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# Transformational leadership and turnover intention: the mediating effects of right speech (*Samma Vaca*) and trust in the leader

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## ABSTRACT

The Right Speech Scale was developed in the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path framework and used to assess the relationships among transformational leadership, right speech, trust in the leader, and turnover intention. Transformational leadership was defined as the process by which followers are inspired to accomplish more than originally expected; right speech as abstention from lying, speaking maliciously of others, using bad words, and engaging in idle talk; trust in the leaders as subordinates' belief and trust in their managers; and turnover intention as the thought of leaving the job and the organization. In a study conducted among 164 bank employees in Bangkok, Thailand, right speech and trust in the leader mediated the effects of transformational leadership to reduce turnover intention. The results of the study support the Buddhist laws of karma stating that good deeds return good results and indicate the need for organizational leaders to practice right speech.

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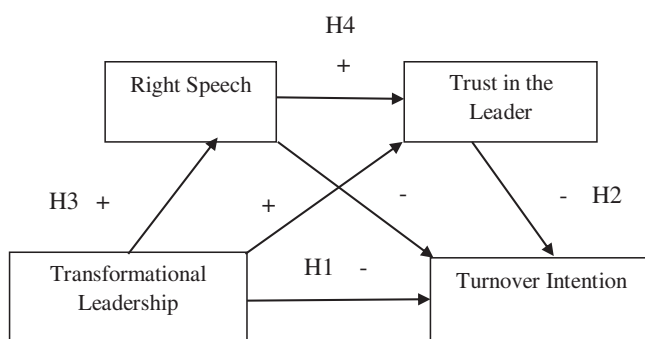
Transformational leadership; turnover intention; right speech; *samma vaca*; trust in the leader

## Introduction

Trust in the leader, the belief that one can rely on the leader's actions and words and that the leader has good intentions toward oneself (Dirks 2000), is related to a variety of positive outcomes. Trust in the leader mediates the relationships between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Braun et al. 2013), followers' helping behavior toward co-workers (Zhu and Akhtar 2014a), employees' psychological well-being (Kelloway et al. 2012), and perceived work stress and stress symptoms (Liu, Siu, and Shi 2010). Two issues concerning the relationships between transformational leadership, trust in the leader and positive outcomes, however, remain unexplored. The first is the mechanism by which transformational leadership is related to trust in the leader; the second is the influence of trust in the leader on employees' turnover intention. We believe that followers trust not only their leaders' actions but also their words, particularly truthful and polite words; we therefore expect leaders' right speech to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and trust in the leader. Right speech (*samma vaca*) is one of the items of the Buddhist Noble

Eightfold Path, which also contains right view, right resolve, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right *Samadhi* (*Maggavibhanga, Abhidhammapitaka, 78/258/569*<sup>1</sup>). We also believe that, in addition to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and psychological well-being, trust in the leader influences to reduce employees' turnover intention. We therefore expect transformational leadership, right speech, trust in the leader, and turnover intention to be related as shown in the model (Figure 1). Thus, right speech and trust in the leader will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention.

To test our belief, we conducted a study among 164 participants who were employees of commercial banks in Thailand. Thailand is a country in Southeast Asia with a population of 65.9 million; Bangkok, its capital, has a population of 8.3 million (National Statistical Office 2015). As of the third quarter of 2016, there were 19 commercial banks in Thailand, with 150,180 employees (Bank of Thailand 2016a); a total of 2,155 of the 7,033 branches were in Bangkok (Bank of Thailand 2016b). Despite their large number, there does not seem to be any study of Thai commercial bank employees. Our study is important in that it will develop a scale to assess Buddhist right speech and provides support for our belief that right speech will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and trust in the leader. Right conduct has been defined as observance of the Buddhist five precepts, which include a pledge against idle talk (Ariyabuddhiphongs 2007); right speech has been defined as including not lying, speaking maliciously of others, using bad words, and engaging in idle talk (*Brahmajalasutta, Atthakatha, D, 11/-/192-199*). Right speech will be defined operationally in this study. The Right Speech Scale thus developed will be used to assess leaders' verbal interaction with their followers. The results of our study will provide support for the Buddhist laws of human behaviors (*karma*) that state firstly that karma consists of thought, speech, and behavior (*Lakkhanasutta, A, 34/441/5*) and secondly that



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model of the hypothesized relationships. H1: Transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention; H2: Transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention, (H3) Transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech, where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech and right speech negatively predicts turnover intention, and (H4) Transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention.

good karma brings good results and bad karma returns bad results (*Ariyamaggasutta, A, 35/236/591*). The results will also increase our understanding of the importance of right speech among organizational members and contribute to the literature on transformational leadership, right speech, and turnover intention.

## **Transformational leadership and turnover intention**

Originally coined to identify leaders of the revolutionary movements (Downton 1973), transformational leadership, initially labeled transforming leadership, has been used to describe political leaders who help their followers to move to a higher level of morale and motivation, while transactional leaders approach others with the purpose of exchange (Burns 1978). In organizations, transactional leaders improved and maintain performance, substitute one goal for another, reduce resistance to change, and implement decisions while transformational leaders use their vision, self-confidence, and conviction to raise awareness of issues of consequence and to argue for what is right and good (Bass 1985). Transformational leadership has been applied to parenting (Morton et al. 2010), safety behavior (Clarke 2013), school leadership (Leithwood and Sun 2012), and higher education teaching (Balwant 2016). Proponents have claimed the effectiveness of transformational leadership in several areas of business organizations such as delegation, team and organizational decision making (Bass and Avolio 1994), and in the areas of commitment, stress, culture, rank and status of military, educational, governmental and hospital organizations (Bass 1998). The effects of transformational leadership on employees' mental and spiritual well-being were fully mediated by workplace spirituality and the employees' sense of community (McKee et al. 2011).

Critics however have warned of the negative impact of transformational leadership. They have pointed out that bad leadership is a recognized but not genuinely acknowledged phenomenon (Pynnönen and Takala 2013), that destructive and narcissistic leaders are negative dark forces causing damage and harm in organizations (Takala 2010), and that bad leadership degrades quality of life for everyone (Hogan and Kaiser 2005). Bad leadership (Schilling and Schyns 2014) qualities such as leader narcissism (Higgs 2009) and hubris and poor decision-making have led to disastrous or deadly effects for followers (Tourish 2013). As negative aspects of transformational leadership deserve a separate examination, only positive aspects of transformational leadership will be explored in this study.

The antecedents and positive consequences of transformational leadership have been well documented. Personality traits are associated with three dimensions of transformational leadership – idealized influence – inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bono and Judge 2004). Emotional intelligence is significantly related to transformational leadership (Harms and Credé 2010). Transformational leadership is positively associated with individual-level follower performance across criterion types, showing a stronger relationship for contextual performance, motivated behaviors that go beyond prescribed job roles, than for task performance, work behaviors that are stipulated by a job description (Wang et al. 2011). In a study involving 93,576 subordinates, strong support was found for the health-promoting effect of transformational leadership (Zwingmann et al. 2014). Under exposure to extreme events such as combat, transformational leadership was negatively related to followers' turnover intentions (Eberly et al. 2017). It was therefore hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 1:* Transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention.

### The mediating role of trust in the leader

Perhaps in response to the call for studies on the mediating mechanism of transformational leadership and outcomes (Judge et al. 2006), trust in the leader (Dirks 2000) has recently been examined as a mediator and found to mediate between transformational leadership and a range of positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction, helping behavior, psychological well-being, and performance. Trust in the supervisor mediates the relationship between perceived supervisors' transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Braun et al. 2013; Butler, Cantrell, and Flick 1999; Yang 2012; Zhu and Akhtar 2014b). Trust mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' helping behavior toward co-workers (Zhu and Akhtar 2014a). Trust in the leader mediates the positive relationship between perceived managers' transformational leadership and employees' psychological well-being (Kelloway et al. 2012; Liu, Siu, and Shi 2010). Trust mediates the relationships between transformational leadership and followers' work outcomes, such as affective organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job performance (Goodwin et al. 2011; Zhu et al. 2013), between CEO transformational leadership and firm performance (Lin, Dang, and Liu 2016), and between transformational leadership and supervisor-rated group performance (Nübold, Dörr, and Maier 2015).

As turnover intention is more predictive of turnover than overall job satisfaction, work satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Steel and Ovalle 1984), researchers have turned their attention to the predictors of turnover intention. Spiritual resources promoted work engagement and lowered exhaustion, which in turn reduced turnover intention (Bickerton et al. 2014). Among US child welfare workers, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, stress, and emotional exhaustion are more strongly related to turnover intention (effect size  $>0.5$ ) than other attitude, perception, work environment, work-related, and demographic variables (effect size 0.4 or less) (Kim and Kao 2014). A meta-analysis revealed that hindrance stressors such as role conflict, role ambiguity and strain are positively related to turnover intention whereas challenge stressors such as difficult job demands are negatively related to turnover intention (Podsakoff, LePine, and LePine 2007).

The research evidence seems to indicate the emerging role of trust in the leader in predicting turnover intention. Although trust in firms' CEO and top management has been shown to be more highly related to reduced turnover intention than trust in the supervisors (Costigan et al. 2011), other studies have pointed to the effect of trust in the supervisors. Managerial trustworthy behavior is negatively related to turnover intention (Singh and Amish 2015). Four important antecedents of beginning teachers' turnover intention include teacher–principal trust (Tiplic, Brandmo, and Elstad 2015). The influence of transformational leadership on reduced turnover intention occurs through the mediation of trust in the leader (Tremblay 2010). It was therefore hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 2:* Transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention.

## The mediating role of right speech (*Samma Vaca*)

Although the mediating role of trust in the leader in the relationship between transformational leadership and outcomes has been documented well, the question of how trust in the leader could be earned remains unanswered. Interactions between the leader and the followers involve not only actions but also conversations, and trust in the leader may be earned through the followers' belief in the truthful and polite words, that is, right speech, of the leaders. Although the Trust Scale (Dirks 2000) contains items on followers' freedom to talk to the leader, the constructive and caring response of the leader, and the sharing relationship with the leader, there is no item on truthful and polite speech. Leaders' right speech will be explored in this study.

Although written a century ago, a book on the suggested characteristics of a Thai gentle person (Chaophraya Visutsuriyasakdi [M.R. Pia Malakul], 1912 [B.E. 2455]) may have great influence on the behavior of Thai people. Among the ten suggested characteristics is right respect (*summa garava*), that one should show respect to others in words, behaviors, and thoughts. A Thai politeness concept, *kwamkrencai*, means concern for others' feelings (Intachakra 2012); thus, an imposition made with *kwamkrencai* is made with respect and extreme reluctance. School children are socialized into the practices of respect in school, not only in language use but also in certain ways of speaking (Howard 2009). Right respect is perhaps influenced by the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path, which includes right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right *Samadhi*. Right speech requires speakers not to lie, speak maliciously of others, use bad words, and engage in idle talk (*Brahmajalasutta, Atthakatha, D, 11/-/192-199*). Three of the four aspects of right speech – truthfulness, abstention from gossip, and polite words – have been investigated in the social psychological literature; there does not seem to be any research on idle talk.

### Truthfulness

Truthfulness is valuable for its own sake and instrumental to other valuable goals in business (Radoilska 2008); political leaders who have lied have to work hard to regain the lost trust of the constituency (Popping 2013), and businessmen who have been caught lying have been put on trial and sentenced to prison terms (Brickey 2006). On the individual level, children trust individuals who tell the truth regardless of who benefits (Fu et al. 2015), and, while pro-social lies might increase benevolence-based trust, they harm integrity-based trust (Levine and Schweitzer 2015). In organizations lies that are made for personal gain are rated as unacceptable, damage the work processes that require collaboration and trust (Suárez, Caballero, and Sánchez 2009), and have a negative impact on co-workers' trust and interpersonal relationships (Sánchez, Suárez, and Caballero 2011).

### Abstention from gossip

Defined as judgmental talk between two or more persons about a third party who is absent from the conversation, gossip can be negative, neutral, or positive (Grosser et al. 2012). In organizations negative and positive gossip focuses on colleagues from the gossipers' own work group (Ellwardt, Labianca, and Wittek 2012). Although not all gossip outcomes are

harmful in organizations (Michelson and Mouly 2004) and gossip is a powerful tool to control self-serving behavior in groups (Beersma and Van Kleef 2011), leaders' verbal repertoire should not include gossip. Individuals with a high level of gossip activity have fewer friends in the network (Ellwardt, Steglich, and Wittek 2012); job-related gossip is related to employee cynicism (Kuo et al. 2015); and a low tendency to gossip helps to maintain the leaders in the central position in their work groups (Erdogan, Bauer, and Walter 2015).

### **Polite words**

Although polite speech is dependent on the relative power of the speaker and the addressee, the degree of the imposition of the request, and the social distance between the speaker and the addressee (Brown and Levinson 1987), polite words in conversation are those spoken with *kwamkrengrai* or concern for the listeners' feelings (Intachakra 2012). Messages using forceful language produce an overall threat to face and resistance to persuasion (Jenkins and Dragojevic 2013). Groups that share cognition concerning polite communication rules are satisfied with their group processes (Park 2008), and organizational members use politeness to maintain friendships with peer coworkers (Sias et al. 2012). Politeness in giving directives significantly improves the attitude toward the directive giver (Miller, Wu, and Ott 2012).

It was believed that right speech engenders employees' trust in the leader and therefore hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 3:* Transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech, where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech and right speech negatively predicts turnover intention.

Combining the mediating effects of right speech and trust in the leader, it was hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 4:* Transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention.

### **Research model**

Figure 1 displays the conceptual model of the hypothesized relationships. Specifically, we hypothesized that (H1) transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention, (H2) transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention, (H3) transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech, where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech and right speech negatively predicts turnover intention, and (H4) transformational leadership would negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention.. In our cross-sectional, non-experimental study, we used PROCESS program (Hayes 2013) to evaluate our research model.



## Method

### Participants

The participants in our study tended to be young (average age of 33.62,  $SD = 9.67$ ), single (65.9%), and female (54.9%). A great majority had earned a bachelor's degree (89.5%) and a monthly income between 10,000 and 50,000 baht (82.8%). Table 1 displays the breakdown of their demographic characteristics.

### Instruments

The questionnaire used in the study consisted of five parts: Transformation Leadership Scale, Right Speech Scale, Trust Scale, Turnover Intention Scale, and demographic data.

### Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership was represented by the inspirational factor of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio 1989). A group of researchers (Den Hartog, Van Muijen, and Koopman 1997) tested the MLQ among 1200 employees of 8 Dutch organizations; exploratory factor analyses of the data yielded 3 factors: inspirational leadership (18 items), rational-objective leadership (9 items), and passive leadership (7 items). The inspirational leadership items describe the participants' perception of their managers' behaviors, such as (1) I have complete confidence in him/her and (8) the manager listens to my concerns. The participants indicated the extent to which the statements were true of their perception of their managers from (1) *the least* to (5) *the most*. Transformational leadership is the sum of the scores of the 18 items, with a high score representing a high degree of perceived transformational leadership. Exploratory factor analysis with an eigenvalue of 1.0 and varimax rotation yielded 1 factor that accounted for 70.92% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was 0.98.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample ( $N = 164$ ).

Participant characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender: Male	74	45.1
Female	90	54.9
Age: $M = 33.62$ , $SD = 9.67$		
Education: Primary school	0	0
Secondary school	1	0.6
Senior secondary school	10	6.1
Associate degree	12	7.3
Bachelor's degree	114	69.5
Higher than bachelor's degree	27	16.5
Marital status: Single	108	65.9
Married/living in	49	29.9
Divorced/widowed	7	4.3
Monthly income: (30 baht = US\$1)		
Baht 0–9999	5	3.0
10,000–19,999	45	27.4
20,000–29,999	35	21.3
30,000–39,999	32	19.5
40,000–49,999	24	14.6
50,000–59,999	11	6.7
60,000 and higher	12	7.3



### **Right speech**

Leaders' right speech was assessed with the eight-item leader Right Speech Scale developed by the authors ([Appendix](#)). The scale was tested for face validity by asking thirty university faculty members to assign each item to one of the four facets of right speech (not to lie, speak maliciously of others, use bad words, and engage in idle talk). More than 80% of the respondents correctly assigned the items to the facets. The scale contains items that describe the manner of the leader's speech, such as (1) the manager speaks politely and (4) the manager does not speak maliciously of others. The participants indicated the extent to which each statement was true of their manager's right speech from (1) *the least* to (5) *the most*. Right speech is the sum of the scores of the eight items, with a high score representing a high degree of right speech. Exploratory factor analysis with an eigenvalue of 1.0 and varimax rotation yielded one factor that accounted for 70.79% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was 0.94.

### **Trust in the leader**

Trust was assessed by the seven-item Trust Scale (Robinson 1996), which contains statements indicating the participants' belief in their managers, such as (1) I believe my manager has high integrity and (7) I am not sure I fully trust my manager. The participants indicated the extent to which the statements were true of their trust in their manager from (1) *the least* to (5) *the most*. Items 3, 5, and 7 expressed the participants' doubt in their manager and were reverse coded. Trust is the sum of the scores of the seven items, with a high score indicating a high level of trust. Exploratory factor analysis of the scale with an eigenvalue of 1.0 and varimax rotation yielded two factors that accounted for 83.05% of the variance. The first factor consisted of items 1, 2, 4, and 6; items 3, 5, and 7, which expressed doubt toward the manager, loaded on factor 2. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale in this study was 0.72.

### **Turnover intention**

Turnover intention was assessed with the six-item Turnover Intention Scale developed by the authors to assess the participants' intention to leave their jobs and organizations. Sample items include: (1) how important to you is your present job (response ranging from 1. *very important* to 5. *not at all important*) and (5) how often do you think of leaving your job (response ranging from 1. *never* to 5. *all the time*). Turnover intention is the sum of the scores of the six items, with a high score indicating a high level of turnover intention. Exploratory factor analysis of the scale with an eigenvalue of 1.0 and varimax rotation yielded one factor that accounted for 59.30% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale in this study was 0.86.

### **Procedure**

The university research review committee approved the research project. The questionnaire contained a letter from the researchers informing the participants of the voluntary nature of the research, the confidentiality of the responses, and the non-disclosure of the data. The Transformational Leadership Scale and Trust in the Leader Scale were taken from the literature and used in a previous study (Ariyabuddhiphongs and Kahn 2017). The Right Speech Scale and Turnover Intention Scale were developed by the authors for this study. We

used the G\*Power program (Faul et al. 2009) to determine the sample size; the parameters of effect size = 0.15,  $\alpha = 0.01$ , and power = 0.99 with five predictors (three predictors in the model and two demographic characteristics as control variables) suggested a sample of 164. Data were collected in the public areas near the headquarters of three large Thai commercial banks. We did not approach the banks' management to contact bank employees officially as the questionnaire would have been required to be distributed through managers and supervisors; their roles in the distribution and collection of the questionnaire might have an undeterminable influence on the participants' responses. Research assistants approached every fifth passerby and requested their cooperation in responding to the questionnaire. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete. Approximately 20% of the prospective participants approached declined to participate. The research assistants were compensated for their work; the participants were given as a gift the ball-point pen (costing 37 baht [US\$1]) that they used to complete the questionnaire.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations of transformational leadership, right speech, trust in the leader, and turnover intention and their correlations with the participants' age, education, and income. Age was positively related to education and income but negatively related to transformational leadership, right speech, and trust. Older participants tended to be better educated and earn a higher salary; their perceptions of the transformational nature of the leaders, the leaders' right speech, and the trust in the leaders were unfavorable. Education was related to income; the highly educated participants tended to earn a high salary. Income was negatively related to right speech and turnover intention; the participants who earned a higher salary tended to view their leaders' right speech unfavorably but were not inclined to leave their jobs and organizations. Transformational leadership, right speech, trust in the leader, and turnover intention were related to each other.

**Table 2.** Transformational leadership, right speech, trust in the leaders, and turnover intention: Means, standard deviations, and correlations with participants' age, education, and income ( $N = 164$ ).

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Correlations with					
			Age	Education	Income	Transformational Leadership	Right Speech	Trust in the Leaders
Age	33.63	9.67						
Education	4.95	0.73	-0.19*					
Income	3.75	1.85	0.61***	0.31***				
Transformational Leadership	3.76	0.87	-0.26**	-0.81	-0.15			
Right Speech	3.85	0.83	-0.28***	0.00	-0.18*	0.84***		
Trust in the Leader	3.47	0.79	-0.13	-0.05	-0.08	0.64***	0.62***	
Turnover Intention	2.21	0.74	-0.12	0.09	-0.19*	-0.46***	-0.39***	-0.47***

\* $p < 0.05$ ;

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ;

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

### **Analysis of the Relationships among Transformational Leadership, Right Speech, Trust in the Leader, and Turnover Intention**

To test the model, we performed regression analysis using the PASW 22 program with PROCESS dialog (Hayes 2013), specifying 5,000 bootstrap resamples and a 95% confidence interval (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010). The bootstrap routine produces a confidence interval of 5,000 betas instead of a single beta; the significance of the mediation effects is obtained if the confidence interval does not include a zero. As income was related to turnover intention, it was used to partial out its effect on turnover intention. Table 3 and Figure 2 display the results of the regression analysis.

Path  $c$  (Table 3) indicates that transformational leadership negatively and significantly predicts turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); hypothesis 1 was supported.

In the analysis of mediation, transformational leadership significantly predicts trust in the leader (path  $a_2$ ,  $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention (path  $b_2$ ,  $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The indirect effect 2 (path  $a_2 \times$  path  $b_2 = 0.14 \times -0.24 = -0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is significant. Transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of trust in the leader where transformational leadership positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Transformational leadership significantly predicts right speech (path  $a_1$ ,  $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but right speech does not predict turnover intention ((path  $b_1$ ,  $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , ns). The indirect effect 1 (path  $a_1 \times$  path  $b_1 = 0.35 \times 0.01 = 0.00$ , ns) is not significant. Transformational leadership does not negatively predict turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech; transformational leadership positively predicts right speech but right speech does not significantly predict turnover intention. Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Transformational leadership significantly predicts right speech (path  $a_1$ ,  $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), right speech significantly predicts trust in the leader (path  $a_3$ ,  $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and trust in the leader negatively and significantly predicts turnover intention (path  $b_2$ ,  $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The indirect effect 3 (path  $a_1 \times$  path  $a_{3x}$

**Table 3.** Bootstrap results to test the significance of the mediation effects (Hypothesized Model).

Path/effect	Standardized		
	$\beta$	$SE$	$p$
$c$ Total direct effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention	-0.09	0.03	<0.01
$a_1$ Transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ right speech	0.35	0.02	<0.001
$a_2$ Transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader	0.14	0.04	<0.001
$a_3$ Right speech $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader	0.26	0.09	<0.01
$b_1$ Right speech $\rightarrow$ turnover intention	0.01	0.08	ns
$b_2$ Trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ turnover intention	-0.24	0.07	<0.001
Income	-0.62	0.16	<0.001
Indirect effect 1 (transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ right speech $\rightarrow$ turnover intention)	0.00	0.03	ns
Indirect effect 2 (transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ turnover intention)	-0.03	0.01	<0.001
Indirect effect 3 (transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ right speech $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ turnover intention)	-0.02	0.01	<0.001

Notes: Bias-corrected confidence intervals: transformational leadership  $\rightarrow$  right speech  $\rightarrow$  trust in the leader  $\rightarrow$  turnover intention = -0.0553 to -0.0039, CI95, bootstrap resamples = 5000. The 95% confidence interval for the standardized result was produced with the bias-corrected option in the bootstrap dialog box in the PROCESS procedure (Hayes 2013). ns = non-significant.

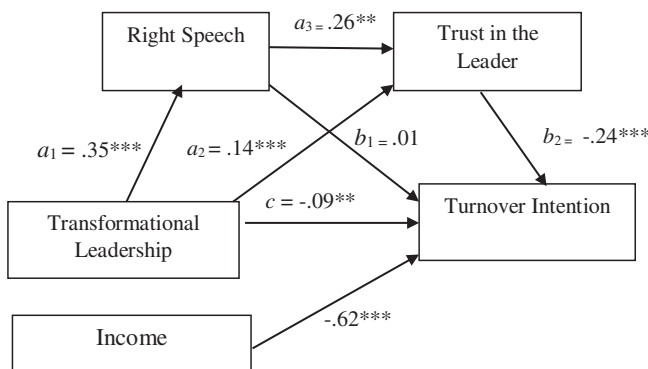
path  $b_2 = 0.35 \times 0.26 \times -0.24 = -0.02, p < 0.001$ ) is significant. Transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader, and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention. Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Income negatively and significantly predicts turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.62, SE = 0.16, p < 0.001$ ). The predictors account for 33% of the variance in turnover intention. The results support the hypothesis that transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader where transformational leadership positively predicts right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention.

To eliminate the possibility of a competing model in which trust in the leader and right speech in that order significantly mediate the effects of transformational leadership to reduce turnover intention, we performed a regression analysis of the competing model. The competing model and the regression analysis results can be found in Figure 3 and Table 4. The bias-corrected confidence interval of the mediating effects ( $-0.0069$  to  $0.0108$ ) covers a zero; the mediation of trust in the leader and right speech on the effects of transformational leadership to reduce turnover intention is not significant.

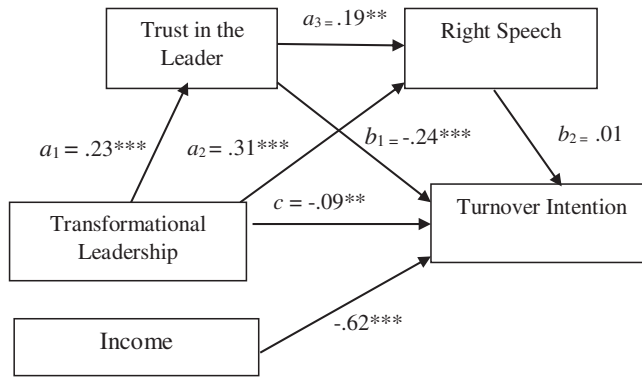
## Discussion

Believing that trust in the leader could be gained from transformational leadership behavior and right (truthful and polite) speech, we developed a scale to assess right speech within the framework of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path. We then tested the scale among a group of 164 bank employees in Bangkok, Thailand, and found that the Right Speech Scale is a valid measure of truthful and polite speech and that right speech and trust in the leader together mediate the effects of transformational leadership to reduce turnover intention.



**Figure 2.** Statistical tests of the hypothesized mediation model, showing transformational leadership negatively predicting turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader, with income as the control variable. Transformational leadership positively predicts right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader, and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention. Together, the predictors account for 33% of the variance in turnover intention. Standardized regression coefficients are displayed.

Notes:  $^{**}p < 0.01, ^{***}p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 3.** Statistical tests of the alternative model, showing transformational leadership failing to predict turnover intention through the mediation of trust in the leader and right speech, with income as the control variable. Transformational leadership positively predicts trust in the leader, trust in the leader positively predicts right speech, but right speech does not significantly predict turnover intention. Together the predictors account for 33% of the variance in turnover intention. Standardized regression coefficients are displayed.

Notes: \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 4.** Bootstrap results to test the significance of the mediation effects (Alternative Model).

Path/effect	Standardized		
	$\beta$	SE	$p$
$c$ Total direct effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention	-0.09	0.03	<0.01
$a_1$ Transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader	0.23	0.02	<0.001
$a_2$ Transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ right speech	0.31	0.02	<0.001
$a_3$ Trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ right speech	0.19	0.07	<0.01
$b_1$ Trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ turnover intention	-0.24	0.07	<0.001
$b_2$ Right speech $\rightarrow$ turnover intention	0.01	0.08	ns
Income	-0.62	0.16	<0.001
Indirect effect 1 (transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ turnover intention)	-0.05	0.02	<0.001
Indirect effect 2 (transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ right speech $\rightarrow$ turnover intention)	0.00	0.03	ns
Indirect effect 3 (transformational leadership $\rightarrow$ trust in the leader $\rightarrow$ right speech $\rightarrow$ turnover intention)	0.00	0.00	ns

Notes: Bias-corrected confidence intervals: transformational leadership  $\rightarrow$  trust in the leader  $\rightarrow$  right speech  $\rightarrow$  turnover intention = -0.0069 to 0.0108, CI95, bootstrap resamples = 5000. The 95% confidence interval for the standardized result was produced with the bias-corrected option in the bootstrap dialog box in the PROCESS procedure (Hayes 2013). ns = non-significant.

Income negatively predicted turnover intention; bank employees who earn high income are disinclined to leave the organizations.

At present, there seem to be two scales to assess two paths of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path – the Right Speech Scale (*samma vaca*) developed in this study and the Observance of the Five Precepts Scale to represent the Right Conduct (*samma kammanta*) (Ariyabuddhiphongs 2007). Research using the Observance of the Five Precepts Scale has shown that observance of the five precepts is related to subjective wealth and happiness (Ariyabuddhiphongs and Jaiwong 2010), whereas violation of the five precepts is related to the tendency to pay bribes among organizational members (Ariyabuddhiphongs and Hongladarom 2011). The results of this study support the laws of karma that karma includes

thought, speech and behavior, and that good karma (transformational leadership and right speech) produces good results (trust and reduced turnover intention).

The mediation of right speech (*samma vaca*) in the relationship between transformational leadership and trust in the leader indicates the importance of polite and truthful speech by leaders in organizations. Right speech has been suggested as a topic for training programs for managers to negotiate effectively (Bamford 2014). The research results suggest that right speech or positive words should be in the verbal communication repertoire of leaders. The human brain is reactive to highly and mildly positive words (Yang et al. 2013), and negative words demonstrate a discriminating impact on the assessment of leadership talent and effectiveness (Yuan et al. 2000). Leaders in organizations should become a role model to reduce salespeople's lies (Mathieu and Pousa 2011). Japanese managers use politeness to strengthen the solidarity with their subordinates and mitigate potential face-threatening acts (Tanaka 2011). The research participants trust leaders who use linguistic politeness strategies in their emails (Lam 2011). Our study has demonstrated the importance of right speech in Thailand; future research would establish their likely application in other Buddhist Asian cultures and possible relevance to non-Buddhist and non-Asian cultures.

Researchers have been interested in identifying the mechanism in which trust in the leader could be developed. Antecedents to trust in the leader include leader attributes, subordinate attributes, interpersonal processes and organizational characteristics (Nienaber et al. 2015). The leader's characteristics such as ability to set direction and create structure, benevolent leadership behaviors to create supportive context, and integrity are also antecedents to trust in the leader (Burke et al. 2007). Trust in the leader has been defined as the followers' reliance on the leader's actions, words and good intention (Dirks 2000). Transformational leadership may be regarded as the leader's actions and right speech as their words; positive behaviors in transformational leadership and positive words in the right speech represent good intentions. Transformational leadership together with right speech then work to engender trust in the followers. Our study contributes the literature on trust in the leader by adding right speech as an antecedent to trust in the leader.

The results of our study also contribute to the growing body of literature on the mediators of the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intention. These mediators include goal clarity among public employees (Caillier 2016), social identification among nurses (Cheng et al. 2016), followers' on-the-job embeddedness (Eberly et al. 2017), and affective commitment (Tse, Huang, and Lam 2013). The results of our study show that transformational leadership directly and negatively influences to reduce turnover intention; the mediating effects of right speech and trust in the leader explain that the impact of transformational leadership on employees' turnover intention involves leaders' right speech and employees' trust in the leaders.

### ***Limitations of the present study and directions for future research***

The Right Speech Scale developed in this study seems to be its primary limitation. Whereas the face validity test confirmed that the majority of Thai respondents could assign the items in the scale to the appropriate facets and the exploratory factor analysis yielded a single factor, the scale was not tested for convergent and discriminant validity. The Right Speech Scale describes abstention from lying, speaking maliciously of others, using bad words, and engaging in idle talk. The truth-telling factor of the scale would require a similar scale for

the convergent validity test and an opposite scale for the discriminant validity test; there does not seem to be a scale to test truthful speech and lies. Although similar and dissimilar scales are difficult to find for the other three facets of the Right Speech Scale, future research need identify them to test the Right Speech Scale for convergent and discriminant validity.

The second limitation is the sample, which consisted of a majority of young women. Although the demographic characteristics of the sample may limit the generalizability of the study result to white-collar jobs in which young women are found, we believe that right speech by leaders will be appreciated in blue-collar jobs in which the majority of workers are male. A future research among blue-collar workers will provide a support for our contention as polite speech, linguistic indirection, used to show social consideration after all is a crucial element of interpersonal communication in all human cultures (Morand 1996).

The third limitation is the possibility that the intention to leave or not to leave a job may reflect many factors other than right speech. For food service industry, an introduction of workplace spirituality interventions did not seem to reduce turnover intention (Beehner and Blackwell 2016). Many people stay in their jobs because they cannot find a better alternative (Gerhart 1990), even if they are unhappy with their boss. They may be happy with the work or with their colleagues or the pay and conditions, even if they dislike their bosses and their behavior. As the results of our study show a negative relationship between income and turnover intention, work engagement (Lu et al. 2016), coworker support (Tews, Michel, and Ellingson 2013), friendship network (Feeley, Hwang, and Barnett 2008) should also be taken into account in future research on their relationships with turnover intention.

The fourth limitation has to do with the weakness of turnover intention as the dependent variable. In our research participants were recruited in public areas and their individual circumstances were little known; understanding of their turnover intention is limited. The strongest relationship found in the study was one between income and lack of turnover intention, indicating that participants with low income were likely to leave their jobs. The results of the purportedly beneficial effects of transformational leadership, right speech, and trust in the leader are at best suggestive and a future research may control the income effect by recruiting participants who earn a similar level of income.

The last limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study where the participants responded to a number of self-report measurements; the association between transformational leadership and right speech by the leader might simply be a halo effect. As the subordinates were the only party competent to assess their leaders' right speech and to express trust in their leaders, self-report scales were the only means to collect data, with the risk of the halo effect or the common method bias due to the use of self-report scales. The total variance of 70.79% of the results of the exploratory factor analysis may be interpreted as a halo effect or the construct validity of the scales used in this study. We believe that the subordinates' use of self-report scales to assess leaders' behaviors and the total variance of 70.9% to support the construct validity of the scales could reasonably countervail the risk of common method bias (Conway and Lance 2010). A future research may consider a quasi-experimental design with two groups of subordinates working under two leaders who differ in their manner of speech.



## Conclusion

To support our belief that trust in the leader could be gained from transformational leadership and right (truthful and polite) speech, the Right Speech Scale was developed and used to assess right speech by leaders in organizations. Together with transformational leadership behavior, right speech engenders trust in the leader. In a multiple-mediation model, transformational leadership negatively predicts turnover intention indirectly through the mediation of right speech and trust in the leader, where transformational leadership positively predict right speech, right speech positively predicts trust in the leader and trust in the leader negatively predicts turnover intention. The results of the study support the Buddhist laws of karma that specify that good karma returns good results and point to the need for organizational leaders to practice right speech.

## Note

1. References were made to the Thai language version of the Tipitaka scripture published by Mahamakut Royal College in commemoration of the 200 years of the Royal Chakri Dynasty, Rattanakosin, B.E. 2525. Numbers refer to volume/paragraph/page numbers. A stands for *Anguttara-nikaya*, D for *Dhiga-nikaya*, K for *Khuddakanikaya*.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Appendix

### Right Speech Scale

Please indicate the extent to which each sentence describes your manager's manner of speaking from (1) the least, (2) little, (3) moderately, (4) much, to (5) very much.

No.		Factor 1
1	Speaks politely	0.79
2	Discusses only official business	0.81
3	Speaks truthfully	0.87
4	Does not speak maliciously of others	0.86
5	Assigns tasks politely	0.87
6	Discusses only matters beneficial to subordinates	0.88
7	Does not gossip about subordinates	0.82
8	Her word is her bond	0.84
	Total variance explained	70.79%