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Effectiveness of the use of Spiritual Intelligence in Women Academic Leadership Practice

ABSTRACT

Spiritual intelligence has been portrayed as an important contributor to enhanced sense of meaning and purpose within workplace leadership. There are studies on the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence done specifically in leadership practices. To address the gap, this study was designed to explore what will be the contributions of integrating spiritual intelligence within higher education environment. The study implemented phenomenological investigation. Data collection was accompanied by in-depth interview with nine female academic leaders. The finding established three main effectiveness of integrating spiritual intelligence into leadership practices: 1) employees inspired by vision; 2) increased credibility and long term sustainability of institution; 3) Heightened moral values and reduced ethical issues. It was concluded that spiritual intelligence can transform the workplace into a more meaningful and purposeful atmosphere by constructing balanced and harmonious relationship among employees

KEYWORDS: spiritual intelligence, higher educational institutions, women academic leaders, leadership, phenomenology study.

Introduction

The concept of spiritual intelligence 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 ability and its use in various domains, including the spiritual. Despite these two major arguments 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 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 intelligence, Emmons (1999) 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. Spiritual intelligence within workplace environments allows leaders to focus on building an atmosphere embedded with greater mutual respect, ethics, values, and integrity (Wolf, 2004). Leaders with spiritual intelligence can better inspire meaning and purpose in others (Bass, 1990, 1997, 2001; Bennie, 2000, 2001, 2007; Fry, 2003, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 1992, 2005, 2006; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). 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 has been suggested as a prerequisite of contemporary organizational leadership, especially of transformational leadership style where leaders must 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. Stiernberg (2003) said that women leaders are more relationship focused emphasize cooperative and decision making and portray attributes of concern and empathy. In addition, women leaders are more democratic and less autocratic compared with their male counterparts (Hopkins et al., 2008). In a different research 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 for 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 at workplace, emphasize on the whole individual, mutual vision construction, and empowerment. Incorporating elements of spirituality within leadership practice seems of importance to women academic leaders.

Study context

In Malaysia, little is known about the experiences of women leaders despite 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 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 can acclimatize to changing business environment.

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 centre of excellence for higher education by ensuring excellent academic leaders. Zuraina and Chun (2013) stated that according to leaders in public university in Malaysia, some challenges faced by Malaysian HEIs in today's market environment include : (a) to become 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's 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 programmes developed by national

government. Academic leaders are held responsible to unite their workforce and contribute clear and comprehensible guidelines and empower them to do the required task to achieve the specified shared objectives. These types of leadership comprise spiritually intelligent type of leaders that can generate positive changes through the leader's inner strength, instead of through knowledge and system itself.

Purpose of the study

Against this backdrop the main purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence in women academic leadership practices. The study was designed to provide a clear understanding of the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence practices in women academic practices. In addition, the study will be an ideal 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 when translated through leadership practice will contribute to a more balanced and harmonious work environment .The main research question that guided the study was: What is the effectiveness of the use of spiritual intelligence in women academic leadership practices?

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 are parallel to one another (Gardner, 2000). Compared with the two types of intelligence, spiritual intelligence enables people to ask whether they need to be in the present situation that assists them with the connection among mind and body as well as reason and emotion (Kadkhoda & Jahani, 2012). Although spiritual intelligence mainly encompasses a capability for a deeper understanding of questions 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 deals with issues of meaning and value (Kadkhoda & Jahani, 2012) and provides clarifications directed towards the benefit of the whole (Sisk, 2002).

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." Gilligan observed 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). 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.

Effectiveness of spiritual intelligence

Inspire Higher Individual and Organizational Performance

Leader's approach towards inspiring people with meaning, values, and purpose through spiritual intelligence practices has been proven to transform individual, and organization effectiveness. Scholars signified that spiritual intelligence in leadership practices will contribute to personal and organizational transformation through meaning making by connecting ideas, events, and persons (Dent, Higgin & Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003). Amram (2005) added that meaning production will help the leaders to acknowledge the needs of people with enhancing personal meaning and purpose. This will increase the level of the mutual raising of leaders and followers towards higher level of motivation and morality (Chakraborthy & Chakraborthy,2004).

Leading employees with meaning and purpose as part of spiritual intelligence practices provides employees with a sense of direction as they know their ultimate objective of performing the task. In addition, meaning also inspires employees as they feel more energized towards their innate purpose. Frankl (2004) mentioned that it is the peculiarity of the individual, that the individual must have something significant to do in the individual's life, for that gives meaning to life. Employees may feel as if they are trapped in an environment where they are performing without a sense of purpose and meaning as they have no direction as to where they have to pursue. The lack of meaning and purpose could also lead to negative outcomes such as employee distrust.

The affirmative vision generated by leaders through spiritual intelligence practices will give employee meaning and purpose to their daily job. This will permit them to be part of something enormous. Developing vision that delivers employee with meaning and purpose, fulfilment and sense of belonging, will allow individuals to perceive their work based on their personal meaning, values, and purpose (Bowman, 2000**;** Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Zohar, 2005; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Inspiring hope in the workplace will enable leaders to enlighten the vision that supports purpose through values, attitude, and behaviours (Amram & Dryer, 2008; Fry, 2008). In addition, empowering employees will inspire them to find harmony in their work and life, which will motivate them and those they serve at their workplace.

Flexibility and Resilience towards Managing Complexities and Ambiguity

According to Katherine Noble (2001), spiritually intelligent leaders retain resilience, which is the ability to respond to situations of extreme stress with extraordinary competence. Noble posited that individuals with high spiritual intelligence possess inner strengths and higher resilience that make them better able to adapt to changes and to overcome adversity. Specifically, spiritual intelligence will be valuable for leaders who function in an ambiguous and complex realm. The organizational environment is changing, becoming volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. This chaotic and turbulent environment can be very demanding, causing stress and burnout. Therefore, it is vital for leaders to become more resilient and flexible towards handling those circumstances and helping others to move forward to achieve success. Scholars (e.g., Amram, 2007; Vaughan, 2002; Noble, 2001) suggested there is a link between individuals with high spiritual intelligence and the ability to respond positively to situations of extreme stress. The attributes of spiritual intelligence such as values, appealing vision, and strong relationship with employees will help leaders to lead

in any circumstances, as everyone will be accountable for any circumstances and will cooperate towards managing things in a more systematic way.

Respectable Relationship With all the Stakeholders

McGeachy (2001) proposed that a culture of mutual trust induced by a spiritually intelligent workforce enhances open and honest communication among co-workers and supports innovation as well as creativity. With a larger organization and having diverse employees, it is important to have good relationship among the employees for the leaders to achieve their vision and mission statements. It is impossible for the leaders to complete their vision without the assistance of the right human resources. Therefore, the capability for leaders to assimilate the spiritual intelligence practices such as shared system thinking, building trust, and authorizing employees will enable them to see the significance of the priorities given to them as part of the organization. Spiritually intelligent leaders will be conscious and aware of their relationship and task throughout their role as leaders, especially when they have to deal with people. Wolman (2001) proposed that individuals with high spiritual intelligence are more conscious and can therefore better make ethically mindful choices with a consequent improvement in the quality of their relationships with others**.** This view is supported by Amram and Dryer (2008). Sustaining good relationship also may avoid various issues such as employees' dissatisfaction, unnecessary complaints, mistrust and betrayal, as the employees always have a good reputation towards their leader and the organization. In addition, the element that sustains good relationship is the capacity of the leaders to understand people as their important assets and guide them to excel in their career. Covey (1999) confirmed that conscious leaders decide on their own accountability for their lives. In addition, they live their lives according to their inner resilience and power that enable them to surpass the role of being victims to blaming employees for any mistakes

Reputable Environment Increases Credibility of the Organization

Wolf (2004) mentioned that the assimilation of spiritual intelligence in leadership practice emphasizes that spiritual intelligence builds environment of respect, ethics, values, and integrity. Portraying positive traits and shared values in the workplace atmosphere such as integrity and respecting others developed a strong awareness of principles and values in employees and all other stakeholders on how they should behave, react, and respond in performing their tasks, in decision making, and in their relationships. The ability of the employees to model their leaders also enables them to understand the importance of ethics and values, which are important in performing their tasks. Employees can also learn to be virtuous by observing ethical leaders who always stand up for doing what is right through their value-based attributes. Value- and principle-based ethical leaders can assist towards providing meaning into employees' tasks. Therefore, decisions made by the organization will be based on moral values (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog, & Folger, 2010). Moral leaders persistently strive to integrate ethical principles in their opinions, principles, and conduct. In addition, they strive towards greater purpose, prudence, pride, tolerance, and determination (Khuntia & Suar, 2004). Positive environment enhances the credibility of the organization as ethical issues will eliminate half of the disreputable issues within the organization. Zohar (2004) supported the increased benefits of ethically led organizations.

Method

The study assimilated a qualitative approach guided by phenomenological inquiry to explore the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence practices among women leaders. Phenomenology best fit the researchers' assumptions that it is possible to know, define and categorize women academic leader's experiences in a more structured manner. It is by entering their field of perception that the researcher pursues to understand spiritual intelligence as the leaders saw it.Therefore, to determine the essential structure of 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 signifies the work of describing human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Van Manen (1997) stated that from a phenomenological perspective, to research is always to question the way one experiences the world. Therefore, phenomenology investigates the nature of the phenomenon, in which "it ask 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). Nine women academic leaders were purposively selected 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). To include in the study, all participants had to: 1) be female; 2) have held leadership positions at their university limited to vice and deputy vice chancellors, deans and directors (e.g., research institutes); and 3) were in their leadership roles for over 10 years. The last criterion was included to ensure that participants would be familiar with the culture of their institutions or units they were heading. Similarly, the researcher wanted to ensure that they would be fully capable of answering questions related to their ability and capacity to lead. The small sample size is supported by Dukes (1984) who recommends including 3 to 10 participants in a phenomenology study.

Data collection

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. 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. (Merriam, 2002) A set of instructions was developed and sent before the interview session which clarified the research, and 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 leader's experiences. The main method of data generation was through phenomenological interviewing to gain access to the participants' life worlds. According to Van Manen (1992), interviews may be a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of 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 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 experiences. Interview transcripts were read and memos made based on initial reactions and observations and were followed-up on later (Willig, 2001). Transcripts were then analysed 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 relevant to the participant's experience towards integrating spiritual intelligence in their leadership practices were highlighted. Utilizing this concept enabled the researcher to have a complete understanding of the participants' life experience. Using a horizonalization process, all statements from the interview transcripts related to 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 these 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 enquiry 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 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 nine individual textural descriptions and nine individual structural descriptions. The subsequent stage in the study was the synthesis which involved 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 to comprehend better the essential, invariant essence of the experience, distinguishing the single unifying meaning of the experience of spiritual intelligence**.**

In order to ensure trustworthiness triangulation method was utilized by consulting with experts in the similar area of the study towards seeking multiple sources of data. Various documents from library also have been reviewed to gather information towards ensuring validity. Using multiple methods such as semi-structured interview and follow up interview also provided the researcher with a more detailed and balanced explanation of the phenomenon. 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, increasing the understanding of the investigated phenomena. Besides triangulation researcher used member checking with respondents and also peer reviewing with committee members to ensure trustworthiness. Member checks require that the researcher present 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 participants through email a copy of transcripts, interpretation of the data and also participants' profiles for their review and feedback. Peer debriefing was led to ensure that researcher stay in regular contact with committee members and reflexive notes will be taken constantly to review their feedback while discussing the findings with them.

The results are presented in response to the main research question, "What is the effectiveness of the use of spiritual intelligence in women academic leadership practices? The three main themes resulted from the analysis as stated in figure 1: 1) Employees inspired by vision; 2) Increased credibility and long term sustainability of institution; 3) Heightened moral values and reduced ethical issue

Figure 1

Themes of the study

Themes

    (a)   *Employees inspired by vision*

    (b)   *Increased credibility and long term sustainability of institution*

    (c)   *Heightened moral values and reduced ethical issues*.

(a)   Theme: Employees inspired by vision

The women leaders claimed that letting people know what they have to do and guiding them towards achieving the vision, make employees feel more excited to move forward. When employees understand their purpose, they will be more energized to perform the task. According to the women leaders, aligning employees with the common purpose will help them to contribute to find their own role and make meaning for themselves by centring their personal resolution and capability. When employees work together towards the meaningful purpose it will unify the team or organization.

Respondent Ros, mentioned that let employees know that their work is meaningful and this can be done through shared vision. She stated that when employees are given clear and compelling vision, their performances are enhanced as they understand their purpose better. According to her, employees would prefer to see their work as something that gives them meaning and value instead of seeing their work as performed for salary only. Ros commented,

> People always want to identify their work has meaning instead of just getting their pay-check. People prefer having a larger purpose for what they do and they want to feel proud in their work. A good vision or framework will obviously can contribute

larger meaning to work by clarifying its purpose, its interrelationship with other work and its impact within the organization. (Respondent Ros)

In addition, the women leaders also stated that vision permits people to sense they are part of a greater whole, and get meaning out of their work. The right vision will be momentous for everyone in the organization if they can appreciate how and what they contribute to that vision. Hanah suggested,

> Employees are the prime mover of an organization. They help us to achieve our goal and support us. As a leader I can only decide but without them I cannot carry out my plan. When we create a sense of meaning within them I'm sure it will help them to perform better as they are working in an environment where they feel they can contribute their work well and feeling as if they belong to the institution. We see them being very committed and happy to work here. (Respondent Hanah)

Respondent Sanah said that having energetic employees with higher responsibility and commitment in her department hardly caused any problem with employee dissatisfaction. In addition, those leaving the institutions did not crop up.

> I think all of them enjoy working with me and I enjoy working with them you know. So it means we make everybody to stay but it means we have to work hard. I think all of them are very committed to making sure that whatever we do is well thought of criteria or whatever that we produced. (Respondent Sanah)

(b)   Theme: Increased the credibility and long term sustainability of institution

The women academic leaders also shared their experience that having attributes of spiritual intelligence will increase the credibility of the institution. Credibility, as meant by the women leaders, is when the institution can be acknowledged by others as trustworthy and reliable for their success. Spiritual intelligence is assumed to enhance the good reputation of the institution. It increases the institution's worth, and provides to the long term sustainability of the institution.

Some women academic leaders confirmed that the culture of embedding employees with values such a respecting others, practicing honesty, being trustworthy, and having integrity will be modelled by others. Demonstrating it at the workplace, especially will deliver a better image and credibility to other people, such as customers and to other institutions or organizations. The women leaders stated that people will always highlight moral values and downplay unethical behaviours. Therefore, having a good culture radiated to everyone will become a great emphasis for the institutions reputation. Imparting the good values in the working culture will enhance the credibility of an institution as it protects the image of institutions towards being more ethical.

Based on her observation, Respondent Aida noticed that having people who really appreciate values and are ethical have gained good credibility compared with those who do not impart those values to their employees.

People are observing how we behave and respond to others. When we have value which radiates to others it will definitely lead to credibility for the individual, leader and the institution. We are given negative judgment based on our attitude that will also lead to poor reputation of the whole institution. (Respondent Aida)

Respondent Shila said that the respectability of institution will be retained when people around have good values radiated to others.

When people are conveyed with values they will portray them into everyday practices. How they behave and how they solve problems will determine the image of the institutions. If the staffs do not respect them and treat them well they may tell other students and it will affect the credibility of our institutions. (Respondent Shila)

Respondent Aida said that when leaders are being people-centred rather than being autocratic, it will definitely increase employee's performance as all their needs are fulfilled and they can find purpose in whatever task they are performing. This will consequently increase the credibility of the institutions that leads to its long term sustainability.

When people are given priority and they find meaning in their task I am sure their performance will be great as their commitment is high. As such good group of people lead to long term sustainability of institution. (Respondent Aida)

(c) Theme: Heightened moral values and reduced ethical issues

As stated by most of the women leaders, being spiritually intelligent leaders enhanced moral values of the people because they were appreciated for portraying and conveying the innate qualities. Emphasis on the values such as respecting others, having integrity, having a sense of belonging has developed responsible individuals who can differentiate and judge whether they are doing the right things. It has also reduced ethical issues in numerous ways. The women leaders find they need not instruct their employees much as they themselves can judge their action well. Employees developed their own principles and they know of things they are supposed to do and things they are not supposed to do. Therefore, the women leaders strongly agree that embedding good values into the institution as part of their spiritual intelligence attributes will avoid them from making wrong judgments. In addition, women leaders stated that in an environment where everyone is having the right attitude conveyed through the innate qualities, it will also eliminate issues such as misconduct or unethical behaviour as people can make judgment between the right decisions and wrong decisions.

Respondent Shila said that cultivating the right values in the institution has avoided ethical issue among people as they know what they should and should not practice. It also helped them to understand each other better and improve teamwork. She added that she did not have to instruct her people on their attitudes as they are matured enough to take responsibility of their own action.

When employees have their values, they understand each other better and this will avoid conflict among them. Employees can judge their actions and behaviours. They will have no problem of misconduct, and so on.

I have no problems with my people such as coming late or fighting in the office as they know their values well. Whatever they perform they know that they have to handle it. (Respondent Shila)

Respondent Hanah said when employees have value they need not be judged by their supervisor. They will have their own guidelines on things they are supposed to do and things they are not supposed to do. She believes that when individuals are embedded with good values, they will not make wrong judgments. So, she said,

It guides the individual regardless of whether you are being evaluated by your immediate supervisor or you are being audited by external assessors. You have your own screening mechanism, using your spiritual values. You know whether what you are doing is ethical or unethical. You know whether you should be telling something that is the truth but do you make sure that the other person, you know will not feel offended and if you have to be direct you know, to be true to that person, you can justify it using your innate qualities. So this is where spiritual values help because it governs you. (Respondent Hanah)

In addition, the women leaders believe that in the current era, with rapid changes, it is very important for everyone to balance values with other material elements to create a balanced and harmonious relationship.

Respondent Aida stressed that the values are also important for individuals even if they are outside the workplace as they can cascade it to upcoming generation.

Respondent Nik also believes that in the current era with rapid changes, it is very important for everyone to balance values with other material elements to create a balanced and harmonious relationship. She mentioned,

Looking at the current era, in 21st century it is impossible to survive when you do not know how to balance value with other materialistic things. If you want to survive and create a harmonious relationship you really have to hold onto your values. (Respondent Nik)

Respondent Ani said that in spite of her position, as a lecturer she observed how values helped her individually. She believes that every lecturer should have the same appreciation towards conveying positive values.

In terms of teaching I think the spiritual values help the lecturers andthe students to enjoy a very fruitful kind of learning environment, where everyone is being very honest in what you are doing. The lecturer will impart the knowledge truthfully and then the students also will be very honest and demonstrate a positive attitude towards the lessons and what not, so they will never be any kind of cheating, copying, plagiarism because you know that this is a crime.And when we talk about the lecturer , you know with your spiritual values you understand that your responsibility is to educate your student, so it is not about just delivering a lecture note, it is about educating them so that you can bring about changes in their knowledge, attitudes and skill. (Respondent Ani)

Respondent Timah said that bringing values within the institution will benefit not only the leaders and employees, but also the people surrounding the workplace, as the values will be spread to others through behaviours and actions.

> When we have the moral values within us people will see us in a different way. For example when you talk to the customer, you can touch their heart by being kind and polite. When dealing with students, they will appreciate us if we help them to rectify their problems in a very smooth way. People love to approach us when shielded with all those positive values. (Respondent Timah)

Discussion

Spiritual intelligence practices contributed towards assisting people to grow and excel throughout their career when people are inspired by vision and have a sense of direction. Sharing with people and letting them know what they have to do, and guiding them towards achieving the vision, make the employee to feel more excited to move forward. When people understand their purpose they will be more excited to perform their task. Collins and Porras (1994) and Peters and Waterman (1982) professed a well-made vision as a key element of organizational success that can create tremendous influence on employees productivity. Communicating the vision has also been linked to successful organizational transformation in most of the leadership studies (Avery, 2004). In addition, establishing a vision will also lead towards employees' enthusiasm and garner their commitment (Daft, 2005; Kantabutra, 2009). A powerful vision delivers people from the routine by providing them with a challenge commendable of their best works and efforts.The attributes of spiritual intelligence practices which focused more towards developing and excelling people based on meaning and shared values will enhance the credibility of the institution and thence long term sustainability of the institution. Being people centered will lift the employees' performance as all their needs are being fulfilled and they can find purpose in whatever task they are performing. Kouzes and Posner (2007), supporting the aforementioned statements, have provided characteristics of leaders with lost credibility such as being demotivated or motivated solely for profit, having little invention, condemning organization, considering for other job and feeling of being unacknowledged. Imparting the good values within the working culture thus will enhance the credibility of an institution as it protects the image of the institutions towards being more ethical. People demonstrate their values at work and this determines their behaviour (Karacaer, Gohar, Aygün, & Sayin, 2009; Roe & Ester, 1999). This behaviour is relatively stable over time and it creates positive influence on their attitudes and behaviours. Values also influence the way individuals perceive a situation, the way one relates to others, and they become guidelines for choices and actions (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). Noble (2001) indicated that individuals with high spiritual intelligence possess inner strengths and increased resilience, which make them better able to adapt to changes and to overcome adversity. Amram (2007), Noble (2001), and Vaughan (2002) proposed there is a link between individuals with high spiritual intelligence and the ability to respond positively to situations of extreme stress. The challenge that leaders confront currently is to accept the accountability for performing whatever that leads to progress in the midst of hardship. Leaders who are resilient will lead and act with courage and convictions despite the risks they are facing (Patterson & Patterson, 2001).

Practical implication

The findings from the interviews conducted in this study were established based on everyday examples from women serving as leaders of their institutions. The study provided the participants with the opportunity to reflect and share how unique expression of their leadership helps them to face the challenges and demands of leadership in the higher educational institution. The study has presented dynamic information that can inspire, encourage, teach, and give them the confidence of taking up leadership positions. Content from the interviews that made up the data for this study provides concrete, real-life examples from women serving as leaders of their institutions. It has provided clear evidence that women are critical resources in helping to address the challenges higher educational institutions are facing and will face in the future. This study provided the participants with the opportunity to reflect and share how the unique expression of their leadership helps them meet the current and future demands of leadership in the higher educational institution. The information from the findings could be used by leaders to develop potential skills and attributes that could be implemented in the work place atmosphere specifically for emerging and existing leaders.

The study, in addition could assist Human Resource Development (HRD) researchers and practitioners in understanding the approaches and contributions of spiritual intelligence attributes in leadership practice. The attributes of spiritual intelligence as shared by women academic leaders in the study could also be incorporated into leadership training and development programmes. This could be initiated with a general discussion of the benefits and characteristics of spiritual intelligence and strategies for enhancing the attributes of spiritual intelligence, and how the practices might affect the individual leadership behavior. These types of practices help to spread awareness and provide opportunities for growth of women leaders through implementing the attributes and skills of spiritual intelligence in HRD practices. Some practices that can be enhanced through the findings include enhancement of leadership skills, online training and internal grading and individual development plans that assimilate the essence of spiritual intelligence. Leaders can also be provided with the opportunities to engage in self- reflection activities such as journals and personal or professional mission statements. Case study based activities could be implemented to enable leaders make tough decisions and evaluate their responses and decisions against their values to provide participants the opportunities to practice spiritual intelligence

Research implication

The study has implemented phenomenological research paradigm, which is essential to determine the framework, meaning and circumstances which produced the overall experience of the women academic leaders. The paradigm of study helps the researcher to obtain descriptions of the spiritual intelligence as experienced by women academic leaders in their everyday tasks. Using phenomenology inquiry enables the nature and meaning of spiritual intelligence practices shared by women academic leaders to be viewed in a broad perspective. The value of the findings in this study has captured the themes that were perceived across the different ways in which the spiritual intelligence practices were constructed by women academic leaders. As there is no agreed method for pursuing phenomenology, applying this method based on life world paradigm has eased the discovery of the essence of the whole of the spiritual intelligence practice from women academic leaders. The discovery of these essential themes has significant implications towards understanding the strategies of implementing spiritual intelligence practices, specifically in a changing work atmosphere.

Significance value of the study

This study attempts to contribute to the existing knowledge in higher educational research by focusing on individual details of the lived experience of women academic leaders. Given the increasing number of women entering the leadership roles in higher educational institution, it is important to understand their thinking and perceptions in more depth. The study is also intended to retrieve a better understanding of the concept of spiritual intelligence and the importance of its practice for leadership, especially in a changing era of higher educational institution. Review of spiritual intelligence and leadership practices will assist towards improving the body of knowledge. Understanding the theory and practices of spiritual intelligence will enhance knowledge on the issues of current leadership practices and how spiritual intelligence approach will be significant towards leading with environment of meaning and purpose. The evidence from the study could help them develop employee training programs and promote HRD intervention remedial programs as inputs to facilitate the HRD intervention for academic leaders, academics and change agents. The study will also determine the unique learning needs of women leaders to enhance their professional development and their confidence. In addition, this study also provides added value for policy development. Higher educational institutions are experiencing remarkable transformation in various aspects. They are also acknowledged as a service industry. Intrinsically, understanding and integrating spiritual intelligence practice will promote them towards executing good measurement and policies towards addressing the challenges. The outcomes of the study could provide significant value and contribution for Human Resource personnel to establish guidelines, measurements as well as policies necessary to expand the strategies of managing and leading Higher Educational Institutions in a wider perspective.

Future direction

The finding of the study has contributed to the understanding and knowledge of women academic leadership experience on spiritual intelligence and its use in higher educational institutions. In future, the design of the study could explore the perception and experience of employees working with the leaders who have integrated spiritual intelligence practices. Though these women leaders have been portrayed to have spiritual intelligence attributes based on their interview responses, however the answers are limited to their way of interpreting the phenomenon. A future study could be conducted that interviewed people with whom those women academic leaders work and view how their responses could be compared with the self-perceptions of the leaders. Additional research also probably could be conducted on this area by including diverse settings. This implementation of multiple perspective approach would be efficient towards comparing data collected from different perspectives and sources for triangulation. The analysis from multiple perspectives would begin to reveal pattern within the expectations of different groups of participants such as academicians, administrative staff and others who have capability to give better contribution to certain spiritual intelligence attributes due to their positions within the education institutions and its broader community. The study also focused particularly on women leaders on how they integrate spiritual intelligence within their leadership practices. Conducting similar study with men leaders probably would yield additional insight into phenomena of spiritual intelligence. The final recommendation is suggested to look at different level of universities. This study focused mainly on public research university. Conducting the study at private university probably would provide different views of leadership on spiritual intelligence practices.

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