

# Humanistic leadership in the Tata group: the synergy in personal values, organisational strategy and national cultural ethos

Humanistic leadership in the Tata group

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Received 31 January 2020

Revised 3 June 2020

3 July 2020

Accepted 3 July 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose** – To identify the characteristic features of humanistic leadership in the Tata group in India, and to explicate the key facilitating factors.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Narrative case-study inquiry via semi-structured interviews with top management leaders and middle managers, and secondary sources of information.

**Findings** – The top leaders of the Tata companies emphasised the following values and leadership experience: (1) Adherence to the founder's philosophy and the basic core values, (2) Leadership with Trust, (3) Community as the key purpose of the enterprise, (4) Senior leaders as mentors and role-models, (5) Abiding by the ethical code of conduct, (6) Employee-focus and (7) Tacit alignment with Indian cultural values. These resonated with the humanistic leadership tenets. Based on the literature the authors also identified that in Tata leadership, there is an amalgamation of personal values (*humata, hukhta, hvarshata*: good thought, word and deed) and national cultural ethos (*dharma, karma and jnana*: emphasis on duty-bound action and knowledge). These leadership values are conveyed and institutionalised in the organisation via strategic initiatives such as the Tata Trusts, Tata Business Excellence Model, Tata Code of Conduct. This synergy of personal values, national cultural ethos and organisational strategy makes Tata group realise the humanistic leadership objectives, while achieving business targets.

**Research limitations/implications** – The thematic analysis of interview data provides a contextualised understanding of how humanistic leadership gets realised at both the individual behavioural level, as well as at the broader organisational strategic level. This provides inputs to building the theory of humanistic leadership.

**Practical implications** – By unravelling the factors that facilitate the realisation of humanistic leadership in the Tata group, the authors provide an exemplar for other organisations and business leaders to draw insights from.

**Social implications** – Humanistic leadership, oriented towards upliftment of community and society, and not just profit maximisation, is critical to creating a more sustainable and peaceful world.

**Originality/value** – This is one of first studies that conceptualises the Tata leadership from the humanistic perspective. The theoretical insights are of basic and applied use.

**Keywords** Humanistic leadership, Indian culture, Tata group

**Paper type** Research paper

In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder in business, but is in fact the very purpose of its existence.

– Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, Founder Chairman, 1868–1904

To be a leader, you have got to lead human beings with affection.

– JRD Tata, Chairman, 1938–1991

One hundred years from now, I expect the Tatas to be much bigger, of course, than it is now. More importantly, I hope the group comes to be regarded as being the best in India — best in the manner in which we operate, best in the products we deliver, and best in our value system and ethics.

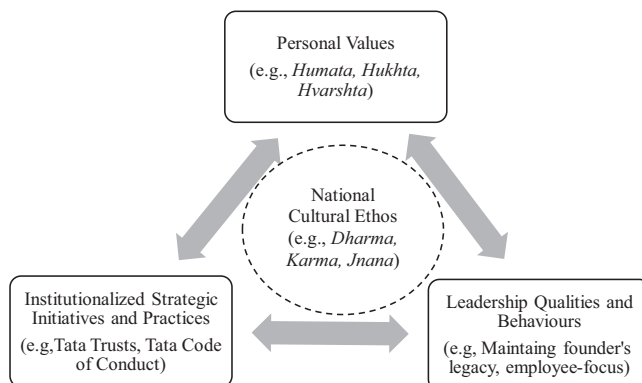
– Ratan Tata, Chairman, 1991–2012; Chairman Emeritus, 2012-present



The three most iconic leaders of the Tata group quoted above emphasise human values as their core leadership philosophy. This is second only in importance to the giant strides that Tata group has made in the business world. Started in the pre-independence India in 1868 with the vision of Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, Tata is now a global business group with products and services in over 100 countries, employing 720,000 people. The “Tata” brand continues to be India’s most valuable brand according to the annual assessment by Brand Finance, the world’s leading brand valuation and strategy. In 2020, Tata group surpassed the US\$20.0 billion – the first time any Indian brand has reached this brand value marker. Often referred to as the “Salt-to-software conglomerate”, this \$100-billion-plus business group is one of the forerunners in the current global business economy and is a name to reckon with (Shah, 2018). The Tata group has transformed itself from an approximately \$5.8-billion domestic company in 1992 (Mithas, 2015) to a global player, with substantial portions of its revenues coming from outside India, particularly US and UK (retrieved from <https://www.tata.com/tata-worldwide>).

Structurally, Tata group consists of diverse business units – 30 companies under 10 business sectors; these include Tata Consultancy Services (information technology), Tata Motors (automotive), Tata Steel, Tata Chemicals, Titan (personal lifestyle), Tata Capital (trading and investment), Tata Power, Tata Consumer Products, Indian Hotels, Tata Communications and others. These business units function as separate legal entities, each with its own set of shareholders, board of directors, and top management teams. Tata Sons is the principal investment holding company and promoter of Tata companies. Sixty-six percent of the equity share capital of Tata Sons is held by philanthropic trusts, which support education, health, livelihood generation, and art and culture. For example, on March 28th 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis when the nationwide lockdown was announced, Mr. Ratan N Tata, Chairman, Tata Trusts, committed Rs. 500 crores (\$67 million, approx.) towards tackling the situation. The same evening, Tata Sons announced an additional Rs. 1,000 crores (\$133 million, approx.) support towards COVID-19 and related activities. This donation was the highest an Indian organisation had pledged to fight the crisis.

In present paper, we attempt to unravel the top leadership in the Tata group from the humanistic perspective. Through interview insights and archival sources, we identify the key elements in Tata leadership that align with the humanistic values. We further explore the points of intersection in the national cultural ethos, personal values, and strategic initiatives that contribute to realising the goals of humanistic leadership. Based on these insights, we propose that Tata – with its synergy in the three realms can serve as an exemplar case of sustaining and scaling up the humanistic leadership values for persons and organisations in contemporary business world (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The synergistic interplay of personal, organisational, and cultural elements. In sustaining and scaling up humanistic leadership

### **Tata group and humanistic leadership: a case for theoretical convergence**

Contemporary leadership literature is advancing in multiple directions to keep up with changing business scenarios, workplace demands, as well as generational shifts (Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Avolio *et al.*, 2009; Dinh *et al.*, 2014). While concepts such as “transformational leadership”, “e-leadership”, “servant leadership” dot the emerging leadership literature, one theme that has remained pervasive and fundamental to the study of leadership as well as to management in general is the importance of human values and virtues (Davila and Elvira, 2012; Melé, 2016). In contrast to the “economistic”, the “humanistic” orientation is directed towards social community and stakeholders rather than profit maximisation and shareholder margins (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010).

Based on the extant literature, the working definition proposed by the Editors (Fu *et al.*, 2020) serves as a good starting point to look at Tata leadership from the humanistic perspective: “Humanistic leaders are those who: (1) respect people as holistic human beings by taking care of himself/herself as well as the followers’ multiple needs and motives; (2) they constantly improve themselves while developing the followers to unleash their full potential; and 3) they recognize and try to take into account all stakeholders’ interests while striving to pursue the common good” (Fu *et al.*, 2020).

It is no coincidence that the Tata Group converges with the humanistic leadership tenets in its mission statement and core values. As stated at the outset, the adherence to humanistic values has been a core defining feature of the leadership philosophy. The mission statement of the Tata group is: “To improve the quality of life of the communities we serve globally, through long-term stakeholder value creation based on Leadership with Trust”. The core values of the Tata Group, often referred to as I-PURE, are considered to be the foundation of all benchmarks for business; these are, Integrity, Pioneering, Unity, Responsibility and Excellence:

Integrity: We will be fair, honest, transparent and ethical in our conduct; everything we do must stand the test of public scrutiny,

Pioneering: We will be bold and agile, courageously take on challenges, using deep customer insight to develop innovative solutions,

Unity: We will invest in our people and partners, enable continuous learning, and build caring and collaborative relationships based on trust and mutual respect,

Responsibility: We will integrate environmental and social principles in our businesses, ensuring that what comes from the people goes back to the people many times over, and

Excellence: We will be passionate about achieving the highest standards of quality, always promoting meritocracy (retrieved from [www.tata.com](http://www.tata.com)).

Most of these formalised principles owe to the humanistic values espoused by the founding father of the Tata group, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata.

### **Founding father’s philosophy: an amalgamation of personal values and national cultural ethos**

Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (b. 1839 – d. 1904), the founder of Tata group, followed the Zoroastrian faith as a Parsi. His ancestors had found refuge in Gujarat, India, in 10th-century AD while fleeing the Arab persecution in their homeland of Persia. The local Hindu ruler granted them land where they were also free to follow their own faith. The three defining values, that Jamsetji, coming from a line of Parsi priests, imbibed from his faith, were: *Humata* (good thoughts), *Hukhta* (good words), and *Hvarshata* (good deeds). The Tata group is guided by these cardinal virtues. A crest with this motto adorns the entrance of the museum-

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converted erstwhile house of the Tatas in Navsari, Gujarat. Because of the exemplary contribution of the Parsis, Mahatma Gandhi, in pre-independence India, famously noted, “I am proud of my country, India, for having produced the splendid Zoroastrian stock, in numbers beneath contempt, but in charity and philanthropy perhaps unequalled and certainly unsurpassed” (Taraporevala, 2002).

As a young entrepreneur, Jamsetji Tata was quick to identify opportunities. After a few initial trading ventures, in 1874 he started “The Central India Spinning, Weaving and Manufacturing Company” to manufacture cotton goods in Nagpur. His biographer Frank Harris (1925) writes:

When Mr. Tata first announced his intention of building a mill in what seemed a remote and backward town, the people of Bombay laughed him to scorn for ignoring the place which they regarded as the “Cottonopolis” of India. But Jamsetji Tata knew his business. Land in Nagpur was cheap, agricultural produce was abundant, and distribution could easily be facilitated, owing to the central position of the town and the gradual growth of converging railways (p. 27).

Jamsetji was a pioneer in technology and a leader in human-orientation:

Jamsetji was more than half a century ahead of his time. The textile mills at Nagpur became his laboratory. He personally looked after every little detail of its growth. Here, he tried experiments in technology and labour welfare reforms, nothing but the best was good for him. The excellence of his new plant was matched only by his care for the workers (retrieved from [www.tatacentralarchives.com](http://www.tatacentralarchives.com))

As an industrialist in the colonial era, when the British regulated and curbed any growth of independent Indian businesses, Jamsetji was fuelled by the nationalist desire to contribute to the growth of the country.

Successful in two textile venture, his name trusted by the public, contemporaries said that Jamsetji would multiply his wealth by adding to his textile units. He and his staff had the know-how to do so if he so wished. Instead, he chose the unknown path to give India steel, hydroelectric power and technical education to a high order. Something had happened to Jamsetji. The nation had become his business (cited in Lala, 2004, p. 12).

This was Jamsetji’s spirit in pre-independence India. The Ethics scholar, Skip Worden (2003) argued that Jamsetji’s Parsi ethics and orientation towards “swadeshi” or self-rule of a colonised India, could have compromised his immediate and mid-term business interests – especially his reputation as a businessman. While this position is based on historical narratives, one can argue for the counterfactual. The Parsi ethics dovetailed well with the key values of the Indian culture. Three Indian cultural values, in particular, that implicitly map on to Tata’s leadership ethos are *dharma* (fulfilment of moral duties and obligations to others), *nishkama karma* (selfless work-orientation and quest for excellence without fear and anxiety of the results), and *jnana* (orientation towards learning and knowledge). Two other Tata values that are close to Indian cultural ideals are: family values with a family like organisational ambience, and *daanam* or giving. The association with these ideals have found expression in the policies and processes that are followed in the group companies of Tata.

Tata’s espousal for the cause of organised philanthropy, giving back to society and scientific development of India (Kumar, 2018) is an expression of *nishkama karma*, *dharma* and *daanam* (Heim, 2007). The city of Jamshedpur, christened after the founder, where the first steel plant was constructed embodies these ideals. Tatas developed the city as an exemplar of town planning and community development. Jamshetji Tata wrote in 1902, five years before the steel plant were to begin operations to his son, Dorab: “Be sure to lay wide streets planted with shady trees, every other of a quick-growing variety. Be sure that there is plenty of space for lawns and gardens. Reserve large areas for football, hockey and parks.

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Earmark areas for Hindu temples, Mohammedan mosques and Christian churches” (Lala, 2004, p. 12).

Besides such gestures of *dharma* and *karma*, Tatas, more than adequately facilitated the spread of *jnana* by establishing eminent institutions, such as the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). Jamsetji Tata foresaw the power of higher education and scientific research as India’s road to growth. After a chance encounter with Swami Vivekananda—the Indian philosopher who inspired a renaissance of ancient Indian knowledge and treatise in colonial India – Jamsetji wrote in a letter on 23 November, 1898:

I trust you remember me as a fellow-traveller on your voyage from Japan to Chicago. I very much recall at this moment your views on the growth of the ascetic spirit in India, and the duty, not of destroying, but of diverting it into useful channels. . . I recall these ideas in connection with my scheme of a Research Institute of Science for India (retrieved from [www.tatacentralarchives.com](http://www.tatacentralarchives.com)).

The establishment of the premier Indian Institute of Science, located in Bengaluru, India, in 1909 was a fruition of these socio-cultural aspirations, in which Jamsetji’s own contribution financially and emotionally was immense. He donated half of his personal wealth (14 buildings and four landed properties in Bombay) to start the institute (retrieved from <https://www.tata.com/community/education/indian-institute-of-science>).

Jamsetji Tata, therefore, laid a solid foundation of entrepreneurship, vision, and community development at the start of the company. The question then is how do the present-day leaders in the Tata group implement and enact these principles.

### **Narrative stories of present-day top management leaders**

In order to arrive at a thematic understanding of the humanistic leadership as it plays out in the field – in the behaviours and actions of the present-day leaders – we pursued a narrative case study inquiry (Riessman, 2008). This methodology is especially suited to conducting culturally-embedded organisational research when, researchers instead of testing theories in a hypothetico-deductive paradigm, are trying to build theory bottom-up. In contrast to pre-conceived, quantitative dimensions of cultural differences, this approach, therefore, allows an immersive understanding of culture: “[By] confronting local actors’ accounts of implicit factors from different countries, rich descriptions of cultures . . . can be realized for cross-cultural analyses” (Soin and Scheytt, 2006, p. 72). Towards this end, we conducted semi-structured interviews – in a narrative story-seeking manner – with three top leaders in three different Tata companies. We complemented the first-hand interview insights with secondary sources such as mainstream literature, company records, and social media posts, for a richer and nuanced understanding. In addition, we conducted three more interviews with functional heads in mid-management level to know more about the implementation of strategic leadership initiatives. The top leaders whom we interviewed were: (1) Mr. B. Muthuraman, Former Managing Director, Tata Steel, 2001–2009, (2) Mr. Bhaskar Bhat, Former Managing Director of Titan, 2002–2019, (3) Mr. Harish Bhat, Brand Custodian, 2016-present (see Table 1 for their biographical sketch).

Demographically, the three leaders were well-suited to the narrative inquiry of leadership stories. They were 10–12 years apart in their top management tenure, thereby providing us a more representative sample of leaders across time. Also, the three leaders came from three different companies: Tata Steel which is manufacturing, Titan which makes products in the personal lifestyle category, and the third, currently in a brand custodian role in Tata Sons, with experience in products such as Tata Tea and Consumer and Retail. All three of them were “home grown” leaders, in that they progressed in their careers at the Tata group, handling diverse and varied roles in Tata companies, and eventually rising to the top

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Mr. B. Muthuraman, Managing director, Tata steel (2001–2009)	Mr. Bhaskar Bhat, Managing director, Titan (2002–2019)	Mr. Harish Bhat, Brand custodian, Tata sons (2016-current)
<p>Mr. Muthuraman joined Tata Steel as a Graduate Trainee in 1966, worked in various divisions of the company like blast furnaces, new project development, and project planning, headed the marketing division of Tata Steel from 1991 to 1995, eventually taking over as the Managing Director of the company in 2001 till his superannuation in 2009. Tata Steel saw a number of milestones during his tenure as MD, including the internationalisation of the company with the acquisition of the UK based Corus in 2007 – the largest overseas acquisition by any Indian industry; winning of the prestigious Deming Award in 2008. In recognition of his contribution to Indian Trade and Industry, Mr. Muthuraman was conferred the prestigious “Padma Bhushan” award in 2012 – a civilian award for distinguished service of a high order from Government of India</p>	<p>Mr. Bhaskar Bhat started his journey in the Tata Group with the Tata Watch Project in 1983, later to become Titan Watches Limited, and now Titan Company Limited – a consumer lifestyle retail company. At Titan, Mr. Bhaskar Bhat dealt with sales and marketing, HR, international business and various general managerial assignments. He then took over as Managing Director of the Company in 2002 and held the position till his superannuation on September 30, 2019. Currently he is serving as a Non-Executive Non-Independent Director of the Company. Mr. Bhat’s contribution to expanding Titan’s portfolio from watches to other personal lifestyle products such as jewellery, eyewear, etc. and raising the profit margins has been regularly featured in mainstream media (e.g. “Good people can also succeed”, 2019). He was also conferred the Forbes India Leadership Award and EY Entrepreneurial CEO Award in 2019</p>	<p>Mr. Harish Bhat joined the Tata Group in 1987, as an officer in the Tata Administrative Service (TAS). Currently, he is the Brand Custodian at Tata Sons. He is also the Chairman of Tata Coffee Ltd. and is a Director on the Boards of several other Tata Companies, including Tata Consumer Products Ltd., Trent Ltd., Tata Starbucks Pvt. Ltd., and others. During his career spanning 33 years with the Tata Group, he has held several senior roles. These include stints as Managing Director of Tata Global Beverages Ltd., Chief Operating Officer of the Watches and Jewellery businesses of Titan Company Ltd. He has played a key role in several strategic moves of the Group over the past two decades, including the launch and nurturing of many iconic brands of the Tata Group, the successful turnaround of the Jewellery business, as well as the acquisition of Tetley. He is a prolific writer and columnist, and has written a book on the Tata Group, in addition to other works, primarily in the area of marketing and consumer behaviour</p>

**Table 1.**  
Biographical Sketch of the three top leaders interviewed for research

echelons. Such homegrown leadership is another hallmark of the Tata group, as they believe in tapping, investing, and nurturing talent within instead of hiring from outside. For example, 80% of the leadership positions at Tata Steel are filled internally.

The interview questions ([Appendix](#)) were shared with the interviewees in advance to provide them an idea of the topics of discussion. The questions mainly asked the leaders to reflect on their leadership journey and provide specific instances on how they translate the Tata values into actions and behaviours. The semi-structured nature of the interview protocol allowed the interviewees to engage in narrative story-telling in a free-flowing manner, while adhering broadly to the key themes identified by the researchers. All interviews, conducted in one or two sessions, lasted 40 min to an hour and were recorded and transcribed. The key verbatim quotes of the interviews are presented as data in the following section to provide an authentic portrayal of their spontaneous emotions and expressions ([Corden and Sainsbury, 2005](#)).

*Mr. B. Muthuraman, Managing Director Tata Steel (2001–2009)*

Narrating his leadership journey in Tata Steel, Mr. Muthuraman emphasised the inspiration drawn from founding father's life story and the challenges he faced in establishing the business in pre-independence India. This, he says, is the most abiding learning any new comer in Tata Steel gets:

I joined Tata Steel in 1966. And then one of the first things we learn even during training period is the life of Mister J.N. Tata. How he struggled to establish Tata Steel in India when the British did not want any industries in India. . . For example in Tata Steel, it was with great difficulty he got the licenses for exploration. . . When he found out iron ore was available somewhere, he needed money, he needed technology. He first went to the UK for technology. . . when he was turned down in the UK, he went to US and got technology from Pittsburgh. He was successful in raising money in India. . . Those were enormous challenges and difficulties. . . It is easy to establish companies in present times, but it was very difficult against opposition in pre-independence India.

He further articulated on how the founding father's vision is considered the core principle of running the organisation and how these principles are imbibed in the organisation with leadership examples and narratives:

We learn early on that the prime purpose of an industrial organization is to improve the quality of life of the people around. In order to achieve the prime purpose well, one has to run the enterprise well—profitably—so part of the profit can go back to the society. . .

We see these principles in the people who have followed these over the years. . . we read these in books. . . we hear stories. . . Whether someone like me who joins in 1966 or someone who joins today—they all get these lessons.

On being asked to elaborate on how “leadership with trust” which is a reciprocal and long-term process, gets built, he mentioned:

It spreads from what you have heard of leaders of the past, what you see in leaders of the present, it spreads from constant communication about the correct values in life of a company. . . it spreads from the founder's philosophy. . . The trust with the suppliers, with the customers, with the employees builds over time. Each and every action counts. Here's an example. . . A blast furnace had to be relined in Tata Steel. The group completed the work ahead of time. Even without them asking for it, we gave them a bonus. . . This is how trust gets built. . . Another example is how we undertook the exercise of reducing the unionized category of workforce peacefully from 78000 to 40000. . . This was not possible without first building trust. We did clear and transparent communication with the Union.

He further emphasized the importance of communication in building trust:

In Tata Steel there is a tremendous amount of communication that goes on. On the first of every month, in an initiative called the MD Online the MD addresses the entire strength of the company and listens to the questions of the employees who are largely from the unionized category. So when you are willing to share information with people the mutual trust and confidence increase enormously.

He emphasised that such communication helps in building workers' engagement:

We saw the quality of the questions asked by workers improve over time. Initially they would ask more about mundane matters, such as their house. . . the taps not working, roads not clear. . . day-to-day problems. Slowly they started asking how can they get involved with the company? . . . what is TQM? . . . what is Deming Prize? . . . who is Mr. Deming? This is all a result of the tremendous amount of communication that takes place between CEO and workers.

Mr. Muthuraman gave examples of tough decisions taken at Tata Steel, one of which was bringing down the workforce from 78,000 to 40,000 in the years 1995–2000. The company had operated under licenses and regulations, first under the British regime from 1907 to 1947, and

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then under the Government of India from 1947 to 1991. The opening up of the Indian economy in 1991 paved way for modernisation but it was not without challenges:

In 1991, when India became a liberalized economy, being competitive in the world market was critical. The external consultants hired to recommend the way ahead produced voluminous report that outlined areas that made us uncompetitive like outdated plant and machinery, poor IT systems, slow decision making processes etc. and declared that we will not be able to survive the competition. We had to meet several challenges simultaneously.

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Mr. Muthuraman elaborated that one of the toughest decision was reducing the workforce:

Till 1995–96 we produced 2 million tonnes of steel with 78,000 employees. The global standard for this output was 20,000 employees. Had we continued at this level, we would have had to shut the plant. We needed to reduce the workforce. Under the leadership of my predecessor, Dr. J. J. Irani, we launched an early separation scheme (ESS) that guaranteed to all those taking early separation, salary every month till they reach the notional age of retirement besides other benefits like health and company quarters. Such a scheme was unheard of anywhere in the world and was ridiculed in the beginning but we were convinced and asked everyone to wait and see the results. . . The leadership engaged in constant and close communication with the workers. I saw Dr. Irani make business presentations to the unions outlining the challenges and the threats, eventually making them understand the seriousness of the situation. . . What we achieved peacefully and without rebellion is exemplary. I do not think this kind of an exercise has ever been done anywhere else in the world.

With rightsizing, Tata Steel not only increased production, but it did so in a sustainable, quality-congruent manner. In 2008, Tata Steel became the first integrated steel company in the world, outside Japan, to be awarded the Deming Application Prize for excellence in Total Quality Management. Mr. Muthuraman, during the application process, was asked by the Deming Examiner what was the biggest challenge he faced in implementing TQM in Tata Steel, to which his reply was, asking his workers to “take off one hat and wear another” when these workers came from one of the most economically backward regions of the country (cited in [Bhat, 2012](#)). We asked him to elaborate on this:

Wearing a hat is only a metaphor. We asked workers to think global, cultivate a desire to become world class, world number one and not think small. This cannot be achieved overnight and requires constant work. People follow examples and I always urged my senior managers to ask the right questions, make the workers think, make them participate in the improvement process. Don't ask them how much was the production but enquire as to how can the production be improved? What can be done better? It is almost like bringing up children. If you ask them about grades, they will focus only on that but if you ask them about their friends, their teachers, what did they enjoy in the class etc., suddenly you will see their interest level transform.

Mr. Muthuraman also mentioned that when Tata acquires a company, they do not see the acquired company as an acquisition but a partner as has been the case with Corus Steel, Jaguar Land Rover, and Tetley. He said, “when Tata group was in the fray to acquire Corus Steel, the employees of Corus Steel held a meeting that demanded that they be acquired by Tata group and not by any other as they had by then become familiar with its people practices”.

In fact he goes to the extent to say that for the Tata group, families of employees form the core of its policies which is akin to Indian societal practices where family forms the nucleus of society. Indian ethos are also represented in the oft quoted hymn from Rig Veda, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, which means “the whole world is one family”. In such ways the group interprets its value of Unity. Just the way family values are passed from one generation to the next, in Tata Group too, the values are passed from one cohort of employees to the next. It is a common practice of generations taking pride in working for a Tata group company. It is not uncommon to find grandfather, father and son, all three working in Tata Steel in Jamshedpur, the city that the group established around its steel plant in the state of Jharkhand.



*Mr. Bhaskar Bhat, Managing Director, Titan (2002–2019)*

Mr. Bhat elaborated on his journey in Titan by talking about the entrepreneurship spirit he observed when Tatas were about to launch watches.

Tata Press was the company which incubated Titan. . . It was not the values as much as the style of the group, which encouraged individuals to take initiative. Mr. Xerxes Desai, whom we call the founder of this company, was the managing director of Tata Press. So how a printing press could get into a complex manufacturing and marketing business and a personal lifestyle category was indeed a surprise, but that was the style of leadership of JRD Tata. And therefore, [because of] the interest and the knowledge and the passion Mr. Desai had for watches and design as a category, JRD Tata encouraged him to go on. Of course, it was not only that much. So the first, in a way, learning was encouraging individual entrepreneurship and letting people realise their own potential and supporting that.

He further elaborated on identifying and nurturing talent, irrespective of the formal training and designations:

That is really one major learning from my side, and we've kept that alive in the company saying, "It's not just whether you're an engineer, MBA, and you've been trained in marketing or design." There are many examples thereafter of the top team's assessment of where this person could go, not where this person has been trained or what he's been trained in. Yes, it is important; competency alone is not enough. It is commitment as well, not just competence.

On being asked about his understanding of the core values of the company, he mentioned:

When you work in these companies you realize all the basic, ethical standards: honesty, serving the community. . . Other values have to do with respect for the individual. . . wherever you are in the hierarchy. It is a more humane kind of approach. . . for example, Tata Steel teaches what kind of relationship to have with the labour force in the company. That does not come out of any formal process. There are policies, but policies do not build culture. It is through absorption, it is through learning from other leaders, visiting those leaders, getting management to interact.

He elaborated on Leadership with Trust:

The Tata name stands for trust. People trust products from the group; people trust people from the Tata group; they trust that they will do no wrong; and they trust that they will always have the nation at heart.

On being asked specific examples of Leadership with Trust, he mentioned:

Business partners who are franchises are part of our ecosystem. In Titan, we call them part of the family. In that, you have to share joys as well as sorrows. When the going gets tough, who is to bear the burden? When GST [Goods and Services Tax] was introduced, it was 28% for watches when the average tax at that time was only 20 or 21%. So there was this pay-out that the franchises had to bear. In the watch division, without batting an eyelid, we told everybody "Don't worry. Continue with doing business. We will take care." We did not say "What will we do?" We said, "We'll take care." Fighting a battle with the government that this is too high a tax did not stop us from telling them that we'll take care. It is during these difficult times that you're trusted.

In building trust with employees he mentioned:

Employee trust gets built when there is transparency, when you walk the talk, and the transparency is reverse, that is, you are as transparent in the way as you demand from them. And you are listening and responding to what you hear. . . So trust is built when they see you admitting that this problem is not possible to solve, or you say "I'll solve it" and solve it, and lastly when you say "Sorry, we cannot." Employees understand when you cannot.

On being asked how do values get transmitted across leaders, Mr. Bhat said:

We get a lot of senior leaders to talk to the leaders. Leaders become the exemplars; they showcase what is the right behaviour. One of the biggest things is ethical standards. Storytelling is the process. . . Transfer information through behaviour.

I do not call it an enterprise; I call it an institution. You have a sense of belonging in the institution. The word institution means “do not go there just to transact—just to give your eight hours of work and get money back.” You go there because there is a sense of belonging. E.g. School and family are institutions. When “Titan does good” and “Titan does good to *me*,” there is a genuine sense of belonging. We conduct a “tell-me” survey in which we ask “which is your dream company?” Every survey for the last x number of years, 93% of people have scored Titan as their dream company.

Mr. Bhat showed a framed plaque adorned on the wall of his room with the following words, which he said was a gesture from his employees to keep the memory of what he himself had told them once, alive:

Titan should evolve into a virtuous organization that pulls together all stakeholders, that is, employees, customers, associates, the community, and investors, in building a sustainable institution—an institution that strives to bring meaning, not just material gain to its stakeholders. Such an institution will need little supervision and regulation and will chart out a journey of its own to achieve unimaginable goals. This is my idea of an institution. I believed in leadership through inspiration and not through supervision.

*Mr. Harish Bhat, Brand Custodian, Tata Sons (2016–current)*

Mr. Bhat mentioned the four characteristics of the Tata Group, which he has also highlighted in his book “Tatalog”: (1) Pioneering – “going where no one has gone before”, (2) Purposeful – Giving back to the Community : “what our founder said. . . community is centre stage in our enterprise”, (3) Being principled: “doing business the right way”, (4) Not perfect: “occasionally makes errors, but acknowledges and corrects them in the best way possible”.

He elaborated on each of these aspects. Regarding “pioneering” he said:

I was part of the Tata Tea company in the early days when we were just launching poly packs and branded Tea. . . I saw how, for the first time, tea was marketed directly to consumers from tea plantations, in polypacks that kept the tea very fresh, cutting out many middlemen. This powerful, pioneering move transformed the tea category in India and also got in many new players. . . but it was something no one else had done earlier in this country . . . Another pioneering venture I saw over a decade later was in branded jewellery, through my stint at Tanishq . . . There were so many sceptics in the early stages, who said this would never succeed, but visionary leaders like Mr. Xerxes Desai talked very passionately and with great belief about how branded jewellery can actually succeed, because of the large market opportunity and the opportunity to deliver trust to consumers. . . I can say that I saw at close quarters two absolutely pioneering ventures. Whether it was Mr. Darbari Seth or Mr. R.K. Krishna Kumar in Tata Tea, or indeed Mr. Xerxes Desai in Tanishq – I saw how leaders transform businesses through courageous and pioneering moves.

Regarding community orientation, Mr. Bhat described how Tata Tea which is now Tata Consumer Ltd. gave back, and continues to give back, to the community of tea plantation workers in Munnar—the region from where tea is sourced. The Company set up a *Shristi Trust*, established hospitals, a school, and a foundation for teaching and providing livelihoods to differently abled children. He further elaborated:

Similarly with Tanishq, which is part of the Titan Company. A large part of Tanishq’s jewellery manufacturing happens in Hosur in Karnataka. There, and in other locations like Kolkata, the Company has created “*Karigar Parks*” [craftsmen hubs] for jewellery craftsmen (who are called *Karigars*) so they can work in modern, hygienic, well-lit conditions. Typically they used to earlier work in dark, dingy, almost medieval conditions. Also a lot of money used to be taken away by middle men, which is now no longer the case. By creating these *karigar* parks, the Company has

actually taken good first steps towards modernising and elevating the lives of these craftsmen, adding to their wellness and prosperity. Also, nurturing the artist and their artform for the next few generations. . . This is different from regular CSR initiatives, which many companies undertake. . . this is an example of how the community has been made integral to the brand and the business.

Mr. Harish Bhat also described how community service is even prevalent in marketing campaigns:

Tata Tea went out of its way to show how community is integral through the *Jaago Re* [Wake up!] promotional campaign. . . These memorable campaigns have exalted consumers to wake up with their hot cup of tea, but also wake up and do something about issues such as civic awareness. . . about encouraging women to cast their vote. . . currently, the latest edition of this campaign is urging young people to take care of elders in their community, during this covid19 pandemic and lockdown. So even the marketing and communication platform is fused with the community with respect to the Tata Tea brand, thus giving everyone associated with the brand a larger purpose.

Mr. Bhat emphasised being principled:

Doing business the right way is something I have always seen in the Tata group. The Tata Group cherishes that. That's why I have stayed with the group for 33 years now, this is my very first job after I graduated. Working with the Tata Group, I can be sure that I can sleep well at night, and nothing beats the joy of sound sleep. . . In the past 33 years I have never been asked to do anything which goes against my conscience, and that is always a very nice feeling to have. . . This is one of the reasons when I go out in society and tell people I'm working in Tata group, there is always a feeling of respect.

Regarding his point about making errors, but taking care to correct them, Mr. Bhat said:

We are not perfect. . . like any organisation composed of human beings, we make errors. In the early years of Tanishq, the Company launched the wrong kind of jewellery products for India. . . and so the brand did not succeed initially. . . but then the Company acknowledged this, took care to understand the customer in depth, and changed the products to also include relevant 22 carat jewellery, with a marketing innovation called the "karatmeter". Then Tanishq succeeded. . . I have never seen people in the Tata group being reprimanded because they have tried to experiment with new initiatives and have not been successful, as long as the intent has been right, and the required effort has been there. The Tata group has always permitted me to take initiatives. I have worked in creating brands, in putting together sales and distribution or retail networks. . . many initiatives succeeded, but there were also a few that did not succeed. All my bosses have given me the freedom to fail. The only thing they have told me is, if you fail, please do not repeat the same mistake. Ishaat Hussain, Director of Tata Sons, once used this beautiful Hindi phrase while describing to me the leeway to experiment – *Niyat theek toh sab theek*—if intention is right, then everything is fine.

In addition to the interview insights, we also gathered that March 22nd 2020 onwards, Mr. Harish Bhat had been running an online campaign *#tatastories* on LinkedIn, with stories that illustrate the character and values of the Tata Group:

In these difficult and uncertain times, it often helps to read simple, true, inspiring stories, which elevate us. The stories I know best come from the history of the timeless Institution which I am proud to be part of – the Tata Group (retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/hashtag/?keywords=%23tatastories>).

In one of the stories Mr. Bhat highlights JRD Tata's letter to a school teacher, written on 13th September, 1965 in response to the teacher's request to share the guiding principles in his life. JRD in his reply, shared his guiding principles in a very succinct manner ". . . That one must forever strive for excellence, or even perfection, in any task however small, and never be satisfied with the second best; That no success or achievement in material terms is worthwhile, unless it serves the needs or interests of the country and its people, and is

achieved by fair and honest means ; That good human relations not only bring great personal rewards but are essential to the success of any enterprise”.

Mr. Harish Bhat's own personalisation of JRD Tata's guiding principles is also noteworthy; he mentioned in the same LinkedIn post:

For more than thirty years now, JRD Tata's guiding principles – an extract from this memorable letter – have stood on my work desk at the Tata Group, printed on a bright, laminated board that also bears his photograph. Whenever I need a special burst of motivation, or some internal guidance, I look at these simple, powerful points, and I always draw great energy from them.

### *Mid-level managers' interviews*

We also interviewed three mid-level managers (proxy names M1, M2, and M3) to see the alignment between the top leadership and mid-level managers mentioned.

M1 underscored the family-focused approach of the company:

It is a very family-like culture. Tata group is passionate about itself as a family, and families are the centre of its developmental activities. It believes that there is much more to family than individuals which is akin to Indian societal practices. ...Cultural values getting passed on through generations of managers like grand father to father to son in an Indian family system.

M2 also reiterated this. He elaborated that company policies such as *sunahre bhavishya ki yojna* [plan for a golden future] allow an old employee giving his or her job to the son or daughter. JRD Tata sports complex and other sporting facilities are made available to all the family members of the employee. The establishment of Tata Football academy, Tata Archery academy are initiatives to build future generations for the country. M3, currently employed in China, mentioned that in rural China, when both parents go to work, it is difficult to find quality teachers even though they have infrastructural facilities like Wi-Fi. His organisation responded to this challenge and launched a program titled “Purpose for Life”. It allowed interested employees to become teachers for a term and teach such children. It also launched a Smile project that contributed towards cleft lip surgery. He also recounted that not more than a year back, he along with his country head travelled 1,500 kilometres from Shanghai to a school in a village, which was further 8 kilometres away from the nearest tarred road to contribute towards their needs. He mentioned: “we have constantly tried to remain at the third level of corporate social responsibility, first being donating money, and second being giving away things and the third being to create capabilities among people and communities”.

M1 also mentioned the inclusive culture of the organisation: “Company is committed to creating a diverse work force and have women even at the shop floor level. There is absolutely no bias in decision making related to promotion, transfer and deputation”. M2 also echoed the same sentiment: “Tata group is also very accommodating in its functioning – Similar to Indian society that accommodates diversity of religion, communities, geographies etc., Tatas too practice similar ethos. Within Tatas we do not have shia-sunni divide. Bengali-punjabi, north-south divide etc. are not practiced.”

M1 quoted the Founder Chairman, Jamshetji N Tata, “What comes from people, goes back to people” and went on to emphasise that this remains the philosophy and the source of all values that Tata as a group espouses. “Jamshetji Tata articulated it, JRD Tata reiterated it and Ratan Tata formalized it. It reflects the deep sense of commitment of stakeholders, enterprise, society and Earth”. He further elaborated how the Company does not differentiate between people, it is all-encompassing and empathetic – these are the cornerstones of dealing with employees, vendors, in fact the entire ecosystem. He recounted:

First time I experienced this value was in \_\_\_ in the year, when it incurred a huge loss. The way people came together to meet the challenge as a distress call. Twenty thousand people sat together for two days in small groups to discuss what is the way ahead for the company? Small groups were

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formed and enormous cost cutting exercise began. It involved projects, exercises and re-engineering. Even the suppliers' involvement was sought. . . It took two years to achieve the remarkable turn around and the transformation.

Humanistic  
leadership in  
the Tata group

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While elaborating on the Tata's pioneering spirit M1 said:

It's senior leaders like Ratan Tata who despite their age and retirement continue to guide start-ups, promote entrepreneurship etc. Pioneering spirit is institutionalized in the form of Tata Industries whose job is to nurture new business initially and once strong enough let them grow on their own . . . Hence what is done at the individual level, is also done at the group level.

### **Thematic analysis of interview insights**

There was enough commonality in the six interview responses that these could be the organised into broad themes. The two authors upon discussion arrived at the following categories:

- (1) *Founder's philosophy and the core values:* All six interviewees in a spontaneous and natural manner referred to the founding fathers of the Tata family who laid the foundation stone of the key business principles and ideals. Mr. Muthuraman referred to the struggles that Jamsetji Tata faced in pre-independence India, Mr. Bhaskar Bhat alluded to the support that the entrepreneurial venture got from JRD Tata. Mr. Harish Bhat talked of the quality consciousness initiatives taken by Ratan Tata.
- (2) *Leadership with trust:* The three leaders gave specific examples of how they build trust with practices such as open and transparent communication, with relationship and empathy with different stakeholders in the business, be it the retailers, suppliers, vendors, or the employees within the company.
- (3) *Community as the key purpose of the enterprise:* The respondents volunteered a lot of information on community-based initiatives. Tata Cancer Hospitals are well-known in India, but wherever Tatas have set up businesses they have uplifted the community, be it in tea plantations in Kunoor, or the craftsmen in Hosur, or the region around Kalinganagar steel plant. Even in China, TCS leaders made sure that they serve the community needs first.
- (4) *Senior leaders as mentors and role models:* The top management leaders as well as those in middle management, without fail, mentioned the names of senior leaders whom they saw as mentors in the organisation and learned from. For example, Mr. Harish Bhat talked about the passion with which new ideas were introduced in Tata Tea or in Tanishq. Mr. Bhaskar Bhat talked of Xerxes Desai who envisioned a market for branded jewellery.
- (5) *Ethical code of conduct:* All respondents gave a high degree of importance to the ethical principles which are considered sacrosanct as the key guiding principles. They referred to the I-PURE motto and the Tata Code of Conduct where these are laid out as formal principles.
- (6) *Employee-focus:* The senior and the middle managers all emphasised the importance given to employees and their families; be it in planning the facilities or the long term interests of employees and their families.
- (7) *Tacit Alignment with Indian cultural values:* All respondents agreed that Tata's values align with Indian cultural values. This alignment almost emerges naturally without an external imposition or forceful yoking.

In sum, the seven themes that emerged from the narrative case studies come full circle with the espoused mission and values of the Tata group. The personally experienced stories,

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anecdotes, incidents, and episodes substantiate the claim that the values are not merely lip service but they get enacted and implemented in leadership's thoughts, words and deeds. The interview insights provided live illustrations of *Humata, Hukhta, and Hvarshata* principles.

A closer look at the seven identified themes suggests possible relationships among them owing to the meaning they indicate when situated in the context of the Tata group. The seven themes may be divided into two groups of two and five themes that are homogeneous within themselves but differ from others in a significant way. They are Community Development and Leadership with Trust as the first group and the other five as the second group. These may also be seen as terminal and instrumental values (Rokeach, 1973).

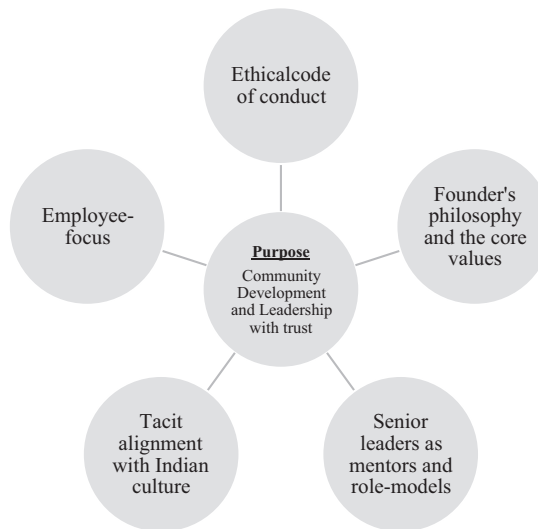
As gleaned from various interviews of the top management executives and various statements of founders referred to by them, the two themes of leadership with trust and community development appear to be the twin purpose towards whose realisation the other five themes are pressed into service. As asserted by several leaders, Tata group is known for products and services that are trusted by consumers even if they are first of their kind, as evidenced in references to branded jewellery or pouched tea. To win trust of the consumers, the group continues to invest in product and process excellence so that they can enjoy their continuous patronage. These products go on to achieve leadership positions in the battle for market share and remain so for long periods. In the same way, community being at the centre of all activities in the group, is demonstrated by the controlling stake that Tata Trusts have in Tata Sons, the holding company of the group. Both the purposes together provides direction to every individual, groups and firms within the Tata house. It may therefore, be concluded that these two themes have the character of terminal values for the group.

The two purposes are realised by continuous insistence on the other five themes: Founder's philosophy and basic core values, Tacit alignment with Indian culture, Senior leaders as mentors and role-models, the Ethical code of conduct, and Employee-focus. In these five themes, the leadership practice of the Tata group is enshrined. All the leaders interviewed have demonstrated not only unwavering adherence to the founder's philosophy and basic core values of the group but taking enormous pride in abiding the ethical code of conduct. In fact, they have asserted this aspect as the distinguishing factor in the industrial firmament both domestically and globally by citing the cases of Corus Steel acquisition or Airlines business in India. Living by them is a way of life regardless of the results. Similarly, alignment with Indian culture at the subliminal level has made the group a household name in the country and people who work with the group enjoy respect in society. In the same vein, leaders look at themselves as mentors and role models and focus their efforts on employee learning and welfare. We find enough evidence of this in the interview responses. These themes or values function as instrumental values through which the twin purposes are achieved. If this classification and the relationships among the seven values were to be expressed as a model, it may well be the Tata model of humanistic leadership (Figure 2).

One final piece that is critical to understanding the long-term permeation and company-wide adoption of Tatas values is the strategic institutionalisation of key leadership values.

### **Strategic institutionalisation of the leadership values across business units**

When Ratan Tata took over as the chairman of Tata Sons in 1991, after JRD Tata's 53-year tenure, he speculated: "Do we have a common thread that runs through the Tata Group? In the past, the thread was embodied in a personality, may be JRD Tata. But I think times are different now. You have to institutionalize certain things. You cannot rely forever on personalities. There may be a Tata as chairman, or there may not be a Tata as chairman of the group" (cited in Khanna *et al.*, 1998, originally published in Economic Times, 1996). Ratan Tata, from thereon, set afoot on a path of introducing major strategic initiatives in the organisation.



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**Figure 2.** Instrumental and terminal values in Tata's humanistic leadership

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### *Tata business excellence model*

In 1993, Ratan Tata introduced the Tata Business Excellence Model in order to institutionalise the pursuit of core Tata values. The Malcolm Baldrige framework was selected as the basis for the JRD QV award (Schaefer, 2012). This included several parameters along which the companies were evaluated. Market share and revenue was only a miniscule score in the TBEM metrics (Mithas, 2015). There was higher weightage associated with product and process outcomes, customer- and workforce-focused outcomes and senior leadership. A new Tata logo was also introduced. To license the Tata brand, each Tata company was asked to sign a legal agreement with the Tata Group holding company, Tata Sons, that ensured that Tata's code of conduct (TCoC) and the TBEM will be followed.

Adherence to TBEM was a highly successful institutionalised practice that yielded rich dividends in terms of quality-consciousness and growth towards excellence in different parameters of business functioning. The Tata Annual Report (2013–14) mentioned: "Leadership with Trust [This] group motto is the North star on the path towards excellence in business. . . Leadership excellence in business is nurtured by conforming to the TBEM, while trustworthiness in business is nurtured by allegiance to the core values and the TCoC within the ambit of the framework for MBE".

The Tata Code of Conduct (TCoC), instituted in 1998, served as a formal guidebook for values, ethics and business principles expected of all employees. It has 25 clauses of which the first 16 belong to corporate code and the rest relating to employees' conduct; the first clause being that of "National Interest":

A Tata Company shall be committed in all its actions to benefit the economic development of the countries in which it operates and shall not engage in any activity that would adversely affect such objective.

### *Employee-oriented initiatives*

Tatas have long been known for their employee-friendly practices and policies which are often cited as their strength regardless of the organisation in the group. Tatas were the pioneers in most employee welfare measures, such as eight-hour work week, maternity

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benefits, leave with way, etc. much before they became the either a norm or a part of statutory requirements (Pandey, 1989; Sinha *et al.*, 2005).

These initiatives were institutionalised through formulating appropriate policies, launching relevant schemes, and creating group-wide platforms. Establishment of Tata Management Training Centre (TMTC) and Tata Administrative Services (TAS) are two such initiatives that sought to integrate the leadership practices across the groups companies. TMTC is positioned as in-house training centre and is supposed to act as cradle of change for Tata executives. Its training programs are designed to develop leadership traits that are rooted in ethos of Tata as most faculty are employees who have a penchant for teaching (Shah, 2010). Similarly TAS recruits fresh graduates and post graduates from top business schools and grooms them for business leadership. It is probably the only program that offers candidates life-long mobility across group companies (Shah, 2010). As the leaders work across companies, they carry along with them, leadership values of Tata group and seek to further and deepen them across companies and cultures.

The leaders we interviewed mentioned employee-oriented initiatives in their company. A few others are: Tejaswini programme in Tata Steel to train unskilled and illiterate women who were doing jobs of sweeping and cleaning as drivers of heavy vehicles. Another initiative by Tata Motors, then Telco, was to pay the last drawn salary to the employee's family till his notional day of retirement, were he to die while in service (Shah, 2010). The company also encourages hiring "second-career" women through the Tata Second Careers, Inspiring Possibilities (SCIP) platform, a return to work programme which provides flexible employment opportunities for women who had to take a career break.

#### *Unique philanthropic model: the Tata Trusts*

The Tata group is an exemplar of responsible capitalism because even before CSR became a buzz word and a mandatory exercise for companies, the Tatas had formed an institutionalised mechanism to offer 66% of its shares to the Tata Trusts (for a review see Shah, 2014). For its employees, the Clause 10 dealing with Corporate Citizenship in the Tata Code of Conduct states:

A Tata company shall be committed to good corporate citizenship, not only in the compliance of all relevant laws and regulations but also by actively assisting in the improvement of quality of life of the people in the communities in which it operates. The company shall encourage volunteering by its employees and collaboration with community groups. . . .

The company shall not treat these activities as optional, but should strive to incorporate them as an integral part of its business plan.

Tata group has been committed to improve standards of living of poor and rising middle class people by introducing new products developed through frugal innovation. For example after the Asian tsunami in 2004, Tata Teleservices and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) came together to develop a weather-alert system for fishermen; it also created a software which can teach adults to read in 40 h (Nodoushani, 2012). It has undertaken countless such activities to achieve the philanthropic objective set forth by the founding fathers. Established in 1892, Tata Trusts is India's oldest philanthropy. It has catalysed development in the areas of Healthcare and Nutrition, Water and Sanitation, Education, Energy, Rural Upliftment, Urban Poverty Alleviation, and Arts, Craft and Culture.

#### *Preserving and celebrating the heritage legacy*

Tata group makes concerted efforts to keep the founding fathers' principles and legacy alive, in an effort to endorse, promote, and transmit the values and the culture, across the organisation as well as from one generation of leaders to another. Two key events that serve



as institutional forms of celebrating and remembering the heritage are: (1) Founder's Day (March 3), first instituted by Tata Steel in 1932 to commemorate the birth anniversary of Jamsetji Tata. Stories about his life and legacy are disseminated in all offices on this day. A grand event, typically attended by the Chairman of the Tata group, is held at Jamshedpur, and (2) JRD Tata's birthday (29th July); in this annual event business excellence awards are given to Tata companies to celebrate JRD Tata's unwavering commitment and passion to pursuing excellence in process, products, people, and community-oriented initiatives.

Besides the two annual events, Tata group rigorously maintains the archival information of the legacy in the "heritage" links in each of its business unit website (<https://www.tatasteel.com/corporate/our-organisation/heritage/>). It has a large database of online archival resources (<http://www.tatacentralarchives.com/tata-legacy/luminaries.html>) as well as a central repository of preserved paper documents in a museum in Pune and at Jamsetji's birthplace in Navsari, Gujarat.

In sum, the key institutional initiatives in the Tata group, namely the Tata Business Excellence Model, Employee-oriented institutional Practices, Tata Trusts, and Heritage celebration, provide a tight reciprocal link between the behavioural aspects of leadership and the broader company policies and practices. The organisation-level strategic initiatives are key to facilitating individual leadership behaviours, and vice versa.

### **Theoretical propositions and conclusion**

While it may be difficult to draw robust generalisations from narrative case studies and archival information, we propose that the Tata group can be seen as an exemplar case of how strategic management and personal values can be put together to offer a sustainable, implementable, and potentially replicable model of humanistic leadership. The synergistic interplay of personal values, the strategic interventions, and the national cultural ethos provide the ingredients for humanistic leadership to germinate and flourish. Although all cultures and faiths are unique, the three-pronged approach – of adhering to one's personal values, seeking congruency with the broader cultural ethos, and strategically institutionalising the practices – leaders and organisations can strive towards honing humanistic leadership principles. By considering these facets, we provide an exemplar case on how business leaders can sustain and scale up humanistic leadership.

Tata Group's contribution to the world's business, as a model example of humanistic leadership, therefore, may be contained in the following two propositions: (1) that a company can successfully transition from a local firm to a global one without compromising on its core philosophy of humanistic leadership, and (2) that a company can become a profit-making global conglomerate and yet remain rooted to the humanistic ideals of its founding fathers.

Cappelli *et al.* (2010) in their empirical study of top Indian firms and leadership stressed that Indian companies do not place shareholder value at the top of their concerns and almost always place it below interests of employees. They noted: "A particularly important lesson for the United States is that major Indian companies are not succeeding despite the fact that they are pursuing a social mission and investing in their employees. They are succeeding precisely because they do" (Cappelli *et al.*, 2010, p. 6). This idea resonates with our quest to portraying Tata group as an illustrative case of humanistic leadership, as well as that of positive business and leadership outcomes. A future exercise, worthy of empirical research, would be to see how far other Indian organisations, drawing from the national cultural ethos – are driven by the specific humanistic leadership ideals as we have outlined in the paper. While the Tata group is exemplary in terms of scale and scope of its adherence to the core philosophical ideal of "community as the very purpose of an enterprise", the Tata model of synergising the behavioural and organisational aspects serves as practical ways to carrying the humanistic leadership ideals forward – in and outside of India.

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**Appendix**

**Interview protocol**

- (1) Can you briefly take us through your leadership journey in Tata? Please share with us incidents and experiences that helped you understand the Tata values?
- (2) Tata's motto is "leadership with Trust"? Can you please share some experiences from your own leadership journey which would help us understand it more fully? (Please share with us specific examples/scenarios that show how it gets followed in real-life? Specially, what leaders do to win the trust? Trust should be mutual, how leaders make themselves trust worthy and trust their followers?).
- (3) Tata's business is defined by the five core values: Integrity, Responsibility, Excellence, Pioneering, Unity. Can you please show, using contemporary business scenarios as examples, how does your leadership maintain these values? How do you pass them on to your followers? What do you do when these values are challenged?
- (4) The Tata Code of Conduct "outlines our commitment to each of our stakeholders, including the communities in which we operate, and is our guiding light when we are sometimes faced with business dilemmas that leave us at ethical crossroads". How would you like it to be interpreted by managers and leaders on an everyday basis? Can you provide a few examples of the business dilemmas and how this philosophy guided your actions?
- (5) Jamsetji Tata, famously said: "In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder in business, but is in fact the very purpose of its existence". Request you to elaborate on how this philosophy reflects in your leadership in particular, and TATA group in general?
- (6) What, according to you, are the Indian cultural values that resonate with the leadership ethos at Tata?

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