

Work Culture: Essence from Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract

Management is the art of getting things done. In today's era management concepts are indispensable for every type of business organisation be it big or small. The difference between a more successful and a less successful organisation is due to the extent of efficiency with which such management principles are implemented in an organisation. Experts have stated that sharp insights can be drawn from our scriptures, Vedas, Purana. One of the ancient Indian scripture which apart from having spiritual essence is closely related to management is 'Shrimad Bhagavad Gita'. During the battle of Mahabharata Lord Krishna vowed of not taking weapons in hand but rather he acted as a manager to Arjuna. Lord Krishna preached 'Bhagavad Gita' to Arjuna for motivating him to perform his task and duty when he was facing an ethical dilemma whether not to defeat and kill his relatives and friends in the war field of 'Kuruksheetra'. 'Bhagavad Gita' is like the river Ganga, in which knowledge, duty and deed are emphasised upon. As river Ganga has been flowing for many eras on this Earth, it quenches the thirst of every thirsty man without asking him about the caste, colour and creed or to which country he belongs to, so also Bhagavad Gita, like the river Ganga, is flowing for the welfare of mankind irrespective of the caste, creed, religion and country. Out of innumerable preaching of Bhagavad Gita, an attempt has been made through this paper to focus on the teachings related to 'Work Culture' in an organisation. The ancient scripture suggests that there are two types of cultures being Daivi work culture (positive) and Asuri work culture (negative). It has been suggested that for any business to be successful, it is important to adopt a mixture of both the types of culture.

Keywords: Work Culture, Bhagavad Gita, Daivi, Asuri, Motivation

Introduction

Management is a crucial aspect for every aspect of a business. It may be a private or government. Even management principles are applicable in a human being's day to day life. In all organizations, where a group of human beings assemble for a common purpose, management principles come into play through the management of resources, finance and planning, priorities, policies and practice. Management is a systematic way of carrying out activities in any field of human effort. Its task is to make people capable of joint performance,

to make their weaknesses irrelevant, says the Management Guru Peter Drucker. It creates harmony in working together - equilibrium in thoughts and actions, goals and achievements, plans and performance, products and markets. It resolves situations of scarcity, be they in the physical, technical or human fields, through maximum utilization with the minimum available processes to achieve the goal. Absence of application of management principles efficiently in a business leads to lot of imbalance. For a successful organisation, it is important to manage all the 5 Ms: men, material, money, machinery and methods well.

Figure 1: Inter Relationship of Bhagavad Gita and Management



Modern management concepts such as leadership, vision, motivation, attitude, organisational culture, decision making etc have been discussed in Bhagavad Gita (figure 1). In all the eighteen chapters of Bhagavad Gita, these concepts have been beautifully illustrated in form of different verses. Bhagavad Gita equips not just an individual but also an organisation with finest insights for dealing with day to day problems.

Essence of Bhagavad Gita

Indian culture and value system has always been considered as very strong and sacred. All these values have their roots in ancient scriptures such as Puranas, Vedas and Upanishads. One of the most important scripture is 'Bhagavad Gita' which is known as the "Song of Lord". (Chinna, 2009). It is not just a kind of writing but rather provides direction to the reader for attaining inner peace and for self-introspection. It is a medication which helps in developing the highest level of consciousness. Lord Krishna preached 'Bhagavad Gita' to Arjuna for motivating him to perform his task and duty when he was facing an ethical dilemma whether not to defeat and kill his relatives and friends in the war field of 'Kurukshetra'. 'Bhagavad Gita' is like the river Ganga, in which knowledge, duty and deed are emphasised upon. As river Ganga has been flowing for many eras on this Earth, it quenches the thirst of every thirsty man without asking him about the caste, colour and creed or to which country he belongs to, so also Bhagavad Gita, like the river Ganga, is flowing for the welfare of mankind irrespective of the caste, creed, religion and country (Harvey, 2007).

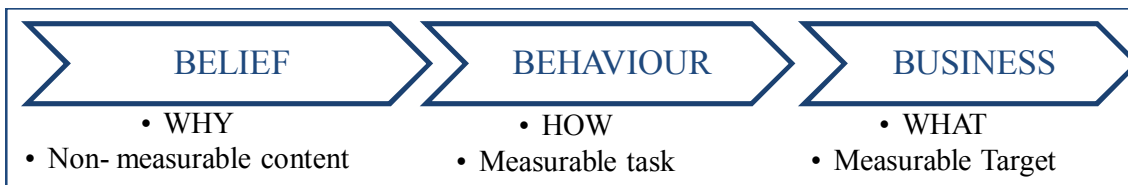
Table 1 shows the lessons that each chapter of Bhagavad Gita reflects upon the living being. In this paper the focus has been on an aspect of ‘Work Culture’ which has been discussed in chapter sixteen.

Table 1: Learnings from Bhagavad Gita
Chapter 1: Wrong thinking is the only problem in life.
Chapter 2: Right knowledge is the ultimate solution to all our problem.
Chapter 3: Selflessness is the only way to progress and prosperity.
Chapter 4: Every act can be an act of prayer.
Chapter 5: Renounce the ego of individuality and the bliss of infinity.
Chapter 6: Connect to higher consciousness daily.
Chapter 7: Live what you learn
Chapter 8: Never Give-up on yourself.
Chapter 9: Value your Blessings
Chapter 10: See the divine all around
Chapter 11: Have enough surrender to see the truth as it is.
Chapter 12: Absorb your mind and heart to supreme divine
Chapter 13: Detach from materialistic assets and attach to divine.
Chapter 14: Live a life style that matches your vision.
Chapter 15: Give priority to divine.
Chapter 16: Being good is a reward in itself.
Chapter 17: Choosing the right over the pleasant is a sign of power.
Chapter 18: Let’s go, let’s move to union with divine.
Source: Hee, C. C. H. (2007). A holistic approach to business management: Perspectives from the Bhagavad Gita. <i>Singapore Management Review</i> , 29(1), 73.

ASSOCIATION OF BELIEF WITH BUSINESS

So far we have understood the relevance of management and Bhagavad Gita separately. But there is some connection between the two which has been illustrated ahead. The moment a person believes in something and had infinite faith, he becomes spiritual. Devdutt Pattanaik (Former Chief Belief Officer at future Group) states that belief plays a key role in business: it determines choices and propels the decision of buyers and sellers, regulators and shareholders, investors and entrepreneurs, employers and employees, vendors and customers. It determines how we do business and what ultimately gets done (this is what we call management). As is belief, so is behaviour, so is business. This is Business Sutra. Sutra is a string that connects the dots; here the string connects belief with business. So the 3B framework of belief, behaviour and business is called ‘Business Sutra’.

FIGURE 2: BELIEF TO BUSINESS



Source: Business Sutra by Devdutt Pattanaik (2013)

Work Culture

Culture is helpful in the fulfillment of committed goals of an individual, organization and society. It increases the capabilities and efficiency of an individual which is likely to reflect itself in the long run in the well-being of the individual good reputation of the institution and ultimately the well-being of society.

An organization is formed to achieve certain goals and objectives by bringing individuals together on a common platform and motivating them to deliver their level best. It is essential for the employees to enjoy themselves at the workplace for them to develop a sense of loyalty towards it. Work culture plays an important role in extracting the best out of employees and making them stick to the organization for a longer duration. The organization must offer a positive ambience to the employees for them to concentrate on their work rather than interfering in each other’s work. Work culture is a concept which deals in beliefs, thought processes, attitudes of the employees and ideologies and principles of the organization.

It is work culture which decides the way employees interact with each other and how an organization functions. Work culture refers to the mentality of the employees which further decides the ambience of the organization. An organization is said to have a strong work

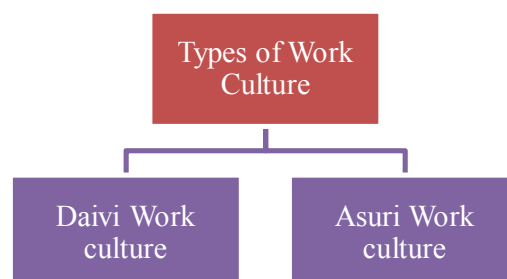
culture when the employees follow the organization's rules and regulations and adhere to the existing guidelines. There are certain organizations where employees are reluctant to follow the instructions and are made to work only by strict procedures. Such organizations have a weak work culture. A healthy Work culture is required for utilizing and enhancing employee competencies and to develop employee motivation. Organisations also aim at culture development. A healthy culture is where:

- The free expression of ideas, opinions and suggestions (openness) is encouraged.
- There is a promotion of collaboration among various individuals, teams and departments.
- People say what they mean, so what they say can be trusted.
- Initiate pro-active work and creativity.
- Problems are diagnosed, confronted and solved collectively or individually.
- Every senior hand sees the development of their subordinates as his or her responsibility.
- Senior hands support their subordinates and junior hands respect their seniors.
- Problems, mistakes and difficult situations are handled with a learning orientation.
- Participation is encouraged.
- Every incident is treated as a learning opportunity.
- People have a sense of satisfaction in their work.
- People feel that they are cared for and have a sense of belonging.

Organisation aims at developing such a culture through periodic diagnosis and appropriate intervention to reach the organizational objectives. Work culture means vigorous and arduous effort in pursuit of a given or chosen task.

Bhagawad Gita and Work culture:

When Bhagawan Sri Krishna rebukes Arjuna in the strongest words for his unmanliness and imbecility in recoiling from his righteous duty it is nothing but a clarion call for the highest work culture. Poor work culture is the result of tamoguna overtaking one's mindset. Bhagawan's stinging rebuke is to bring out the temporarily dormant rajoguna in Arjuna. In Chapter 16 of the Gita Shri Krishna elaborates



on two types of Work Ethic viz. daivisampat or divine work culture and asurisampat or demonic work culture.

Daivi work culture/Healthy work culture means fearlessness, self-denial, self-control, sacrifice, straightforwardness, absence of greed, purity, absence of fault-finding, gentleness, modesty, calmness, absence of envy and pride. It means where a person can freely express his ideas without any fear of dismissal from job or any kind of punishment. Or where a subordinate has power to take decision (decentralisation).

Asuri work culture/ unhealthy work culture means egoism, desire-centric, improper performance, delusion, work which is not oriented towards service. It is to be noted that mere work ethic is not enough in as much as a hardened criminal has also a very good work culture. What is needed is a work ethic conditioned by ethics in work. This type of work culture prevails where there is single supreme authority and he is not ready to give power to his subordinates (centralisation).

Daivivs Asuri work culture

Where there is a daivi / healthy work culture superior/ employer give positive motivation to employees/ subordinates. Positive motivation is the type of motivation a person feels when he expects a certain reward. An example of Positive motivation is when a father tells his son, "If you studied well and got high grades I will buy you the new play station".

And where there is anasuri /unhealthy work culture superior/ employer give negative motivation to employees/ subordinates Negative motivation is the type of feeling a person gets when he expects punishment. An Example of negative motivation could be telling your child "if you didn't study, I won't let you travel this summer"

Both positive (daivik) and negative (asuri) motivation could lead to the same result however on the long run the overuse of negative motivation may result in problems like hating the person who uses it against you. For example a boss who always uses negative motivation to motivate his employees is most likely going to be hated. So the difference between positive (daivik) and negative (asuri) motivation is that positive motivation doesn't have side effects on the long run while negative motivation may have some.

Using Daivik (positive) and Asuri (negative) work culture together

Human beings are naturally motivated towards pleasure and away from pain. We are reward-seeking organisms and everything that we do contains an inherent reward in it, conscious or unconscious, perceived or real. For example, if a person is a non-smoker he might think that smoking is a harmful and a reward-less activity but to a smoker, it might be a useful way to get rid of his anxiety (a reward indeed). So no matter how fruitless or harmful an activity may

seem to be, to a person doing it there is some kind of a reward in it or it's warding off some kind of pain (which in itself is a reward).

Negative motivation means running away from pain and in order to do that you must know which way to run. There must be a way first. If there isn't, then negative motivation will only paralyze you.

If negative motivation itself forces you to find a way out- well and good! But hey "finding a way out" is also a way in itself and that's better than being paralyzed.

Should you use the stick or the carrot?
In fact you should use both together!

Its advised that you use positive and negative motivation together whenever possible because it has been proven that people become more motivated that way.

By using both positive and negative motivation together you will be able to motivate the people you are dealing with to a great extent.

It seems that Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also known as Motivation-Hygiene Theory or intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation also based on this daivik and asuri work culture concept together where it is shown that there are certain factors in the workplace that can cause job satisfaction and a separate set of factors that can cause dissatisfaction.

According to Herzberg, intrinsic motivators and extrinsic motivators have an inverse relationship. This is to say that intrinsic motivators tend to inspire motivation when they are present, while extrinsic motivators tend to reduce motivation when they are absent. This is because of expectation. Extrinsic motivators (e.g., salary, benefits) are expected and so will not increase motivation when they are in place, but they will cause dissatisfaction when they are missing. Intrinsic motivators (e.g., challenging work), on the other hand, can be a source of additional motivation.

Conclusion

There is a very close connection between Bhagavad Gita and management. As illustrated in the text above it can be stated that for a business to be successful culture is very important. Instances can be drawn from a verse of Bhagavad Gita which highlights the types of work culture in a nutshell it can be concluded that both 'Daivi culture' and 'Asuri culture' are required. These two cultures work best when practiced together as the negative culture somewhere acts as a silent motivator for the employees.

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