciding on the following steps. Although employee participation mattered in many of those meetings, decision-making

was not a significant aspect of those meetings, and they mostly involved the ‘decide’ (obtaining information) or ‘consult’ (obtaining opinions and suggestions) aspect of Vroom’s (2003) participation.

### **8.2.3.2 The open-door policy**

The participants frequently mentioned the open-door policy as one of the specific features of their work at PHX. They said that all employees could knock at any manager’s door and share with them their opinions, suggestions and concerns. The participants said that their opinions were carefully considered, and they would be updated about their results (e.g. FGD1, FGD1,3,6,10, M1,2,21,3,31,36,41,5).

For instance, an employee in FGD10 said:

*“... And so, if there’s something that employees aren’t happy about then obviously the organization needs to change and adapt to that, and I feel like the organization is willing. I mean there’s several things that have come out from that.”*

Some examples of such changes were the fitness centre, some social events for the employees, and the food truck on site<sup>58</sup> (instead of the requested cafeteria) (FGD10). Another employee mentioned that the glass walls of the offices enabled and encouraged the open-door policy (FGD10).

This was another mechanism to channel the employees’ voice through ‘*informal participation*’ as Cotton et al. (1988, p. 10) discussed, which is mostly through the interpersonal relationships between managers and the subordinates rather than particular meetings or official channels. The open-door policy served as the ‘consult’ aspect of participation, as Vroom (2003) mentions, for obtaining employees’ suggestions and inputs.

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<sup>58</sup> The employees mentioned that they had asked for a cafeteria but that had not been feasible at one point, and the food truck was offered instead, which they said they were happy about (FGD10).

### **8.2.3.3 Employees' feedback mechanisms**

There was mention of several methods for receiving employees' feedback, as another mechanism for employees' participation. Examples of these means were: suggestion boxes; monthly poll survey; poll surveys following big events or big initiatives (e.g. launching a new program); and shout-outs<sup>59</sup> for recognition and feedback (M31). M31 mentioned examples of changes as a result of the poll survey such as the 'benefits' the company offered based on the requests of the employees, building the athletic centre and the type of philanthropic activities to engage with.

The results of the surveys were analysed by the Human Resource department, the founder and a few other managers, who decided on how to proceed. The results of the decisions were then communicated with the employees (M31). Some examples of the suggestions that had been rejected were more holidays or more paid time off since it was not realistic to apply this to 500 employees according to M31. Some employees in FGD2 mentioned that 'more holidays' had not been considered as well.

These examples suggest that not all the employees' requested were accepted democratically, and the decision depended on the costs, the impact of the change, etc. This mechanism was similar to the 'consult' aspect of participation as Vroom (2003) mentions, as it only involved employees' suggestions and inputs.

### **8.2.3.4 Mechanisms of participation in brief**

The mechanisms that the participants spoke about such as regular or occasional meetings, the open-door policy, and some feedback mechanisms involving employees' suggestions, input, feedback and complaints, involve the aspect which Vroom (2003) calls 'consult' or obtained information which Vroom (2003) calls 'decide'. These are the aspects of employee involvement that were most frequently spoken about by the participants as their ways of participation.

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<sup>59</sup> Shout-outs were an employee recognition mechanism through which emails were sent to the whole company recognising a particular employee, where many others responded to that and thanked the employee.



#### **8.2.4 Involvement and participation in PHX, summary**

In this section various levels of employee involvement in the decisions of the company along with different mechanisms and policies that facilitated participation at PHX are looked at. This company presented different levels of involvement, more as part of the organisational culture, than a company strategy to be applied across the company.

There were some levels of autonomy based on the employees' years of experience with the company and the capacities they had exhibited, but it was only mentioned by a few employees in some departments.

The most commonly mentioned practices were employees' participation through information, input and opinion, suggestions, and feedback through different meetings, the open-door policy and feedback channels. Therefore, the managers often made the decisions and employees were informed about the results.

Moreover, the participation that was mentioned at PHX only included direct participation and there was no formal union representation or shop stewards. However, there was reference to supervisors representing the opinions of the employees (FGD2).

Overall, based on the views expressed and the existing mechanisms, it can be generalised that the level of involvement most frequently practised at PHX was 'consult' as Vroom (2003) calls it, which was mostly through gaining employees' (individually or in groups) input and suggestions, with the decision resting with the managers.

### **8.3 Second Case Study – AP**

At AP, employee involvement and consultation were extensively spoken about in the interviews and the FGD; this dominated over half of the conversations. The results of the analysis of the data are presented in this section.

#### **8.3.1 A 'consultative approach'**

The process of decision-making at AP was explained as a "consultative" approach. As the participants explained, the strategic decisions were made through 'consultation' among

the managers and would involve the employees who were connected to the decision; and the decisions regarding the clients were made through ‘consultation’ between the employees, their managers and the clients, but the employee would be in charge of implementing the decision, planning what needed to be done about his/her client (M1,11,12, FGD). The phrase ‘consultation’ repeatedly used at AP did not refer to the ‘consult’ stage of participation as used by Vroom (2003), but it mostly resembled the ‘facilitate’ stage. In this section the ‘consultative approach’ as defined and practised in AP is explored.

Managers made the strategic decisions, or decisions about promotion of the employees, in consultation. For instance, M12 offered an example of promoting a senior support worker to manage their new accommodation which was proposed by the founder, and then all the managers and the founder met, discussed their opinions, and decided together whether to promote the employee. Then, M12 explained, they needed to decide on a replacement in her team for the promoted employee. She said that all the managers met, they all proposed names and explained why they proposed the particular person, discussed what they thought, what could he or she do, what if another person replaced him/her, etc. She said that the managers who brought the cases accepted the results of the consultation since they analysed it together. She said at their consultations, they analysed the pros and cons of different options and they made a joint decision. She said:

*“So, we analyse together, we try to be analytical, we try to understand and this through reflection and through consultation; and then maybe what was my point of view can be reviewed because all the other things are brought to the table and are discussed.”*

This method has some similarities with the analytic hierarchy process (AHP), which is one of the common processes studied in group decision-making (Saaty, 2008). However, in AHP, there is a step-by-step process to: define the problem; set the objective, criteria, and alternatives; set the comparison matrices; weight the options by priorities; and come to a decision. At AP they did not seem to follow a process, such as setting the criteria, alternatives, etc., but they strongly stressed the characteristics of the consultation approach.

M1 explained, in detail, the characteristics of their consultations and said that they did not argue, did not have an offensive or defensive dynamic in any of their relationships with each other or during team meetings, did not push personal agendas, nobody took ownership of the ideas so that when put forward they belonged to everybody, did not have inter departmental rivalry or competition at any level where each department would be trying for the best interests of their own, but rather they were trying for the interests of everybody concerned and all the departments, which ultimately benefited the whole organisation and all the stakeholders.

M1 further stated that when the decision was made, then everybody took ownership and worked towards that objective. If the decision ended in success, nobody took credit, and if it did not, nobody would be blamed, but they learned from it and moved on. M12 said that if that solution did not work, they brought it back to the table for discussion and further analysis. She said: “...it’s never management who takes the lead and says that’s it”, but they ‘made the decisions together’; they discussed different options, and then the solution that had the majority’s agreement would be their way forward. Similarly, M1 mentioned that “one or two individuals do not really take the over-riding decision, the decision is made by the majority of the people who are involved in that project”. He said that they ideally aimed for a unanimous decision, but if not, they went with the majority.

Here the participants characterised the consultative approach at AP as discussion about different issues with a focus on the aspects of communication (e.g. not argumentative or offensive/defensive approach, no departmental competition, detachment from one’s ideas), and making the decision based on consensus, or otherwise majority voting. This is not a common process for organisational decision-making, particularly the aspects of the environment for consultation. Majority voting has been mostly studied in political settings (e.g. Dahl, 2017; Tullock, 1959). Tullock (1959) argued that there were certain problems in majority voting in government settings, such as the paradoxes in the process itself (e.g. logrolling, referring to vote trading), the voters being poorly informed or even deceived, and oversimplification of the issues in order to reduce them to a simple form to be determined by vote. However, here the participants insisted on different aspects of communication and transference of information and opinions, detachment from one’s

ideas or departmental interest in their consultations, and freely discussing the issues from different aspects; which are opposite to the issues Tullock (1959) raised.

Furthermore, the participants spoke about consultation with the employees in most of the organisational decisions. For instance, M12 said that part of her role was to make deadlines and schedules, which she did in consultation with the employees. Other examples included running an accommodation complex, renovating programmes, improved recovery programs for the clients or dealing with a specific situation with a client (M1,11,12). M11 explained that the teams met weekly and they discussed any issues that would arise and if anything needed to change. He explained that he never said, 'let's do this'. He brought the issues to the meeting, they discussed the problems together and came up with different solutions, and then decided on the solution they preferred.

M12 explained another example about dealing with a specific situation with a client and said that the managers and the employees met and discussed the case that was put forward and then everybody would “*give their advice or their point of view*”, and then they would “*decide together what to do*”. She was asked further what she meant by deciding together. M12 described that they would employ certain characteristics as part of the process:

*“Well there is a process of reflection and then we try to be logical, we try to be respectful, like for example during the meeting there is we try to not talk at each other, to not if somebody says something which is not in line with what I think I would respect it and we try to then analyse the pros and the cons and then make the best decision on the base of whatever has been said.”*

These examples explain some aspects of group decision-making process, where the group comes to a collective decision (e.g. Herrera, Herrera-Viedma, & Verdegay, 1995).

However, participants mentioned that although they used a consultative approach, employees – the support workers – had autonomy over the decisions about the clients under their care. The participants explained that every support worker was the named key worker for several clients. The employees decided what to do every day, but in planning the clients 'development program' they also involved the client and other relevant parties

(FGD). Moreover, if there were any issues with the clients, then the employees took the issues to the meeting for consultation (M12).

M1 further said that *“the role of support worker is quite creative and free”*, while they generally planned together about what to be done. M1 explained that the support that they offered to their clients varied from attending an appointment with them, to get them engaged in education and training, to dealing with their benefits. He mentioned that the way each support worker decided to provide the services to their client, the relationship they built with them, the way they engaged with the clients and understood them, what was important for the clients to achieve, which activities or workshops to hold for them, was *“very personal”* and depended on the decisions of the employees.

Similarly, employees mentioned that when they started, they were supervised for some time so that they got confident and got used to the work. Then they were *“very independent in our (their) work”*. An employee mentioned that they obviously needed feedback on big issues, and they had a well-kept system for data that they all had access to if they needed to know anything, but unless there was an issue the employees made their own decisions. She continued that they had weekly meetings where they discussed their issues or shared their methods with each other, and the managers attended as well and could help, along with other employees, if there were any issues (FGD).

Another employee said that the employees managed their workload because everybody worked differently, and they managed the way they related to their clients, which could vary from one client to another for the same support worker as well (FGD). She said:

*“So, it’s just really working in your own way to try and engage that client, and as well it’s really good that we’ve had these meetings so you can sit down and be like I tried this with so and so and it’s not working, what do you think? So, it’s not only you get the input from the manager, it’s also means that other support workers can be like oh I’ve tried this before, maybe that as well, so it’s like input from everyone and just really I guess team work and not necessarily just our managers telling you what to do really.”*

Here, the employees described their work with a sense of autonomy and support, stressing that they made their own decisions and when needed they brought their issues to

consultation, with managers, other employees, the clients, and external institutions. This combination of autonomy and consultation is a characteristic which, as discussed in Chapter 6, on the one hand limits autonomy and on the other hand can empower the employees to be supported when they face a problem or an issue.

Furthermore, in the FGD the employees explained the decision-making process about the wages. They said that at the end of every year the founder asked the employees to conduct benchmarking research about their salaries, add what they thought was fair, and then propose it as their desired salary. Then they sat together in a meeting, discussed the points, while the founder listened carefully and took them into consideration. The employees said that they had always received what they asked for. The founder mentioned the same and said that the employees were fair in what they asked for (M1). The employees at FGD mentioned that their salary was higher than the support workers in other organisations according to their benchmarking research and previous experience, but it matched their backgrounds and what they did at AP. An employee said: *“this is also I believe very fair and you will not find elsewhere so easily.”*

In summary, the participants explained their method of decision-making was based on a consultative approach, where decisions were mainly made through discussions in meetings and the final decision would be through the consensus or the opinion of the majority. They said that they maintained respect, not speaking over each other, were logical, were not offensive or defensive, and were detached from one’s opinion and ready to discuss and accept other points of view. On the other hand, they said that the employees had autonomy to manage their workload and their relationship with their clients, but they involved others when required. They added that their pay was decided based on employees’ benchmarking research and the following consultation between the employees and the managers.

This discussion does not resemble the types of participation studied by Cotton et al. (1988), as the commonly cited types of consultation. However, it is similar to the aspects of participation discussed by Vroom (2003) in the ‘facilitate’ stage, where the discussions happened in a group and the leader facilitated the discussion, and the group made the final decisions, as well as ‘delegate’, where the decisions of the job were delegated to the

employees, while the leader provided support. These areas will be further analysed in the Discussions Chapter.

Moreover, this method of decision-making is similar to the method of decision-making based on Bahá'í scripture discussed in Chapter 3, where the Bahá'ís are advised to consult in all matters including in business ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982), with particular characteristics such as calmness and composure ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 72), care and moderation to express their views ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 88), and detachment from one's opinion ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87).

The next section covers the mechanisms for participation at AP.

### **8.3.2 Mechanisms and procedures**

The main employee involvement strategy described at AP was the culture of consultation. In this section, the mechanisms and procedures that they employed to facilitate consultation are explored further.

#### **8.3.2.1 Meetings**

The participants repeatedly referred to their meetings as the main mechanism that utilised the 'consultation' approach in AP. Some of those meetings were regular meetings and some were the occasional meetings any employee or manager could request/set up when there was an issue they needed to discuss.

Among the regular meetings were the morning meetings to hand over the shift and updating the team on the clients (M12), weekly meetings with all the managers, senior support workers and support workers (the whole support team) where they discussed the needs of their clients and made decisions together (M11,12), and monthly meetings with all the staff where they discussed and decided on "*whatever needed to be done*" (M11,12).

M11 further emphasised that the discussions and decisions were not limited to the daily operations and said: "*the team meets weekly and we take decisions and if there is an issue*

*and something has to be changed in our structure, in our way to do things”*. He said that they all shared their opinions and their solutions and chose the solution that most of them agreed on (M11).

Here, the meetings were said to cover any issues, and they could be regular meetings or the meetings on request. This indicates that the employees could have influence over the agenda for discussion as well, which is one of questions of the balance of power and authority in what Lukes (2005) calls the second phase of power. Here, this power was shared since the employees could suggest changes to the structure or organisational procedures and bring those issues to meetings for discussion and decisions.

### **8.3.2.2 The open-door policy and employees’ feedback**

Another mechanism for employee participation was the open-door policy and the feedback system. Explaining the open-door policy, M1 said that they had transparency, the information was not filtered out and nobody would withhold information or intelligence from others. M12 explained that it was a flat organisation, they worked at the same office with the employees and there was no difference between them, she had also been a support worker and had dealt with the same stress and situations before, so she could understand and support them.

Here the managers explained the open-door policy in terms of a flat organisation as well as transparency, which is consistent with the culture of consultation as poor or incorrect information are among the main flaws of group decision-making (Tullock, 1959).

In addition to meetings and the open-door policy, M1 explained that they had a 360-degree feedback system where everybody was entitled to provide feedback, criticism or suggestions about ‘anything’, through one-to-one or group meetings, and it did not fall ‘on deaf ears’. M1 said:

*“We also have a 360-degree feedback, so if anyone’s not happy at any time, because part of our mission statement is to make sure everyone’s happy, they can always come to me or go to a manager”*.



The focus of the feedback system, as the manager mentioned, was employee satisfaction, which can result from concern for productivity and employee performance (e.g. Dehaghi, Goodarzi, & Arazi, 2012). However, the examples the employees mentioned such as the diverted calls to their mobiles, which the employees found did not work so it was changed back, can indicate that the focus was not necessarily on productivity, but the employee welfare was at least considered and included.

M1 explained another example and said that at one of their accommodations a manager *“was taking more of a transactional leadership style rather than a transformational leadership style, which is more directive and basically a little bit authoritarian”*; and an employee brought it to the founder’s attention. He said that they had a meeting along with the senior manager and the accommodation manager, they discussed it with that manager in a supportive manner. He said that the manager accepted it ‘with humble posture of learning’ and received further training material on transformational leadership. M1 said that the manager *“didn’t take that negatively in any way, they changed their behaviour, they improved their capacity and their competency and that helped”*. M12 had mentioned an example of where she had communication issues because of her English skills, she was approached and supported to improve but she did not take it negatively. The way feedback was communicated and received as mentioned by providers and receivers of feedback in the above examples indicate that it worked as they explained.

M11 further said that she strongly encouraged staff to specifically bring one or more areas of improvement, including about their manager’s methods, to their meetings. Similarly, employees (FGD) explained examples of changes as a result of their suggestions, such as an additional support worker for their team, a computerised benefits system<sup>60</sup> which made their work ‘smoother and less stressful’, and an external training about dealing with difficult situations, which was accordingly paid for and offered to all the employees. These examples including employing a new employee indicate that the company involved employees’ opinions in strategic decisions as well.

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<sup>60</sup> The income of AP was based on the benefits of those staying in their accommodation and receiving their support, but managing those benefits was difficult for the employees and they suggested computerising them (FGD).

In brief, in AP the participants mentioned the company's open-door policy and transparency in sharing information and the intelligence, and the feedback mechanism where everybody could bring in suggestions or complaints and these were carefully considered and acted upon.

### **8.3.2.3 Mechanisms for participation summary**

At AP participants spoke about the variety of meetings that they had, which were the routine meetings as well as the meetings employees or managers requested, and they all 'consulted' about the problems or what needed to be done. They also spoke about the open-door policy and 360-degree feedback mechanism, through which employees influenced the decisions that they were not directly involved in making.

### **8.3.3 Involvement and participation in AP, summary**

Participation and involvement at AP were mainly spoken about as a 'consultative approach' in making the decisions, including the decisions that the founder and the managers made together, the decisions that managers and the employees made together, or the decisions that the employees made along with their clients or the relevant external institutions.

They explained that they discussed the matters in an environment of respect and not talking at each other, with a humble posture of learning, without an offensive or defensive attitude, and detachment from their opinion. They said that they all shared their opinions and there was not a single person who had an overriding voice, so they made the decision based on consensus or the opinion of the majority. If the decision did not work, they revised it together and made another decision in a similar manner. This resembled an aspect of participation by Vroom (2003) called 'facilitate'.

Furthermore, the employees were in charge of managing their workload and their engagement with the clients, which resembled another aspect of participation by Vroom (2003) called 'delegate'.

The mechanisms that the participants explained for participation and consultation were the regular or occasional meetings, transparency and open-door policy, and the 360-degree feedback system, through which all the information and intelligence were shared, and suggestions and complaints were heard and dealt with, with a 'positive' manner.

Overall it can be said that the participation and 'consultation' exercised in AP mostly resembled the 'facilitate' and 'delegate' aspects of participation as Vroom (2003) discussed.

## **8.4 Third Case Study - THEL**

At THEL, the founder and the three employees (two of which had just left the company) were interviewed, where only the founder believed in the Bahá'í faith.

Here, the data were analysed to explore the company's involvement strategies and principals, and the participants' opinions about them. These results are presented in section 8.4.1.

### **8.4.1 Delegation**

At THEL, employee involvement and autonomy were mentioned most in the interviews. This mainly referred to delegation and employees' ownership of the decisions in the company including: deciding on and developing the service they offered; communicating with the clients; and delivering those services.

Initially, speaking about who decided the agenda, M1 said that they did not generally have an agenda as a list of points that they discussed and decided about, but they discussed how well they could best serve a certain organisation, and as a consequence of the discussions, they came to a list of decisions. He mentioned that it was participative; it could not be said that employee X made a certain decision and manager Y made the other. M1 further said that his role was 'to create the conditions where they all could talk about what they were trying to do and make the decisions'. He said that they talked about tangible things not just about how they felt about the situation.

Having control over the agenda is the second phase of power according to Lukes (2005). At THEL, while the founder mentioned that they did not have a particular agenda (so nobody had control over the agenda), he decided which projects to accept or reject (E13), which accordingly would influence the agenda through choosing the organisation and the problem they were trying to resolve. However, the rest of the decisions, over what type of service to offer, or other aspects of the agenda were open to decide as the participants chose.

About bringing in the projects, E13 further explained that the founder had a great ability to develop personal relationships with key leaders, often in internal communications or HR, and he generally brought in the clients and discussed with them the purpose of their organisation, etc. Then the employees worked on the projects, delivery of the service, and other aspects. He said that they had ownership over the projects and collaborated on them with other colleagues, where one employee (at each project the employee who had previous connections with the client) led and the others supported. They *“ran everything to do with that account, send the proposal in, developed the relationship with the client, we do the work, bill the work, the whole thing”*. E13 mentioned that, as time passed, the founder was more interested in the “broader societal purpose discussions” so the employees would end up *“being the leader of (the company’s) delivery”*.

Similarly, E11 said that he and his colleague had to decide about several aspects of the projects and the founder had somehow removed himself from the decisions. He said that they had *“the degree of autonomy where I could just take all the decisions on budgeting and how we were going to get new business from that client and everything”*. He said that they did not always feel comfortable about that because they needed to know if the founder was happy about the direction they were going, especially because it was his money they were spending. E11 said that it was like they were running their mini business within THEL.

E13 further explained that they had a very *“decentralized approach”*, where the founder mainly *“asked tough questions, to be visionary, and to make connections between different types of thinking”*. Therefore, the founder *“wouldn’t at all be interested in us bringing him projects and asking for approval, because that wasn’t his role”*. E13 said

that they were “*steered originally*” by the founder because it was a new purpose for THEL, “*but once it was clear, there’d be no point asking (the founder) because he would respond with what do you think, so there’s no need to take it to him in the first place.*”

In this regard, the founder said that they were getting closer to the idea of consultation on an ongoing basis, which informed the decisions they made individually and collectively.

These statements highlight the high level of autonomy of the employees, through which they made most of the decisions at the company. It resembles the ‘delegate’ stage of participation as Vroom (2003) explains, where the problems and finding the solutions are all delegated to the employees and they are supported when they need it. In participation as Cotton et al. (1988) explain, it resembles ‘*participation in work decisions*’, which refers to formal, direct, long-term, high influence participation of employees with veto rights for them as well, where the decisions are focused on the work and how it’s organised, and often has a positive impact on productivity. In the examples that follow, this approach is explored further.

However, as some employees explained, in this level of autonomy the founder did not get involved in the decisions and employees had the veto right, as Cotton et al. (1988) referred to as ‘participation’<sup>61</sup>. This was, as E12 mentioned, based on trust as well as intuition and knowing the expectations and the way of thinking of the founder. E12 said that over the years, she knew when she needed to ask the founder’s opinion and for the most part she knew his opinion and would not need to talk to him. She said that they did not have “*rules or norms*” and their decision-making was more “*intuitive*”. This statement, while referring to the autonomy of the employees, can indicate the power of the founder through influence. This influence is not an exercise of power according to Lukes (2005); however, Kunda (2009) finds it a means of bureaucratic control and exercise of power, in which its impact goes beyond the organisational life as it shapes the individuals.

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<sup>61</sup> Cotton et al. (1988) mentioned this level of participation, ‘*participation in work decisions*’, as formal, direct, long-term, high influence participation of employees with their veto right in their decisions, which is focused on the work and how it is organised.

E12 and 13 explained examples of working on project proposals that they discussed with the founder at the start of the projects and then at the time of budgeting, but they made the rest of the decisions in collaboration and communication with their colleagues and the clients, especially because they all (including the clients) shared the same path and the same beliefs about society. Regarding involving the clients, E13 explained their relationship with clients at three levels: at one level it was based on supplier-receiver of the service, and at another, THEL helped the organisations to achieve their organisational goal and ‘cement their view, define their objective and articulate it, and develop a strategy of how to bring it to life’ (by providing opinion and specialist advice to them but recognising that the client company had their own expertise and their unique understanding of their organisation) in a ‘partnership’. The third level, as E13 explained, was the societal level where they helped the organisations find their role in society, THEL created some space and brought together clients, THEL staff, their friends, and various stakeholders (such as NGOs, individuals, and institutions) that would be involved with the operations of the company, to think about the topics bigger than the organisation itself. He said that there it would not matter if one was a leader or a participant, they all discussed and shared thinking, questions, examples, stories, etc., and developed bigger concepts through collaboration.

This way of providing a service to the clients can indicate that the autonomy and collective decision-making is not only a policy towards the employees but also part of the operational strategies of the company, where the company develops and offers its services in conversation and collaboration with clients and different parties, not through a pre-set mechanism in isolation at their office. While this further highlights the high level of employee participation at the company it also points to the risks of such autonomy, such as uncertainty in tasks and operations, which could negatively impact employee performance and their motivation as Cordery, et al. (2010) state. This was part of the discussion of conflict of interest, as discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **8.4.2 Involvement and participation in THEL, summary**

In summary, the participants spoke about the manager's decision to accept or reject the projects, which was considered as an influence on the agenda of discussions.

The rest of the decisions about development and delivery of the services was in total autonomy of the employees, where the founder asked the bigger questions and asked the employees to define their answers in their own way. This level of autonomy resembles 'delegation' as Vroom (2003) explains, where the problem goes to the employees and they are in charge of making the decisions and finding the solutions while the leader provides resources and encouragement and is involved when asked. It has also similarities with 'participation in work decisions' as Cotton et al. (1988) discuss, where the employees have formal, direct participation in the long-term, they have high influence with a veto right, and their decisions are focused on the work and how it is organised. However, at THEL the employees did not have a veto right about the projects they accepted, but only for the rest of the process.

Moreover, they provided their services in collaboration and consultation with the clients and other parties as well, which further highlighted the uncertainty of the tasks and the type of services THEL provided, which made it difficult for the employees. Thus, it is worth asking: in what conditions would 'delegation' have a positive impact on employees, and what level of autonomy could benefit the employees to pursue their interests and be empowered, without demotivating them and resulting in their additional stress.

In the next section, the three organisations are compared in a cross-case analysis, and an overall analysis of the data is presented.

### **8.5 Findings from the three case studies – Cross-Case analysis**

In this chapter the discussions of the participants in relation to employee involvement and participation were presented and analysed. In the previous sections the results of the single case analyses have been discussed, and here these results are discussed together through a cross-case analysis with the similarities and differences highlighted.

### **8.5.1 Employee participation**

Different aspects of employee involvement and participation have been discussed in the literature, including employees' bargaining power about their working conditions, employees' representation on the board of directors, employee ownership, which involves employees' ownership of some of the shares of the company often without voting rights, and employee participation in decision-making (e.g. Albrecht, 1983; Timpereley, 1969; Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988). Among these aspects of involvement as some researchers maintain, involvement in decision-making is usually in the form of some level of influence on the decisions and in their organisational performance (e.g. Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995). In these three cases, being privately owned, share ownership schemes or representation in the board of directors did not apply. However, they discussed their practices, policies and mechanisms in relation to participation in decision-making, in various ways.

At PHX, the managers often made the final decisions while they sought information and input from the employees. Some employees also had autonomy over their decisions and the projects they participated in, but they mostly participated through providing input and opinions at different stages of the process. This mostly resembled the 'consult' stage of consultation (Vroom, 2003).

At AP, decision-making was frequently mentioned in the form of a 'consultative approach', where decisions were made through the discussions among the relevant parties, including the managers, the employees, the clients and relevant third parties. The 'consultative approach' was mentioned with characteristics such as respect, detachment from one's opinion and interest, no blame or offensive/defensive behaviour, and being open to the results of discussions, in order to come to a consensus or go with the majority vote. The employees also had autonomy about their relationship with their clients and how they decided their development plans with them. These approaches mainly resembled 'facilitate' and 'delegate' aspects of Vroom's (2003) model of participation, although the characteristics and conditions of 'consultation' in AP were not specifically mentioned in previous studies.



At THEL, the owner decided what projects to accept or reject and the employees made the rest of the decisions, which indicated a high level of autonomy and ‘delegation’ (Vroom, 2003), but imposed task uncertainty and additional stress on the employees (Cordery, Morrison, Wright, & Wall, 2010).

In the three cases, some mechanisms for participation were also mentioned, such as regular or occasional meetings to discuss the current matters, suggestions, and any problems, the feedback system for employees (PHX, AP, THE), and the open-door policy where the employees could approach any manager with their opinion, suggestions and feedback and they were carefully heard, considered, and updated about changes (PHX, AP). However, the meetings at PHX mostly involved sharing news, information, opinions and reports, while at AP the meetings involved discussion of concerns, experiences, and opinions and they resulted in collective decision-making. At THEL, the meetings were often motivational, and discussions were focused on solving the problems, and broadening the approach and understanding, but they did not usually include decisions.

Overall, these cases showed different levels of employee autonomy while they all tried to apply employee involvement. Decision-making through a ‘consultative approach’ in meetings was highly emphasised at AP, and autonomy of the employees in decision-making through delegation was mainly emphasised at THEL. Among all the three approaches, the ‘consultative’ approach of AP was the most positively received by the employees (with no conflict over the processes or procedures). This highlights an area for further research on the characteristics of this ‘consultative approach’, its requirements, characteristics, impacts, and limitations.

In the next section, these results are discussed in relation the results of scriptural study of Bahá’í scripture.

### **8.5.2 Employee involvement in relation to Bahá’í scripture**

In this section the results of the cross-case analysis are discussed in relation to the approach of Bahá’í scripture to participation in decision-making, based on the scriptural study in Chapter 3.

In Bahá'í scripture, 'consultation' in all matters including the matters of business has been highly advised (e.g. Bahá'u'lláh, 1991; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982). The consultation discussed there is aimed at: bringing forth the light of awareness and certitude (Baha'u'llah, 1991), the shining spark of truth (e.g. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, p. 87; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1982, pp. 72-73), unity ('Abdu'l-Bahá , 1976) and wellbeing (Bahá'u'lláh, 1991), making decisions and solving problems ('Abdu'l-Bahá , 1991).

Accordingly, the administrative system (management body) of the Bahá'í faith operates based on consultation, where through a process of election, the relevant local, national and international bodies are elected by all adults in the relevant Bahá'í community, and they are guided to consult not only among themselves but also among the members of their communities and societies that they represent (e.g. Effendi, 1991; Effendi, 1974; 'Abdu'l-Bahá , 1976). These consultations are required to be conducted with particular characteristics such as utmost love, harmony and sincerity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1991, p. 97), calmness and composure ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 72), care and moderation to express their views ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 88), and purity of motive, detachment and humility ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87).

This concept of consultation is very different from the phrase 'consult' as used in the literature of participation (e.g. Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988; Gifford, Loukas, & Neathey, 2006).

Here, participants at all the three organisations expressed concern for and spoke about their experiences of trying to apply '*consultation*' and employee participation. However, the extent and styles of employee involvement were different across the cases. In relation to Bahá'í scripture, the consultation mentioned at PHX was mostly in the areas of information and awareness and solving the problems; at AP it was mostly concerned with awareness and certitude, decision-making, and problem solving, and at THEL they were mostly concerned with awareness and certitude, shining spark of truth, and employee well-being.

In particular, at AP where 'consultation' was highlighted the most, the participants emphasised particular characteristics that they employed in their consultations such as love, calmness, care, and moderation in how to express their opinions, detachment from

their decisions, purity of motive, and humility (the humble posture of learning), but these were not emphasised explicitly in the other two cases. The method of consultation and its characteristics at AP showed similarities with the range of aspects of consultation in Bahá'í scripture' (although only the founder in AP was a Bahá'í). Whether such 'consultation' requires this particular mind-set and organisation is another question for further research.

Another question that deserves further attention is, while all three organisations were trying to apply the Bahá'í precepts, and 'consultation' was particularly mentioned among those precepts by all three founders, why did the practice vary so widely with such different impacts and results. In all three cases the founder believed in the Bahá'í faith and so did most of the employees and managers at PHX although the managers and employees at AP and THEL held different beliefs. PHX is a multinational company with its headquarter in USA and the other two were small businesses in the UK. Therefore, the differences could be due to the sizes of the organisations and difficulty of involving the employees in a larger scale organisation.

However, the variety of the practices are more strongly related to the open approach of Bahá'í scripture to decision making, with no clergy and no uniform style, where the principles are open to interpretation and discussion between the believers; and its local administrative body is elected by the individuals and is required to consult with the members of its community. Applying this style to management of organisations can result in a variety of practices based on the varied understandings of the actors. This (the varied understandings, practices, and results) can be considered as the risk of this consultative approach as well as its strength.

Further discussion on participation and consultation is presented in the Discussion Chapter.

## **8.6 Summary**

In this chapter, employee involvement and participation has been discussed. It started with single case analysis of the three organisations and it continued with the cross-case

analysis of how the decisions were made. It then discussed the relevance of the results in relation the results of the scriptural study of Bahá'í scripture.

Here, the three organisations displayed different levels of employee participation. At PHX, 'consult' (where employees' input and suggestions were obtained, and the managers made the decisions), at AP 'facilitate' (where managers provided the space for the teams and the employees to discuss and make the decisions) and at THEL 'delegate' (where the employees had mainly the ownership of the decisions), have been identified as the dominant styles, while some other practices also were discussed from the three cases.

Bahá'í scripture also emphasises consultation in making decisions, and identifies particular characteristics for consultation including calmness and moderation, love and sincerity, and detachment from one's opinion. Overall, at AP the participants discussed a 'consultative approach' as their culture of decision-making and similar characteristics in their environment of decision-making.

Further areas of research have been identified throughout the chapter as well, with regard to employee participation and consultation, which may shed more light on various aspects of a consultative approach.

In the next chapter, the results of the four chapters of analysis will be analysed in relation to the relevant theory based on a review of the literature, and further details will be explained.

## 9 Discussion

In order to explore in more detail the contribution of the research, this chapter discusses the key findings and revisits themes and issues addressed in the review of the literature.

It is worth reiterating the questions of this research, in order to facilitate summarising the answers in relation to existing theories. The main question of this research is: ***How do Bahá'í principles influence employment relations, and is it possible to maintain these principles in practice?***

In the scriptural study this question was explored in more detail based on Bahá'í scripture. Then through the empirical research, it was further explored through the perceptions and practices of 'work in the spirit of service', and its impact on employment relations. The detailed questions for the empirical research were:

- ***Work in the spirit of service:*** How do organisations that aim to apply Bahá'í precepts perceive and explain their work and their workplace? How do they perceive the 'spirit of service' and translate this into their objectives and employment relations? Are there any common characteristics between the organisations that try to apply Bahá'í principles? Are there any significant differences, which may be related to their size, their operational requirements, their management style or their organisational culture?
- ***Power and authority:*** What are the power structures in the organisations that apply the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, how do they legitimise authority, and how is the power distributed?
- ***Dealing with conflict:*** To what extent are the interests of the employees and the employers aligned in the organisations under study? Can they pursue their interests and/or how do they pursue their interests? How are conflicts dealt with?
- ***Employee involvement:*** What are the policies and practices through which these organisations involve their employees in decision-making? To what extent are the employees involved and do they have control over those decisions and their

application? Are there any systems in place to mobilise employee participation? If so, what are their characteristics and limitations?

The results of the case-study research on each of the above questions have been discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. In Chapter 9, the summary of these results is discussed in relation to theory. The first section mainly focuses on the impact of religious beliefs on business, and on management of organisations. It also includes a discussion of the results in relation to the findings from the research on Bahá'í scripture (Chapter 3). The second section focuses on the concept of work, and the perceptions and practices of the participants in the three organisations, and also in relation to the concept of 'work in the spirit of service' based on Chapter 3. The third section then focuses on discussion of the results in relation to the aspects of employment relations' literature, as highlighted in Chapter 2 - power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement.

## **9.1 The impacts of religious beliefs on business and on management of organisations**

This section discusses the results of the three case studies in relation to the review of literature on the relationship between religious beliefs and the organisation of a business. It compares the main characteristics of work highlighted in the three cases with the dominant theories that explain the relationships.

### **9.1.1 Religions and business – Weber's theory of Capitalism**

The relationship between religion and business, and more specifically the influence of religion on employment relations, is wide-ranging according to the literature.

The debate in the literature is mainly centred on Weber's (2003) theory of capitalism, where he argued that the development of capitalism was a result of Protestants' industriousness and their desire to fulfil their religious 'calling' through their work. This argument has been challenged by other researchers such as Collins (1986), who argued that Capitalism was formed following the institutional revolution of the Middle ages, not

as a result of Protestant ethics, and Tawney (1961), who also explained capitalism as a result of the economic changes of the time. It is also notable that, as discussed in section 2.2.1.1. Weber's theory of Capitalism is his interpretation of the behaviour of the Protestants, rather than an interpretation of the Bible. Accordingly, this section does not present Weber's theory as a representative of the Bible or Christianity, but instead highlights it as a theory at the centre of the debate of the relationship between religion (Christianity) and business.

The theory of Capitalism according to Weber (2003) was focused on the Godly value of work, the 'calling', and accordingly the significance of profit and accumulation of wealth among the Protestants, which resulted in Capitalism (Weber, 2003). However, in the Bible, according to 1 Timothy 5:8, work has been regarded as worship; but also according to 1 Timothy 6:1 the, accumulation of wealth is discouraged and it is even warned that it might risk one's faith. To explore whether Weber's theory about the Godly value of work applies to the Godly value of work in the Bahá'í scripture, or it has more similarities with the approach of the Bible to work, the Bahá'í scripture was explored for references about the characteristics of work. It was found that, in Bahá'í scripture, work was regarded as the highest form of worship, or 'calling' as Protestants refer to it, but only if "*done in the spirit of service*" (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998). 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1972, p. 176) says:

*"In the Bahá'í Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship... Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. **This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer.**"*

Therefore, based on this research, in Bahá'í scripture it is 'service' and 'the highest motives to serve humanity' that is considered as worship, rather than work for the accumulation of wealth and profit. This scripture does not discredit making profit, but financial gain is not the factor that attributes the Godly value to work.

In the three cases that are explored in this research, the concept of industriousness was emphasised in terms of excellence, improving the business, empowering the employees, and excellence in the quality of the products and services. However, the concept of profit

and accumulation of wealth was not mentioned as a main objective in any of the cases, in contrast to Weber's (2003) articulation about the value system adopted by Protestants in their approach to work, but more as a means to an end. This does not mean that profit was not an objective, but it refers to articulation of the objectives by the participants as it informed their decisions and behaviour. If profit-making was highlighted as a main objective, it would indicate that profit would be the priority criterion in the behaviour and decisions of the participants. Since it did not come up in any of the interviews, it indicates that it was not the 'focus' or priority in the choices the participants made, but other factors played a more important role in their choices. For instance, at PHX there was a great emphasis on 'customer service' ('customers as the lifeblood of the company') and innovation ('breaking with tradition'). Managers in different companies might express the same focus, but in PHX they focused on the concept of improving the lives of their customers as their religious-inspired value and did not highlight 'making profit' as their religious value, organisational culture or a shared focus. The managers and employees were heavily focused on the service to society, and they discussed the efforts and resources spent in their humanitarian efforts and in engaging the employees to contribute to this service and care for its impact. This did not mean that they were not interested in making profit, but that making profit was not their main/only objective, and did not inform their decisions as a single or most important criterion.

Participants at AP and THEL highlighted the focus of their business on implementing the spirit of service, through focusing their business objective and their strategies on service. The participants (the founders and some employees in both AP and THEL) particularly mentioned that their business objective was actually 'decided' with the focus on serving society. Furthermore, the structure of these two cases supported this objective as AP was a social enterprise and THEL shifted in its business objective towards assisting organisations to identify their social purpose. Moreover, in THEL, there was a mention of the reduced emphasis on financial purpose and stronger emphasis on service and helping organisations to find their social purpose made him feel uncomfortable as he needed a stronger financial focus. Accordingly, it can be said that the way Weber (2003) described business action based on Protestant ethic cannot be used as the theory (i.e. the dominant



theory in relationship between religion and economic relations) to explain the economic behaviour of the participants in the organisations applying Bahá'í principles.

### **9.1.2 Religion and control versus freedom and autonomy– Marx, Engels and beyond**

Another influential aspect of beliefs about the influence of religion on business in the literature has been around the argument of illusionary happiness and control. Marx and Engels (2008) argued that religion was ‘the opium of people’ and an illusionary source of happiness that prevented people from seeing the underlying causes of their miseries. Marx (2008, p. 41) argued that man was the “*world of man, the state, society*”, and, “*this state, this society produce religion, a reversed world consciousness, because they are a reversed world*”. So, he described religion as a consciousness of the world made by the state and the society, which was not real and created illusionary happiness. The reason Marx wrote this was that he believed religion created a halo around humans that prevented them from exploring their true reality; thus, in the absence of religion man could think, act and shape his own reality. In that case, philosophy would replace religion, which is ‘in the service of history’, and would unmask the saintly form of human alienation as well as his unholy alienations in the absence of religious authority. Thus, Marx (2008) found Luther’s movement only the first step in freeing man, by freeing him from religious authority, as an outer religiosity and making the religiosity the inner man. So, Marx believed that the next step would be to free man from that ‘bondage of conviction’ (with which Luther had replaced the bondage of devotion) as well, so man could find reality (2008, p. 51).

In analysing this statement in relation to Bahá'í scripture the approach of the Bahá'í Faith to reality and discovery of truth, the role of religious institutions, and the concept of obedience/following religious principles and beliefs which are among the key aspects of Marx’s argument about religion were explored. It was evident that in the context of religious beliefs, the concepts of discovery of truth and obedience, and the role of religious institutions were interwoven, and complementing one another.

Reality or truth in Bahá'í scripture is a singular broad concept ('Abdu'l-Bahá (1976, p. 226): "*reality is one and not multiple*"), and it is the responsibility of every individual to investigate the truth ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 246). Therefore, one purpose of consultation is to discover the truth after the clash of 'differing opinions' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87). However, in consultation they might discover a part of the truth but not necessarily the whole truth, so that in another consultation, in a different place or time, they might come to a different agreement or realisation. While this might differ from the previous one it could still be (another part of) the truth. Thus, discovery of truth is a personal as well as a social process where every individual is required to interpret religion for himself, both alone and in consultation with others, based on the written scripture but without following dictates of religious authorities. Accordingly, there are no clergy or priests in the Bahá'í Faith (Effendi, 1991, pp. 153-154).

However, there are administrative bodies (not a religious institution to interpret and enforce religious beliefs), that are elected periodically (annually at the local and national level, and every four years for the international level), that makes the administrative decisions for the Bahá'í community, and these are required to take individuals into their counsel in making their decisions (Effendi, 1974, p. 63). The international institution called the Universal House of Justice is the only body that can set the laws that had not been set by Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, individuals are required to 'obey' the decisions of the local or national Spiritual Assemblies (the administrative local and national body), or the Universal House of Justice (the international body), even if their decisions were thought wrong, because "*it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 411). So, the concept of obedience is mainly connected to the administrative decisions, for the sake of maintaining unity, while there is also an appeal process to the decisions that are believed wrong (Effendi, 1983, p. 151).

Therefore, here the individuals do not find their reality under the influence of religious authority or the clergy as Marx stated, but neither is this reality completely free, as it is influenced by the understanding of the religious principles and the discussions with others, although this may result in a range of understanding and practice. These practices can also vary based on the discourses and norms in place and the local and national

culture. This was observed in the organisational studies conducted for this research, as is further discussed in section 9.3.

Moreover, the individuals are required to follow the religious obligations out of love: “*Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty*” (Baha'u'llah, 1992, p. 20). This concept if followed results in happiness and fairness. Bahá'u'lláh continues the believer who experiences this love would be happy; and he says that “*He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favour*” would follow the commandments (Baha'u'llah, 1992, p. 21). Therefore, this indicates that in following these commandments fairness and love are prerequisites, and then the fellowship results in happiness. However, the administrative bodies do not enforce the ‘personal’ laws, e.g. prayer or fasting; and membership in the Bahá'í community is not lapsed if the believers do not follow these. Therefore, here, while some obligations exist that identify the reality and the concept of ‘right’ that the believers perceive, the obligations are to be practised out of love and fairness and based on the individual and collective understanding of the believers, and they are not questioned by any religious authority. Thus, while their reality is influenced by the religious principles, labelled by Marx as ‘devotion’, it is not directed by religious authority. Therefore, the reality for the believers is influenced by religious principles, but not shaped by them alone, rather shaped by a variety of factors that influence individual and collective perceptions, such as discourses or norms in each society, or even in a locality; thus the realities each individual perceives might vary, as an aspect or a part of a broader unknown reality, as further explored in section 9.3. Thus, in relation to Marx’s discussion of the role of religious institutions in shaping individuals’ reality and the concept of control and illusionary happiness, in Bahá'í scripture, individuals are required to discover the truth, see with their own eyes, and hear with their own ears (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1976, p. 246), and shape their reality, obey out of love not any institutional force, and maintain unity and appeal to the institutions’ decisions if disagreeing with these.

Other studies of religious influence have focused on control through religious institutions. For instance, Jeremy (1990) in an organisational study in 100 firms in Britain, highlighted the role of church and clergy and concluded that religion was a means of control and gaining obedience (through paternalism and cultural hegemony), except

among Quaker organisations he had surveyed. Here, these theories focused on the ‘influence of clergy’ on business, and argued against it since it resulted in hierarchical control. Shah, Lergi and Batley (2007, p. 13) also discussed hierarchy and control in organisations ‘*derived from ecclesiastical institutions*’. However, in Quaker organisations such as Cadbury, paternalism was less evident and they used participation through unions and committees, such as women’s committees, to improve their working conditions (e.g. Gardiner, 1923; George, Okanlawon, & Owoyemi, 2012; Rowlinson, 1988).

Exploring the role of religious (Bahá’í) institutions and clergy in the three cases, there was no mention of any institutions or references to clergy, and the employees were not required to observe specific religious obligations or attend the church for instance, as part of their organisational requirements (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Shah, Lergi, & Batley, 2007); so they were different, and the theories of ‘control’ through religious institutions as mentioned in the previous studies did not apply. This was also consistent with the results of Chapter 3 based on Bahá’í scripture.

However, it was considered that there could be other forms of control in the organisations under the influence of the Bahá’í principles, and therefore the data were explored further. In all three cases, the participants spoke about a softened hierarchy, or no hierarchy, and most of them said the level of hierarchy that existed in their organisation did not entail control or a ‘boss-subordinate’ relationship. In PHX, some hierarchy was observed in the organisational chart, but employees and managers said that while some levels of hierarchy existed in the organisational structure it was not reflected in the behaviour of the managers; and they emphasised that they did not attribute superiority or the attitudes of a ‘boss’ to their managers. However, some level of hierarchy was evident in the decision-making processes in PHX, as often the final decisions were made just by the managers (as opposed to the other two companies). In AP, while there was a managerial level and a supervisory level in the organisational structure, the participants spoke about ‘no hierarchy’ and autonomy for employees. In THEL, this was stronger with a high level of autonomy.

However, in PHX there were two employees that mentioned they were not involved in the decisions of their departments in any way, which contradicted the culture of

consultation as emphasised by other participants and the founder, as well as the culture of teamwork and co-operation as an attribute of work at PHX, as discussed in Chapter 5. Here, having looser regulations and a level of autonomy among managers and employees as an aspect of work at PHX had resulted in various management styles in different departments, which had caused a lack of participation in some departments, and some employees' exclusion from participation as a result of managers' personal preferences or biases, since participation was not a uniform policy. The possibility of damaging effects of managers' autonomy and looser regulations is among the criticisms of neoliberalism, where it is argued that it can increase powerlessness for ordinary people, i.e. in this case the employees with less influence (e.g. (De Lissovoy, 2015). On the other hand, in PHX lack of hierarchy and the existence of employee involvement were highlighted as part of organisational culture, although the existence of variations in managerial practices did not indicate a 'strong' culture since the 'strength' of organisational culture depends on the level of intensity and consensus of certain values and principles among the members (e.g. O'Reilly C. , 1989; Schein, 1984); whereas in PHX participation there did not seem to be consensus among the managers. This is explored further in section 9.1.4.

The existence of some level of hierarchical authority, as opposed to complete freedom, is among the points raised by the critics of post-bureaucracy, who argue that post-bureaucracy does not necessarily create more freedom but creates a superficial freedom where the employees are trapped in power relations (e.g. Casey, 1999; Barker, 1993; Kunda, 2009). These researchers argue that the focus of management in post-bureaucracy has shifted from controlling the employees' behaviour (in bureaucracy) to controlling 'the selves of employees' through the empowering initiatives, corporate culture programmes, teamwork, etc. (e.g. Casey, 1999; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992), which instil commitment and make it a norm that is enforced and controlled by the workers themselves (Barker, 1993). So these researchers argue that post-bureaucracy is in fact potentially totalitarianism, which instead of providing the employees with more freedom traps them in 'boundary-less responsibilities' and a 'dictated autonomy' that is so wide that it is no longer defined even by the heteronomy ("*i.e. the condition of being under the domination of an outside authority*"), which is a characteristic of autonomy in bureaucracy) (Maravelias, 2007, p. 562). Friedman (1977) also suggested that, in these

environments, subordinates would need to anticipate the intentions of their managers, and to do so they needed to have internalised the values and norms.

Freedom as autonomy was mentioned in all three cases presented here, but whether it actually existed in the three cases is another question that was explored further. In PHX, the employees who had gained the trust of their managers and their co-workers had developed some level of autonomy, but other employees did not have any autonomy over their decisions. So, based on the argument of freedom through autonomy, most of the employees in PHX did not have freedom. In AP all employees had autonomy about the decisions they made for and with the clients under their care, as explained in detail by employees and managers. In THEL, a high level of autonomy was spoken about, and similar to Friedman's (1977) statement, the employees said that they knew what the founder thought, or if they asked him, he would ask what they thought. However, based on the evidence, the autonomy in THEL did not aim for employee commitment, as opposed to findings from other studies (Barker, 1993; Friedman A. , 1977); for instance, the founder mentioned the employees were empowered to pursue their interests even if not in the benefit of the company, and employees mentioned that their contracts had changed in order for them to be able to pursue their interests in 'external projects' (those not connected to the company), which is not in the interest of commitment to the interest of the company.

Freedom has also been discussed in the form of 'opportunities', as a characteristic of post-bureaucracy. For instance, Sennett (2003) argues that in post-bureaucracy hierarchies that used to be imposed by roles based on technical skills, are replaced by networks of self-created and self-governed roles; therefore, post-bureaucracy does not only take something away from its employees (their protected zones of autonomy), it also provides them with opportunity (2003). Maravelias (2007) refers to opportunities as well, stating that there has been neither an increase nor a decrease of individuals' freedom, but a reconfiguration of the nature of individuals' freedom, from 'freedom as autonomy' in bureaucracy to 'freedom as potential' in post-bureaucracy. He (Maravelias, 2007) explains that if freedom as autonomy means freedom from power (which is however safeguarded by authoritative power), freedom as potential means freedom to seize on opportunities via distributed power.

In the three cases, there were similar discussions about opportunities. Freedom at PHX was characterised by access to and benefiting from opportunities through participation in specific projects, promotion, monetary rewards, and non-financial rewards (such as trips or access to company accommodations), as well as being involved in some decisions. At AP, the participants mentioned autonomy and the opportunities to make their own decisions, influence the changes in the organisation, choose their training, influence the content of their service, and further their education, knowledge and skills. At THEL, the participants referred to opportunities such as being able to work with organisations with a high impact on the world and working in a large network, as well as autonomy through being able to shape their role at the organisation and to plan and manage their service to their customers. Therefore, freedom in these three cases was mentioned in the form of a combination of both autonomy and opportunities; at THEL autonomy was mentioned more strongly and in PHX opportunities seemed more commonly identified. In AP, while both autonomy and opportunities were highlighted, the significant role of ‘consultation’ was added to this mix, which is not found in the arguments of freedom in bureaucracy or post-bureaucracy. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

However, control has been discussed in the form of influence and manipulation of employees’ values and emotions. Maravelias (2007, p. 565) explains post-bureaucracy as a system of control as well, through “*internalised values*”, while Lukes (2005) reasons against the arguments of manipulation of individuals’ emotions and values. Lukes (2005) argues that a few individuals can be mistaken but not a mass, and the case for the exercise of power through manipulation ignores the power of individual’s intellect and their choices. Thus, if the values are internalised and appear as a consensus among the individuals, it does not necessarily indicate power through which the values are imposed, but highlights that individuals ‘perceive, evaluate and act’ based on their perceptions and evaluations rather than being ‘collectively mistaken’ (Lukes, 2005).

Lukes’ (2005) argument seems applicable to the results of this research since the participants emphasised that the corporate values they discussed resonated with their personal values. Where clashes were identified, the participants highlighted these at the interviews. For instance, at PHX a participant from purchasing said that sometimes, against her values, she ‘lied’ to the supplier regarding the prices and quotes they had

received from other suppliers in order to get a better price from them. When she was asked why she lied, she said she had to, in order to get a better price yet another employee from purchasing said he never lied or had to lie, and he did not have to provide all the information (about prices or other suppliers) to any supplier because of data confidentiality. This contradiction, in which one emphasised that she had to lie, and the other stressed he did not have to lie and did not need to provide all the information, indicates that it was not necessarily part of their organisational culture to be completely honest, but the stress on getting a better price could push some employees to feel obliged to lie due to a focus on 'productivity' (e.g. McGaughey, 2014; Albrecht, 1983; Abbott, 2006).

In summary, there was no mention of religious authority or control in any of the cases, which makes these different from cases in other organisational studies about the influence of religion; all three expressed a softened hierarchy and some level of freedom for employees, including autonomy and opportunities. In PHX opportunities were more strongly highlighted, and in THEL autonomy was emphasised. In AP, however, it was a combination of both. Freedom as a combination of autonomy, opportunities and collective decision-making has not been discussed in similar organisational studies and can be considered as the particular articulation and practice explored and presented through this research. In further investigations of freedom through autonomy, opportunities and consultation, the limitations that consultation could impose on individual's autonomy are among the areas that require further research. This freedom would certainly not indicate an absolute autonomy, and it would have its own characteristics and potential conflicts. Since at AP freedom and autonomy was connected to a particular style of consultation (based on the Bahá'í principles, as the participants extensively explained), it will be further analysed in relation to consultation and participation in following sections.

It is worth considering here that the consultative approach practised in AP, which seems quite distinct and has been discussed by all the participants in this organisation, could be a 'front', as Goffman (1959) argued, where the social behaviour of the members of the team or the workers of the company could be different in the 'front' (as visible to customers and outsiders), from what was at the 'back', (as in internal communications



and environment). Basically, Goffman (1959) argued that two different shows could be going on at the front and at the back. In order for the researcher to test such theory in her analysis as an aspect of reflexivity and credibility of the results (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006, p. 146), different measures were taken. Initially, since the researcher had conducted a brief pilot interview with the founder over Skype, she knew about their insistence on ‘consultation’ and their particular clear articulations of their values and culture. Thus, further probe questions were prepared to ask the participants when they discussed this and other aspects, to make sure the practices in the organisation were captured, not just ideals and values. The participants were asked in extensive detail what they meant by consultation; for instance, what they exactly did in action, what steps they took, and what happened when they were not in agreement. Furthermore, all the participants were asked for examples of the decisions made with the ‘consultative’ approach, and the details of the examples were further investigated as well, such as the type and significance of those decisions (to check whether they were only minor decisions), and the process they employed in each particular example they mentioned. While reviewing the interviews, at points it felt like the interviewer was asking too many questions, but it was intentionally done in order to gather reliable details on those areas. The researcher conducted each interview with careful observation, with a focus on the participants’ reactions, emotions, and the process of the discussions, in order to deepen the understanding of the data and the reliability of the findings. As the final measure, the data and the details provided by the founder, the managers and the employees were compared to search for traces of contradictions or different opinions.

Overall, they all provided extensive details about their ‘consultative approach’ with its specific and complementary characteristics; they spoke about this very passionately, and as a significant aspect of working at AP which they strongly praised; and there were no contradictions or differences in the details they provided. These details will be analysed in the following sections.

### **9.1.3 Bahá'í 'inspired' organisations as opposed to Bahá'í organisations – spirituality in the workplace**

At the initial contact, and through further interviews, the founders in all three cases emphasised that the organisations under study were 'Bahá'í inspired' establishments, where they tried to apply some Bahá'í principles based on their learning and understanding as well as their family upbringing. This is different from the context of the organisations under the influence of the church or the priests (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Shah, Largi, & Batley, 2007; Smith C. , 1996). These studies often discuss the commitment and obedience of the employees in organisations under the influence of the church (e.g. Jeremy, 1990), or notion of hierarchy, checks and control, and authority based on ecclesiastical institutions (e.g. Shah, Largi, & Batley, 2007). This was often different in the studies on Quaker organisations with unions and employee welfare mechanisms (e.g. Gardiner, 1923; George, Okanlawon, & Owoyemi, 2012; Rowlinson, 1988), however, Wagner-Tsukamoto (2008) argued that these organisations excluded non-Quakers and at points fail to translate the Quaker ethics to ethical behaviour at work.

Here, the three founders described their organisations as 'Bahá'í inspired' as opposed to 'Bahá'í organisations' (like 'Quaker organisations') and they referred to their environment as a 'spiritual workplace' where variety of beliefs and religions could be practised and respected (repeated mentions in all three cases).

However, having a dominant set of values (the Bahá'í precepts) could potentially contradict the concept of a spiritual workplace and the potential for practice of other religions. Thus, during the analysis there was a search for evidence of conflict, complaint, or discomfort about the practice of the participants' personal or religious values as opposed to the influence of the Bahá'í values. In PHX, there was particular mention of the diversity of religions and beliefs, the freedom they had in practice of their beliefs, the meditation room for all religions, and flexibility of the managers towards individuals' religious obligations (which is also a principle from the Bahá'í Faith, as discussed earlier). At AP, there was no mention of other religious practices, but some managers (not believing in the Bahá'í Faith) talked about the organisations' values being Bahá'í inspired, and they described these as 'why they were successful' (see Chapter 3). At

THEL, there were no discussions of religion or Bahá'í values by the participants other than they were aware of the founder's religious values and inspiration and that they admired them. In summary, there were no potential or latent conflicts observed at any of the three cases in this regard. It might be considered as the 'power of influence', where the values could have been ingrained in participants' thinking and practice and therefore generated no conflict, but this theory could not be applicable here since none of the organisations employed religious training, religious requirements (for recruitment or promotion), or connections to any religious institutions to create attachment or commitment that studies indicate (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Tawney, 1961), and none of the participants agreed that there were any religious discrimination (as to whether one believed in the Bahá'í Faith or not) upon recruitment or regarding the opportunities or conditions of work (e.g. Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2008).

The main difference between these studies and the three cases, for the present study, as to being under the influence of a religious institution or particular priests is there are no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and individuals are encouraged to operate based on their 'individual and collective' understanding of the Faith (Effendi, 1991). This could result in a variety of practices and policies in different organisations. However, the three organisations displayed major similarities in the principles they adopted, such as consultation, diversity of beliefs and nationalities, service for the society, excellence and development, support and flexibility towards employees, and concern for fairness and justice. The similarity of principles can indicate the 'embeddedness' of the religious values (e.g. Stroope, 2011) in the founders' upbringing and thinking which, even without the influence of the religious institutions or clergy, has resulted in similar concerns among different groups of people. However, the way they adopted these principles and the extent to which they operationalised them were different.

Considering that PHX operated worldwide, with its headquarters and majority of its employees in the USA, while AP and THEL were small businesses operating in the UK, there could be differences in the way the same values were implemented as a result of various interpretations of the same principles due to the differences in national culture, organisational size, or type of business. For instance, *consultation and employee involvement* was implemented through delegation and broad autonomy of the employees

in THEL, collaborative/consultative decision-making in AP, and sharing input, opinions and suggestions in PHX, and so one reason for the difference could be different sizes of the organisations, where employee participation could be considered more practical in small organisations. However, this perception that participation would be easier in smaller organisations is under debate since some researchers show that small enterprises focus on information rather than involvement due to the tight regulations they face (e.g. Wilkinson, Dundon, & Grugulis, 2007).

Another example was the concept of *justice and fairness* (especially in the pay and reward system in PHX in comparison to AP). Here, fair pay was interpreted as performance-related pay in PHX but as equal pay for similar posts and jobs in AP. These two approaches relate to two different theories of distributive justice, where the former is considered fair based on Leventhal's proactive approach, and the latter is considered fair based on the equity theory (Greenberg, 1990). Moreover, performance-related pay has resulted in different outcomes as several studies indicate, (e.g. Storey & Sisson, 2005; Perry, Engbers, & Jun, 2009), such as complaints regarding the performance assessment process, subjectivity in appraisal, and emphasis on extrinsic motivation, all of which were mentioned by the employees at PHX. The choice of different interpretations of fair pay could have also been influenced by national culture (e.g. individualism in national culture where American pay-fairness judgment is more sensitive to individual job performance and work efforts (Hundley & Kim, 1997)).

Nevertheless, such variety of practices and interpretations, and their different results, particularly about the concept of justice raises further questions about the scope of justice, its flexibility to interpretation, and the possible consequent results. For instance, it is worth asking, whether justice needs to be universally defined, have set policies, and be universally applied, or it can be open to interpretation; and what would the possible outcomes of a liberated or variably interpreted justice be to the individuals who receive the variable treatments. These questions deserve further in depth research, however, for the purpose of this thesis, with reference to Bahá'í scripture, the employers are required to pay their employees 'high enough' that they can save for their times of need, or pay them their wages along with pay when they cease work ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277), which the latter is similar to the concept of insurance and pension pay. Moreover,

while it is not clear how to decide a way to measure ‘high enough’, and the ability of individuals to save varies, this principle also requires the employers to be moderate in their withdrawal of profit, and conduct (concerning the employees’ salary and their own withdrawal) based on lofty and noble characteristics and out of care for humanity (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277). This approach with highlighting the responsibility of the owners towards the welfare of the employees, has some similarities with Rawls’ (1971) theory of justice, where he identified justice with fairness, and argued that access to and distribution of wealth should be based on equality or in favour of those less advantaged in the society.

This reference to justice in the Bahá’í scripture, and its interpretation and application in connection with conscious and noble moral values, develops an approach to justice that requires further in-depth empirical research, and so cannot be simply advocated or dismissed. With regard to the three cases, it was concluded in Chapter 7 that AP and THEL maintained the requirement based on the Bahá’í scripture, but PHX while maintaining it for most of the departments, had struggled to maintain it in some departments (Production and R&D). This could indicate the influence of individualistic national culture on the rewards system (Hofstede, Country Comparison, 2017), where the departments with lower skill requirements were rewarded at the lowest scale.

Another example of the similar characteristics between the three cases being ‘Bahá’í inspired’ organisations, was a stress on appreciation of diversity of beliefs and nationalities through various policies, processes and events. In all three cases there was mention of ‘spirituality at the workplace’. For instance, PHX had won a spirituality at workplace award, had a meditation and prayer room for any religious or non-religious believers, appreciated diversity and had employees from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, as discussed by the participants. At AP and THEL, the participants spoke about their practices as spirituality led, rather than strictly religious led, and they too had employees from a variety of religious backgrounds. In the literature, the context of spirituality in the workplace has received increased attention (e.g. Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2008; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Burack, 1999; Dehaghi, Goodarzi, & Arazi, 2012) and it includes a large volume of publications from late 1990s and 2000s.

However, there is no agreed definition of workplace spirituality, and so different researchers have identified and described it differently. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) for instance, define workplace spirituality as the “*recognition that employees have an inner life which nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work taking place in the context of a community*”, appreciating diversity and different beliefs or religious backgrounds. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003, p. 13) take a different approach and suggest that workplace spirituality is “*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*”. Here, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) try to provide a definition that covers both spiritual attributes and spiritual activities, in order to enable research in the ‘substantive aspects’ of workplace spirituality such as variety of beliefs, emotions, relationships, etc., and the ‘functional aspect’, which further addresses the relationship between spirituality and absenteeism, productivity, ethicality, health, leadership, etc. In a study of impacts of spirituality, Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008) study five dimensions of workplace spirituality as the ‘team’s sense of community’, ‘alignment with organisational values’, ‘sense of contribution to society’, ‘enjoyment at work’, and ‘opportunities for inner life’, and their impact on commitment. In the interviews and FGDs, all these five dimensions of workplace spirituality were mentioned by the participants as aspects of their work in the three case studies.

Thus, it could be said that the results of the study of these three cases show more similarities with the literature on workplace spirituality, than with the literature on religiosity and religiously led organisations. Hence, it can be concluded that these Bahá’í-inspired organisations have created an environment that respects and utilises different beliefs and religious backgrounds and exhibits similar characteristics of the working environment with the organisations employing workplace spirituality, such as concern for and contribution to society, opportunities for inner life and for individual development, and enjoyment at work. However, existence of a dominant set of values over other value systems can pose a contradiction preventing practice of different beliefs and values. In this context, as Bahá’í inspired organisations however, it is not dominance of a religion or its authoritative and institutional system, but a set of values that the founders have chosen

and understood and implemented in their own ways. Thus, it is worth considering how being a Bahá'í inspired organisation is different from domination of a religious system (with unified practices under the instructions of clergy).

Based on this research, the religious diversity and lack of religious discrimination was mentioned by the participants, which along with some other values applied in practice (e.g. emphasis on collective decision-making), pointed to different power relations from the authority generated from the influence of the Christian church or belonging to certain religious group (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Kennedy & Lawton, 1998). This is further discussed in the next section.

Furthermore, 'alignment with organisational values' is an aspect of workplace spirituality as Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008) argue; this was observed in the three cases, where the employees described the organisational values as part of their values, or described their agreement with and appreciation of them. How this aspect was applied while the employees held different values, is discussed further in the next section, under the influence of organisational culture.

However, a broader question was why the results of this research showed more similarities to the literature on spirituality at work, and values through organisational culture, than to literature on religiosity and religious led organisations (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Shah, Lergi, & Batley, 2007; George, Okanlawon, & Owoyemi, 2012)? One reason could be the Bahá'í Faith being a 'faith' rather than a 'religion'. In explaining what could be a difference between faith and religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's research on different religions, and his influential books, which many researchers refer to (e.g. Wainwright, 1984; Geaves, 1998), can provide potential explanations in the context of convergence of religions, and the differentiation of religion from faith. About the former, Smith (1981) argued that different traditions could not live in isolation anymore, and world religions were potentially convergent. In order for the religions to be able to converge, he (Smith W. C., 1981) argued that people needed be able to distinguish between the doctrinal expressions and codes of each religion, and what they expressed through them, through which it could be possible to see a common faith among different religions. Thus he (Smith W. C., 1981, p. 125) hoped for a theology, which would give "conceptual

articulation to... the faith of all of us". In Bahá'í scripture also, convergence of religions has been explained. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1982, p. 28) says: "*The Reality of the divine Religions is one, because the Reality is one and cannot be two. All the prophets are united in their message, and unshaken. They are like the sun; in different seasons they ascend from different rising points on the horizon.*" Moreover, the main purpose of religion has been emphasised in Bahá'í scripture as unity in diversity and peace among humankind (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990, p. 215; Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25). Thus, Bahá'í scripture, through a shared reality of religions and through the means of unity in diversity (such as equality of men and women, a common language, its principles of universal peace), aims to provide an environment for the believers from different religions and the nonbelievers, to be able to live together in peace and joy. This is similar to the way Smith (1981) explains that 'faith' that can be realised through convergence of religions.

Moreover, Smith differentiated between religion, faith, and belief. Faith, according to Smith (1977), is an experience of being grasped by (transcendent) reality, which necessarily precedes any attempt to conceptually articulate it. Faith does not presuppose belief; belief presupposes faith (Smith W. C., 1977, pp. 78-80). Smith insisted that faith involved 'recognition', 'insight' or 'perception', and thus had an intellectual dimension (Wainwright, 1984). He argued that it was essential to perceive faith as generic and as transcending discrete traditions. Therefore, faith had to be studied with a global perspective in order to further the understanding of human spirituality (Smith W. C., 1979, pp. 130-133).

Similarly, about the intellectual dimension of faith, Bahá'í scripture prevents its believers from blindly following the clergy in their faith, but rather requires them to actively and independently investigate reality in order to "*be saved from the darkness of imitation and attain to the truth*" (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979, p. 28). 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1979, p. 75) says:

*"God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth...Therefore depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God."*



There is no clerical role in the Bahá'í Faith, and its administrative system works through elected bodies at local, national and international levels. (Effendi, 1991, pp. 153-154). Furthermore, religious beliefs ought to be based on “*science, education and civilization*” (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 28). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “... *These lay the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity and promulgate universal brotherhood. They are founded upon the unity of science and religion and upon investigation of truth.*” (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 109)

Based on these, the Bahá'í scripture and its administrative system have emphasised independent investigation of truth, the unity of science and religion, and understanding the faith based on one's investigation rather than following clergy. This is similar to Smith's intellectual aspect of faith and the status of 'recognition', 'insight' or 'perception'.

Another aspect of Smith's explanation of faith is his statement that recognising faith through convergence of religions furthers the understanding of human spirituality. His (Smith W. C., 1979) focus on spirituality over the differences among religions were also found in the results of the case studies in this research referring to being Bahá'í inspired institutions.

In the three cases, the participants highlighted that they did not follow the religious dictates of any clergy, but they discussed and behaved according to their values. Especially in THEL they discussed the aspects of the beliefs and their challenges, and behaved accordingly. So, the three cases displayed differences in the application the Bahá'í principles, such as in the principle of fair pay and employee participation, which can indicate a range of different understandings, based on their various circumstances, organisational requirements, and perhaps the influence of national cultures, through which the concepts of the principles would be formed and practised. These varied understandings resemble what Smith (1979) called ‘recognition’, ‘insight’ or ‘perception’, as aspects of the faith.

Additionally, the three cases displayed similarities of organisational philosophy and practice with the aspects of spirituality as work, such as ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’, ‘sense of contribution to society’, ‘enjoyment at work’, and ‘opportunities for inner life’.

Based on these explanations, it can be concluded that a study of the scripture of the Bahá'í Faith and the organisational study of the organisations attempting to apply some of those principles exhibited more similarities with aspects of workplace spirituality and values at work than with the literature on religiosity or religious-led organisations. One explanation for this conclusion can be that the Bahá'í Faith is a *'faith'* rather than a religion and thus it exhibits aspects that are more inclusive, diverse, concerned with contribution to society and based on investigation.

Moreover, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) state that in order to move beyond the debate between spirituality and religion, organisations need to create a culture and structure where managers and the employees can respectfully negotiate religious and spiritual diversity. This was only observed and discussed in THEL, where any values or principles the participants would apply, were openly discussed and negotiated. They suggest a model called Holistic Development Model to create an environment, which facilitates grounded discussion about spirituality in the workplace.

In summary, the participants in the three cases described their organisation as a spiritual workplace, rather than under the dominance of a particular religion or religious institution. Accordingly, they described some similar organisational values but exhibited different practices and policies in connection to those values, which was coherent with the approach of Bahá'í scripture in understanding the principles and practising them based on the followers' individual and collective understanding. Moreover, the three organisations displayed a strong sense of community, alignment of employees and managers with organisational values, sense of contribution to society, enjoyment at work, and opportunities for inner life and cohabitation of different beliefs and backgrounds, which are discussed as aspects of workplace spirituality in the literature. It was thus concluded that the three cases applying the principles of the Bahá'í Faith displayed more similarities with characteristics of workplace spirituality than control and domination in religious led organisations.

#### **9.1.4 Influence of religious values as part of organisational culture**

The investigation into the impact of religious belief in the three case studies started by asking the founders why they employed the Bahá'í principles to their business and their employment relations. In the first case study (PHX), the founder stated that it made “*good logical sense*” and made their organisation “*far better, more productive, unique and more progressive*”. Productivity and business growth as a result of employee commitment are among the reported impacts of religious beliefs on organisations in previous research (e.g. Jeremy, 1990; Weaver & Agle, 2002; Yousef, 2001). However, these previous studies indicate the commitment resulted from the influence of instilled shared values through shared religion, while at PHX there was a wide discussion of ‘diversity’ by managers and the employees, i.e. the employees believed in different religions and were from different ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds. Thus, they did not necessarily share the same value systems except for aspects of the organisational culture. On the other hand, as the founder tried to apply the Bahá'í precepts as part of the organisational culture, and the employees expressed connections to those organisational values, it can be said that these values were shared through the organisational culture. However, this poses further questions that require further research, such as: whether the commitment as a result of organisational culture is as effective as intrinsic religious beliefs and commitment; whether shared organisational culture results in long term commitment; and whether it has similar impact on productivity as does the commitment generated from shared religious values.

The impact of organisational culture on commitment has been widely studied. O'Reilly (1989), for instance, discusses the role of organisational culture in commitment and success of the organisations as ‘critical’. He (O'Reilly C. , 1989) lists three stages as ‘compliance, identification, and internalisation’ of the values of the organisation, where, respectively, the individuals comply to obtain something (e.g. pay), they accept influence to maintain a satisfying relationship, or the values of the organisation have been internalised and the individuals feel pride in applying them (which results in the highest level of commitment). However, as can be expected from such level of commitment, O'Reilly (1989) also suggests culture as a form of social control system that creates efficiency and effectiveness. In the current research, although commitment was not

pointed out as a rationale for the organisational culture or for what they did, it could have been a conscious or subconscious underlying driver for the focus of these organisations on their culture.

On the one hand, in the context of social control through organisational culture, the cases displayed the influence of organisational culture in their perceptions and behaviours; such as the value of philanthropic activities in PHX, the consultative approach and its requirements in AP, and the inquisitive and autonomy-based culture in THEL. These examples indicated the influence of organisational culture as internalised values in the employees, although some of the interviewed employees had been with the company for only a few years (1-3 years). Whether this was a form of power and control is explored in section 9.3.1 in the context of power.

On the other hand, diversity was strongly mentioned in the three cases, in appreciating individuals with their various beliefs, nationalities, and background. In AP and THEL, diversity was stated as one of the main values; it was mentioned in their approach to recruitment from any religious or ethnic background and in utilising the managers' and employees' opinions and involving the employees in the decisions. Diversity has been discussed more in recent literature (e.g. Lopez-Rocha, 2006; Morgan & Várdy, 2009; Hicks, 2002). These studies discuss various aspects of diversity such as ethnic and cultural diversity, minorities' employment gaps, and diversity as opposed to religious discrimination. For instance, Morgan and Vardy (2009) argue that the minorities often suffer an unemployment gap due to different reasons, including being less literate but also linguistic issues, leading to them not being able to present themselves well. Here they do not state that the migrants are necessarily illiterate or linguistically incapable of communication; but they focus on how less appealing they are in comparison to the natives of that country. In particular, about being 'linguistically appealing', in AP, there was an example by one of the managers that when she started working there, and again later when she was being promoted, her English competency skills needed improving. In her case it had not become a cause of discrimination, as she received support to improve it (although she was not a Bahá'í).

Concerning diversity in relation to religion and spirituality, Hicks (2002) argues that most studies of spirituality at workplaces try to identify the workplace with spirituality rather than religion, while they exclude diverse employees' religious expressions. Thus, he (Hicks, 2002) rather suggests that organisations need to create a structure and culture in which leaders and followers can respectfully negotiate religious and spiritual diversity. Discussing the values and concepts among the organisation members, and understanding them and the challenges of their application, were particularly addressed by the participants at THEL. It was mentioned that they believed any values 'they chose to apply' needed to be discussed, any challenges highlighted and then applied based on understanding and choice. In PHX and AP however, there was mention of discussing the values in terms of understanding them together and learning about the challenges, but not about choosing them. Thus, in terms of diversity, the organisational values at the three cases mainly appeared as a set of values based on the Bahá'í principles applied in the founders/organisations' own way (AP and PHX) or through a shared understanding and choice (THEL), allowing other religious obligations and values to be practised as well; but not as 'religious' values or obligations to be imposed to the employees which would discriminate against the non-believers. At the same time, the organisational values in the three cases did not exhibit room for other religious values as part of the organisational culture, which could indicate the dominance and some level of discrimination against including other religions' values as part of the organisational culture.

However, in a more detailed investigation of the results and examining the values that were mentioned as based on the Bahá'í faith these were mainly focused on diversity, service for the society, excellence and hard work, respect and friendliness, fairness (with different approaches), an open-door policy, and consultation. These values are common among many different religious beliefs, other than consultation as practised by Bahá'ís, which was most strongly raised at AP and is further explored in this chapter.

It is notable, however, that in the three cases employees and the managers did not mention any other aspect of diversity nor had any policies relating to them, such as disability, age, marital status, social status, sexual orientation, personality (Shen, Chanda, D'netto, & Monga, 2009), and language (Rodriguez, 2006).

To provide more detail on the choice of organisational values, the other two founders' reasoning for their choice of applying the Bahá'í principles were analysed as well. The founder in AP spoke about his belief, based on the Bahá'í quote regarding attending to the needs of the age and the people, and said that he had accordingly decided their line of business to be in supported-housing for vulnerable people. Then in the operational context of the organisation, he referred to the methods and procedures (such as 'consultation') that he had learned from the Bahá'í principles and the activities at the Bahá'í community, which he had found effective and had resulted in having "much happier employees". Another manager (not a Bahá'í) at AP said that their success and recognition in the market was due to their method of operation based on Bahá'í principles, such as consultation and collaboration even with the clients, respect and no blame, and having a cultivated environment for employees to grow, and support and flexibility for individual progress of employees; as a result of which 'they were constantly receiving recognition from local authorities, were growing fast and were making a difference' (M11). Similarly, the employees spoke about the organisational values and their method of operation as one of the main reasons they wanted to work at AP (FGD).

At THEL, the founder explained that the Bahá'í principles were innate to his way of thinking, came to him naturally and defined for him what was a good contribution to their business. He said at their organisation it was mainly a faith-based approach rather than a religion-dominated approach, and it never mattered what religion anyone who joined the company believed in, but it mattered that they shared a similar concern for the society and humanitarian values.

In summary, at all three organisations, the religious values were implemented through the dominance of organisational culture, which some researchers find a contemporary way of executing power, through influencing the employees' values and thinking, (e.g. Kunda, 2009), while some others do not, such as Lukes (2005, p. 35) who argues that influence or consensual authority is not a form of power without conflict of interest. In the three cases here, since there were no disputes in the aspects of organisational culture it could be considered as the power of influence, which could have shaped the employees' values

(Kunda, 2009). To explore this further, the role of founders and the strength of organisational culture are explored.

In relation to the role of founders in embedding the organisational culture, Schein (1983) argues that the culture is generally formed through the influence of the founder in an organisation's early years with his/her bag of experiences and beliefs. However, the elements of culture that survive over time are those that the founding group have examined, and where solutions have worked over time in solving the problems (Schein, 1983). Schein (1983) states that generally the founding group have more commitment to the culture than external or new members, since the first group have gone through the problems together, have worked out the solutions to the problems as elements of their culture, and they have survived together. In PHX, the aspects of culture could be considered as the factors that had survived and worked over time, but not in AP and THEL, being still quite young medium or small size organisations and still mostly working with the founding group. However, a few employees at AP had worked with the company for around a year, and they showed strong commitment to the values; and so, any common agreement of aspects of organisational values could be a result of internalised organisational culture.

Schein (1984) examines culture in three levels of influence. Initially, the '*visible artefacts*' (the constructed environment of the organisation, its architecture, technology, office layout, manner of dress, visible or audible behaviour patterns, and public documents), the data for which are easy to obtain but are difficult to interpret and analyse (Schein, 1984, p. 3). Thus, to help analyse why members behave the way they do, the '*values*' that govern their behaviour are then analysed at the second level; through asking people about the reason for their behaviour and for what is going on at the organisation (Schein, 1984). Then, their '*underlying assumptions*' are explored that determine how the group members perceive, think, and feel. Schein (1984) argues that as values lead to behaviour, and then behaviour begins to solve the problems, the values gradually transform into underlying assumptions and drop out of awareness. Thus, to determine strong organisational cultures, Schein (1984) argues that culture is often passed to new members by old members and the strength of a culture is often identified by homogeneity and stability of group membership and the length and intensity of shared experiences.

Similarly, O'Reilly (1989, p. 13) argues that it is through the '*intensity*' ("or amount of approval/disapproval attached to an expectation") and '*consensus*' ("the degree of consensus or consistency with which a norm is shared") of the norms that strong cultures exist.

In the present research, the employees and the managers were asked about their experiences and the way things were done, as well as how they identified their work and their workplace, how they made decisions, and the challenges they faced. The participants' noticeable facial expressions and emotions while speaking about their experiences were also noted during the interviews, exploring the three levels of culture as Schein (1984) suggests for studying organisational culture.

It was found that THEL did not have a strong organisational culture, as its employees (whether an old or new member) openly defined their role (job description) at the organisation, and that they discussed and identified their organisational values through conversations (as addressed by both the employees and the founder). This is different from how Schein (1984) argues culture is often being passed to new members by old members, and how the strength of a culture is identified by homogeneity and stability of group membership, and the length and intensity of shared experiences. Furthermore, at THEL their values did not work through a strong organisational culture since the group membership dissolved over time as the organisation changed its structure. AP, on the other hand, could be considered as holding a strong organisational culture that did not negotiate the assumptions and beliefs underlying its values, culture and structure, despite being consultation-based. However, after the culture was accepted (i.e. within that culture), as the participants discussed the other decisions were made based on consultation. This is similar to the patterns of social movements/social culture, where the common underlying assumptions are generally fixed by the prophet, messiah, or other kinds of charismatic leader (Schein, 1983). The concept of existence of a charismatic leader and their followers refers to the discussion of symbolic power, which along with exploring power through influence as Etzioni (1975) calls normative power, will be further discussed in section 9.3.1 through examining the context of power and its aspects in the approach based on Bahá'í principles.



### **9.1.5 The impact of religious beliefs in summary**

In the preceding sections, the influence of religious values on the three organisations has been analysed in relation to the theories of management and their relation to religious studies. It was argued that firstly, based on the scriptural study in Chapter 3, the standpoint of the Bahá'í scripture was '*work in the spirit of service*', focused on distribution of wealth through sharing the profit with the employees and moderate withdrawal of the profit by the owners of the companies, and stress on service of the society, which made the theorisation of the Bahá'í principles different from those of the Protestant ethics based on Weber (2003), and his theory of Capitalism.

On the other hand, the results of this research did not show similarities with theories of control by Jeremy (1990), Shah, Largi, and Batley (2007), and similar studies, since the results of the analysis of the three cases focused on a softened hierarchy, participation, and freedom of the employees, and did not involve religious institutions, authority, or control.

However, it showed similarities to theories of post-bureaucracy such as the discussion of freedom by Maravelias (2007), who discusses freedom in terms of autonomy as well as in terms of access to opportunities, both of which have been widely discussed in the three cases.

The results of these cases indicated more similarities to the studies of spirituality at workplace rather than religious organisations, due to the stress on being 'Bahá'í-inspired organisations', diversity of religions and beliefs, and having employees and managers who mostly did not believe in the Bahá'í Faith, with the space for people with different beliefs to practice their own religious/spiritual beliefs, and no preaching of the religion nor any connections to religious institutions (Bahá'í institutions).

Finally, there was the influence of the Bahá'í precepts through organisational culture, which involved the debate on domination and power through culture as well as diversity and appreciating different cultures, through cultural events such as international foods day (at PHX), recruiting employees from different cultural and religious backgrounds

(PHX, AP, and THEL), and negotiating and discussing the values and culture in conversations (THEL).

However, to what extent, the influence of certain values as part of culture or as inspiration to the organisation, is an exercise of power, is further examined in section 9.3.1.

## **9.2 Work based on the Bahá'í principles**

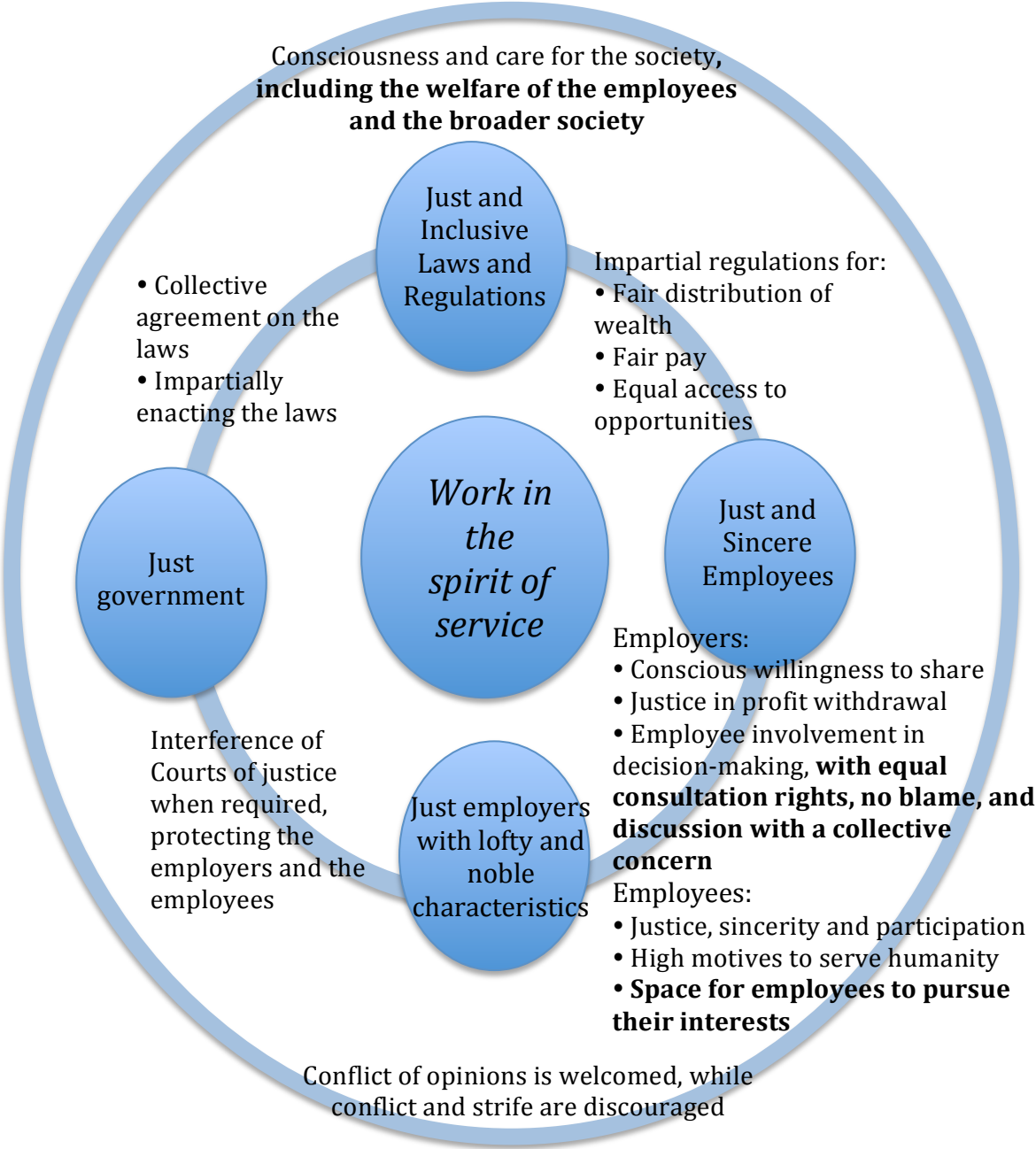
In order to focus on the influence of religious beliefs of organisational relations and behaviour, the concept of work and its relevant practices were further explored in Bahá'í scripture and in the three cases, in order to understand the drivers behind the concepts and practices the participants attributed to and experienced at their work and the employment relations.

The concept of '*work in the spirit of service*' based on the Bahá'í scripture is:

“A justice-centric approach with emphasised focus on service for the society, and conscious and lofty concerns and practices of the employers and the employees, active involvement of the employees in the decisions of the company, and just and effective laws and institutions.”

Therefore, the figure developed in Chapter 3 is updated and presented here, incorporating the results of the case study analysis. These points have been explained in the following sections, in the discussions of power, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement. The updated points are presented in bold in the proposed framework in Figure 9-1.

**Figure 9-1 Work in the Spirit of Service - Based on the interpretation of the Bahá'í scripture and analysis of the three case studies applying Bahá'í principles**



This framework proposes that the employment relationship should be built on justice, where the managers and the employees sincerely and collaboratively work for the improvement of the organisation, the welfare of the employees, and betterment of the society, as a shared responsibility. It proposes that they all work based on the lofty and noble characteristics of human beings, and to the fullness of their ability. In the meantime, if a conflict occurs, it should be resolved through calm, respectful, honest, and considerate consultation, while employees have the right to participate in decision-making and in raising concern about their work and workplace, and they have space to pursue their interests. However, if the conflict persists, it is the responsibility of the ‘just and impartial government’ to intervene and resolve the problem protecting the employees and the employers, according to just and inclusive laws and regulations. Therefore, this justice centric approach to work extends to the role of governments and holds them responsible to be just and impartial. Accordingly, whether a workplace can be just if the government is not, is a question for further research.

This framework can have practical implications for the organisations in building their employment relations and creating relevant policies and spaces for empowerment of the employees, and an environment where the employees can sincerely and wholeheartedly work for the service of the society.

The concept of work was explored in three cases, and the results are presented here.

In PHX:

A customer-centric approach with emphasised humanitarian values and practices, which provided employees with a diverse (in nationalities and beliefs), family-like, fun, innovative and hard-working environment; where the employees were heard, appreciated/rewarded, and had opportunities to progress.

In AP:

A consultation-centric approach, in an environment of diversity and unity, respect and trust, without blaming, and with a ‘humble posture of learning’, where employees had space to pursue their interests through training, support, and empowerment, and exercise of equality and justice; and the decisions were made

collectively between managers, employees, and the clients (the clients were involved in decisions about themselves).

In THEL:

A freedom-oriented approach with trust, lack of hierarchy and job description, space and support for learning, development, and decision-making, and a humane and friendly environment; aiming to serve the society by collaboratively helping organisations find their role in society.

In the three conceptualisations of work here the focus is quite different. The PHX concept of work is centred on wellbeing of the customers, in AP it is on consultation and collective decision-making, and in THEL it is on freedom and autonomy of the employees. However, they all share various aspects of their concepts such as: service for society; collaboration and participation in decision-making; and respect, appreciation and support of the employees in a friendly environment.

These three concepts are similar with the conceptualisation of '*work in the spirit of service*' based on Bahá'í scripture in their concern for service for the society and concern for the employees; however, they do not indicate a justice-centric approach, and they do not discuss the role of lofty characteristics for the employees or the just laws and institutions. Basically, the concepts in the three cases are focused on the relationship with the employees and the society. However, in the three cases, the managers and the employees specifically highlighted the values and characteristics of the founders (their employers), even those who pointed to any conflict in the organisation, which can refer to connections to noble characteristics. But there were no references to the just laws or regulations.

Nonetheless, the similarities between the three conceptualisations in the organisations, as well as the similarities in the aspects of employment relations with the concept of work based on the Bahá'í scripture, can further point to the connection between the three cases and their relation to Bahá'í principles; while remembering that the participants did not have a formulated theory or framework to follow, but they had applied the Bahá'í principles based on their own knowledge and understanding. Accordingly, sharing these similar concerns, which are based on the main characteristics of work as developed in

Chapter 3 in the aspect of employment relations, highlights the influence of Bahá'í principles in the three organisations.

### **9.3 The influence of religious values on aspects of employment relations**

The previous section explored the participants' concept of work as the driver for their organisational behaviour and practices based on the Bahá'í principles. This section focuses on employment relations and the aspects of employment relations as the key focus of the research. These aspects include power and authority, conflict of interest, and employee participation.

#### **9.3.1 Power and authority**

In Chapter 6, the results of the analysis of the data in relation to legitimisation and exercise of power were presented as an aspect of employment relations.

At PHX, the aspects of power and authority were spoken about in terms of the aspects of managers' power in making the final decisions, setting the goals, monitoring and control, as well as exercise of power through organisational culture, and the aspects of employees' power through employees' input in daily decisions, raising their ideas and suggestions, power of seniority, merit-based power through an earned trust, and power of personal relationships (Chapter 6). Here it can be said that the managers made the final decisions while the employees could influence the decision process through their input. This influence increased as the employees' tenure with the organisation increased and they gained the trust of their managers and their colleagues. However, there were a few employees who did not have any influence on the decisions in their department. There was also monitoring and control in the organisation, which was an aspect of exercise of power at PHX. There was, however, the discussion of an organisational environment which was not based on the boss-employee relationship, where the employees felt comfortable to talk to any manager at their organisation at any level (including the founder) and share their concerns, suggestions and ideas with the open-door policy. Then,

concerning legitimisation of power and authority at PHX, this was not through the religious principles, since there was diversity of religions, backgrounds, ethnicities, and genders; but it was through intensity and agreement of the factors of 'organisational culture' among employees and managers, and a softened hierarchy where most managers were in charge of final decisions (as opposed to the founder being involved in the decisions).

These aspects of power showed most similarity with power as discussed by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). The types of power, based on Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989), that could be found in PHX were 'reward power' (depends on A's ability to provide rewards for B), 'expert power' (based on B's perception of A's competence), and 'legitimate power' (based on the internalisation of common norms and values) (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989). Here, based on Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989), 'reward power' refers to the power of managers to direct the employees and influence their pay rises and promotion, which was particularly related to the performance-related pay mechanism in PHX, where managers decided the pay rises based on annual reviews. 'Expert power' in PHX related to the power through which they gained trust as the 'subject-matter expert', as participants called it. 'Legitimate power' was in place through the factors of organisational culture, where the employees felt responsibility and commitment towards their role due to internalised norms (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989), which were evident in the discussion of diversity of beliefs and ethnicities, philanthropy, hard work and innovation at PHX.

At AP, power was mentioned as the power of participation, including employees' participation, and clients' and other parties' participation, with a 'humble posture of learning', and flexibility and support, while at the same time the dominance of organisational values and culture were strongly emphasised. Here, all participants discussed their process of decision-making through a culture of consultation, where they all discussed matters in an open and respectful environment and came to a decision unanimously or with majority vote. Thus, the power and authority was mainly identified as shared power through consultation at different levels. However, the basic principles of the organisation, according to the participants, were not subject to negotiation, such as the 'culture of consultation' itself, the 'humble posture of learning', diversity of beliefs and

nationalities, and justice. The principles discussed by the participants were fixed as parts of the organisational culture and in the processes and procedures of the organisation, and all the participants expressed agreement of and appreciation towards them. Consensus on the aspects of organisational culture can be considered as the way of legitimisation of authority at AP.

Thus, in AP the most common type of power, based on Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989), was the 'legitimate power' (based on internalisation of common norms and values), which Etzioni (1975) called 'normative power' (through allocation or manipulation of symbolic rewards and deprivation). Normative power, in recent organisational studies, has been connected to the concept of organisational culture (e.g. Kunda, 2009). Similarly, Kärreman and Alvesson (2004, p. 152) argue that managers use socio-ideological forms of control through "*beliefs, meaning, norms, and interpretations*" to control "*relations, emotions, identity formation, and ideology*". In AP the principles and values were strongly accepted and appreciated by all the employees and the managers, which points to a strong normative power. Kunda (2009) argues that this manipulation through culture is often in favour of employers. Thus, it is an exercise of power. However, Lukes (2005) discusses the role of 'conflict of interest', arguing that 'if influence is in the form of encouragement, inducement and persuasion' but 'without conflict of interest' it is not an exercise of power. Furthermore, Kunda (2009) stresses the influencing role of those who are at the receiving end of the exercise of power, and states that employees are not passive observers as they eventually rethink and react. Here, in AP, there was no conflict of interest discussed despite the detailed probing questions by the interviewer. This does not necessarily mean that there was no conflict of interest. However, the participants particularly expressed appreciation of their culture of consultation and they (FGD) mentioned that when there were decisions made at the management level which they disagreed with, they had raised it with the managers, had a meeting, discussed it and it was changed (e.g. the clients' calls policy, in which calls were diverted on the support workers' personal mobile phones, which was then cancelled after the consultation with the employees in a meeting). However, their experiences were limited to few years and probably few experiences of this kind, since AP existed just five years prior to the interviews, and it would have taken a few years for the organisational culture and



processes of ‘consultation’ to consolidate. This was mentioned by M11, that the culture of consultation had gradually developed and they (the managers and employees) were gradually learning how to consult effectively.

In THEL, power was spoken about as employees’ autonomy in all the decisions, except for the decision about the type of business and which projects to accept, which were made by the founder; the latter indicating some power for the founder. The ‘autonomy’ was further explained by a lack of agenda, job description or formal structure for the company, and in the decision-making process of THEL. In this regard, the participants mentioned complete autonomy even in defining their job descriptions as long as it was in the context of their business objective. They did not discuss elements of organisational culture as a strong context at THEL (as opposed to the other two cases), and the principles or values they adopted were open to discussion and acceptance/rejection. So, legitimisation of authority can be considered through employees’ autonomy in making the decisions and forming their job descriptions and organisational values.

The high level of shared power spoken about in THEL did not show similarities with most existing studies of power and autonomy (e.g. Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989; Etzioni, 1975; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). Grey (2007) refers to the lack of control, and argues that in post-bureaucracy control is not the main concern but rather motivation, trust, empowerment, and shared responsibility are the aspects that are valued. This level of shared power requires further research into its potentials, risks, and particular requirements.

Furthermore, considering accountability (Gastil, 1994), which, as mentioned in the literature review was often missing in the study of power in organisations, this was raised in PHX in terms of being accountable to the president of the company (the founder), while a manager had mentioned that managers were not regularly assessed through the annual review, which indicated an inconsistency in assessment of accountability. In AP and THEL, since formal assessments did not take place, but they emphasised collective decision-making and problem solving, it can be said that accountability was exercised through group meetings and discussion of the problems and faults, without ‘blaming’.

Considering all three organisations together in the context of power and authority: PHX,

with managers mainly making the final decisions, had a single source of authority; AP, where the decisions were made with consultation among the managers, employees and the clients, but not as competing sources of power as pluralists ascribe this (managers versus employees or their representatives), had a particular consultative/collaborative approach; and THEL, with discussion and involvement of the manager, employees and clients, and a high level of autonomy of the employees, had multiple sources of authority.

The consultative/collaborative approach is introduced here as a specific approach, because most characteristics of the latter two cases in this research did not fit the common characteristics of organisations with multiple sources of authority as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). In addition, this approach, while displaying some potential for improving employment relations, would have its own limitations, which require further investigation. I have called this approach the ‘consultative/collaborative approach’.

The consultative/collaborative approach based on the results of this research in terms of power and authority in organisations includes participation, lack of veto power or domination, influence of all the members on the agenda discussion, and existence of an environment which supports consultation (e.g. through trust, ‘humble posture of learning’, diversity, respect). Other characteristics of this approach will be discussed in the following sections.

### **9.3.2 Dealing with conflict of interest**

The second aspect of the employment relations explored in this thesis was dealing with conflict of interest. In this section the results of the analysis of the three cases are discussed in terms of different types of conflict that the participants mentioned or the potential conflicts that were identified in relation to the relevant theory (mostly based on Lukes’ (2005) observed and latent conflict), how the organisation approached and dealt with those conflicts, and the spaces for the employees to pursue their own interests, if any existed.

As the first point, a common characteristic of the three cases was lack of representation of the labour whether in the form of unions or shop stewards, which is one of the main aspects that the pluralists fought for (e.g. Edwards, 2009; Hyman, 1987).

In PHX, some areas of observed and latent conflict were discussed. The main area of observed conflict concerned the concept of fair pay. They had performance-based pay for most of the employees (whereas employees from accounting for instance received fixed pay and were happy about it). While most employees had expressed satisfaction with their pay and rewards, a few employees shared deep concerns about the low pay for employees from production and R&D departments (few employees from R&D were interviewed). Some employees highlighted that, while the company spent part of its budgets in service of the society and humanitarian activities, it could have increased the employees' salaries. The discussion of fair pay in this relation has been addressed before, e.g. based on Greenberg (1990), where performance-related pay was considered fair based on Leventhal's proactive approach as opposed to equal pay being fair in equity theory.

However, the discussion of fair pay here was not limited to the equity or procedural justice theories, since the conflict discussed here did not question the performance pay or the assessment criteria, nor did the participants demand equal pay. The conflict mainly concerned the wages of employees with low pay, in the production and R&D departments, who struggled financially. Berg and Frost (2005) discuss the level of pay as an aspect of dignity at work, and they found that higher pay, adequate level of staffing and resources, and access to training are the variables that most closely satisfy dignity at work. In Bahá'í scripture, it is a concern of fairness, and the employees are required to have high enough wages in order to have a dignified life and also save for their time of need (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 273-277). This, however, does not indicate how much would be 'high enough'. In the three cases in this research, all the employees in AP said they were paid generously – above the average; in THEL they said they were paid enough, but highlighted pay was not the reason they stayed there but all the 'other characteristics' that they spoke about (which were also the same characteristics that challenged some of them); and in PHX some mentioned they were paid generously, while employees from production and R&D highlighted they were not paid enough. Therefore,

how to decide how much is 'high enough' requires further research. In AP, the employees spoke about the process of deciding the salaries as benchmarking with other firms by employees then proposing an amount with their reasons, discussing it at a meeting and deciding together on the amount. This indicates a participative process, which could be considered as a method of deciding a 'high enough' salary, which has similarities with procedural justice where the method of deciding the pay is influential in deciding whether it is just (Greenberg, 1990).

There was some discussion about the system of annual awards at PHX (as an important mechanism of appreciation in PHX), some finding it mainly focused on innovation and exceptional work rather than appreciating hard work. However, a similar argument in another focus group explained their awards system as inspiring and fair. Since there were arguments for both sides (with most of those interviewed appreciating the system), there was no way of knowing whether the majority appreciated or criticised the awards system in PHX through this qualitative research. Nevertheless, existence of this argument about the focus on innovation instead of hard work, as well as the question of fair pay, indicates an individualist structure of rewards system in PHX, which could be influenced by the US national culture (Hofstede, Country Comparison, 2017), since some managers and employees spoke about similar companies in USA, and said that PHX, while much smaller than those companies, offered many similar benefits and rewards (e.g. M31, FGD1,4,6,7,9). However, based on Hofstede's (2017) indexes, the UK has a similar individualist index (where AP and THEL are located) with USA, at 89 for the UK and 91 for the USA, but AP and THEL did not have a similar rewards system or a similar conflict. Thus, the rewards system in PHX could be a company-specific method, as initiatives of the founder or the managers, or just broadly following a common reward system in the industry; or even both.

Other areas of conflict mentioned in PHX mainly involved conflicts among employees or among departments regarding their performance, and managers explained they generally talked to both the parties, explored the issues, and resolved the conflict amongst them.

Regarding dealing with conflict, when some managers were asked about the issues with pay or the rewards system, it was often mentioned that they could never keep everybody

happy, but they tried their best. One manager mentioned that the company had been very generous with him and many others, but he could not say the same for everybody, since their resources were limited. Most managers mentioned their bonuses, pay rises, and profit-sharing scheme as methods to resolve the issue (although the profit-sharing and rises had not happened prior to the interviews due to the financial crisis and its consequences). The participants also said that the profit-sharing scheme at PHX was fair and would balance the pay structures, since it was based on the number of years with the company rather than based on salary.

There were also discussions of opportunities for the employees to pursue their interests, such as training inside or outside the company, being heard through the open-door policy, opportunities for growth and promotion, spaces to work on the projects they felt passionate about, and some level of autonomy to make the decisions regarding their work.

These points indicate that conflict was recognised and allowed for at PHX and the managers attempted to find ways to resolve it. Yet, some conflicts seemed to be unresolved such as the issue of low paid workers, and this indicates that some issues were not resolved in the interest of the employees. Moreover, with absence of union representation, the employees with the low pay did not have a space to negotiate their terms of employment, which along with their disengagement with the decisions of the company (it was mentioned that they generally did not have access to computers and were not involved with many aspects of the PHX organisational culture), indicated inconsistency in the awards system and conflict resolution mechanisms in PHX, in its various departments and towards different employees; which questions their discussion of justice.

At AP, there was mention of examples of issues or conflicts such as: a new member's difficulty in involving others in running a project; communication issues; employees' disagreements with a decision made by the managers; criticism and feedback; and conflict with the clients. The participants referred to these examples as 'issues' rather than conflict, and they spoke about them positively as experiences they were proud about. They were not however, discharged as non-conflict, and were explored further. The

participants said that if there was a conflict, it was dealt with not as issues of competing interests, but as issues that they were trying to resolve together, so they did not last for a long time, and were resolved in a friendly environment when they would arise (M1,11,12, FGD). The participants said that in AP the method to deal with the issues was to sit together and discuss them in a respectful and peaceful manner, without placing blame, and resolving them together. All the employees referred to the culture of 'not blaming' at AP, and they shared their experiences with these issues (such as conflicts with the clients, or disruption to a project, which they explained as their mistakes), and how at a meeting all had discussed each issue as a problem of the group and resolved it together without blaming the person at fault but supporting them to overcome the issues. The culture of 'no blaming' seemed very instrumental in resolving the conflicts and how the employees approached them as issues not conflict, and did not find them significant or distressing.

These issues and the way they resolved the conflict appeared as an interactive environment where employees were not only an opposing source of power, as in pluralist approach (Budd & Bhawe, 2008), but also beneficiaries or part of a large group with the purpose of resolving the issues. Similarly, managers were not mentioned as if they were on the opposite side or competing powers. In other words, the issues in AP were not treated as opposing interests, but as common issues to resolve together. The employees further spoke about how different interests were considered and flourished as well, such as: the employees' autonomy towards their work; consultation and space for suggestions in improving the workplace, methods, processes, and policies; and space for personal growth and improvement (such as internal training, support and flexibility for external training, or continuing their education).

There was also discussion of a consultative pay mechanism, equal pay for equal position, pay rises and pensions, encouraging and empowering culture with no blame, and mutual support among all staff, which the participants discussed as interests of the employees that were met. Here, the pay mechanism at AP follows the equity theory, which focuses on perceptions of the employees of fair pay and finds equal pay (outputs) for equal job (inputs) as fair (Adams, 1963). Here, the theory is based on the perceptions of the recipients of pay (employees), of the relationship between their job and pay, and the

psychological character of fairness where the employees compare the relationship between their input and outcomes and feel they are treated fairly or feel inequity (Adams, 1963). Moreover, the pay mechanism in AP displayed similarities with procedural justice, where the process through which the justice was decided and distributed was also material (Greenberg, 1990). In AP the participants spoke about the consultative pay mechanism, through which they decided the salaries together; the employees conducted research about the amount of pay for their role in similar organisations and submitted a proposal; then they all met with the managers and the founder and they discussed the proposed pay together along with the employees' reasons; and at the meeting they decided together on what a fair pay was, considering employees' responsibilities at AP, which then applied to all the employees in the same job. Thus, here not only the salaries but also the process of how it was decided and enforced mattered in the concept of fairness (Greenberg, 1990).

Furthermore, in AP, similarly to PHX, there was no union membership. However, in AP the employees discussed and negotiated their pay and working conditions directly. Having a particular consultative mechanism for discussing the issues including the salary could point to the specific approach mentioned earlier - the consultative/collaborative approach - which extended the employee participation to deciding the pay and terms of employment.

In THEL, the main area of conflict mentioned was about issues among employees; for example, they discussed one (based on a personal matter) that they ignored, and it gradually became uncomfortable between the two employees until one of them left. The participants mentioned that this was a mistake and they had learnt from it. So, when there was another issue among employees they sat together, discussed it, supported the person who needed more support, and resolved the issue. They said that this was their method since then. Furthermore, an area which was particularly mentioned as a 'non-conflictual' issue was that two employees had recently left the organisation due to being uncomfortable with the changes that had recently happened in the organisational objective, which made it less business-oriented and more society-oriented. While the employees had complete autonomy in their job within this framework, they preferred to decide the direction of their business; so, they separated from the company to start their

own business. It was mentioned by the employees and the founder that they met each other regularly and were in a great relationship and there was no conflict. However, although mentioned as a 'non-conflictual' issue it resulted in two employees' departure from the company, which could point to a hidden conflict. Here, the company's way of dealing with this issue/conflict was to support those employees to take an alternative path, and as a result continue its restructure as project-based resourcing while the ex-employees could maintain their autonomy and join on the projects they preferred and were most competent in. The founder mentioned (and the employees confirmed) that this style of operation was not a sudden choice, but it evolved over time to that stage. Thus, the company and the employees could not be considered as competing sources of power since they went through an interactive change together where both the founder and the employees' choices impacted upon the operation and structure of the organisation.

Employees' choice in their contractual relationship with the company was also reflected in the spaces for the employees to pursue their interests. All the participants mentioned that the employees were supported to pursue their interests, whether they fitted the interests of the company or not. For instance, the founder said that some employees preferred to work 'project-based', so that they could work on different projects that interested them and best utilised their capacities rather than on a full-time contract, some decided to continue their education and wanted to be shifted to part-time. He mentioned that their preferences had been accepted, and as a result of that the company was working on an associate-based structure, where they had a pool of resources that they called upon for any relevant project, rather than the 'traditional full-time employee based structure' (as the founder and another participant called it). This structure, and these discussions about THEL, were different from most literature in the theories of employment relations and theories of management ideology, rather it implied the space for all the employees to pursue their interests and a consultative approach which also influenced the structure of the organisation.

In summary, concerning the conflict of interests, PHX displayed spaces for the employees to pursue their interests, but mainly as long as they were compatible with the interests of the company (e.g. there was the employee who wanted to send his son to university, and the company supported him to get promoted in his job and save enough



for his son's education). There were also discussions of conflicts dealt with in the interest of the company (e.g. in disputes about annual review where both the employees and the managers filled the forms, met and discussed the points to improve, and if the employees objected to the outcomes, they could submit a document with their reasons and evidences to be reconsidered for their promotion; although the employees rarely submitted the latter document). Also, in some departments the employees were not involved in the decisions of the company. Therefore, while there were some spaces for the employees to pursue their interests, it did not seem a focus of the company and was not strongly promoted and facilitated at all the departments in PHX. Also, there seemed to be an on-going conflict about the salary of low paid employees, and the company had not indicated it was pursuing a policy to resolve the issue.

In AP and THEL employees had spaces to pursue their interests even if not in the interest of the company (e.g. studying in a field different from the field of the operation of the company, or getting involved in projects different from and outside of the scope and projects of the company) and they resolved conflict in discussion and collaboration, which pointed to a specific approach called a consultative/collaborative approach here, where interests of the employees were recognised and supported, and the areas of interest as well as issues and conflicts were spoken about, analysed in discussions, and resolved in consultative meetings, with respect, no blame, and support.

Based on the results of the analysis of the three cases here, the 'space for employees to pursue their interests' was identified as a specific aspect of just employment relations. This point has accordingly been added to the proposed framework from Figure 2-2. Moreover, considering the concern of some employees about service of the society to be along with the welfare of the employees rather than in its absent, the point at the framework about 'Consciousness and care for the society' has been updated as "Consciousness and care for the society, **including the welfare of the employees and the broader society**".

The next section continues the analysis and presents the results about employee participation.

### 9.3.3 Employee involvement and participation

Another aspect of employment relations, employee involvement and participation, is discussed here. Based on the review of the literature, while employee involvement practices have been variably employed for several decades, for a long time they often did not result in employee participation or any voting rights (e.g. McGaughey, 2014; Albrecht, 1983; Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995; Langan-Fox, Code, Gray, & Langfield-Smith, 2002). Cotton et al. (1988) in their widely-quoted research, identified six main forms of participation<sup>62</sup>, and Vroom (2003) in his 'Normative' model of decision-making considers five types of decision-making<sup>63</sup>; it is the latter with which the results of this research shared most similarities.

At PHX, employee involvement was mainly part of the organisational culture rather than the company strategy that would be applied all across the company. Although all levels discussed by Vroom (2003) were mentioned in different departments, the most commonly practised type of participation was mentioned at the level of 'consult', where information, input and suggestions were obtained from the employees (individually or in groups, which were also observed through the meetings attended by the researcher) and the final decisions were made by the managers.

At AP, the main focus of most discussions by the participants was on a 'consultative approach' in making the decisions, involving the founder, the managers, the employees, the clients, and the relevant external institutions, depending on the subject of the decision. They explained their 'consultative approach' through different examples from the decisions they had made. The participants explained that they discussed the matter (plans, suggestions, issues, projects, etc.) in an environment of respect and not talking at each other, with a 'humble posture of learning', equal rights to share their opinions, and

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<sup>62</sup> Cotton et al. (Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988) identified six main forms of employee participation as: (a) Participation in work decisions, (b) Consultative participation, (c) Short-term participation, (d) Informal participation, (e) Employee ownership, (f) Representative participation – rather than the dimensions from the taxonomy.

<sup>63</sup> Vroom (2003) in his 'Normative' model of decision-making, considers five types of decision-making processes where the leader may: **Decide** (with just getting information from employees), **Consult** (individuals), **Consult** (groups), **Facilitate** (the discussion and decision of the groups), and **Delegate** (the problem and the decision to the employees while supporting them).

detachment from their opinions. Then they made the decisions based on the opinion of the majority. They said that they further revised the decision if it did not work, discussed it again and made another decision in a similar manner. This is similar to the type of participation that Vroom (2003) calls 'facilitate', where the group discusses and makes the decision (the decision is not made or dominated by the leader). Furthermore, the employees said that they were in charge of managing their workload and their engagement with the clients, which resembles another aspect of participation by Vroom (2003) called 'delegate'.

At THEL, the participants said that all the decisions about the delivery of their services were in total autonomy of the employees. They mentioned that the nature of their business was that the projects came in through the founder's networks and his discussions with top-level managers in other organisations, then the rest of the decisions on how to deliver the service would be made by the employees, often in discussions with the clients or other stakeholders (those that the employers would see fit to involve). Based on the employees' statements, after the project was accepted the founder had little involvement in the development and delivery of the service. This is similar to the level of involvement that Vroom (2003) calls 'delegation' where the problem goes to the employees and they are in charge of making the decisions and finding the solutions, while the leader provides resources and encouragement and is involved when is asked. However, some employees said that sometimes they felt that the founder was disengaged from the projects, and they were in charge of making all the decisions. Basically, they needed more support rather than full autonomy, as was mentioned in the previous section. This has similarities with 'participation in work decisions' as in Cotton et al. (1988), where the employees have formal, direct participation in the long-term, they have high influence with veto rights, and their decisions are focused on the work and how it is organised.

In summary, the three cases displayed different types of employee involvement and different levels of participation. At PHX, although different levels of participation were spoken about and observed, the most commonly practised level of participation was 'consult', which involved employees' opinion, feedback, and input, but not any power over the decisions. (Vroom, 2003). AP displayed a consultative approach, which is considered as a specific approach here. As the participants highlighted, they made the

routine decisions individually, but for the rest of the decisions they (whether employees or the managers) called for meetings, discussed the matters and made the decisions at the meetings. Thus, this method is more focused on collective decision-making rather than the power of decision-making by the individual. Therefore, it is called as 'consultative/collaborative approach'. THEL, displayed domination of 'delegation' (Vroom, 2003) in the decision-making, considering broad autonomy and power of decision-making for the employees as well.

In the levels/methods of employee involvement practised in the three cases the various aspects of collective decision-making included: the culture of no blame if the results of a decision were not as expected; equal rights in discussions and decision-making (where at AP all managers and employees had equal rights to participation in a decision, and could bring a decision to discussion if they were not involved in it); and participating in consultation considering the benefit of all rather than self-interest or interest of their departments. These characteristics are often absent from the reported employee involvement practices, and were identified as specific aspects of collective decision-making in this case study research. Therefore, they are added to the proposed framework presented in Figure 9-1.

### **9.3.4 Aspects of employment relations in summary**

In this section the results of the analysis are discussed in relation to power and legitimisation of authority, dealing with conflict of interest, and employee involvement and participation.

Here, the three cases displayed different results in relation to exercise of power and participation. PHX displayed various sources of power in different departments, and for employees with different capacities and years of service at the company. However, managers mainly had the power of decision-making, although not in a traditional boss-employee manner. Concerning the areas for the employees to pursue their interests, the areas of conflict, and the organisation policies to deal with conflict, it was concluded that conflict was not discouraged or suppressed in PHX, and the employees often had space to pursue their interests. However, since the case about low-paid employees did not indicate

any power for them to influence their salary or the decisions of the company, it questioned the universality of employees' rights to fair pay and participation in PHX. Concerning employee involvement and participation, it was concluded that the PHX mostly employed the level of 'consult' as Vroom (2003) addresses: involving opinions and input from the employees, while the final decision was made by the managers. Thus, it can be said that overall, with having a stronger source of power and decision-making (the managers), PHX mostly displayed a single source of authority and employee involvement in the level of providing input.

At AP, the participants said that they made the decisions in 'consultation' among managers, employees, the clients and external organisations, concerning a range of subjects while employees were in charge of their work with their clients. Their salaries (working conditions) were also decided in consultation and they spoke about having the power to influence the decisions over their working conditions. In addition, they mentioned different areas for the employees to pursue their interests, and dealing with conflict through consultation, with 'no blaming' and support (again with a consultative approach). Furthermore, employee involvement and participation at AP concentrated on collective decision-making while the employees were also in charge of their work and the decisions regarding their clients.

Overall, it can be said that AP employed a specific approach to employment relations as introduced in this research, a consultative/collaborative approach. The characteristics of this approach based on the results of this research are: participation, lack of veto power or domination of the managers, influence of all the members on the agenda for discussions, and existence of an environment to support consultation (such as trust, a 'humble posture of learning', diversity of beliefs and nationalities, respect), active involvement in deciding the terms of employment (including the salary), autonomy along with spaces for discussions and consultations when any matters arise (including any problems with the clients, or structural or procedural issues), 'no blaming' in case of conflicts while resolving them in a consultation meeting, and making the decisions at the consultation meetings based on consensus or vote of the majority (without a veto right for anybody). This aspect needs to be further examined in terms of different variables, such as the size

of the organisation, the sector and the industry the organisation operates in, and the influence of national culture, to further explain and test its characteristics.

At THEL, the participants explained that they discussed work with each other and with their clients and made most decisions along with them, and the rest of the decisions were their own. Regarding areas for the employees to pursue their interest, THEL displayed the most space for employees' interests even if not in company's best interest, an example of which resulted in a change in the structure of the company. Furthermore, conflict was resolved through discussions among those who were involved. Concerning employee involvement and participation, THEL displayed 'delegation' as Vroom (2003) labels it, providing autonomy and power of decision-making for the employees. Overall, it can be said that THEL displayed some similarities with the consultative/collaborative approach, as the emphasis on consultation and its particular characteristics and environment were less apparent in THEL while the individuals' autonomy was more widely highlighted; however, in THEL, the participants employed discussions and a consultative approach in the service they provided to their clients, in widening their understanding of the issues and the services they offered to the clients, and among themselves and with the founder as well; and they resolved conflicts and issues through discussion. Therefore, it can be said that both AP and THEL displayed specific characteristics in their employment relations and particular type of environment and mechanisms that is called a consultative/collaborative approach here.

Comparing the results of the scriptural study of the Bahá'í principles and the cases studied for this research, the consultative/collaborative approach based on the empirical research showed several similarities with most of the results from the research on Bahá'í scripture, such as consulting in all matters and at all levels, characteristics of the environment and participants in consultation, de-emphasis on power and power relations, and dealing with conflict through respectful and supportive discussions. However, the main difference was the elective administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith, whereas the organisations in the study only had management levels that operated through consultation but were not elected. Another difference was the discussion of reforms in rules and regulations as well as relevant institutions in order to develop fair and just employment conditions for the employees in Bahá'í scripture, which has not been mentioned by the

organisations (it is generally beyond organisational scope). However, they both shared very similar relevant characteristics in their concerns and operational approach.

However, there was another question considered here. Why the results of the research regarding the approach of the three case studies varied and their impacts were different, while all three cases had been trying to apply the Bahá'í precepts (and 'consultation' has been particularly mentioned among those precepts by all three founders)? To answer this question, it was considered that: PHX was a multinational company with its headquarter in USA and the other two were small business in the UK; and that the country culture (Hofstede, Country Comparison, 2017), types of businesses, and the sizes of organisations could have influenced the types and outcomes of the efforts. Alternatively, it was considered that the variances could be due to the particular ideologies of the Bahá'í Faith, with no clerical authority and the individuals' responsibility to develop understanding of the principles by studying them, discussing them together and implementing them in their lives. Therefore, as the individuals and circumstances were different at the three cases, individuals' understandings and experiences could accordingly be different, which could result in their choices of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and their applications, and consequently result in different outcomes. It was not possible to examine whether the sizes of the organisations or types of their businesses were more influential in the variety of the practice, or the consultative nature of understanding and application of the Bahá'í principles, or both; since the choice of principles and their applications were made prior to the research, (e.g. the participants at PHX did not speak about a focus on a 'consultative approach' from the beginning; whereas it was there at AP and THEL from the start of their business according to the participants). This could be further examined through ethnography or action research, where this approach could be explored in different organisations (different in size, type of business, number of employees, etc.) to compare the results.

Therefore, further questions are explored. Whether these values and approaches (such as collective decision-making, 'humble posture of learning', unity in diversity, service of the society, etc.) are applicable to different organisations and circumstances, and could they result in desirable outcomes? What are the preferable characteristics of the organisations that such principles could be applicable to? What are the strengths and weaknesses of

such an approach in different circumstances? To what companies is this approach not applicable? What are the desired outcomes of such approach?

Based on the results of this research, its similarities with spirituality at work, the specific characteristics of this collective/collaborative approach (including the characteristics of this type of decision-making, its focus on unity in diversity, humility and respect, and justice and fairness), it can be said that this approach could potentially be applicable to organisations that share the same concern towards the society and their employees (responsibility to serve the employees and the society), and a desire to develop an environment for decision-making that does not suppress or punish mistakes (culture of no-blame), creates space for the employee to participate, grow and pursue their interests, and is inclusive and diverse. However, how such characteristics are defined, applied, and managed, and the impacts they might have on the operation of the companies, would vary between the companies based on their differences and circumstances. Thus, this approach cannot be considered as a unified approach with predictable outcomes due to its collaborative nature.

So, describing the concept of '*work in the spirit of service*', based on Bahá'í scripture it involved: fair and just employers with lofty characteristics (such as a ready willingness to share and moderate and considerate withdrawal of the profit due to their responsibility towards the poor); just and sincere employees; just and impartial regulations (which enable fair pay for employees so that they can save for their times of need); fair and just governments who protect the employees and the employers and judge between them at times of their conflict; and an environment of participation and consultation, respect, love and sharing, with a genuine concern and responsibility towards the society.

To conceptualise '*work in the spirit of service*', it can be said:

A justice-centric approach with emphasised focus on service of the society and conscious and lofty concerns and practices of the employers and the employees, and just and effective laws and institutions.

These aspects of '*work in the spirit of service*' have been highlighted in the empirical research of the three cases as well, except for the role of the government and regulations. Moreover, although in the three organisations the phrase '*work in the spirit of service*'



was not specifically mentioned, they highlighted different aspects of service that they highly valued in their organisations. They stressed a focus on service for the society, their clients, and the community around them (e.g. AP was a social enterprise with the main purpose to serve the vulnerable adults through assisted housing, PHX had a wide range of service projects, and THEL focused their business objective on helping the organisations to find their role towards helping the society). The three organisations displayed particular concern and focus on the service for those who received their services in particular, and the wider society, and the employees particularly explained their concern and connections to such motives and practices. Furthermore, in the three cases the discussion of fair pay had been raised with different approaches to fair pay, including performance-related pay, equal pay, and collectively decided pay. There was also particular emphasis on employee participation and involvement in decision-making in all three organisations, at different scales, such as employee input and suggestions at PHX, collective decision-making along with autonomy at AP, and extended autonomy and broad opportunities to pursue one's interest at THEL.

In summary, it can be said that the three organisations shared similar concerns about working to serve, although the phrase was not used directly, and they had employed a variety of methods, procedures, and policies to implement this; the differences could mainly be a result of the open approach of the Bahá'í scripture to understanding the Faith and its principles (without the influence of clergy or clerical institutions).

It is notable that the strong emphasis on just employers is among the particular characteristics of this approach to business; where it requires them to be just, in their withdrawal from the profit of company, to pay employees sufficient to save for their times of need, or to continue to pay them when they are not able to work anymore (similar to the concept of pensions and sick pay), and to share the profit of the company with the employees. These aspects have been mentioned in the three cases (employees in PHX spoke about profit-sharing, at AP and THEL they spoke about sufficient pay and benefits, and in THEL the founder mentioned the fair withdrawal of profit).

Furthermore, based on the involvement and consultation, it should be noted that in Bahá'í scripture among the main purposes of consultation is the desire to achieve unity. In other

words, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says “*the shining park of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions*” (e.g. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1982, p. 87; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , 1982, pp. 72-73), and consultation can result in unity (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1976); in an organisational context this can be achieved through bringing all those with different opinions to an agreed plan to work together. This model of unity in diversity is highly stressed, similar to the emphasis on consultation.

At AP, where a consultation method closely related to Bahá’í scripture was employed, the employees displayed connections to and even devotion to organisational values and operation, and resolved previous conflicts in a supportive environment without blame (they did not have on-going conflict). Accordingly, it can be stated that one outcome of collective decision-making in an environment of trust, equal rights of involvement, respect, and open space of sharing the opinions and revising the decisions could be a unified workforce, where employees are empowered and take ownership of the decisions with a sense of belonging and responsibility.

This unity is different from aligning the interests of the employer and the employees and suppressing the conflict, as conflict is not discouraged here but is dealt with and resolved with the same mechanism that the decisions are made, through discussions and collective decision-making. Moreover, employees’ interests are recognised and accommodated/supported.

However, it is notable that such an approach may not work in the interest of the employees and the company if conflict is suppressed or discouraged, the consultation does not involve genuine and equal rights for the employees and the managers, if the environment for decision-making is not conducive to this approach, and especially if the desire of the managers/owners is not the spirit of service towards the employees and their involvement. The variability of practices and outcomes across the cases in this research signal the potentially variable results if such an approach is employed only in certain aspects; an issue seen in many existing managerial theories and practices. Bahá’í scripture emphasises a fundamental prerequisite for employment of these principles, and calls upon the wealthy, the owners of capital, and the employers to exercise their ‘*ready willingness to share*’, out of the ‘*concern*’ and ‘*care*’ for others, which is resulted from

*“the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979, pp. 43-44).

He (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979, pp. 43-44) says:

*“But in the divine teachings equality is brought about through a ready willingness to share. It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor. This equality is the result of the lofty characteristics and noble attributes of mankind.”*

This could mean that this consultative/collaborative approach is only applicable in the organisations with owners or managers believing in the Bahá’í Faith. On the other hand, it can be said that neither of the characteristics solely belong to Bahá’í scripture. However, it is the composition of the organisational values and the approach that is unique to Bahá’í scripture, with the emphasis on collective decision-making in a particular environment, with the genuine concern and conscious decision of the owners/employers to responsible withdrawal of profit and in the act of sharing, and the centrality of fairness and justice in the whole organisational system, and in each of its aspects.

Finally, based on the findings from this research *‘work in the spirit of service’* can be described as a justice-centric approach with a high emphasis on just employers and their desire to share and serve, and just employees, just rule of law and just institutions. Moreover, it requires an environment of trust, support, ‘no blame’, detachment from one’s opinion and readiness to learn, and united while diverse, which utilises collective decision-making in several aspects of the matters of the organisation.

This approach to work, as a justice-centric approach with emphasis on the spirit of service for all the stakeholders and collective decision-making requires further research on the characteristics of the organisations where it works in the interest of the employees, the employers and the society (including the size of the organisations, the sectors they operate in, the national and organisational culture, the organisational values in practice, and the organisational structure); the limitations of such an approach, and the potential results in organisations with different characteristics while sharing the concern to serve.

## 9.4 Summary

In this chapter the results of this research were analysed in relation to the theories of management and the impact of religious beliefs. It started by discussing the results in relation to the impact of religions on business and management in the literature and presented the results in relation to Weber's theory of Capitalism as a dominant theory in this field, and in relation to religions as a means of control as a dominant criticism of religious impact on businesses. It then explored the concept of being a 'Bahá'í inspired' organisation rather than a Bahá'í organisation and the difference this made in comparison to being a religious organisation or under the influence of a religious institution, as was often the case in the literature. In the end, it explored the influence of religious values as part of the organisational culture, which was strongly observed in the three cases in this research, and compared them in relation to the literature.

The second section of the chapter explored the concept of work as the underlying motive for the participants' behaviour. It compared the concepts across the cases and with the concept developed based on the Bahá'í principles, and found that, while the central aspect of each approach varied, they all had similarities in their approach that could point to the connection of being based on the Bahá'í principles.

In the third section, the results in relation to the aspects of employment as power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement were examined. It was concluded that, in PHX, while different approaches existed, managers made most of the decisions, while employees had some opportunities to pursue their interests, and conflict existed over pay for low salary employees but was not suppressed. In AP and THEL, there was a strong focus on collective decision-making, with its particular characteristics and environment, and on employees' autonomy and space to pursue their interests, and therefore a 'consultative/collaborative' approach was introduced based on the results of this research.

In the next chapter, these discussions are summarised in relation to the aims and questions of this research, and the summary of findings from the empirical research and the scriptural study are presented.

## 10 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter completes the thesis by drawing conclusions from the research. It begins with restating the overall research question and key findings, followed by a summary of the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual contributions. In addition, the research implications are drawn, its strengths and limitations are identified, and a direction for further research is also provided.

### 10.1 Restatement of the research question and key findings

This thesis focused on exploring the approach of Bahá'í scripture to work and employment relations, and its practice in organisations informed by those principles. It explored '*work in the spirit of service*' in Bahá'í scripture and in three companies that, based on the belief of the owners, aimed to apply Bahá'í principles in their organisations. It aimed to eventually describe '*work in the spirit of service*' with its specific characteristics and evaluate their implications for employment relations (in terms of power relations, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement) based on theory (the study of Bahá'í scripture and related literature) and practice (an organisational study); and whether they could be maintained in practice.

Therefore, this research has explored '*How do Bahá'í principles influence employment relations, and is it possible to maintain these principles in practice?*'

To answer this question, it focused on two broad questions, since work based on the Bahá'í perspective to employment relations has not been academically and empirically explored before, particularly in the context of employment relations. The first broad question was 'how work was identified and described' both in Bahá'í scripture and among the managers and employees who aimed to work according to Bahá'í principles. The second broad question explored the approach of Bahá'í scripture, and the participants in the three cases, in relation to the aspects of the theories of management ideology or frames of reference related to power and legitimisation of authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement.

This research therefore, consisted of two main steps: scriptural study of Bahá'í scripture exploring the *concept and attributes of 'work in the spirit of service'* and *the approach of Bahá'í scripture to employment relations* in terms of power and legitimisation of authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement. These results were presented in sections 3.2 and 3.3 in Chapter 3.

Then, for the empirical research, a multiple case study method was employed to explore *the concept of work* (Chapter 5) and *the approach and experiences of the participants in relation to power and authority, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement* (Chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively) based on the experiences and perceptions of the managers and employees at three case study organisations where the founders believed in the Bahá'í Faith but most of the managers and employees held different beliefs.

It is notable that this research is the first in its kind exploring the influence of Bahá'í principles on employment relations, through a scriptural study as well as an organisational (empirical) study. Therefore, there were a number of topics that needed to be covered in order to enable conceptualisation of an approach based on these principles. Accordingly, this research used multiple theories as its analytical lenses. In analysing the approach of the scripture and the participants to work, and how they conceptualised it, the dominant theories discussing the relationship between religion and business were employed as the analytical lenses; including Weber's theory about the influence of Protestant ethics on the economic behaviour of believers, and therefore the formation of Capitalism and its critics, and the theories of control and discrimination as the most commonly articulated influences of religion on business and management (e.g. Marx & Engels, 2008; Jeremy, 1990; Shah, Largi, & Batley, 2007; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2008). However, it was found that the results of this research displayed more similarities with the literature on 'spirituality at work' (e.g. Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2008; Morgan & Várdy, 2009; Hicks, 2002).

In exploring employment relations, this research mainly used theories of management ideology or frames of reference as the bases for its analysis. It did not employ the frames of reference as the analytical framework, but employed their key factors, to inform the empirical research and analysis: power and legitimisation of authority; dealing with

conflict; and employee involvement. In exploring power and conflict, the study mostly employed Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional theory of power, and his (Lukes, 2005) theories of latent and observable conflict. In analysing employee involvement, Vroom's (2003) theory of participation in decision-making was employed as the analytical framework.

The research design for this project was initially based on in-depth single case study of PHX in the USA with one-to-one interviews, FGDs and observation; which was intended to be followed by questionnaires to all the employees and managers. However, after the initial analysis of the results, it was decided that, in order to broaden the understanding of the concepts and their relation to Bahá'í principles, it was essential to explore multiple cases since there were no frames of reference or previous studies on Bahá'í inspired organisations that this research could draw upon. Therefore, another two companies (in the UK) were contacted and interviewed similarly, but without the period of observation (as there was a large dataset already generated). However, a period of observation in the companies in UK could have broadened the understanding of the concepts and the processes and attributes the participants spoke about and the challenges they faced.

The key findings of this research included the concept of '*work in the spirit of service*' based on Bahá'í scripture and the practice of organisations that aimed to apply those principles. This conceptualisation was purely inductive and solely relied on the analyses of the empirical data in single case and then the cross case analyses. These concepts, while displaying similarities between the three cases and the approach based on Bahá'í scripture, had varying characteristics at the centre of their conceptualisations. Based on Bahá'í scripture, work was conceptualised as a justice-centric approach, while in PHX it was customer-centric (service of the customers to improve their quality of life, as well as service of the society), in AP it was consultation-centric (collective decision-making and its characteristics and requirements), and in THEL it was mainly freedom-oriented (employees' freedom to shape their job description and the service they developed and delivered). At the same time, they all shared characteristics such as an emphasis on service of the society; values such as honesty, respect, and trust; employee involvement (to different extents); justice; diversity of gender, beliefs, and nationalities; and opportunities for employees to progress and pursue their interests (to different extents).

Notably, '*work in the spirit of service*' based on the Bahá'í scripture emphasised 'justice' as its main characteristic, as a responsibility of the employers and employees, and the institutions, and the rule of law. This approach was presented in Figures 4.2, 5.7, and 9.1. This concept of work provides specific characteristics that contribute to the conceptualisation of work and employment relations, as will be further discussed in section 10.2.3.

In relation to power it was found that power relations were softened in the three cases and in the administrative system of the Bahá'í Faith. In Bahá'í institutions (elected by the members of the community), the representatives were required to consult with the members of their community. In PHX, power of decision-making mainly rested with the managers, in AP collective decision-making was most strongly highlighted, and in THEL it was focused on the autonomy of the employees to make the decisions. Some areas of conflict were mentioned in the three cases, but the method of dealing with conflict was through discussion in all three cases, although discussion was more strongly emphasised in AP and THEL. However, power through influence is considered as power if against interests of the employees (followers) and it results in conflict (Lukes, 2005), and it is an aspect of latent conflict as Lukes (2005) articulates. In the three organisations the values and principles in operation (based on the Bahá'í principles) were commonly followed. It was in THEL that the principles were discussed, the challenges in their application were highlighted, and they were applied based on the discussions, whereas in PHX and AP they were imposed on the employees, although the employees did not object to them. In AP the participants stressed most agreement with those principles, but in PHX, some employees shared concerns about the stress on hard work, and the centrality of service for the society while some employees were not paid enough. Since, in AP, if employees had objections to any processes and procedures they could bring it to discussion and decide on changes together (based on the examples they provided such as the decision about the diverted phone calls as discussed in Chapter 7), it was not considered as power of influence. However, in PHX, since the concerns they had shared were on-going conflicts and they did not mention any opportunities to change them, it was considered as power. What does this indicate if power is softened in the Bahá'í scripture, and two cases here did not display strong power relations yet one case displayed some levels of exercise of



power over the employees? It could be a result of national culture in USA (Hofstede, 2017), or other reasons explored here.

Employee involvement was exercised to different extents as well, but most effectively discussed in AP through consultation, as well as the autonomy of employees about the cases in their care (this mostly resembled ‘facilitate’ as Vroom (2003) mentions), and in THEL it was mostly focused on the autonomy of the employees (‘delegation’ based on Vroom (2003)).

In the three cases, while the basics of all the three approaches were the same, the extent and details of their experiences varied. It was suggested that the variety of experiences could have been a result of the influence of national culture (Hofstede, 2017), the size of the organisations and the requirements of the industry they operated in (PHX was a multinational organisation in separation industry (an area in chemistry) with its head office in the USA; AP was a private social enterprise in supported housing, located in the UK; and THEL was a private consultancy helping organisations find their role in society, operating in the UK). However, a more likely reason seemed to be ‘the nature/structure’ of the Bahá’í principles that were in effect. Bahá’í scripture removes the role of clergy, and every Bahá’í is required to study the principles, consult with others, and operate accordingly (Effendi, 1991, pp. 153-154). This can result in a range of understanding and practices, as adherents would share their basic principles but vary in the details. Whether such variety would be beneficial to employment relations or to the organisational operations is a question for future research.

On the other hand, as stated by the participants and evident in the analysis of the results, AP operated ‘by the book’, studying the principles, conducting some training for the employees (e.g. on consultative approach, ‘spirit of unity’ and support instead of speaking behind each other’s backs), and making decisions collaboratively, based on the consultation approach in Bahá’í principles. The employees shared appreciation of the principles and values in their organisation and characterised their employment relations as ‘just’ and ‘participative’. Accordingly, their approach to employment relations was articulated as a framework characterising their approach to power, conflict, and employee involvement that will be discussed in section 10.2.1.

However, it raises the question whether operating so closely based on the principles of the Bahá'í Faith (religious principles) would eventually result in discrimination of those not believing in this religion? This question cannot be answered easily based on a single case, and it requires further study of this organisation and similar organisations. Based on the results of this research, since none of the interviewed staff were believers in the Bahá'í Faith, and they elaborated on the just treatment they received, no discrimination was observed. It is also notable that among the main principles of the Bahá'í Faith is unity in diversity, appreciating the differences between individuals (compared to the variety of flowers which made the garden beautiful as opposed to uniform flowers) ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1998, p. 25), and welcoming differences of opinions ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, p. 87). Therefore, it can be concluded that the approach based on the Bahá'í principles could provide potential for a working environment that does not involve religious discrimination.

## **10.2 Summary of theoretical, methodological, and conceptual contributions of this research**

### **10.2.1 Theoretical contribution**

This research was the first academic research on the approach of the Bahá'í principles to work and employment relations, inductively exploring '*work in the spirit of service*' and its relation to employment relations, in scripture and in organisational practice through case study research. It is intended to contribute to the knowledge in employment relations, through articulating the approach of Bahá'í scripture to employment relations and the perceptions and practices of these principles in organisations, mostly in AP and THEL (which showed more connections to the results of the study of Bahá'í scripture), in relation to power, conflict and authority. This approach was not productivity-oriented (Fox, 1966), autonomy-oriented or opportunity-oriented (Maravelias, 2007), or top-down information sharing, and suggestion or input seeking (e.g. Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, & Jennings, 1988; Vroom, 2003; Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van-Fleet, 1995). It rather exhibited a collaborative/consultative approach, which was characterised with:

- *In terms of power and authority*: participation, lack of veto power or domination, influence of all the members on the agenda for discussions, and existence of an environment that supports consultation (e.g. through trust, humble posture of learning, diversity of beliefs, gender, and nationalities, respect).
- *In terms of dealing with conflict*: recognition and support of the interests of the employees (as opposed to alignment of their interests with the interests of the company), discussion about the areas of interest as well as the issues and conflicts in consultative meetings, with respect, ‘no blame’, and support;
- *In terms of participation*: focus on employee participation in decision-making and the individual’s power over the routine decisions in the organisation, a strong emphasis on collective decision-making for the rest of the decisions where employees or the managers called for meetings, discussed the matters and made the decisions together at the meetings, based on consensus or majority vote; in an environment of frank discussion, respect, detachment from one’s opinion or promoting single department’s interests, not speaking at each other, and with a ‘*humble posture of learning*’; and then unified action to carry out the decision of the group.

Moreover, this research has provided empirical support for the approach developed based on the Bahá’í principles, at the same time as identifying its influence it highlighted the challenges and limitations of such approach based on the experience from the three cases; it identified that the managers and employees in the organisations that attempted to employ such principles or values needed to share a similar concern about service of the society, sense of responsibility in any position (whether as an employer, an employee, or the government), and an active desire for participation and collective decision-making, to be able to employ such principles (whether or not adhering to the Bahá’í Faith). Without such shared concern, as observed in the case-studies, the autonomy, and the stronger desire for service and weaker financial focus can discourage and challenge some managers and employees and result in the failure of such approach (e.g. in THEL some employees did not share the same desire for weaker financial focus and they stressed how it challenged them). This is a limitation of such an approach that needs to be taken into consideration.

### **10.2.2 Methodological contribution**

Often the research exploring the relationship between religion and business or management has employed a sociological approach studying the trends of behaviour (e.g. Weber, 2003; Tawney, 1961), or an empirical approach (e.g. the case study research by Jeremy (1990)), or even has taken an agnostic stance (e.g. Marx & Engels (2008) as Corley (1994) states). These approaches, focusing solely on behavioural or historical trends relating to Christianity, have failed to capture the broader extent of the relationship and have accordingly articulated the historical movements or trends, or even the resultant effects of the economic or political processes, as the influence of religion (such as the arguments of the critics of Weber's theory of Capitalism and how Capitalism were argued to be 'rationalised' by Protestants rather than influencing their behaviour (e.g. Söderlund, 1958).

This research however, employed both an empirical approach studying the perceptions and practices of participants who were involved in applying Bahá'í principles, and a scriptural study, exploring the scripture as the underlying drivers of their perceptions and practices. This enabled the researcher to make sense of the behaviour of the participants and identify the similarities between the approaches and the practices. Moreover, it enabled identification of the differences that could highlight potential threats to such approach. An example of these differences was in the approach of the organisations to fairness in pay mechanisms, where in one organisation (AP) it was based on equity theory and in another (PHX) it was based on Laventhal's distributive justice theory (PHX) (Greenberg, 1990); so in AP the salaries were decided based on benchmarking and in a consultation meeting, and in PHX it was decided by the managers based on performance reviews; in AP employees said that they were paid higher than average in their industry, but in PHX some employees reported that they were not paid enough and struggled; and accordingly in AP the employees were happy with their pay, while in PHX these employees with lower salaries were not happy and did not find it fair. Employing both an empirical approach as well as the theoretical approach enabled identification of the outliers and the practices that the approach based on the Bahá'í

principles also characterised as fair, not only interpretation and practice of one group of participants.

### **10.2.3 Conceptual contributions**

This research, while focusing on aspects of employment relations, also explored the concept of work, the perception and practices of the participants in relation to their work and organisational values, and the specific concept of '*work in the spirit of service*' in Bahá'í scripture. Here the aim was to enable the research to make sense of the findings in relation to power, conflict, and participation. But by exploring the concept of work in particular, it shed more light on how different approaches to work can translate into various business objectives and organisational behaviours.

The concept of '*work in the spirit of service*' based on Bahá'í scripture involved a justice-centric approach, with requirements for just employers (e.g. responsible and moderate withdrawal of profit, ready willingness to share inspired by lofty and noble characteristics, and care for the society), just employees (working sincerely and to the best of their abilities with care for the society), and just institutions and rule of law, which justly secure and protect the rights of the employers and employees, especially in disputes (based on Chapter 3). Also, this concept of work entails the collective decision-making and involvement of the employees in the decisions and benefits of the organisation.

This conceptualisation of '*work in the spirit of service*' is the first conceptualisation of work based on the Bahá'í principles through an analytical interpretation and can contribute to the literature of the relationship between religion and business by providing the approach of the Bahá'í principles to a justice-centric approach to work and employment relations, thereby contributing to the theories of management.

However, for this conceptualisation of work to extend to a practical contribution it requires further research on its influences on employment relations in a variety of organisations with different characteristics: sizes, business objectives, industries, geographical locations and cultures, and types of business (e.g. private, public, social enterprise) in order to provide a broader perspective based on larger empirical evidence,

and knowledge of the variety of outcomes and limitations. This could then result in development of theory; this research is the first step towards that.

### **10.3 Research implications**

This research can provide practical advice for companies that care for and are concerned about their employees' welfare and the betterment of society, to develop their framework based on justice, including: developing policies that consider the balance of the rights of the employees and the profit of the company, developing policies that encourage and utilise participation in decision-making, and creating space for employees to responsibly work to serve their customers and the society while pursuing their interests.

Furthermore, this research can provide advice to companies to develop their policies in consultation and collaboration among the managers and the employees in a respectful, calm, and supportive environment, without blame and open to suggestions and ideas. This can enable the organisations to find a balance between autonomy, collaborative decision-making, sharing concerns, support, and independently or collaboratively implementing the decisions, which would not demotivate the employees or overwhelm them, but support them to grow, be themselves and pursue their interests, and serve their customers and the society effectively. It was found (in THEL) that extended autonomy could demotivate some employees, but through collective decisions and identification of the boundaries this challenge could be avoided (based on the discussions in AP).

Therefore, the proposed conceptual framework as presented in Chapter 9 can provide practical advice for organisations that are Bahá'í inspired, to develop an employment relation framework where decisions are made according to 'justice' as fairness, generated from noble and lofty characteristics of human beings, and aimed at the service of the employees, the organisation, and the broader society as a collective responsibility. It proposes that organisations can benefit from working 'in the spirit of service' as opposed to a self-centric focus, founded on self-interest. It welcomes profit-making but also necessitates meaningful sharing of the profit (moderate withdrawal of the profit by the employers, and sharing profit with employees with a willingness to share, towards a more balanced distribution of wealth). It considers the right of the employers to decision-

making, but also requires employees' rights to object to those decisions in a frank, considerate, and respectful manner, and employment of collective decision-making as much as possible. It further proposes that for collective decision making to be effective, specific characteristics need to gradually develop in all participants including purity of motive (considering the benefit of all), no backbiting, love and respect, and openness along with moderation in expression of the opinions.

This framework can propose potential practical advice to organisations in general, if they have aspirations and values that are consistent with some of these principles, but are not faith based/inspired.

Moreover, this research can have policy implications highlighting the role of 'just' laws and regulations, requiring adjustments to the employment relations' regulations, which enable employees to participate in the decisions of the company, benefit from the profit of the company, and negotiate their terms of employment not on the basis of the level of power the employees might have, but in terms of fairness, and responsible employers' willingness to share; and enable the employers to trust the fairness of their employees and their service with sincerity and to the best of their ability.

Furthermore, it can highlight the role of 'just' institutions in devoting specific attention and resources to safeguarding the rights of the employees and employers, requiring organisations to maintain the employees' welfare, and intervening when either sides' rights are violated.

#### **10.4 Research limitations**

The research limitations were firstly evident in the research design. This research eventually employed interviews and focus group discussions to collect the data from managers and employees respectively. This was decided for two main objectives: one was to collect data of a manageable size, suitable for a PhD thesis and its time limits; and the other was to capture different sides of stories from managers and employees, and to encourage employees to speak in a focus group discussion.

For the first objective, for the cases in the UK, observation and field notes were reduced, and data collection was mainly limited to the interviews and FGDs. However, observation of the consultation meetings, the relationship of the participants with their clients, and the collaborative decision-making sessions with them, as well as the challenges they faced in those processes, would enrich the data and the discussion of this research. This difficulty indicates that the methods, processes and procedures, especially as discussed in AP, may not have necessarily captured all the difficulties that the participants would face employing such a collaborative approach, such as the amount of time spent on the discussions, difficulty of coming to an agreement or majority voting, and maintaining the supportive, calm, and positive environment in discussions and consultation meetings.

For the second objective, employees and the managers were interviewed separately, but the employees were interviewed through FGDs. This method, while it enabled capture of the opinions of a larger number of employees, and encouraged them to speak, might have silenced some employees or kept some challenges or limitations unsaid due to the presence of the co-workers and possible implications such as changing their perceptions about each other, or about breaking confidentiality of the discussions in the FGD afterwards to others including the managers. Although this did not come up, and in discussions employees appeared to freely share their concerns and complaints, it is still quite possible that some employees had remained silent or some issues remained unsaid. Thus, it could be helpful to conduct a number of one-to-one interviews with randomly chosen employees as well to ensure capture of negative aspects of the opinions as well.

Another limitation was about the area of research. Since this was the first research on Bahá'í scripture and management, the range of the topics to be covered was very broad and it involved in-depth study of a variety of topics, each of which could be considered an independent area, such as 'the relationship between religious beliefs and approach to work and management', 'power', and 'employee participation'. If any of those aspects were not investigated, the discussions would not cover the various aspects they referred to. However, exploring all those aspects resulted in a very lengthy thesis which was difficult to abridge without losing some key details, depth, and useful analysis and discussions, therefore it was decided to keep these areas in rather than focus on keeping



the thesis within strict limits. In spite of this, the topic is broad, and this research is the first step in understanding the approach of the Bahá'í scripture and its influence on employment relations; some areas of this research require more in-depth study in order to develop deeper concepts, capture more detailed practices, and observe and analyse the potential variety of challenges and limitations.

## **10.5 Directions for future research**

The current study has opened potential directions for further academic research. One of the areas is about the variances between the practices of different organisations. There are several questions for further research. Should the approach developed in this research be trusted if it does not provide a uniform guideline? To what extent would autonomy and relying on collective development of criteria and decision-making be beneficial to employment relations and to operation of organisations? Are these variances of practices beneficial or detrimental to organisations, considering that certain basic principles are applied in common in this approach? Are uniform frameworks more preferable for employment relations, or are openly decided structures and practices better? If 'work in the spirit of service' was desired, how can organisations ensure they operated based on the spirit of service in their various aspects of operations and relations (e.g. employment relations, relation to customers, to society, etc.)?

Furthermore, specific aspects were highlighted in this research that require future research. For instance, centrality of the concept of justice in this approach to work requires further research to explore its various aspects; some future research questions are listed here. How to decide the 'moderate withdrawal' of profit? How to decide the 'sufficient' or high enough pay for the employees, in practice? What are the characteristics of just rule of law in employment relations? How can institutions support the employers and employees justly, and how would it be different from what is happening at present?

In addition, the approaches developed here require further empirical research in order to broaden the results and capture different aspects, potentials, and limitations of 'work in the spirit of service' based on this research, and the collective/consultative approach

discussed here articulating power relations, dealing with conflict, and employee involvement, and its requirements and limitations.

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## 12 Appendix 1 - Interview and Focus Group Questions in relation to the research questions

Here, the research questions of the primary research are listed, and the relevant questions asked during the interviews and focus group discussions are presented after each research question. During the interviews and FGDs, often additional probing questions or other questions that had arisen from the answers of the participants, were asked in addition to these questions.

***How do Bahá'í principles influence employment relations, and is it possible to maintain these principles in practice?***

*Primary Research:*

1. ***Work in the spirit of service:*** How do the managers and employees of the organisations that aim to apply Bahá'í precepts perceive work, perceive the '*spirit of service*', and translate their perception of '*work in the spirit of service*' into their objectives and employment relations? Are there any common characteristics between the organisations that intend to apply these principles? Are there any significant differences in their sizes, their operational requirements, their management styles, and their organisational cultures, and do these differences point to significant differences in their perceptions and practices of '*work in the spirit of service*'?
2. ***Power and authority:*** What do the power structures look like in the organisations that apply the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, how do these organisations legitimise authority, and how is the power distributed?
3. ***Dealing with conflict:*** To what extent are the interests of the employees and the employers aligned in the organisations under study? Can they pursue their interests and/or how do they pursue their interests? How are conflicts dealt with?
4. ***Employee involvement:*** What are the policies and practices through which these organisations involve their employees in decision-making? To what extent are the employees involved and have control over those decisions and their application? Are

there any systems in place to mobilise employee participation? If so, what are their characteristics and their limitations?

## 12.1 Interview Questions

These questions were asked from the managers during one-to-one interviews:

- Can you please explain what you do in a day? (Lead in question that will also give overall information as to the context of what they do to adjust further questions accordingly)

Research Question 1 - *Work in the spirit of service*:

- Can you please name and explain your personal and then your organizational values? Where do they come from? Do you apply certain values that you have taken from the Bahá'í principles? (this question was asked from the founders, and the few managers believing in the Bahá'í Faith).
- How do you explain work done in the spirit of service? How do you try to apply it in this organisation? How do you apply it in employment relations? Can you provide some examples from your organisation? (In PHX, serving employees was part of their mission statement, so referring to that, the question has asked: How do you serve your employees as part of the mission of the company?)

Research Question 2 - *Power and authority*:

- Can you please explain your organisational structure, its different departments and management system? Who is in charge? Who has the final say and makes the final decision? (Paying special attention of how they explain who is in charge and makes the decision, to realise how they justify the person in power)

Research Question 3 - *Dealing with conflict*:

- What are the employee rights? What are their benefits? How are the working conditions decided/agreed upon? How do promotions work and are decided? Is there any union or other form of employee representation?
- Are there any practices for employee development and well-being? Do they have a say in it? Can employees have their own way of doing things? What happens

when there is a conflict? How do you go about conflict? Can you please use examples, maintaining confidentiality?

Research Question 4 - *Employee involvement*:

- How do you make different decisions in an organization? (Paying attention to whether they raise the issue of involving employees before it is asked, also looking for their initiatives in employee involvement if any)
- Are employees involved in decision-making? How? To what extent? What responsibilities do they have? How is their success measured? How does it work?
- What are the limitations to employee involvement? What are the challenges you face in your employment relations and the methods you employ?

In the end, the managers were asked: Anything else you would like me to consider/you would like to add?

## **12.2 Focus group Discussion Questions:**

During the discussions, in addition to the main questions listed, the employees were asked if they agreed with what other participants said, what they thought, what was their experience, in order to encourage discussion to enable capturing details about their perceptions and experiences).

These questions were asked from the employees during the focus group discussions:

- Can you please introduce yourself, mention your job title, and briefly explain your role and what you do daily? (Lead in question that will also give overall information as to the context of what they do to adjust further questions accordingly)

Research Question 1 - *Work in the spirit of service*:

- Can you please name and explain your personal and then organisational values? Where do they come from (your upbringing, education, religion, etc.)? (paying attention to whether they make connections to “Bahá’í” values explaining their



organisational values, or any mentions of any aspects of the spirit of service or concern for service in any ways).

- Is there a concern to serve at the Organisation? In what sense? How do you try to apply it?
- How does the organisation look after its employees? Do you find the employment relations fair (including salaries, employer-employee relationship, decision-making)?

Research Question 2 - ***Power and authority:***

- How does every department operate? Who is in charge? Who makes the decisions? Do you agree with this person making the decisions or do you think it would work better otherwise? (Trying to explore whether authority is legitimised among employees and how)

Research Question 3 - ***Dealing with conflict:***

- What are your rights? What are your benefits? How are the working conditions decided/agreed upon? How are promotions decided? Do you find them fair? Is there any union representation? Are there any practices for employee development and well-being? Do you have a say in it?
- Why do you work here? What do you expect from your work? Are they achieved? Does the organisation allow for their fulfilment?
- How does the company resolve conflict? Can you explain an example of that? Do you find it fair?

Research Question 4 - ***Employee involvement:***

- How are the decisions made? Please discuss different types of decisions, and give an example if possible.
- Are you involved in the decisions? How? To what extent? What responsibilities do you have? How is the success measured?
- What are the challenges you face at your work/ in your responsibilities/ in the method the company employs?

In the end, the employees were asked: Anything else you would like me to consider/you would like to add?

### **12.3 Information sheet**

How do the moral/ethical stances of the Bahá'í Faith impact upon business practices? An empirical investigation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

This research aims to study the application of Bahá'í principles in business. There is a common challenge in application of values and ethics in current styles of business and the competitive market, lack of which has resulted in unethical practices in organizations. Real examples of applying certain values can open the path for further practices and investigations and can result in a common understanding and acceptance of the necessity and application of values to business.

To achieve this goal the current company has been contacted because of their attempts to apply values inspired by Bahá'í principles. It does not aim to contact only people believing in the Bahá'í Faith, but also people believing in any religion or philosophy who are involved in applying values and ethics in their daily activities.

The process involves interviews with managers and group discussion with employees as well as questionnaires to be distributed to all the employees and managers. The questionnaires will be sent out later, following the visit. You are required to answer the interview questions or fill the questionnaires as complete as possible because all your responses contribute to an understanding of the application of the values as well as constrains to them. The duration of the study and analysis is one year. The results of the study will be shared with the company and used for submission in partial fulfilment of a PhD in Management at the University of Sheffield.

You are absolutely free to choose whether or not to participate in the study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

You are requested to take your time and answer the questions, which contain both open and closed answers. At times you are required to clearly describe how things are done or why you do what you do, which might involve longer answers. Your precise responses are critical to understanding the process and generalising the results. It is important to note that the data collected during the course of the research will be kept absolutely confidential and you will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Your information and identification won't be shared with the company or any other beneficiary either. If you are taking part in an interview, your voice will be recorded. The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of ns PhD thesis or for publications. Whilst there may be no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work may contribute to application of values in organisations towards a more ethical and responsible business. Therefore your participation is extremely valuable in development of your and similar organizations.

If there are any doubts about the questions or the process, or any comments, please contact me in person while I am at your office or send me an email me at the email address provided bellow at my absence. The results of the study will be published at the end of the PhD period, which will be over a year after this research through the PhD thesis or in the form of a paper prior to that. You will also receive a copy of the results then. The data collected during this course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research if required, while your confidentiality will be kept protected.

This research is organized and partially funded by the University of Sheffield. Besides external sources of fund has been sought for, to facilitate accomplishment of the project. This project has been ethically approved via Management School's ethics review

procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

For further information please contact;

Legha Momtazian

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Phone: +44 (0)114 222 3348

Address: Room A07, Management Doctoral Centre, 171 Northumberland Road,  
Sheffield S10 1DF, England

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Once again I would like to deeply thank you for reading this information sheet and for taking part in this research!

## 12.4 Participant Consent Form



Title of Research Project: ***How do the moral/ethical stances of the Bahá'í Faith impact upon business practices? An empirical investigation***

Name of Researcher: ***Legha Momtazian***

Participant Identification Number for this project: \_\_\_\_\_ Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [.....] explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Researcher's email address is [l.momtazian@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:l.momtazian@sheffield.ac.uk) should I need to contact her.

3. I understand that my responses (including the recording from the interview) will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent  
(if different from lead researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

### Copies:

You will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and the information sheet.

A copy of the signed and dated consent form will also be placed in the project's main record, which will be kept in a secure location.