

Effective Listening as a Leadership Communication Skill: A Study Based on the Kamba Ramayana

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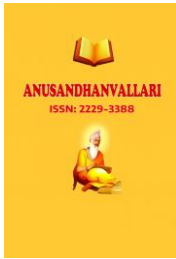
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Abstract

Listening is one of the key managerial skills that enables leaders to understand team's perspectives, analyse the information and make informed decisions. This paper explores the importance of listening as an essential leadership and communication skill in management through an analytical study of the Kamba Ramayana. This comparative study of the ancient literary work and management provides valuable insight into importance of listening, highlighting its relevance in modern organizational contexts. Management lessons can be derived from classical epics, which offer rich narratives depicting leadership and communication. Although Ramayana had been extensively examined from literary, and cultural perspectives, relatively limited attention has been given to its relevance for management studies, particularly in relation to listening as a strategic communication skill. This research therefore seeks to bridge this gap by examining how listening behaviours are portrayed through key characters in the Kamba Ramayana. This paper analyses in depth how various characters in the epic exemplify different types of listening based on the situation. Informative listening, Critical listening and Empathetic listening are studied, and compared in relation with Kamba Ramayana through its characters. Informational listening is illustrated through the attentive engagement of Rama with Sage Vasishta before coronation, and when detailed information was provided by Hanuman about Sugriva in Kishkintha Kanda. Critical listening is reflected in the decision-making approaches of Rama and Dasaratha. They carefully considered multiple viewpoints and evaluated the consequences of their actions. Empathetic listening, an essential aspect of compassionate and servant leadership, is demonstrated through Rama's interaction with Bharata in Chitrakooda. Using the hermeneutic methodology, the research interprets selected verses from the epic to analyse how listening behaviours influence leadership communication and decision-making. By comparing the Kamba Ramayana with management, the study demonstrates the relevance of classical literature in contemporary management. This



interdisciplinary approach bridges ancient wisdom with modern management practices, offering insights into how attentive listening contributes to strong relationships, building trust, shared responsibility and effective leadership.

Keywords: Management, Leadership, Effective Communication, Ramayana, Listening skills

Introduction

Communication is a major management skill. Communication plays a vital role in conveying a message from one person to another. It is essential to build relationships, as it enables the sharing of views, the expression of ideas and opinions, and in explaining of needs. Effective communication relies heavily on the skill of listening. Peter Drucker says, “No matter whether the manager’s job is engineering, accounting or selling, his effectiveness depends on his ability to listen and to read, on his ability to speak and to write.” (Drucker, 2007, 299). Attentive listening allows us to understand, comprehend and grasp the message being conveyed. Attentive and active listening determines the success of the team. Poor listening can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the message, which are significant barriers to effective communication in management.

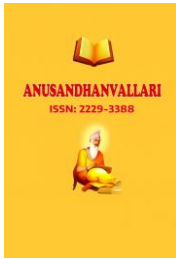
This paper aims to identify and examine the listening skills and types demonstrated by the characters of Ramayana. Informative listening, Critical listening and Empathetic listening are considered for this study. This paper focuses on how these different types of listening are demonstrated by various characters of Ramayana and the way it is utilized in various situations within the epic. By examining these listening behaviours, the study aims to draw insights into how effective communication can enhance management, leadership, decision-making, building trust and relationship-building in both historical and modern contexts.

Methodology

Various research papers and books were reviewed to grasp and comprehend the diverse management, communication and listening styles depicted in the Ramayana. Using hermeneutics technique, this research analyses the management concepts related to listening and communication in the texts of Kamba Ramayana. This paper focusses mainly on the three listening types- Informational listening, Critical listening and Empathetic listening as portrayed in Ramayana. Texts of Kamba Ramayana were analysed and the stanzas that are relevant to above listening skills are considered for the study.

Kamba Ramayanam

Kamba Ramayana is written in Tamil by Kambar in the 12th century. Kamba Ramayanam consists of 123 sections, which are called padalams and consists of approximately 12,000 verses. There are six parts in Kamba Ramayana which are called ‘kandams’ namely Bala Kandam, Ayodhya Kandam, Aranya Kandam, Kishkintha Kandam, Sundara Kandam and Yudhha Kandam. Each kandam describes a specific part of Rama’s life. Dr. Irai Anbu, 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. Irai Anbu, 2018). Kamba Ramayana abounds with management and communication concepts and leaders today can benefit from the teachings of Ramayana. This research explores and dwells deep into the listening styles showed in the characters of Kamba Ramayana. By examining the listening skills demonstrated by the characters in the epic, the study seeks to highlight the undying importance of effective listening in fostering understanding, collaboration, trust and leadership, both in ancient times and in contemporary settings.



The Role of Effective Communication in Organisational Leadership

Effective communication is important to run any organisation. Communication affect the quality of relationships and work within the organisation. 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). Good and proper communication enhances trust and motivation within the team. At the same time, bad and inadequate communication will lead to frustration in the organisation. "Communication is at the heart of everything we do in business, yet poor communication is a huge problem for businesses and individuals, causing low morale, poor performance and high staff turnover". (Boyes, 2010, 8) It is important for a leader to communicate the right message at the right time in the right tone. To be an effective communicator, a leader needs to understand the people involved in communication. Communication involves clarity and credibility. Communication is an important aspect of Management. A leader must deliver a message with proper use of words to ensure the message is conveyed properly. One of the main elements of leadership is collective responsibility and all the members of the team are bound by the group decision and they support it (Pettinger, 2001). Communication involves understanding the audience and their needs, and effectively conveying the message in a way that builds rapport within the team. Tim Hannagan says, "The process of communication is a complicated one that involves a range of factors to be considered when attempting to either put across a message or interpret a message one is receiving." (Hannagan, 2008, 331). According to John Adair, there are five elements involved in communication. They are communicator, receiver, aim, content, methods and situation. He says, "Good communication requires an understanding and skilled communicator, presenting a true and necessary content to an alert and able communicant, using the most appropriate methods in a situation that is contributing to the meeting of their minds, so that the aim is fully achieved". (Adair, 2011)

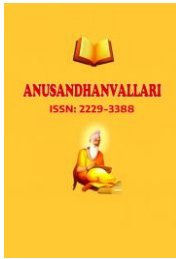
The Power of Listening

Listening is a key skill for effective leadership and is a critical aspect of communication. "Listening is not the same as hearing. It is the positive business of paying heed or giving your thoughtful attention to someone while they are speaking." (Adair, 2011, 208). A good communication starts with listening. Active and attentive listening involves understanding and grasping the deeper and underlying meaning behind the words being spoken. Peter Drucker says "The more important thing in communication is hearing what is not said". (Adair, 2011) This attentive listening ability enables a leader to cultivate a sense of being heard and trust within the team. Simon Sinek, in his speech, 'The Art of Listening' says, that listening is not the act of hearing the words spoken, it is the art of understanding the meaning behind those words. Art of listening is creating an environment in which the other person feels heard, feels seen and feels understood".

Listening is the primary characteristics of a servant leader. Greenleaf says "Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's own inner voice, and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating." (Greenleaf, 1998, 5).

Listening with full attention enables a leader to connect with team members on an individual level. Understanding each person's inner voice and circumstances help the leaders to provide the support needed and resolve challenges within the team. "When you actively listen, you don't jump to conclusions about what the speaker is saying but try to see things from the other person's viewpoint. Real listening is not passive. It takes focus and energy, but the payoff is much improved communication." (Boyes, 2010).

This approach not only strengthens relationships between the team but also fosters a positive and inclusive work environment. This helps the leader to motivate their teams towards collective goals, also ensuring that everyone feels valued and understood. "Important considerations when looking at communication is the extent to which the



person on the receiving end is listening and the extent to which they comprehend the message” (Hannagan, 2008, 317). Ken Blanchard and Randy Conley says, Good listeners focus on other person and what they are saying whereas poor listeners relate everything to themselves. Good listeners are interested in others and how they are feeling. (Blanchard & Conley, 2022).

Analysing listening skills in Ramayana

This study examines the significance of listening in the context of leadership and management. By exploring how these listening styles are portrayed through the characters of the Kamba Ramayana, the study draws parallels between ancient narratives and modern leadership practices. So ma. Valliappan mentions Kamban illustrates various management concepts through the characters of Kamba Ramayana (Valliappan, 2008). Through a comparative analysis of the listening skills exhibited by various characters, we gain valuable insights into how effective listening contributes to strong communication and sound decision-making, which are essential for effective leadership. The findings highlight how the ability to listen attentively and appropriately in different contexts enhances a leader’s capacity to understand complex emotions and foster cohesive team dynamics. 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.

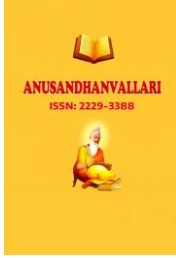
Results and Discussion

The three types of listening - Informative listening, Critical listening and Empathetic listening are considered for this study. An attempt is made to compare these types of listening and explore their relevance through the characters of Kamba Ramayana. By examining and comparing the listening skills in various characters of Kamba Ramayana, we can gain insights into the different ways listening skills that are portrayed and their impact on communication and leadership within the epic.

(i) Informational Listening

Informational listening occurs when one listens to understand and retain the information being communicated. It’s the process of grasping and comprehending the words being said and recalling the information when necessary. In any organization, this skill is vital, as it involves not only grasping the deeper meaning of the message, but also understanding its implications. This type of listening happens when there is strong desire to learn and accurately follow instructions. To avoid misinterpretations, the listener must remain fully attentive throughout the communication process. Informational listening extends beyond simply grasping the message; it also necessitates the retaining of key facts and details. The listener also understands the importance and significance of the message communicated and the need to retain the information. This skill plays a crucial role in learning and interactions. Employees who excel at comprehensive listening tend to perform well during training and easily understand the new process.

In the Kamba Ramayana, the character of Rama exemplifies comprehensive listening through his attentive and thoughtful approach to communication. Rama demonstrates an exceptional listening skill by fully engaging and paying attention to what others say. He also effectively retains and recalls important information which can be seen in many places in Ramayana. This ability allowed him to use the past information effectively in critical situations. Rama demonstrated a strong desire to learn, which enhanced his ability to engage in comprehensive listening. He believed in continuous learning and applied this principle to enhance his listening skills.



In the Ayodhya Kanda, in Manthara Conspiracy Patala, Sage Vasishta said to Rama before the coronation,

“I have to speak to you a few words of welfare. You keep them in mind carefully and follow them. Thus, speaking to Rama, the sage Vasishta further advised him” (Shanthilal Nagar, 2023).

Sage Vasishta then offered him detailed guidance on the essential rules and principles that a king should follow to govern the kingdom effectively. Rama listened attentively and effectively to the words of Sage Vasishta. He grasped the deeper meaning behind the words. He carefully considered the insights on the responsibilities of a ruler, including the importance of justice, fairness, and wisdom in leadership. Through this focused listening, Rama ensured he was well-equipped with the knowledge needed to fulfil his duties as a king, ensuring the well-being and prosperity of his people.

Informative listening also takes place when family histories or stories about the past are shared. When someone narrates a family history or recounts events from the past, informative listeners pay close attention to the context, timeline, and specific events to gain a deeper understanding of their past and the lessons that can be learned. Another instance where Rama’s listening skill was portrayed was in Kishkintha Kanda in Friendship Patala.

When Rama and Lakshmana arrived in Kishkindha, searching for Sugriva, they encountered Hanuman, who introduced himself as Sugriva's minister. Upon learning this, Rama and Lakshmana expressed their desire to meet Sugriva. Hanuman then arranged a meeting between them. During this encounter, Hanuman explained in detail why Sugriva was hiding from his brother, Vaali. He provided a comprehensive account of Sugriva's past, including the reasons that led to the conflict with Vaali and the need to defeat Vaali. Rama listened attentively to Hanuman's narration, demonstrating focused and careful listening to fully understand the difficulties of Sugriva's situation. His attentive listening allowed him to grasp the nuances of Sugriva's predicament which allowed him to take decisions.

(ii) *Critical listening*

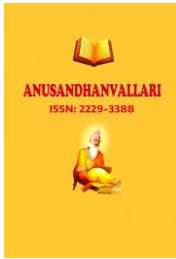
Critical listening involves analysing and evaluating the information being communicated, with the goal of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the conversation. This skill is crucial for effective decision-making. For leaders, critical listening is essential as it enables them to strategically assess and understand a situation before making decisions. It requires the listener to pay full attention not only to the words being spoken, but also to the tone and nuances of the communication. Critical listeners must grasp the underlying messages, assess the credibility of the speaker, and evaluate the logic of the arguments presented. This type of listening is especially important during times of crisis or when the speaker is attempting to persuade the listener. In an organizational setting, critical listening plays a vital role in planning, negotiations, and other key decision-making processes. Critical listeners process the message while also thinking about the potential outcomes of the action being discussed.

In the Kamba Ramayana, we can observe critical listening skills demonstrated by the characters. Rama and Dasaratha engage in critical listening by carefully analysing the information they receive and considering the implications of the actions being discussed. They demonstrated the skill of critical listening in various situations. It is the emperor's duty to coronate the prince at the appropriate time for the welfare of the kingdom. In Ayodhya Kanda of Kamba Ramayana, in The Council Patala, Dasaratha says,

“I see before me old age most welcome

When I can no longer bear

The burden of this earth which Adisesha



The eight elephants and the mountains bear. (1328)

When King Dasaratha contemplated the coronation of Rama as his successor, he did not make the decision in isolation. To understand the views of his ministers, he discussed with them their perspectives and thoughts.

“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)

During this discussion, Dasaratha demonstrated critical listening by carefully considering each minister's input. He attentively listened to their opinions which ultimately reinforced his decision of coronating Rama as his successor.

Rama demonstrated the skill of critical listening in many places in Kamba Ramayana. Rama, as an epitome of leadership and communication, possess enormous listening skills. One such instance where Rama displayed his critical listening skills is found in Yuddha Kanda of Kamba Ramayana. When Vibhishana surrendered to Rama, Rama sought the views of everyone in his team before offering his own perspective.

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

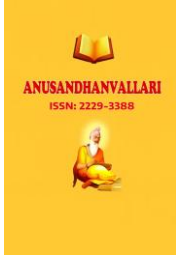
Whether I should accept or reject him”. (55)

He carefully listened to each viewpoint, demonstrating his critical listening skills. He thoroughly listened to everyone, also evaluating the pros and cons. This ability to critically listen enabled him to analyse the situation comprehensively and ultimately make the right decision. Rama's critical listening ensured that he considered all perspectives and made a choice that was both fair and strategic.

Through their interactions, Dasaratha and Rama made strategic decisions, showcasing the importance of critical listening in navigating complex situations and ensuring wise leadership and communication.

(iii) Empathetic listening

Empathy is one of the main characteristics of an effective leader. Empathetic leaders try to understand others and their position. This helps the leader to better connect with the team and eventually build trust. It is necessary for a leader to understand the needs of the follower before taking any decision and communicating the message to the followers. This listening can enhance communication skills. Empathetic listening is crucial because, this listening helps to understand the communicator's position. It gives a feeling of being heard and valued. Tim Hannagan in his book “Management concepts and practices”, says, “It is important to communicate to the other person that you understand, where they come from”. (Hannagan, 2008, 317). Empathetic listeners are fully attentive during the conversation and they engage with the speaker. These listeners possess high level patience and compassion, allowing the speaker to express fully without interfering. This builds trust and strengthen the relationship between the team. By listening to and valuing diverse perspectives, empathetic listeners contribute to creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels heard and respected. Empathetic listeners connect with the team in a deeper level, understanding their emotions and concerns.



Rama was known for being an attentive listener, a quality that is highlighted in several instances throughout the Kamba Ramayana. Rama's empathetic listening is seen in Ayodhya Kanda. Bharatha visits Rama in the forest with the intent of persuading him to return to Ayodhya and reclaim the throne. Bharatha felt guilty and unhappy about the events that transpired after his mother, Kaikeyi, used her boon to demand that Bharatha to be crowned king and that Rama be sent to the forest for 14 years.

In The Sandals Crowned Patala in Ayodhya Kanda, Bharatha said out of guilt,

“I a sinner born to that sinner

Who brought to this world a world od woe

May neither commit suicide

Nor be allowed to do penance.

How then Shall I save myself? (2473)

During the conversation between Bharata and Rama in Chithrakooda, Rama listens to Bharatha with great attentiveness and patience. He allowed Bharatha to express his thoughts and emotions without interruption, providing Bharatha the space to fully articulate his concerns and desires. Bharatha wanted Rama to rule Ayodhya.

After listening to Bharatha, Rama replied,

Realising the firmness of those words

And how they revealed his determined heart,

Rama, looking at every aspect,

Said, “Brave hero, listen to me. (2478)

Through this empathetic listening, Rama was able to address Bharatha’s concerns thoughtfully and with empathy. Rama was able to connect with Bharatha on an emotional level. Rama, then explains gently, the importance of respecting their father’s decision and their duty, the values they must uphold under any circumstances.

“If you out of love for me

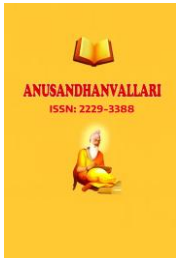
You give me the kingdom”, Rama said,

“Will it be right? Can all the years,

Imposed by my father to avoid blame

To which I agreed, be over in a day? (2488)

This example highlights Rama's ability to empathize with others' emotions, even in moments of great personal adversity. Rama's empathetic listening allowed him to reassure Bharatha, alleviate his guilt, and reaffirm their bond, demonstrating his deep compassion and understanding of his brother's pain. Rama, then promised to Bharatha that he will be back after fourteen years and accept the kingdom. His empathetic listening helped to strengthen the bond between them, showcasing Rama’s listening skills and leadership in handling difficult situations.



Conclusion

The study of Ramayana and different types of listening skills—informative, critical and empathetic listening, reveals the importance of these listening skills and abilities in both ancient and modern contexts. By examining the characters of the Ramayana and their interactions, it is evident, how these types of listening play a crucial role in shaping decisions, building trust and relationships. By drawing parallels between these listening skills and their application in Ramayana, this paper highlights the relevance of effective listening in communication, leadership and management today. The characters of the Ramayana demonstrate that listening is not just about hearing words but involves understanding the deeper meanings and emotions behind them.

This paper selected and analysed the management and communication skills through listening from the texts of Kamba Ramayana. The main limitation of this paper is that, since Kamba Ramayana is written in Tamil, accessing and understanding the original text poses challenges for scholars who are not fluent in the language. Additionally, the stanzas in ancient texts like the Kamba Ramayana can be open to various interpretations, which might result in differing perspectives on communication and listening concepts depicted in the text. Despite these limitations, this research offers valuable insights and has the potential to pave the way for future studies, where additional management concepts could be extracted from Kamba Ramayana and similar ancient texts.

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