

A Managerial Exploration of Participative leadership and Decision-Making in the Kamba Ramayana

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Abstract— This paper investigates participatory leadership and decision-making as exemplified in the Kamba Ramayana. Ancient epics Ramayana and Mahabharata provide deep lessons about people and leadership. This comparative study of the ancient literary work and management provides valuable insight into participative leadership practices relevant to modern organizational contexts. While the Ramayana has been widely studied from historical and literary perspectives, limited research has explored its connection to leadership and decision-making. Utilizing the hermeneutic methodology, this study interprets selected verses from the Kamba Ramayana to uncover leadership dynamics rooted in participatory leadership and inclusive decision-making. Rama and Dasaratha illustrate a leadership approach that actively seek diverse perspectives, promotes collective decision-making and respects different opinions. This paper analyses the participatory leadership style that integrates collaborative input which reinforces the value of shared responsibility in ethical and strategic decision-making. This exploration offers a culturally grounded perspective on participatory leadership, highlighting the relevance of classical literature in informing contemporary management theory. By drawing parallels between Rama's inclusive leadership approach and contemporary frameworks such as servant leadership, stakeholder involvement and participative decision-making models, this paper contributes to the interdisciplinary research in leadership and management studies. The leadership styles depicted in the Kamba Ramayana are analysed in relation to modern management theories that prioritize collaboration and distributed authority. The study offers cross-cultural insights into participatory decision-making. Interpreting the text through a managerial lens allows for a deeper exploration of classical wisdom in contemporary contexts. This perspective enhances our understanding of participative leadership as portrayed in the Kamba Ramayana and highlights its continued relevance in today's complex and evolving organisational setting.

Keywords: Management, Leadership, Participatory Leadership, Decision Making, Ramayana.



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INTRODUCTION

In the modern management practice, participatory leadership and inclusive decision-making are one of the critical elements of effective leadership. As organizations grow and become more complex, leaders are expected to make decisions by involving their teams in the process. Tim Hannagan defines leadership as “Leadership is the process of motivating other people to act in particular ways in order to achieve specific goals.” (Hannagan, 2008). Leadership involves people who are working for the team and for the common goal. Participatory leadership is characterized by shared authority, open discussions and collaborative problem-

solving. Creating unity and harmony within the team can be achieved through participative leadership and involving the key stake holders in the decision-making process during crucial situations. John Adair says, a leader is not the one who just lead, a leader is expected to guide the team and keep the team united and care for the individuals in the team. (Adair, 2010). Involving the team in decision making has been recognized for building trust, accountability and long-term sustainability in both public and private sector institutions. A leader will always speak the truth and the team will see the reality of the situation (Adair, 2011). While the theory and application of participative

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decision-making are widely discussed in modern organizational behaviour, its foundational principles can also be traced to ancient texts.

The *Kamba Ramayana* was written in Tamil by the poet Kambar. It presents rich leadership and management perspectives through its characters and narratives. *Kamba Ramayana* consists of six chapters which are known as *kandas*. The epic encapsulates the leadership and management insight that transcends time. Leaders such as King Dasaratha and Rama are portrayed as individuals who consistently seek counsel, respect the team's voices and make decisions based on consensus and ethical values. Their leadership style aligns closely with the tenets of participatory leadership which emphasize on inclusivity while making decisions and stakeholder involvement which makes the decision-making process transparent.

This paper aims to explore the concept of participatory leadership and decision-making as exemplified in the *Kamba Ramayana*. Drawing parallels from key episodes, such as King Dasaratha's consultation before crowning Rama and Rama's deliberations with his council before granting refuge to Vibhishana, this study investigates how ancient leadership practices reflect principles that are highly relevant to contemporary management thought. Through these episodes, the epic demonstrates that participatory processes yield more ethically grounded outcomes and strengthen trust, encourage diversity of thought and promote shared responsibility. By bridging the classical literature and modern management practices, this paper draws managerial insights from timeless narratives that emphasize collaboration, shared responsibility and governance. By doing so, the study contributes to a research that integrates cultural and historical perspectives into current leadership theory, offering a richer and more contextually grounded understanding of participatory leadership.

The *Kamba Ramayana* which is a classic work of literary and has religious significance, is also a valuable resource for cultivating leadership practices rooted in empathy, inclusivity, and moral responsibility. These qualities are the key attributes for leaders in today's global and multicultural organizations.

METHODOLOGY

This study undertakes a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and the texts to examine how the *Kamba Ramayana* portrays participatory leadership and the associated managerial attributes relevant to decision-making. Employing the hermeneutic method, the study involves an interpretive analysis of selected verses from the *Kamba Ramayana*. The study analyses selected verses that reveal nuanced dimensions of participatory leadership embedded in the epic. Particular emphasis is placed on leadership behaviours that reflect inclusivity, shared responsibility and collective decision-making. Through a close reading of key episodes, the research seeks to identify how ancient

literary narratives embed principles aligned with modern participatory management practices. The *Kamba Ramayana*, with its rich cultural and philosophical depth, serves as a valuable source for interpreting ethical governance, consultative leadership and the role of stakeholder engagement in decision-making. By closely analysing selected verses, the research explores how participatory leadership and decision-making are portrayed through the actions and the dialogues of key characters. The method focuses on textual interpretation to uncover underlying managerial principles embedded in the epic. This approach enables a culturally contextual understanding of leadership rooted in ancient Tamil literature. This research focuses on identifying participatory leadership characteristics such as inclusiveness, open discussions, mutual respect and shared responsibility. These traits are mapped onto modern leadership theories to highlight their relevance in today's organizational setting. The *Kamba Ramayana* serves as both a literary and managerial text for examining participatory leadership frameworks.

Kamba Ramayana

The *Kamba Ramayana*, composed in Tamil by the poet Kambar, is an enduring epic structured into six distinct sections which are called *Kandams*. They are *Bala Kandam*, *Ayodhya Kandam*, *Aranya Kandam*, *Kishkintha Kandam*, *Sundara Kandam*, and *Yuddha Kandam*. Each *kandam* reflect pivotal moments in the life of Rama. Encompassing 123 chapters which are called *padalams*, the text presents a wide array of narrative situations rich in ethical, strategic and interpersonal dimensions. As noted by Dr. V. Irai Anbu (2018) in *Effective Communication – The Kambar Way*, the *Kamba Ramayana* serves as a compelling repository of management insights. According to So ma. Valliappan, Kambar illustrates various management concepts through the characters of *Kamba Ramayana*. This paper investigates the epic through the lens of participative leadership and decision-making, exploring how ancient narrative traditions exemplify contemporary organizational values such as inclusivity, shared governance and collective deliberation. By analysing episodes wherein leaders like Dasaratha and Rama consult councils, seek advice and share decision authority, the study draws parallels to modern participatory leadership frameworks. These insights offer valuable lessons for today's managers striving to foster engagement, transparency and trust within dynamic and diverse organizational settings.

Why Participatory leadership is important?

Participatory Leadership is vital in an organisation as it involves the team members in making decisions. Participatory Decision Making (PDM), is an approach where leaders involve employees or team members in the process of decision making. The decision will not be solely made by the top management. It involves the concerned people while making decisions. Participatory Decision making plays an important role in building trust and transparency within the organisation. It is vital to involve the team in the decision-making process as

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they feel valued and heard. It encourages positive work culture within the organisation. It includes all relevant employees who are impacted by the decision have a voice in the decision-making process. This also gives diverse perspectives as all the suggestions are respected. Involving right people is the key for making good decisions in this decision-making process. Everyone in the group should share the common goal and work towards it. Healthy debate is essential to have a diverse viewpoint (Harvard Business Essentials, 2005).

Effective participatory decision-making requires the involvement of individuals who possess the appropriate knowledge, experience and authority relevant to the issue being addressed. This includes subject matter experts, seasoned professionals with contextual insight, and stakeholders who have a direct impact on or are impacted by the decision. Stakeholders are those who are affected by the activities and the decisions made by the organisation (Hannagan, 2008). To gain acceptance among employees or the public, it is necessary to ensure participation, engagement, and consultation. (Pettinger, 2001). Equally important is the inclusion of individuals with the authority to allocate or manage resources, ensuring that decisions are practical and aligned with organizational capabilities. Engaging the right participants not only enhances the quality of the decision but also increases its legitimacy and implementation.

Analysis of Participatory leadership and decision making in the Ramayana

The Ramayana, one of the most revered epics of ancient India, provides deep insights into leadership and management through its diverse characters. In Kamba Ramayana, leaders like Rama and Dasaratha exemplify participatory leadership and decision-making through their interactions. This paper explores the manifestations of participatory leadership and decision-making in the Ramayana, analysing how the characters of Ramayana demonstrate the key traits of participatory leadership and decision-making such as mutual respect, inclusiveness, collaboration and influence in their leadership roles. Participatory leaders make decision after consulting the group and the members support the decision (Pettinger, 2001).

By analysing these characters and their actions, we can gain a deeper understanding of how involvement of stake holders had shaped effective leadership in the past and fostered harmony between individuals and teams. Kaner listed four core values of participatory decision making. They are Full participation, Mutual understanding, Inclusive solutions and shared responsibility. These values help to build stronger individuals in turn, building stronger teams. (Kaner, 2014). This paper draws parallels between these qualities of a leader who practice participative method in leadership 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 Kamban) 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.

Dasaratha's decision to crown Rama

King Dasharatha, the ruler of Ayodhya, decided to crown his son Rama as the next heir. However, rather than making this significant decision unilaterally, Dasharatha chose to involve his royal council. He sought the input of his ministers, sages and trusted advisors, thereby adopting a **participatory decision-making** approach. It was a conscious effort to include those with the knowledge, experience and authority to ensure that the decision was well-considered and supported across the kingdom.

In the Ayodhya Kanda of Kamba Ramayana, in "The Council" Patala, Kamban says,

- ❖ "Ancient in lineage, skills ahead,
- ❖ With varied knowledge and attainments,
- ❖ Balanced even amid losses,
- ❖ Free of wrath and devoted to virtue" (1318)

In the *Ayodhya Kanda* of **Kamba Ramayana**, the qualities of those involved in the consultation process are highlighted. Kamban described the qualities of good ministers and king's counsellors in six stanzas. (Sundaram, 1991). Kamban emphasized that the members of the council were individuals who were well-versed in the scriptures. They had a deep understanding of past events and their consequences.

These individuals brought a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to the decision-making process.

- ❖ Knowing well time, place and agent
- ❖ As prescribed, seeking God's aid,
- ❖ Great men, virtuous, skilled to do good,

And able with their advice to strengthen the king; (1320) They were seasoned in their approach, exhibiting maturity and a long-term perspective in their deliberations. Importantly, they adhered to the principles of righteousness and dharma, ensuring that their guidance was always aligned with ethical conduct.

Examining both the good and the bad

- ❖ And like a good doctor prescribing the good;
- ❖ And when dangers threatened apace
- ❖ Helpful like one's past virtues; (1322)

Their collective wisdom and commitment to their leader's success played a crucial role in the decision to crown Rama, reinforcing the values of integrity, virtue and sound judgment in governance.

Once the council members had assembled, King Dasharatha began discussing his decision to crown Rama as the heir to the throne. During his speech, he mentioned After presenting his thoughts, he concluded by respectfully asking, "You kindly let me have your opinion."

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- ❖ “So I shall give the kingdom to Rama
- ❖ Go to the forest and start a great penance
- ❖ To end this life with its delusions.

What”, he asked, “do you advise?” (1343)

This invitation for feedback demonstrated his willingness to engage with his advisors and value their perspectives. By encouraging open participation in the discussion, Dasharatha exemplified a participatory leadership style, which prioritizes collaboration and inclusivity in the decision-making process. His approach reflected a deep commitment to shared governance, where all voices, particularly those of his trusted advisors, were heard and respected. This ensured that the decision was made with careful consideration and had the support of those who were integral to the kingdom’s success.

Dasharatha’s approach exemplifies the principles of **participatory leadership**, a style that emphasizes collaboration, inclusivity and shared responsibility in decision-making. By consulting with his council before finalizing his choice, the king acknowledged the importance of collective wisdom and diverse perspectives in the governance process. This approach strengthened the legitimacy of the decision and fostered a sense of shared ownership with a commitment to its implementation among the key stakeholders.

Vibhishana’s Refuge

In the *Kamba Ramayana*, the episode in which Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, seeks refuge with Rama presents a significant case of the intersection between strategic judgment and ethical leadership. Kambar brings out the exemplary skills of Rama’s participatory leadership and inclusive decision making through this incident. This episode is filled with immense responsibility for Rama, as granting refuge to a member of the enemy camp was fraught with political and ethical implications.

In the Yuddha Kanda, after being sent out by his own brother for supporting 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 distrust from Rama’s team, including Jambavan and Sugriva. Before deciding, Rama encouraged an open discussion. In the Vibhishana takes refuge padala of Yuddha Kanda, Kambar says Then Rama told his friends nearby, “Having heard all this, tell me After a careful examination Whether I should accept or reject him”. (55) He asked his team to share their perspectives about accepting Vibhishana. Rather than rushing to decide by himself, Rama exemplifies **participatory decision-making** by involving his trusted counsel. Understanding the complexity of the situation, he seeks input from his ministers and advisors, inviting them to share their perspectives and opinions on accepting Vibhishana’s request. Rama actively listened to everyone’s opinions, allowing them to share their perspectives fully. Rama asked for Hanuman’s view.

- ❖ All the other faultless counsellors,
- ❖ Truthful, full of love of him,
- ❖ Also advised him with one mind
- ❖ Against accepting Vibhishana (82)
- ❖ He who transcended knowledge
- ❖ Looked at Hanuman the incomparable
- ❖ And said, “All these are of one mind
- ❖ Learned One, what is your view?” (83)

While the majority was against accepting him, Hanuman advocated in Vibhishana’s favour. Hanuman stressed on Vibhishana’s adherence to dharma, his moral stance against Ravana’s misdeeds and his commitment to righteousness. After listening to everyone’s perspectives on the situation, Rama began to convey his decision of accepting Vibhishana.

- ❖ Enjoying Hanuman’s ambrosial words
- ❖ Rama said, “Wise one, well done!”
- ❖ And looking at the others he said,
- ❖ “This is excellent. Here what I say”,
- ❖ And all of them heard him. (103)

Rama’s decision to seek counsel before taking decision reflects a deep commitment to **participative and inclusive leadership**. He valued the contributions of others and recognized the importance of gathering diverse viewpoints before making significant decisions. This approach is rooted in the belief that leadership is about facilitating a collective decision-making process that considers wisdom, experiences and values of those involved. Rama’s willingness to listen and incorporate the views of his advisors highlights his respect for their expertise and experience, ensuring that the decision made would be well-rounded, ethically sound and wise.

RESULTS

By analysing the above incidents from the *Kamba Ramayana*, we gain valuable insights into participative leadership and decision-making as practiced in ancient times. The attributes of participative decision making are evident throughout these episodes, offering lessons that align closely with contemporary leadership and management theories. The characteristics of a **participative leader** are clear in these events, leading to the following key observations.

- (i) **Inclusive leadership:** Both Rama and Dasaratha demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive and participative decision-making. They actively sought the ministers, sages and trusted allies before making significant decisions. This collaborative approach reflects an understanding of leadership as a shared process in which diverse inputs must be welcomed and must be integrated into the final decision, ensuring that outcomes are both informed and ethical.
- (ii) **Full Participation:** In both instances, the crowning of Rama and the acceptance of Vibhishana, the principle of full participation was prominently upheld.

King Dasaratha summoned a council of learned ministers and advisors to discuss on the succession plan, providing space for each voice to be heard and respected. Likewise, Lord Rama, when approached by Vibhishana, engaged in open discussion with his ministers, including Hanuman, Sugriva and Jambavan. Rather than unilaterally deciding, he listened attentively to all perspectives, fostering a participatory environment that led to a morally sound and strategically effective resolution. Allowing each stakeholder to express their viewpoint empowered the participants and fostered a deeper sense of engagement.

(iii) **Involving experts for decision quality:**

The quality of decisions made by both King Dasaratha and Rama was significantly enhanced through structured consultations with experienced and knowledgeable individuals. In the Kamba Ramayana, Kambar highlights that Dasaratha's ministers were well-versed in scriptures and possessed deep wisdom, making them valuable contributors to the decision-making process. Similarly, during the deliberation on whether to grant refuge to Vibhishana, Rama engaged in meaningful dialogue with key advisors such as Hanuman, Jambavan, and Sugriva. These participatory discussions with the knowledgeable stakeholders enhanced the overall quality of the decisions made. By encouraging open consultation, both leaders ensured that their final choices were well-reasoned, balanced and ethical. This illustrates how participative leadership contributes to informed and sustainable decision-making, which is critical for effective management practice.

(iv) **Shared Ownership:** By actively involving others in the decision-making process, both King Dasaratha and Lord Rama fostered a strong sense of shared ownership and collective accountability. One of the main elements of participatory leadership is collective responsibility and all the members of the team are bound by the group decision and they support it (Pettinger, 2001). Although the authority to rule rested solely with the king, Dasaratha's engagement with his knowledgeable ministers in critical decisions, such as the coronation of Rama ensured that responsibility was distributed and that the decisions reflected the collective wisdom of the kingdom. This inclusive approach made the ministers feel respected, valued and integral to the

outcome. Similarly, Rama's consultation with his war council during Vibhishana's plea for refuge exemplifies leadership that decentralizes authority in favour of collaboration. This fosters a sense of shared responsibility, where the burden of the decision is not solely on the leader but is distributed across those who are involved. In a contemporary organizational context, this mirrors how effective leaders create an environment of **collaboration** and **shared ownership**, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process. This leads to increased engagement, greater accountability and stronger organizational alignment. This participatory ethos closely aligns with contemporary organizational practices, where shared decision-making enhances employee commitment, boosts morale and promotes coherence in achieving common goals.

(v) **Transparency:** Both leaders underscored the importance of decision-making by ensuring that their processes were transparent and perceived as legitimate by all stakeholders. One of the characteristics of leader in servant leadership is to trust their people and they openly share information about them and the organisation (Blanchard & Conley, 2022). In the Kamba Ramayana, both King Dasaratha and Rama exemplify a leadership style grounded in openness. Dasaratha convened his council of learned ministers and openly communicated his intentions, seeking their opinions and support. This act of involving the court in such a critical decision ensured that the process was transparent and open. When Vibhishana sought refuge, he assembled his war council and encouraged each member, Hanuman, Sugriva, Jambavan, and others to share their views. This transparent deliberation process, in which dissenting opinions were respectfully heard, demonstrated Rama's ethical commitment to participatory decision-making. These episodes illustrate that transparency and stakeholder engagement are essential elements of effective leadership. This emphasis on transparency and openness strengthened the credibility of leadership.

(vi) **Diverse Perspectives:** Integrating different perspectives from a wide range of individuals in the team enhances a decision quality. Both King Dasaratha and Rama demonstrated a deep appreciation for cognitive diversity. In the Kamba

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Ramayana, Dasaratha's consultation with learned advisors before announcing Rama's coronation, and Rama's deliberation with his war council prior to accepting Vibhishana, both exemplify how the inclusion of diverse viewpoints enriched the decision-making process. This participatory approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of complex situations, leading to well-balanced and thoughtful outcomes. Such practices underscore the enduring value of inclusive leadership, where the synthesis of varied insights leads to decisions that are sound and socially informed.

- (vii) **People-Focused Leadership:** When a leader adopts a cooperative approach, it promotes a culture and environment that encourages collaboration over competition, reducing conflict. Such leaders provide direction and those leaders assist when needed and share a powerful vision. (Associates, 2022, p. 551). In both Dasaratha's and Rama's leadership approach, we can find a deep respect for people and their contributions. They both show the intention to serve first. Both Dasaratha and Rama exhibited people-centric leadership by recognising the value of individual voices and building harmony through empathy, respect and collective responsibility. Collective decision-making, as illustrated in these narratives, reinforced unity among the leadership circle. The inclusive process nurtured cooperation and reduced dissent, highlighting the team-building potential of participatory governance. Such a focus on people-centric governance aligns with current leadership paradigms that prioritize employee well-being and stakeholder engagement.

Managerial Implications

These examples illustrate that participatory leadership and decision making with **full participation in leadership fosters shared understanding, strengthens commitment and builds trust** among stakeholders. For modern managers, they serve as important models of how involving and encouraging complete engagement from relevant team members while making decisions can lead to decisions that are more robust and inclusive. Leadership is about how the person fosters teamwork and collaboration (Associates, 2022, p. 550). Leaders should intentionally involve individuals from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise in decision-making processes. In the same way that Rama and Dasaratha actively consulted ministers, sages and trusted allies before making decision, modern managers can improve decision

quality and team cohesion by leveraging diverse perspectives within their teams.

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates how the Kamba Ramayana, a classical Tamil epic, provides enduring lessons in participative leadership and decision-making. By analysing key episodes such as King Dasharatha's consultation with his council before crowning Rama and Rama's inclusive discussion before accepting Vibhishana, the research highlights the core values of participative leadership and decision making such as full participation, mutual understanding, inclusive leadership and shared responsibility. These narratives reveal that leadership, when grounded in collective wisdom and ethical reflection, yields decisions that are more sustainable and accepted. The research underscores that effective leaders are those who value the perspectives of others, fostering a culture of respect and shared ownership. Such traits are directly applicable in contemporary organizational contexts, where the complexity of decision-making often requires diverse input, ethical clarity and transparent processes.

Kamba Ramayana contains abundant management and leadership insights that resonate with contemporary management concepts. This paper only selected and analysed the aspects of participative leadership and decision making from the texts of Kamba Ramayana. However, a notable limitation of this study is, as the Kamba Ramayana is written in classical Tamil, accessing and comprehending the original text may have challenges for scholars who are not proficient in the language. As with many ancient texts, its poetic nature leaves it open to multiple interpretations on leadership and management. Future research can build on this work by comparing interpretations across versions of the Ramayana or exploring similar leadership narratives in other cultural epics to enrich our understanding of ancient wisdom and its relevance to modern leadership paradigms.

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