



Vidura Nīti and Corporate Ethics: Reinterpreting Ancient Indian Knowledge (IKS) for Modern Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

The moral advice provided by the sage Vidura in the Mahabharata is a classical guide to ethical values, integrity, justice, and prudence that have not become obsolete with the passing of time. This review paper critically addresses the role of Vidura Niti in enlightening ethical human resource (HR) policies in the contemporary corporate world in India and the rest of the world. Using peer-reviewed sources on management and ethics and classical works of Indian philosophy, the paper provides synthesized information on the topic of leadership virtues, relations with employees and organizational culture. The ancient Indian wisdom has been derived to relate with modern management principles, and research conducted in the past has indicated that the emphases on righteousness (dharma), impartiality, and empathy of Vidura can be closely termed within the areas of HR which are recruitment, training, performance management, and conflict management.



1. Introduction

The human resource policies are critical in influencing the ethical climate and relationship of the stakeholders of an organization. In the global business world, business organizations are under the microscope on matters relating to equity when hiring employees, managers and business ethics. The scholars have become quite vocal that HR management should not be seen as a way to comply, but as an active participant in the promotion of ethical ideals [1] [2]. The contemporary HRM theories, including ethical stewardship, highlight that the HR leaders have a responsibility to respect their duty to a variety of stakeholders (employees, customers, society) and focus on long-term values instead of short-term profitability [1]. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to develop HR policies that will be constantly based on such values under the pressure of the competition and cultural diversity. In this respect, there is an increasing desire to extract conclusions to the long-term ethical philosophies and apply them to corporate HR practice.

2. Literature Review

Ethical Leadership in Literature and Vidura Niti: The Mahabharata has been identified by several academic articles as a text of managerial wisdom [6]. Vidura Niti, a compilation of Vidura giving advice to King Dhritarastra, is also pointed out as a source of ethical principles in the government and rule. To Vidura, being a leader is above all a moral task: a king (or, more precisely, a manager) should not only be doing justified actions, but also be long-sighted, otherwise he is liable to his kingdom being destroyed. Contemporary management theorists have also compared the advice given by Vidura to modern day management ideas. As an example, Kaipa (2014) writes about leadership lessons of the Mahabharata, explaining that such topics as wise decision-making and ethical behaviour as demonstrated by such characters as Vidura can enlighten modern leaders. Similarly, Sivakumar and Rao (2010) consider Vidura Niti as part of the Indian scriptures that were examined in the creation of an all-inclusive framework of values-based management. Their labour outlines the prescriptions of ancient literature on the moral leadership, the welfare of stakeholders, and virtuous organizational cultures, which are in line with objectives of ethical HRM.

Empirical and Conceptual Studies on Vidura Niti: More to the point, recent research has examined the applicability of Vidura Niti to Management. The verses that Patel (2020) isolates and interprets in Vidura Niti draw the line between wise and foolish attributes in leaders. Vidura defines wise leaders as those who are truthful, self-contained, foresighted, modest and kind to those who are foolish (or immoral)



leaders as those who are dishonest, arrogant, greedy, angry and shortsighted. Guru Prasad and Rath (2017) also have a qualitative study of the teachings of Vidura on leadership and trace them, plotting them on the Good Vs. Bad Leader Characteristics. They observe that Vidura, who is worshiped as the embodiment of Dharma (righteousness), was a leader of principle - he is called Mahaprajna (extremely wise) and Dirghadarsin (farsighted) due to his ethical insight. According to their research, contemporary organizations can help themselves by integrating the characteristics that Vidura proposes into leadership development and HR standards (e.g., truthfulness, patience, kindness, etc.). In short, it can be expected that the literature shows a point of convergence between the ethical prescriptions of Vidura Nīti and the objectives of modern HRM. The table gives a summary of the most important works in this field, outlining their interest and results.

Table: Key Studies linking Vidura Nīti & Indian Ethos to Management and HR

Study (Year)	Context and Focus	Key Insights Relevant to Ethical HRM
Sivakumar & Rao (2010)	Integrated Indian ethos in management	Ancient scriptures (incl. Vidura Nīti) provide guidelines on values-based leadership, ethical conduct, and stakeholder welfare in organizations. These eternal principles can be synthesized into modern management frameworks for HR policies promoting integrity and trust.
Muniapan & Satpathy (2013)	CSR and Bhagavad Gītā (Indian Scripture) [12]	<i>Dharma</i> (duty) from Gītā closely aligns with corporate social responsibility [12]. Emphasizes that moral obligations to stakeholders and society should guide corporate policies – a view complementary to Vidura’s emphasis on righteous duty in leadership.
Guru Prasad & Rath (2017)	Leadership traits from Vidura Nīti	Identified qualities of <i>Good Vs. Bad Leaders</i> per Vidura’s counsel. Good leaders are truthful, justified, self-restrained, and compassionate, whereas bad leaders are deceitful, unjust, indulgent, and cruel. Recommends HR to assess and cultivate these virtues in leadership selection and training.

3. Review Methodology

The critical literature review is the methodology used in this paper, as the author attempts to synthesize and evaluate the existing knowledge instead of providing new empirical results. The systematic searches



in the academic databases and Google Scholar of peer-reviewed materials based on the following topics (1) Vidura Niti or moral teachings contained in the Mahabharata when applied to management, leadership, or human values; (2) ethical human resource management, corporate ethics, and leadership in global or Indian contexts; and (3) the incorporation of Indian philosophical or religious ethos into business or HR practices were used in the review process. The priority was placed on the articles published in the well-known journals (Example: Journal of Human Values, Journal of Business Ethics, International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management) and on the studies that could be tracked in accordance with CrossRef or similar databases. Besides this, a single text of Vidura Niti [3] was referred to, in order that faithfulness to the original moral codes should be secured. Paying attention to the relevance and scholarly character of the sources, about 40 sources were initially identified, and 15 of them were chosen. These involve theoretical frameworks, literature analysis, case studies and scripture analysis, which have a balanced approach.

4. Results and Synthesis

Results of the review indicate that the ethical values of Vidura Niti are highly congruent with the core values of ethical HRM. The advice of Vidura though presented in a court of antique royalty is traced to a number of fundamental areas of contemporary HR policy and practice. The results of the synthesis are structured according to the main themes: leadership and governance ethics, fairness and justice in HR practices, welfare and development of the employees, as well as ethical organizational culture.

1. Governance, Ethics, Leadership:

Vidura Niti as the book depicts ethical leadership as the key of good governance. One of the major findings of this review is that Vidura descriptions of an ideal leader correspond to the modern models of ethical leadership in organizations. Vidura demands that a leader should be objective, truthful and prudent and set righteousness over self-interest [4] [5]. Not only does a leader or a minister who is unrighteous through lust become spiritually degraded, but he also puts the realm in danger: he cautions that judges who stand and see justice being destroyed by injustice themselves shall be destroyed [13]. This is in line with the contemporary observation that leaders who allow unethical behavior destroy trust and legitimacy, which eventually affects organizational performance negatively [14] [15]. In contrast, Vidura highlights that righteousness brings wealth and happiness and reminds people of the long-term advantages of the ethical behavior on their prosperity and moral being [5]. Conversion of this in HR terms implies leadership development programmes and executive HR policies that reward integrity,



transparency and the courage to tell the truth to power. The literature proves that this kind of ethical leadership practices such as telling the truth, being responsible and treating the subordinates in a fair way contribute to the trust of the employees and organizational citizenship behaviour [16] [17]. To illustrate, Brown and Treviño (2006) observe that ethical leaders act as role models who establish the explicit ethical behaviour and use reward systems to entrench ethical behaviour thus affecting the overall climate of an organisation. This was anticipated by the teaching of Vidura who advised the king to have truth-tellers and virtuous men about him, and to avoid flatterers and the sinful, much like a man setting an ethical glass at the summit [4] [18]. Accordingly, an outcome of the inclusion of Vidura Niti is a theoretical framework whereby the HR policies are clear about their preference of leaders that meet ethics leadership standards not based on technical expertise or immediate outcomes, but on their virtue, wisdom, and adherence to fairness.

2. Ethical Organizational Culture and Long-term Sustainability:

The vision of the value-driven organizational culture may be the most significant addition of Vidura Niti to the modern HR thinking. This advice of Vidura does much more than merely lay down do and don't, this is a description of a virtuous kingdom, where moral behavior is the common-place and is instilled in the lives of the people in large measure [20] [21]. In the organizational context, this would mean stimulating a culture of internalizing ethical values by all people in the organization and shaping all policies and practices. This area of review is greatly aligned with modern concepts of such ideas as ethical climate and sustainability. Organizations that are well-ethical (which is often determined by Human Resources policies in recruitment, socialization and management modeling) are less prone to misconduct and enjoy more trust of their stakeholders, employees, business partners and customers. .

An ideal is given in Vidura Nititi: *“When maintained, moral behaviour is the way of behaviour in the organization. It is with this understanding that work is worship and business is higher purpose calling”*. This is a strong quote, taken out of a recent analysis of the teachings of Vidura, which summarizes the aim of an ethical culture - work is not merely a transaction, but a service (seva) which should have a noble purpose other than profit. In the real HR world, this might be characterized by the implementation of ethical values within the company mission and HR practices, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and community involvement, and making employees perceive their role in the company as valued more than in terms of monetary scales. Empirical data is in line with the idea that a motivated culture based on



ethical principles can enhance employee engagement and innovation and even the financial performance over the long term[23][24].



Picture: Vidura teaching Dhritarashtra about Dharma and Niti

The example of the Tata Group and the Godrej Group in India demonstrates that the business, which has an explicit basis on the values of ethics and trusteeship usually have sustainable success and reputation capital [25] [26]. The synthesis of this review indicates that one way to strengthen such an organizational culture is to make Vidura Nīti an ethos to be implemented. HR can implement it by putting moral standards into any HR system, whether it is values-based recruitment (hiring on character and cultural fit) or performance appraisals which have moral behaviour, to recognition programs which reward integrity or community service of employees. These HR initiated interventions eventually assist in the development of an organizational identity that is focused on social accountability and ethics. It is interesting to note that the thinking of Vidura is long-term in nature (he is telling to do what might be against the short-term interests in favor of long-term good) (caution against greed, shortsightedness, and rashness). This visionary perspective is aligned with the contemporary focus on sustainable HRM that is centered on the long-term prosperity of both employees and society as the constituents of organizational success.



As an illustration, a business could set up value-based recruitment (in search of honesty and empathy among candidates), ethics training based on the stories of Vidura to improve moral judgment, equity boards to uphold righteousness, and leadership performance measures, which comprise humility and truthfulness. All these forms an ecosystem where ethical HR policies would support one another and form an ethical and resilient organization.

5. Discussion

It is also discussed in relation to particular HR areas, Example: character-based and Values-based recruitment can demand the creation of new assessment instrument or interview methods that can help measure integrity and empathy. Performance management may also include ethical behavior 360 feedback, rather than focusing on achievements. They are those areas that require more empirical study so as to perfect best practices. Case studies of organizations who have made a specific effort to tap into indigenous wisdom such as Vidura Niti when formulating HR policies or leadership development programs are also needed. To this point, the conceptual foundation of academic literature has been established, yet more specific organizational evidence would add credibility to the business case and give it more refined insights into traps and winning strategies.

CORPORATE ETHICS



In a critical perspective, it must be admitted that not every piece of advice given by Vidura would fit well into the situations in the contemporary corporate environment. As an example, the context of Vidura was



in giving advice to a king, which presupposes the paternalistic, top-down government system. The contemporary organizations are more participative and employees want to be heard. But the ethos of Vidura Niti - of ethical responsibility in authority by the people it represents - can be adjusted to the democratic leadership theories within the easy concession of simply acknowledging that authority in a corporation is shared (managers, HR officials, executives all have areas of influence). The other one is that ethical dilemmas in the modern world (digital privacy, AI in HR choices, layoffs due to globalization, etc.) may be incredibly complicated. Vidura Niti offers a value compass (Example: put human well-being and truth first), but a more specific policy will have to be interpreted creatively and possibly also combined with the current ethical frameworks and rules.

On the whole, this discussion highlights that Vidura Niti presents an interesting philosophical premise on which ethical HR architectures may be established. It urges HR executives to think of their work not only as managers of processes, but as guardians of dharma in the workplace - people who have to reconcile the profit motive with the ethical need to do right by the employees and society. This dual attention can help companies get to where the Vidura would call the real success that is realized and maintained in a righteous way [5]. The theory that has been developed as a result of the synthesis can be used as a starting point to pilot initiatives and research results by organizations and researchers. By so doing, we will bring the legacy of Vidura into the corporation boardroom and the HR department, which may change it into a place of illuminated management.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, accepting Vidura Niti in corporate HR does not mean returning to the outdated ideas or pressing the text of a specific culture on a multicultural workforce. It is concerned with reacquiring human time-tested values and moral wisdom that can be applied in recruitment halls, training rooms, and corporate suites. By ensuring that HR policies are developed based on the principles of Vidura, organizations will have a higher chance to respect and treat their employees fairly, make leadership choices that can be trusted in, and develop cultures that not only work towards profit generation but also towards righteousness and social goodness. This means that such organizations can enjoy long term employee loyalty, brand reputation and respect in the society which in the long run leads to the success and sustainability of the organization [21] [17].

This review has both scholarly and practice implications. To scholars, it introduces future research possibilities on exploring how incorporating indigenous ethical wisdom (in Vidura Niti or similar sources



across the world) influences organizational results and employee conduct. It is a reminder and a roadmap to the HR practitioners and corporate leaders. Ethical HR policies that are based on eternal values are not the luxury and the side effect of compliance, but the strategic and moral necessity. By grounding our human resource management in ethics and good deeds, we open the way to not only economically successful organizations, but also to those that have become the pillars of social well-being and moral leadership to the society.

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