

COVID-19 : An Opportunity to Create a Comprehensive and Holistic Indian Management Perspective

*Rajesh K. Pillania*¹

Abstract

We should use the COVID-19 as an opportunity to create a comprehensive and holistic Indian management perspective. There are a number of arguments behind it such as our success for many centuries as a culture and as an economy, importance of culture and context, availability of rich literature, lack of a comprehensive and holistic Indian management perspective, and lastly, using COVID-19 as a shock therapy to get out of the business as usual mode. To be an economic superpower, we need to bring something new, which is unique to us, with which we can relate, can embrace, and can enjoy for a long time. This opinion paper has important implications for practitioners, academicians, and researchers.

Keywords : COVID-19, Indian management perspective, culture, context, shock therapy

JEL Classification Codes : H12, I25, P46

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I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.

(Mahatma Gandhi, 1921)

Unfortunately, in India, we have not given any attention on management lessons from our own glorious past. We must correct our bias of looking towards management literature from the West. Though we should include important lessons from the West, we must also include great management lessons from our own rich and vast heritage.

The world, including management education, has come to a standstill by COVID-19, though online platforms are being used to keep running the management education, though with mixed success. Instead of running business as usual, except using the online platform, we must use the COVID-19 as an opportunity to re-look at management education in India.

Creating Indian Management Perspective

Though we should include important lessons from the West, we must also include great management lessons from our own rich and vast heritage. There are a number of reasons behind the argument.

¹ Professor, Management Development Institute (MDI), Mehrauli Road, Sukhrali, Gurgaon - 122 007. (E-mail : rajeshpillania@mdi.ac.in)

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(1) Rich Culture and History of India : India has a long history and a continuously evolving culture going back to the starting of human civilization. Its history and culture are rich with a plethora of achievements over the times. From this deep, diverse, and vast knowledge, we can take out a large number of lessons, which are still relevant.

(2) India as a Global Economic Superpower - Our Times of Golden Sparrow : Even economically, India along with China, were dominant economic powers till the advent of steam engine and industrial revolution, which these two countries missed. India was so rich that it was called the Golden Sparrow. There is a huge success story of us in our past, not for few years, but many centuries, and we must be doing a lot of good things to achieve that. This makes it imperative to revisit the era and identify the great management lessons that are even applicable today.

(3) Context and Culture Matters : Context and culture are very important in leadership (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018). Not only leadership, it matters in any management. Not everything that we bring from the West in terms of management literature is totally relevant to our context. In fact, the learnings from our past, both of success and failure, would be more relevant to our context, though we need to align these learnings with modern technologies and realities.

(4) Availability of Indian Literature : Indian literature is full of management lessons. We can learn management lessons from the *Vedas* consisting of *Upanishads*, *The Ramayana*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Mahabharata*, and many more. Each one of these is full of management lessons. Many major ideas are mentioned in different Indian scriptures (Pandey & Pandey, 2019).

(5) Success Stories from Recent Times : There are a lot of success stories post-independence in India. To keep it contemporary, we should include more recent examples and cases from the Indian context as many Indian companies are doing well. A good work in this regard is the book, *The India Way : How India's Top Business Leaders are Revolutionizing Management*.

(6) Absence of an Indian Management Perspective : There is an absence of an Indian management perspective. There is lack of high quality, context specific management research in India, and the predilection of Indian researchers to follow Western models of research and publication blindly (Khatri, Ojha, Budhwar, Srinivasan, & Varma, 2012). Though there are some efforts in bits and pieces by some researchers to bring management lessons from our past, we need to create a comprehensive and holistic Indian management perspective. It should be rooted in our ancient wisdom, but made relevant to the current times by also including our current Indian practices, recent success stories, and taking some key messages from the West, which might be not present in our literature. Though we want to create an Indian management perspective, we should also stay open to learning from others, if it is also relevant for us.

Unfortunately, in India, many times, many of us agree about a bias towards foreign research journals. To a certain extent, it is right because of the good quality of many international journals and publications. However, there are some good journals and publications in India, which are doing contextual level research specific to India, which need to be supported and promoted. Not every foreign research journal is a great journal, and not every Indian research journal is of poor quality. We need to be more transparent and open in terms of policy formulation and promotion of good Indian journals.

(7) Presence of Shock Therapy : Generally, we are happy running our life as usual, even though we know, it is not the way we want or it needs overhaul. We are scared of change. Shock therapy is used in psychiatry (Sabbatini, 1997). COVID-19 can be used as a shock therapy to come out of our business as usual approach and use this

opportunity to create a 'comprehensive and holistic Indian management perspective.'

Last, but not the least, India has a huge young population with big aspirations. As a country also, at times, we aspire to be a big economic power. We cannot be a big economic power and stay there for long, if we are just copying the same approach as prevalent in the existing economic superpowers because they are good at it. They can always outsmart us when we are focused on copying them.

Conclusion, Take Away for Practitioners and Academicians, and Future Research

We should use COVID-19 as an opportunity to create a comprehensive and holistic Indian management perspective. To be an economic superpower, we need to bring something new, which is unique to us, with which we can relate, and can embrace & enjoy for a long time. To do so, we also need to be more transparent and open in terms of policy formulation and promotion of good Indian journals and publications.

✍ **Take Away for Practitioners :** Practitioners should not blindly follow the management concepts from the West, but also look at the great management lessons available from India, including both ancient and recent times.

✍ **Take Away for Academicians :** We, academicians, must include lessons, stories, and cases from the Indian perspective in our teaching and training.

✍ **Take Away for Researchers :** Researchers can look at the wide variety of literature available in India for carrying out in-depth study of relevance and uses of that literature in today's context.

✍ **Directions for Future Research :** This is a conceptual paper and research needs to be carried out in a number of areas. One area is to do a comprehensive literature review on the existing management literature based on Indian past. Another area of research is to take, one by one, each important piece of knowledge such as *The Bhagavad Gita* and identify the management lessons from them which are relevant even today.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Rajesh K. Pillania has used his extensive experience of academics, particularly of research, both in India and abroad, to put forward an idea for creating a holistic and comprehensive Indian management perspective. Over the years, he has gone through a lot of literature, discussions with senior academicians, corporate leaders, and policymakers, and based on the synthesis of that, he is suggesting the need and importance of a holistic and comprehensive Indian management perspective in this opinion paper. India cannot be an economic powerhouse and sustain it in the long term if India does not have a holistic and comprehensive Indian management perspective.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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About the Author

Rajesh K. Pillania is ranked jointly Number # 1 in average research productivity among Indian management faculty. He is on the advisory board of many esteemed research journals and has published 80 research papers and eight books. He is a Professor of Strategy at MDI, Gurgaon.