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Analysis of Social Intelligence in Leadership: Insights from the Ramayana

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Abstract

The Ramayana is a timeless epic that offers profound insights into leadership, ethics and human relationships. Kamba Ramayana, composed by Kambar in Tamil, provides valuable lessons in social intelligence, a crucial trait for effective leadership. While the Ramayana has been widely studied from historical and literary perspectives, limited research has explored its connection to social intelligence in leadership. This research paper explores the characteristics of socially intelligent leaders, drawing parallels with the leadership qualities exhibited by the characters of the ancient Indian epic, Ramayana. By examining the narrative and actions of characters in various situations, we aim to identify and analyse the core components of social intelligence in leadership. This study suggests that the timeless wisdom embedded in the Ramayana offers valuable insights into the enduring principles of socially intelligent leadership. Through the research method of hermeneutics, this paper connects and speak about the core characteristics of Social Intelligent leader embedded in Ramayana. This attempt seeks

to connect the creative literature and social intelligence in leadership. By drawing parallels between socially intelligent leadership and the Ramayana, this study underscores the epic's relevance in contemporary leadership and management practices.

Keywords: Management, Leadership, Social Intelligence, Kamba Ramayana, Ramayana

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is essential in any organization for achieving its goals effectively. Managers with strong leadership skills can successfully guide their team to accomplish tasks with expertise. Leadership abilities of a person determine the success or the failure of the team (Hannagan, 2008). Social intelligence is a crucial aspect of effective leadership. Social intelligence enables individuals to comprehend and navigate difficult situations, making it an essential trait for effective leadership.

Leaders with high social intelligence can build strong relationships, inspire, motivate others and foster collaborative environments. Social intelligent leaders listen and communicate effectively. This paper investigates the characteristics of socially intelligent leaders as exhibited in the Kamba Ramayana. The Ramayana, an epic that has resonated through centuries, offers a diverse array of characters whose leadership styles and interpersonal skills provide a compelling backdrop for exploring the nuances of social intelligence leadership. Valuable leadership lessons can be drawn from the past, emphasizing the importance of both principles and practical application for effective leadership. Insights from historical experiences, conveyed through stories and case studies serve as a base for developing strong leadership skills (Adair, 2010). This paper explores how Rama's leadership in the Ramayana embodies social intelligence, analysing key instances where his ability to understand, empathize and influence, shaped his success as a leader. This research primarily focuses on the traits and behaviours of a socially intelligent leader and highlights how these qualities are exhibited in Kamba Ramayana.

Methodology

A thorough review of various research papers and books was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how the Ramayana portrays a socially intelligent leader and their managerial and leadership attributes. This study employs the hermeneutic technique, a qualitative research method that explores leadership characteristics associated with social intelligence in the texts of Kamba Ramayana. Relevant verses from Kamba Ramayana were analysed, with particular emphasis on those that illustrate the role of social intelligence in leadership, decision-making and interpersonal skills.

Kamba Ramayana

Kamba Ramayana was written in Tamil by Kambar. The epic is divided into six parts which are called 'kandas'. They are BalaKandam, Ayodhya Kandam, AranyaKandam, KishkinthaKandam, SundaraKandam and YudhhaKandam. Each part narrates a distinct phase of Rama's life. It consists of 123 sections, which are called padalams. Dr. IraiAnbu, in his book "Effective Communication - The Kambar way", says,

“Kamba Ramayana is an unfailing reservoir of situations and pointers which can unlock many management thoughts and concepts” (V. IraiAnbu, 2018). Kamba Ramayana is rich in leadership principles and strategies, offering valuable lessons that modern leaders can apply to their own practices. This epic portrays the life of Rama and serves as a valuable source of insights, presenting rich material for modern management concepts through its diverse characters. This research explores and dwells deep into the social intelligence in leadership depicted in Kamba Ramayana. The paper endeavours to draw parallels between the traits of a social intelligent leader in today's world and those of individuals during the Ramayana era.

Importance of Social Intelligence in Leadership

Social Intelligence is a vital aspect of leadership. Social intelligence in leadership can be explained as the ability to connect with people by understanding the emotions of the team, inspiring them and helping them navigate through difficult situations. It involves understanding of social situations, building strong relationships and effective communication. It involves influencing and inspiring which forms the foundation for building trust within the team. Social intelligence is the ability to understand others and maintain relationships. The success of the leader depends on the success of the team members and the followers. The ability to connect individually with team members and followers is crucial for building and maintaining strong relationships. Social intelligent leaders are able to adapt their behaviour and their leadership style to the difficult and unforeseen situation. Daniel Goleman in his book ‘Social Intelligence, the new science of Human Relationships’, proposed the ingredients of social intelligence that can be organised into two broad categories. They are social awareness and social facility. Social Awareness is about understanding others, their feelings, and their thoughts and perspectives where as social facility is how one uses the social awareness to build effective interactions. Social Awareness include primal empathy, attunement, empathic accuracy and social cognition. Social Facility include synchrony, self-presentation, influence and concern (Goleman, 2006). Achieving an organization's goals is never a solitary effort; it is a collective effort where every team member contributes toward the shared objective. A leader's success is intrinsically tied to their ability to foster meaningful connections, inspire collaboration, and steer the team toward the desired vision. It is the leader's social intelligence that serves as the cornerstone of this dynamic, enabling them to engage with the team effectively, cultivate trust and drive collective progress with unity and purpose.

Analysis of Social Intelligence leadership in the Ramayana

The Ramayana, one of the most revered epics of ancient India, provides profound insights into leadership and management through its diverse characters. In Kamba Ramayana, leaders like Rama and Hanuman exemplify social intelligence through their interactions and decision-making.

This paper explores the manifestations of social intelligence in the Ramayana, analysing how the characters of Ramayana demonstrate the key traits of social intelligence such as empathy, listening, collaboration and influence in their leadership roles.

By analysing these characters and their actions, we can gain a deeper understanding of how social intelligence had shaped effective leadership in the past and fostered harmony between individuals and teams. According to Daniel Goleman and Richard E. Boyatzis, there is a significant difference in the performance amongst a social intelligent leader and social unintelligent leader. They used seven social intelligent qualities to measure the social intelligence of top-level executives and leaders. These qualities include empathy, attunement, organisational awareness, influence, developing others, inspiration and team work. This paper draws parallels between these qualities of a socially intelligent leader and their depiction in Kamba Ramayana by analysing the key incidents from the epic. Kamba Ramayanam (Tamil) by V. Ilavazhudhi, Kamba Ramayana (English Translation of Tamil Ramayana of Sage Kambar) translated into English by Shanti Lal Nagar and P.S. Sundaram's translation of Kamba Ramayana in English are used as handbooks for this study.

(i) Conversation with Bharatha at Chithrakoota

Rama, throughout the Ramayana, exhibits exceptional social intelligent skills. He ensured that everyone is acknowledged, respected and valued. His social intelligence helped him to listen with empathy and patience, a leader who inspired trust, influenced others positively and motivated them. An incident that highlights Rama's Social Intelligence leadership is his conversation with Bharatha at Chithrakoota.

When Bharatha learned that Rama had left the kingdom to fulfil the boon given to Kaikeyi, he was filled with sorrow and guilt. He believed that the throne rightfully belonged to his brother, Rama and was determined to bring him back. With deep respect and love for his brother, he went to Chithrakoota with his ministers and the people of Ayodhya. When he reached Rama's hermitage, he was overwhelmed with emotion. Bharatha pleaded to Rama, saying he had no desire to rule and the throne belonged to Rama. Bharatha passionately argues that the exile was unjust, that he had no role in it and that Rama must reclaim his throne. Instead of interrupting or dismissing Bharatha's emotions, Rama listens attentively, allowing Bharatha to fully express his pain, loyalty and devotion. Despite his own hardships, Rama patiently hears out his brother, demonstrating deep empathy, listening and respect for Bharatha's perspective.

After carefully considering Bharatha's plea, Rama explains his own commitment to dharma and his duty to honour King Dasaratha's command. Rama also highlighted Bharatha's responsibility to rule the Kingdom during his exile which reassured Bharatha to uphold dharma and righteousness. This incident reflects that great leaders listen not just to respond, but to understand others. They first listen to understand the struggles of others before offering guidance.

(ii) Rama's acceptance of Vibhishana

Rama's acceptance of Vibhishana in the Ramayana reflects social intelligence and empathetic leadership. Vibhishana was the brother of Ravana, the King of Lanka. In the Yuddha Kanda, after being cast out by his own brother for advocating ethical conduct, Vibhishana sought refuge with Rama. Vibhishana, despite being Ravana's brother, seeks refuge in Rama's camp. However, his arrival was met with widespread suspicion from Rama's team, including Sugriva and Jambavan. Before deciding, Rama encouraged an open discussion. He asked his team to share their perspectives about accepting Vibhishana. Rama, instead of making an immediate decision, actively listened to everyone's opinions, allowing them to share their perspectives.

While most were against accepting Vibhishana, Hanuman supported welcoming him citing the events he had witnessed during his visit to Lanka in search of Sita. He highlighted Vibhishana's righteousness and virtuous nature, emphasizing his opposition to Ravana's unethical actions and his commitment to dharma. After listening to everyone's perspectives on the situation, Rama began to convey his decision of accepting Vibhishana. Rama empathizes with Vibhishana's difficult position, understanding his decision of choosing ethics and values over his brother, Ravana. After carefully considering the arguments, Rama makes his judgment, stating that a person who surrenders seeking protection should not be turned away. Everyone agreed to his decision and was convinced it was the right one. Not only did Rama accept Vibhishana, but he also later crowned him as the king of Lanka.

Both Hanuman and Rama demonstrated social intelligence through their attunement to their team members, carefully listening to their concerns and perspectives before deciding about Vibhishana. Rama, in particular, exhibited deep attunement by ensuring that every voice was heard, fostering an environment of trust and inclusivity. His ability to listen to diverse viewpoints before deciding shows maturity, patience, and wisdom, all essential qualities of a socially intelligent leader. At the same time, he inspired confidence by making a decision rooted in both ethical reasoning and strategic wisdom. Their ability to actively listen, empathize, and influence others positively highlights the essence of socially intelligent leadership.

Results

By analysing the above incidents from Ramayana, we gain deep insights into socially intelligent leadership as exemplified during that era. The characteristics of a socially intelligent leader are evident throughout these events, leading to the following key observations.

- (i) **Empathy:** Empathy is one of the key traits of social Intelligent leader. It helps to connect with others and understand their emotions. It plays a vital part in building trust and loyalty with the organisation. Empathetic leaders support and care for their followers. They understand the suffering and the pain of the followers. This is a main characteristic of a servant leader. Successful servant leaders are mostly empathetic listeners (Greenleaf, 1998). It is the skill and the

ability to apply empathy in the communication so that managers can order their thoughts and information, and present them effectively (Pettinger, 2001). Rama's acceptance of Vibhishana exemplified empathy which is a key characteristic of Social Intelligent leader. Rama's decision to accept Vibhishana teaches that empathetic and social intelligent leadership builds strong and loyal teams which fosters trust and paves the way for long-term success.

- (ii) Attunement: One of the defining traits of socially intelligent leaders is their ability to be attentive listeners. Effective leadership is not just about making decisions but about actively listening, understanding and comprehending the needs of the team before arriving at a conclusion. Listening to the team with full attention give them the feeling of being valued and heard. It also helps the leader to plan on how the decision should be communicated. When people work in an environment where is no coercion, pressure or force, they tend to work together and help each other. This can be attained when people feel heard and valued (Sinek, 2017). Rama exemplified the qualities of an attuned listener in both instances. At Chitrakoot, he patiently listened to Bharata without interruption, allowing him to express his emotions fully and understanding his perspective with empathy. Similarly, before accepting Vibhishana, Rama carefully considered the opinions of his team, demonstrating a deep commitment to understanding their concerns before deciding. His approach highlights the importance of active listening, ensuring that every voice is heard before offering support. Leaders who create such environments, where individuals feel valued and heard, nurture loyalty, motivation and personal development among their followers. Leaders balance collective input with decisive action to achieve an effective outcome. Peter Drucker says, "The most important thing in communication is hearing what is not said." (Adair, 2011). Rama demonstrated that listening is not just about hearing words but it involves understanding the deeper meanings, emotions and contexts behind them.
- (iii) Developing Others: Rama's acceptance of Vibhishana and friendship with Sugriva in the Ramayana serves as a powerful example of how socially intelligent leaders help in developing others by fostering trust, empowerment and personal growth. A socially intelligent leader understands that true leadership is not just about personal success but about uplifting others. Social Intelligent leader develop and mentor others by creating opportunities for growth and guiding them toward their full potential. Rama's decision to accept and crown Vibhishana as the King of Lanka after defeating Ravana and crowning Sugriva after defeating Vaali was an act of transformational leadership that enabled Vibhishana and Sugriva to grow into capable ruler. This act is significant because it highlights Rama's ability to recognize potential and prepare others for leadership roles. By accepting Vibhishana despite scepticism from his allies, Rama provided him with emotional safety, a key element in developing others. This reinforced his self-belief and gave him the

confidence to contribute his knowledge and skills, ultimately playing a crucial role in Ravana's defeat. Rama mentored Bharata, guiding him on righteous governance and entrusting him with the responsibility of ruling Ayodhya until his return. This incident underscores the importance of identifying and nurturing talent, even in unconventional places. Leaders must be able to see beyond preconceptions, recognize potential in individuals and provide them with the right opportunities to grow. Investing in employees through mentorship, empowerment, and trust ensures that organizations cultivate strong future leaders. Ultimately, Rama's approach teaches that socially intelligent leaders create a legacy by developing and uplifting those around them, ensuring long-term impact and growth.

- (iv) **Inclusive leadership:** By welcoming Vibhishana and building an alliance with Sugriva, Rama demonstrated his inclusive leadership approach. It is vital for a leader to be open to new perspectives and ideas. By accepting him and placing trust in Vibhishana, Rama shows his inclusive leadership which was rooted by empathy. Vibhishana, who had been rejected by his own people for standing by ethics, found a leader who valued him based on his principles rather than his background. His leadership teaches that a true leader appreciates and supports the culture and values of an organization or community to foster trust, unity and collective progress
- (v) **Organisational Awareness:** Rama, throughout the Ramayana, exemplifies a deep respect for culture, traditions and the values of the groups and societies he interacts with. As a socially intelligent leader, he embraces, understands and upholds the customs and beliefs of the people he leads. One of the most defining aspects of Rama's character is his unwavering commitment to righteousness, which aligns with the moral and ethical foundation of his kingdom, Ayodhya. By honouring King Dasharatha's command and accepting exile, Rama exhibited deep awareness of organizational values, inspiring the people of Ayodhya to uphold ethics and righteousness.
- (vi) **Inspire and Influence:** Rama's acceptance of exile is a demonstration of his deep appreciation for the principles of duty and honour. Through his actions, he inspired the people of Ayodhya to uphold the values of the kingdom. The people of Ayodhya remain devoted to him throughout his exile, eagerly awaiting his return, because of the deep influence he had made on their lives. Rama's acceptance of exile serves as a powerful inspiration by showing his unwavering commitment to righteousness and duty, even in the face of personal hardship. His ability to honour his father's word without hesitation influenced others to value integrity and selflessness over personal comfort. Socially intelligent leaders influence others through their action. He set an example of sacrifice and moral strength, inspiring the people of Ayodhya to uphold dharma in their own lives. His actions demonstrated that true

leadership is about staying true to one's principles, leaving a lasting influence on his kingdom and future generations.

- (vii) Collaboration: Collaboration and team work are the key traits of a social intelligent leader. This characteristic of a social intelligent leader allows them to unite with diverse people and build alliances. Rama's alliances with Sugriva, the Vanara king and Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, showcased his ability to collaborate across diverse groups to achieve a common goal. Rama illustrated that great leaders are those who create opportunities for collaboration.

II. CONCLUSION

The study of Ramayana and leadership reveals the importance of social intelligence in leadership. By examining the characters of the Ramayana and their interactions, it is evident, how social intelligence plays a crucial role in making decisions, building trust and maintaining relationships. By drawing parallels between these social intelligent skills and their application in Ramayana, this paper highlights the relevance of social intelligence in communication, leadership and management.

Kamba Ramayana contains abundant management and leadership insights that resonate with contemporary management concepts. This paper selected and analysed the aspects of social intelligence and leadership from the texts of Kamba Ramayana. The main limitation of this paper is, as Kamba Ramayana is written in Tamil, accessing and comprehending the original text may have challenges for scholars who are not proficient in the language. Also, the meaning of passages in ancient texts like the Kamba Ramayana can be open to interpretation, which may lead to differing views on the principles of social intelligence and leadership depicted in the text. Despite its limitations, this research has the potential to open new windows for future research, where additional management and leadership concepts could be extracted from the Kamba Ramayana and similar ancient texts.

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