

Assimilating Spiritual Intelligence into Women's Academic Leadership Practices in Malaysian Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Spiritual intelligence has been portrayed as an important contributor to an enhanced sense of meaning and purpose within workplace leadership. Despite a growing body of literature significant gaps remain, particularly in understanding how spiritual intelligence is experienced and practiced by women leaders from non-Western countries. To address this gap, we set out to better understand how women academic leaders integrate spiritual intelligence practices within higher education environments. Phenomenological inquiry was used as a method of study. The findings generated two main approaches of integrating and assimilating spiritual intelligence into leadership practice: 1) To work with purpose and meaning; and 2) fostering and demonstrating shared values. We conclude that spiritual intelligence can serve as a way to transform the workplace into being more meaningful and purposeful by creating 'spiritual' -- i.e. balanced and harmonious -- relationships between and within employees.

Keywords: spiritual intelligence, higher educational institutions, women academic leaders,

Introduction

Spiritual intelligence in the workplace has received substantial consideration in leadership studies. At the mid of 1990s more researchers related the concept of spirituality and its association to leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1995; Dehler & Welsh, 1994; Fairholm, 1996). However, in the midst of 2000 dimension of spirituality have been profoundly researched with the term spiritual intelligence and its link to leadership (Emmon, 2000; Noble, 2000; Vaughan, 2002; Wolman, 2001; Zohar & Marshall, 2001). Spiritual intelligence can be described as a person's capacity to understand the purpose of their existence and their ability to make meaning based on their ideal values or principles. Various scholars conceptualized spiritual intelligence as a means to create meaning by connecting ideas, events, and persons, toward enhancing greater personal and organizational transformation (Dent, Higgins & Wharf, 2005; Fry, 2003).

The concept of spiritual intelligence nevertheless has been argued by two main psychologists, John Mayer (2000) and Howard Gardner (2000) at the early stage. Mayer (2000) questions whether one might speak of spiritual intelligence or consciousness, while Gardner (2000) opposes the inclusion of the spiritual as intelligence, pointing to the need to differentiate between intelligence as the ability and its use in various domains, including the spiritual. In spite of these two major arguments many other many others are proposing the concept of spiritual intelligence. Emmons (2000) draws on Gardner's definition of intelligence and argues that spirituality can be viewed as a form of intelligence because it predicts functioning and adaptation and offers capabilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals (Amram, 2009). In looking at spirituality through the lens of

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intelligence, Emmons (2000) writes, spiritual intelligence is a framework for identifying and organizing skills, and abilities needed for the adaptive use of spirituality (Amram, 2009).

Zohar and Marshall (2001) described spiritual intelligence as an individual's capacity to address issues concerning meaning and purpose and leading people's actions in a broader perspective. Leaders with spiritual intelligence are better able to inspire meaning and purpose in others. (Bass, 1990, 1997, 2001; Bennis, 2000, 2001, 2007; Fry, 2003, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 1992, 2005, 2006; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Zohar and Marshall (2001) recognized several attributes of spiritual intelligence, such as mindfulness, spontaneity, leading based on vision and value, humility as well as a positive use of adversity. Sisk (2002) described spiritual intelligence as a deep self-awareness in which one becomes more and more aware of the dimensions of self, not simply as a body, but as a mind-body and spirit. Nasel (2004) believe that spiritual intelligence represents the ability to draw on one's spiritual abilities and resources to better identify, find meaning in and resolves existential, spiritual, and practical issues. Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) is defined by Wigglesworth, C. (2006) as the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion, while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the circumstances.

The attributes of spiritual intelligence have been suggested as a prerequisite of contemporary organizational leadership, especially of transformational leadership style where leaders are required to possess new attributes of leadership skills and talents within the changing environment. In addition, the increasing number of women in management and leadership positions has triggered the significance of empowering them towards leading in the changing environment. These two factors are the main contributions of the importance of bringing the concept and practices of spiritual intelligence in women leadership practices. As stated by Omar and Davidson (2001) contrary to individual inputs, contemporary organizations adopt a high degree of teamwork because in such workplaces entail less direct, authoritative leadership, and a higher degree of self-management amongst empowered employees (Cooper & Lewis, 1999). Scholars have proven that since organizations today are required to be more service-oriented compared with those of the past, a new focus on leadership roles is required as the motivation and aspiration of employees is paramount in generating a positive work culture, where the contributions of workers are valued (Palmer, Walls, Burgess & Stough, 2001). The current prerequisites seem to be on relational-oriented, nurturing and caring leadership (Omar & Davidson, 2001). In this kind of leadership, compassion, sensitivity to the needs of others, and understanding are highly relevant (Powel, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002). Moreover, such styles are typically linked with women's leadership styles.

Stiernberg (2003) said that women leaders tend to be more relationship focused, emphasize cooperative and decision making and portray the attributes of concern and empathy. In addition, women leaders tend to be more democratic and less autocratic compared with their male counterparts (Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008). In a study conducted by Donaldson (2000), Stiernberg (2003) and Millar (2000) women leaders attributed spirituality to their achievement and the capacity to cope with difficult conditions. Other scholars (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Jones-Johnson, 2001; Parrish, 1999; Ward & Hyle, 1999) indicated that for women leaders having a "spiritual perspective" is important to their leadership practice and helps determine how they lead. In addition, compared with their male counterparts, female leaders tend to express their leadership attributes as bounded by ethical and values-based practices, exploring meaning in the workplace, emphasize on the whole individual, mutual vision construction, and empowerment. Incorporating elements of spirituality within leadership practice thus seems to be of importance to women academic leaders. In spite of the increasing number of women in leadership positions which has increased scholarly attention on women's leadership practices (Stiernberg, 2003) nevertheless research exploring the

spiritual dimensions of leadership practice among women is still scarce, particularly in non-western countries such as Malaysia. Few studies have acknowledged on how women leaders utilize spiritual intelligence to improve workplace environment.

Study context

In Malaysia, little is known about the experiences of women leaders in spite of the increasing number of women entering higher positions. The importance of female leaders to Malaysia's future workforce has been highlighted by Randstad World of Work Report released in 2013. According to the report, 37% of Malaysian leaders in business claimed that leadership proficiency and talent is essential for ensuring success of Malaysian organizations in the current economy. Several messages have been highlighted by the Director of Randstad Malaysia, Jasmin Kaur in the report. According to her, the report signified that Malaysian employers showed a progressive view on the role of female leaders in the workplace. The Report also indirectly highlighted the attributes of spiritual intelligence in the women leaders in terms of women's leadership skills. As claimed by Jasmin Kaur, women leaders are acknowledged as exhibiting a different approach in the meeting room and this can inspire superior performances from employees. Female leaders are also commonly identified as having important human skills such as the ability to nurture strong teams, establish trusted relationships, and leverage on emotional intelligence and spontaneous with non-verbal indications. The report also found that employers are gradually considering for leaders attributes that inspire, motivate, and are able to acclimatize to changing business environment. Therefore, there is a need for a unique style of dynamic leadership, and basically, women leaders are acceptable and fit the scenario. In addition, some people suggested that with a new generation of employees entering the workforce in entry and mid-level roles today, there is a major need for tomorrow's leaders to possess the ability to engage and influence their teams. This is because the new generation or Generation Y is identified to appreciate the more collaborative management style with lesser hierarchy in the workplace. Leaders who have the capacity to lead by example will be able support increased productivity in the workplace and deliver enhanced business performance. However, the issue remains that studies on the importance of women and leadership are still scarce, in spite of the report that has been mentioned. Nevertheless, the statement from the report will be the initial steps for Malaysia to consider the consent of women leaders specifically for the attributes of spiritual intelligence practices in future.

Looking from the perspective of higher educational institution, the leadership role is different from those of other types of business or industry because it has different organizational environments coupled with unique constraints on the part of the leaders (Gmelch, 2004). The current trend in higher education is that leaders have to deal with a mounting list of social and economic challenges, with the overall calamity of leadership in the country. Therefore, a new way of leading styles is required. In addition, a new generation of leaders to bring positive transformation to local, national and international affairs is essential (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1991). Leaders in higher education institution are in addition mainly burdened with the challenges towards balancing managerial as well faculty regulations in the midst of promoting an open atmosphere for students, which is considered as a demanding role for most of the proficient leaders (Brown & Moshavi, 2002). Added to this is the heightened paradigm of consumerism in higher education, with advanced technological invention and certification and funding issues (Tierney, 2005). With these challenges, it is thus undeniable that higher education necessitates leaders with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead

The role of academic leadership in transforming Malaysia's Higher Education, specifically the public universities, can be signified through the Malaysia National Higher

Education Action Plan 2007-2010. The commitment of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) could be viewed from their revelation to transform Malaysia into a center of excellence in higher education by ensuring excellent academic leaders. Zuraina and Chun (2013) stated that according to leaders in a public university in Malaysia, some of the challenges faced by Malaysian HEIs in today's market environment include the following:

- (a) To become a university of choice from the perspective of future market;
- (b) To be highly ranked by the ranking system for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (SETARA) and if possible other recognizable ranking bodies such as THES;
- (c) To be recognized and awarded with Academic Performance Audit (APA);
- (d) To be given an autonomy for self-accreditation (SWA);
- (e) To ensure the graduate employability is high;
- (f) To inculcate a quality culture by introducing the ISO;
- (g) To increase the proficiency of English among the staff;
- (h) To support the national government call for One Malaysia and New Economic Model;
- (j) To continuously call Malaysian experts overseas to come back and serve the nation;
- (k) To share information via effective communication;
- (l) To grab the opportunities for research based on various programs developed by national government.

House (2004) commented that academic leaders should be able to influence and direct people's efforts to achieve success. He indicated that academic leaders should have the capacity to bring together the entire members of an organization, give clear and understandable directions and empower them to do the required task using each member's competency and creativities, to achieve the specified shared objectives. Therefore, academic leaders are held responsible to unite their workforce and contribute clear and comprehensive guidelines as well as empower them to do the required task to achieve the specified shared objectives. These types of leadership consist of spiritually intelligent type of leaders that will be able to generate positive changes through the leader's inner strength, instead of through knowledge and the system itself. The culture of spiritual intelligence boosts the interconnectedness among students, faculty, staff members towards helping them better appreciate the significance of harmonious relationship, discover meaning, purpose in life, and foster innate potential in each person.

Purpose of the study

Against this backdrop, the main purpose of the study was to explore how women academic leaders in Malaysian higher educational institutions integrate spiritual intelligence practices in their work environments. The study aimed to provide a better understanding of how women academic leaders promote a greater sense of meaning and purpose in the workplace, particularly in the context of a changing work environment. In addition, the study will be an exemplar for women in academic environment, considering that more women will have the opportunities to hold leadership positions in Higher Learning Institutions. Understanding the unique skills and attributes of spiritual intelligence could increase their confidence towards taking on leadership positions in the future. This study will also provide greater clarification on how spiritual intelligence becomes translated through leadership practice. Though there were plenty of study describes about spiritual intelligence, however, there remains a limited study on how leaders translate this intelligence into actual leadership practices, behaviors or communication style. The main research guiding the study was "how do women academic leaders integrate spiritual intelligence into academic leadership practice? The question will permit the respondent to describe their experience through their reflection as well as personal stories.

Literature review

The Spiritual intelligence phenomenon is often insufficiently investigated compared with rational (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ). The three types of intelligence consisting of IQ, EQ, and SQ, work together and parallel to one another (Gardner, 2000). Zohar (2000) clarified that where computers have an IQ, some animals can have high EQ. Nevertheless, only the human being has SQ, that is, the ability to question why they exist. Spiritual intelligence is perceived to be beyond a person's intellectual capability that connects the personal to the transpersonal and self to the spirit (Vaughan, 2002). Rational intelligence embraces the act of thinking and solving logical issues, while emotional intelligence consists of feeling and permits people to assess a particular situation.

Compared with the two types of intelligence just mentioned, spiritual intelligence enables people to ask whether they need to be in the present situation that assists them with the connection between mind and body as well as reason and emotion (Kadkhoda & Jahani). Although spiritual intelligence mainly encompasses a capability for a deeper understanding of questions, nevertheless, it also remains as set of abilities and resources that simplify problem solving towards the attainment of goals (Sisk, 2002; Wolman, 2001). Spiritual intelligence supports people to view things in a wider perspective and associate their actions and greater perspective (Frankl, 1985). Spiritual intelligence thus deals with issues of meaning and value (Kadkhoda & Jahani, 2012) and provides clarifications directed towards the benefit of the whole (Sisk, 2002).

Spirituality and religion

Due to the nature of Malaysia that is being considered as a religious country (Abdullah, 2001) intrinsically it is essential to take into consideration of understanding the concept of both religion and spirituality at the workplace. In differentiating the concept of religious and spirituality Koenig (2012) defines religion as an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality), and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relation and responsibility to others in living together in a community. Spirituality on the other hand is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which could lead to the development of religious rituals and the formation of community.

Religiosity in Malaysia encompasses total aspects of daily living and this comprising the workplace environment (Abdullah, 1996). The national figures indicated the diversity of religious affiliation towards Islam (61.3%), Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), and Hinduism (6.3%) with a smaller population acknowledges to Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional religious practices (1.3%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The importance of religion in Malaysia is pledged in everyday lives through the Declaration of the National Principles of Malaysia in which the first tenet is to "Believe in God" (Department of National Unity and Integration, 2013). In order for a comprehensive understanding of workplace spirituality to proceed, the integration of religion at work is crucial as this allows for the inclusion of dogma, tradition, and institution and allows one to capture rituals, beliefs, and religious values (Monty L. Lynn, Michael J. Naughton & Steve Vander Veen, 2009). In addition to that scholars have indicated that Malaysian culture embraces more of personal human aspects compared with Western culture (Abdullah et al., 2001). According to various studies, in general Malaysians emphasize more on a collective unit of the group. Consequently, Malaysian society is characterized as a collectivist society in which the culture gives emphasis and value for group commitments as well as collaborative requirements, grounded with individual consideration (Hofstede, 2001). As a consequence, the assimilation of these characteristics in the workplace contributes towards developing the spiritual

Malaysian workplace from the perspective of their values and belief system which are then outwardly expressed through work attitude and behavior.

Nevertheless the concept of spirituality and religious within Malaysia working environment is considered inseparable and discussed interchangeably. Hence, it is anticipated to observe employees bringing religion to work (Abdullah, 1992; Hamzah-Sendut, Madsen & Thong, 1989). Consequently, Malaysian workplaces can be best described by Ashmos and Duchon's idea of a spiritual workplace, which is an environment that provides the opportunity for self expression of 'one's many aspects of one's being, not merely the ability to perform physical or intellectual tasks (Donde P. Ashmos and Dennis Duchon, 2000). The idea that religion shapes and informs the employee's beliefs and value systems, (Winters T. Moore, 2008); Praveen K. Parboteeah, Yongsun Paik and John B. Cullen, 2009) and in turn influences their behaviors, perceptions, and decisions (Anselmo F. Vasconcelos, 2009) suggest a high degree of correspondence between religiosity and workplace spirituality.

Spiritual intelligence and women leadership practices

According to Gilligan (1982), women possess a female style of moral reasoning, such as longing to sustain relationships and concerned with avoiding harm, which she labelled as "caring." Furthermore, Gilligan described that women perceive the world as a "web of relationships." Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) enhanced Gilligan's analysis by adding qualities of spiritual leaders such as treating others with compassion and respect, exhibiting care and concern, encouraging self-reflection, and working based on a clear set of personal values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005). A study by Noddings (1984) offered greater support for the impression that caring is vital for women's moral decision making. According to her, women make moral decisions when they have the capacity or the inclination to communicate with participants, observe their facial expressions, and recognize their feelings. Women often contribute motives for their decisions based on feelings, requirements, impressions, and a sense of personal ideal instead of universal principles. Additionally, Nodding's study specified that women approach moral problems by "placing themselves as nearly possible in concrete situations and assuming personal responsibility for the choices to be made" (p. xxx). Nodding's work also specified the link between qualities how women lead and spiritual leadership, especially treating others with compassion and respect treatment, expressing care and concern, and operating from a clear set of personal values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005).

According to Rosener (1990), many scholars have shown resemblances in the ways women lead. For instance, she discovered that women leaders are more attentive to changing people's desires into organizational objectives. They do this by encouraging participation, empowering people, enhancing other people's self-worth, and having the capacity to create a sense of enthusiasm among people about their work. In another study, Helgesen (1990) established that women leader incline to avoid traditional-based hierarchies in favor of "circular management," symbolically being part of "the web" instead of "the pyramid." Similarly, Regan and Brooks (1995) acknowledged five feminine leadership attributes, namely collaboration, caring, courage, intuition and vision. Furthermore, in their works on women's leadership, Rosener, Helgesen, and Regan and Brooks have included components such as conveying care and concern, listening attentively, and appreciating the contribution of others as common themes expressed in their work (Reave, 2005). In their Meta analysis on gender and leadership, Eagly and Johnson (1990) recognized that women leaders possess the capacity to embrace a democratic leadership style of understanding people's feelings and purposes.

Assimilating spiritual intelligence within leadership practices

Articulating a clear and compelling vision

Spiritual intelligence is the fundamental intelligence of the visionary leader (Zohar, 2005). Prominent leaders such as Churchill, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa used spiritual intelligence to inspire people and provide them with a sense of something worth struggling for (Zohar, 2005).

Spiritually intelligent leaders in the workplace foster meaning and purpose among their employees by articulating a clear vision. According to Hesselbein (2002), such leaders will provide an unswerving effort to mission, a clear sense of direction and opportunities to find meaning in work. Senge (1990) specified collective vision as an important aspect towards establishing and sustaining a learning organization. Therefore, visionary leaders empower people as they have held the vision of their leader themselves. Effective visions are flexible as well as communicable (Kotter, 1995). They are also memorable and quotable. Senge (1990) mentioned that collective vision enhances people relationship in a workplace through the development of a sense of belonging to one another.

Kotter (1997) in addition pointed out that vision is the only approach that works towards embracing long term changes. Kotter (1996) claimed that in the vision of changing organization, there are three essential functions. They include clarifying the general direction of change, simplifying detailed decisions, and assisting efficiently to coordinate the actions of diverse people. It defines the organization's direction and the purpose of the leaders and followers. Vision promotes people with commitment, inspiration, and motivation by aligning them intellectually and emotionally with the organization's development and accomplishments (Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998). It should revitalize employees, provide meanings, and enhance commitment. Vision enables organizations to connect their people and inspires towards greatness (Miller, 1995). Employees are in fact positively influenced by leaders who have the capacity to convey a future that is promising and embracing them along with the vision. Vision aids people to prompt for deepest meaning and purpose (Miles, 1997).

Practicing leadership holistically

Another important attribute of a spiritually intelligent leader is the capacity to see wholeness, unity, and interconnectivity among diversity and differentiation (Amram, 2009). For human enterprises to be more effective, it is important to have leaders that can foster cooperation and a sense of oneness within their organizations (Zohar, 2005). The approach of bringing spiritual intelligence into leadership practice thus depends on the capacity to see the interrelationships between diverse peoples or things. Molinaro (1999) mentioned that by being a holistic throughout their practices, leaders tend to view their organization, community and society as a complex living whole that is evolving, unfolding and enfolding through a sense of purpose, collaboration and deep sense of inner direction.

In order to convey the concept of wholeness within leadership practice, Senge (2006) described systems thinking as a discipline for seeing wholes and as a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than individual things; for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots. According to Senge (1990), system thinking is a framework from which one can organize and understand how events, behaviors, and phenomena affect one another, both in the short-term and the long-term. It reflects the dynamics of reciprocity and interdependencies.

Cultivating and promoting shared values

Spiritually intelligent leaders have the capacity to portray and convey intrinsic values such as empathy and concern for others that are gradually reflected to be an essential quality

of successful leaders. Values enable leaders to establish principles for how people within the organization should be treated and the manner in which goals should be pursued. Values play an essential role in decision-making and problem solving as well.

Stephen Covey, according to his principle-centered leadership asserted that leader's values should be aligned with certain correct principles, which show them the way to be an effective leader. As stated by Covey, correct principles are like compasses in which they are always pointing the way, and if individual know how to read them, they won't get lost, confused, or fooled by conflicting voices and values. Examples of principles include "fairness", "equality", "justice", "integrity", "honesty" and "trust". Covey (1991) thus stated that involving employees in developing shared values and principles helps improve unity within the organization (Covey, 1991).

Reilly and Ehlinger (2007) described a value-based leader as an approach of leadership which is based on foundational moral principles or values such as integrity, empowerment, and social responsibility. Leaders convey values directly as in the case of formal statements about values and indirectly through the actions and decisions they make (Lord & Brown, 2001).

Methods

The current study incorporated a qualitative approach guided by phenomenological inquiry to explore the spiritual intelligence practices of women leaders. Phenomenology best fit the researchers' assumptions that it is possible to know, define and categorize women academic leaders' experiences in a more structured manner. It is by entering into their field of perception that the researcher pursues to understand spiritual intelligence as the leaders saw it. Therefore, to determine the essential structure of the spiritual intelligence, the researcher is expected to learn the perceptions and thoughts of the women academic leaders about the experiences and the interaction that took place between the leaders and the roles they played as leaders. Phenomenology focuses on the subjective experience of an individual. The phenomenology approach thus signifies the work of describing human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Van Manen (1997) stated that from a phenomenological perspective, to do research is always to question the way one experiences the world. Therefore, phenomenology investigates the nature of the phenomenon, in which "it asks what something is, and without which it would no longer be what it is" (Van Manen, 1997, p. xv). The main focus of a phenomenological study is to describe the "essence" or structure of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Meriam, 2002). The phenomenologist views human behavior, what people say and do, as a product of how people define their world (Taylor & Bodgan, 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). Their task is thus to embrace towards how people construct their realities or the essence of how people perceive their experience. The phenomenological study nurtures questions about collective, everyday human experiences, experiences believed to be important sociological or psychological phenomena of our time or typical of a group of people as well as a transition that are common or of contemporary interest (Tesch, 1990).

The study utilized purposeful sampling by selecting nine women academic leaders from three research universities in Malaysia. All the respondents were selected based on a criterion-based approach coupled with snowball sampling which involved asking participants interviewed for suggestions of additional respondents (Creswell, 1998). Because the goal of this study is to explore women's leadership, the first criterion is that the participant must be a female. The second criterion is that the participant must be an academic leader based on their position such as vice chancellor, deans and also directors. By including these different positions, the pool from which the leader could be chosen from becomes broader. In addition, the women academic leaders selected are reflected as successful leaders who have

experienced their leadership role for more than 10 years in administrative as well as leadership positions. The requirement of leadership experience for 10 years and above is included to address the issues of institutional culture. The length of the experience allows the participants to become familiar with the institutional culture and to address questions that will be linked to their capacity as an effective leader as well as their ability to lead. The successful women leaders are denoted by those who are considered to be talented, cherished, well-organized, and compelling. Different approaches were used to determine the sample frame. This included visiting the websites of several institutions to obtain a list of women leaders holding higher level positions, contacting colleagues and friend, and consulting with committee members to seek recommendations for finding potential participants, snowballing sampling measures which involve asking participants interviewed for suggestions of additional respondents (Creswell, 1998). The potential participants were then contacted via email containing an explanation of the study and request them to participate in the research. Consent letters were sent through email once the agreement to the participant has been confirmed and collected during the interview.

Participants were initially contacted by email. After agreeing to be part of the study, interviews were conducted at the participants' offices. Interviews were semi-structured. As stated by Merriam (1998), semi-structured interviews allow researchers to respond to the situation at hand, the emerging worldview of the respondents, and to new ideas that arise on the topic. A set of instructions was developed and sent before the interview session, which clarified the nature and purpose of the research, as well as what would be expected from them during the interviews.

In line with a phenomenological approach, the interviews set out to describe the essence of the women's leaders' experiences. As such, the main method of data generation was through phenomenological interviewing in order to gain access to the participants' life worlds. According to Van Manen (1992), interviews may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon. An interview guide was developed that included broad questions on the topic under investigation (Riessman, 1993). The researcher also posed follow-up questions where necessary that delved deeper into the content of the guide. Each interview lasted between one to two hours. Field notes were used in order to provide the researcher additional information related to feelings, impressions and other interesting incidence, including follow up questions that arose throughout the interview sessions.

Data analysis

During the data collection transcriptions, notes and personal documents were gathered and organized sequentially, according to the story of each participant's experience. Interview transcripts were read and memos made based on initial reactions and observations and were followed-up on later (Willig, 2001). Transcripts were then analyzed using the modified van Kaam method or Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenology as a guideline (Moustakas, 1991). On the transcripts, all statements that seemed to be relevant to the participant's experience towards integrating spiritual intelligence within their leadership practices were highlighted. Utilizing this concept enabled the researcher to have a complete understanding of the participants' live experience. Using a horizontalization process, all statements from the interview transcripts related to the experiences of women leaders towards integrating spiritual intelligence were then extracted. Each statement was viewed as having equal value. The significant statements were then pasted into another word document, creating what became meaning statements. In the following step similar or overlapping statements were deleted. The remaining descriptions were identified as "invariant constituent" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The meaning units were scrutinized to check the accuracy of the inquiry into the phenomenon of spiritual intelligence practices. Irrelevant and redundant meaning units identified were omitted. Each meaning unit was

rephrased grammatically to a more direct expression of the participant's meaning. Then, they were grouped into categories and the invariant horizons were clustered into themes. The themes were then evaluated according to the respondent's experience.

The meaning units were listed, and general descriptions of the textures of the experience which denoted what happened or what was experienced were written with the examples verbatim. This individual narrative was a synthesis of the invariant horizon and clustered themes. The individual textural description was then used to create imaginative variation. The main purpose of imaginative variation is to create an individual structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). To develop the individual structural description, structural themes were developed from the individual textural description created during the phenomenological reduction. The structure described how the phenomenon of spiritual intelligence was experienced. Once the individual textural and structural descriptions were established, the participants were contacted to schedule the second interview to complete the whole interview process once again, with second interview transcripts. The method was used with all the nine participants. Upon completing the process, the researcher now has 9 individual textural descriptions and 9 individual structural descriptions. The subsequent stage in the study is the synthesis which involves integrating the textural and structural descriptions into one. The resulting composite textural structural description is a universal description of the experience for the entire participants (Moustaka, 1994). In the final step, the total description of the meaning and the essence of the experience were assembled. The report is expected to help readers comprehend better the essential, invariant essence of the experience, distinguishing the single unifying meaning of the experience of spiritual intelligence.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness, triangulation method has been utilized by consulting with experts in the similar area of the study towards seeking for multiple sources of data. Various documents from the library also have been reviewed to gather information towards ensuring validity. Using multiple methods such as semi structured interview as well as follow up interview also has provided researcher with a more detailed and balanced explanation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, seeking related literature helped the researcher in examining and interpreting the data by contrasting evolving themes and patterns with existing literature. This helped the researcher make meaning of what was similar, what was different, and why, thereby increasing the understanding of the investigated phenomena. In addition to triangulation researcher used member checking with respondents and also peer review by committee members in order to ensure trustworthiness. Member checks require that the researcher presents the findings or interpretations of the findings through descriptive triangulation, which is consistent between researcher and participant (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The researcher has contacted and sent participant through e-mail a copy of transcripts, interpretation of the data and also participant profiles for their review and feedback. Peer debriefing were led to ensure that researcher stays in regular contact with committee members and reflexive notes will be taken constantly to review their feedback while discussing the findings with them. The researcher has consulted with committee members regularly by presenting the data in order to ensure appropriate methodology of the study.

Findings and discussions

The results are presented in response to the main research question, “How do women academic leaders integrate spiritual intelligence within their leadership practice?” Two main themes and four sub-themes resulted from the analysis as stated in table 1. The two main strategies are: 1) to work with purpose and meaning; and 2) Fostering and demonstrating shared values. As for the first theme the subthemes were: a) Reflecting or being conscious as a leader and b) To be able to make difference in people’s life. The subthemes developed for second theme were a) Modelling exemplary leadership and b) creating value within decision making and problem solving

Table 1

Themes and the sub themes of the study

Themes	Subthemes
1) To work with purpose and meaning	a) Reflecting or being conscious as a leader b) To be able to make difference in people’s life
2) Fostering and demonstrating shared values	a) Modelling exemplary leadership b) Creating value within decision making and problem solving

To work with purpose and meaning

Women academic leaders believe that being a spiritually intelligent leader mean to be able to lead and work with purpose and meaning. In this case there two important aspects have been discussed by most of the women leaders. The first aspect is to reflect or being conscious of their role as a leader. The second element is to be able to make changes and create progressive impacts onto another through their contribution such as to the people surrounded by them or even to the society’s well being. Few women leaders claimed that it is important to always be conscious of their role as leader by reflecting on certain aspects. There is a deep personal connection when the women leaders shared about performing their work. For example, some of them said that being as a leader they will always questions to themselves on things such as who am I? What is my purpose? How am I going to be a leader?” Being a leader, women academic leader believes that before they embark on their journey of leading it is thus essential to know their true purpose of being a leader. As such reflecting on those questions will give them clear indications of leading successfully. They believe that leading is not just based on position, power and influence, but it is something beyond that conception, which is more towards fulfilling their ultimate purpose. Understanding their role and purpose also helped them to lead the institution as well as the people surrounded will also able to hold the same concept of living with purpose and meaning.

Timah said that being as a woman leader; she is always reflecting on her purpose of holding the leadership role and will ensure that whatever she is performing within her leadership routine will be based on her reflection.

“So what are you, what is your role, and I think even in religion or philosophy, to have meaningful existence is to realize what is the purpose of your being in this so called earth. So I guess first thing drive me just to make sure people are aware of their role and purpose”.

Understanding clear purpose of their role also created passion towards making things happen. In this case most of the women leaders have claimed that being able to make a significant contribution is also a vital part of being a spiritually intelligent leader. Having a purpose without making things happen is futile effort, according to them. For example, many

of the women leaders mention that their determination is basically to be able to make changes and contributions to people, to the institution or even society. Being as a leader they believe that it is important to be able to make a contribution and to bring changes as a leader towards fulfilling their achievement. The contribution varies depending on their ambition. For example, there are some women leaders would want to contribute towards creating an impact on people and there are some women leaders who strive towards contributing towards society's well being.

For Rahmah she has always been keen to make a contribution through the educational field. Having the capabilities to lead from the time she was in her primary school, she believes that being a leader will make her desire fulfilled towards creating impact on society's wellbeing through knowledge support.

"I realized my persistence of being a leader is actually more in education and to be the best either as a lecturer or a researcher or person involved in the community with all revolves around transfer of knowledge and how knowledge enrich a family or society. There are many ways to contribute, but to me knowledge is a great contribution to the society well being"

As for Aida, her purpose of being a leader is more towards her desire to make changes within her department that she is currently leading. She believes that it is important for her to be able to make a significant contribution or else she would not prefer to be in a leading position.

"To become a leader, I take up the post because I think I can make a change. If I feel I can't make a change, then I would not take up the post. I need to develop the department and I need to help my people to develop as well. There are certain programs that need to be further enhanced, so that was good for me. Basically, if I think my existence in the organization would be, I am able to make a significant contribution, then I will take the job"

Ros said that she will always have something to contribute within her career as a leader and that's how she found her role is more meaningful.

There is always something that I wanted to do, especially in my discipline.

Consequently, all the respondents interviewed are passionate to be a leader where they will be able to create an impact through their purpose and contribution. Women leaders understood that when leader do not understand their purpose, it is impossible to bring in others as they do not know their purpose as well and it will be very difficult to communicate with the rest.

Fostering and conveying values

From the perspective of the leaders we interviewed, values represent an individual's ideal way of conveying what is essential for their institutions' success. Values that have been described include respecting others, honesty, showing concern for others and caring. As such values will emphasize what an institution stands for and hence will be a guideline for the behavior or the people within the workplace. Values conveyed by leaders, by being an exemplary leader and also through the cultivation of values within their decision making and problem solving. Values portrayed by being a role model as well as promoting it as part of the institutional culture.

Modelling exemplary leadership

When it comes to conveying positive values in decision-making and problem-solving, it is important for leaders to demonstrate their leadership qualities. Before a leader can expect his or her employees to have certain values they should exemplify the very qualities that they

wish to see in their employees. Our leaders stressed on the need to always ‘walk the talk’ by portraying the values such respecting others and caring within their everyday work.

Ros indicated that innate value such as caring and respecting others requires practices and demonstration as opposed to articulation alone. In such a way employees will observe the values if first of all leaders are actually representing the values that they express throughout their practices.

“People see and observe their leaders, and so I think when this is how we manage -- when I see staff, I respect them -- and so they should respect the students as well. So I think it has to be that way because if I don’t respect them, then they will say she is just like that. The culture would not be there”

Timah believes the importance of walking the talk instead of just instructing employees to practice the values. She shared her experience of how she will ensure that the values are assimilated throughout her practices. As stated by her:

“Well, I guess it is the action that speaks louder than the word. You can’t be telling them, “practice this value” and then let it be like that. It will never work. Sometimes they don’t even understand what they have to do. So we have to learn to demonstrate innate value through our behavior, action, word as people tend to learn through observation. So we have to walk the talk. For example, what I try to say to them, the way I say it, how I deal with problems and so on. So as a leader it is important for us to have the attributes before we expect others to have or portray them”

Cultivating values within decision making and problem solving

Women leaders try to ensure that values are infused into the work culture by practicing them in their everyday tasks and decision-making. They feel that this inspires their employees to pass on the same values when completing their tasks, especially through their interactions with others. Some of the core values the leaders prioritize include appreciating, acknowledging and respecting others. Whenever the leaders get the opportunity to meet their employees they will remind them and share experiences on why and how values play a significant role within the workplace. For example, when the team has to make a decision or solve a problem, Hana does what she can to ensure that the values she espouses such as respecting and helping others and being honest are imparted by her staff. She says:

“I try to inculcate the values whenever the employees gather when decisions have to be made, for handling conflicts and so on so that they know how important the values are for giving us strength and providing solutions”

Aida in addition stated that:

“Every time we have meeting or discussion, we will make sure that the values will be stressed. For example, I will always ask my people to always respect other people’s value and do not judge them based on their opinion. Even by just acknowledging people and gesturing at them will make a big difference”

She added how values play an important role to create a better working environment when we used it to handle conflicts or to make a decision. In addition is also important to create a good relationship within the team. She said that:

“I think every time there is an issue or a decision that we have to make it is important to prioritize the values that have been imparted. For example, when we are working in a large team and we have to make a very important decision, it is important to explain to the employees how we should respect people’s opinion, respect their values; appreciate each other’s viewpoint and being truthful to each other. People are different and we must accept and tolerate with each other”

Discussion

In their practice as an academic leader, to work with purpose and meaning through self reflection or being conscious as a leader is apparent in the standards the participants embrace themselves to. The women leaders in this study emphasized the importance of nurturing the sense of meaning and purpose within their leadership role by being a conscious leader and also capable of making significant changes in people surrounding them. They shared on the importance of persisting learning, engaging in the process of thinking about their leadership and performance, and knowing what is important to them (Palmer, 2000). Being a leader is not merely holding a position, power or influence. However, it is important for them to be aware of their role and influence on others towards creating a positive impact. Leaders living and working with purpose will be aware and attentive towards their response to important matters as they are linked to their purpose and thus create a meaningful environment. The women leaders discussed on the importance of becoming very aware of the scope of influence the academic position has and of the importance of being very intentional about how they interact with staff, how they listen to students, how they create a vision for the institution, and what their presence is in the community (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003). Support for the idea of self reflection being a component of spiritual leadership is indeed found in Reave's (2005) interpretation which says spiritual leadership is demonstrated through behavior, in individual reflective practice. These attributes of spiritual intelligence as depicted by the women leaders is also comparable to Vaughan's understanding of spiritual intelligence as an individual's capability for deep understanding of existential matters and queries that include questions such as "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" and "What really matters?" (Vaughan, 2002). Understanding the true purpose will undeniably direct individual towards executing their decision in a more precise manner, specifically as a leader. Zohar and Marshall (2000) also described spiritual intelligence as an individual realization to access the meaning, vision, values and a sense of purpose.

The women leaders have discussed the importance of cultivating shared values within the institutional culture. As a leader it is important for them to be an example to the people in the working environment. Values that the women leaders particularly emphasize include respect and concern for others, being integrative, and being honest and trustworthy. By merely explaining the concept to the employees and expecting them to follow will be impractical as they tend to forget it. Instead, the employees should be encouraged to apply the value throughout their daily task and decision making. Communicating the values to people remains an important practice that leaders should cultivate. People should be encouraged to practice the values in their daily task by regularly communicating the values to them and to the team members. This will ensure that they will remember and be aware of the importance of those values and principles. These values are said to bring huge changes in people's attitudes. Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated that a leader will not be able to become an example or enable people to act if the leader is not perceived as having the values such as being honest and trustworthy. Such values must also be expressed when leaders need to make certain key decisions or when they have to solve problems. Through their actions, leaders display that they have such collective values such as trustworthiness, honesty, courage, empathy, and humility, and that they have the capacity to gain acknowledgement for their positive personality from their followers (Fry, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). When people perceive their leaders as having good attributes, people will nurture developing trust that leads towards their willingness to accept influence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Lord and Brown (2001) mentioned that leaders may convey values formally or indirectly through the actions and decisions they make. When leaders understand the importance of integrating values in their leadership practices, it will enable them to understand how their personal values or principles influence the working environment when

they are used to handle conflicts or to make decisions. Reave (2005) specified that in effective leadership, spirituality “expresses itself not so much in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual values such as integrity, and in the demonstration of spiritual behavior such as expressing caring and concern” (p. 656). The participants reflected on how strong, positive relationships provide the necessary foundation of trust for them to be able to be effective in their jobs. This finding is consistent with Reave’s research (2005) that describes spiritual leadership as an observable phenomenon occurring when a leader embodies spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility, creating the self as an example of someone who can be trusted and admired. Kouzes & Posner (2007) stated that a leader will not be able to become an exemplary or enable people to act if they are not perceived as having the similar values. Such values also said to be expressed in when leaders need to make certain key decision or when they have to solve problems. Leaders by their actions, display the possession of such collective values as trustworthiness, honesty, courage, empathy, and humility have the capacity to gain acknowledgement of positive personality from their followers (Fry, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Conclusion and future scope

The study was initiated to explore the assimilation of spiritual intelligence throughout leadership practices, precisely among women academic leaders. Understanding the experiences of women academic leaders who have gone through various experiences contribute a better view on greater leadership attributes, specifically towards leading in an environment of changes and transformations. The study has established significant findings regarding the assimilation of spiritual intelligence within women academic leadership practices by bringing into the light on the two main approaches on how women leaders use the spiritual intelligence throughout their leadership practices. These practices entail the capability of working with purpose and meaning and also by fostering and demonstrating shared values. The approach is particularly important within the contemporary learning organization in which people prefer workplace environment that consist of elements, such as teamwork, intrinsically motivating, collaborative and also value based. Spiritual intelligence has been exhibited to assist leaders to provide an insight on understanding the effective way of leading people in a changing and turbulent environment and consequently providing a greater purpose and meaning in their working atmosphere. The strategies that have been shared by women leaders towards integrating spiritual intelligence have provided greater understanding for leaders to lead people effectively, particularly in a changing environment and in promoting an environment that is embedded with purpose, meaning, and values. These attributes of spiritual intelligence could additionally inspire, motivate and increase the commitment of employees, when they feel that they are able to make significant contributions within their working atmosphere beyond the routine task. The elements such as meaning, vision, purpose as well as values embedded within the work culture through spiritual intelligence practices will undeniably enable leaders to achieve greater accomplishments towards transforming people as well as the institution to achieve higher institutional credibility and sustainability.

Although these women leaders have been portrayed as having spiritual intelligence attributes based on their interview responses, however, the answers are limited to their way of interpreting the phenomenon. Intrinsically the design of study could include a study to explore the perceptions and experiences of employees working with the leaders who have integrated spiritual intelligence practices. Future studies could be conducted to interview people who work with those women academic leaders and analyze their responses and compare them with the self-perceptions of the leaders. Additional research also probably could be conducted on this area by using diverse settings. The employment of various

perspective approaches would be effective towards aligning the data assembled from diverse viewpoints and using them for triangulation. By examining the data from various perspectives would enable the various groups of participants to reveal of framework in the expectations. These groups could be administrative staff, students, academics, and others who can contribute more in terms of certain attributes of spiritual intelligence because of their positions in higher education and its broader community. This study has focused particularly on women leaders to see how they integrate spiritual intelligence in their leadership practices. Conducting similar studies with men leaders would probably yield additional insights into phenomena of spiritual intelligence. Finally, it would also be beneficial to look at different levels of institutions of higher learnings. This study focused mainly on public research universities. Conducting the study on private university probably would provide different views of the women leadership concerning spiritual intelligence practices.

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