

Gita for Contemporary Management: Holy Text with Secular Advice



Management

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ABSTRACT

In any organization diverse people work towards achieving a goal through planning and utilizing present means within the constraints of ethics and morals. Competition may drive a person to reach far but social mores may hold back. Also, distinguishing greed from duty can help one to balance spirituality with secularity. The philosophy of ancient text, Gita has been time and again described as a guide for personal and professional management. Between the battlefield and today's pragmatic world, one can discern the common thread among problems of Arjuna and the modern manager. Just as Arjuna felt distressed in the face of complex situation, a manager constantly deals with deadlines, resources, results, subordinates, work-life & competition. In this storm of life, the centuries' old doctrine, applicable to people of all outlooks comes to help.

"My limbs quail, my mouth goes dry, my body shakes and my hair stands on end" (Bhagavad Gita 1.29)

Modern management is multifaceted, engaging enormous mental and physical vigor from managers. With myriad business activities going on simultaneously, it may prove exhausting to handle it without letting it all get to self, jeopardizing work life balance as well as being the pioneering 'Man'-agement [1, 2].

The roles of modern managers are leadership, motivation, developing human resources, team building and communication. These qualities of decision making, attitude towards work and people, vision, planning etc. was expounded so expertly centuries ago by the 'most acclaimed' Management Guru Lord Krishna to His disciple Arjuna during the epic war that it is worth inclusion in the 21st century Management curriculum.

Indian enterprises are rife with conflicts, tensions, low productivity and reduced efficiency due to incapability of managers to analyze the situation from deeper grass root level. Though western work regulations may have been successful through principles of perennial profit generation, philosophies of *Gita* delivers two fold advantages by not only helping in spiritual advancement but extending a pragmatic angle to executing modern day management practices too [3].

Significant learning from Bhagavad Gita (B.G)

• Numbers do not matter

When faced with a choice to select either Krishna's army or Himself, Duryodhana chose the former for it gave him a sense of might. Although he had, in addition to 99 brothers, great sages and warriors like Dronacharya, Bhishma, Asvatthama, Karna, his defeat was imminent. Pandavas with few but heroic fighters and Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer came out to be the ultimate winner in the war of righteousness.

Recruitment and selection is a key task in every organization. Hiring many candidates with great achievements without paying close attention to the context of those achievements, genuineness of mentioned details or the current job compatibility may cost an organization huge loss of effort, money or time. For, when few employees with a drive for learning and excellence are given preference over 20 'apparent achievers', an organization invests more concretely in its future growth and a stable workforce [4].

Besides, effective teamwork and cooperation is lucid in small groups who exhibit greater cohesiveness than large, heterogeneous and scattered groups. Consequently, it is the responsibility of a manager to direct team solidarity towards a favorable attitude of high standards and acceptance of necessary changes [5].

• Understanding 'Karma'

"Perform your prescribed duty, for doing so is better than not working. One cannot even maintain one's physical body without work" (B.G 3.8)

Just as Krishna advises Arjuna to perform his warrior duty at least for the sake of people in general, a manager who could be an idol for many of the subordinates should execute the duties with utmost dedication. For leaders who demonstrate assiduity in their work are more successful in motivating the followers than those who themselves lack perseverance.

Organizational committed managers go beyond their contractual agreement and identify themselves with the company and revel in the overall growth and progress. Such committed managers understand the Karma Yoga. While Hatha yoga, Pranayam and Dhyana are the techniques of physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation respectively, Karma Yoga is the Yoga of Action i.e. performing one's duties in the form of service to the people, sincerely and to the best of abilities, without expecting anything in return [6].

Management is all work keeping in mind the long term goals. But focusing only on results may prove blinders for managers. Instead of being creative, one may become skeptic towards out-of-box ideas and prefer to do routine activities, thus infusing "boredom" in work and looking forward to "weekend getaways" [7]. B.G advises us to not only engage in constructive work but to also enjoy and allow freedom in activities so as to create satisfaction in job itself. Management should encourage a work culture of novelty so as to regularly impart freshness in work practices.

• Biggest enemies –Desire & Anger

Since Dhrtarastra was born blind, though eldest, he lost the throne to his younger brother Pandu who fathered 5 sons. In comparison, former had 100 sons who grew up in the same royalty and got trained by Dronacharya and Bhishma but still not known by names anywhere. Moreover, Dhrtarastra being weak minded couldn't ever let go of his subdued anger & hurt ego and therefore supported his sons' erroneous means to acquire the throne, nevertheless losing out the battle to Pandavas.

"karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadachana ma karma-phala-hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani" (B.G 2.47)

B.G counsels one to work with a poised mind without worrying about success or failure of his/her endeavors; for only such a person could engage fully in work effectively and efficiently. A person has a right to work but does not have the right to its fruits [8]. Attachment to the results may make the person egoistic, paying attention to only the ends rather than means.

Humans are full of desires; expecting from Almighty, parents, peers, bosses, subordinates and so on. And when these expectations remain unfulfilled we start holding resentment in our hearts. The negativity that we harbor rankle us and we seek to meet our desires by hook or crook, thus becoming unethical, immoral beings. Further, with many unfulfilled desires in ourselves, we become annoying, edgy creatures who tend to lose patience and tolerance over small things and eventually bargain our peace of mind for never ending desires.

• Mental Health of Managers

On the battlefield when Arjuna saw all kinsmen, friends and relatives he became overwhelmed and de-motivated for he could see the futility of war and ensuing loss of lives. But Krishna revived his motivation by playing a role of an advisor and trainer. Being a warrior, Arjuna's role was to fight and he could do it only when his mind was stable enough to aim and shoot.

Modern business environment is unpredictable. There is no success without risk taking, and it entails a peril of failure. Mentally calm managers can introspect in times of adversity to identify the wrong moves and come up with innovative solutions. Hence, Management Developing Programs should focus on creating managers who could face a letdown without losing out on the initiative. Traditional methods of stress control train a person to focus his/her concentration and achieve mental balance [9]. Delhi Metro former M.D E. Sreedharan has had been ardently active in promoting spiritual teachings of B.G in terms of doing one's work with stable mind and dedication. DMRC has conducted many Yoga sessions and motivational lectures to drive home the point of mental stability since, as stated in B.G, mind can be the best as well as the worst enemy of a person [10].

• Personal Management

Self management includes all aspects like managing time, life, stress, desires through development of habits and attributes which will fabricate a mind free from greed, fear, pride, hatred, anger and power of speech. *Brahmanas* (Intelligent managers) as per B.G, have peacefulness, self control, austerity, honesty, knowledge, wisdom etc. while *Kshatriyas* (Administrative Managers) have qualities of heroism, resourcefulness, determination,

courage, generosity and leadership.

A self realized individual through *Jnana Yoga* (Yoga of Knowledge) attains great stature by means of rationality. On the other hand, who runs after false ego, pride and power to lord over others is prone to anger, fear and suspicion. Such person, engaged in power games, lose out all intelligence and suffer massive mental and physical stress [11].

• Transformational Leadership

Krishna starts advising only when Arjuna, out of compassion and weak mindedness, decides not to fight. After around 575 verses, the same Arjuna picks up his bow and arrow to execute his warrior duties. This great transformation happened through Krishna's words who profoundly affected Arjuna's beliefs & his understanding of values, justice and integrity.

This style of leadership works on principles viz. Charisma, Inspiration, Intellectual Stimulation and Individual Consideration. Leader raises the awareness level of followers towards organizational issues, through personal attention explains the purpose of an action and thus able to generate trust and respect [12].

Conclusion

Modern managers can derive a lot from *Bhagavad Gita* as it holds the key to holistic success. In business world, managers need to maintain equipoise in the face of stumbling blocks. Also, contemplating only about the end result may compromise the means to achieve those ends. This may further create anxiety and angst in anticipation of desired results. A person who is always on toes awaiting future without living in present is constantly sacrificing mental peace; and corporate surely can not afford stressed out leaders!

Thus, apart from being a spiritual guide, B.G is a secular textbook that addresses specific issues of conflict, motivation, leadership, rationality etc. Written centuries ago, this text can still help every individual progress without losing self in the process. *Gita* has a unique value proposition, applicable in various circumstances, to gain triumph at both physical and mental levels.

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