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MANAGEMENT SCIENCE IN SUNDARA KĀṆḌA OF RĀMĀYAṆA

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Abstract : The success of any projects solely depends on the mindset of individuals serving in that project. While most managers focus on tasks to be carried out, a few focus on mindset of the team that is carrying out the task. The Sundara Kāṇḍa of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa can be considered to be a book of project management for managers attempting to accomplish goals that seem impossible to achieve in the beginning. When analysed from this light, the Sundara Kāṇḍa of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa can provide insights to about behaviours required of a manager at various stages during a project. It sheds light on the do's and don'ts of project management. Additionally, it also sheds light on the role of teams and the role of individual's mindset during the journey of managing a project. This paper explores all the learnings from the Sundara Kāṇḍa of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa to decipher the role of managers and star performers in meritoriously managing a project and achieving success.

Index Terms - Project management, obstacles, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, *Hanumān*, *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, mindset, transformation, success factors, role of teams, celebrating success, competition, humility, organization, Indian management.

INTRODUCTION

Indian epics have stood the test of time and have taught the world lessons in every walk of life intertwined with masterful story telling. Many researchers (*Sinha* 2013, *Singhal* 2013, *Agarwal* 2014, *Goel*, *Shrivastava* and *Singhal* 2014, *Sahoo* 2017, *Chug* 2018) have conducted study on the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* from the perspective of leadership and management lessons. Whilst there have been several such explorations on the *Rāmāyaṇa* overall, there is hardly any notable exploration on project management based on *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*¹. Many of the authors who have studied *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* have explored lessons from the *Rāmcaritmānas* of *Tulsidās*. Drawing lessons from *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Tulsidās*'s *Rāmcaritmānas*², *Sinha* (2013) has concluded that the text is full of learnings and anyone who follows the teachings found in this text could experience great happiness and contribute towards a better world. *Goel*, et. al. (2014) based on their study of *Tulsidās*'s *Rāmcaritmānas*² came up with an idea of the *Hanumān* circle which is a list of leadership traits such as intuition, adaptability, humility, etc., that an individual needs to have to be a successful professional and to be recruited by organizations.

As found by *Christensen* et al. (2011:12), every organization has to consider three factors to judge its capabilities. The way an organization prioritizes its resources, processes and values affects the result of the organization. Having the ability to allot the right resources to the right project, having stable processes including those of decision making and protocols and having the right values that foster growth. Together these three increase the chances of success for teams. Using examples of *Kṛṣṇa* and *Rāma*'s leadership styles, *Chug* (2018) explains that the leader needs to synchronize himself with the team he leads to achieve goals that they set out to achieve in the first place. He also touches on the idea of adopting leadership styles according to the situation you are dealing with currently. In a very interesting study *Sharma* (2016) points out to the importance of CEOs giving importance to subtle aspects of dealings and behaviour of themselves as well as their employees. Through the study of *Rāmāyaṇa*, he points out to the importance of going from gross to subtle to transcendental (GST) in terms of dealings and self-behaviour.

Muniapanand Satpathy (2010) explores the texts of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* for developing managers and enhancing managerial effectiveness. Though the study goes into great details of various aspects of managerial duties like decision making, motivation and the like, it does not zoom into any one area of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* or does it explore the idea of project management exclusively from the *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*¹. Probably one study of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* that definitely needs a mention is a study of narcissistic personality disorder by Sahoo (2017). It is an in-depth analysis of the personality of *Rāvaṇa* in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. These studies have definitely made the age-old epic of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, more accessible to the academic world as well as the common man. The more there is study of these epics, the more there is wisdom of these ancient texts available to guide leaders of modern society. This paper specifically focusses on learning lessons on project management and effectiveness of star performers and managers in ensuring successful completion of the project by sensitively dealing with various obstacles that come in the path of project completion. This paper also explores very subtle thoughts, mindsets and attitudes involved in ensuring peak performance and enhanced output at various stages of project execution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs hermeneutics, which is a method of analysis and interpretation of religious texts. Hermeneutics means finding meaning in written word as per Michelle (2001). It is used to interpret religious texts and find hidden meaning for application in practical life. Using the theory of hermeneutics this paper interprets from *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*¹ and derives insights to help managers of today's organizations manage their projects more effectively as well as have a check and balance system created mentally to help handle obstacles on the path to executing the project. Thus, these interpretations serve the managers both on a personal capacity in terms of behavioural enhancement as well as on an organizational level in terms of system check. As per *Singh* (1999), interpretation of religious texts is an art, not just a technique alone, since it requires in depth study and practice. Researcher *Sharma* (2016) suggests that the present-day analysis of ancient texts is based on three approaches. The critical, appreciative and reflective approach. While critical approach is kept away from this study, the appreciative and reflective approach is very much emphasised in this study of *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*¹ to derive various practical insights into the ancient texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identifying the right person for the right role

While good leaders focus on building massive organizations by quantitative progress, great leaders focus on building a crisp team by qualitative progress. Triumphant teams can be built only when individuals become mindful of their limitations. Teamwork is about borrowing intelligence when one's own falls short, clearly keeping the goal in mind. Ego spurts in members ensures that teams disintegrate even before they take shape. Team building is about synergizing the individual egos of team members into team confidence. Team building is about converting your individual dream into a collective team dream. Without synchronization of dreams there cannot be building of teams.

A good team is about diverse talents with matching chemistries. The foundation on which good teams are built is mutual respect between team members. On that foundation of respect is a layer of trust, on top of which the entire team building structure stands. Diverse interactions with diverse people in diverse situations create a diverse type of leader who is realistic and wholesome. Just like the ability to eat a variety of foodstuffs is a sign of healthy appetite, digesting diversity in an organization is the sign of a healthy leader's appetite. Lack of variety in an organization makes its growth sluggish.

When individuals who are aware of their limitations come together setting aside ego to borrow each other's intelligence in order to pursue a collective dream, then teams are built. When such diversely talented teams with matching chemistry stay together embracing flexibility with care, consistently and empathetically, then those successful teams become thriving communities. The main role of a good manager is to identify the right person for the right role.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (*Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 65), when the *Vānara* army reached the southern tip of the landmass and they were told by *Sampāti* that *Sītā* was in *Laṅkā* which was an island 800 miles into the ocean, they began to discuss amongst themselves who amongst them could cross the formidable ocean and reach *Laṅkā*. When each one of them admitted to their limited capacity, the leader amongst them *Jāmbavān*, realised that none could actually do it. He began to survey the entire army. That's when he realised that one amongst them had not spoken at all. He walked up to *Hanumān* and spoke to him as follows.

Sloka -

बलं बुद्धिश्च तेजश्च सत्त्वं च हरिसत्तम ।
विशिष्टं सर्वभूतेषु किमात्मानं न बुध्यसे ॥ (वाल्मीकि रामायणम् ४-६६-७)

Transliteration -

Balaṃ buddhiśca tejaśca sattvaṃ ca harisattama ।

Viśiṣṭaṃ sarvabhūteṣu kimātmānaṃ na budhyase ॥ (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 4-66-7)

Meaning -

By the dint of strength, intelligence, charisma and fortitude, you are the best amongst the monkey army. Why then are you heSītāting to take up this task of leaping across the ocean?

Jāmbavān spent a few moments reminding *Hanumān* of his powers and potential. The words of *Jāmbavān* penetrated the soul of *Hanumān* and he began to realise his true strength and potential. *Hanumān* became so inspired that he began to increase his size and ran towards *Mahendra* Mountain to use it as a launch pad to jump across the ocean.

Jāmbavān at this juncture played the most crucial role in the project. The role of inspiration. Perhaps, the most important role of a leader is to inspire and enable their followers to reach their highest potential. There is latent strength within every individual. But it needs a *Jāmbavān* to remind them about it. *Hanumān* became a hero only after this conversation with *Jāmbavān*. Every single page of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* talks about the heroism and charisma of *Hanumān*. But from the point of view of *Hanumān*, it is *Jāmbavān* who gets all credit for inspiring him to greatness. Every project needs a *Jāmbavān* who is not interested in his own greatness but is interested in the accomplishment of the project. The most important thing is to find the right person for the right role and remind him of his potential to take up that role.

Celebrating transformation

Nothing great can be achieved alone. Greatness is always a team effort. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (*Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 67), while *Hanumān* had climbed the *Mahendra* mountain to leap across the ocean, the *Vānara* army below was astounded by the transformation of their colleague. He was one amongst them and within a few minutes he had assumed a form so huge and resplendent. When the *Vānaras* saw the transformation of their friend, they were overjoyed.

Sloka -

तमेवं वानरश्रेष्ठं गर्जन्तममितौजसम्॥
प्रहृष्टा हरयस्तत्र समुदैक्षन्त विस्मिताः। (वाल्मीकि रामायणम् ४-६७-३०)

Transliteration -

Tamevaṃ vānaraśreṣṭhaṃ garjantamamitaujasam |
Prahṛṣṭā harayastatra samudaiḡanta vismitāḥ || (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 4-67-30)

Meaning -

While the greatest *Vānara* hero *Hanumān* was roaring enthusiastically about his abilities to accomplish the task of crossing the ocean, the other *Vānaras* were amazed by his gigantic form and gladdened with great joy.

According to *Tom Mullins* as quoted in *Servant Leadership in action* book by *Ken Blanchard*, "...servant leaders understand the impact celebration has on the health of their organization. They make celebration a high priority in their leadership and are always looking for new ways to acknowledge their team's success. They understand that when the team experiences a win, they must pause to celebrate that win before they can expect the team to move on to the next goal. That's a valuable lesson for all of us in leadership. When you celebrate your team's wins, big or small, you are affirming the effort made to reach team goals. Winning calls for celebration! I have found there are five benefits of celebration: it demonstrates that you value your team, it reinforces core organizational values, it builds team morale, it increases retention and productivity, and it is a great recruiting tool. Let's investigate each of these benefits. Celebrating your people demonstrates that you value them and you acknowledge their part in making the victory possible. Simply put, your people need to feel valued and affirmed by their leader."

For any project to be accomplished, the mood and the attitude of the team members towards the success and failures of each other matters the most. When members of a team show empathy towards one another's failures and joyful enthusiasm towards one another's successes, it bonds the team together and such a well bonded team can achieve any impossible feat together. Very often the performance of any team member depends on the attitude of other team members towards him or her. Creativity and output are often by-products of the environment that exists within the department or organization. In places where there is a feeling of perceived threat and lack of trust, creativity and productivity are often stifled. Even the most talented individual needs an environment of encouragement and trust in order to showcase his best abilities. When people feel safe and trusted, they exhibit the best version of themselves and the organization benefits tremendously.

Dealing with distractions

The greatest enemy to achieve any goal is often not outside of you by inside of you. The human, mind distracted by temptations, often becomes the greatest enemy of a manager trying to achieve success in his goals. While one has embarked on the journey to success, one very often meets distractions that lure you away from your path. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (*Sundara Kāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 1), *Hanumān* encountered his first obstacle during the course of his journey, a golden mountain named *Mainaka*. Citing old stories of obligation and gratitude, *Mainaka* invited *Hanumān* to spend some time relaxing in his mountainous pleasure parks relishing succulent fruits and revelling in divine music. Though this proposal was too tempting for a traveller who has been

on the road for months, *Hanumān* did not allow his mind to trick him into accepting the enticing proposal. He dealt with the proposal with alertness and clarity.

Sloka -

त्वरते कार्यकालो मे ह्यहश्चाप्यतिवर्तते ।
प्रतिज्ञा च मया दत्ता न स्थातव्यमिहान्तरे ॥ (वाल्मीकि रामायणम् ५-१-१३२)

Transliteration -

*Tvarate kāryakālo me hyahaścāpyativartate ।
Pratijñā ca mayā dattā na sthātavyamihāntare ॥ (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 5-1-132)*

Meaning -

The duty I have to undertake is time bound and is calling me urgently. The day is quickly ending. I have a promise to keep. I cannot stay here while being neglectful of my duties.

It is seen that employees in organizations are very much conscious of their rights but often forget or neglect their responsibilities. While rights are very important, responsibilities towards the organization are even more important. In fact, rights exist and come into play only after performance of responsibilities. But when there is a snare of temptations, one often forgets one's duties and gets carried away by the sway of temptations. Distractions while you are on a mission are often tests of your focus and determination to achieve the desired goal. If you are not alert when faced with these distractions, then you neglect your duty and miss your goal. Distractions can come in the form of comforts. Often a comfortable cabin, a comfortable residence and a comfortable car, are given to managers to help them focus on their work better, but these could trigger extreme desire for comforts that lead to deviation from the organisational goals.

Managers have to deal with temptations and distractive proposals of the mind by extreme alertness. The intelligence has to be trained to focus strictly on the goal. Just like *Hanumān* refused to budge from his path and duties, one has to learn to say no to comforts and distractions that deviate the mind's focus.

Competitive mindset that causes internal strife

A huge amount of energy gets wasted in internal strife in every organization. The time, energy and intelligence that should ideally have been used to deal with external challenges often gets directed into dealing with internal strife between managers within an organization and very often within a department. When you deal with external challenges dextrously, the organization grows. When you are caught up with internal challenges foolhardily, the organization loses out on precious time and opportunities for growth.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa (Sundara Kāṇḍa, Sarga 1)*, the gods sent *Surasā*, the mother of snakes, to test *Hanumān*'s abilities. She took on a formidable form and obstructed his path. She claimed to have a boon from *Brahmā* that anyone trespassing over the ocean could not go ahead without entering her mouth. *Hanumān* explained to her that he couldn't afford to lose any moments of time as he had an urgent mission to accomplish. He had no fear of death, but he couldn't even die before giving the message of *Rāma* to *Sītā*. *Surasā* refused to listen to him and expanded herself to block his path. Angry at her adamant stance, *Hanumān* took a form much bigger than her. She in turn increased her size even further. Neither was *Hanumān* going to give up and nor was *Surasā* willing to compromise. This one-upmanship continued for some time until *Hanumān* realized that there was no end to this competition. What could be achieved by proving that he was greater than her? That wasn't his goal. In trying to prove that he was greater than her, he was losing precious time. He decided to humble himself in front of her and took on a very tiny form. Before she could realize it, he flew into her mouth and exited thus keeping *Brahmā*'s boon intact and yet not losing his mission.

Sloka -

प्रविष्टोऽस्मि हि ते वक्त्रं दाक्षायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ।
गमिष्ये यत्र वैदेही सत्यं चासीद्वरस्तव ॥ (वाल्मीकि रामायणम् ५-१-१६९)

Transliteration -

*Praviṣṭo'smi hi te vaktraṃ dākṣāyaṇi namo'stu te .
Gamiṣye yatra vaidehī satyaṃ cāsīdvarastava .. (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 5-1-169)*

Meaning -

O daughter of *Daksha*, please accept my respects. Please give me permission to go to the place where *Sītā* is located as I have managed to keep intact your boon.

Competition kills the spirit of cooperation. When two people compete intensely, intelligence to focus on the goal is lost and the spirit of cooperation is dampened. While two people in an organization are so busy trying to prove their superiority over one another, many an opportunity is lost. *Surasā* belonged to the same team as *Hanumān*, yet she tried to prevent him from achieving his goal. Very often the greatest enemy to growth is not an outsider but an insider. Managers who want to achieve organizational goals should discourage internal competition that stifles progress. The best way to deal with internal competition is with humility. One person has to stop competing and trying to prove greatness. Instead of focussing on greatness, a more mature manager would focus on the goal. True greatness is in achieving the goal you set out to accomplish rather than being stuck in between the muck of competitive one-upmanship.

External obstacles that slow down momentum

The closer one gets to success, the more one attracts negative energy towards oneself. Every star performer will come across envious people who try to pull him down. Successful people somehow end up attracting envious people. The nature of envious people is to conveniently ignore the many good qualities in a person and focus on the single flaw they find in a person, zooming into that. Envious people revel in pulling down successful people. While mature team members love to celebrate the success of a team mate, envious people love to pull them down from heights of success and throw them into pits of negativity.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa (Sundara Kāṇḍa, Sarga 1)*, as *Hanumān* was flying very high in the skyways, he felt himself being pulled towards the ocean by a great force. He realized it was a demon named *Simhikā* who had the ability to hold a person by grabbing his shadow. She devoured him and *Hanumān* tore open her belly and came out unharmed. When he successfully eliminated her, the celestials who saw this heroic act of *Hanumān* made an interesting observation.

Sloka -

यस्यत्वेतानि चत्वारि वानरेन्द्र यथा तव ।
धृतिर्दृष्टिर्मतिर्दाक्ष्यं स कर्मसु न सीदति ॥ (वाल्मीकि रामायणम् ५-१-१९८)

Transliteration -

*Yasyatvetāni catvāri vānarendra yathā tava ।
dhr̥tirdṛṣṭimatirdākṣyaṃ sa karmasu na sīdati ॥ (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 5-1-198)*

Meaning -

O *Vānara* hero, anyone who has the four qualities of courage, vision, intelligence and expertise will never fail in any task. Since you have all four in abundance you will always attain success in your endeavours.

It's important that one eliminates envy from one's mind. No matter how skilled you are, if you give mental space to envy, it has the capacity to destroy you. Do not surround the environment of your life with toxic people that focus on your weaknesses. Rather, avoid negative company that discourages and embrace positive company that encourages. It requires great courage, vision, intelligence and expertise in choosing the right company and creating the right environment that fosters creativity and positivity.

Dealing with despondency

Perhaps the greatest demotivator for achieving success is despondency that arises from a sense of hopelessness. Not every endeavour will be met with success immediately. Success often comes late especially in an endeavour that is extremely difficult. When one tries his best and yet success alludes, those are times that despondency sets in. In every project, there will a point in time when no amount of endeavour seems to be yielding results. No matter how good you are and how well you have worked towards a goal, there will be some factors that are beyond your control.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa (Sundara Kāṇḍa, Sarga 13)*, *Hanumān* reached that stage of despondency when he realized that he had searched all over Lanka without discovering the whereabouts of *Sītā*. He had scrutinized every nook and corner of the city and various buildings. When hopelessness engulfed his mind, all kinds of negative thoughts took over and he fell into depression. So much effort had gone in trying to locate her and yet there was absolutely no clue. Just when he was about to give up all hope, he resorted to means that he hadn't tried yet. He had put so much focus on his efforts that he had not had a chance to offer a prayer seeking help and direction from higher powers. He offered a small prayer remembering his worshipable master *Rāma* and mother *Sītā* along with the divine deities that are in charge of the universe.

Sloka -

नमोऽस्तु रामाय सलक्ष्मणाय देव्यै च तस्यै जनकात्मजायै ।
नमोऽस्तु रुद्रेन्द्रयमानिलेभ्यः नमोऽस्तु चन्द्रार्कमरुद्गणेभ्यः ॥ (वाल्मीकि रामायणम् ५-१३-५९)

Transliteration -

*Namo'stu rāmāya salakṣmaṇāya devyai ca tasyai janakātmajāyai ।
Namo'stu rudrendrayamānilebhyaḥ namo'stu candrārkamarudgaṇebhyaḥ ॥ (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 5-13-59)*

Meaning -

Offering my respects to *Rāma* along with *Lakṣmaṇa*. Offering my respects to the divine mother *Jānaki*. Offering my respects to *Rudra*, *Indra*, *Yama* and *Vāyu*.

As soon as *Hanumān* offered these prayers, his eyes fell on a section of Lanka that he hadn't sighted so far. That happened to be *Aśoka*-garden where he indeed found *Sītā*. Often, the solutions to many problems of life are not in our hands. For success in any endeavour, there are several factors. Some are tangible factors and yet others are intangible. Cognition of both the tangible and intangible factors leads to success. The *Bhagavad-Gītā*(18.14) talks about five factors that are responsible for the success of any project. Of these five, four are tangible and one is an intangible factor.

Sloka -

अधिष्ठानं तथा कर्ता करणं च पृथग्विधम् ।
विविधाश्च पृथक्चेष्टा दैवं चैवात्र पञ्चमम् ॥ (भगवद्गीता १८.१४)

Transliteration -

Adhiṣṭhānaṃ tathā kartā karaṇaṃ ca pṛthagvidham /
Vividhāśca pṛthakceṣṭā daivaṃ caivātra pañcamam // (Bhagavad-Gītā 18.14)

Meaning -

The five factors behind action are the body, the doer, the senses, the types of efforts and divine will.

CONCLUSION

For success in any endeavour, one has to choose the right person who will carry out the action, the right place for the action to be performed, the right instruments to carry out the action. In addition, fourth factor is the types of endeavours and finally fifth factor is the will of destiny or the hand of God. Of these five factors, we have complete control over the choice and execution of the first four factors, which are the tangible factors whereas we have absolutely no control over the fifth factor, which is called the intangible factor behind success.

Cognizance of the first four factors keeps one intensely focussed on the effort and the recognition of the fifth factor keeps one humble understanding that in spite of all efforts, there is one factor that is absolutely not in one's hands. Every manager who wants to achieve any significant result, has to recognize the presence of all five factors to avoid despondency in life. Despondency sets in when one feels that everything has to necessarily go as per our plan. *Hanumān* had put in hundred percent efforts in searching for *Sītā* but in spite of that he wasn't able to succeed in his mission until he recognized the presence of the fifth factor that governed action. That cognizance immediately made him humble. Humility has such an important role to play in the life of an achiever. It keeps one grounded and ready to receive help from sources that one has no control over.

END NOTES

1. *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* which is the fifth section of the ancient text *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* written by *Vālmīki* Muni. This text has referred to [Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa - Sundara Kāṇḍa - Sarga 13.](#)
2. *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of *Tulsīdās's Rāmcharitmanas* which is the fifth section of the ancient text named *Ramcharitmanas* written by *Tulsīdās*.

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