Spirituality and Women Business Leaders: Evidence from Small & Medium Entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both the authors contributed to design the study, analyze the data and write up the manuscript. The data collection was done by author MGH Madusha. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study is to explore spiritual values and practices among the women business leaders in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Sri Lanka.
Methodology: A qualitative study based on snowball sample of ten women business leaders in SME sector. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection and thematic analysis was used to data analysis.
Findings: The study found ten common spiritual values (integrity, trust, endurance, forgiveness, sympathy, altruism, humility, gratitude, hope and sympathetic joy) and seven spiritual practices (care and concern on others, respecting ideas of others, open communication, listening responsively, appreciating others, self-awareness and understanding others and protecting of five precepts in Buddhist teachings) among the women business leaders in SMEs in Sri Lanka. As notable contextual findings, it was found that the spiritual value of sympathetic joy and practice of protecting of five precepts which are Buddhist teachings.
Research Implications: Findings implied that growing spiritual values among women leaders and practicing them contributes merits in terms enhanced support and loyalty towards the organization.

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Research Limitations and Future Research Suggestions: There are limitations pertaining to the small sample size. Further researches can be done in spirituality among the male business leadership in SMEs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of spiritual leadership can be introduced as one of the emerging concerns of the contemporary business world. After the traditional leadership theories, the concept of transitional leadership has introduced, and spiritual leadership is considered as going beyond of transitional leadership. About a decade ago, the studies on spirituality in general and workplace spirituality in particular were very scarce [1]. Compared to then there is an increasing awareness on spiritual leadership especially in the western countries and there are many studies conducted about spirituality and leadership. However, in non-western countries including Africa and Asia, the focus on spiritual leadership is still lacking. "Spiritual Leadership" theory is being examined crossways in a diversity of settings and cultures but there is a significant research gap in this area of research in South Asian countries [2].

Even in the western countries, researches on spirituality in women leadership are very few and there is almost no researches regarding women leadership and spirituality in eastern countries. Then again it was identified that there is a concern on women leadership and spirituality in African countries including Kenya and South Africa. But there is room for more, particularly those studying non-western forms of spiritual leadership [3]. As a country which has a long history of women leaders and Buddhist spirituality, it is hardly found research focusing on spirituality and women leadership in Sri Lanka. Hence, In order to fill the identified research gap, this study intends to examine 'how spirituality is practiced at work place, by women entrepreneurs in Small and Medium Enterprise sector in Sri Lanka', where the percentage of women entrepreneurs is high compared to the other sectors of Sri Lanka. It was identified that among SMEs, 25% of the entrepreneurs are women [4]. Therefore, this study was conducted in SME sector. In Sri Lanka, the category of SME is made up of enterprises which employ less than three hundred employees, and which have an annual turnover not exceeding Rs.750Mn.[5]. The objectives of the study are to find out spiritual values among the women entrepreneurs in the Small and Medium Enterprise sector in Sri Lanka and examining their practice of spirituality at workplace.

This research was intended to focus on the experiences and perspectives of women business leaders on spirituality and leadership, using interviews and identifying the common themes of spiritual leadership. The findings were not expected to generalize but they are expected to provide a deep understanding about the values and practices of spiritual leadership among women leaders. The study is significant as it addressed comparatively new aspect on leadership in South Asia with special reference to women business leaders in SME's in Sri Lanka. As the research implications for further research, use of a larger sample size and conducting research on the male female comparison of the spiritual leadership values and practices are suggested.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Spirituality

No spiritual leadership and workplace spirituality have a commonly agreed definition. [6]. According to Delbecq, it is the unique and personal inner experience of and search for the fullest personal development through participation into the transcendent mystery [7]. Mayer, Viviers, Oosthuizen, & Surtee said that spirituality was often interwoven with religion, supporting each other mutually: spirituality contributes to religion and religion contributes to spirituality. Further, they identified that the concept of spirituality is connected to four themes namely approach to life and work, values, expanding religion and spirituality as a resource [8]. Spirituality is identified as a resource since it opens way to face challenges successfully [8].

2.2 Spiritual Leadership

Findings of Mubasher, Salman, Irfan, & Jabeen have also prove that there is no agreement on the definition of 'spiritual leadership' [2].

According to Nicolae, Ion, & Nicolae,[6] among all the definitions, the most robust definition belongs to Fry who defined spiritual leadership as comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership [9]. After reviewing several definitions, Nicolae, Ion, & Nicolae defined spiritual leadership as a style of leadership based on moral, ethical and religious values, embodied in the organizational culture and aimed at accomplishing both social and business ends [6]. Another definition on spiritual leadership say that 'spiritual leadership' is a practical leadership theory that aids organizations and mends the well-being of groups [2].

Nicolae, Ion, & Nicolae argue that, the central constructs of spiritual leadership are derived mostly from other theoretical leadership models, such as transformational or servant leadership [6]. Singh & Kumar said that spiritual leadership goes one step beyond from transformational leadership [1]. Fry (2003) stated that spiritual leadership theory is not inclusive of other major current theories of motivation, but that it is also conceptually distinct, less conceptually confounded, and more parsimonious [9].

2.3 Theories on Spiritual Leadership

Fry (2003) has built causal theory of spiritual leadership. According to him, the causal theory of spiritual leadership is developed with an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love,

theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival [9].

2.4 Women Leadership and Spirituality

According to Ngunjiri, the women's spheres of influence ranged from grassroots to global – from the principle of an elementary girls' school to president of global organization, from national politicians to pan-African leaders [3]. Women leaders see spirituality as identity building, which can be compared to Peterson and Seligman's view of spirituality (2004) as a character strength and virtue. Women leaders often refer to these character strengths and virtues as values, such as respect for humanity, freedom of belief and core values, which include honesty and sharing [8]. It is further said that spirituality is viewed by women leaders as a holistic life concept [8]. The findings of Mayer, Viviers, Oosthuizen, & Surtee explores that, women leaders are highly aware of their spirituality and religious affiliation which influence their work and work spirituality. Further it says that spirituality builds a positive mindset and add to the feeling of connections and wholeness [8].

2.5 Values and Practices of Spiritual Leadership

Fry's causal model has identified spiritual leadership values under the components of vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith. Vision includes values as broad appeal to key stakeholders, defining the destination and journey, reflecting high ideals, encourage
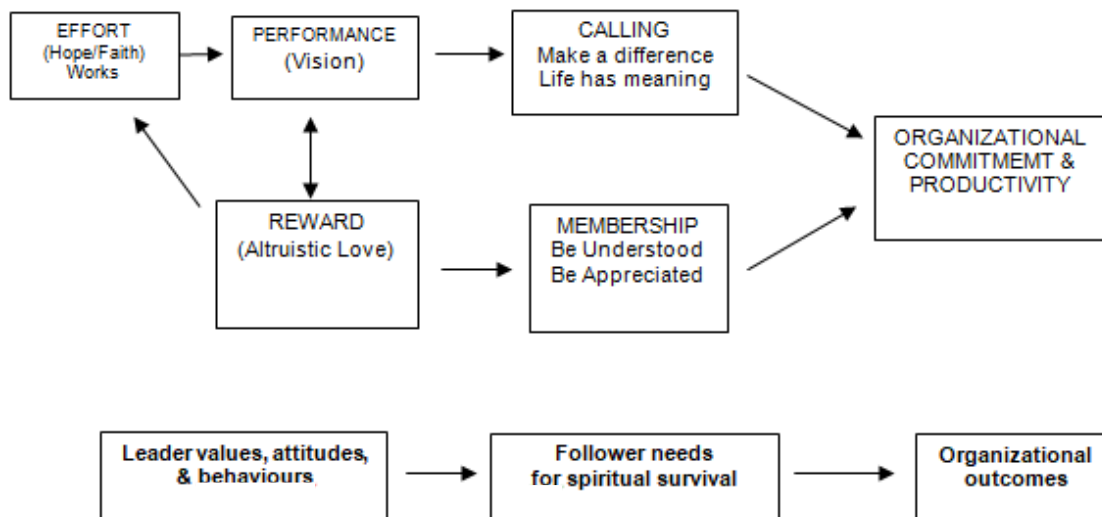

Fig. 1. Causal Model of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) [9]

hope/faith, establishment of a standard of excellence. Altruistic love includes forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust/loyalty, and humanity. Hope/faith include endurance, perseverance, do what it takes, stretch goals, and expectation of reward/victory [9]. Reave has identified three spiritual values namely, integrity (integrity; as the most crucial spiritual value for leader success, integrity and follower trust and integrity and ethical influence), honest communication with self and others and humility [10].

Reave identified six spiritual practices which related to leader effectiveness namely demonstrating respect for others' values, treating others fairly, expressing caring and concern, listening responsively, appreciating the contributions of others and engaging in reflective practice [10].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is focused on exploring the spiritual values and the practices of the women business leaders in SME sector in Sri Lanka. This is a qualitative study, conducted during the year 2019. The sample of the study was ten women SMEs in Sri Lanka and elements for the sample were selected through snowball sampling technique. The primary contact was made using the list of women entrepreneurs obtained from the Department of Business Entrepreneurship, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. Primary data collection for the study was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interview guide was used to identify the demographic information, religion, business environment, success factors, unique business values, practices, and the future insights of the participants. Time duration of the interviews were approximately two hours and ten interview sessions were conducted. Data analysis was done by employing thematic analysis, to identify the main spiritual values and practices among the women business leaders.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Data Analysis

This study conducted using ten selected women business leaders in SME sector in Western province. Participants were at the age range from twenty-five to fifty years. All the participants have either following or completed a diploma or a master qualification in business management except for one participant. One participant has finished her education after completing Advanced Level examination in commerce stream. Participants engage in different types of businesses and have had experiences ranged from three to twenty-seven years in the field of business (Table 1). Annual income among the participants were also varied from Sri Lankan Rupees four million to twenty million approximately. When examining the relationship between the age, level of education and business experience of the participants with the spiritual values bearing and spiritual practices following, it was not revealed such an association.

However, it was revealed that the family and the religious background have highly influenced on the spiritual values and practices among the participants. Although it was not intentionally selected the sample, yet the religion of nine participants were Buddhists. One participant declared that she was a non-religious person, and it was found that she was lacking in spiritual values compared to others. Participants who had a strong relationship with their parents have displayed more spiritual values. Participants who had negative relationship with their parents were lack of spiritual values including trust and sympathy.

4.2 Identified Spiritual Values of Women Business Leaders in SMEs

When examining the sample in the study to identify the spiritual values among the women business leaders in SMEs, following themes have been identified. Majority of these values has been recognized by other scholars as well. Fry [9] and Reave [10] have identified most of these values except sympathetic joy. Sympathetic joy is a value that comes from Buddhism.

4.2.1 Integrity

Integrity can be defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles [11]. Participants have identified being honest, truthful, being ethical and open communications as some of the practices of integrity. Participant say the following:

> "I never cheated others. We never go away without completing the service we are to provide. And I never do unethical businesses. We do earn a profit but it's solely from our own dedication, not from cheating others." (Participant #7)

Table 1. Sample profile

Participant No.	Age	Religion	Educational Qualifications	Business type	Year started	Total experience in business (Years)	Annual income (LKR)	No. of employees
01	48	Buddhist	Diploma in Business Management	Advertising	2014	5	10mn	8
02	50	Buddhist	Master in Business Management	Restaurant	2013	6	36mn	20-22
03	43	Buddhist	Diploma in Business Management	Optical care shop	2004	15	4 - 5mn	4
04	36	Buddhist	Diploma in Business Management	Food Manufacturing	2016	3	7.2mn	7
05	50	Buddhist	Master in Business Management	Explosives & Fireworks	1991	27	14.5mn	13
06	50	Buddhist	Master in Business Management	Printing press & Garment Shop	1996 2018	23 02	300mn 28mn	15 5
07	45	Non - religious	Master in Business Management	Outbound Travel Agency	2009	10	90mn	7
08	32	Buddhist	Reading for Bachelor in Business Management	Buying & Selling of Body Building Vitamins	2010	12	7.2mn	10-12
09	45	Buddhist	Master in Business Management	Chemical Industries	2009	10	150mn	5
10	25	Buddhist	Passed G. C. E. Advanced Level in Commerce Stream	Washable Diapers	2014	05	7.2mn	6

(Source: Field data, 2019)

All the participants equally value integrity as a moral value. Majority consider integrity as the core value of their business. Participants value integrity towards the employees, customers and the society at large. They be honest and open with their customers and never sell a product in low quality. Paying salaries on time and open communication are expressed as the ways to reflect integrity towards employees. In return, participants expect their customers and employees to reflect integrity from their side. Truthfulness and honesty are admired as the values of good employees by the participants. Integrity towards the society is reflected through the ethical considerations of participants. Without being limited to the business, integrity is valued in each and every aspect of the participants' lives.

4.2.2 Trust

Trust is defined as the assured reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone or something [12]. Trust is explained by the participants as their belief in employees and customers, and the employees' and customers' belief in them.

It was identified that not all the participants equally value trust as a moral value of leadership. Eight out of ten participants highly value trust, believing that their trust on employees and customers and the employees' and customers' trust on them as the leading factor for the success of their organizations. They always prefer to keep trustworthy employees. For the trustworthy people, the participants willing to support at any cost. According to them, developing mutual trust will produce loyal employees and loyal customers for the organization.

> "There were sometimes that some people work against me while staying in this business. I had one manager who sent some very good employees away. In that case I took the toughest decision to send him away. Because I can't trust him anymore" (Participant #2)

It was found that there are two participants (Participant 1 and 7), do not prefer to trust their employees. They think that no matter how good an employee is, you will never know when they turn their back on you. Participant 7 quoted as follows:

> "No matter how well an employee behaves, I don't trust anyone. It is my nature. They can

change instantly by tomorrow" (Participant #7)

When finding out the reasons behind, it was observed that both of them have lived their childhood without the care of their parents. Participant 1 was separated from her family by her parents since her childhood. Participant 7 had lost her father and her mother left them alone. Since the two participants have faced hardships from their loved ones, they are not willing to trust others easily. However, as a result of the lack of trust, especially in the case of employees, these participants have faced a high rate of labour turnover. Both participants had identified this as their biggest challenge.

4.2.3 Endurance

Oxford University Press defines endurance as the ability to endure an unpleasant or difficult process or situation without giving away [13]. Just like integrity, endurance is also valued by all the participants equally. When starting a business and continuing it, they had the ability to endure all the difficulties arose. Many participants expressed that unlike a man, when women engage in business, they have a lot to endure.

Based on the expressions of the participants, it was observed that they are proud to have endurance as a key value. Their main advice for the researcher was also to carry on what you do as hard as possible until you achieve the deserved destination, while tolerating all the difficulties arise. One reason behind this ability to tolerate was that, all the participants have had that incorporated a target in their mind. As a result, they never give up even in the worst possible situation. Following expression reflects this:

> "Once I started a Solon which was a huge investment. But after two months of starting that, a court case has filed to the building and I had to stop my business. I felt mentally down and disappointed. But I had a target for my life. So I started again, but in a new field" (Participant #8)

4.2.4 Forgiveness

Forgiveness is defined by Oxford University Press as the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven [14]. It is clear that forgiveness

has two aspects. The ability to forgive others and the willingness to receive forgiveness.

Not all participants value forgiveness equally. All are willing to forgive but that depends on the nature of the behavior of those who ask for forgiveness. Simple matters are usually forgiven but continuous occurrence of same ill-behaviour is not accepted. However, if the wrongful behavior is something that connects with the trust, in those cases majority of the participants rarely forgive.

> "There are instances that I keep my team even after I found a bad behavior. But if that behavior does a damage to the organization that cannot repair, then I won't keep them" (participant #2)

Participant 9 has a different attitude towards forgiveness. According to her, no matter what the action is, everyone deserves a second chance. But, all the other participants were not ready to forgive in frauds or other serious ill-behaviors.

Willingness to be forgiven is valued by all the participants. This was mainly related to the mistakes that happens to their customers. If there is a mistake happened towards a customer, there are formal and informal ways of asking for forgiveness. Participants themselves apologize or sometimes send a token or a gift as a symbol of apologizing.

4.2.5 Sympathy

Sympathy is referred to feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune [15]. Majority of the participants highly concern on the misfortune people. Sympathy have reflected two aspects as, sympathy towards the followers (employees) and sympathy towards society.
Majority of the participants are aware about the problems of the employees. They maintain a friendly behavior and the employees share their problems with the participants. As a result, the participants have a greater understanding about the employees. Whenever they got to know a misfortune happened, they try to make employee comfortable as much as possible. When this kind of relationship is maintained employees feel more connected with the business rather than just complete their work for a salary. As a result, the loyalty of the employees become high. Sympathy towards society is also consist with majority of the participants. Whenever they found a tragedy or a misfortune of someone, they feel

sorry for them. Without any hidden motives, they try to support them.

> "There's a lady in my office who lost her husband on 1st of January, this year. When her husband died, we're the people she called first. We did all necessary arrangement and expenses for the funeral. It was very sad situation." (Participant #5)

Compared to the other participants, participant 1 and 7 are lack in this value. They have not much focused on maintaining friendly connections with the employees and signs of sympathy was not highly reflected in their stories. Since there is no deeper understanding on employees' requirements, the employees also not retained with these two participants for a long time. They feel paying salary will satisfy employees and will ease their problems. The reason may be their low ability to sympathize on others. Following quote is an example for that:

> "I think my employees are satisfied. I pay a reasonable salary for them" (Participant #1)

4.2.6 Altruism

Altruism means disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others [16]. All the participants of the study value altruism. Other than the feeling to serve for the well-being of the society through business, most of the participants have expressed their desire to do something else to the society. Practices such as donating healthcare facilities to the hospitals, provide stationaries to schools have reflected that these participants admire being altruistic.

Participant 3 and participant 8 have the feeling that while doing business, not only the targets of themselves, but also the targets of their employees must be achieved. With that in mind, they always concern on the needs of their employees without solely focusing on the business. It was also identified as working with altruistic mind.

> "When we engage in business to achieve our targets, we should keep in mind that our followers have their own targets as well. We have to help them as a whole or personally to achieve their targets even from little by little" (Participant #8)

Accordingly, it was clear that all the participants value altruism, but in different extends. Some are being altruistic inside the business while some

have gone beyond the boundaries of business with their altruistic mind.

4.2.7 Humility

The term humility refers to freedom from pride or arrogance. It is the quality or state of being humble [17]. Reave (2005) in her study has explained humility as the ability to accept negative feedbacks [10]. In addition, accepting the contribution of others towards one's success can also identified as a feature of humility.

Majority of the participants value humility. Especially, being humble to the customers is highly appreciated by all participants. Not only from customers, some participants have accepted negative feedbacks from their employees as well. Participants are ready to accept and correct them. Humility is also expressed through accepting the contribution of others for the success of the participants' businesses. Following comment expressed humility:

> "Our workers are not always satisfied. In those cases, we receive complaints from them. Accordingly, we try to sort out that problem by giving the best possible solution." (Participant #4)

When the participants were asked about the wrong decisions that they have taken, all the participants have accepted their mistakes and shared them. Being able to see and accept their own mistakes also reflected humility of the participants.

4.2.8 Gratitude

According to Oxford University Press, gratitude is defined as the quality of being thankful or readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness [18]. All the participants see gratitude as a moral value. They always admired the support provided from different people, including family members, employees and other people.

Majority of the participants were given a significant support for their businesses by their family members and participants accept and admire this contribution. Being grateful for the contribution of the employees was also reflected from the participants. Majority of the participants identify their employees' contribution as a crucial factor for their success. Some admitted that the employees serve the customers better than the participants. This is illustrated as follows:

> "My parents helped me a lot in the beginning of this business. My mom came to go everywhere with me, my father found suppliers for me. I did all the things with my family. Now I don't let my parents to work. I can look after them now." (Participant #10)

Participant 1 and 7 also admires the employees but they think that the workers are mainly focused on money. They appreciate very few workers. Majority's contribution was not properly valued.

4.2.9 Hope

Hope is a feeling of expectation and desire to a particular thing to happen [19]. Fry (2003) in his study states that hope is the absolute trust that the desired expectation will come into a reality, rather than a mere wish [9]. All the participants have a hope about the future of their organization and have a clear mind to reach it.

> "We hope that we have a long journey with our agricultural project. We have planned to export our products. Our dream is being the best exporter in agricultural products" (Participant #9)

It was further observed that the majority of the participants' hope is not limited towards their business. It has connected with a social concern. They hope to make a positive change in the society. Participant 1 stated the following:

> "I have an idea to build ten entrepreneurs for the country in twenty-five years. I think I have already made one entrepreneur up to some extent. So there are another nine to go." (Participant #1)

4.2.10 Sympathetic Joy

Sympathetic joy or 'Muditha' is defined as finding happiness in the good fortune of others [20]. It simply means being happy by seeing someone else's happiness. Majority of the participants have this value and it is reflected through different aspects.

Many participants feel happy when their employees are happy. Some are happy because they provide employment opportunities to their workers, while some are happy seeing their

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employees' lives look more beautiful and happier than them. Other than the employees, participants are happy seeing their customers happy from consuming products and services provided to them. Following quote expressed this value.

> "I like to see my workers appear more beautiful than me. I want them to be better thank us. If my workers are also happy, I think that is the real success." (Participant#6)

The value sympathetic joy is a concept in Buddhism. It was observed that all the nine participants who believe in Buddhism have reflected this value in different ranges. Participant 7 who does not believe in any religion have also reflected this value expressing that she feels happy and proud generating jobs for her employees.

4.3 Identified Spiritual Practices among Women Business Leaders in SME Sector

The selected participants practice the above-mentioned spiritual values in different ways. Care and concern on others, respect and accept ideas of others, listening responsively through open communication, appreciate others' contribution, awareness of self and understanding others are the identified spiritual practices among the women business leaders.

4.3.1 Care and concern on others

According to Reave (2005), expressing care and concern for others is a practice emphasized by virtually all spiritual paths and it is crucial to leadership success [10]. It was observed that all selected participants have the same feeling on this practice. Three common aspects of expressing care and concern was identified as care and concern on employees, on costumers and on the society at large.

Majority of the participants try to maintain a friendly behavior with their employees and they usually express care and concern towards them in different ways. Without limiting to offer due salaries and other monetary incentives, they care about the employees, their families and other matters. When expressing the care, practices such as maintaining a secure and comfortable work environment, support employees to start up their own business, support family members of employees and provide different welfare facilities

have been identified among the majority of the participants. Participant 6 expressed as:

> "Once in a year we buy and gift all necessary books and stationeries for the children of all my workers, and we present cloths from our shop to all the family members and the close relatives of workers." (Participant #6)

When expressing their care and concern towards the customers, participants try to give something else other than the expected product. They try to produce something healthier or more comfortable for the customers. When a customer reaches them, they support the customer to complete necessary pre-requisites as well, maintaining a friendly and respectful behavior.

Reave (2005), have explained that care concern can go beyond the walls of the organization to make a commitment to the community [10]. Majority of the participants have engaged in similar practices for the well-being of the society at large. Protecting the environment, help the helpless, serve for sick people and conducting health camps were identified as some ways of expressing care and concern towards the society. However, compared to other participants, the practice of care and concern is low with participant 1 and participant 7. They do concern but not at the level of other participants. Practicing care and concern reflects spiritual values including sympathy, altruism and humility. In order to identify one's problems, sympathy is needed. Expressing care and concern towards helpless or sick people is possible only for a person who is sympathetic towards others. Concern in society without expecting anything reflects being selfless. That means altruism. In order to maintain friendly behavior with employees, humility is essential.

Expressing care and concern have generated multiple positive impacts to the participants. Employee loyalty has increased, and more customers have reached to them.

4.3.2 Respect and accept others' ideas

Rather than taking all the decisions independently, make collective decisions by respecting and accepting others' ideas of others reflect a better spiritual person. Reave (2005), has stated that in order to achieve a sustainable success, leaders must respect the followers' values as well [10].

Majority of the participants usually ask the ideas of their employees before make a decision. It was also observed that if the employees' decision is better, it is accepted. This reflects values such as humility and trust of the participants. In addition, all the participants respect and accept the suitable ideas proposed by the customers. They value both positive and negative feedbacks of the customers very much and they are accepted with humbleness. This was expressed as follows:

> When preparing the fish curry paste, we firstly took the ideas from our workers. The taste also firstly tested by them. At the end, our final product which presented to the market was the product they accepted." (Participant #4)

Two participants were not willing to accept the ideas of their employees compared to other participants as they do not trust their employees very much. Participant 1 rarely listens to employee ideas and participant 7 prefer to make fully independent decisions. They inform the decisions in advance but not asking for employee ideas.

4.3.3 Open communication

Open communication refers to honest communication with others. All the participants equally practice clear and open communication with both customers and employees. Participants had always maintained honest communication with employees in problematic situations.

> "When I fired a manager who broke my trust, all my employees were upset with me. They didn't understand the real face of him. Then I immediately called a meeting and explained why I fired him with past incidents that has happened while he was around. Then my workers realized that my decision was right" (Participant #2)

In addition, when an employee is found ill-mannered or malpractice, he/she is advised personally. Similarly, when dealing with customers, participants tend to make open conversations with them. Spiritual values of truthfulness, integrity and forgiveness are reflected through open communication.

4.3.4 Listening responsively

Listening responsively means listening to the workers and the customers with a full awareness

and giving practical answers for their issues. Participant 9 explains this as an 'open door' policy. The problems and the requests of the employees are listened carefully and proposed solutions. When new idea is presented, participants accept it if it is good if not, kindly reject it. In addition, participants ready to listen for the honest acceptance of the mistakes done by the employees. According to participant 2, before she finds outs a mistake in other ways, direct acknowledgement would open the path for better solutions.

All the participants equally listen and respond accordingly to the customers. Whether the feedback is a complaint or a compliment, they always accept it and react. Whenever there is a complaint, the participants act immediately to settle down the situation and once the problem is solved a formal apology is sent. If a customer expresses his/her feedback, it is appreciated.

> "Once we have delivered a string hopper parcel to an elderly customer without one curry that he requested. It was our mistake. The customer called us around 11.30p.m and we immediately sent the curry that he requested, free of charge." (Participant #2)

This practice always strengthened the relationship among the participants with the employees and customers. It establishes trust among them. Employees have worked more loyally and efficiently, and the number of the customers arrived has been increased. In addition to trust, this practice reflects spiritual values such as humility, sympathy, forgiveness, and gratitude.

4.3.5 Appreciate others' contribution

Appreciation means providing a recognition for one's contribution. Reave (2005), has expressed that this has a powerful impact on follower's motivation and performance [10]. These appreciations happen in two ways. Appreciating the target achievement in monetary forms is the most popular method among all the participants. Rather than using monetary form, it was identified that employee loyalty is mostly built through the second way of appreciating. It is the use of non- monetary forms. Appreciate the followers' contribution publically, provide different gifts, taking for foreign tours were identified as the non-monetary forms, which is expressed as follows:

"When our workers achieve their targets, we grant them a portion prom our gross profit. In addition, we allocate new year bonus for our followers as well." (Participant #4)

Although the participant 7 provides the above appreciations, she hesitates to trust her followers. She signs a bond agreement before taking the employee to a foreign tour. Even though the tour motivates employee, the bond agreement displays the miss-trust of the participant towards her employees. Therefore, the employee's loyalty is not developed. Participant 1 gives monetary forms of appreciations only.

Other than the above two, all the other participants maintain very close relationships, and their employees are loyal to them. With these appreciations, their loyalty will be further developed, and they are motivated further. Through this practice, spiritual values such as humility and gratitude are reflected. Accepting the contribution shows humility and rewarding them with different incentives shows gratitude.

4.3.6 Awareness of self and understanding others

Awareness of self refers to the effort to understand inner senses by him/herself. Understanding others means the effort of understanding the inner thoughts of others. With the purpose of identify self and others, majority of the participants engage in reflective practices. Since the majority (9 out of 10) believe in Buddhism, these participants practice Lord Buddha's teachings to aware about the self and others. Meditation, spiritual readings, listening to Dharma preaching are the main practices that are practiced by the participants. Following comment has expressed this practice:

"I listen at least one Dharma preach per day. Through that I have the mentality that no matter what we do in this short life, we all will have the same end." (Participant #4)

Participant 7, who does not believe in any religion, did not express any idea about the above practices. However, when considering her expressions on other matters, it was understandable that she has an understanding about herself, but even though she has the ability, she does not try to understand the inner thoughts of others.

It was observed that all the participants have had a self-examination. They have a good understanding on themselves and the majority have tried to understand about the others as well. For that, clear and close relationships have been established among the majority of the participants and their employees. If the employees are identified well, it was clear that the participants tend to forgive and appreciate them. Accordingly, this practice reflected values such as integrity and forgiveness.

4.3.7 Protect five precepts

Five precepts are the basic and the simplest teaching in Buddhism to be a spiritual person. Not hurting the life of another, not taking what is not given, abstaining from sexual misconduct, refraining from misuse of senses and refraining from self-intoxication through alcohol or drugs are the five precepts. It guides how to be ethical in daily life. Among the participants, nine are Buddhists and all of them are practicing these precepts. Participant 6 quoted as:

"I thoroughly say that we need to protect the five precepts. I don't like to cheat others. I remember once we removed an entire stock of cloths that were imported from India, due to poor quality. It was a huge cost but rather than deceiving the customer, I prefer to bear that cost" (Participant #6)

Not hurting others' life reflect altruism and sympathy. Not taking what is not given and refraining from the misuse of senses reflect integrity. Likewise, all the precepts display values that are important to behave as an ethical person.

Participant 7 who does not believe in religions did not use the term five precepts, but it was clear that she tries to be ethical as much as possible. Just as other participants, she also admires spiritual values such as integrity and honesty therefore she practices them accordingly.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have compared and contrasted with similar studies and observed that, mainly three scholars have identified the majority of the findings of this research. Fry [9] has identified the similar values that this study has identified. Integrity, trust, endurance, altruism, humility and gratitude are exactly similar

with the values identified in this study. Fry [9], has included all these values under two components namely, hope/faith and altruistic love, whereas all the above values and hope has identified as separate spiritual values in this study. Furthermore, he has identified the value "compassion" that is similar to the sympathy in this particular study.

After Fry, Reave [10], has conducted a study that solely focused on the values and behaviors of spiritual leader success. She has identified integrity and humility as spiritual leadership values. Reave [10], has also identified another value as honest communication, but in this study, it is identified as a practice of spiritual values. Reave further expressed that in addition to the values she found, hope/faith and gratitude that Fry [9] identified can also treat as spiritual values.

Ngungiri [3], one of the recent researchers on Kenyan woman spirituality has identified four lessons of spirituality. Among them, 'beneficence' is related to altruism, but it is narrower than altruism. In addition, Ngungiri [3], has further explained that hope is also a lesson understood from Kenyan women spirituality.

Accordingly, among the ten values that has found in this study, nine values have been already identified in previous studies. The value 'sympathetic joy (Muditha)' was not found in any study that has been referred when conducting this study.

When considering the practice of the spiritual values, seven practices have been identified in this study. Among them, six practices are similar to the spiritual leadership practices that has been identified by Reave [10]. Demonstrating respect for others' values, treating others fairly, expressing care and concern, listening responsively, appreciating the contributions of others, engaging in reflective practices are the practices that has been identified by Reave [10]. Among them four participants have exactly similar to the practices that have been found in this study. Reave's [10], sixth practice, 'reflective practices' include the practice of self-examination, so it also partially related to the finding of this study. Treating others fairly was not found in this study, as a spiritual practice. Honest communication with self and others, which have been identified as a value by Reave [10], is identified as a practice of the spiritual values including integrity, truthfulness and forgiveness.

In addition to Reave's [10], findings, this study has identified a new practice of spiritual values, which is taught in Buddhism, namely 'protecting five precepts'. This practice has not found in any other referred study when conducting this study.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to explore spiritual values and practices among the women business leaders in Small and Medium Enterprises in Sri Lanka. The study found ten common spiritual values and seven spiritual practices among the women small and medium entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka. Among the ten spiritual values that has been identified in this study, sympathetic joy was a unique value found in Sri Lankan context. The meaning of sympathetic joy is finding happiness in the good fortune of others which is a major teaching in Buddhism. Among the seven practices in spirituality, protecting five precepts in Buddhist teaching was another distinct finding of the study. It is also a fundamental practice that comes from Buddhism, which is a self-determination to prevent from doing harm to one's self and others. This practice was highly adhered by women business leaders in the sample as their main ethical practice. The foundation for all the other practices derived through this practice.

The sample could be divided into two groups based on the extend of the application of identified values and practices. Family background and religious background has played a significant role on the spiritual values and practices of the two groups. First group consisted with two participants who were more materialistic oriented, and the spiritual values and practices applied by them are at a lower level compared to the other group. These participants had issues regarding their employee loyalty. Their labour turnover is very high. The second group consisted with 8 participants who are more spiritual oriented compared to the first group. The participants in the second group have a high trust and sympathy towards their employees. Hence, they maintain friendly and close relationships with them. As a result, employee loyalty and retention are at a satisfactory level.

The findings of this study implied that growing spiritual values among women leaders and practicing them contributes merits in terms enhanced support and loyalty towards the organization, irrespective of the type of their businesses. Also, women business leader can be a role model to spread those values and

practices among the other employees. Therefore, it is recommended to promote organizational culture which is led by business leaders to inculcate more spiritual values and avenues to practice them.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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