

Use Of Focus Group Discussion Method In Qualitative Research Approach On The Influence Of Ancient Indian Wisdom Among Leadership

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: *This paper covers the use of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) Method in firming up the Qualitative research approach on “Influence of Ancient Indian Wisdom among Indian origin IT Industry leaders”.*

Methods/Statistical analysis: *A comprehensive Review of Literature (ROL) was conducted along with attending seminars, interaction with scholars to familiarize with available research in this domain. The researcher further developed methodology, leader selection process, sample questionnaire. There was a need felt to reaffirm the approach with larger group before initiating qualitative work. Further to reaffirm, a FGD was scheduled with a set of industry leaders, senior academicians from multiple universities and research scholars.*

Findings: *Focused Group Discussion was shortlisted in discussion with the Research Guide as suitable method to firm up the research approach and deliberate on the sample selection and questionnaire with industry/academic members before kicking off the qualitative study. FGD was organized with Mid Management Industry leaders and Academicians covering research Scope, ROL & Gaps, Hypothesis, Selection process/Sample questionnaire for Qualitative study. Background and sample questionnaires were shared with participants in advance and discussions were held fo'r over two hours on an online platform and was moderated by the Research Guide. How big a role did it play in their socialization process and was it a key input in their professional life. The FGD also focused on exploring what kind of influence they believe ‘ancient Indian wisdom’ has played.*

Key findings/suggestions from FGD were

- *Relevance of research area was reconfirmed by the participants as an important area*
- *Strengthen the ROL and consider developing theoretical Model*
- *Sharpen the Operational definitions of Ancient Indian Wisdom*
- *To consider leaders with initial part of their education in India as a criterion for selection*
- *Refinement of questionnaire to remove any pre-conceived opinions entering into the discussions*

Novelty/Applications: *Based on the FGD experience in this case, FGD appeared as a potential tool in constructively strengthening/reaffirming Qualitative research method which could be used by other researchers.*

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1. Introduction

Ancient Indian wisdom's influence on IT origin leaders is the focus of research researcher. To perform the in-depth investigation beforehand, the qualitative research method was required. The process of organizing and carrying out the qualitative research was really difficult.

Business executives now face a number of difficulties, including rapid technological advancements, talent shortages, unparalleled industrial growth, demands from many stakeholders in the capital market, and globalization. Being one of the fastest expanding economies in the world, infrastructure readiness, problems associated with a huge population, and other hurdles may be added to what Indian business executives are facing.

In this case, the topic of discussion is how Indian leaders are doing in comparison to their international counterparts. According to the CEO 100 of the Harvard Business Review (2019), three of the top ten global CEOs are Indian.

Few initial questions of the research were

1. Why many Indian leaders are selected to lead large global organizations like Microsoft-Satya Nadella, Google-Sundar Pichai, PepsiCo-Indra Nooyi, Harvard Business School-Nitin Noria?
2. With a possible grounding in Ancient Indian Wisdom and the values, are Indian leaders able to respond to challenges better than their peers across the globe?
3. Do values as outlined in Ancient Indian Scripts have an influence on Indian managers in their decision-making frameworks, thus making it easier to outperform their counter parts?

Western Management evolved from 15th Century Machiavelli and 18th Century Adam Smith onwards, moved on to Frederic Taylor's Scientific Management followed by big wave of management theories by many researchers. In the last century, western management picked up great pace which enabled industry to learn and implement quite of a few changes.

Contrary to the Western Management, Ancient Indian Wisdom was available thousands of years ago, had deeper insights which are relevant even in the modern age. E.g. Vedas/Upanishads/ Mahabharata-Bhagavad Gita. There are many references of western leaders speaking about Ancient Indian Wisdom and believe that there are possible solutions to some of the challenges from Ancient Indian Wisdom.

Researchers Primary research study is to understand 'Influence of Ancient Indian Wisdom among Indian IT Industry leaders' through Qualitative Research method. To reconfirm the interest on this research and approach for Qualitative study including sample questionnaire, detailed Focused Group Discussion was conducted in July 2020 with participants from Industry and Academia. This helped in firming up the approach, sample selection and questionnaire design.

2. Review of Literature and Analysis

There are many articles and books on Ancient Wisdom linkage to Western world. Few of them were reviewed and are used to understand the concept and arrive at the broad gaps.

Birren and Svensson ⁽²⁾ in their THEORIES OF WISDOM ACROSS TIME, CULTURE, AND PEOPLES, stated:

‘ Mohenjo-daro, on the banks of the Indus River in India, is considered one of the oldest civilizations known to man. Its reign has been placed between the fourth and third millennia B.C. (Durant, 1935). The oldest known religion of India was animistic and totemic worship of spirits found in animals, stones, and nature. Through the “Vedas” we learn of ancient India. Veda means “knowledge” or wisdom; thus, literally, Veda means the Book of Knowledge and refers to all sacred early lore. Only four have survived: Rig-veda, knowledge of hymns of praise; Sama-veda, knowledge of the melodies; Yajur-veda, knowledge of sacrificial formulas; and Atharva-veda, knowledge of magic formulas.’

Hijya, J. (2000) ⁽³⁾ quotes J. Robert Oppenheimer, the 'father of the Atom-bomb' said in 1945 after the bomb, christened 'Little Boy', was dropped on Hiroshima on the orders of the then US President, Harry Truman. "We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed; a few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita. Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty, and, to impress him, takes on his multi-armed form and says, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another." Oppenheimer, Jewish by birth, was quoting a translation of verse 32 from Chapter 11 of the Bhagavad Gita ⁽⁴⁾:

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha
kālo 'smi loka-kṣhaya-kṛit pravṛiddho
lokān samāhartum iha pravṛittaḥ
ṛite 'pi tvām na bhaviṣhyanti sarve
ye 'vasthitāḥ pratyaniḱeṣhu yodhāḥ

The Supreme Lord said: I am mighty Time, the source of destruction that comes forth to annihilate the worlds. Even without your participation, the warriors arrayed in the opposing army shall cease to exist.

(For the exact translation reference <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/11/verse/32>)

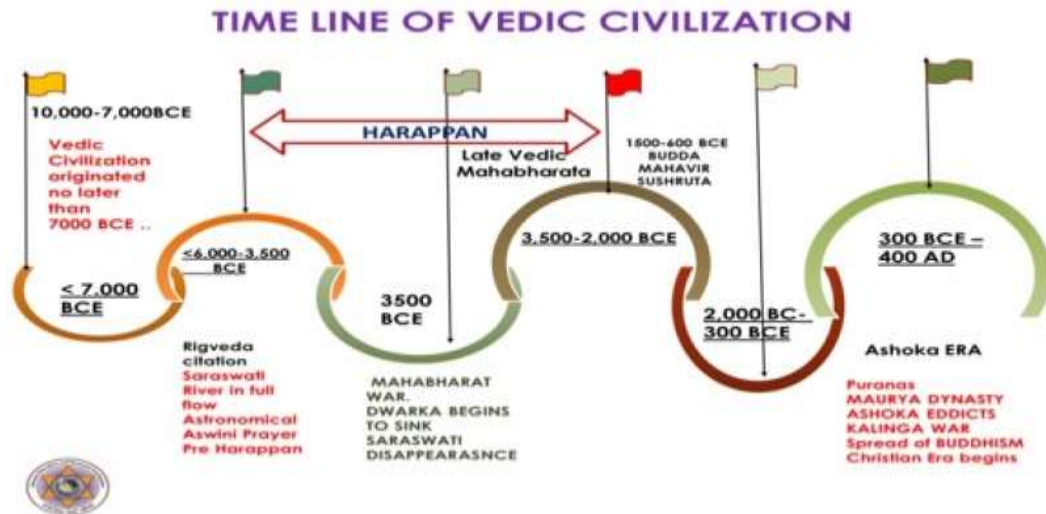


Fig 1 : Time Line of Vedic Civilization. (Source <http://ancientindianwisdom.com>)⁽⁵⁾

1. While the chronology of a part of this civilization overlaps the Harappan era (between 3800 and 2100 BC) the oral tradition of the Vedas preceded this phase by several millennia, starting no later than 7000 BC, and possibly earlier.
2. Impartial appraisal of linguistic evidence, astronomical projections with newly developed software, paleontological evidence, satellite maps of the Sarasvati basin, and a total insight into what constituted Vedic culture and its doings, support this conclusion.
3. The controversial theories developed during the colonial era, assigning 1600 BC as the earliest period of Vedic thought, and still persisting in the writings of certain Western scholars, finds no validity in these studies.
4. While no final clarity on the dateline issues has been reached, and further intensive archaeological and other studies of vast territories are needed, we can reasonably conclude on the basis of scientific evidence now available, that the origin of the Vedic tradition began not later than 7000 BC.

On the perspective of Indian leaders using Ancient Indian Wisdom principles, in his Autobiography⁽⁶⁾, Mahatma Gandhi considered to be father of the nation in India adopted Ahimsa (Non-Violence) to fight against the British for India's freedom movement. Ahimsa is a very ancient Indian spiritual practice which was supposed to be not harming any living beings including animals and plants. Ahimsa is the first of the five Yamas (restraints) amongst the eight limbs of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, the others being Niyamas (five observances), Asana (posture), Pranayama (breath control), Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (spiritual absorption). According to Gandhi (1990), the central tenet of Jainism is Ahimsa (Non-violence) and Gandhi's philosophy rested upon it. Growing up in that province with a pious mother, Gandhi was constantly exposed to the Jain doctrines.

Chakraborty (2002)⁽⁷⁾ argues that the foundation of ethics in practice lies in values within. Values are the cause and ethics is the effect. Distorted values or disvalues jostle with positive human values and our actions depend on which of the two is on the ascendant. In building this ethical stamina, Chakraborty reiterates the need to go back to our roots and grow strong on them, to build on the time-tested civilization and culture that is India's. Chakravarthy analyzed

Indian Leaders like P C Ray who lived simple life in spite of being large entrepreneur due to the strong foundation of values.

Bhawuk, D. (2011) ⁽⁸⁾, in the work *Spirituality and Indian Psychology: Lessons from the Bhagavad-Gita*, deals with the emergence of positive psychology in the West, and the many fold discovery of the impact of psychology in one's life, there is a need to understand spirituality, and to use its positive aspects to maintain a balance in hectic modern life. Bhawuk's book presents models for mapping basic psychological processes and their relationships. It covers basic constructs like cognition, emotion, behavior, desires, creativity, as well as applied topics like personal happiness, intercultural conflict handling, and world peace. Bhawuk quotes Ramakrishna - Indian Spiritual Guru declaring that all religions (Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) lead to the same end. This connects with the modern corporate view of diversity and inclusion with Ancient India's view of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The whole world is one). Bhawuk work covers deep understanding of Indian wisdom, analysis of spiritual gurus over the years, explains concept like Karma Yoga brilliantly.

Sharma (2010) ⁽⁹⁾ provides a useful framework with his deep work on Ancient wisdom over decades through his multiple articles and books. Sharma states while the idea of Western management owes its origin to the Philosophy of corporation, the idea of Indian Management owes its origin to the philosophy of life. Sharma suggests Three Ancient books for future Management Thought

Ramayana : Key lesson is the idea of 'Good Governance'

Mahabharata : Key lesson is the idea of Dharma and Dharma Vs Dharma dilemmas

Arthasastra : Key lesson is the idea of Wealth (artha)

Few foundations of Indian management as per Sharma

Ancient Indian Foundations: Essence of Mahabharata - Bhagavad-Gita, Ramayana

Rama - Role model for Good Governance popularized by M K Gandhi

Krishna - Leadership & Strategy

Vivekananda – Spiritual approach to Management

Arthashastra Foundations: Management of Kingdom connecting to corporate structure

Indian Business Foundations- Indian Business acumen brought up in communities

Cultural Foundations: Indian leaders learn American and Japanese methods and blend them well in Indian cultural context

ROL Gaps : While there were anecdotal references found in the texts and articles about how Ancient Indian Wisdom is helpful in leadership and management, there was no formal study of Ancient Indian Wisdom's influence on Indian IT Industry leaders

Hence Shortlisted the Research focus to 2 areas

- Is there an influence of Ancient Indian Wisdom that leaders of Indian Origin perceive or believe?
- If there is an influence, what were the factors that influenced the same?

With the help of Review of Literature and guidance from Research Guide, research methodology, sample selection criteria and sample questionnaire was prepared. This being relatively new area of formal research work, papers availability was limited.

‘Focused Group Discussion’ (FGD) Method was one of the suggestions which came up during Research review and further brief study of the method was done to look at the applicability of this method in the context of my research area.

Ochieng, NT (2018)⁽¹⁰⁾ talks about Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion is a flexible technique and is adaptable at any stage of the research. Compared to more conventional techniques such as individual interviews and surveys, focus group discussion offers an opportunity to explore issues that are not well understood or where there is little prior research on the topic. This is because, focus group discussion builds on the group dynamics to explore the issues in context, depth and detail, freely without imposing a conceptual framework compared with a structured individual interview. Our field experiences point to the fact that such dynamics and the process of sharing and comparing understandings and views mean that the focus group discussion can yield more insights than the equivalent number of individual interviews. Researchers can hugely benefit from the group context since it provides insight into social relations, and the information obtained reflects the social and overlapping nature of knowledge better than a summation of individual narratives through interviews and surveys

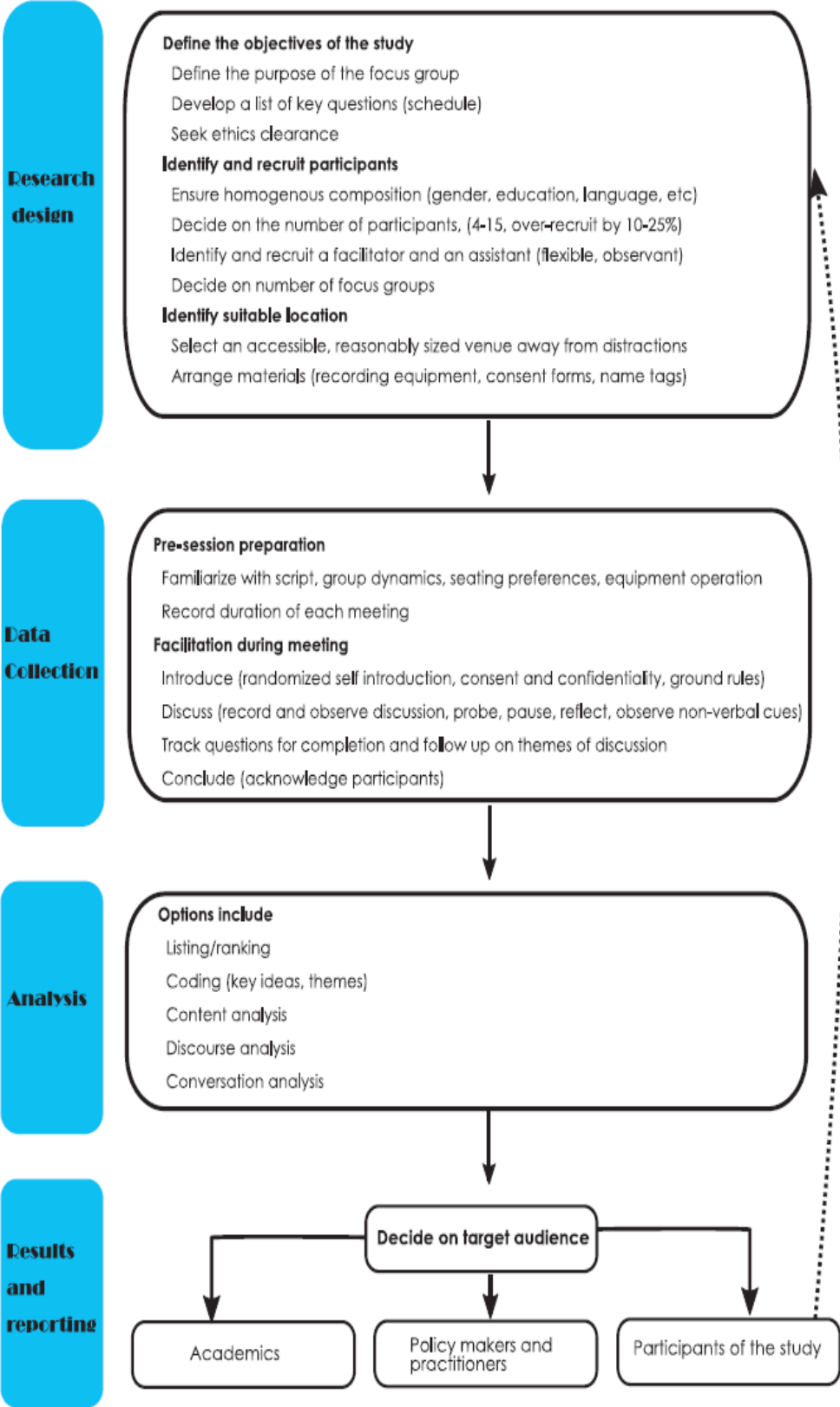


Fig 2 : FGD Process Flow

FGD was initiated further to firm up the sample selection, questionnaire sample and reaffirm the focus areas of research.

Approach for Focused Group Discussion (FGD) held in July 2020, covered

- Briefing of Scope
- ROL& Gaps
- Hypothesis
- Selection process drafts, Sample questionnaire
- Conducting the FGD covering Mid Management Industry Layer and Academicians
- Summarizing the outcome

FGD Agenda as shared with participants

- **Date:..... Time :**
- **Virtual Meeting: Zoom Platform**
- **Participants:** Selected Senior Leaders from industry, senior academicians and Research scholars
- **Schedule**
 - Welcome and Project Briefing by Research Scholar Nagarjuna Sadineni
 - Guidelines and Facilitator Remarks by Dr. Sandeep Shastri Research Guide and Pro Vice Chancellor Jain University
 - Participants' introduction and perspectives discussion
- Summary and conclusion

Research Background and sample questionnaire was shared with FGD participants in advance and Intense discussions were held for nearly 2hours over Zoom Video platform moderated by the Research Guide. 19 participants from IT industry with Geographical diversity from multiple Indian cities and United states, non-IT industry and Academia participated enthusiastically.

Key findings/suggestions were

- Relevance of research area was reconfirmed by the participants as an important area
- Strengthen the ROL and consider developing theoretical Model
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4. Conclusion

Considering the nature of topic and newness of the area of research, Focused Group Discussion helped significantly to sharpen/define the problem and was helpful as methodology. It increased the confidence of the research study, reinforced the area of research and brought insights into the areas which needed higher rigor. Post the FGD inputs, review of literature and the operations definitions work was initiated. Necessary corrections were made in the sample questions and the questionnaire process. Research work moved into the next stage of administering the samples and initiating the qualitative research study.

Based on the FGD experience in this case, FGD appeared as a potential tool in constructively strengthening/reaffirming research method which could be used by other researchers. It could be checked out for multiple domain scopes.

5. Acknowledgement

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Annexure on Prominent Schools of Thought in Ancient Indian EthosBhattacharjee (2011) ⁽¹¹⁾ describes:

Scripture	Description
The Vedas	There are four vedas viz. Rig-veda, Yajur-veda, Sama-veda and Athar-veda. The primary thought in the Vedas is a mystic conception of the universe. The whole effort of the Veda is directed towards one goal – to achieve union of the individual-self (Atman) with the world Self(Brahma)
Upanishads	The Vedanta seeks to know the ultimate reality (Brahman) and the cause behind everything. In this pursuit, it seeks to detach from the “Maya” and the material world and unite with Brahman (God or supreme consciousness)
Bhagavadgita	It is a poem which depicts lessons on spirituality and ethics through a dialogue between Lord Krishna and warrior Arjuna who is at a great crisis of his life. The Karma Yoga, Samkhya Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and the notion of three Gunas (Sattwa, Rajas, Tamas) have very important implications in the context of ethical leadership, decision-making, and management
Ramayana	It depicts the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters like the ideal father, ideal servant, the ideal brother, the ideal wife and the ideal king. Apart from this, the Ramayana also teaches how the temptation for lust can bring a powerful and well established man’s doomsday.
Buddhism	The founder of this school was Gautama Siddhartha who later became Lord Gautama Buddha. The Buddhism is based on the four noble truths: (i) Suffering exists (ii) There is a cause of the suffering ; (iii) Suffering can be eradicated ; (iv) There is a means for eradication of that suffering. Buddha establishes that everything on this earth is non-permanent. And, nothing on the earth is self. Hence, everything on this earth is “ anatta” or not-self. Finally, Buddha taught the eightfold-path to liberation from all suffering.

Table 1 **Prominent Schools of Thought in Ancient Indian Ethos**