

**To cite this article:** Thiratitsakun, B.; Klomkul, L. (2019). Development of Sustainable Employee Engagement Using Buddhist Psychological Traits. *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences (IJSHS)*, 3(3), 57-70

**Submitted:** June 25, 2019

**Accepted:** November 11, 2019

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT USING BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS**

Bundhita Thiratitsakun<sup>1</sup>

Lamongkorn Klomkul<sup>2</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

The purposes of this research were 1) to study the concept of Buddhist psychological traits and sustainable employee engagement; 2) to develop and propose a model of sustainable employee engagement using Buddhist psychological traits. The research method was the mixed methods research using the quantitative research to extend the qualitative research results. The key informants consisted of employees' best practices who were working in Bangkok using purposive sampling to obtain 15 employees for qualitative research, and two-stage random sampling to obtain 540 employees for quantitative research. The research instruments were in-depth interview schedule and questionnaires. Data analysis consisted of content analysis and analytic of induction for qualitative data, and statistical analysis using SPSS and LISREL were analyzed for quantitative data. The research results were as follows: 1) there were 8 aspects of Buddhist psychological traits consisted of good heart, good speech, good sociable, good consistency behavior, conscientiousness, optimistic, adaptability and friendliness. These eight aspects were divided into two variables which were (1) bases of sympathy and (2) the big five personality. In addition, sustainable employee engagement were contained in 4 aspects consisted of self-passion, self-dedication, self-evaluation and self-development. 2) Two developed models of sustainable employee engagement using Buddhist psychological traits were fit with empirical data. Results of two models analysis showed that chi-square = 79.06, 43.87; df = 63, 36; p = .83, .17; GFI = .98; .99 AGFI = .96, .97;

---

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand,  
Tel. +66 87 907 1919, E-mail: tbundhita@yahoo.co.uk; research.mcu@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> ASEAN Studies Centre, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand, Tel. +66 92  
251 1212, E-mail: research.mcu@gmail.com

RMSEA=.022, .020, accounting for the variations in sustainable employee engagement = 95.00, 94.00 percent. Therefore, Buddhist psychological traits can use for the encouragement of sustainable employee engagement and it was appropriate to the Thai context.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Employee Engagement, Buddhist Psychological Traits, Big Five Personality

## 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 in Thailand 4.0 that emphasizing more on digitalization and innovation and also engaging to be 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution). All organizations prepare to change in many aspects for survival or to transform the business 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. 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 their behaviors; it can identify the cooperation and lead to the employee engagement. The measurement of personality adjustment for strengthen and increase potentiality (Siruen Kaewkangwan, 2011) 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 sustainable employee engagement, the integration of Buddhist principle that called in Pali, Sangahavatthu Four (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016) as the fundamental traits of employees that consists of Dana (Good Heart), Piyavaca (Good Speech), Atthacariya (Good Sociable), and Samanattata (Good Consistency Behav-

ior) and its personality traits to be Buddhist psychological traits. Moreover, 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 Kalyanamitta (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016) principle, it is the qualities of good friend. Kalyanamitta consists of seven elements; Piyo (be lovable), Garu (be respectable), Bhavaniyo (be admirable), Vatta Ca (be good counsellor), Vacanakkhamo (be patient listener), Gambhiranca Katham Katta (be good listener) and No Catthane Niyojaye (be good advisor). The employee engagement was studied by many researchers; Schaufeli, W.B., & Bakker (2006); vigor, dedication, absorption. However, to make it sustainable, Iddhipada Four (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016) was investigated as the Buddhist principle. Iddhipada Four (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016) consists of Chanta (Self-passion), Viriya (Self-dedication), Citta (Self-evaluation) and Vimangsa (Self-development). In sum, there are no research had been conducted the integration of Buddhist traits and 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.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The two objectives of this research were 1) to study the concept of Buddhist psychological traits and sustainable employee engagement; 2) to develop and propose a model of sustainable employee engagement using Buddhist psychological traits.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

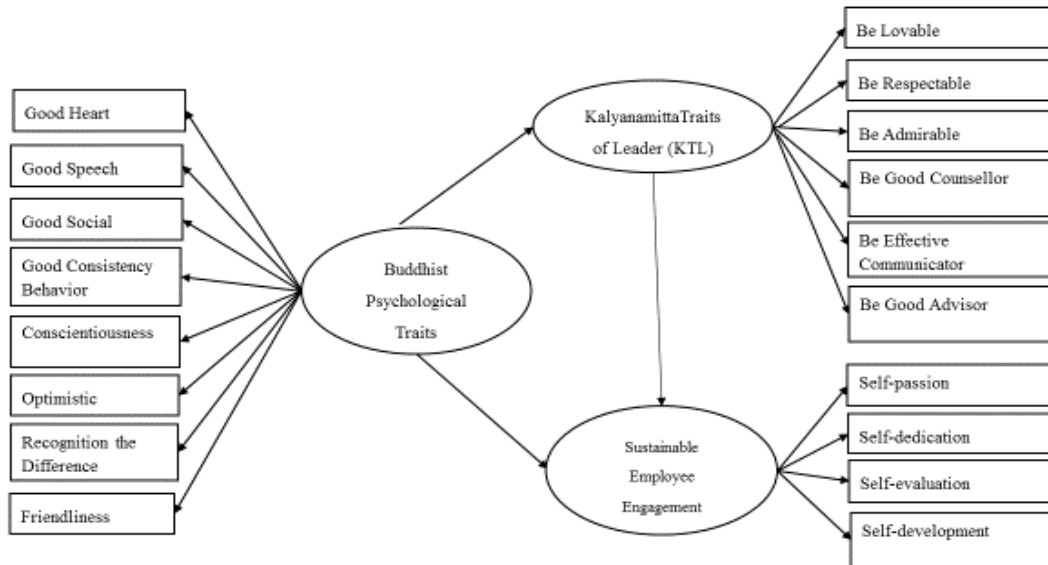
In current world of changes, the business must be survival and it is important that the individual differences of personality traits of each people in the organization and how to do the business sustainable not just only for survival. Sangahavatthu Four is the Buddhist principle that can be inner traits of human being. 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 Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) (2015) stated that Sangahavatthu 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 Sangahavatthu Four principle aims to render service to others. Sangahavatthu 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 Brahmaganabhorn (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.

Moreover, the leader is one factor that be the driver of employee engagement. The leader account for 70% affecting the level of employee engagement, the leader who cares about the needs of employees, it can help to increase the engagement of employee (William A. Kahn, 1990). There is one Dhamma principle that can build trust between leader and followers that be called in Pali Kalyanamitta (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), 2016). Kalyanamitta is the qualities of good friend, consists of seven elements; Piyo (Be Lovable), Garu (Be Respectable), Bhavaniyo (Be Admirable), Vatta Ca (Be Good Counsellor), Vacanakkhamo (Be Patient Listener), Gambhiranca Katham Katta (Be Good Listener) and No Catthane Niyojaye (Be Good Advisor). Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) (2010) described that Kalyanamitta 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. Schaufeli, W.B., & Bakker (2006) described that the employee engagement has vigor, dedication, absorption. 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. However, in order to make it sustainable, the employee engagement can be measured by Buddhist principles called in Pali Iddhipada Four which is the way to accomplishment and be investigated in this study. Iddhipada Four consists of Chanta (Self-passion), Viriya (Self-dedication), Citta (Self-evaluation) and Vimangsa (Self-development). The summary, the conceptual framework can be illustrated as below Figure 1.



**Development of Causal Model for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Buddhist Psychological Traits from field study (in-depth interview)**

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## RESEARCH METHODS

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 selecting purposive sampling, interviewing of 15 key informants who were classified in 3 groups which were 1) the venerable monks who are experts in Buddhism, 2) the academic experts in industrial and organizational psychology field 3) the top management who managing in human management. The instrument was the constructed questionnaire and the researcher conducted face-to-face in-depth interview. 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 questionnaire that constructed from the field study of in-depth interview. The researcher constructed 112 questions using 5 points Likert Scale upon



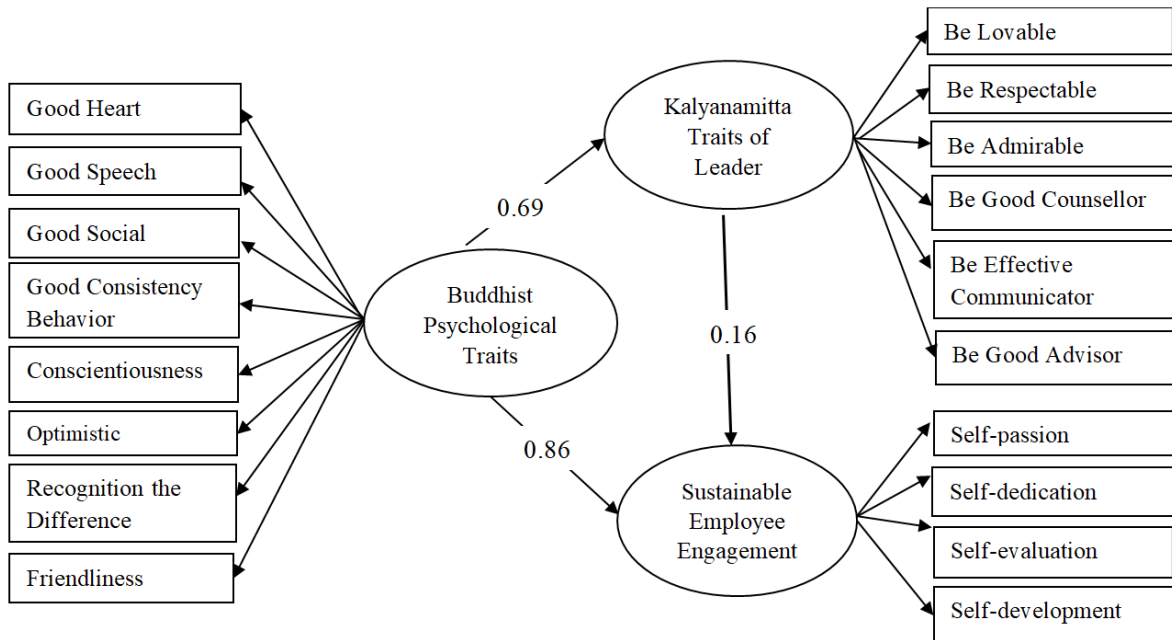
the defined operational terms used in this research and verified and proved Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) by 5 experts. The researcher implemented the try-out for 30 persons in order to ensure the consistency of the constructed questionnaire and checked the reliability with Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.947. The researcher distributed 600 questionnaires with the total returned questionnaire of 540 respondents. The sampling group was employees who are working in the private firms located in Bangkok.

## RESULTS

The qualitative results were as follows: 1) there were 8 aspects of Buddhist psychological traits consisted of good heart, good speech, good sociable, good consistency behavior, conscientiousness, optimistic, adaptability and friendliness. These eight aspects were divided into two variables which were (1) bases of sympathy and (2) the big five personality. In addition, sustainable employee engagement were contained in 4 aspects consisted of self-passion, self-dedication, self-evaluation and self-development.

The quantitative results showed that a causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist Psychological traits by Kalyanamitta traits of leader as mediator which 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 Kalyanamitta 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. 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 of "causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits by Kalyanamitta traits of leader as mediator. The result was found that this model was congruence with the empirical data, Chi-

Square ( $X^2$ ) = 79.06, degree of freedom = 63, P-value = 0.833, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.022, at .01 level of significance respectively. Kalyanamitta traits of leader can be explained Buddhist psychological traits at 47% while sustainable employee engagement can be explained Buddhist psychological traits at 95%.

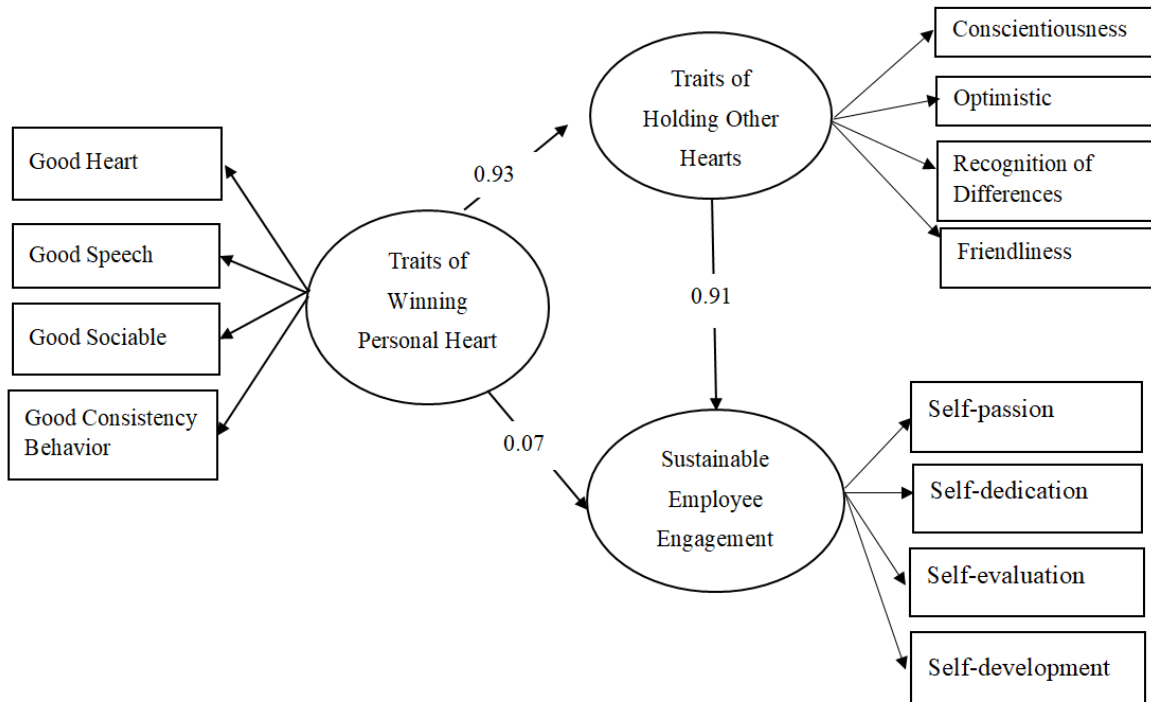


Chi-Square = 79.06, df = 63, P-value = 0.833, RMSEA = 0.022

**Figure 2:** SEM Analysis of the First Model

Result from the first model was fit, but it did not show that Kalyanamitta traits of leader as mediator. Therefore, the second model was modified and the findings of goodness of fit test of the second causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist Psychological traits by holding other hearts as mediator. The result was found that this model fit with empirical data, Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) = 43.87, degree of freedom = 36, P-value = 0.17, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.020, at .01 level of significance. Personality trait of holding other hearts can be explained traits of winning personal heart by 86% and sustainable employee engagement can be explained by 94%.





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

**Figure 3:** SEM Analysis of the Second Model

## DISCUSSIONS

The researcher tested 2 models. The first causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist Psychological Traits by Kalyanamitta traits of leader as mediator is congruence with the empirical data but it shown that Kalyanamitta traits of leader was not significant as mediator between Buddhist psychological traits and sustainable employee engagement. If the employees have their own set of Buddhist psychological traits that consisted of 8 characteristics; Good Heart, Good Speech, Good Sociable, Good Consistency Behavior, Conscientiousness, Optimistic, Recognition of Differences and Friendliness, they can be sustainable engaged employee. A Kalyanamitta trait of leader as the role of leader is not essential as the driver to enhance sustainable employee engagement.

The most powerful model is the second causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist Psychological traits by holding other hearts as mediator. This model indicated that trait of holding other hearts was significant as mediator between traits of winning personal heart and sustainable employee engagement. Traits of winning personal heart consisted of Good Heart, Good Speech, Good So-

cial and Good Consistency Behavior which was congruence with Pannatorn Thienchaipurk (2009) the most important elements that affected to the positive organizational commitment were good speech and good sociable, on the other hands good heart and good equality manner are moderately build positive organizational commitment. Traits of holding other hearts consisted of Conscientiousness, this was congruence with previous research of Nayyar Raza Zaidi et.al, (2013), Macey and Schneider (2008) that the high conscientiousness, higher employee engagement; Optimistic, this was congruence with previous research of Dana Arakawa & Margaret Greenberg, 2007; Recognition of Differences, this was congruence with Lucy McGee, 2006; and Friendliness which is first finding from grounded work. If the employees who has their own fundamental traits of Buddhist principle – Traits of winning personal heart by having Good Heart, Good Speech, Good Sociable and Good Consistency Behavior and they have another psychological traits of Conscientiousness, Optimistic, Recognition of Difference and Friendliness, this integration leads to sustainable employee engagement that consists of Self-passion, Self-dedication, Self-improvement and Self-development. Self-passion, the results of the study are in congruence with the findings of some of the previous studies of Alan M. Saks (2006) that the engaged employees deliver better outcome with positive attitude towards the organization and its values. While Arnold B Bakker (2012) claimed that if the employees have the opportunities to develop their skills and abilities, they may increase their work engagement because they can personally grow at work and can take on new challenging tasks. Self-dedication was congruence with Schaufeli & Bakker (2006) claimed that the engaged employees, they have dedication that the employees has inspiration, and pride, the sacrifice of energy, thoughts, and the time to reach success in achieving the goal. Self-evaluation, the results of the study is congruence with the findings of some of the previous studies of IES (2003) that engaged employees work actively to make things better. Self-development, the result of the study was congruence with the findings of Alan M. Saks (2006) that the engaged employees normally recognize the importance of their growth and development.

## CONCLUSION

This research can conclude that the Buddhist psychological traits can be integrated the trait of winning personal heart which is the fundamental trait by Buddhist principle and trait of holding other heart which is the psychological trait as significant mediator. This Buddhist psychological trait can be predicted the sustainable employee engagement. The winning personality traits 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 holding other heart trait compose 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. These Buddhist psychological traits can lead to sustainable employee engagement that the employees themselves have their own self concerns, 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. It can be concluded and shown that this is causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits.

## REFERENCES

Alan M. Saks. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*. Vol.21. Iss.7: 600-619.

Andrzej A. Huczynski and David A. Buchanan. (2013). *Organizational Behavior*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. United Kingdom: Pearson Education.

Aon Hewitt. (2015). *Trends in Global Employee Engagement: Making Engagement Happen*. AON Hewitt Report, 2015, p.30.

Arnold B Bakker, Maria Tims and Daantje Derks. (2012). *Proactive personality and job performance: The role of job crafting and work engagement*. *Human Relations*: p.1373.

Dana Arakawa & Margaret Greenberg. (2007). Optimistic managers and their influence on productivity and employee engagement in a technology organization: Implications for coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review*. Vol. 2 No. 1, March, 78-89.

IES (2003) cited in Dilys Robinson, Sarah Perryman & Sue Hayday. (2004). *The Drivers of Employee Engagement, Institute for Employment Studies*. British Cataloguing-in-Publication Data: p.6.

Lucy McGee. (2006). cited in Andrzej A. Huczynski & David A. Buchanan, *Organizational Behavior*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. United Kingdom: Pearson Education, 2013).

Macey and Schneider (2008) cited in Schaufeli, W.B. (2013). *What is engagement?* In C. Truss, K. Alfes, R. Delbridge, A. Shantz, & E. Soane (Eds.), *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P.T. Jr. (2007). Brief Version of the NEO-PI-3 (Electronic Version). *Journal of Individual Differences*: 28.

Nayyar Raza Zaidi et.al. (2013). The Big Five Personality Traits and Their Relationship with Work Engagement among Public Sector University Teachers of Lahore. *African Journal of Business Management*. Vol.7 (15).

Pannatorn Thienchaipurk. (2009). *An Application of Sangahavatthu IV for Creation of Organization Commitment: A Case Study of Bangkok Hospital*. Master of Arts (Public Administration). Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto). (2015). *Dictionary of Buddhism, Pramuantham Version, 31<sup>st</sup> Edition*. Bangkok: Palitham Printing.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2013). *Son Nak – Son Tit, Chewit Phra – Chewit Phut*. Bangkok: Palitham Printing.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2010). *A Constitution for Living, 120<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Bangkok: Sahadhammika Co.,Ltd.

Phra Rajsuthiyanmongkol (Jaran Thitithammo). (1999). *Buddhaloyi: Buddhist Principles and Changes of Life*. Bangkok: Thurakit Kaona.

Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dhammacitto). (1997). *Buddhist Administrative and Management*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Printing.

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto). (2016). *Dictionary of Buddhism: Pramuantham Version 38<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Bangkok: Palitham Printing.

Schaufeli et.al. cited in Richa Chaudhary et.al. (2002). Relationships between Occupational Self Efficacy, Human Resource Development Climate, and Work Engagement. *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*. 2012, Vol.18 Iss 7/8, 370-383.

Schaufeli, W.B., & Bakker, A.B. (2006). A Measurement of Work Engagement with a Short Questionnaire, A Cross-National Study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*. Vol.66, 4, 701-716.

Sriruen Kaewkangwan. (2011). *Personality Theory*. Bangkok: Mor Chaw Ban Print.

William A. Kahn. (1990). Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 33. Iss:4.