CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Implications of the Study

The present study has implications to the managers and their organisational functioning in determining the commitment and performance of their staffs because:

1. Human beings are not only rational but also emotional and spiritual beings. They not only have a mind, but also spiritual needs and that spiritual development may be integral to their mental development (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Therefore, employees do not ignore this search for spirituality when they first walk through the company's door thinking only for the satisfaction of material and financial needs.

2. Pava (2003) argued that all human activities are spiritual to some degree. Thus, employees are spiritual beings, and to a greater or lesser degree, have spiritual needs, and desire to have a meaningful life and work; desire to be treated with respect and dignity in a community context; and to share their existence with their fellow workers and superiors.

3. If work provides meaning for their lives, it is likely that their work becomes a "calling" rather than a mere "job".

4. When an organisation develops an environment where employees perceive that they are valued and cared for as human beings and their needs (material, social, emotional and spiritual needs) being well taken care of, employees would feel encouraged to respond, thus bringing their entire self (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) to the job and organisation. This would result in increase efficiency, commitment and performance, and instead of withholding efforts on the job (Moore and Casper, 2006), the employees would display work effort beyond the confines of their job descriptions.

The study of workplace spirituality and organisational commitment relates to attitudes towards organisational change (Yousef, 2000; Madsen *et al.*, 2005), Mohamed *et al.* (2004, p.101) asserted that "while traditional change models have debated whether change could be bottom-up or top-down, a spiritual perspective would suggest that change should be inside-out". If affectively committed employees tend to be more receptive or ready for organisational change, and if workplace spirituality promotes affective commitment, then organisations and managers could not neglect spirituality when preparing and carrying out organisational changes.

However, managers and organisations need to be careful when making changes, because if changes impact spirituality in a negative way (e.g. harming the sense of meaning at work, clashing with co-workers, and causing a breach in the values of individual-organisational alignment), then the outcome can be devastating and could cause a dramatic decrease in affective commitment; decrease in individual's efforts and performance; and subsequent drop in organisational performance. For example, it may be possible that what one considers to be highly spiritual belief or practice may have a negative impact on other people where some potential negative implications include the potential for promoting a set of spirituality values as the "only path" which can breed intolerance in religiously diverse workplaces such as in Malaysia. It is also possible that employees who experience a high degree of spirituality at work may become too deeply attached to the current practices of the organisation and therefore may become resistant to change. Thus, the concept of spirituality at work may be manipulated to suit certain vested interests.

On the contrary, a spiritually-rich workplace may stimulate employees to form more positive perceptions of the organisation, and therefore to appraise and accept change more favourably as well as to achieve better adjustment through higher job satisfaction, higher ethical principles, greater attachment to the organisation, lower absenteeism and lower turnover intentions (Martin *et al.,* 2005); which ultimately resulted in higher organisational performance.

5.2 Limitations of the Present Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the present findings had been consistent with those previously found in other empirical studies by Milliman *et al.* (2003) and Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008), it is necessary to consider the limitations of the present study and to suggest some avenues for future research.

Firstly, this is a new research area in which workplace spirituality dimension is a highly personal nature of the subject matter (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002) and may be difficult to measure with a survey instrument as the respondents may have the tendency to relate the measure instruments to their personal life rather than their working life (Milliman *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, the respondents may not have answered the questionnaires truthfully when the survey were conducted in the evening classes and it could be the conflict between having to pay attention in class and a survey that is not related to their studies. Thus, the results may not be reflective of the current findings because the respondents may require more time to reflect over.

Secondly, due to time and budget constraints, the present research is conducted within the Klang Valley with a sample size of 132 out of 200 questionnaires distributed, which may be perceived as insufficient to be representative of the whole sectors and organisations in Malaysia. In order to improve the generalisation of the findings, future

research should increase the sample size and broaden the sample location from a single administrative site to cover a larger regional and national site.

Thirdly, the present study focuses only on one outcome variable i.e. affective organisational commitment (the employee's emotional attachment to the organisation). Future studies may want to include the other two organisational commitment dimensions such as the normative commitment (the perceived costs associated with leaving the organisation) and continuance organisational commitment (feelings of obligation towards the organisation) developed by Allen and Myer (1996). Moreover, future research may also include other outcome variables such as intentional to quit, job satisfaction, job involvement, self-reported individual performance, organisational citizenship behaviours, retaliatory behaviours, innovative and creativity behaviours or productivity.

Fourthly, the present study limits its findings on the three workplace spirituality dimensions of individual level, the group level and the organisational level. Future studies should concentrate on other workplace spirituality dimensions such as opportunities for inner life, individual spirituality and positive organisational purpose. Furthermore, it would be interesting to know the outcome of future findings whether the various religions (if religion is viewed as an aspect of spirituality perspective) in Malaysia can play a pivotal role in affecting the organisational commitment of the employee.

Last but not least, the current study does not include any moderating or mediating variables. Hence, future studies may include moderating variables such as individual characteristics or leadership behaviours. For instance, employees with different individual characteristics and personality traits or different leadership behaviours can react differently to the same workplace environment. Or variables such as trust, perceived organisational support, positive emotions, stress and even religion can act as mediating variables.

5.3 Recommendations for Effective Organisational Change

Effective organisational change approaches are needed to implement spirituality at work philosophies if these benefits were to pass on to employees and the organisation. Some of the recommendations for effective organisational change approaches are as follows:

1. Organisational change approaches must be guided by a clear philosophy that workplace spirituality represents truth and is the right thing to do, not because it may lead to higher profits. In other words, workplace spirituality must be practiced in a sincere and authentic manner before it can have a positive impact on employees or on the longer term effectiveness of the organisational change. For example, organisations and managers must promote organisational climates where trust, dignity, justice and respect are seen as governing factors in their relationships in promoting workplace spirituality in their organisations. In addition, there would be ineffective organisational change unless the organisation promotes organisational mission and vision with meaning that would provide the

employees with a sense of meaning and purpose in their working lives towards arousing the employees' enthusiasm by involving them into shaping the organisation's mission and vision. The employees' involvement should be seen as a platform for them to perform their tasks with joy and meaning in their working environment such as putting their imagination, innovation and creativity into their work with great autonomy, responsibility, task significance and challenge to ensure the realisation of the organisational mission and vision.

2. It is essential that organisational change and development programs associated with spirituality at work must have strong employee participation so that input is heard from all levels of the organisation. An important aspect of this spirituality at work development process is creating forums for open discussion and greater clarification of what spirituality at work means, since the concept is highly personal and abstract. Strong organisational values will need to be developed to ensure that the values and rights of all employees are respected, including creating an environment that grants the employees the ability to live an integrated life so that work does not clash with their values, rights and their desires to live as human beings. Such a discussion is exciting and interesting, but will stretch the boundaries of what levels of freedom of expression are allowed in organisations. Training programs on interpersonal communication and listening skills will likely be required to help promote this process.

3. Workplace spirituality must take place within the context of appropriate organisational goals after taking into account the impact towards the respective stakeholders. For example, do the practices and policies toward such organisational goals have a potential direct or indirect positive or negative effect on employees or other stakeholders of the organisations? For this reason, the change efforts must incorporate feedback mechanism from internal sources such as the employees and external sources such as the customers, external consultants and suppliers to ensure the true impact of the workplace spirituality approaches on the organisation.

5.4 Conclusion

Spirituality is an undeniable human need for many people (Hard and Brady, 2005) and the present research suggests, workplace spirituality is a "reality" that must not be ignored by society and organisations (Judge, 1999; Sanders *et al.*, 2003). As a consequence, it seems reasonable to expect employees to search for meaningful work, having a greater sense of community between the co-workers and a higher alignment of values between employees and the organisation. It is increasingly accepted that when those needs are fulfilled, especially the spiritual ones, employees become happier and are willing to make extra efforts to the benefit of the team and organisation (Gavin and Mason, 2004; Wright and Cropanzano, 2004) and therefore, if organisations allow them to get these "spiritual resources" and satisfy their "spiritual needs", it is likely that the employees would bring their entire physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves to the organisation and treated their work as "calling" rather than "job" and thus, responding beyond their call of duty. The present study is an empirical contribution to the academic field of workplace spirituality suggesting that organisation that respect and nourish the spiritual needs of their employees can tap into the employee's full potential and obtain higher individual performance in return. This would inevitably result in individual as well as organisational benefits.

The concept of workplace spirituality seems to call for a paradigm change in management thinking. As Gull and Doh (2004) suggested, it is necessary that managers be able to examine their underlying system of orientation from an exclusive focus on economic and financial criteria, to an understanding of the organisation as community of spirit. In this kind of organisation, ethical misconduct and its perverse consequences are less likely, when people derive joy from their work, employees are more affectively committed to their organisations; and where creativity and innovation are fostered, all of these would result in higher organisational performance and competitiveness. In short, this is to change the organisation in the way that the "caterpillar transforms into a butterfly" (Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008).