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Research Article

## Karna's Relevance to Strategic HR in Corporate Corridors

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### Abstract

Findings show that good alignment between personal and corporate values or objectives usually results in beneficial consequences such as increased commitment and performance. An example of bad alignment is the mismatch of talent - i.e. placing a high-performing person in a situation that is not clear of his or her values or talents - which leads to disengagement, so-called underemployment or underutilisation of talents, and eventual loss of talents. The notion of loyalty that is usually hailed as a virtue among employees turns out to be a two-edged sword, as it brings about loyalty and determination, but it can also lead to unethical silence or maintenance of bad elements in the staff in an ill-conceived sense of duty. Talking about these results, we use the story of Karna as a good metaphor to say that the HR leaders should strike a balance between thankfulness and loyalty, meritocratic alignment and ethical clarity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is a review paper that takes a critical approach to analyse the overlap of these themes - the loyalty of Karna as a metaphorical way of analysing the loyalty of employees and the misalignment of talent as the contemporary HR problem of poor person-organisation or person-role fit. The main idea is to combine available peer-reviewed sources of literature on talent management, organisational fit/misfit, as well as employee loyalty (commitment), and to see how these phenomena represent each other. By so doing, we answer questions like: What are the implications of a misfit between a talented person and his or her job in the organisation, such as performance, commitment, and ethical conduct? In what situation is loyalty helpful to organisations, and when can it be said to be in the wrong place, potentially generating negative consequences similar to those that befell Karna? Through critically examining the findings of previous research, we hope to draw insights and suggestions to HR decision-makers to manage high-talent employees in a manner sensitive to loyalty, yet at the expense of being ethically aligned and strategically fit.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Person–Organisation Fit, Misfit and Outcomes: To gain the implications of talent misfit, it is important to remember the long literature on the concept of Person-Organisation (P-O) and Person-Job (P-J) fit. P-O fit is the fit of an individual with values, beliefs, and personality to the culture or values of an organisation [1]. P-J fit is a fit between the skills of a particular person and the job demands and needs provided by a job. The positive results that come with a high level of fit are high job satisfaction, organisational commitment and high performance and low turnover [1] [2].

Indicatively, a meta-analysis conducted by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) revealed that both the P-J and P-O fit substantially forecast the satisfaction and intention of employees to stay in the organisation, among other requirements [1]. On the contrary, misfit - be it of values or ability - is not only unpleasant to the individual, but may be very expensive to the employer. Workers who develop the feeling that they are not part of it or that they cannot use their talents will psychologically disengage and literally leave the company at a later stage. The misfits leave hypothesis, which originated with Schneider (1987), and which has since been confirmed by other studies, is that with time, misfit individuals will either conform, be dealt with or resign, leading to some sort of a self-reinforcing alignment within organisations [2].

Nevertheless, during the period of misfit stay, the organisations can experience serious performance problems, and individuals can experience a decline in well-being. Recent research points to the fact that occasionally misfit can result in creative results, as well, such as the feeling of being an outsider may motivate someone to propose new ideas (A Beneficial Re-evaluation of Misfit) [4]. However, in the most cases, long-term misfit, like serving in a job which does not recognise one's talent or infringes one's morality, is bad. In an exploratory paper, Jessurun et al. (2019) introduced the phrase chronic relative underperformance to mean employees who underperform despite their potential due to their talents not being observed and not being utilised - the situation which evidently resonates with talent misalignment [3]. Their study is conceptual; however, it is in line with previous results on underemployment: people working in these states tend to become bored, feel like they are stagnating, and eventually become cynical or even burned out if the situation continues [3] [14]. Talent management-wise, misalignment is a deployment failure, that is, a wasted investment in human capabilities and organisational capabilities.

## 3. METHODOLOGY (REVIEW APPROACH)

We used the allegory of Karna as a qualitative filter throughout the review process: Does a particular study provide insight into what transpired in the case of Karna or what may have been done to address it differently in the context of the modern world? This was not a bias in terms of the choice of the sources (Based on the Relevance in Academia), yet it acted as a guide to the interpretation and discussion. Simply, the story of Karna offered a system of joining the fragmented research findings into a consistent story about HR Decision-Making.

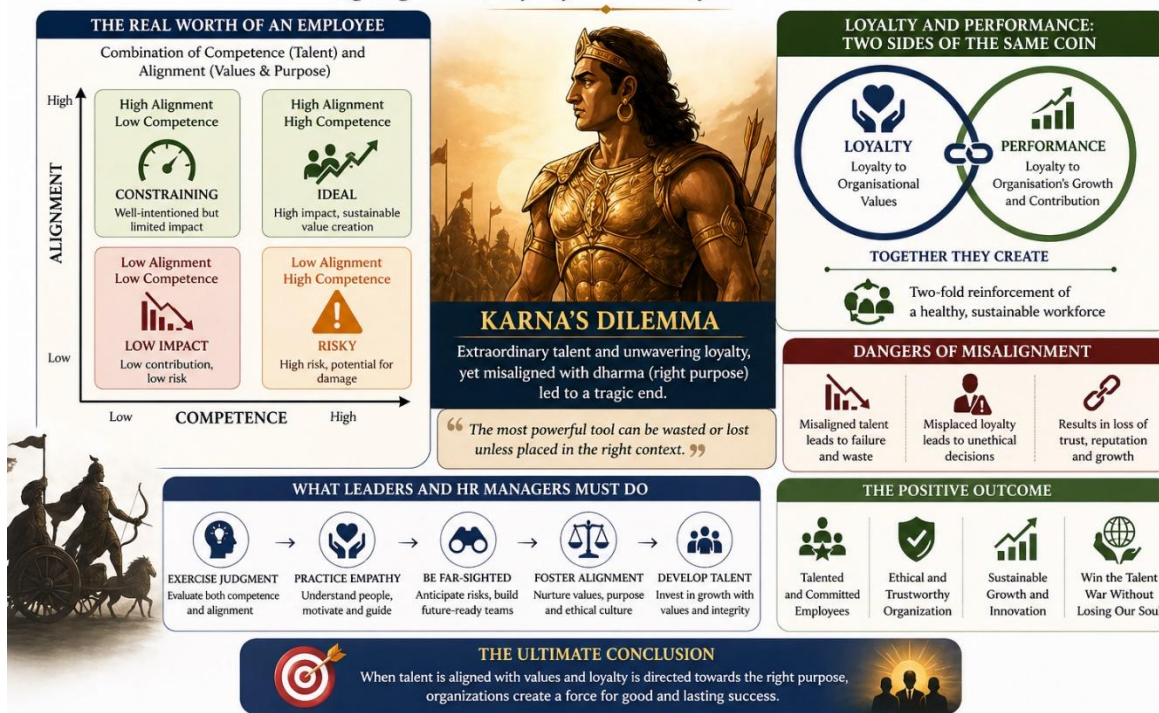
## 4. RESULTS AND SYNTHESIS

Key Patterns – The Talent Alignment Matrix: Synthesising the above, we identify several trends that may be represented in a Talent Vs. Alignment Matrix. There are four quadrants in this matrix:

High Talent, High Alignment (the ideal case, equal to heroic characters who are both talented and morally right in the epic): The literature demonstrates that such individuals become the so-called star players that bring about organisational success and have extended and fruitful careers [1]. They are mostly highly loyal, which is aligned with organisational objectives, thus benefiting each other. The role of HR is to keep them and make them continue to challenge.

# KARNA'S LESSON FOR MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

Aligning Talent, Loyalty and Values for a Sustainable Future



Picture : 1

High Talent, Low Alignment: Ex: Karna dilemma quadrant, talented misfits. This is where we have people who are highly talented and whose values or allegiance are somewhere else (or are misplaced). A study has shown that this quadrant is a risky one; this category of employees may turn into internal conflict or flight risk. They can provide short-term results. Ex: Karna played a critical role in the campaign of Duryodhana, but because of their incompatibility, such results usually eventually cause some adverse consequences, like departure or moral

failure. This group has to be carefully managed: either realign them, such as changing their role or context to fit better or discontinue them in case they cannot be aligned with despite talent. When managed ineffectively, either the talent can be lost, or there will be disengagement ramifications for the organisation. This quadrant is an illustration of why talent management should not just be identified as talent identification, but also take into consideration cultural and ethical fit [4].

Table: Summary of Key Studies

Study (Year)	Focus	Key Findings/Insights
Feldman (1996)	Underemployment & Misfit	Described “Underemployment” as a scenario of talent misalignment (Employees in jobs below their capacity). Showed that underemployed (Misaligned) individuals experience lower job satisfaction and are more likely to seek other employment. Signalled that failing to utilise employees’ talents leads to frustration and eventually turnover, aligning with later misfit studies.
Sun & Billsberry (2025)	Employee Misfit (Systematic Review)	Reported that employee misfit is generally linked to negative outcomes like higher turnover, social isolation, and even depressive feelings [4]. Also noted that some misfits find positive side-effects (Ex: Personal growth or impetus for change), but such cases are exceptions. Overall, reinforced the importance of addressing misalignment early – misfit employees often eventually exit (“Misfit Turn” in recent literature emphasises this trend) [2].

## 5. DISCUSSION

Literature synthesis provides a multidimensional view of the central problem, the conflict between loyalty and talent match in organisations. These findings can be restructured through the allegorical prism of Karna as a loyal servant and lessons learnt about contemporary HR management and leadership can be discerned. As part of this discussion, we explore the

implications of the results, we thought more on how organisations can address the dilemma of misaligned talent in practice and we thought more on the theoretical and ethical considerations. We also highly assess the shortcomings of existing studies and recommendations on future research.

### Making sense of Dilemma of Karna in the Modern world

The case of Karna - a highly skilled person but burdened with allegiance to a situation that was incompatible with his identity and future - is what we have recognized as the High Talent, Low Alignment quadrant of our analysis. Contemporary companies tend to have their own Karnas. Ex: A High-Production Salesperson, who has a propensity to be disruptive and loud, but has a personality that does not fit into the ethical culture of the company, or an engineer genius that is more loyal to the manager (or even to his/her professional values) than to the mission of the company.



Picture 2: Krishna's preaching to Karna on his Dilemma

These are hard decisions to make. According to the literature, the lack of attention to the misalignment and the immediate elimination of the talented person is not the solution. Neglect can result in short-term success, but long-term troubles. The talented outcast can become more disengaged or even act contrary to the interests of the organisation (purposely or not). Conversely, the cost of losing an employee who is highly performing can be expensive in terms of experience and even competitiveness. The suggested tactic is a realignment strategy. This may entail open discussions to establish some form of

commonality between the individual values/career objectives and the organisational needs, change of roles, extra training, or mentoring in an attempt to accommodate the individual more into the organisational culture.

In other instances, a company may provide the individual with an alternative home (that he fits better into), as was extended to Karna by Krishna, who urged him to cross over to the other side both ethically and strategically, such as transfer to a department more consistent with their values or a specially created position that maximises their talent without the sources of incompatibility. Naturally, the characters of the epic do not have the freedom to make their own decisions; on the contrary, an organisation can just help and convince the real employees. In case of failure of the realignment, i.e. in case the personal loyalties or ethics of the individual are essentially incompatible with those of the company, then it may be reasonable that the two should part ways in a friendly manner.

This is in line with the Schneider ASA cycle in which the result of unresolved misfit [21] is attrition. Sometimes it is wiser to lose a star in such cases than to face some internal discord or compromise of ethics. The manner in which that parting is done is indeed important, though; one can receive knowledge transfer and reduce the adverse backlash should it be done with a certain degree of respect. Indeed, in the Mahabharata, the opposition Karna received was addressed with a degree of respect once it was known that he had been on the right side of the battle all along.

### 6. CONCLUSION

Combining the views on organisational behaviour and ethics in this paper makes it possible to draw the ultimate conclusion. The real worth of an employee to an organisation is in the combination of his or her competency and his or her conformity to the purpose of the organisation and its values. Low competence with high alignment is constraining, and high competence with low alignment is risky as they are high and low, respectively. Businesses must not assume false opposites of the ideas of loyalty and performance, and establish a climate where the latter goes hand in hand with the former, and the former implies that the former will remain loyal to the values of the organisation and the latter will remain loyal to the organisation and its ongoing development and contribution. This is the two-fold reinforcement of a healthy, sustainable workforce.

To conclude, the story of Karna gives an excellently tragic lesson to companies - a lesson to remember that the most robust tool can be wasted or lost unless it is placed in the appropriate context. The wise characters of the epics are similar to the contemporary HR managers and chiefs who need to be judgmental, empathic, and far-sighted to make sure that talent is fostered along with alignment. In this way, it is not only that they prevent the eventual crashing that would otherwise be the result of misaligned talent and misplaced loyalty, but they actually make them the instruments of the good, developing employees who are not only exceptionally talented but also highly committed to the success of the organisation. This balance is not easily achieved, yet this is what is required of

good talent management and ethical leadership in this modern day. The Karna tale does not have to be recreated in corporate corridors; with the lessons to be learned and the strategies to be given, companies can hope to win the talent war without losing their souls in the process.

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