

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF RAMAYANA

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ABSTRACT

The practice of Management is as ancient as civilization and from affairs of the state to matters of the society were all managed rather effectively even though schools of Management and the Discipline of Management was not there. Our ancient religious narratives like Ramayana offer several lessons on Management that can add value to modern Management literature. The present paper is an attempt to discuss the managerial implications of Ramayana and is based on the author's deliberations as an invited speaker in the International Conference on Ramayana organized jointly by Ministry of Education, Culture and Art, Government of Fiji and Fiji Sevashram Sangh at Suva during October 2016.

Keywords: Management, leadership, empathy, governance, strategic management, project management, HRM

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of Management is of rather recent origin when we compare it with other Social Sciences. However, as a practice Management is as ancient as civilization. The ancient civilizations like the Indian, the Egyptian, and the Chinese all bear testimony to the fact that the practices that were adopted during those days for managing the affairs of the society were quite akin the modern day elements of Management function. The literature of the yore contain copious concepts of Modern Management theory. Even the scriptures that are said to be eternal contain many of the ideas that Management Literature claims to be contemporary.

Ramayana, the narration of life and times of Rama, the scion of Raghukula of Ayodhya in India and eldest son of Dashratha, the king of Ayodhya, is among the greatest of the Indian epics and is originally supposed to be written by the sage Valmiki. The story of Rama dates back to the Tretayuga, the second era according to Hindu conception of time. The time when Rama ruled is also referred to as Rama Rajya, which is used in

the present times to denote ideal governance which is the aim of good governance. Good Governance may not be easy to define but the objective is to create an ideal state where the society is governed by the tenets of Dharma or righteousness leading to *summum bonnum*. As the modern day governments and societies strive to achieve good governance and look for options ranging from ideology to technology Ramayana may be a useful reference point to identify the benchmarks. No wonder why the then British Premier David Cameron had referred to Ramayana as a good lesson for good governance during his Diwali address to the Indian community at his official residence in November 2012. According to him Ramayana throws light on how to give people protection, affection and correction. Certainly Ramayana may serve as a repository of good governance based on sound management principles. The goal of Management practice is judicious utilization of resources based on right means.

We seem to have come a long way since the first Management school gave its first degree some 116 years ago at the Amos Tuck University

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of USA. Those were the times when focus was on productivity and efficiency through the use of human ingenuity popularly referred to as IQ or Intelligence Quotient. As we now realize that it is not the IQ that is crucial and Morality Quotient or MQ is the critical factor. Ramayana seems to be the best reference book for management practitioners to understand MQ

WHY RAMAYANA?

It was more than five centuries ago that Sir Thomas More had raised the question why enterprises failed to operate efficiently and concluded that it was due to poor management. Even since the search for an answer to poor management is on. Theories galore have been propounded but rather than clearing they have added to the confusion. Yet, there is wide agreement on one concept that effective leadership is the antidote to poor management. And what is that effective leadership? There may be as many answers as definitions. However, Ramayana offers some cues on effective leadership through the descriptions of actions of Rama. The various roles he played and the way he did justice to those roles. The way Rama handled role conflicts may be worth emulating by many CEOs. The present paper attempts to pick up those cues and develop the idea of effective leadership.

Though there are many variations of Ramayana the ideas have been taken from two most popular and authentic sources the Valmiki Ramayana written by sage Valmiki and *Ramcharitmanas* written by Goswami Tulsidas. Even as the ideas on effective management through Leadership actions keep on pouring in, the problem is that they are too transient and situation specific to qualify for a theory though they are called theories. A theory must withstand the test of times and transcend time and space, societies and cultures. Ramayana does qualify that test given its emphasis on those eternal leadership qualities of Rama that are universally accepted as desirable leadership attributes.

It will require a thorough reading and deep understanding of the narration in Ramayana to

appreciate the leadership qualities of Rama but there are some very prominent episodes and incidents that are as visible as light houses.

As we sift through Management literature on leadership we come across several attributes that have been recommended by both theoreticians and practitioners of both past and present. The eternal leadership values that have always found favour for leader success are humility, integrity, commitment, righteousness and ability to get along with people. Both the texts on Ramayana that is the Valmiki Ramayan and the *Ramcharitmanas* have several lessons for Leader-Managers on these attributes.

From team building to talent Management, from walking the talk to empathising Rama possessed all the recommended qualities of effective leadership. He exhibited all the three basic attributes that Management theorists want effective managers to possess. Thus he shows his Intelligence Quotient, Emotional Quotient and Morality Quotient in taking decisions. He hardly seems to let emotions rule over him, carries out his duties diligently and almost always proves his ability to act ethically and discriminate between right and wrong.

While broaching on the entire narration of Ramayana may not be possible within the scope of this paper certain select portions have been picked up for the deliberations. Very useful lessons on effective management that deal with almost the entire gamut of management functions can be found in these sections taken from both the texts.

MANAGEMENT LESSONS FROM RAMAYANA

The *Ayodhya Kanda* is the second chapter in the Valmiki Ramayana and contains comprehensive lessons on good governance. When Bharata, the younger brother of Rama, goes to meet the latter in the forest to request him to return to Ayodhya and rule, the two brothers enter into a long and instructive dialogue.

Rama counsels Bharata on almost all facets of governance. From quality of ministers and the importance of strategy sessions to temperance in administration and justice, Rama dwells upon all

the subtleties of statecraft very succinctly. Even though Rama is inquiring Bharata of his well-being and whether all is well at Ayodhya, he is, in the process, giving lessons on effective administration in a powerful manner. Though the dialogue between the two brothers runs into several pages and a thorough reading is required to understand the intricacies, some important lessons are obvious, particularly the ones given on pages 441-449 of the Valmiki Ramayana.

Rama tells that a critical factor in good governance is the quality of Ministers. Rama asks Bharata whether the latter has appointed courageous, knowledgeable, strong-willed men with a high emotional quotient as his ministers, because the quality of advice is the key to effective governance. Effective management of a state depends on the right kind of the people at the right positions. This is what modern day HRM advocates- Right man for the Right Job. The problem today is that the yes men are calling the shots while the right men are pushed on the margins. Rama emphasized on competence and confidentiality. His advice to Bharata was to take decisions on complex issues neither unilaterally, nor in consultation with too many people. There should be an efficient core group. Not much different, then, from the modern day corporate boards. Brain storming was thus the prescription. This sums up the essence of effective decision making. Rama also advises Bharata to rely on reflections in solitude to improve decision making and enhance administrative capability.

MINISTER TALKS ABOUT FACILITATING EASE OF DOING BUSINESS?

Protecting the forests and maintaining livestock have also been dealt with as important aspects of effective governance. So the modern day mantra of triple P bottom line that is Planet, People & Profits is firmly rooted in the ancient wisdom of Ramayana. In fact, the vision of the Ramayana has eternal relevance. Law and justice, finance and business, corruption, framing of innocents for monetary gains, injustice to the poor are all mentioned there in. Trade, Business, Agriculture, Economics, Management and Finance

have all been deliberated upon by Lord Rama.

If Ayodhya Kanda in the Valmiki Ramayana talks about Management and Governance, the *Ramcharitramanas* offers tremendous insights into strategic management in the *Sunder Kanda*.

It is in the *Sunderkanda* that the battle between Rama and Ravana is described as also the exploits of Rama's principal aide Hanuman's in Lanka. When the Lord and his army of monkeys need to cross the ocean, the discussion between Rama and his brother Lakshmana comes out to be classic lessons on strategic management. Strategies on how to make a strong enemy succumb have been succinctly brought out in the verses of *Sunder Kanda*. While most of the verses in the *Sunder kandas* on Strategy lessons and tactical warfare two of the popular ones are quoted below along with their translations and the context.

*Binay na maanat jaladhi jad gae teeni din beeti/
Bole Raam sakop tab bhay binu hoi na preeti//*

The context is when Rama has to cross the Ocean to reach Lanka, the Kingdom of Ravana. He prays the Ocean God to allow him the passage. After continuously praying for three days in vain Rama gets worked up and tells his brother Lakshmana that there is need to tame the Ocean God with force because even after three days of request if there is no result, then there is need to show strength as fear often leads to compliance. He then asks Lakshman to fetch his bow and arrows to shoot at the Ocean God. Lord Rama then qualifies his statement by further elaborating that praying before a cunning person, befriending a rogue, trying to inculcate liberal values on a born miser do not work as is given in the verse quoted below is :

*Sath san binay kutil san preete/
Sahaj krupan san sundar neete//*

Similarly Hanuman's visit to Ravana's kingdom *lanka* is full of strategic lessons which have been poetically expressed in several verses. Everything from negotiation skills, to tactics, to intelligence and diplomacy can be found in the *Sunder Kanda*.

Again in the *Uttarkanda* of Valmiki Ramayana there are lessons which are similar to

modern day HRD when Rama sends his younger brother Shatrughana to fight the mighty demon king Lavanasura, the counsel given by the Lord to his brother is worth understanding. Lord Rama advises his brother to keep his army well fed and well paid and asks him to treat them well because only such an army is motivated enough to go whole hog for its leader. Not only he tells why to motivate, he also talks about how to motivate.

There are many discussions between Rama and his counsellors and aides which are full of insightful lessons on strategic management and team building. In fact, if we read Ramayana carefully the entire episode describing the construction of bridge over the sea in the Lanka Kandais a classic lesson in Project Management. Given in both the versions of Ramayana it tells how cross functional teams are to be led and how a leader should manage operations, cooperation and orchestration. Leadership action, leadership philosophy and leadership theory are all mentioned in the Ramayana.

CONCLUSION

The *Ramayana* is widely acclaimed as one among the greatest of all Indian epics. A veritable treatise on applied social sciences it offers practising management lessons that transcend time and space. The text carries useful tips on ethics and values, statecraft and politics even General, Strategic and Human Resource Management (HRM). Not only these it also throws light on philosophy of management rather than the practice only. So one may find insights into psychological constructs like attitude and perception and their impact on behaviour. Empathy, Communication, risk taking, assertiveness can all be learnt from Ramayana.

Management is certainly a discipline of recent origin. But the practice has been there since ages as the need for managing all kinds of resources effectively and efficiently was always

felt. In fact, it was this management of resources that distinguished between a successful society and a failed one. Against this backdrop Ramayana seems to be an appropriate text to refer to. Management theorists are now emphasizing that Values, Ethics and Righteousness hold the key to effective leadership. Rama epitomized all this and thus was the model leader. In the Indian society Rama is referred to as *Maryada Purushottam* which means "peerless among men" one who lives his life according to the tenets of *Dharma* (Righteousness).

The lessons that have been referred to in the text of this paper have been taken largely from the *Valmiki Ramayana* and *Ramcharitramanas* of *Goswami Tulsidas*. Keeping in view the seminal importance of *Ramayana* conclusions have been drawn in this article from both the texts.

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