

Management Lessons from how the Mahabharata war was won

Trivia

- Second Longest Epic of the World
- Narrated thrice:
 - By Vyasa to Ganesha as “Jaya”,
 - By Vaishampayan to Janamejaya as “Bharata”,
 - By Suta/Sauti to the Rishis at Naimisharanya as “Mahabharata”.
- Has “mind-boggling” revelations:
 - Astronomy: Existence of Uranus (Shweta) and Neptune (Ksharaka),
 - Geography: Lands as far as Cambodia (Kamboja), Kazakhstan and/or Scandinavia (Uttarakuru),
 - Mathematics: Numbers to the range of 10 raised to powers of 16 and -16,
 - Descriptions of weapons resembling modern day weaponry including Nuclear and/or Chemical weapons,
 - Complex Military Formations and Strategies,
 - Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Spirituality, Religion, Politics,
 - And, even Modern Management Lessons.

Logistics

Army

- Kauravas: 11 Akshouhini's
- Pandavas: 7 Akshouhini's

[1 Akshouhini = 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses and 109,350 foot-soldiers (in a ratio of 1:1:3:5)]

Generals

- Kauravas:
 - Bhishmacharya
 - Dronaacharya
 - Karna
 - Shalya
 - Kripacharya
 - Ashwatthama
 - Duryodhana
- Pandavas:
 - Arjuna
 - Bhima
 - Dhrshtadyumna
 - Abhimanyu
 - Ghatotkach
 - Shikhandi
 - Satyaki

Background

- Kauravas:

In power for 13 years. Duryodhana has been a benevolent king. There was no guarantee that the subjects really miss the Pandavas. Not only do they have the wealth and power of Hastinapur, but also that of Indraprastha, the kingdom that the Pandavas had taken such labors to build and which had surpassed the Hastina of old in all degrees. Karna had gone on a nation-wide conquering quest on behalf of Duryodhana. They are the national sovereigns.

- Pandavas:

Exiled for 13 years. Have no kingdom. Their main strength both in terms of political and financial power depends on their friends and relatives: the Panchalas, the Yadavas, the Magadhas and the Chedis.

Motivation

- **Kauravas:** *“Without war, will not concede even a needle-prick’s size of the earth.” - Duryodhana*

Duryodhana was completely focused on the War. It was his moment of truth. He had usurped a kingdom, and he meant to keep it. He had resorted to any means, foul or fair to get the kingdom, which he believed to be rightfully his, and he was in no mood to give it up.

- **Pandavas:** *“We fight over a Kingdom, as dogs over a piece of meat.”- Yudhishthira*

The Pandavas had been humiliated, their wife insulted, their kingdom taken. But still they wanted to avoid the War. The three elder Pandavas were against the War. They even went as far as making an offer that they will stop the War in exchange of 5 villages.

Result

- War Lasted 18 Days: 10 Days (Bhisma), 3 Days (Drona), 1½ Days (Karna), ½ Day (no generals), 1 Day (Shalya), 1 Night (Ashwatthama)

- 18th Night of the War: Ashwatthama slaughtered the Pandava camp while they were sleeping.

- Prior to that:

- Kaurava deaths: Bhishma, Drona, Karna and his sons, Shalya, Bhagadutta, Bhurisrava, Susharma, Jayadrath,

- Duhsasana and all of Duryodhana’s brothers, Shakuni and Ulooka.

- Pandava deaths: Drupad, Virat and his sons, Abhimanyu, Ghatotkacha.

How did the Pandavas Win?

Preparation

Kauravas:

- Karna went on a country-wide military mission, subdued the different kingdoms and acquired wealth. But it meant a loss in terms of both men and money, and creation of new enemies.

Pandavas: Though in exile they turned their attention to improving over their weakness

- Arjuna set out on a mission to acquire the Divyastras.
- Bhima met his brother Hanuman and got a blessing of enhanced strength.
- Yudhisthira acquired teachings from the various wise Rishis, and also learnt the Game of Dice from Gandharava Chitrasena, lest he was challenged to yet another dice game. It's said that he had become undefeatable in Dice.

Management Lesson: Turn your Weakness into your Strength

Allies

Kauravas: Centralized power system. The greatest empire of the time. But not many powerful allies, except from old relations from far off places like Gandhara (Shakuni), Sindhu (Jayadrath) and Kambodia (Camboja - Bhagadutt)

Pandavas: No wealth. No power of their own. But powerful allies all over India.

- Panchala through Marriage with Darupadi.
- Dwarka through marriage with Arjuna and Subhadra.
- Magadh through marriage of Shalva and Vijaya.
- Chedi through marriage of Nakula and Karenmayi.
- Kasi through marriage of Bhima and Balandhara.
- Kekaya through marriage of Yudhisthira and Devika.
- Matsya through marriage of Abhimanyu and Uttara.
- The Rakshasas through marriage of Bhima and Hidimba.
- The Nagas through marriage of Arjuna and Uloopi.

Management Lesson: Make Powerful Allies

Leadership

Kauravas: Centralized leadership. One Head of Army at a time, who has supreme authority of 11 Akshouhini's of the army. Bhisma, Drona, Karna, Shalya and Ashwatthama, in order of succession.

Pandavas: Distributed leadership. Seven commanders for the seven divisions (1 man commands an Akshouhini each).

- Virat (King of Matsya)
- Drupad (King of Pancala)
- Sahadeva (King of Magadha)
- Dhrishtaketu (King of Chedi)
- Satyaki (Only warrior from Dwarka)
- Shikhandi (Prince of Panchala)

Dhrishtadyumna – Commander in Chief
Arjuna – Supreme Commander

And, Lord Sri Krishna – Arjuna's Charioteer and Counselor.

Management Lesson: Share your responsibilities

Team Spirit

Kauravas: No team spirit. They all fought their individual wars.

- Bhishma: For his Vow to protect the throne Hastinapur.
- Drona and Kripa: They owed allegiance to the throne.
- Shalya: Simply cheated by Duryodhana to be there. Was originally a Pandava ally.
- Karna: To prove his mantle against Arjuna. Friendship for Duryodhana.

They didn't get on well with each other.

- Bhishma and Karna.
- Bhishma and Shakuni.
- Karna and Shakuni.
- Karna and Shalya.
- Shalya and Bhishma.

It was like bees, hornets and mosquitoes put together in a jar.

Pandavas: One Team, One Goal. As men, they all had huge respect for Krishna and Yudhishthira. While as warriors they were in complete awe of Bhima and Arjuna. Most of them were close relatives – cousins, brother-in-laws, father-in-laws. More than that, they all were part of the decision-making process. It was their "common" war.

Management Lesson: Teamwork succeeds where Individual effort fails.

Individual Motives

Kauravas: Except for Duryodhana nobody wanted the War. All the four main generals had strong ties with the Pandavas.

- Bhishma (grandchildren) – Would kill a thousand soldiers each day but won't kill the Pandavas.
- Drona (students) – Won't kill the Pandavas. Would only capture them.
- Shalya (Nakula-Shadeva's maternal uncle): Loved the Pandavas and covertly helped them by humiliating Karna
- Karna (brother to the Pandavas): Promised not to kill any of the other Pandavas except for Arjuna.

A Team of Traitors.

Pandavas: Common goal. But the individuals had their individual targets. They had their own agenda, which happened to become one with the teams' agenda.

- Dhritadyumna: Drona.
- Shikhandi: Bhishma.
- Satyawati – Bhurisravas.
- Arjuna – Karna.
- Bhima – Duryodhana and his brothers.
- Sahadeva – Shakuni and his sons.
- Nakula – Karna's sons.

Management Lesson: The right team is made by selecting the right individuals. Get the right person for the right job.

Commitment

Kauravas: As already said, the 'Big 4' had a big emotional attachment with the 5 Pandavas. Looking further on their commitment:

- Bhishma himself gave away the secret of how to kill him to the Pandavas. He prolonged the War by killing only inconsequential soldiers. He did not fight a warrior like Shikhandi because of his personal bias.
- Drona too indirectly gave away his secret, by saying he was invulnerable as long as he held a weapon. Moreover he abandoned weapons as soon as he knew his son had died.
- Karna did not kill Yudhishthira and Bhima when he got the chance. He gave away his Kavach and Kundala prior to his War. Karna fled innumerable times from the War when he was hurt. He didn't save Dushasana when Bhima was killing him.
- Shalya kept on insulting Karna while in Battle.

Pandavas: Let's look at their commitment:

- Abhimanyu, just 16 years old.. Ventured beyond enemy lines alone. This was clearly a suicide mission but he still went in and took a great part of the Kaurava army down with him. It took the combined effort of 7

Maharathis to take him down.

- Ghatotkach, even in death took with him almost half the Kaurava army.
- Yudhisthira, he knew he couldn't face Karna in War, but still went in to set an example. Yudhisthira didn't hesitate to tell a lie or a twisted truth when faced with the decision of whether to stick to his personal integrity or welfare of the team.
- Krishna took up arms twice and almost entered the War, in spite of his promise, only to be stopped by Arjuna.

Management Lessons: The interests of the Individual should never exceed the Team interest. The best person for a Job is not the one with the best capabilities but one with the greatest commitment.

Right Managers

Krishna: The Greatest Crisis Manager the world has seen.

Yudhisthira: Low-key strategist.

- On the first day of the War, he played a Master game. He went over to the Enemy side to seek blessings from Elders. In reality he made a covert deal with them, wherein all of them agreed to help him and unfolded the secrets of defeating them.
- While coming back, he took a calculated risk. He made an offer to all the assembled people to change sides if they wanted to. He knew well of the lack of cohesiveness among the Kauravas. Yuyutsu, son of Dhrtarashtra crossed over to the Pandavas. This exposed the Kauravas' weakness for all to see.

Management Lessons: Know your enemies weaknesses and exploit them. Take Calculated risks. Inspire, invigorate, counsel your own team in moments of need.

The Roots

Kauravas: Princes brought up in the comfort of the Royal Palace, matured on romanticized ideals of Power, Fame, Courage and Valour. No experience of ground reality.

Pandavas:

- Spent the greater part of their lives in Poverty. Childhood in the Himalayan foothills among Rishis. Spent one year of their exile among the poor people of Kuru-Panchala. 12 years of Vanvas and 1 year of Agyatvas.
- Experienced with the ground reality. Contact with people from various strata of the society. Sannyasis (celibate monks), Acharyas (Householders, teachers), poor Brahmins, lower-class Potters.
- Different races of people. Rakshasas, Gandharavas, Apsaras, Nagas. People from different regions Uttarkuru,

Bengal etc.

- Sense of Sharing. A Sense of Brotherhood.

Management Lessons: Know ground realities. Know different ideologies. Share.

Empowerment of Women

Kauravas: Patriarchal structure. Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Dhritarashtra, Vidur, Shakuni, Duryodhana, Karna,

Duhsasana. No women in the decision-making process. Gandhari retreated to the Inner Chambers.

Nobody listened to her.

Pandavas : Matriarchal Structure.

- Kunti was the authority supreme for the Pandavas.

“Whatever my mother says is Dharma to me” - Yudhishthira.

- Draupadi was a companion in whatever the Pandavas did. She had a big role in all the decision-making. Without her the Pandavas would have most probably retired to the forests.

- Even the younger Pandavas, Ghatotkach, Abhimanyu and Iravan were brought up by their mothers. So the female influence was huge.

Management Lesson: Women = Better Half. Any team which doesn't have women is unbalanced. The Masculine traits of Aggression and Dominance should be balanced by the Feminine traits of Harmony and Sustenance.

Management Recap

- Turn your weaknesses into strengths.
- Turn enemies into allies.
- Share your responsibilities.
- Teamwork scores over Individual Effort.
- Right Team = Right set of Individuals. Assign the right person for the right job.
- Commitment scores over Competence.
- Team interests over Individual interests.
- Know your enemy/challenges. Exploit its weaknesses. Take calculated risks.
- The Right Managers: To inspire, invigorate, and counsel in crisis.
- Know Ground realities. Accept different ideologies. Foster sharing and co-operation.
- Empower Women. Gender Balance is required for stability and administration.