

## Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study Buddhist psychological traits for sustainable employee engagement. Qualitative research applying documentary study and in-depth interview was used for the research design. The key informants consisted of employees' best practices who were working in Bangkok using purposive sampling to obtain 15 employees. The research instruments were record form and in-depth interview schedule. Content analysis and analytic of induction were used for data analysis. Results indicated that there were 8 aspects of Buddhist psychological traits that consisted of being in good heart, good speech, being sociable, behavioral consistency, conscientiousness, optimistic, adaptability and friendliness. These eight aspects were divided into two variables which were (1) bases of sympathy and (2) the big five personalities. These two variables have been developed as the key performance indicator for development employees who were working in Bangkok in order to encourage them for having sustainable employee engagement which be consisted of self-passion, self-dedication, self-evaluation and self-development. Therefore, Buddhist psychological traits can use for the encouragement of sustainable employee engagement which was appropriate to the Thai context. This study, result from qualitative study was also generating the grounded theory for further quantitative study.

**Keywords:** Bases of Sympathy; Big Five Personality; Buddhist Psychology; Grounded Theory; Mixed Method Research

### Introduction

Employee engagement has become a real concern for most organizations, however, in current world of changes, it is not enough to have only engagement but also must be sustainable. Thailand is currently undergoing major changes and engaging to be 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution) that concentrating on digitalization. All organizations prepare to change in many

aspects for survival or to transform the businesses to match of the world of changes. Human Resource is one of the key areas in competitive advantage to make business survival. Therefore, it is important to drive the businesses with the development of potentiality of human resource to achieve the extraordinary results, to increase competitive advantages, to make the profitability and to be sustainability. The individual differences, knowing the personality traits is very important to let people know the difference characteristics of each other in the organization. It emphasizes the difference of each people and behaviors of them, and it is an important factor in forming employee engagement, also an accurate predictor of whether or not an individual is likely to be engaged (Aon Hewitt, 2015). Currently, the most powerful personality trait is studied by Costa and McCrae called Big Five Personality Traits Theory or OCEAN theory (McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P.T. Jr, 2007) which consisted of Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. In order make the sustainable employee engagement, the integration of Buddhist principle that called in Pali, Saṅgahavatthu Four (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016), meaning of bases of sympathy as the fundamental traits of employees that consists of Dāna (Good Heart), Piyaṇācā (Good Speech), Atthacariyā (Good Sociable), and Samānattatā (Good Consistency Behavior). In addition, the practitioner world, the leader is the one key driver for employee engagement. The leadership can create trust between followers and leader. The leader account for 70% affecting the level of employee engagement (William A. Kahn, 1990). There is one Dhamma principle related to create trust that be called in Pali, Kalyāṇamitta (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016) principle, it is the qualities of good friend and can create trust to the follower. Kalyāṇamitta consists of seven elements; Piya (be lovable), Garu (be respectable), Bhāvanīyo (be admirable), Vattā Ca (be good counsellor), Vacanakkhamo (be patient listener), Gambhīrañca Kathaṁ Kattā (be good listener) and No Caṭṭhāne Niyojaye (be good advisor). Harvard Business Review found that the factor most likely to bring success is having high level of employee engagement which accounted for 71% (Harvard, 2013). Employee Engagement is very important for organizations (Schaufeli et.al., 2002) Therefore, the employee engagement was studied by many researchers; Schaufeli, W.B., & Bakker (2006); vigor, dedication, absorption. However, to make it sustainable, Iddhipāda Four (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016) was investigated as the Buddhist principle called in Pali. Iddhipāda Four is the ways of accomplishment which is consisted of four elements; Chanta (Self-passion), Vīriya (Self-dedication), Citta (Self-evaluation) and Vīmaṅsā (Self-development). Gallup Organization (Gallup, 2013), the study found that Thailand had the engaged employees 14%, not engaged 84% and actively disengaged 2%. While, lack of engagement can bring absenteeism; less work; less dedication; intention to quit; no organizational citizenship (Alan M. Saks, 2006). In sum, there are no research had been conducted

the integration of Buddhist traits and psychological personality traits to enhance the sustainable employee engagement in Thailand context in this era. This is a paradigm shift that moving forward from employee engagement to be sustainable employee engagement with composited with Dhamma well-being as base.

## **Research Objectives**

The 3 objectives of this research were 1) to study Buddhist principles or concepts and personality traits theory for sustainable employee engagement, 2) to develop causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist Psychological Traits, 3) to validate and propose Development of Causal Model for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Buddhist Psychological Traits.

## **Literature Review**

In current world of changes, the business must be survival and it is important that the learn the individual differences of personality traits of each people in the organization and how to do the business sustainable not just only for survival. The previous research results showed that personality has been proven to significantly influence employee engagement (Kartono, Hilmiana & Wa Ode Zusnita Muizu, 2017). The base of sympathy, Buddhist principle called in Pali that Saṅgahavatthu Four. It is the Buddhist principle that can be inner traits of human being, it is the fundamental traits of Thailand context. It can apply in the social life for connecting with others by giving without any return, making the people in sociable or organization living together with happiness, be virtues making for group integration, voluntary contribution to the community. Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto) (2015) stated that Saṅgahavatthu is the dhamma principle to bring the sharing, cooperative, unity in the community. In order to have a harmonious relationship or engagement among the members of community or organizations, each member should have the certain principle regarding the services that are to be rendered to others which Saṅgahavatthu Four principle aims to render service to others. Saṅgahavatthu Four consists of Dana (Good Heart), Piyavaca (Good Speech), Atthacariya (Good Sociable), and Samanattata (Good Consistency Behavior). The most venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dharmmacitto), (1997) stated Good Heart is giving helps to others linked to have engaging mind with others. The most venerable Prarajsuthiyanmongkol (Jaran Thitithammo) (1999) stated Good Speech is speaking with others to love, not speaking with others to hate and not speak with slander. In addition, the most venerable Prarajsuthiyanmongkol (Jaran Thitithammo) (1999) said that Good Sociable is behaving good things for sociable, not be useless and be patient in doing for sociable is a part of this principle. Lastly, the most venerable Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A.

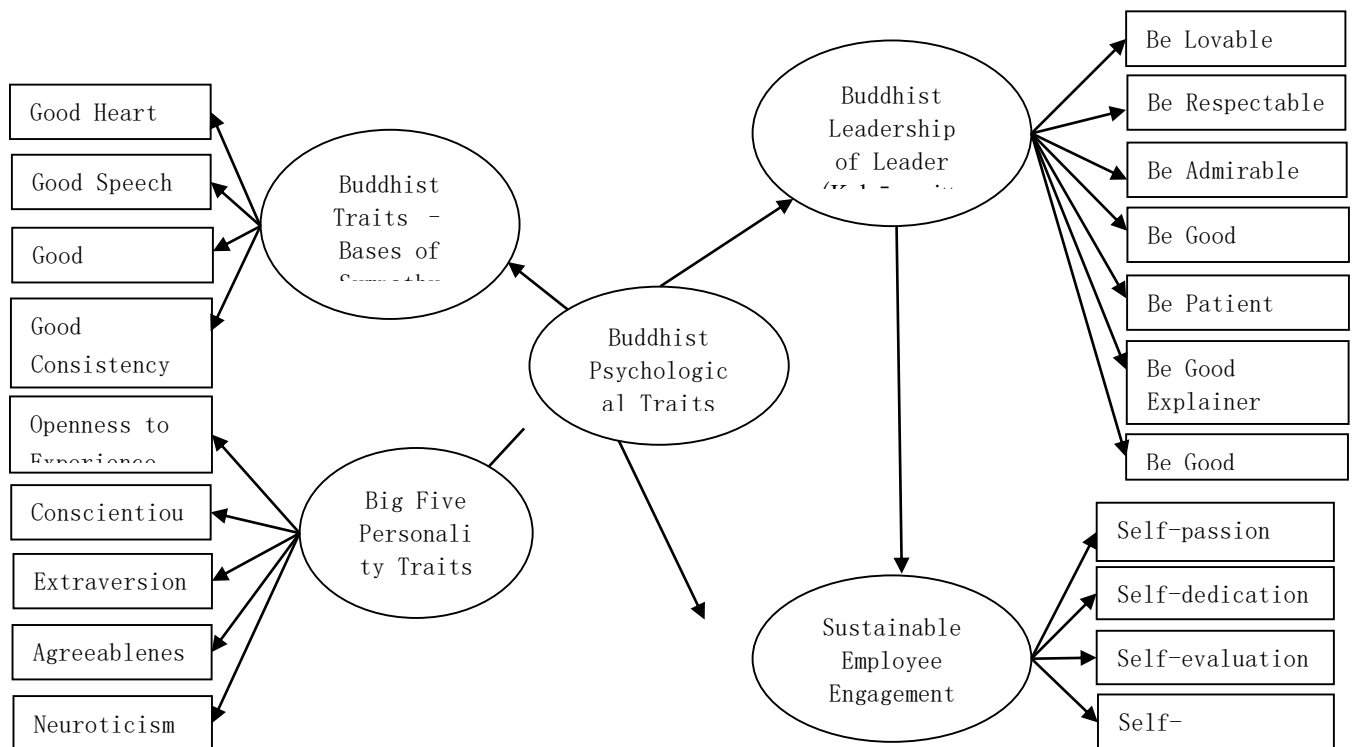
Payutto) (2013) described that Good Consistency Behavior is participation, behaving consistently and impartially; behaving equitably toward all people, not taking advantage of them; sharing in their happiness and suffering, equal treatment, getting along with others, unity and cooperative under same goals or directions, including acknowledging problems and participating in resolving them for the common good.

In addition, it is necessary to know the personality traits of the employees that currently the most powerful personality traits are Big Five Personality Traits Theory which studied by Costa and McCrae (2007) which consisted of Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Open to Experience is trait for people who like to learn new things and enjoy new experiences including imaginative. Conscientiousness is traits for people who have a high degree of self-discipline, direction to be goal-oriented, intention to work till successful. Extraversion is traits for people who interact with others, be talkative, building connection. Agreeableness is traits for people who has cooperative and compassionate and believes that other people help them in return, be friendly and ease to adjust, emphasizing on teamwork and sympathetic. Neuroticism is traits for people who bases on one's emotional stability, no reasonable and cannot control his emotion. It can evaluate the work efficiency and effectiveness, the teamwork evaluation, the leadership evaluation, moreover, the forecast of relationship of employee engagement (Prapaipan Sripan 2012, Ozgur Ongore 2014).

Moreover, in the practitioner world, the leader is one key factor that be the driver of employee engagement. The leader account for 70% affecting the level of employee engagement, it can help to create or increase the engagement of employee (Molraudee Saratun, 2016). The leader who cares about the needs of employees, it can help to increase the engagement of employee (William A. Kahn, 1990). There are many leadership characteristics in the research study, however, importantly, the trust is very crucial between leader and followers. In terms of Buddhism, there is one Dhamma principle that can build the trust and can be leadership traits, called in Pali Kalyāṇamitta (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016). Kalyāṇamitta is the qualities of good friend. It can be the leadership traits which consists of seven elements; Piyo (be lovable), Garu (be respectable), Bhāvanīyo (be admirable), Vattā Ca (be good counsellor), Vacanakkhamo (be patient listener), Gambhīrañca Kathaṃ Kattā (be good listener) and No Caṭṭhāne Niyojaye (be good advisor). Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) (2010) described that Kalyāṇamitta is having a good friend who is a person or social environment that is helpful to one's life development, seeking out sources of wisdom and good examples.

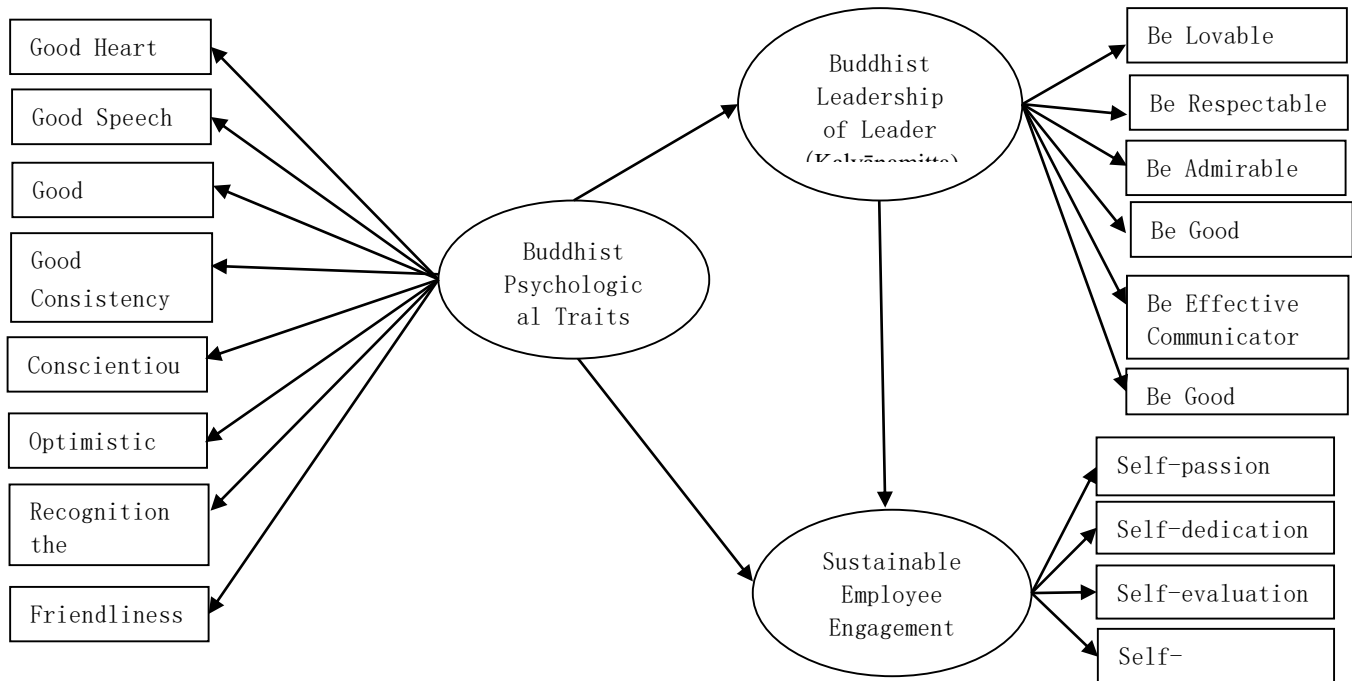
The engaged employee can be measured by many researchers. The employee engagement have evaluated by vigor, dedication, absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker ,2006). While, May et.al.

(2004) studied engagement and found that the engagement elements can be described three factors, physical factor in the form of energy used to carry out the work; emotional factor shown by the dedication of employee; and mind factor in the form of employee's absorption in his or her work till forgets the things happened around he or she. "The engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm, (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012). However, in order to make it sustainable, the employee engagement can be measured by Buddhist principles called in Pali Iddhipāda Four which is the way to accomplishment and be investigated in this study. Iddhipāda Four consists of Chanta (Self-passion), Vīriya (Self-dedication), Citta (Self-evaluation) and Vīmaṅsā (Self-development). The summary, the conceptual framework can be illustrated as below Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework (from documentary search)





**Figure 2:** Research Framework from Field Study (In-depth Interview)

## Operational Definitions in this Research

Buddhist Traits of Bases of Sympathy means the employees have the personality to make well coordination among all parties, stay with love and good heart to each other, helpful integration among people in organization. There are four elements 1) Good Heart is giving; sacrificing, sharing his own things with others always welcome to teach jobs, helping others what they can do and fully support all activities in organization, self-sacrifice for public (voluntarily mind), giving encouragement to the colleagues; 2) Good Speech is speaking positive toward the organization, always say thank you and complimentary words to your colleagues for their success or cheer up for motivation, speaking with nice and polite words; 3) Good Sociable is performing actions that are useful to the organizations, willing to help the organization's activities coordinating with leaders, supervisors or colleagues to do work, and be patient to do work with others in the organization, understanding the feeling of others and joint feeling empathy with colleagues; 4) Good Consistency Behavior is behaving consistently and impartially manner, being a good

performer or role model in the organization such as coming to work on time, behaving equitably towards all co-workers or colleagues, behaving in the right place, right time and right position.

Personality Traits of Applied Big Five Personality Traits (Holding Other Hearts) is the personality traits that can make others to understand each other's, learning the individual differences among groups. There are four traits which consisted of 1) Conscientiousness is the employees have the self-consciousness, self-discipline, completion works on time with timeframe, have vigor and motivation to work, being proud to work in this organization, 2) Optimistic is the employees always have positive thinking toward organization and departments, be pleased with the organizational success, being happy with current work and current organization, be proud to be member in the organization, accepting and complying all objectives, 3) Recognition of Differences (Adaptability) is the employees accept the changes, listen and accept the good comments of colleagues, willing to comply the new changes, opened-mind to the unexpected situations, ready to do what have never been done before, welcome for the advices receiving from others, 4) Friendliness is the employees have trust and good intention toward others, be glad to help others, feeling of "We and I", go together.

Buddhist Leadership Traits (Kalyāṇamitta) of Leader is the Buddhist principle that can be described the personality traits of leader who can enhance the sustainable employee engagement. There are six elements that the leader should have 1) Be Lovable is the leader always care the employees, gives the chance to the employees expressing their opinions, the employees can consult with the leader and be relied on; 2) Be Respectable is the leader is a role model of employees, has the consistent behavior and impartially, giving respect to other; 3) Be Admirable is the leader being praiseworthy person, acts equal treatment, be able to tolerate frustration and stress, dedicating himself; 4) Be Good Counsellor is the leader is careful with problem-solving, opened-mind to change, optimistic, sincerity to help others and giving the recommendations; 5) Be Effective Communicator is the leader is good listener and explainer, listens the employees for all stories, be patient to listen both positive and negative words, speaks a good speech of encouragement and gives compliments words, expresses the kindness and sincerity; 6) Be Good Advisor is leader being visionary, knowledgeable, introduces the good things and guidance, leads the employees to behave good and positive directions.

Sustainable Employee Engagement is characterized of four elements; 1) Self-passion describes that the employees love their works or jobs, feeling that their works are important; love their organization that they are working with and be proud to be part of organization's success, talk positive toward their organization; 2) Self-dedication describes that the employees commit to work hard with their fully capabilities, dedicate themselves for achievement, give the extra miles

for working without any requests, working with objectives and targets, working with challenged jobs and complete jobs with timeframe; 3) Self-evaluation describes that the employees regularly search themselves for the improvement points, accept other's recommendations and feedback without any dispute, always monitor other's work performance for improvement and accomplishment; 4) Self-development describes that the employees continue to learn more on new things, new jobs, seek new knowledge and challenged jobs for more skills, always develop themselves.

Buddhist Psychological Traits means the integrated traits between Buddhist Traits of Winning Personal Heart and Personality Traits of Holding Other Hearts. Its integration is became the unique traits that can be identified the personality traits of employees who have their uniqueness characteristic of Sustainable Employee Engagement in current era and in Bangkok context.

### **Research Methodology**

This research was Mixed Methods Research that use quantitative method to explain qualitative results then analyzed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). After reviewing the documentary, the conceptual framework was constructed. Then, the first step, the researcher started the qualitative method for in-depth interview by purposive sampling, interviewing of 15 key informants. The researcher classified into 3 groups which were 1) the venerable monks who are experts in Buddhism, 2) the academic experts in industrial and organizational psychology field and 3) the top management who managing in human management. The instrument was the developed questionnaire by Semi-Structured Interview, conducted face-to-face in-depth interview for all 15 key informants. Then the researcher implemented the data analysis by the predetermined lists, classifying, categorizing the data and ordering the data according to the guideline of questions, and interpreting the interview data. The answers were evaluated, verified and constructed the research model.

The second step, the quantitative method, the instrument of this research was survey, by using developed questionnaire that constructed from the field study of in-depth interview. The researcher constructed 112 questions using 5 points Likert Scale ranging from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. The questions were constructed from the defined operational terms used in this research and verified and proved Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) by 5 experts. The researcher conducted the try-out for 30 participants in order to ensure the consistency of the constructed questionnaire and checked the reliability with Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.947. Sample selection was probability sampling by using two-stage simple random sampling method. The sampling group was employees who are working in the private firms which have



more than 200 employees and located in Bangkok. Data collection Then the researcher analyse the data by using Lisrel to validate the model. The researcher distributed 600 questionnaires with the total returned questionnaire of 540 respondents.

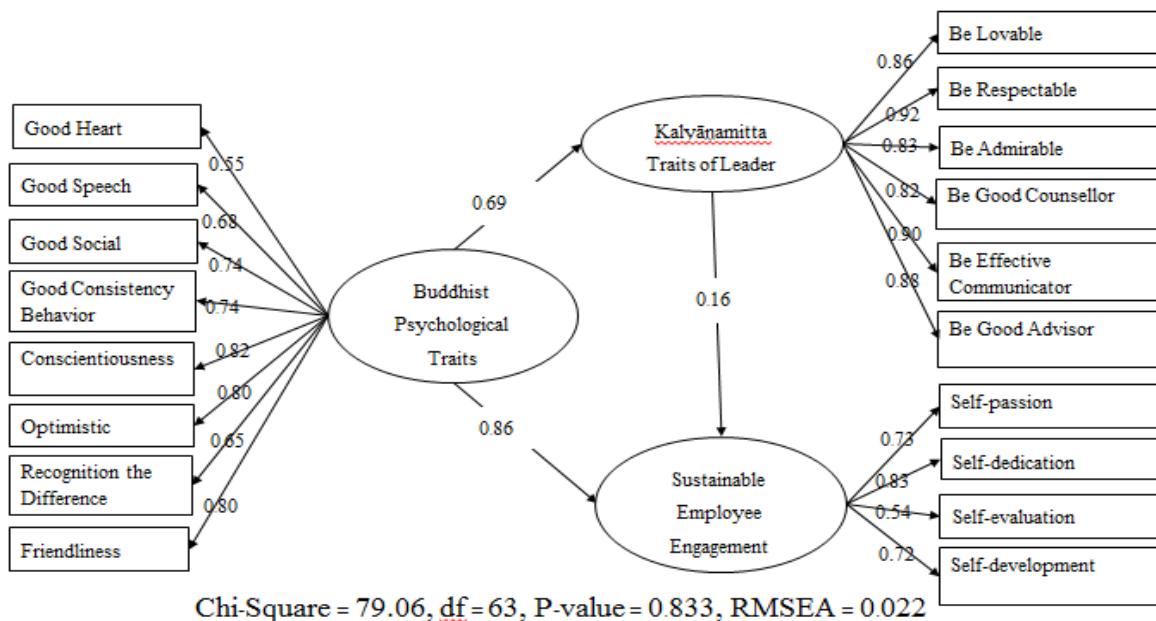
## Results

The demographic data information showed that the respondents of 60.40% were female and 39.60% were male. Majority age of respondents were between 25-45 years old accounted for 73.70%. The education level were bachelor degree accounted 65.90%. Most of the respondents were single accounted for 58.70%. The respondents were officer level accounted for 73.90%. The results of this study were 2 investigated models. Model 1, Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement with by Buddhist Leadership (Kalyāṇamitta) Traits of Leader as Mediator. This model composed of 2 endogenous latent variables and 1 exogenous latent variable with total of 18 observed variables. The endogenous latent variables were consisted of 4 observed variables of Sustainable Employee Engagement; Self-passion, Self-dedication, Self-evaluation and Self-development, and 6 observed variables of Kalyāṇamitta Traits of Leader as Mediator; Be Lovable, Be Respectable, Be Admirable, Be Good Counsellor, Be Effective Communicator and Be Good Advisor. The exogenous latent variable was Buddhist Psychological Traits that an integration of Buddhist principle and personality traits, there were 8 observed variables; Good Heart, Good Speech, Good Sociable, Good Consistency Behavior, Conscientiousness, Optimistic, Recognition of Difference (Adaptability) and Friendliness. Model 2, Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Applied Big Fiver Personality Traits (Holding Other Hearts) as Mediator. This model composed of 2 endogenous latent variables and 1 exogenous latent variable with total of 12 observed variables. The endogenous latent variables were consisted of 4 observed variables of Sustainable Employee Engagement; Self-passion, Self-dedication, Self-evaluation and Self-development and 4 observed variables of Holding Other Hearts as Mediator; Conscientiousness, Optimistic, Recognition of Difference (Adaptability) and Friendliness. The exogenous latent variable was Bases of Sympathy, there were 4 observed variables; Good Heart, Good Speech, Good Sociable and Good Consistency Behavior.

The results were illustrated as below Figure 3 and Figure 4. The results of goodness of fit test of the developed model, these two models were congruence with the empirical data.

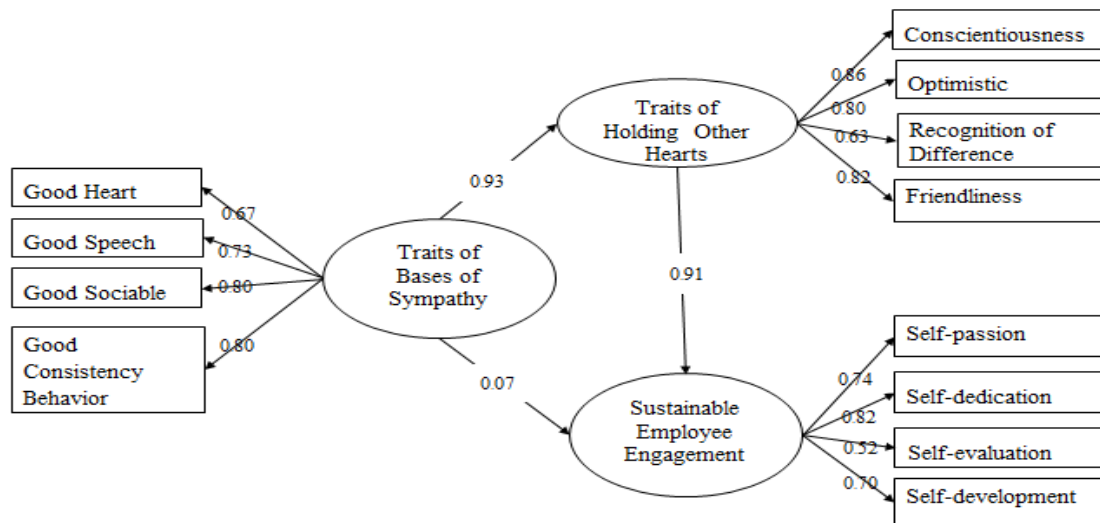
The findings of goodness of fit test the developed model, Model 1, Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Kalyāṇamitta Traits of Leader as Mediator. The result was found that this model was congruence with the empirical data (Chi-Square = 79.06, degree of freedom = 63, P-value = 0.833, RMSEA = 0.022, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.022)

at .01 level of significance. Kalyāṇamitta Traits of Leader can be explained Buddhist Psychological Traits at 47% while Sustainable Employee Engagement can be explained Buddhist Psychological Traits at 95%. However, the Buddhist Leadership - Kalyāṇamitta Traits of Leader is not significant to be the mediator.



**Figure 3: SEM Analysis of Model 1**

The findings of goodness of fit test the developed research model, Model 2, Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Applied Big Five Personality Traits (Holding Other Hearts) as Mediator. The result was found that this model was congruence with the empirical data (Chi-Square = 43.87, degree of freedom = 36, P-value = 0.17, RMSEA = 0.022, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.020) at .01 level of significance. Personality Trait of Holding Other Hearts (Applied Big Five Personality Traits) can be explained Traits of Bases of Sympathy by 86% and Sustainable Employee Engagement can be explained Traits of Bases of Sympathy by 94%.



Chi – Square = 43.87,  $df = 36$ , P-value = 0.1723, RMSEA = 0.020

**Figure 4: SEM Analysis of Model 2**

## Discussion

The study examined the relationship between integrated of Buddhist principle and psychological personality traits of Big Five and Sustainable Employee Engagement, while also examined the mediator by having Buddhist leadership characteristics. This research tested 2 models to know the Buddhist Psychological Traits that can enhance the sustainable employee engagement. Based on finding, these tested 2 models were congruence with empirical data. Model 1, Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Kalyāṇamitta Traits of Leader as Mediator. This model the leadership is not significant and support to predict the Sustainable Employee Engagement. The employees have their own set of traits that consists of 8 elements, they can be Sustainable Employee Engagment without their leader. Model 2, Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Applied Big Five Personality Traits (Holding Other Hearts) as Mediator. This model, the employees have their fundamental traits of Bases of Sympathy and if they have more traits of Holding Other Hearts, the employees will have Sustainable Employee Engagement. These two models are the developed model by integrated Buddhist Psychological Traits and can lead to Sustainable Employee Engagement.

This research can conclude that Buddhist Psychological Traits can be integrated between the traits of Bases of Sympathy which is the fundamental trait by Buddhist principle and trait of Holding Other Hearts which is the psychological trait of applied Big Five Personality Traits.

The Traits of Bases of Sympathy composes of; Good Heart, the employees give, share his own things with others, always welcome to teach jobs, helping others what they can do and fully support all activities in organization, self-sacrifice for public (voluntarily mind), giving encouragement to the colleagues; Good Speech, the employees speak positive toward the organization, always say thank you and complimentary words to your colleagues for their success or cheer up for motivation, speaking with nice and polite words; Good Sociable, the employees perform actions that are useful to the organizations, willing to help the organization's activities coordinating with leaders, supervisors or colleagues to do work, and be patient to do work with others in the organization, understanding the feeling of others and joint feeling empathy with colleagues; Good Consistency Behavior, the employees behave consistently and impartially manner, being a good performer or role model in the organization such as coming to work on time, behaving equitably towards all co-workers or colleagues, behaving in the right place, right time and right position. The psychological traits of applied Big Five Personality Traits (Traits of Holding Other Hearts) composes of; Conscientiousness, the employees have the self-consciousness, self-discipline, completion works on time with timeframe, have vigor and motivation to work, being proud to work in this organization; Optimistic, the employees always have positive thinking toward organization and departments, be pleased with the organizational success, be happy with current work and current organization, be proud to be member in the organization, accepting and complying all objectives, Recognition of Differences (Adaptability), the employees accept the changes, listen and accept the good comments of colleagues, willing to comply the new changes, opened-mind to the unexpected situations, ready to do what have never been done before, welcome the advice receiving from others; and Friendliness, the employees have trust, sincerity and good intention toward others, be glad to help others, feeling of "We and I", go together.

The Sustainable Employee Engagement is the employees themselves have their inner self factors, there are four predictors; Self-passion, the employees love their works or jobs, feeling that their works are important; love their organization that they are working with and be proud to be part of organization's success, talk positive toward their organization; Self-dedication, the employees commit to work hard with their fully capabilities, dedicate themselves for achievement, give the extra miles for working without any requests, working with objectives and targets, working with challenged jobs and complete jobs with timeframe; Self-evaluation, the employees regularly search themselves for the improvement points, accept other's recommendations and feedback without any dispute, always monitor other's work performance for improvement and accomplishment; Self-development, the employees continue to learn more

on new things, new jobs, seek new knowledge and challenged jobs for more skills, always develop themselves.

### **Practical Implications**

First, in terms of Human Resource Development (HRD) and Organization Development (OD) practitioners, this findings can be a direction for human capital development and career development, develop the learning program for new joiner or current employee, a guideline of selection and hiring people in the organization, establishment of mid-term and long-term strategies to achieve high levels of performance in the workplace. Second, while working as a leaders or managers, it is a tool how to cultivate the engaged employees for better performance of their individual and as a team. The managers can use as guidelines to manage the employees or followers and know their individual differences. Third, employees himself or herself, he or she can strengthen their performance whenever in any position level or any organization. They can apply to use in their daily working life and achieve the individual outcome and goals, improve their performance without rely on others. Enhancing employees to be knowledge employees – knowing themselves, knowing others, knowing community and finally deliver to the sustainable development.

### **The future research**

First, this study was investigated the quantitative research that tested with the empirical data, however, the research can extend to the future research design such as experimental research design. Second, the sampling was the organizations which more than 200 employees, the different organizations and groups such as small enterprise which lower than 200 employees and the different job group, different organizational context such as technician, teleworker, security guards, government or state enterprise sectors, they have the different characteristics under the cultural differences, therefore, they might make the sustainable employee engagement differences.

### **Conclusion**

The employee engagement is not sufficient studied in the current world of changes, but how cultivate it as sustainability. This research can explain the psychology of personality traits suits with one particular working group in new era. The context in Bangkok can apply the Buddhist principle which can be applied the general terms of use in international businesses and not specific of Thailand. The study suggests that the inner self of employees which integrated of



Buddhist principle traits and psychological personality traits is very important to let them sustainabl whether they will move to higher position or move to another organizations. The inner self factors can improve their performance and resulting the organizational performance. There are more future research area to study or extent this research.

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