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The Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model: A Four-Pillar Framework of Commercial Intelligence, Ethical Governance, Stakeholder Trust, And Strategic Risk-Taking

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ABSTRACT

Theories from the modern industrial and corporate environment have traditionally influenced management scholarship. However, the historical commercial civilizations had to develop a culture of enterprise governance and business management prior to the formalisation of management as a discipline of learning. Ancient Tamilakam was one such ancient commercial civilization that had grown up to possess a large commercial network, market places, merchant communities and ethical business practices. This paper introduces a descriptive management model (Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model - TMEM) based on the business activities of the ancient Tamil society. The study proposes four interrelated pillars on the basis of historical evidence of merchant behaviours, market regulation, commercial ethics and market organization as enabling the survival of merchant enterprises: Commercial Intelligence, Ethical Governance, Stakeholder's Trust and Strategic Risk-Taking. The framework proposes that these dimensions were combined, and the merchants were able to achieve economic success, continuity of the organization, and market legitimacy and sustainability. The study is a conceptual framework that constructs these practices into one management paradigm and that aids in the current debates concerning sustainable enterprise, business ethics, stakeholder management and entrepreneurship. Based on the results, historical Tamil commercial systems are found to have relevance for the present management theory and practice, and relevant in the context of profitability and ethical responsibility and sustainable growth.

This gives an introduction to Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model (TMEM) and the business intelligence, ethical governance, stakeholder trust, strategic risk-taking, sustainable enterprise, ancient Tamilakam, entrepreneurship, business ethics and business management thought.

Keywords: *Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model (TMEM), business intelligence, ethical governance, stakeholder trust, strategic risk-taking, sustainable enterprise, ancient Tamilakam*



1. Introduction

During the last decades, the search for alternative views regarding the study of management and business had been emphasized. The majority of the modern management theories have been developed from the experience of the industrial/organizational environment in Western economies. While such theories provide some understanding of organizational behaviour and management, they don't reflect managerial wisdom in the old days of commerce. Over the last few years it has been increasingly proposed that knowledge of management is not limited to the present-day business organization, but is also present in other, traditional ways to govern, trade and become an entrepreneur, and in social organisation too.

Ancient Tamilakam is in a unique position in this. Tamil society is situated along the major Indian Ocean trade routes, and had developed extensive trade relations with South India and Rome, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and the Arabian world. The archaeological findings, history and classical Tamil literature show that there were thriving port towns, vibrant markets, merchant guilds and prosperous towns. Culture and wealth were obtained in these business exchanges between regions.

Geographical conditions were not the only thing that aided the economic development of Tamilakam, efficient trade was another factor. Those who were engaged in trading goods across distances of land and sea, were familiar with the markets, transportation routes, consumer tastes and politics. To sustain the trade relationships in a number of areas, they also used the principle of trust, honesty and working together. Such demands imply the presence of an elaborate management system, one which allowed merchants to coordinate resources, to manage uncertainty and to keep legitimacy.

So it is not only because of geography or the ease of trade routes, that the Tamil merchant communities are successful. They appear to have originated in a common commercial management system which was both profitable and socially acceptable. According to the paper, the four competencies that would enable the success of merchant enterprises in long-term future in the ancient Tamilakam would be: Commercial Intelligence, Ethical Governance, Stakeholder Trust and Strategic Risk-Taking. These capabilities created a sound business model that could lead to a successful business and acceptance of the society.

It is not this study's intention to study literary texts as literary artefacts in themselves, but to uncover and interpret the management practices that are inherent in the business practices of ancient Tamil society. The paper is an attempt to make a contribution in the field of management research by formulating a descriptive model of the sustainability of enterprises, which is still relevant for the present business situation.

2. Research Objectives

The aim of the research is to accomplish the following goals:

1. Identify management practices of commercial system which can be traced to ancient Tamils.
2. To understand the role of business intelligence in decision making processes in a business.
3. To investigate the nature of ethical governance for enterprise legitimacy and market stability.
4. To understand why trust amongst stakeholders is crucial in sustaining business partnerships.
5. To understand the role of strategic risk taking in entrepreneurship development and market growth.
6. To create Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model as a descriptive model to understand the sustainable merchant enterprises.
7. 7) To assess the relevance of these practices in today's world of management and business.

3. Research Questions

In guiding the study, the following research questions were used:

1. What are some management practices that can be identified in the ancient Tamil trading systems?
2. How did commercial intelligence impact enterprise sustainability?



3. How did the ideas of 'ethical government' help to keep business 'legitimate'?
4. How did trust by the stakeholders aid business continuity?
5. How would strategic risk taking have been useful to entrepreneurial development?
6. How to embed within a whole enterprise management body?

4. The relevance of the theme to society, and its current meaning.

Trust is lost, governance is compromised, unethical behavior, environmental concerns and unsustainable business practices are all issues that are present in today's business world. Although management theory has developed, there are issues in organizations reconciling profitability and social responsibility. Therefore alternative management traditions are becoming popular, which focus on alternative approaches in enterprise's sustainability management.

There is something to show in this regard in the ancient Tamilakam. The history of business demonstrates that a businessman is destined to be successful only if he is good, reliable and a good risk taker. The idea of making money was not sufficient to be considered successful business - it was believed that it was a consequence of disciplined business practices that would benefit both the business and society.

This is in line with ongoing discussions on environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria, stakeholder capitalism, responsible entrepreneurship and sustainable business models. In contemporary organisations, having a sense of trust, acting in an ethical manner and creating value for numerous stakeholders have been recognized as vital elements to ensure long-term success.

The social relevance of this research is due to its ability to demonstrate the solutions of historical business systems that are relevant today. The study provides useful insights into the management approaches that incorporated economic viability and social acceptability, in the quest to create more socially acceptable and sustainable economic institutions. Furthermore, it prompts scholars and practitioners to think about the indigenous management traditions as sources of managerial knowledge.

5. Development of Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model

The Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model (TMEM) suggests that sustainable enterprise is generated, when four interdependent management competence get interacted. According to Tamil Merchant Enterprise model (TMEM) the four interdependent management competence is interactively combined to establish sustainable enterprise.

- Commercial Intelligence
- Ethical Governance
- Stakeholder Trust
- Strategic Risk-Taking

These 4 pillars are connected in order to form a Sustainable Merchant Enterprise.

It is believed that economic resources are not the only factors that contribute to the success of any enterprise in the long-term, but also the ability to manage relationships, act ethically and be aware of the strategy, as well as being flexible and adaptable as an entrepreneur. These sizes interact to create a sustainable (and tough) company system that can be flexible to changes in market demand and maintain its acceptance and support from stakeholders.

TMEM is a different approach to models, which puts more emphasis on the integration of the economic, social and ethical aspects of enterprise, rather than primarily on financial performance. The model has been developed to move beyond sustainability to recognize that responsible action and engagement with stakeholders fuels strategic ability.

6. Strategic Foundation of Enterprise: Commercial Intelligence.

Commercial intelligence is the ability to gather, analyze and apply information to gain a competitive edge. In the olden days of the Tamil trade, the businessman is engaged in business activities in different geographical region and market environment. In the olden days every year there was a business activity called as "Business" in Tamil culture where the merchants used to go to different geographical area to do business in different markets. A lot of learning of trade routes, opportunities of the market, transport, consumer need, seasons and economy were involved.

The successful functioning of maritime trade in Tamilakam implies that the Tamil trade merchants had higher level skills to collect and employ trading information. They had to come to understand the availability of goods, changing demand for goods and changing prices, as well as potential dangers in trading through long distances. Decisions both had to be made on the basis of accurate information and knowledge of the changes in market conditions was required if decisions were to be made.

Commercial intelligence would have led the merchants to recognize the profit potential in it and so prevent uncertainty. They prospered in long-distance sea trading, in which they had to make decisions on assessing risks, evaluating opportunities and coordinating resources. Market knowledge was a driver of efficiency at the allocation of resources and of opportunities being seized by those who had the best knowledge.

Commercial Intelligence from a management point of view is the strategic aspect of enterprise. It includes environmental scanning, market awareness, opportunity identification and competitive positioning and resource allocation. Another important tool in the arsenal of today's companies is market intelligence, business analytics, and strategic planning, which all help to keep them competitive.

Commercial intelligence was also a factor in innovation and adaptability. Businessmen who were aware of how to adapt their business to the evolving preference and dynamics of the market could adapt with their trading. This flexibility promoted resilience and resilience, enabling companies to withstand the turbulence of marketplaces.

So, commercial intelligence was one of the critical enablers for Tamil businesses to succeed. It provided the skills and knowledge that was required for decision making and sustainable commercial exploitation.

7. Ethical Governance: The Institutional Basis of Market Legitimacy.

Markets are not effective without trust in the market that that transactions are done fairly and predictably. So, ethical governance is a vital tool in achieving the maintenance of the commercial order and institutional legitimacy.

The ancient Tamil merchant communities appear to have emphasized the importance of being just with their business associates, honest in business, responsible in business and to live up to the accepted rules of business life. These values guide the market interactions and constrain opportunities to be opportunistic which could impact on trust and market interactions.

Ethical governance is a non-formal control which is very effective and commercial. Rather than having to enforce it by the law, merchants established the rules of good conduct and ensured the integrity of the marketplace. The traders' image was enhanced and their trustworthiness grew following ethical behavior.

Good governance, particularly evident in long distance trade. But rural traders were not always subject to regulation and did not enjoy any special law to allow them to trade from one location to another. In such situations, uncertainty was reduced and cooperation was encouraged by applying moral rules. Those merchants who managed to get their customers trusted had higher probability of gaining new customers and forming a partnership or maintaining access to commercial networks.

The concept of ethical governance is akin to corporate governance, compliance, transparency, accountability and responsible business practices in terms of modern business jargon. Ethical companies are more likely to get stakeholder trust and maintain it in the long run.

Ethical governance is integral to organisational resiliency as well. It is easy to see that companies with integrity are better able to withstand reputation risks and have the trust of their stakeholders in times of uncertainty. In Tamil, moral control was an intrinsic part of sustainable business on the commercial relations.

8. Trust Among stakeholders—Social Capital for commercial success

Trust is a key intangible asset in any enterprise system. Customers, suppliers and business partners, staff, communities and governing bodies are just a few of the business relationships that demand confidence.

As it seems the Tamil merchant system could not have seen the need to sustain the enterprise as a unit with transactional efficiency alone. Consistency in ethical behavior, respect for each other's interests, keeping obligations and fair dealing practices were the methods of building trust among merchants. These activities developed social capital, establishing a reputation and long-term relationships.

Stakeholder trust reduced transaction costs, because there is less need of monitoring and enforcement. When the merchants were seen to keep their word, there was no difficulty with cooperating and it was efficient. Trust was thus a strategic resource for strengthening business relationships and improving organisational efficiency.

Trust wasn't the only thing that was needed for doing business but it was also about “managing the doing business process.” The reliable ones of these merchants would be able to cultivate long-term relationships that will further their growth. These relationships provided opportunities to work together, share information, share and receive support. In this regard, trust was directly associated to enterprise sustainability.

Trust of the stakeholders is synonymous with relationship management, with stakeholder engagement, with theories of social capital and with the theory of management of the reputation from a modern management point of view. Trust is a vital asset for any organisation in today's world and has an influence on customers' loyalty, employees' commitment, investors' trust and community support.

A second aspect that helps to build resilience in crisis situations is trust between stakeholders. Building high trust in the relationships with the stakeholder will enhance the likelihood of help during crisis for a company. Trust is not the only thing that contributes to competitiveness, but it's a way of ensuring continuity and stability.

9. Strategic Risk-Taking, The Entrepreneurial Driver of Growth

Trade is always risk of uncertainty. Seafarers who were involved in oceanic trade had to deal with various difficulties such as transportation, changing demand, political changes, weather disturbances, and competition. Despite these dangers, businessmen strived to grow and expand their business.

Strategic risk-taking is an entrepreneurial behavior that involves being innovative, adaptable, opportunistic and with initiative. Rather than try to dodge uncertainty, merchants learned how to consider risk and take advantage of the possibilities for profit.

Their willingness to engage in long-distance trade is proof enough of some measure of boldness in the entrepreneur. The traders put their money on investments that were not guaranteed. Risks, however, were not undertaken without reason. Commercial information and practical experience were the bases for making decisions. For the merchants it was a balance which enabled them to deal with opportunity and risk.

Market growth, diversification and innovation were achieved by strategic risk taking. Traders went out to new places, established new trading relationships and introduced new products into new markets. The activities helped in improving the economic development and strengthening the business ties.

Importantly, there was a balance between commercial intelligence and ethical governance, and risk taking. Market information and ethical issues were the boundaries of the decisions taken. The partnership enabled traders to experiment and develop without putting traders' security or the stability of the company at risk.

The literature in management has been closely linked to strategic risk taking with entrepreneurship and organizational adaptability in recent years. Those companies that are willing to take risks on the calculated ones would, therefore, have the chance to gain from new opportunities, which would give them a better chance to grow sustainably.

The strategic risk-taking, therefore, was the entrepreneurial mechanism which facilitated the enterprise development and growth of the Tamil merchant system.

10. Sustainable Merchant Enterprise: The Integrated Outcome

The Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model implies that all the four pillars can have an interaction and make enterprise sustainable. Commercial Intelligence provides direction and ethical governance provides legitimacy; stakeholder trust provides relational strength and strategic risk taking provides growth.

These dimensions do not stand alone, rather they complement each other. Commercial intelligence enables making good strategic decisions. Ethical governance improves trust within the stakeholders. Stakeholder trust enables stakeholders to work together and reduces uncertainty. The strategic risk taking enables enterprise to benefit from the opportunities and adapt to the environment. These skills become a flexible and robust enterprise system.

The outcome of these interactions is an economically viable merchant enterprise, which is resilient to organizational issues, socially accepted and has continuity. Sustainability is viewed throughout the concept of maintaining legitimacy, flexibility and stakeholder support over time rather than just in terms of financial sustainability.

The model proposes a balance among profit and responsibility, growth and governance, opportunity and accountability is achieved in successful enterprises. Companies can value-add into this balance without upsetting relationships and institutional frameworks that will be integral to their ongoing success.

Another significant point of the TMEM is to acknowledge enterprise as a social institution, in addition to an economic one. Sustainable commercial success is when it is an element of ethical norms, trusted relationships and responsible entrepreneurial behavior.

11. Consequences for modern times of management.

The Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model has some implications to the present day management theory and practice. First, it stresses the importance of considering ethics in a strategic decision making process. Focusing on profit and not responsibility can be very short term successful and then have a hard time maintaining their long-term legality.

Second, the model calls attention to the importance of trust in the model's resources. Trust is essential to good reputation, investment and customer loyalty and employee engagement, today when stakeholders are more likely to be scrutinising them through the lens of the spotlight.

Third, it is demonstrated that sustainable governance and informed decision making is an essential for making entrepreneurship grow. If a risk taking strategy is not smart, the risk is not realised and if governance is not innovative, then stagnation can be experienced. There is no way to achieve sustainable success unless there is a balance between each of these dimensions.

Thirdly, the model encourages stakeholders' perspectives from managers. The enterprises are not only social systems, but they also depend on the support of a number of stakeholder groups. Hence, the concept of relationships, legitimacy and social responsibility need to be considered for effective management.

In conclusion, the study provides a contribution to the current debate about stakeholder capitalism, sustainable entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility and responsible business leadership. The study provides a historical perspective, extending the focus of management scholarship from the organizational management paradigm and demonstrates the importance of the indigenous management knowledge.

12. Conclusion

This research formed the Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model (TMEM) as a descriptive model to explain the management bases of the success of the Tamil merchants during the ancient times. Commercial Intelligence, Ethical Governance, Stakeholder Trust and Strategic Risk-Taking are four critical elements that are interdependent and provide the framework for a sustainable merchant enterprise.

It is suggested that the inclusion of strategic awareness, ethics, relational capital and entrepreneurial adaptability in the analytic process determined the sustainability of the enterprise in the ancient Tamil landscape. Commercial Intelligence resulted in informed decisions and opportunities. Legitimacy and fairness in market interactions was achieved through ethical governance. Stakeholder can be more trusted to enhance the commercial network and resilience. The strategic approach to risk-taking promoted innovation, growth and long-term development.

Together these dimensions created a harmonious enterprise system, which had the potential to be economically successful and to maintain social acceptance and continuity of the enterprise. The results show that financial resources are not the only factors leading to the successful construction of an enterprise, but also the values of ethics, the trusted relationship and strategic ability.

The study is also a contribution to management knowledge because it demonstrates that knowledge acquired from the commercial systems in the past is useful in management. The Tamil Merchant Enterprise Model thus offers conceptual addition to the management theory and offers a frame of reference to understand the sustainable enterprise in the context of modern business environment. The knowledge gained from the Tamil Tamilakam commercial tradition of the past is relevant and fascinating and should be continued in the study of Tamil.

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