

# Lessons for Effective Business Leadership - Ramayana Depicts Through Many Real-life Examples



ISBN: 978-1-7362088-2-3

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*Across the globe, there are many people holding various leadership positions but it is common to listen that there is dearth of actual leaders. On the other hand, in business, it is very common to listen from people holding responsible positions that team spirit is missing among subordinates and it is very difficult to manage with them. Despite several top management institutes, leadership coaching and best of business oriented teachings, such adverse observations indicate that there are definite gap areas. Those gap areas can be filled by the Ramayana which, through many real-life examples, carries lessons for effective business leadership.*

## 1. Introduction

Effective business leadership is about executing the vision of the respective company by setting tone and culture for the business house. As required, it may also incorporate improving or redefining the vision itself. Prentice (2004) defined leadership as “the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants”. As per him, “successful leader is the one who can understand people’s motivations and enlist employee participation in a way that marries individual needs and interests of the group’s purpose”. These timeless definitions stating that how leaders can motivate employees to support respective businesses is quite precise.

In the present era, there are common observations that despite the fact that there are so many leaders across the globe but people often keep quoting that there is definite dearth of good leaders. It surprises to listen so, since there is no dearth of quality management institutes, there is no dearth of quality skilled employees and workforce and moreover, there are high ranked leadership coaching institutes and coaches available in abundance. Despite these, irrespective of which business house it is, often employees complain about leadership and leadership keeps complaining about difficulty in managing employees and about missing team spirit and dedication. In addition, nowadays quite often, conflicts within organization due to generation gaps or other dividing factors are getting observed. This phenomenon clearly indicates towards definite gap areas in business leadership.

One of the most sacred Indian scripture Ramayana is not only a religious text but it is also the great exposition on human and organizational behavior. Ramayana is a narrative of young Prince Lord Rama’s successful fight with demon Ravana to free his abducted wife Mata Sita. However, it also demonstrates a “new leadership order” in which, exiled Prince Lord Rama opts for making an unlikely and unconventional alliance with monkeys and challenges the powerful demon King Ravana who represents the “old leadership order”. Thus, Ramayana becomes narrative of two contrasting leaderships. One represented by Ravana – an established king who ignores alliances or technologies, was confident of his strategic position (separated by ocean) and was dismissive of emerging challenges. The other is represented by Lord Rama – new emerging leadership with new alliance (with monkeys), technologies (bridge over ocean) and with strong value system (humble and inclusive). Thus, Ramayana provides one of the best scriptures to look for lessons - to fill up gap areas in modern business leadership. This paper intends to demonstrate that how Ramayana, through many real-life examples, carries lessons of effective business leadership. In this paper, a few of the incidences of Ramayana are analyzed in details in subsequent paragraphs to demonstrate and reveal the great leadership lessons emerging out of them.

## 2. Contrasting Leadership Styles of Rama & Ravana

A few incidences of Ramayana presently being taken for analysis are to infer contrasting leaderships of Lord Rama and Ravana. Lord Rama demonstrates new leadership order whereas demon Ravana represents old leadership order.

**2.1 Case-1:** This case study refers to the situation when Rama along with his army of monkeys arrived at the shores of ocean they were required to cross the ocean to reach Lanka. It is mentioned in the Ramayana that arrival of Lord Ram’s army was a matter of great concern for citizen of Lanka. That time, Vibhishana, Ravana’s younger brother counsels Ravana to recognize threat with suggestion to return Mata Sita and to make Peace. Ravana got angry, cursed Vibhishana and kicked him off his kingdom. In contrast, when Vibhishana approaches Lord Rama, he anoints him as the King of Lanka and makes him an ally. Analytical contrast in leadership between Lord Rama and Ravana for present Case-1 are construed in Table 1 below:

Sl No.	Lord Rama	Demon King Ravana
1.	Lord Rama realizes that to challenge established order of Ravana, he has to make alliance.	On the other end, Ravana completely ignored advice of his own younger brother Vibhishana who suggested जड़ से ही रार मिटादो यह, अर्पण कर उनकी सीता को   रघुकुल पति से मित्रता बढ़ा, बलवान बनाओ लंका को
2.	Lord Rama not only allies with monkeys but also makes a strategic alliance with Vibhishana who was familiar with local conditions. Moreover, being younger brother of Ravana, he was also well aware with the strengths and weaknesses of Ravana and his allies	On the contrary, Ravana humiliated Vibhishana and throws him out for expressing dissenting opinion बस मौन विभीषण हो, अनुचित है दंड सहोदर को   इस समय और होता कोई, तो अभी काट देता सर को    क्या काम इस जगह है उसका, जिसने बैरी से प्यार किया   ले माया ममता त्याग आज, मैंने तेरा त्याग किया

Table-1: Contrast in leadership behavior of Lord Rama and Ravana for Case-1

**2.2 Case-2:** As second case study, the subsequent incident has been taken for analysis. In order to deal with then immediate problem of “safely crossing the ocean to reach Lanka - without wasting too much efforts or incurring losses”, Lord Rama started consulting his team members. Analyses of contrast in leadership of Lord Rama and Demon King Ravana for this case are reflected in Table 2 below:

Sl No.	Lord Rama	Demon King Ravana
1.	Lord Rama started consulting his team members to deal with immediate problem of crossing the ocean to reach Lanka.  Lord Rama specially seeks opinion of Vibhishana who was familiar with local conditions.	On the other end, Ravana though he himself sent his own loyal ministers Shuk & Sharan to spy, he totally ignored their advices when Shuk said (Radheshyam, 2017): संशय की रही बात ही क्या, जब स्वयं देख हम आये हैं   निश्चय ही अपनी ताकत से, वे ड्योढ़े और सवाये हैं    सीता को दे कीजिये संधि, जग में यदि जीवित रहना है   अन्यथा हमें यह दीख रहा, उनसे लड़ना खुद मरना है     On the contrary, Ravana got very angry on them thrown them out (Radheshyam, 2017) रक्तवर्ण रावण हुआ, नेत्र हो गये लाल   लात मार दरबार से, दोनों दिये निकाल
2.	Vibhishana advices to pray to ocean God. Though in parallel, Lakshaman advices to dry up the ocean by firing an arrow (Radheshyam, 2017).  चढ़ जाय धनुष पर बाण अभी, तो इसका गर्व हरण होगा   फिर सागर हो या महासागर, आरत हो चरण शरण होगा     But Lord Rama pleasantly assured his brother as follows: (Radheshyam, 2017) शान्त शान्त हो अनुजवर, मेरे भाई वीर   ऐसा ही होगा मगर, धरे रहो कुछ धीर     Rama then followed advice of Vibhishana who was more experienced of the local conditions.	Even Ravana ignored his wife Mandodari's suggestion to make peace with Lord Rama by returning Mata Sita and laughed at her stating her a weak women (Tulsidas, 2002):  श्रवन सुनी सठ ता करि बानी। बिहसा जगत बिदित अभिमानी॥ सभय सुभाउ नारि कर साचा। मंगल महुँ भय मन अति काचा॥  Mandodari Mata warns Ravana about strengths of Lord Rama's arrows with following verse (Tulsidas, 2002): राम बान अहि गन सरिस निकर निसाचर भेका जब लगि ग्रसत न तब लगि जतनु करहु तजि टेका॥

		<p>Ravana in place of understanding the noble suggestion of Mandodari Mata, he brushed off her suggestions with following verse (Tulsidas, 2002):</p> <p>जौ आवइ मर्कट कटकाई। जिअहिं बिचारे निसिचर खाई॥ कंपहिं लोकप जाकीं त्रासा। तासु नारि सभीत बड़ि हासा॥</p>
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Table-2: Contrast in leadership behavior of Lord Rama and Ravana for Case-2

**2.3 Case-3:** Third case study is taken to compare two different incidents when secret agents of opposite parties were caught on different occasions and how they were treated by Lord Rama and Demon King Ravana respectively. The treatments given to secret agents of opposite parties are compared in Table 3:

Sl No.	Demon King Ravana	Lord Rama
1	Lord Rama sent Hanuman to just locate Mata Sita. Hanuman after locating Sita Mata with her permission started eating fruits and simultaneously destroying the trees.	In the other incident, after getting the news of arrival of Rama along with his army at Lanka after crossing the sea, Ravana ordered two of his ministers “Shuk” & “Saran” to take forms of monkey and to enter in Rama’s camp to fetch details about their strengths.
2	On the other hand, Ravana ordered to catch him. When Hanuman was brought in front of him, in anger, he desired to kill him as punishment.	Despite them taking form of monkeys, “Shuk” & “Saran” got identified by Vibhishana. After getting caught, both were brought in front of Lord Rama and informed about these two spies of Ravana.
3	When intervened by Vibhishana against killing, Ravana mistaking Hanuman as ordinary monkey ordered to burn his tail.	In front of Rama, both “Shuk” & “Saran” stated their truth that they are sent by Ravana to spy to know strength of army and about quantum of arsenals available with them.
4	Despite Hanuman’s demonstration of power with spread of tail, Ravana did not bother to heed the threat for which, Hanuman gave clear-cut warning. This adamancy of Ravana resulted in burning of Lanka via Hanuman.	Lord Rama got very happy with truthfulness shown by “Shuk” and “Saran” and assured them that they will not be punished. Rather Lord Rama suggested them to complete their intended tasks fearlessly, before returning back to Ravana.
5	In fact, Hanuman when brought in front of Ravana, very respectfully he suggested Ravana to release Mata Sita and make peace with Rama to avert future destruction of his kingdom.	Along with “Shuk” and “Saran”, Laxman handed over a letter addressed to Ravana. Lord Rama also conveyed last warning for Ravana by stating that else he should be ready to face major destructions of his army from next sunrise onwards.

Table-3: Contrast in leadership behavior of Lord Rama and Ravana for Case-3

### 3. Interpretation of Incidences: SWOT analysis from Leadership Perspectives

The incidents of Ramayana taken-up as case studies under Para 2.0 are sequentially analyzed and interpreted for their relevance in present business environment and also to fetch leadership lessons from them.

**3.1 Case-1:** Lord Rama’s arrival at the shores of ocean along with his army of monkeys was indication of a great Threat for Lanka and in particular, for Ravana. Till that point, people of Lanka had already tasted the strength of Lord Rama after they witnessed that how a singly monkey (for them, it was one of the monkeys of Lord Ram’s army) Hanuman, entered Lanka and destroyed it with fire. However, Ravana due to his ego did not bother to realize the Threat despite witnessing Hanuman’s strength. Observing so, Vibhishana approaches Ravana with solution but he was ridiculed and thrown out of Lanka. Even suggestions of Mata Mandodari was also ignored and rather laughed at by Ravana. On contrast, when Vibhishana approaches Lord Rama, he anoints him as the King of Lanka and makes him an ally. SWOT analyses of behaviors of both from Leadership Perspectives are shown in Table-4.

Sl No.	Lord Rama	Demon King Ravana
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Lord Rama assessed weakness prevailing on his side</li> <li>* Assessed threats of established order of Ravana</li> <li>* Hence, gauging needs, arrived at decision to strengthen his side by making alliances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Ravana due to his arrogance and ego completely forgot to realize the looming threat created due to his ill intentioned move of abduction of Mata Sita.</li> <li>* Ravana on listening solution from his own brother for making peace with Lord Rama (by returning Mata Sita), became so furious that he throws Vibhisana out.</li> </ul>

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Lord Rama allied with monkeys</li> <li>* He also made a strategic alliance with Vibhisana who was familiar with local conditions as well as about strengths and weaknesses of Ravana and his allies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Ravana completely forgot that Vibhisana was aware of all his secrets and by humiliating and throwing him out, would give a great weapon in the hands of his opponent; to the extent that it would be like strengthening the opposite party to easily win over him in the war.</li> </ul>
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Table-4: SWOT Analysis of the leadership behaviors of Lord Rama and Ravana for Case-1

**3.2 Case-2:** In the second case study, Lord Rama starts consulting his team members regarding immediate problem of 'safely crossing the ocean to reach Lanka'. His care for his team members gets reflected from the fact that he was intending to cross ocean 'without wasting too much efforts or incurring losses'. On the other end, Ravana was not ready to listen to any dissident opinions and started firing whosoever tried to suggest him 'to make peace by releasing Mata Sita'. SWOT analyses of behaviors of both from Leadership Perspectives are reflected in Table-5

Sl No.	Lord Rama	Demon King Ravana
1	<p>'Lord Rama consulting his team members' shows his respect for all members and his intention to ensure involvement of all in decision-making process. An important lesson for Business leadership.</p> <p>Lord Rama giving special importance to Vibhishana was a sign of respect for experience and knowledge since Vibhishana was well familiar with local conditions.</p>	<p>On the other end, Ravana was not willing to listen to his own loyal ministers' ("Shuk" and "Saran"), views – forgetting that he himself assigned them the task to spy about strengths of Lord Rama's army.</p> <p>Listening nonconformist views, Ravana got so angry that he treated his own senior experienced two ministers very badly and disrespectfully, thrown them out.</p>
2	<p>Lord Rama respectfully listened contrary views. Despite him encouraging brother's views, he opted to go ahead with advice given by Vibhisana who was the most experienced with the local conditions. This shows matured decision-making with wisdom of a great leader.</p>	<p>On the other end, Ravana did not given heed to even suggestions of his own wife Mandodari.</p> <p>Mandodari Mata when warned Ravana about looming Threat on Lanka - highlighting Strengths of Lord Rama's arrows, he loosely brushed her suggestions off by proudly stating overestimated strengths of his demon army.</p>

Table-5: SWOT Analysis of the leadership behaviors of Lord Rama and Ravana for Case-2

**3.3 Case-3:** Third case study is taken to compare two different incidents when members of opposite parties were caught on different occasions. How they were treated by Lord Rama and Demon King Ravana respectively show the personal standards getting reflected in their leadership traits. SWOT analyses were performed for both incidents to interpret the lessons for business leadership and they are reflected in Table-6

Sl No.	Handling by Demon King Ravana	Handling by Lord Rama
1	<p>Lord Rama sent Hanuman to locate Mata Sita. This shows Lord Rama's delegation of work and believes in capacity of his subordinate.</p> <p>Hanuman's loyalty and respect towards his master can be seen at highest level when he takes permission from Mata to eat fruits.</p>	<p>When Ravana ordered two of his ministers "Shuk" &amp; "Saran" to take forms of monkey and to enter in Rama's army to fetch details about their strengths, he forgot that the sharp eyes of Vibhishana can easily identify them and in turn, they will be caught. This shows lack of wisdom in Ravana.</p>
2	<p>When Hanuman was brought in front of him, in anger, Ravana in first instance decides to kill him as punishment. It shows Ravana's two weaknesses - short temperedness and short-sightedness. Both are dangerous for leaders.</p>	<p>After getting caught, when both were brought in front of Lord Rama stating that they two spies of Ravana. Lord Rama very respectfully gave them opportunity to speak. It shows Lord Rama's quality of listening to others, even to enemies – a great leadership quality.</p>
3	<p>When intervened by Vibhishana against killing, mistaking Hanuman as ordinary monkey, Ravana ordered to burn his tail. This shows another leadership blunder committed by Ravana when he underestimated Hanuman and 'judged him just by his physical appearance'.</p>	<p>Comforted by Lord Rama, both "Shuk" &amp; "Saran" stated their truth and accepted that they are sent by Ravana to spy to know strengths of Rama's army. The quality of compassion demonstrated by Lord Rama towards spies of enemy is a great trait, which has now been accepted as one of the sought-after quality in Business leadership.</p>
4	<p>Despite Hanuman's demonstration of power by extending his tail (when people tried to burn it), Ravana did blunder by ignoring the Threat. This was big leadership blunder of Ravana which resulted in not only burning of Lanka but</p>	<p>Appreciating truthfulness shown by "Shuk" and "Saran", Lord Rama immediately rewarded them by making them fearless on his behalf and secondly, by encouraging them to complete their tasks before returning back.</p>

	Hanuman's single act has broken morale of Ravana's army and instigated fear in Lanka about strength of Lord Rama.	'Appreciation for truthfulness and immediate rewarding for the same' is one of the rare leadership quality demonstrated by Lord Rama. This is the Strength in business leadership which 'though aspired by all but practically achieved in rarity'.
5	In fact, when Hanuman was brought in front of Ravana, he respectfully suggested Ravana to release Mata Sita and make peace with Rama to avert future destruction of his kingdom. This shows lesson that 'power lies in politeness'.	When "Shuk" and "Saran" were returning back, Laxman handed over a letter addressed to Ravana and Lord Rama also conveyed last warning for Ravana. This shows that a true leader tries to make Peace till last without compromising with Dharma. This has also been demonstrated by Lord Krishna during Mahabharata war.

Table-6: SWOT Analysis of the leadership behaviors of Lord Rama and Ravana for Case-3

#### 4. Relevance of Lessons from Case Studies for Effective Business Leadership

The three case studies chosen based on real-life incidents from Ramayana, demonstrate quite contrasting leadership qualities in Lord Rama and in Demon King Ravana. SWOT analysis performed to interpret behavior of two leaders show that Lord Rama always adopted "Inclusive Leadership". In "Inclusive leadership", leader ensures that all his team members feel a sense of belonging and value, are provided with resources and support required to achieve their full potential and treated equitably (Bolden, 2020). Lord Rama in all instances treated everybody with equality, involved everybody in decision-making process and valued everybody's opinion. On the contrary, Ravana due to his arrogance and ego, in all case studies can be seen ignoring the principles of Inclusive Leadership. Ravana never bothered to involve his team in decision-making process. Even, when he was suggested to return Mata Sita and to make peace with Lord Rama - by Hanuman, his own brother Vibhishana, his wife Mandodari and even by his two loyal ministers "Shuk" and "Saran", all were treated very badly by Ravana for expressing their dissident opinions.

Second important business leadership lesson emerged from three case studies in the importance of "Complementary Leadership". Making complementarity work requires outstanding coordination and communication among team members (Miles, Stephen & Michael, 2007). Under Lord Rama's leadership, outstanding coordination and communication among team members required for complementarity to work, were always promoted. Comparing to Ravana, Lord Rama's army consisted of not only people from all walks of life but also bears and monkeys, prominent in numbers. In Lord Rama's army there were even variations in age groups, maturity and experiences. Lord Rama always handled his team ensuring 'Unity in Diversity' principle and with suitable strategy to ensure that complementarity should become strength for his team. One such example of Lord Rama's handling can be seen under Case-2, when Vibhishana and Laxman expressed conflicting views regarding how to address the problem of crossing the sea. Sugreeva, the ruler of monkeys, favored Vibhishana. Observing this, as stated in Valmiki Ramayana 6-19-36, Lord Rama though was in favor of idea of Vibhishana but rather than imposing his or Vibhishana views, suggested both Laxman and Sugreeva to decide on the matter and to inform whichever is agreeable to them. As further stated in Valmiki Ramayana verses 6-19-37 & 6-19-38 (Debroy, 2017) that hearing these Rama's words, Sugreeva and Laxman both with proper courtesy informed together in favor of agreeing to Vibhishana's advice. The handling demonstrated by Lord Rama is a classic example of 'Complimentary Leadership'. On the other end, Ravana was always seen suppressing dissident views and punishing people heavily for expressing the same.

#### 5. Conclusions

In Business, unfortunately conflicts due to varying views majorly, due to generation gaps or due to other created divisive barriers on narrow interests are getting widened day-by-day. Majority of the problems in Business world are related with leadership issues. SWOT analyses carried out for three case studies on three chosen real-life examples from Ramayana, point towards solutions for many gap areas presently getting observed in business leaderships. As outcomes of three cases studies, gap areas can be identified in correlation with Ravana's ways of handling and solution for the same can be identified based on strengths in Lord Rama's ways of handling. Lord Rama kept practicing principles of "Inclusive Leadership" under all scenarios, which helped him to keep his team motivated to win-over challenges under all circumstances. Secondly, it also helped in arriving at "Complimentary Leadership" as the effective way of handling conflicting views and aspirations within any business organization. Based on real-life demonstrations by Lord Rama, it can be summarized that success in Complementary Leadership is possible by focusing on its four pillars of alignment which are (a) a common vision, (b) common incentives, (c) communication and (iv) Trust. From case studies, one can see that in Lord Rama's leadership, practice of these four pillars is always visible whereas, in case of Ravana, all these four pillars were practically non-existent. Thus, from this study based on detailed analyses of three real-life incidents of Ramayana, it can be concluded that "Inclusive Leadership" and "Complimentary Leadership" are two important limbs to ensure effective business leadership. This study also re-assures that gap areas in effective business leadership can be identified, interpreted, analyzed and solved with the help of lessons from real-life incidents of Ramayana.

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