

Embedding Gandhian Philosophy of Trusteeship in HRM Practices: Insights from Indian Enterprises

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore how the Gandhian philosophy of *trusteeship* can be embedded within Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in context of Indian enterprises. Trusteeship is rooted in Mahatma Gandhi's moral and socio-economic philosophy which proposes that wealth, power, and resources should be held and utilised as a trust for the welfare of society. In the contemporary corporate environment, this philosophy offers a framework for ethical management and human-centered HR practices. Through case-based insights from Indian companies such as Tata Group, Amul, and Infosys, this study investigates how trusteeship principles shape HRM practices related to employee welfare, participative leadership, and social responsibility. The findings suggest that integrating trusteeship within HRM enhances ethical governance, fosters employee engagement, and contributes to organizational sustainability. The paper concludes with insights on how Gandhian philosophy can be effectively embedded within present-day HRM practices to cultivate inclusivity, moral responsibility, and sustainable corporate growth.

Introduction

In today's business landscape organisations are striving to balance profitability with ethical responsibility due to rapid globalization, technological disruption, and intense competition. Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral values and organisational culture of the organisation. However, modern HR practices often prioritize efficiency and cost control over human welfare and social responsibility. In Indian context, philosophy and spirituality have influenced managerial thoughts. The Gandhian Philosophy of Management provides a profound moral framework for modern management. Among the different pillars of Gandhian Philosophy of Management, *trusteeship* stands out as a pragmatic approach for harmonising wealth creation with social responsibility thereby providing ethical foundation for sustainable and humane HRM.

The Gandhian philosophy of management offers a value-driven approach that integrates economic goals with social and moral objectives. The core pillars of Gandhian Philosophy of Management includes Truth, Non-violence, Sarvodaya, Satyagraha, Swadeshi, Sustainable development and Trusteeship. Gandhiji's ideas, articulated during India's struggle for freedom and moral reform, holds a profound relevance for modern management. His philosophy emphasizes more on moral values, service to others and human dignity rather than money, status, or power.

Trusteeship stands as one of the core elements of Gandhiji's socio-economic philosophy. It urges that individuals and organizations are mere custodians of wealth and power and are responsible for using them for the welfare

of society. Gandhi envisioned that wealth and resources as tools to serve the society and not as instruments of personal benefit. As it belongs to society as a whole, those who possess them like industrialists and entrepreneurs should consider themselves as trustees rather than owners. Trusteeship is a successful strategy for reducing excessive consumption. Gandhiji believed that possessing more than one need necessarily entails robbing others of their requirements. In the context of business, the principle of trusteeship implies a shift from profit-maximizing behaviour to stewardship-oriented leadership. Many Indian enterprises such as the Tata Group, Amul, and Infosys have implemented Gandhian values into corporate culture through policies that prioritize employee and community welfare.

The adoption of trusteeship in Human Resource Management practices will not only improve employee's engagement, loyalty, and productivity but will also establish businesses as socially responsible entities. This philosophy reflects an integrated approach of the management, where profitability, human dignity, and societal well-being are not conflicting but are mutually reinforcing.

Objectives of the study:

1. To examine the relevance of Gandhian trusteeship in contemporary HRM.
2. To identify HRM practices in Indian enterprises inspired by trusteeship principles.

Review of Literature

The Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship originated as a moral and socio-economic response to capitalism and inequality. Gandhi envisioned trusteeship as a system where wealth and resources are held in trust and utilised for the welfare of all (Gandhi, 1940).

In his writings on Sarvodaya (welfare of all), Gandhi argued that property owners and industrialists should act as trustees, not absolute owners, of the wealth they generate. The goal was not to abolish private property but to humanise its use through moral self-restraint, compassion, and voluntary service (Iyer, 1986).

Thomas (2012) interpret trusteeship as a precursor to modern corporate social responsibility (CSR), advocating social equity, participative management, and ethical leadership. The principle of Aparigraha (non-possession) and Ahimsa (non-violence) also underpin trusteeship, ensuring that economic activity aligns with ethical and humanitarian values.

Modern HRM has expanded to encompass organizational culture, employee engagement, and social sustainability. Ethical HRM practices involve fairness, respect, transparency, and commitment to employee development. Studies (Ulrich, 2016; Paauwe, 2015) suggest that ethical HRM enhances trust, retention, and organizational legitimacy.

Gandhi's ideas profoundly influenced post-independence Indian management philosophy. Krishnan (2001) and Chakraborty (1995) argued that Indian management should draw from indigenous moral traditions rather than western utilitarian models. The Gandhian view of the enterprise as a moral institution resonates with

contemporary ethical leadership theories, stakeholder capitalism, and servant leadership models (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

Patnaik and Rao (2014) proposed that Gandhian values such as truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and service (Seva) can guide HRM functions including recruitment, performance appraisal, and employee relations. They contend that HRM informed by trusteeship fosters harmony between profit-making and social justice, transforming employees into moral partners rather than mere resources.

Mohapatra (2021) and Singh (2020) highlight that organisations adopting trusteeship-based HRM tend to emphasise fairness in compensation, participative decision-making, employee welfare, and community development. This aligns with Gandhi's ideal that "every individual has the right to work for self-realisation and social welfare

Methodology

This study is qualitative and exploratory in nature. Secondary data were gathered from scholarly sources, corporate sustainability reports, CSR disclosures, and documented interviews with business leaders. The study adopts a multiple case-study design focusing on three Indian enterprises: Tata Group, Amul and Infosys as illustrative case studies because of their adherence to ethical and Gandhian principles. The selection is purposive to cover a diversified conglomerate with heritage in trusteeship (Tata Group), cooperative enterprise (Amul), and an IT services firm with modern HRM practices (Infosys).

Findings and Discussion

Tata Group: Trusteeship as Corporate Philosophy

The Tata Group exemplifies institutionalization of Gandhian trusteeship in the business organisation. From Jamsetji Tata to Ratan Tata, the company has viewed business as a public trust, emphasizing the moral responsibility of wealth and resources. Approximately two-thirds of the Group's equity is held by charitable trusts such as the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust that fund initiatives in education, healthcare, and community development thereby promoting social welfare. Thus in the context of HRM, the Tata Group implements trusteeship through several practices:

- **Employee Welfare:** The company has implemented long-standing welfare schemes including housing, healthcare, and pension systems thereby ensuring employee well-being beyond workplace.
- **Ethical Leadership:** HR policies of the company emphasize fairness, diversity, and respect.
- **Value-Based Training:** The organisation's leadership programs focus on integrity, social responsibility, and empathy.

These practices of the company demonstrate how trusteeship nurtures both employee engagement and public trust thereby reinforcing sustainability from moral stewardship rather than mere profit maximisation.

Amul: Cooperative HRM and Economic Democracy

Amul represents Gandhian trusteeship in collective form. As a farmer-owned cooperative, it redistributes profits equitably among members, empowering rural communities and promoting economic self-reliance. Such HRM practices emphasize participative management, shared ownership, and continuous development.

Thus the success of the company demonstrates that trusteeship can function effectively even in large-scale, profit-generating enterprises when equity and participation form the core of HR policies. It translates Gandhian ideals of equality, dignity of labour, and self-sufficiency into tangible organisational practices, sustaining both economic viability and social justice.

Infosys: Ethical Governance and Employee Development

Infosys integrates trusteeship values through ethical governance, transparency, and education-driven empowerment. Since its inception, N. R. Narayana Murthy emphasised corporate ethics rooted in Indian cultural and moral traditions. This moral orientation is evident in the company's HR philosophy, which centres on fairness, learning, and well-being.

Key HRM dimensions reflecting trusteeship include:

- **Continuous Learning:** Infosys operates one of the world's largest corporate training institutions, the Infosys Global Education Centre in Mysuru. It invests extensively in employee learning and upskilling, aligning personal development with organisational growth.
- **Fairness in Compensation:** HR policies are structured to ensure transparency and equity in rewards, linking performance to merit while maintaining a culture of respect and inclusivity.
- **Employee Well-being:** Through comprehensive wellness initiatives and flexible work options, Infosys upholds the dignity of employees and seeks to harmonise productivity with humane working conditions.

The company's ethical governance framework echoes Gandhian ideals of honesty, service, and self-restraint. In doing so, Infosys demonstrates how trusteeship can be embedded in a global, knowledge-driven enterprise through policies that respect both individual potential and social responsibility.

Comparative Insights

Across the three cases, the manifestation of trusteeship varies by organisational structure and sector. The Tata Group reflects institutionalised trusteeship through its charitable ownership and welfare-oriented HR systems; Amul operationalises collective trusteeship via participatory HRM and economic democracy; and Infosys demonstrates ethical trusteeship through governance, learning, and transparency. Employees are viewed as moral and intellectual partners, not instruments of profit. HRM policies contribute to social and environmental well-being. Collectively, these cases affirm that Gandhian principles can be adapted to diverse organisational forms without compromising efficiency or competitiveness.

Implications for HRM

Integrating the Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship into human resource management practices has significant consequences for organizational performance, leadership, and ethics. This transforms HRM from performance-driven function into a moral-strategic instrument that aligns the objectives of the business with societal well-being.

Key implications include:

Increased Employee Engagement:

The employees develop a deeper sense of purpose, belonging, and dedication when the organisation acts as a moral institution rather than a profit-seeking entity. Trusteeship fosters intrinsic motivation, aligning personal ambitions with shared objectives.

Ethical Resilience:

Organisations that adhere to trusteeship principles are more capable of maintaining integrity during challenging times. A culture grounded in honesty, non-possession, and social responsibility minimizes the risk of ethical breaches and builds trust among employees and stakeholders.

Sustainable Growth:

By integrating social responsibility into HRM, organisations can nurture long-term reputation, stakeholder trust, and community legitimacy. Trusteeship ensures that economic benefits are balanced by social and environmental considerations thereby creating a sustainable model of corporate growth.

Leadership Development:

Trusteeship encourages the evolution of servant leaders who view themselves as custodians rather than owners of power. HRM systems based on trusteeship emphasises empathy, humility, and moral courage as core leadership qualities.

Thus, adoption of trusteeship implies systems that align business objectives with ethical and social priorities thereby ensuring fairness and transparency in policies, fostering participative and inclusive structures, and embedding continuous moral education and values-based training across all levels of the organisation. In doing so, HRM becomes not only a driver of productivity but also a guardian of organisational conscience.

Conclusion

Although the Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship is rooted in early 20th-century but it offers a remarkable relevance for 21st-century human resource management. This philosophy advocates a transformation of corporate mindset, from ownership to stewardship, from prioritizing profit maximization to emphasizing human and social development.

Indian enterprises such as Tata Group, Amul, and Infosys illustrate that trusteeship is not just an idealistic notion but a practical reality and pragmatically achievable. When trusteeship is embedded in HRM, it boosts ethical governance, employee satisfaction, and corporate sustainability.

In a world facing widening inequalities and ethical challenges, Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship provides a humanistic framework for rethinking HRM as a system based on trust, care, and collective advancement and not as a mechanism of control

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