UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS REGARDING THEIR SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS USE IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP SETTINGS IN MALAYSIA

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Spiritual intelligence has been portrayed as an important contributor to enhance the sense of meaning and purpose within a workplace. Despite many studies have been conducted on leadership, however, very little studies have been done on the contribution of infusing spiritual intelligence practices for leadership development towards managing the changing environment. This has resulted in critical gaps to understand the strategies to create an educational atmosphere that maximizes the personal and professional potential of leaders in higher educational settings. In addition, significant gaps also remain, particularly in understanding how spiritual intelligence is experienced and practiced by women leaders from higher educational institutions in Malaysia. In such settings where the number of women leaders continues to grow, women tend to place a high value on the attributes of spiritual intelligence. In order to address the issue, this research gap has been examined to understand the experiences of integrating spiritual intelligence practices within Malaysian higher educational institutions.

The main purpose of this study is to understand the experience of women academic leaders concerning their spiritual intelligence and its use within the higher educational institutions leadership. This study was carried out through an in-depth exploration of three research questions. The questions are: (1) how do women academic leaders conceptualize spiritual intelligence? (2) How women leaders use their spiritual intelligence in their academic leadership practices? (3) What is the contribution of the use of spiritual intelligence in their academic leadership practices? A qualitative research methodology and existential phenomenological approach were selected as these approaches have been decided as the most precise approaches for the study of a phenomenon of this nature. Data was gathered and generated from nine successful women academic leaders in Malaysian Research Universities. The data collection methods employed to attain the purpose of the study were primarily in-depth interviews with the participants. Each of the interview session lasted between one to two hours, was tape recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a hands-on approach. Several other documents have also been utilized for this study, such as resources from library, diaries, journal and also logs. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through member checks, peer examination and maintenance of audit trail.

The finding generated four concepts of spiritual intelligence, namely 1) meaning making, 2) holism 3) being vision and value led 4) religious activities. The finding also revealed four approaches of integrating spiritual intelligence into leadership practices which include 1) creating sense of meaning and purpose within people, 2) empowering employees, 3) Viewing things in larger patterns and understand its relationships and connections by being holistic and 4) cultivating and demonstrate values as part of the organisational culture. The contribution of spiritual intelligence to the leadership practice of women academic leaders that has been discovered from the study include 1) employees inspired by vision, 2) increase the credibility and long-term sustainability of institution, 3) systematic way of managing complexity, 4) heightened moral values and reduced ethical issues and 5) resilience to handle stress.

The study concluded that spiritual intelligence is projected to transform the workplace into a more meaningful and purposeful atmosphere by constructing balanced and harmonious relationship within employees. Women leaders believe that spiritual intelligence is an effective tool for leaders to manage their institutions in an effective way, specifically within the challenging and high demand working environment. In addition, the integration of spiritual intelligence that brings people together towards mutual understanding and enhance good relationship will undeniably sustain an environment of less stress and burden, as well as conflicts. Conveying the qualities of spiritual intelligence within leadership practices will transform people and also the institution, as well as enhance long-term sustainability. Consequently having enthusiastic and high performance employees will increase the productivity of the institution, which then will lead to the sustainability of the institution.

The study has provided valuable insight that will be beneficial for leaders towards managing effectively within the contemporary organization provided with unique skills and attributes.

PENGALAMAN PEMIMPIN WANITA MENGENAI KECERDASAN ROHANI DAN PEGUNAANNYA DI INSTITUSI PENDIDIKAN TINGGI MALAYSIA

Oleh

SHARMILA DEVI RAMACHANDARAN

June 2015

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Kecerdasan rohani telah digambarkan sebagai penyumbang penting kepada mempertingkatkan kesedaran maksud dan tujuan dalam tempat kerja. Walaupun banyak kajian telah dijalankan ke atas kepimpinan, namun, sangat sedikit kajian dilakukan ke atas sumbangan dalam menyemai amalan kecerdasan rohani untuk pembangunan kepimpinan terhadap pengurusan persekitaran yang berubah-ubah. Ini telah menghasilkan jurang kritikal untuk memahami strategi bagi mewujudkan suasana pendidikan yang memaksimumkan potensi peribadi dan profesional pemimpin dalam tetapan pendidikan tinggi. Selain daripada itu, jurang yang signifikan juga kekal, terutamanya dalam memahami bagaimana kecerdasan rohani dialami dan diamalkan oleh pemimpin-pemimpin wanita dari institusi pendidikan tinggi di Malaysia. Dalam tetapan itu di mana bilangan pemimpin wanita terus meningkat, wanita cenderung untuk meletakkan nilai yang tinggi pada sifat-sifat kecerdasan rohani. Dalam usaha untuk menangani masalah ini, jurang kajian telah dikaji untuk memahami pengalaman mengintegrasikan amalan kecerdasan rohani dalam institusi pendidikan tinggi Malaysia.

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk memahami pengalaman amalan kecerdasan rohani dalam kalangan pemimpin akademik wanita di institusi pendidikan tinggi. Kajian ini telah dijalankan melalui penerokaan terperinci bagi tiga persoalan penyelidikan. Soalan-soalan ini termasuk: (1) Bagaimana pemimpin akademik wanita mengkonsepsikan kecerdasan rohani? (2) Bagaimanakah pemimpin wanita mengggunakan kecerdasan rohani mereka dalam amalan kepimpinan akademik mereka?(3) Apakah sumbangan penggunaan kecerdasan rohani dalam amalan kepimpinan pemimpin akademik wanita? Metodologi penyelidikan kualitatif dan pendekatan fenomenologi telah dipilih kerana ia putuskan sebagai pendekatan yang paling tepat untuk mengkaji fenomena seperti ini. Data dikumpulkan dan dihasilkan daripada sembilan orang pemimpin akademik wanita yang berjaya di Universiti-universiti Penyelidikan di Malaysia. Kaedah pengumpulan data yang digunakan untuk mencapai tujuan kajian ini terutamanya adalah temu bual secara mendalam dengan para

peserta. Setiap sesi temu bual itu berlangsung selama satu hingga dua jam, direkodkan dengan pita rakaman, ditulis dengan kata demi kata dan dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan amali *(hands-on)*. Beberapa dokumen lain juga telah digunakan untuk kajian ini seperti sumber dari perpustakaan, diari, jurnal dan juga log. Kebolehpercayaan kajian ini dipastikan melalui pemeriksaan ahli, pemeriksaan rakan dan penyelenggaraan jejak audit.

Dapatan kajian menghasilkan empat konsep kecerdasan rohani iaitu 1) Sesuatu yang memberi erti atau makna 2) Holistik 3) berasaskan visi dan nilai 4) amalan keagamaan. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan empat pendekatan kecerdasan rohani dalam amalan kepimpinan akademik termasuk 1) mewujudkan rasa erti dan tujuan di kalangan pekerja 2) memperkasa pekerja 3) Melihat isu menerusi pandangan yang meluas dan memamahi kaitan antara satu sama lain menerusi kepimpinan secara menyeluruh dan 4) memupuk dan menunjukkan nilai-nilai sebagai sebahagian daripada budaya organisasi. Sumbangan kecerdasan rohani kepada amalan kepimpinan pemimpin akademik wanita yang telah ditemui daripada kajian termasuk 1) pekerja diinspirasikan dengan wawasan, 2) meningkatkan kredibiliti dan kemampanan jangka panjang institusi, 3) cara yang sistematik dalam menguruskan kerumitan, 4) meninggikan nilai-nilai moral dan mengurangkan isu-isu etika dan 5) daya tahan untuk menangani tekanan.

Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa kecerdasan rohani dijangka mengubah tempat kerja kepada suasana yang lebih bermakna dan tekad dengan membina hubungan yang seimbang dan harmoni dalam kalangan pekerja. Pemimpin wanita percaya bahawa kecerdasan rohani berkesan bagi pemimpin untuk menguruskan institusi mereka dengan cara yang berkesan, khususnya dalam memenuhi tuntutan persekitaran pekerjaan yang mencabar dan tinggi. Di samping itu, kecerdasan rohani yang menyatukan orang ke arah persefahaman dan meningkatkan hubungan baik tidak dapat dinafikan akan mengekalkan persekitaran kurang tekanan dan bebanan serta konflik. Menyampaikan kualiti kecerdasan rohani dalam amalan kepimpinan akan mengubah pekerja serta institusi dan meningkatkan kemampanan jangka panjang. Mempunyai pekerja yang bersemangat dan berprestasi tinggi akan meningkatkan produktiviti institusi itu dan kemudiannya akan membawa kepada kemampanan institusi.

Kajian ini telah memberikan pandangan yang bernilai yang akan memberi manfaat kepada pemimpin ke arah menguruskan organisasi kontemporari secara berkesan dengan menyediakan kemahiran dan sifat-sifat yang unik.

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First of all I would like to thank the Almighty Sugmad for guiding me and providing me strength and wisdom throughout my study.

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And I am so thankful and grateful for all those awesome women leaders whom I have interviewed as they have helped me to complete my study by providing me the data I needed.

APPROVAL

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 15 June to conduct the final examination Sharmila Devi on her thesis entitled "Lived Experiences Of women leaders regarding their Spiritual Intelligence and Its Use in Higher Educational Leadership Settings in Malaysia" in accordance with the University and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia (P.U. (A) 106) 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Degree of Philosophy.

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Date: 12 August 2015

This thesis was submit   tted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy .The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Declaration by graduate student

I hereby confirm that:

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- quotations, illustrations and citations have been duly referenced;
- this thesis has not been submitted previously or concurrently for any other degree at any other institutions;
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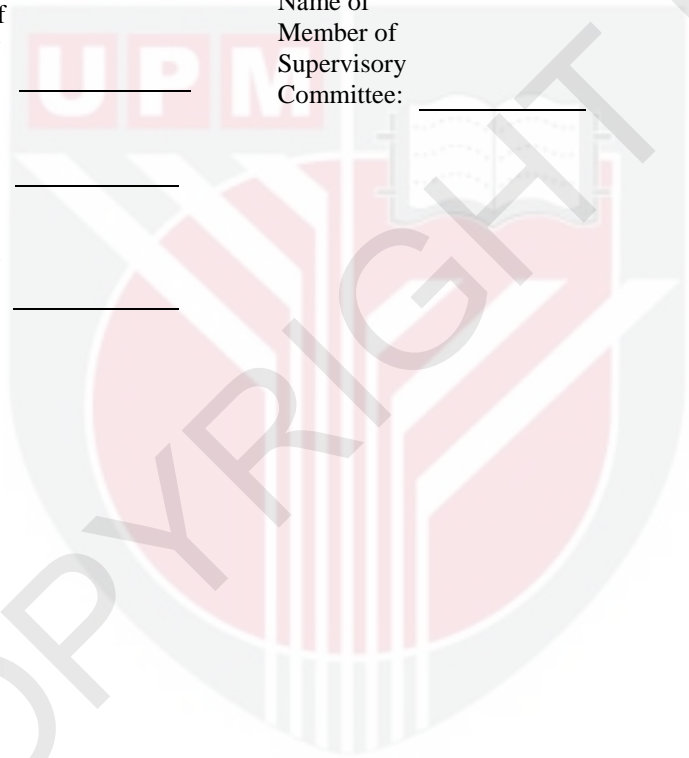
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	Academic Performance Audit
EQ	Emotional Quotient
HEIs	Higher Educational Institutions
HRD	Human Resource Development
IPTA	Institut Pengajian Tinggi Awam
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
ISO	International Organization for standardization
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
SETARA	Rating system for Malaysian Higher Educational Institution SWASelf Accreditation
THES	Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings
SQ	Spiritual Quotient
UPM	University Putra Malaysia
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter present the background of study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study , research questions , significant of the study, scope of the study , limitation of the study and finally the definition of terms.

Background of study

The role of leadership in today's organization has occupied the attention of both theorists and practitioners alike because many domestic and global organizations are under enormous pressure to operate, grow, and succeed in a highly competitive and challenging global economy. Unprecedented technological advances, unparalleled diversity, winds of rapid change, innovation in products and designs, escalating strategic and operational competition, cultural and ethical dilemmas, employee exodus and growing unrest by stakeholders for greater productivity, rising performance demands, are spurring organizational leaders (Venkaiah and Drucker, 2013). The great challenge for human organizations in the 21st Century is to develop the capability to survive and grow in the presence of rapid change. Leadership is beginning to be redefined in ways appropriate for partnership rather than domination systems. Terms such as ethical leadership, transformative leadership, value guided leadership, partnership leadership; thought leadership and servant leadership are widely in use (Mosely and Mtviuk, 2010)

These challenges in addition create huge enormous impacts among employees, as dedicated employees are as well required to fulfil the demands of their task in spite of being drawn away from other activities such as leisure, friend as well as family. Therefore, employee yearns for a heightened sense of purpose and meaning of their work (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Lack of meaning at workplace could trigger dispirited workplace environment such as low morale, high turnover, absenteeism, and burnout. The end of 21st century in fact has brought into the light on the commencement of a new phase of anxiety whereby the significance of success seems to be more elusive and employees tend to pursue balance between their families, work as well and other obligations (Noon, Blyton and Morrell, 2013). The workplace is being perceived as the central place towards seeking for meaning, harmony, balance, and sense of belongings. It is also the place where employees seek identity for their lives, as they are spending additional time at their workplace (Rothmann, 2013). Rather than viewing work as a tedious task, employees wish to perceive their effort to be beyond just executing the task. They desire towards discovering purpose and accomplishment that permit them to assimilate their personal as well as professional life and become a balanced person (Boverie, Grassberger & Law, 2013; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). In this sense, failure to assimilate meaning within a workplace may lead to an emerging crisis which has been labelled as Quarter Life Crisis (Robinson and Wright, 2013). The crisis occurs when employees become increasingly demotivated and dissatisfied with their work and consequently, intended to move to another job that will fulfil their purpose and needs.

Scholars also suggested that in the midst of crucial leadership competencies, existing framework for leadership development embedded with regular method is incompatible with the multifaceted environment (Zheng and Muir, 2015). The proclamation implies that the capacities as well as talents that may have been required in a more stable and

predictable environment will be inadequate in the current era of uncertainty and rapid transformation. Intrinsically, it is apparent that the new era necessitates advanced leadership skills, attributes, and capabilities (Ebrahimi Mehrabani & Azmi Mohamad, 2015).

Spiritual Intelligence

The notion of spiritual intelligence at workplace has been indeed gradually receiving consideration in the 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 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 in general can be described as people'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 mean towards creating meaning by connecting ideas, events, and persons, which will consequently enhance greater personal and organizational transformations (Dent, Higgins & Wharf, 2005; Fry, 2003). Zohar and Marshall (2004) described spiritual intelligence as an individual's capacity to answer and address issues concerning meaning and purpose and residing people's actions in a broader perspective, and in determining that their course of action is more meaningful than those of others. Scholars also have indicated that leaders with spiritual intelligence will be able to embed and to inspire meaning and purpose and call for services that will connect their role towards identifying purpose and embedding meaning within their organizations (Bass, 1990, 1997, 2001; Bennie, 2000, 2001, 2007; Fry, 2003, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 1992, 2005, 2006; Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

There is in fact enduring statement that spiritual intelligence is an important element of leaders. Zohar (2005) proposes that the answer to this modern-day crisis of meaning lies in developing and using Spiritual Intelligence. Spiritual intelligence is being considered as the significant tool towards managing turbulent time leaders facing due to massive changes as it provide the enduring values (Zohar Marshall, 2005). Confronted with social and political turbulence, globalization, rapid technology advancement and also corporate misconduct (Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2006), leaders in 21st century entails a great prerequisite towards leadership practices that reflects insight and wholeness of individual leader. These challenges are also impacting employees as they are forced to fulfil their work demand and being dragged away from their families, friends, and leisure activities. Subsequently, employees are craving for a greater sense of meaning and accomplishment from their work.

Research suggest that in spite of leadership and socio-cultural competencies that is becoming critical , the current models of professional preparation and certification tied to normative approach are ill-suited to the merging complex society (Mengel, 2006). This statement represents that talents and skills that may have been driven in more stable and predictable environment will be inadequate in the new age of uncertainty and rapid change. As such it has become increasingly clear that the new century demand new kinds of leaders with new skills and capacities (Marquadt, 2012). Thus spiritual intelligence is being considered the key solution towards managing turbulent time organization facing due to massive changes as it provide the enduring values (Zohar , 2005). Spiritually intelligent leaders is believed to enable leaders towards

leading the manner towards creating and implementing new vision by transcending traditional frameworks and by finding new meaning for activities at any level (Zohar & Marshal, 2001 ; Jafari 2003 ; Mengel 2004).

In the context of Malaysia, spiritual intelligence will be appropriate to be nurtured in the leadership practices because of the nature of Malaysian culture which is of multiracial and multi-ethnicity. Malaysia is a multiracial country which encompasses three main ethnicities, namely Chinese (24.6%), Indian (7.3%) and Malay (67.4%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014). The three ethnic groups embrace different sets of values, which are influenced by their cultural background and subsequently, encompass their perceptions and thoughts.

Nevertheless being considered as religious country (Abdullah, 2001) intrinsically it is essential to take into consideration of understanding the concept of both religion and spirituality at workplace. Religiosity in Malaysia encompasses total aspects of daily living which also encompasses the workplace settings (Abdullah, 2001). 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 acknowledge to Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional religious practices (1.3%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The importance of religion in Malaysia in addition 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). As such 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 & Steve Vander Veen, 2009).

The concept of spirituality and religious within Malaysia working environment are considered inseparable and discussed interchangeably. Hence, it has been anticipated to observe that employees bring religion to work (Possumah , Ismail & Shahimi 2013). Consequently, Malaysian workplaces can be best described by Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) 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 , Ashmos & Dennis Duchon, 2000). The idea that religion shapes and informs employee's beliefs and value systems, (Winters, 2008; Praveen Parboteeah, Yongsun Paik and John Cullen, 2009) and in turn influences their behaviors, perceptions, and decisions (Anselmo Vasconcelos ,2009) suggest a high degree of correspondence between religiosity and workplace spirituality.

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 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 at 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.

Malaysia is a multiracial country which encompasses three main ethnicities, namely Chinese (24.6%), Indian (7.3%) and Malay (67.4%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The three ethnic groups embrace different sets of values, which are influenced by their cultural background and subsequently, encompass their perceptions and thoughts. 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 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). Individuals live as a close interwoven group and prioritize the needs and the welfare of the group ahead of self-interest. In such cultures, decisions are made with collective consensus and must benefit the group and provide advantage to the group more than to particular individual (Hosftede , 2001). In addition, Malaysians also acknowledge and accept hierarchies across organizational and societal formations, while disagreeing with superiors is seen as an indication of assertiveness and confrontational behavior in individuals. Such attitudes are feared to undermine collective harmony because respect towards elders, superiors, and people with power are fundamental living customs in a collectivist society.

As part of these traditions of collective society, scholars indicated that Malaysian leaders prefer to work in teams compared with individuality. Group tasks are favored with the belief that each individual contributes jointly towards the benefits and well being of the organization. In addition, individual weaknesses are not highlighted because the group takes responsibility for the outcomes (Abdullah, 2001). Harmonious relationships are given more emphasis and therefore leaders are reluctant to provide feedback that could hurt or harm their employees (Ansari, Ahmad, & Aafaqi, 2004). Essentially, leaders are also anticipated to portray their individual and personal power, and to develop relationship towards successfully influencing their people. In his study, Ansari et al. (2004) concisely stated the characteristics of leadership efficacy based on the findings from numerous studies (e.g., Govindan, 2000; Hamzah, Saufi, & Wafa 2002; Mansor & Kennedy, 2000). Fundamentally, in the Malaysian framework, leaders' behaviors are described based on their characteristics in emphasizing on relationship established to provide significant contribution to the insight of leadership effectiveness.

The evidence clearly indicates that spiritual intelligence is applicable to Malaysians because of their cultural homogeneity that emphasizes on the importance of harmonious relationship. This parallel with the spiritual intelligence attributes which emphasizes toward cultivating meaning and values and building philanthropic relationship in the workplace atmosphere. Incorporating the culture of spiritual intelligence in the workplace in Malaysia will bring tremendous results in the workplace. However, few studies have been done on the significance of spiritual intelligence to provide guideline for multiracial organizations. It is thus imperative for leaders to understand and apply spiritual intelligence practices in the Malaysian culture as they are the main human influence that can create impressions within organizational performance.

Leadership in Higher Educational Institution

Leaders in Higher educational institutions are not exceptional case as other organization since they are as well challenged with elements such as technological innovation, consumerism, accreditation, financing as well as other administrative control. It is thus essential for higher education to be adequate with leaders who have knowledge , skills and abilities to lead in an era of uncertainty and change and foster environments of innovation that encourage trust and learning towards leading their constituents , units departments, and universities successfully into the future (Brown, 2001). Bringing spiritual intelligence into higher educational institution with the effort of academic leader will create positive changes through leader's inner strength instead of through knowledge and technique itself. It is important for academic leaders in higher education to foster the culture of spiritual intelligence practices that will develop interconnectedness among students , faculty , staff members towards helping them better appreciate the importance of harmonious coexistence , explore meaning and purpose in life and cultivate innate potential in each person.. According to Zohar (2001) Higher Education which prioritizes on spiritual intelligence does not merely monitor and maintain the system for excellence.

The tasks of effective leaders in higher educational institutes (HEIs) comprise transforming the HEIs to greater performance. This is because of their position in power as well as their ability to influence and manage human, physical, financial and other resources. Thus, they can provide crucial support towards higher achievement and success of their instruction (Bento, 2011; Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007; Yukl, 2010). Many have acknowledged that leadership tasks and responsibilities in higher education institutions are challenging. Some researchers suggest that these institutions are the most difficult organizations to lead in the world (Bennis & Movius, 2006). Leadership in these institutions 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, 2013). The current trend in higher education is that leaders have to deal with 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, 2001). In higher education institutions, leaders are 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 leader (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 & Farmer, 2011). With these challenges, it is thus undeniable that higher education necessitates leaders with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead within the uncertainty and changing era (Tierney et.al. 2011)

In Malaysia, academic leaders in HEIs are considered to be in the most essential post as they are expected to understand the role of their institution, to propose and design the vision and mission of their institution, and to instigate their constituencies towards achieving the anticipated principles and standards of academic output. The best leaders are projected to be visionary, rigorously motivated and committed to the ideals of excellent scholarship. In a nutshell, they are required to be excellent managers, administrators, and leaders who convey talents to bear on the optimal management of

human capital and other assets of the university (Zawawi Ismail, 2008). 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 for higher education by ensuring excellent academic leaders.

Zuraina and Chun (2013) stated that according to leaders in public university in Malaysia, some of the challenges faced by Malaysian HEIs in today's market environment include the following:

(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 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.

It is thus essential for academic leaders to have the capacity to enthuse people towards shared mission and vision in confronting the challenges facing the universities. According to Ibrahim Bajunid (2012), academic leaders are expected to be the guardians of academic integrity and professionalism. They have to struggle in the pursuit of elegant thinking par excellence. They can be thought of as leaders and even intellectual elites to represent the society. Academic leaders may also deliver exemplary leadership in their academic specializations and roles and as public intellectuals in wide-ranging matters. The strengths of these academic leaders constitute the knowledge capability and competencies of society. Ibrahim Bajunid also said that the challenge for each academics and academic leader is to be the best they can be in their respective fields and contribute outstandingly towards the betterment of society. Furthermore, 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 competencies and creativities, to achieve the specified shared objectives.

Therefore, academic leaders are held responsible to unite their workforce and contribute clear and comprehensible 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 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.

Women academic leadership

The study of women and leadership has be considered as a fresh phenomenon as previously there were many studies on leadership focused with the emphasis on political leadership, of great men that define power, authority as well as knowledge (Klenke , 2011). In addition to that in past leadership has been generally linked with men and with male styles of behavior as women has not been in leadership position in great number. As such the mental image of leader were held by most people is male (Sandler, 1993). Klenke (2011) proceeded that most of the leadership research prior to 1980's was carried out by men and dealt with almost exclusively male leaders as women have been largely absent from the description and analysis of male leaders as reported by male researchers . Nevertheless it was until then women leadership began to shed light to form a critical frame and consequently issues of gender and leadership was given consideration.

Thomas Sergiovanni (2007) said that there is a clear description on how men and women approach opportunities. He said for most men, their achievement has to do with accomplishment of goals, whereas for most women achievement has to do with building a connection between and among people. Rosener (1990) in addition recap that until the 1960's, men and women received different indicators about what was expected of them. Women have been expected to be wives, mothers, community volunteers, teachers and nurses. In all these roles, they are supposed to be cooperative, supportive, understanding, gentle and to provide service to others. They are to derive satisfaction and a sense of self-esteem from helping others, including their spouses. This preceding perceptions of women's role in society, along with the expectations of how they were to behave, are imperative to understand because as it is still relevant today regarding how women are perceived in the work environment.

In Malaysia women have always played a decisive role in nation building. Comprising almost half of the population, the role of the Malaysian women has continued to evolve over time. Upon gaining Malaysia Independence in 1957, Malaysian women have advanced greatly in this country in most fields. The achievements were no doubt facilitated by inclusive policies and action plans developed by Government of Malaysia. Hence, the improvements in access to education and healthcare combined with changes in the economic landscape have impelled women out of the traditional domain of their homes and into the labor market.

The emphasis on women as a leader in Malaysia specifically can be seen from the Government effort to recognize women's empowerment as the main agenda in the 10th Plan (2011-2015), the New Economic Model (2010) and also has outlined specific plans to increase women's participation in the labor force, improve provision of support of women in difficult circumstances and eliminate all forms of discrimination

against women (Government of Malaysia 2010). In the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015), women agenda continues to be one of the key focus areas, particularly in economic development. As such, the participation rates of women in labor forces have increased from 46.8 percent in 2008 to 49.5 percent in 2012. This was further improved in 2013 with 49.5 percent for the first quarter, up to 52 percent in the second quarter and rose up to 56.4 percent by the third quarter reporting. This achievement has exceeded the 55 percent target mark set for the year 2015. In addition to that it has been also stated in the 10th Malaysia Plan that government approved legislation to ensure minimum of 30 percent representation of women in decision making positions (Tee & Lee, 2011) as a result of acknowledging women's status and contribution in the national economy. Though the current figure is reaching seven percent , however it has been predicted as moving target and will need remedying as the country's next national development plan for 2016 to 2020. The aim of the policy is to achieve a target of at least 30% of women in decision-making positions in the public and private sector, trade unions, employers' associations, educational institutions and academic, private and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Consequently the whole agenda of women empowerment in Malaysia that is being translated within the national agenda has taken into consideration various factors such as the individual spiritual strength, the individual community involvement, politically, socially and education (Mohamad & Mustafa, 2012). In addition the need for women leadership is in Malaysia as the population grows higher in comparison to men (Women, Family and Community Malaysia, 2011).

Though the participation of women within the higher educational institution is not a new phenomenon, conversely women as academicians are considered newcomers in the world of academia. The status of women in high leadership positions in institutions of higher learning has created much interest among researcher captivated in discovering how women have coped with various challenges, and have managed to move up the vertical career hierarchy. There are few authors argues that leadership and career are gendered (Astin 1984; Gottfredson 1996; Isaacson & Brown 2000), and hitherto nothing much is known about the dynamics of leadership and career among Malaysian academics according to whether they are male or female. Rising number of women leaders within the academia also will inspire other women academics to get involved within the leadership practices. In addition to that rising number of women academic leaders also could be an indication that the university is considering about cultivating gender equity within the higher education.

Nevertheless the status of women academic leaders has still remained scarce and seldom being discussed particularly in Malaysia. The concerns have been only raised as national interest merely from the appointment of Tan Sri Rafiah Salim as the first female Vice-Chancellor of University of Malaya in 2006. This is followed by only three other women have been appointed as Vice-Chancellor including Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Shahabudin from University Kebangsaan Malaysia , Dato Dr Aminah Ayub from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Professor Dato Dr Zaleha Kamaruddin from International Islamic University Malaysia. However very little progress has been noticed after that and there is little study has been done in order to illustrate Malaysian women's position in academia, and academic leadership specifically. As such lack of position still exist for women to take top leadership and management roles in spite of the rising level of education among women and their significant contribution in the institutions.

In an International Leadership Capacity Building Workshop for Women Academic Leaders 2012, the prime minister's wife, Datin Rosmah Mansor hinted that there remain as little as three vice chancellor of women at 20 public universities in the Malaysia even though there is about 60 per cent of the enrolment in public universities was women however Addressing the issue, she ensured that universities should be more proactive in dismantling gender bias that discourages women in the academic line from attaining senior leadership roles. She added that there should be a balanced participation of men and women in the senior management of universities instead of being dominated by men. She added, the issues need to be addressed from the beginning in order to avoid potentiality of further encounters in future on women academic leadership. In addition to that encouraging women to advance in their career would obviously lead towards different mind-set and point of view towards inspiring better performance at the work atmosphere.

Spiritual Intelligence in Women Leadership Practices

The increasing number of women in leadership positions has increased the attention in women's leadership practices (Paustian-Underdahl & Woehr, 2014). However, research that focuses mainly on spiritual intelligence and leadership practice among women leaders are still scarce. Only few studies have acknowledged spiritual intelligence as an important element in women leadership style. The spiritual intelligence practices that connote women leadership practices are prompted by the nature and skills of women leaders that have been assumed to be comparable to the attributes of spiritual intelligence. Scholars from various studies indicated that the traits and qualities that parallel those attributes of spiritual intelligence will be effective if implemented in a changing environment which requires unique set of talents and capacity to lead (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Emmons, 2000; Noble, 2000; Wolman, 2001; Zohar & Marshall, 2001)

Women can bring qualities such as a tendency towards social compassion, a caring, relational emphasis in their moral reasoning, a desire for collaboration, and an awareness of the interconnectedness of organizations to their leadership roles (Gillett-Karam, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Helgesen, 1990; & Rosner, 1990). Women are found to have an open, people-orientated philosophy of leadership that includes communication, motivation, goal direction, fairness, teamwork, delegation, and participatory decision making (Merchant, 2012). Qualities of spiritual leadership that is often expressed by women leaders include compassionate and respectful treatment of others, expressing care and concern, engaging in self-reflection, and operating from a clear set of personal values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005).

Bourdreau and Ziskin (2011) argue that the future of leadership will involve an organizational shift from 'hero leadership' to 'collective leadership.' The new organization, therefore, "will view everyone as leaders, and people will have reinvigorated accountability and authority to act" (Bourdreau & Ziskin, 2011, p. 258). Scholars have proven that since organizations of 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 positive work culture, where the contribution of workers are valued (Palmer, Walls, Burgess & Stough, 2001). More communicative, intuitive and flexible skills are needed, allowing for coaching of others through effective people skills (Sivenko , 2008). Now, the prerequisites seem to be focused on relational-oriented, nurturing and caring leadership

(Jogulu, 2006). In this kind of leadership, compassion, sensitivity to the needs of others, and understanding are portrayed (Powel, Butterfield & Parent, 2002). Such styles are typically linked with women. Women leaders tend to be more relationship focused, emphasize cooperative and decision making and portray attributes of concern and empathy (Chuang, 2013). Some scholars have indicated that men and women embrace different perceptions towards professional attainment, which is perceived as innately rewarding role, personal attainment, self-development and work life balance (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Billimoria, 2008). In addition, women leaders tend to be more democratic and less autocratic compared with their male counterparts (Hopkins et al. 2008).

The importance of spiritual intelligence for women leadership is rarely discussed. Nevertheless, Twymon (2004) mentioned that some studies have shown women leaders exhibited spirituality as the fundamental leadership practices in their behavior and relationship with people in their organizations. Twymon claimed in his study that women leaders, who assimilated spirituality as a foundation, developed a superior understanding and commitment towards their employee's personal values. The natures of women leaders who seem to lead from different value orientations also have proven to be valuable among employees. For example, scholars indicated that women leaders are more often presented to be transformational leaders compared with men (Bessant, 2008). Transformational leaders' styles are portrayed when leaders and followers try to excel each other through high level of moral values and ethics. Scholars have described women as always being robust at displaying the individualized concern to followers. Because of their concern over their relationship with people, they will portray their care, concern, and compassion to the employees for their own benefit as well as for the entire team.

Findings from the study by Eagly & Johannessen-Schmidt (2002) stated that women remained to be evaluated greater than men in most attributes of transformational leadership which is perceived easier for them to bring to the success of teams within the organization. Women leaders in a study examined by Donaldson (2000), Stiernberg (2003) and Millar (2000) admitted on the significance of spiritual attributes to their achievement and the capacity to move forward regularly in difficult conditions. Other scholars (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Jones-Johnson, 2001; Parrish, 1999; Ward & Hyle, 1999) indicated that women leaders in their study discovered a spiritual perspective designated to be important to for their leadership practice which determines how they lead. In addition compared with their male colleagues, 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 according to the study thus seems to be a strong suit for female educational leaders.

Empowering women to lead in an environment of full of challenges, specifically with spiritual intelligence attributes will generate an opportunity for them to disclose their unique talent and capacities. Shaffer Lilienthal (2009) demonstrated better need to appreciate women's leadership practices and behaviors. According to Shaffer the difference between women and men leaders should be given attention due to the attributes and characteristics that women may portray and convey as leaders that has been perceived to be different from their male colleagues.

In Malaysia the importance of women 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 towards ensuring success of Malaysian organizations in the currently advanced economy. However, 58% of them considered that women will play a critical role. Furthermore, the survey report pointed out that more that 14,000 employers and professionals in the Asia Pacific region revealed that Malaysia is more advanced compared with few other neighbors in promoting women in the workplace. In addition, some employers in Hong Kong (47%), India (57%) and New Zealand (55 %) believe that the contributions of women leaders are crucial to their future success. 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. With the Government's effort to promote female involvement in its workforce and empowering them as agents of change, the Randstad World of Work research showed a very positive change regarding the insight into the role of women in leadership positions (Randstad, 2013).

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 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 at 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 empowering more women leaders within the contemporary organization.

Leadership styles of men and women

As leadership is now diverse, many researchers have been concerned with male and female leadership styles (Naji, S., Karimi, M., & Mannani, R., 2015; Mitroussi & Mittroussi, 2009). Many research studies have assessed the styles of male and female leaders since the fifties and found that there definitely exist the differences in leadership styles. However, these differences take the form of highly overlapping distributions of women and men, in other words, the differences are small (Eagly, 2013).

One of the differences, is that, the female leaders are seen to adopt a more democratic and participative style than their male counterparts (Merchant, 2012). Men in leadership positions are found to adopt a top-down style, in general. This is the command and control style. Although female managers are not generally more interpersonally- or communally-oriented than male managers, this tendency emerged to some extent in less male-dominated roles, where the tendency for women to be more participative than men strengthened as well (Eagly, 2013). Fine (2007) stated that women's leadership styles are distinct from men in which women are likely to use more collaborative, nurturing, and democratic strategies that emphasize communication.

It had been also debated that gender decides leadership style due to socialization process which develops in women based on the values and characteristics that hinted the leadership behaviors that are different from those traditionally associated with men (Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Shah, 2009). Due to the fact that the expectation that has been a central aspects of the socialization process (Pounder & Coleman, 2002) women are expected to have certain qualities such as be caring, supportive and cooperative which can account for their different approaches to leadership from men. Leaders who perform against the stereotypical expectation of their gender will be evaluated negatively (Campbell, Bommer & Yeo, 1993).

Nevertheless, Eagly (2007) assess that leadership styles are not fixed behaviors but encompass a range of behaviors that have a particular meaning or that serve a particular function. He added leaders differ in their behaviors within the boundaries of their style depending on the situation .Whereas some authors point out fixed behavior for women, others contend that actions are flexible and tend to mold to the circumstances rather than a gendered norm.

Thereafter when males and females are in the same leadership positions, they tend to behave correspondingly towards fulfilling their roles. Though gender roles have an impact on their behaviors it will be adapted through leadership roles, which will indeed result in minimal differences of their leadership styles. As such it is actually depending on the situation that regulates their practices instead of gender itself. However, the impact of gender on leadership seems to be undeniable. Though gender is not a strong issue in their careers but their performance as leaders was still influenced by the awareness of their gender. For example they paid close attention to how they dressed, moved and used body language to ensure that the messages they communicated as leaders were not undermined by responses to them as women.

Statement of the problem

Changing academic atmosphere requires different leadership attributes and skills that could aid, academic leaders to lead in a more proficient way (Abbas, W., & Asghar, 2010).Scholars have pointed out the importance of implementing a holistic leadership practice, which will balance excellent performance and collective values and purpose (Fry, L. W., & Cohen, M. P, 2009). For leaders to confront the evolving transformation, it is thus crucial for them to have the capacity to apply appropriate intelligence and understanding towards addressing the multifaceted issues. The skill of leaders in future will be based on their capability to perceive changes as opportunities for promoting a novel approach towards performing business (Jena McGregor, 2009).

Most of the literature on spiritual intelligence within the leadership practices has not been empirically tested based on anecdotes. Scholars such as Cowan, 2005; Howard, Guramatunha-Mudiwa, & White, 2000; Wigglesworth, 2006; Wolman, 2001; Zohar & Marshall, 2000 have conducted few studies on theoretical viewpoints about spiritual intelligence. Three studies were found that investigated the quantitative perspective towards measuring spiritual intelligence and leadership practices. For example, Christ-Lakin (2010) in his study, explored spiritual intelligence and transformational leadership among leaders in a military organization. Alternatively, Amram (2009) investigated spiritual intelligence, emotional intelligence, and leadership effectiveness in corporate settings. Doherty (2011) investigated spiritual intelligence and leadership among college students. Nonetheless there is a need to have more studies on empirical investigations of the use of spiritual intelligence within leadership practices particularly from qualitative perspective. Directing the study of spiritual intelligence from quantitative base though has contributed to the leadership field, however, by nature it has limited toward finding new knowledge about the problems and issues of spiritual intelligence phenomena as it is objectively evaluated. Qualitative methods provide a depth of understanding of spiritual intelligence phenomena compared with detached, statistical analyses (Ragin, 2014). Because of the differences in the data, how data is collected and analyzed, and what the data and analyses are able to tell us about our subjects of study, the knowledge gained through qualitative investigations is more informative, richer and offers enhanced understandings compared to that which can be obtained via quantitative research (Richards & Morse, 2012). Thus by having more qualitative perspective it enable researcher to explore in depth understanding on the use of spiritual intelligence among the women leaders in higher educational setting through subjective evaluation of how and what has been experienced through the phenomena.

Despite of innumerable concepts that have been provided in order to define spiritual intelligence however confusion arises when spiritual intelligence has been associated with the term religion especially when compared within the western and non western viewpoints. Indeed, though spiritual intelligence is generally thought to be an idea related with religions, but there is very less inter-relation between these two things (Ammerman , 2013). This is also added with little studies that have been investigated towards developing the broad-spectrum concept of spiritual intelligence specifically in Malaysia context. There are few studies in Malaysia that have explored spiritual intelligence practices which rely more towards religious perspective such as Islamic (Salamun & Shah, 2012; Hanefar, Siraj& Sa'ari ,2014; Bensaid, Machouche & Grine , 2014), Hindu (Arvind Sharma , 2013; Hodge , 2004), and also Chinese perspective (Yang & Wu ; Lynton and Thogersen ,2009). Examining spiritual intelligence practices solely from religious standpoints could lead to misperception when it is being practiced

within the workplace and thus will cause failure to create harmonious workplace environment. Consequently it important to create awareness of the importance of the spiritual intelligence attributes by ensuring that people really understand the concepts and idea of the practices. Therefore there is a need to develop the concept in a more holistic or universal way which can be applied by everyone regardless of religious encounter and can be applied by leadership in all organization.

In spite of numerous studies conducted on leadership, little has been done on the importance of spiritual intelligence attributes and how it is being used within the academic leadership practice. Despite several leadership studies that have explored the role of spirituality in education, few studies have been conducted to examine the role of spiritual intelligence, particularly in Higher Educational Institution (Dussault, 2010). Specifically studies on spiritual intelligence and leadership practices precisely of women in academic leadership roles seemed to be extremely rare. This has created a significant gap in understanding the significant role of women leaders on how do they use the spiritual intelligence within the higher educational setting and also its consequences. Up till now most of the studies on women leadership practices focuses on the issues of gender in Higher education (Mohajeri , Mokhtar & Balash , 2015) and also the under-representation of women leaders in higher education (Dominici et al., 2009; Lam, 2009; Wajcman, 2013; Lie & Malik, 2014). In addition to that few studies have also explored the career experience of women and men within Higher education (Angervall & Gustafsso , 2015; Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak, & White , 2015). Yet there are very few studies done on the significant role of women academic leaders specifically on how they use the spiritual intelligence within their academic leadership practices and its contribution to all the stakeholders within higher educational setting. The attributes of spiritual intelligence that is a prerequisite for contemporary leadership practices will lead towards an understanding of how those attributes enhance the performance of the women academic leaders and thus the institution. Therefore, additional research is needed to identify their successful leadership practices pertaining to spiritual intelligence proficiencies as a consequence of more women assuming leadership roles in corporate organizations. Women leaders are believed to have the capacity to lead effectively provided with the appropriate emphasize given to them equally as men. Randstad report that surveyed more than 14 000 employees in Asia Pacific found Malaysia to be more advanced than some of its neighbor. According to their Malaysia director , Ms.Jasmin Kaur , "Female leaders are often known for possessing important people skills such as the ability to foster strong teams, build trusted relationships, leverage emotional intelligence and pick-up on non-verbal cues" (Randstad , 2013).These characteristics of women leadership styles suit them better in changing environments necessitate towards emphasizing priority for them to hold leadership positions. Understanding spiritual intelligence and its association to leadership practices will enhance the awareness and consideration of the importance skills and competencies that can be utilized towards developing flexibility to lead employees within the changing environment and consequently create balance and harmonious working atmosphere.

In addition, looking at the context of Malaysia, clearly there is a lack of studies conducted on spiritual intelligence regarding with leadership practice. Though there was evidence that studies on spiritual intelligence have been done on leadership, nevertheless, they have been related with student leaders and with managers in general. For example, there were studies that examined the spiritual intelligence and transformational leadership styles among student leaders (Tan, Chin, Seyal, Yeow, &

Tan, 2013). Another study examined the influence of emotional quotient and spiritual quotient with transformational leadership among managers in a university (Faisal, 2007). The lack of studies on spiritual intelligence in leadership practices in the context of Malaysia may lead to little understanding of the important attributes that can be implemented in the Malaysian culture to enhance meaning and purpose into the workplace environment. Specifically, the Malaysian culture that has multiracial and multi-ethnic characteristics, it is essential to understand the leadership attributes that could develop harmonious relationship in the workplace atmosphere. The three races, Malay, Chinese and Indian embrace different set of values which are influenced by their cultural background and subsequently pervade their perception and thoughts. In addition, Malaysian tend to be more intuitive and place importance on relational factors as harmony within the in-group as an important aspect (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2007) Consequently, the use of spiritual intelligence within the leadership practices are important to an organization towards inspiring employees with meaning and purpose and thus yield success to the workplace.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore and offer understanding into the nature of spiritual intelligence attributes among women academic leadership practices within higher educational environment. Phenomenological inquiry is appropriate for the study due to its objective to understand the phenomenon as fully as possible through the eyes of those who have experienced and witnessed it. The study precisely concern with the attributes, characteristics and expression of the spiritual intelligence phenomenon among those women academic leaders and its relationship to leadership practices such as decision making or problem solving.

Research Questions (RQs)

The research questions are as follows:

RQ 1: How do women academic leaders conceptualize spiritual intelligence?

RQ 2: How women leaders use their spiritual intelligence in their academic leadership practices?

RQ 3: What is the contribution of the use of spiritual intelligence in their academic leadership practices?

Significance of the study

This study is an attempt to contribute to the existing knowledge in higher educational research by portraying 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. Appropriate 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.

In respect to practice, this study assists Human Resource Development (HRD) researchers and practitioners in understanding how spiritual intelligence will enhance the leadership effectiveness. As such, 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 and as well as 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 being 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.

Scope of the study

The study is based on a combination of several theories and models of spiritual intelligence and leadership practices that would serve as a foundation towards answering the research purpose and research questions.

The study takes into account of the experience of the women academic leaders. In addition, in-depth interviews are the key mechanism used for collecting data. The study will focus on examining and identifying the use of spiritual intelligence of women academic leaders. Knowledge is thus derived from an inductive procedure, based on specific observations towards the identification of general patterns (Tesch, 1990).

Respondents involved in the study mainly consist of women academic leaders from three research universities in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The positions considered for the study include Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Deans and Directors. The participants selected to participate are those who have been considered successful in their leadership role. Successful leaders are anticipated to have the qualities and attributes of spiritual intelligence demonstrated through their self expression such as conversant, optimistic, respectable and down-to-earth.

Limitation of the study

The purpose of the study is to identify and explore the phenomenon of spiritual intelligence events among women academic leaders. The study relies profoundly on women academic leaders consisting of positions such as Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Deans and Directors as the primary source of data. As such the opinion of the women leaders are biased by the position from which they observe the events. It is also difficult to determine that the entire respondent selected have similar experiences and have the ability to covey their thoughts well.

The study discovered that the self-perceptions of women academic leadership practices regarding spiritual intelligence phenomenon and the data were based on the responses of these women leaders to the interview questions. Therefore, these responses were based on their insight on leadership and experience that could not be verified by others such as the employees whom are working with them. Hence, it is not possible to see if their perceptions on leadership were in line with how others perceive them.

Furthermore, the women academic leaders were all from Public Higher Educational Institution. They may have been some existing elements that may not have been present if the women leaders were from Private Higher Educational Institution.

Another limitation is the generalizability of the findings. The information obtained from this study will contribute to the knowledge base of women academic leaders in higher education by providing insights into how these women experienced and integrated spiritual intelligence in their leadership practices. This study uses the qualitative to study the phenomenon of spiritual intelligence. Therefore, the finding cannot be overgeneralized as the goal of a qualitative study is to construe each event uniquely, as opposed to generalizing the findings (Merriam, 1989)

Definition of term

Academic leaders

Academic leaders are individuals selected to hold formal positions to perform functions to fulfil the responsibility in universities such as vice chancellor, dean, head of discipline or department as well as directors (Marshall, Adams, Cameron & Sullivan, 2000).

Higher Educational Institution

Institutions that provide education beyond the secondary education that include professional schools other than colleges and universities such as business medical and management (Encyclopaedia).

Public Universities

Universities primarily subsidized by public means through national or subnational government.

Spiritual intelligence

In this study, spiritual intelligence refers to the capacity for leaders to be able to lead with meaning and purpose (Zohar, 2005).

Lived Experience

Lived experience, as it is explored and understood in qualitative research, is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge (SAGE Encyclopedia)

Women academic leadership

Women academic leaders in this study consist of those female leaders within the Higher Education being in a leadership position such as Chancellors, Deans and Director.
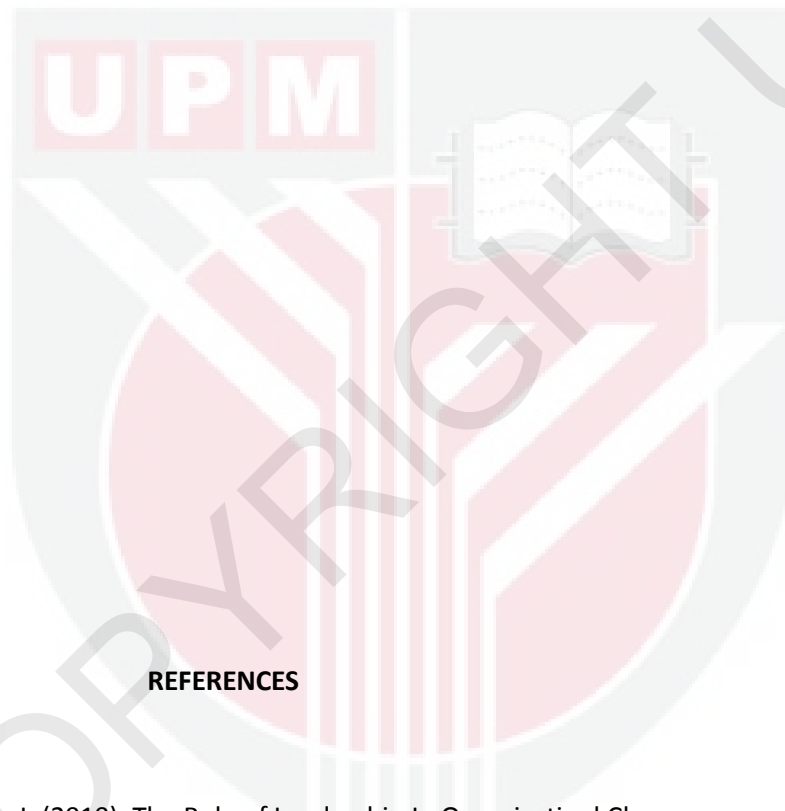
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