

Development of a Causal Model for Sustainable Employee Engagement with Buddhist Psychological Traits

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Received : march 29, 2019 Revised : April 1, 2019 Accepted : April 23, 2019

Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to study Buddhist concepts and psychological traits theory for sustainable employee engagement; 2) to develop the causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits and; 3) to validate and propose the causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits. Mixed methods research applying quantitative methods to extend qualitative results was used for research design. The qualitative method used the in-depth interview of 15 key informants for the confirmation of the research framework. For quantitative method, the survey using the constructed questionnaires was used for data collection with the respondents of 540 employees who were working in Bangkok. Model was validated for the goodness of fit test by LISREL. The findings of goodness of fit test for the developed models, the result found that the model fit with the empirical data, Chi-Square (χ^2) = 79.06, degree of freedom = 63, P-value = 0.833, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.022, accounting for the variations in sustainable employee engagement at 95 percent.

Keywords : Buddhist Psychological Traits, Sustainable Employee Engagement, Causal Model

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 for future business survival and growth. Apart from being member of AEC, Thailand is currently undergoing major changes and engaging in Thailand 4.0 or 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution) that emphasizing more on digitalization and innovation. All organizations prepare to change in many aspects or to transform the business to match of the world of changes such as technology, marketing, value added to the products and etc. 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. Harvard Business Review surveyed that there are many factors most likely to bring success, one of them is having high level of employee engagement which accounted for 71%.¹ The survey was conducted by Gallup Organization, the data indicates that Thailand has the engaged employees 14%, not engaged 84% and actively disengaged 2%.² The engaged employees feel a sense of attachment towards their organization, investing themselves not only in their role but in the organization as a whole.³ The organization should manage the diversity of employees such as body, mind, emotion, feeling, personality, experience, norm, belief and potentiality to be the same direction and ultimate goal of employee engagement. The level of psychological well-being in the organization and employee engagement are

¹ Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, The Impact of Employee Engagement on Performance, **Harvard Business Review Report**, 2013, p.4.

² Gallup, State of the Global Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leader Worldwide, **Gallup Report**, 2013, p.75.

³ Gemma Robertson-Smith and Carl Markwick, Employee Engagement: A review of Current Thinking, **Institute for Employment Studies Report**, 2009, p.V.

effect to the employee's working behavior, personal success and business success and performance.⁴ In the organization, the people must learn how to deal with others, therefore, the individual differences, knowing the personality traits is very important to let people know the difference characteristics of each other in the organization. The individual differences perspective is the theory to emphasize the individual traits such as intellectual, personality,⁵ skill, competencies,⁶ values, perception, emotions.⁷ It can identify the cooperation and lead to the employee engagement. The measurement of personality adjustment for strengthen and increase potentiality⁸ 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.⁹ Currently, the most powerful personality trait is studied by Costa and McCrae called Big Five Personality Traits Theory¹⁰ which consisted of Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism which can measured the employee engagement. In order make sustainable employee engagement, the integration of Buddhist principle that

⁴ Ivan. T. Robertson, Cary L. Cooper, "Full Engagement: the Integration of Employee Engagement and Psychological Well-Being", **Leadership & Organization Development Journal**, 2010, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 324-336.

⁵ Chuchai Smithikrai, **Industrial and Organizational Psychology**, 2nd Edition, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2011), p.65.

⁶ Christine A. Grant et.al., "An Exploration of the Psychological Factors Affecting Remote E-worker's Job Effectiveness, Well-Being and Work-Life Balance", **Employee Relations**, 2013, Vol.35 Iss 5 pp.527-526.

⁷ Wanida Poldej, **Organization Behavior and Strategic Human Resource Management**, (Bangkok: Happy Print, 2017), p.49.

⁸ Sriruen Kaewkangwan, **Personality Theory**, (Bangkok: Mor Chaw Ban Print, 2011), p.302.

⁹ Aon Hewitt. 2015 Trends in Global Employee Engagement: Making Engagement Happen. **AON Hewitt Report**. (2015): 30.

¹⁰ McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P.T. Jr. Brief Version of the NEO-PI-3 (Electronic Version). **Journal of Individual Differences**. 2007. 28.

called in Pāli, Saṅgahavatthu Four¹¹ as the bases of unity and can be the fundamental traits of employees in Thai context that consists of Dāna (Good Heart), Piyavācā (Good Speech), Atthacariyā (Good Sociable), and Samānattatā (Good Consistency Behavior). Moreover, leader is the one key driver for employee engagement. The leadership traits can create trust between followers and leaders. William A. Kahn stated that the leader account for 70% affecting the level of employee engagement.¹² However, in terms of Buddhist, there is one Dhamma principle that can create trust between leader and follower. This principle is called in Pāli, Kalyāṇamitta¹³ principle, it is the qualities of good friend that can be the Buddhist leadership concept. Kalyāṇamitta consists of seven elements in Pāli; 1) Piyo (Be Lovable), 2) Garu – Be Respectable, 3) Bhāvanīyo (Be Admirable), 4) Vattā ca (Be Good Counsellor), 5) Vacanakkhamo (Be Patient Listener), 6) Gambhīraṇca katham kattā (Be Good Explainer) and 7) No caṭṭhāne niyojaye (Be Good Advisor). In the organization, there are many factors that can enhance the engagement but how to make it be sustainable in the inner self of employees, the development must be wisdom development. The Buddhist principle called Iddhipāda Four,¹⁴ the path of accomplishment or success was investigated as Buddhist principle for sustainable employee engagement. Iddhipāda Four consists of Chanta (Self-passion), Viriya (Self-dedication), Citta (Self-evaluation) and Vīmaṃsā (Self-development). In terms of Buddhism, Thais believes that consistency inner mind is sustainability.

¹¹Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism: Pramuantham Version**, 38th Edition, (Bangkok: Palitham Printing, 2016), p.143.

¹²William A. Kahn. “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work”. **Academy of Management Journal**. Vol. 33. Iss:4. 1990. 705.

¹³Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A.Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism: Pramuantham Version**, 38th Edition, (Bangkok: Palitham Printing, 2016), p.204.

¹⁴ Ibid

Research Objectives

1) To study Buddhist principles and personality traits theory for sustainable employee engagement,

2) To develop the causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits,

3) To validate and propose the 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 all the people must know the individual differences of personality traits of each people in the organization and how to do the business sustainable not just only for survival. Saṅgahavatthu Four is 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)¹⁵ stated that Saṅgahavatthu Four can 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. It consists of Dāna (Good Heart), Piyavācā (Good Speech), Atthacariyā (Good Sociable), and Samānattatā (Good Consistency Behavior). The most venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dharmmacitto)¹⁶ stated good heart is giving helps to others linked to have

¹⁵ Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism**, Pramuantham Version, 31st Edition, (Bangkok: Palitham Printing, 2015), p.143.

¹⁶ Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dhammacitto), **Buddhist Administrative and Management**, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Printing, 1997), pp.72-74.

engaging mind with others. The most venerable Prarajsuthiyanmongkol (Jaran Thitithammo)¹⁷ 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)¹⁸ also 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)¹⁹ 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.

Apart from Buddhist trait, working in the organization, 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 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 trait for people who have a high degree of self-discipline, direction to be goal-oriented, intention to work till successful. Extraversion is trait for people who interact with others, be talkative, building connection. Agreeableness is trait 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

¹⁷ Phra Rajsuthiyanmongkol (Jaran Thitithammo), **Buddhaloyi: Buddhist Principles and Changes of Life**, (Bangkok: Thurakit Kaona, 1999), p.35.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto), **Son Nak – Son Tit, Chewit Phra – Chewit Phut**, (Bangkok: Palitham Printing, 2013), p.66.

sympathetic. Neuroticism is trait for people who bases on one's emotional stability, no reasonable and cannot control own emotion. This Big Five can be measured the employee engagement.

Nowadays, there are rapid changes in the organization in various areas, therefore, as the leader, he also plays the important roles to manage and deliver these changes as well. The leader account for 70% affecting the variance in employee engagement and it can help to create or increase the engagement of employee.²⁰ There is Dhamma principle that can build trust between leader and followers be called in Pāli, Kalyāṇamitta.²¹ Kalyāṇamitta is the qualities of good friend, consists of seven elements; 1) Piyo (Be Lovable), 2) Garu – Be Respectable, 3) Bhāvanīyo (Be Admirable), 4) Vattā ca (Be Good Counsellor), 5) Vacanakkhamo (Be Patient Listener), 6) Gambhīraṇca kathaṃ kattā (Be Good Explainer) and 7) No caṭṭhāne niyojaye (Be Good Advisor). Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto)²² 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 Buddhist leadership must be made the employees to be more sustainable engaged employee.

The engaged employee can be measured by many researchers. Schaufeli & Bakker²³ described that the employee engagement has vigor,

²⁰ Molraudee Saratun, "Performance Management to Enhance Employee Engagement for Corporate Sustainability", **Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration**, Vol.8 Iss.1 (2016): 84-102.

²¹ Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A. Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism: Pramuantham Version**, 38th Edition, (Bangkok: Palitham Printing, 2016), p.204.

²² Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto), **A Constitution for Living**, 120th Edition, (Bangkok: Sahadhammika Co.,Ltd., 2010), pp.63-34.

²³ Schaufeli, W.B., & Bakker, A.B., "A Measurement of Work Engagement with a Short Questionnaire, A Cross-National Study", **Educational and Psychological Measurement**, Vol.66, 4 (2006): 701-716.

dedication, absorption. May et.al.²⁴ 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 sustainability, the employee engagement can be measured by Buddhist principles called in Pāli, Iddhipāda Four which are the way to accomplishment and be investigated in this study as the sustainable employee engagement. Iddhipāda Four consists of Chanda (Self-passion), Viriya (Self-dedication), Citta (Self-evaluation) and Vīmaṃsā (Self-development).

Research Methodology

This research was mixed methods research that use quantitative method to explain qualitative results then analyzed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This research had been conducted in 3 steps as following.

Step 1 : The researcher reviewed the documents related to Buddhist principles, personality traits of Big Five and employee engagement concepts from textbooks, academic journals, dissertation and related documents in order to construct the conceptual framework.

Step 2 : The qualitative method

The researcher uses in-depth interview by selecting purposive sampling. Sampling size was 15 key informants who were classified in 3 qualified groups.

²⁴ May et.al. (2004) cited in Kartono, Hilmiana & Wa Ode Zusnita Muizu, "the Influence of personality on employee engagement and emotional intelligence (an empirical study on employees of rural Banks in West Java, Indonesia)", **South East Asia Journal of Contemporary Business, Economics and Law**, 2017, Vol. 12, Issue 2 (April), 54-66.

Group 1) the venerable monks who are experts in Buddhism,

Group 2) the academic experts in industrial and organizational psychology field and

Group 3) the executive management who managing in human management field.

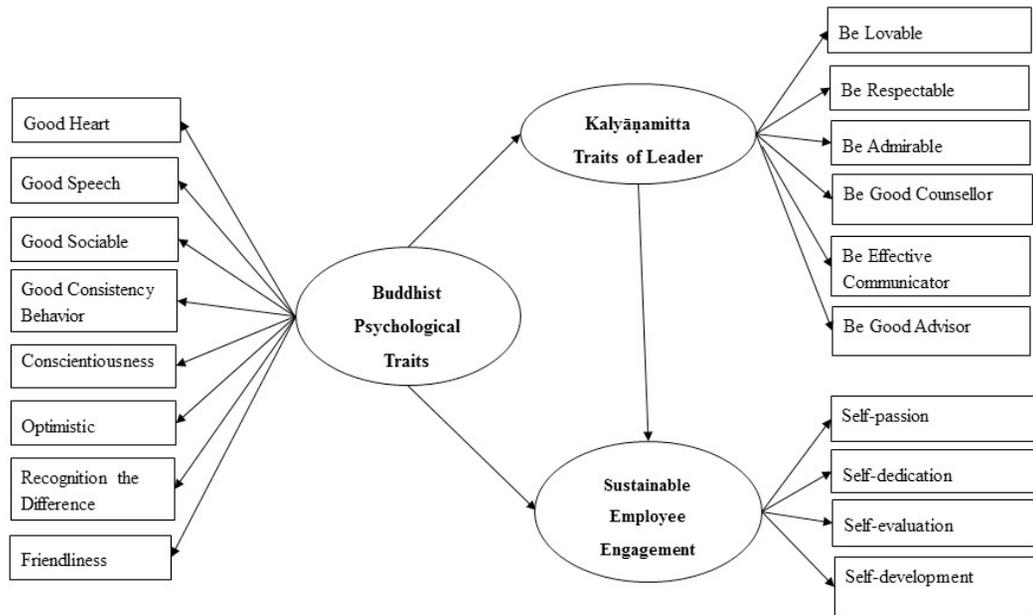
The instrument was the constructed questionnaire. The data collection was face-to-face in-depth interview. And the researcher implemented the data analysis by the predetermined lists, classifying, categorizing the data and ordering the data according to the guideline of questions, and interpreting the interview data. The data were confirmed the conceptual framework and finally the research got the research framework model (as shown in Figure 1). Then the operational definitions were defined before developing the questionnaire for next step.

Step 3 : 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 participants in order to ensure the consistency of the constructed questionnaire. The CFA was run for all constructs of the model in order to check the reliability of the questionnaires. The reliability of overall constructs, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α) was 0.947. The data collection, 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 result of research framework was confirmed by in-depth interview.



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Figure 1: Results of Research Framework from Field Study (In-depth Interview)

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 in officer level accounted for 73.90%.

The results of this study the causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits by Kalyānamitta traits of leader as mediator which composed 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 Kalyānamitta 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 trait 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 were illustrated as below Figure 2, the results of goodness of fit test of the developed model was fitted 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. Result of R^2 indicated that Kalyānamitta Traits of Leader can be explained by Buddhist Psychological Traits at 47% while Sustainable Employee Engagement can be explained by Buddhist Psychological Traits and Kalyanamitta traits of leader at 95%.

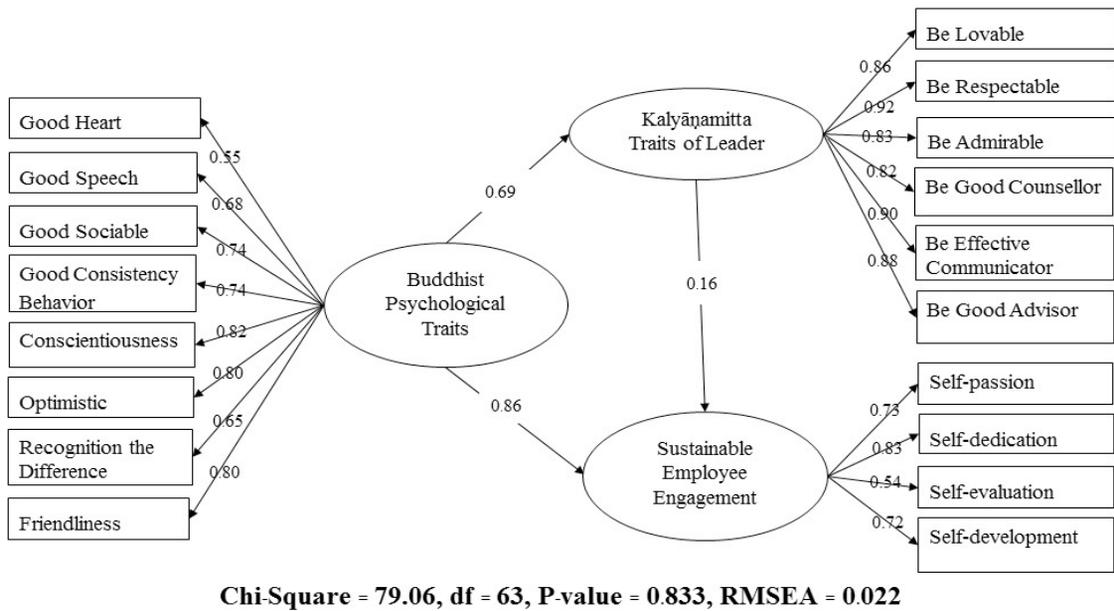


Figure 2: SEM Analysis

Discussions

Employee Engagement is very important for organizations as mentioned by Schaufeli et.al.²⁵ However, the employee engagement is not enough to study in the current world of changes, but how to cultivate it as sustainable. The researcher investigated the model to know the Buddhist Psychological Traits that can enhance the sustainable employee engagement. The employees must have their own set of traits and their sustainability must occur from their inner selves.

This research can conclude that Buddhist psychological traits can be integrated the trait of Buddhist principle and trait of the psychological personality trait. This Buddhist Psychological Trait can be predicted the Sustainable Employee Engagement. The Buddhist trait 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

²⁵ Schaufeli et.al. (2002). cited in Richa Chaudhary et.al., "Relationships between Occupational Self Efficacy, Human Resource Development Climate, and Work Engagement", *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*. Vol.18 Iss 7/8, 2012. 370-383.

colleagues, behaving in the right place, right time and right position. The psychological personality 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.

The Buddhist psychological traits can predict the sustainable employee engagement that the employees themselves have their own inner self-predictors, 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. The summarized of components of Buddhist

Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement can be illustrated in BPT4SEE Model as below Figure 3.

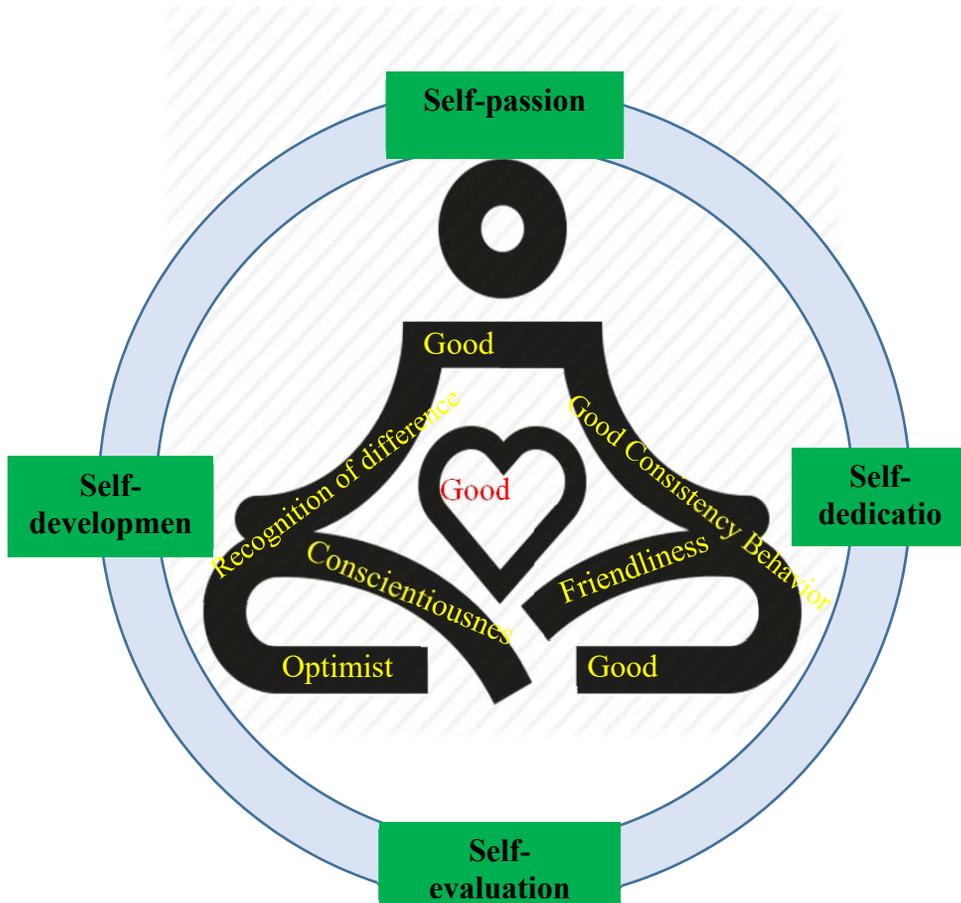


Figure 3: BPT4SEE Model

(Buddhist Psychological Traits for Sustainable Employee Engagement Model)

Conclusion

The development of a causal model for sustainable employee engagement with Buddhist psychological traits by Kalyāṇamitta traits of leader as mediator was fitted with the empirical data. However it shown that the leadership of leader, Kalyāṇamitta Traits was not significant as driver to enhance 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 with their inner self that consisted of four elements; self-passion, self-dedication, self-evaluation and self-development. This is a paradigm shift that moving forward from employee engagement to be sustainable employee engagement with composited with Dhamma well-being. The benefits to human resource and organizational development is to know the individual differences and develop the employees' potentialities by enhancing employees to be knowledge employee – knowing themselves, knowing others, knowing community and finally deliver to the sustainable development.

Suggestions

Implications

1) Human Resource Development (HRD) and Organization Development (OD) practitioners have a direction for human capital development or career development, a guideline of selection, hiring people, performance evaluation or appraisal in the workplace.

2) Leaders or managers have the tools to cultivate the engaged employees for better performance of their individual, team and organization

3) Employees can strengthen their behavior and performance in any position level and can apply to use in the daily working life to get and achieve the individual outcome and goals.

Future Research

1) The future research can be developed the other research design such as experimental research.

2) The future research areas can be different organizations and job groups which might have the different characteristics under the cultural differences, such as small enterprise, government or state enterprise, nurses, technician, teleworker, security guards.

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