

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

There have been a number of scholarly works (Manz *et al.*, 2001; Gunther, 2001; Graber, 2001; Thompson, 2000; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Milliman *et al.*, 2003; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008; Pawar, 2009) that reflects the growing interest of “spirituality” in the corporate world and according to Shellenbarger (2000), the focus and the important trend in the twenty-first century in business is employee spirituality in the workplace. Workplace spirituality has also been the subject of many business magazines, such as the cover story of *Business Week* (Colin, 1999) and *Fortune* (Gunther, 2001) and books written about spirituality at work (Neal, 1997).

Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008) listed the appeal of workplace spirituality could be due to several reasons:

- Today’s organisations are treated as a great human achievement, and work is the centrepiece of most people’s lives and inevitably filled the people’s search for ultimate meaning (Mitroff, 2003).
- As organisations perform better, managers would become more able to improve the working conditions of their employees and the quality of life of customers as well as the society as a whole. In contrast however, it is not easy to grant

“spiritual richness” and meaningful work to employees if the organisation is poorly managed and only focus on material survival.

- There is nothing uncommon or wrong to promote workplace spirituality to improve employee commitment and organisational performance, as long as this is done in the context of respect for the dignity of the people.
- In many of today’s organisations, employees only bring their bodies and brains to work, but not their souls (Mitroff, 2003). Therefore, the seemingly benefits of encouraging workplace spirituality are many. For example, there are some evidence which suggests a link between workplace spirituality and enhanced individual creativity (Freshman, 1999); increased honesty and trust within the organisation (Wagner-Marsh and Conely, 1999; Brown, 2003; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002); enhanced teamwork (Neck and Milliman, 1994); greater kindness and fairness (Biberman and Whitty, 1997); enhanced sense of personal fulfilment of employees (Burack, 1999); increased commitment to organisational goals (Delbecq, 1999; Leigh, 1997); increased awareness of other employees’ needs (Cash and Gray, 2000); higher incidences of organisational citizenship behaviour (Nur and Organ, 2006); expression of more servant-leader behaviour (Beazley and Gemmill, 2006); and more sensitive to corporate social performance (Giacalone *et al.*, 2005).

- If the organisation is not properly managed, workplace spirituality may influence organisational structures with spiritual qualities that serve as a new tool of control, i.e. as new and more sophisticated forms of domination (Driver, 2005; Cunha *et al.*, 2006).
- If it is correctly and appropriately interpreted, workplace spirituality (i.e. workplace opportunity to perform meaningful work in the context of a community with a sense of joy and personal fulfilment) can reduce or even remove what several authors have pointed out as allegedly present in many of today's organisations: injuries to employee mental health, vassalage, employee humiliation and destruction, dehumanised practices and serious threats to the "human soul" (Hancock, 1997; Brown, 2003; Mitroff, 2003).

According to the findings of Mitroff (2003), people want and desire to realise their full potential as holistic human beings, either on or off the job; they would want to perform meaningful work; even though making money is important, it is not the most important goal for most people; and organisations that perceived as "more spiritual" were also viewed as more profitable.

Hence, it would be interesting to do an empirical research on workplace spirituality in the Malaysian context and for the purpose of this study, whether there is a link between workplace spirituality and organisational commitment.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

It is said that spirituality increases commitment by establishing a “Trustful Climate” in the workplace (Burack, 1999) and in most cases of religion, trust is crucial in providing a sound base for commitment (Kriger and Hanson, 1999). For example, Christian beliefs helped executives to solidify their commitment towards their goals (Delbecq, 1999); Islamic work ethic views commitment to the job as a virtue (Yousef, 2000); and Judaism proposes that all individuals are responsible for their products and the responsibility for any defects caused should be owned by the individual who produces it and either sell it directly or through an agent (Dekro and Bush, 1998).

It is important to note that for some people, spirituality at work involves a religious connotation while for others; it does not (Neck and Milliman, 1994). Historically, much of the interest in spirituality has been rooted in religion (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002). However, for many, spirituality at work today does not involve a connection to any specific religion, but rather is based on their own personal values and philosophy (Cavanagh, 1999; Mitroff and Denton, 1999, Milliman, *et al.*, 2003; Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008; Pawar, 2009). In fact, spirituality is inclusive, tolerant and open-minded (Mitroff, 2003) whereas religion divides people through dogma with emphasis on formal structure and excludes those who have different beliefs (Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008).

The study done in the United States by Milliman *et al.* (2003) could be the first known research to empirically test how workplace spirituality explains organisational commitment and among other things, other work attitudes. This was followed by the study carried out by Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008) in Portugal which complements Milliman *et al.* (2003); and found that when employees experience workplace spirituality, they experience not only a sense of obligation or loyalty towards their organisations, but also feel more affectively attached to their organisations as well as the lower the continuance commitment. Recently, empirical research conducted in India by Pawar, (2009) merely confirmed the two previous studies that workplace spirituality has significant positive association with organisational commitment.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to gauge the scarcity of empirical studies on workplace spirituality in Malaysia, by analysing how the perceptions of employees about workplace spirituality in their organisations help to explain their commitment towards the organisation.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This research is of significant importance because previous studies (Milliman *et al.*, 2003; Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008; Pawar, 2009) dealing with the topic of workplace spirituality have often simplistically assumed that spirituality at work has a positive impact but however, there has been a rarity of formally postulated and empirically tested these presumed relationships (Milliman *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, previous studies were done in the United States, Portugal and India which have cultures that are very different from each other (Hofstede, 1991).

Therefore, it is important to conduct research that helps the scientific community to understand the presumably positive impact of workplace spirituality on employee's commitment that may occur when organisation supports individuals' needs in the workplace on a spiritual level (King and Nicol, 1999; Milliman *et al.*, 2003).

1.3 Scope and Objectives of the Study

The present study is consistent with Milliman *et al.* (2003) in that it focuses on the three levels of workplace spirituality, namely, individual level in terms of meaningful work; work group level in terms of having a sense of community; and organisational level in terms of being in alignment with the organisation's values where the authors relied on a survey developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) which conducted principal

components factor analysis that extract seven different dimensions of workplace spirituality.

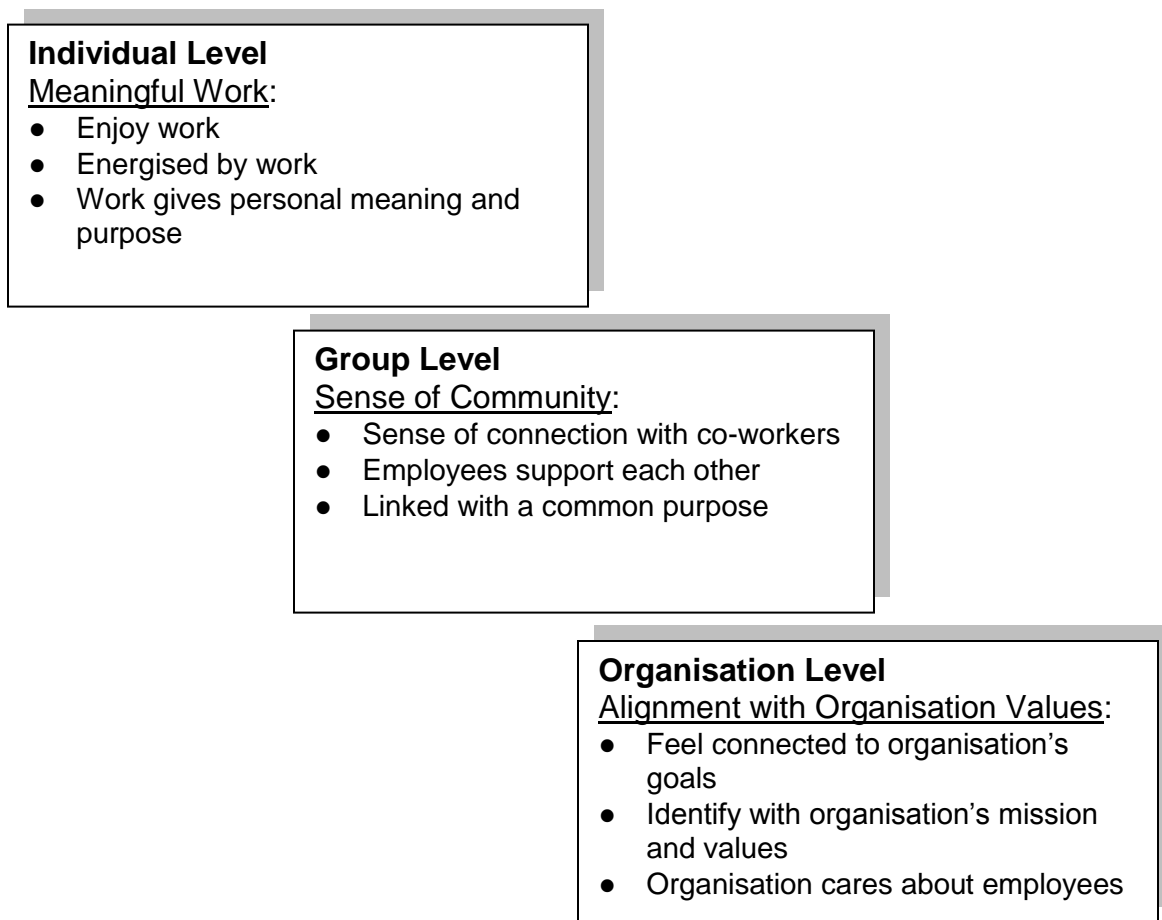
The research done by Milliman *et al.* (2003) was based, to a great extent, on the work of Ashmos and Duchon (2000), but they selected only the three workplace spirituality dimensions mentioned earlier. Three reasons were advanced as justifications for this choice. Firstly, the three dimensions were chosen because they were seen as important in prior studies (Hawley, 1993; Milliman *et al.*, 1999; Mitroff and Denton, 1999) and are representative of employees' involvement in spirituality in the workplace at three levels of analysis suggested by Neal and Bennett (2000). Secondly, workplace spirituality is a complex and multi-faceted construct and the three dimensions were expected to be associated with employee work attitudes and behaviours; considering that the transcendent dimensions of spirituality were more likely to impact an individual's personal life. Finally, focusing on the three dimensions allow for a more narrow and detailed study.

Milliman *et al.* (2003) examined how three workplace spirituality dimensions (meaningful work, having a sense of community, alignment with organisation's values) explain five work attitudes: affective organisational commitment, intentions to leave, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement, and organisational-based self-esteem. The meaningful work dimension represents the degree to which people experience a deep sense enjoyment, meaning and purpose at work. The sense of community dimension means

that people see themselves as connected to each other as well as support for each other and that there is some type of relationship between one's inner self and the inner self of other people. The alignment with organisation's values dimension measures whether or not individuals experience a strong sense of alignment between their personal values and the organisation's goals, mission, vision and purpose.

Figure 1.1 graphically depicts the model developed by Milliman *et al.* (2003) on the conceptualisation of workplace spirituality. Therefore, meaningful work, having a sense of community and having an alignment with the organisation's values are three aspects included in the assessment of workplace spirituality in the present study and they correspond to the three levels - individual, work group and organisational level – of workplace spirituality.

Figure 1.1: Workplace Spirituality Model by Milliman *et al.* (2003)



Conceptualising spirituality in the workplace: individual, group and organisation levels of interaction based on the model by Milliman et al. (2003)

The present research also focuses on only affective organisational commitment, as in Milliman *et al.*'s (2003) study, unlike the study carried out by Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008) which included the two additional commitment dimensions – the normative and continuance organisational commitment.

One of the most cited models of organisational commitment was developed by Allen and Myer (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1990, 1996). It differentiates the three commitment components: affective (emotional attachment to the organisation), continuance (perceived costs associated with leaving the organisation) and normative (feelings of obligation towards the organisation).

Employees with a strong affective bond remain because they want to do so. Those with strong continuance commitment stay because they feel they have to. Normatively committed employees remain because they feel they ought to. This means that a given employee can be affectively, normatively and instrumentally committed to the organisation.

However, the model specifies that the three components are different from each other because it is said that the measures developed for each of the three are relatively uncorrelated with the other two. Another characteristic of the model is that each component develops independently, on the basis of different antecedents and through different processes (Meyer and Allen, 1991, 1997).

Affective commitment develops for example, when the employees become involved in, recognise the value-relevance and derive their identities from the association with the organisation. For example, employees tend to be affectively committed if they feel that

the organisation treats them in a fair, respectful and supporting manner. This is contrasted with the other two components where continuance commitment develops when the employee recognises that he or she stands to lose investments in the organisation, or perceives that there are no alternatives other than remain in the organisation; whereas normative commitment develops when people internalise the organisation's norms through socialisation, receive benefits that induce them to feel the need to reciprocate or to accept the terms of a psychological contract.

It is expected that each of the components will have a different pattern of behavioural consequences (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Since affective commitment relies on an emotional attachment to the organisation, it is likely that affectively attached employees will be motivated to make greater contributions to the organisation compared to employees with a weak affective bond. Thus, the model predicts that affective commitment leads to lower turnover, reduced absenteeism, improved performance and increased organisational citizenship behaviours (Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008).

Distinctly, the model also suggests that employees with strong continuance commitment will feel no tendency to contribute to the organisation beyond what is needed to keep their jobs. Moreover, if continuance commitment is the primary tie that bonds employees to their organisations, this attachment may lead to undesirable work behaviour (Allen and Meyer, 2000).

As observed by Allen and Meyer (2000), because normative organisational commitment does not carry the same feelings of enjoyment, enthusiasm and involvement brought about by affective organisational commitment; affective commitment is chosen for the sole purpose of this study as an outcome variable resulting from the three dimensions of workplace spirituality.

Thus, the objectives of the study were three-fold:

1. To identify the relationship between individual's meaningful work and affective commitment.
2. To identify the relationship between group level's sense of community and affective commitment.
3. To identify the relationship between organisational level of alignment with organisation's values with affective commitment.

1.4 Research Question

Since there has been little or no research done in the Malaysian context (to the knowledge of the researcher) on workplace spirituality to explain its significant impact on affective commitment; the present study is meant to be exploratory and the research question is worded as follows:

Research Question: What is the impact of the three dimensions of workplace spirituality i.e. individual's meaningful work, the group's sense of community and organisational level of alignment with organisation's values (independent variables) on the affective organisational commitment (dependent variable) of employees?

1.5 Organisation of the Study

There are five chapters in this research report. The following organisation of the study is explained accordingly.

The first chapter started with the introduction which then describes the purpose and significance of the study. The scope and objectives of the study would then be formulated, as well as the research question.

Literature review follows in chapter two to describe the theories, the significance of the literature, and the differing views of the research articles that followed. The most central concept of the theories are first defined and followed by a deeper discussion on the area where applicable.

Chapter three would lead to the formulation of theoretical framework and hypotheses of the report. This chapter is also written to give the readers the overview of the data collection procedure of the research used and the sampling design is presented accordingly. The measurement instruments and scales of the questionnaire are then presented and the techniques used to analyse the data gathered.

Chapter four will analyse the results and findings of the theoretical studies of this report completed by the techniques used such as normality analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis to analyse the data after the questionnaires were sorted and coded. Further testing of the hypotheses and discussion of the research findings are presented in this chapter.

Chapter five is the final chapter of this research report which will give the implications of the study, the limitations of the findings as well as suggestions for future research and the recommendations for effective organisational change before concluding the chapter.