

SPIRITUAL COMPETENCIES FOR AN EXEMPLARY ORGANIZATIONAL WORK CULTURE OUTLINED IN BHAGAVAD-GITA

Aswathi Nair*, Nagaraja Rao**

Abstract *Modern organizations are in a constant state of flux. Nothing ever remains unchanged whether it is a bureaucratic, matrix or boundary less organization (Roe, 2014). Organizations are becoming boundary less and transparent with a diverse cross cultural talent landscape and the leaders are encountering fierce battlefield kind of environment on a daily basis. In these turbulent times of leadership crisis, identity crisis and subsequent organizational crisis where individuals and organizations are in a constant state of uncertainty, no individual or organization will be able to stand the test of time if they do not do a little bit of soul searching. (Beaudan, 2002) Bhagavad-Gita is an excellent treatise on spiritual leadership competencies and; relating these principles to contemporary settings help in connecting the souls of crisis-ridden people to achieve exemplary work culture through spiritual quotient. The rationale is to realize the role of spirituality in creating happy and happening organizations where the staff derive meaning and purpose in workplace and celebrate their full potential and think beyond profit margins. The research helps business leaders to find new ways to develop their own leadership style which is less ego-centric and more self-transcendence where the employees find a more actualized and altruistic relationship to self, others, and the planet. The research helps organizations to review their Mission, Vision, Core Values, Quality Initiatives, Business Models, Business Practices, and Leadership Strategies and re alignment of competencies.*

Keywords: *Workplace Spirituality, Leadership Crisis, Spiritual Quotient, Bhagavad Gita, Transformational Leadership, Transcendental Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Modern organizations are in a state of flux. The diversity in terms of cultural, legal and social settings of the workforce working in plethora of time zones with the highly competitive race for dominance make them fragile when similar type of organizations seek to capture the markets with new innovations and ideas. The market has become a virtual battlefield with disruptive innovations all around always trying to destabilize the big players. Any serious reader of Indian marketing scenario finds that the Goliaths are gasping, unable to gauze the wrought wrecked by the Davids. For example, 'Patanjali products' are giving tough competition to leading FMCG brands in India (Singh, 2015). Uber, with disruptive technology, has created history and became a major player in the market. The uncertainty of markets lead to the threat Damocles' sword hanging all around and that is what is called as the crisis of existence. Once the crisis of existence stares the organization, it has

its ripple effect on its employees. A crisis ridden employee always nurtures negative thoughts and negative mindset leading to pessimistic workplace devoid of any happiness and creativity. 'One guy can't make a team but one guy can break a team' (Gordon, 2007).

EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IN THE FACE OF CONSUMERISM

The fundamental crisis of leadership in today's time is the crisis of meaning, the dilemma of existence, the existential crisis of one's own employees in the work place. The life of today is a huge contrast from the bygone times. Everything is fast forward and life seems very much like it's on a highway at full speed. Henry Davies famous dictum, 'A poor life this is if, full of care and no time to stand and stare' is posse of current Gen-Y set of people. Human desires never stop. The crisis ridden employee seeks to find solace and happiness in unbridled consumerism which throws open

* Assistant Professor, Alliance University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Email: aswathi.nair@alliance.edu.in

** Assistant Professor, Alliance University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Email: nagaraja.rao@alliance.edu.in

wide variety of choices in terms of products and services. The brand new house with designer interiors purchased out of an 80% home loan; the brand new car that triggers neighbor's envy which also drives people into deep debt; the up market Couture, Prada, Louis Vuitton handbags and designer sunglasses which one can hardly afford shows the person's vulnerability which cannot resist temptations of conspicuous consumption. The paradox of living without them in life stares the common man and also it is to everybody's knowledge that 'each child born on this world is born with a debt' (Catherine, 2016). In the competitive rat race for material gains men have degenerated into rats. When man misses the meaning in life, the work that he does in the workplace is routine, boring, and monotonous. The Leader's challenge lies in instilling confidence by giving a definite meaning to life (Hyatt, 2012).

SOCIAL CRISES OUT OF FINANCIAL FAILURES

Business leaders face the existential challenge of operating in an economic climate of constant uncertainty; yet need to perform efficiently in diverse markets. Global knowledge economy has seen extensive mergers, acquisitions, strategic alliances, multinational collaborations on one side and devastating economic collapse, financial crisis and massive layoffs and the like that create a disturbing effect on employee morale on the other side. Leadership is unable to convince the employees, potential investors and consumers in a rational fashion the very purpose of being loyal to the organization (Llopis, 2013).

SELF-CYNICISM

Leaders also live a life of diplomacy, not challenging themselves, not daring to take risk, not taking ownership with a belief that diplomacy is an end in itself, rather than a means to achieve organizational goals. While frontrunners of an organization over delegate and indulge in arm chair politics, staff questions the integrity of the leader in getting the work through. The true leadership lies in by owning the organization and tuning the individual's requirements with the organization's vision and mission statement (Llopis, 2013).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Today's leadership faces an intra personal conflict, a crisis of purpose, a crisis of meaning and this leads to depression and ego-centric approach to leadership which focuses mostly on promoting a work culture of cut throat competition and peer pressure. To keep the health of the organization agile and maintaining a happy workplace, there is a need to

reinvigorate the spiritual quotient of the employees which helps in withstanding the onslaught of external turbulence and unbridled consumerism which perpetuates desires and thus unhappiness (Prabhakaran, 2008). Hence the objective of the study is to recognize self-awareness as a deciding factor in developing spiritual competencies. The paper also intends to evaluate the spiritual competencies of Bhagavad Gita in contemporary business setting.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on conceptual research which includes a review of literature on Spiritual Competencies for an exemplary Organizational work culture outlined in Bhagavad-Gita with an in-depth analysis of selected verses of the Bhagavad-Gita. The methodology is hermeneutics described as the interpretation and understanding of ancient literatures.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

Bhagavad-gita, a philosophical work composed some five thousand years ago in India, had a case of a highly talented leader Arjun, the most outstanding warrior of his times, who was caught in identity crisis and lost his inner strength to fight his enemies in a battlefield where he had come face to face with his entire relatives starting from his grandfather, his mentors, cousins, his nephews being strategically positioned as enemies though he had previously decided to fight the war with the same set of group (Bhattathiri, M.P, Bhagavad-gita and Management).

On the chosen day of the Mahabharata battle, the Kaurava (descendants of Kuru) and Pandava (Descendants of Pandu) armies stood face to face. Arjun was to lead the Pandava army. Krishna, though a king and mentor to Arjuna was performing the role of Arjuna's charioteer. Krishna placed Arjuna's chariot in the middle of the army of Kauravas and Pandavas.

Glancing at his relatives, counting his grandfather, his teacher Drona on the other side, Arjuna was weighed down with anguish. He could not rationalize homicide in order to be successful at the battlefield (Dass, 1895-1905).

From this turbulent state of mind, where Arjun's perception was clouded by his emotions, where he was going through a cognitive as well as an affective conflict, his mentor Krishna took charge of the situation and walk the talk of getting him out of the leadership crisis and guided him to fight the cause with all sense of clarity of purpose.

"Arjuna faces the problem of conflict between emotions and intellect. Most of the time emotions triumph. Arjun is a perfect

example for despondency and frustration metamorphosed into self-discipline with a highly trained mind capable of carrying out any task dispassionately” (Muniapan, 2005).

In the Bhagavad-gita, Arjuna sees himself in the entanglement of spiritual dilemma. It is ordained upon a Kshatriya (Arjun being a Kshatriya), to punish the wicked and restore righteousness in the world. If he doesn't perform his dharma (righteous cause) it amounts to 'sin of omission'. The persons on the other side of the war front are his close kith and kin but worthy to be punished in the interest of society and social order. Arjun felt that killing one's own kith and kin for the sake of kingdom amounts to 'sin of commission'. Which way to go? 'This embarrassment of emotional and intellectual confusion leads him to find out the true purpose of existence' (Muniapan, 2006). Bhagavad-gita is a treatise wherein Krishna instilled spiritual inputs in the minds of Arjun and the Arjun realized the need to establish justice, rule of law and equity in society and he waged the war with all his willingness discarding the crisis of confidence that once enveloped his mind.

LEADERSHIP OF SELF: FIRST CRITERIA OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Leadership of self is a key characteristic of a transcendental leader. It includes traits as self-awareness, self-discipline, as well as strength of character, developing virtues, which are cultivated through self-examination and contemplative activities.

Self-management comprises of all characteristics like management of time, existence, anxiety, cravings by the means of progress of conducts and characteristics which will fabricate a heart free from greediness, fear, pride, hatred, anger and power of speech (Mahadevan, 2014).

In Chapter 2, Verse 11 of Bhagavad-gita, Krishna says – “A spiritually intelligent person laments neither for one's kin who are dead nor for those who are alive. What exactly is the source of all anguish? It is the connection to the body that is responsible for anguish over and above its direct associates-love and hatred. In spite of this, mind gets emotionally involved to substance that is considered useful and start hating others. But from the uppermost point of observation, there is no duality at all”. (Prabhupada, Bhagavad-gita as it is (MacMillan, 1972).

Thus, Krishna started giving him, in the very first illustration the most efficient treatment, Atma jnana or the self-knowledge. Krishna rules out two objections that were lingering in Arjuna's mind, saying that the annihilation of the physical body does not signify the demolition of the soul. The knowledge of the physical body as different from the

soul is the first step towards self-awareness. This has been described in the 13th chapter of Gita as field-fielder (*Kshetra-Kshetragna*) theory. (Bhagavad-gita-Oxford,1928) Chapter 13, Verse 3, Bhagavad-gita says -

'Kshetra kshetrajnavor jnanam yat taj jnanam matam mama'

Meaning: “Knowledge of the *ksetra* or the physical body and *ksetrajna* (the knower of the body) -the consciousness or the *Atma* or eternal soul is real knowledge as per my opinion”. –says Krishna to Arjun. Bhagavad-gita, (Hill, 1882).

The term “spiritual intelligence” is treated as soul's intelligence and introduced by Zohar in her work rewiring the corporate brain. (Zohar, 1997). Zohar & Marshall (1997) worked as a team and concluded that SQ (Spiritual Quotient) is the primary brick on which the edifice of EQ (Emotional Quotient) and IQ (Intelligence (Quotient) are built. They also refer to it as the Soul's intelligence. Spiritual intelligence is the intelligence with which introspection is possible to the nature of self, the purpose and meaning of life on the planet, and its highest motivations. It is the intelligence that makes us whole, that gives us our integrity. It is the Soul's intelligence, the intelligence of the deep self. It is the intelligence with which the fundamental questions are answered. Zohar defines spiritual capital as “the wealth, the power, and the influence that we gain by acting from a deep sense of meaning, our deepest values, and a sense of higher purpose, and all of these are best expressed through a life devoted to service”.

SPIRITUAL COMPETENCY TRAITS IN GITA

Positive relations amongst virtues and individual performance have established an overwhelming backing in positive psychology. The qualities of optimism and hope are related to better performance, persistence and better attitudes at work (Peterson, 2000).

Bhagavad Gita highlights *Daivi sampat* as the uppermost work culture grounded on values for organizational and individual excellence. This culture is based on *sattva guna* or pure qualities or compassionate qualities such as being courageous, pureness, strength of mind, sacrifice, frankness, self-denial, quietness, lack of fault-finding, lack of greediness and egotism, calmness, and humility. Studies relating to companies that have freshly downsized show workplace deviance behavior (Cameron, 1998). It includes non-virtuous behavior such as the wreckage of interpersonal relationships, faith and openness, lack of promise keeping, feelings of malevolence, cruelty and revenge.

There is a catalogue of virtues identified in Bhagavad Gita Chapter 16 verses 1, 2 and 3.

*'abhayam sattva-samsuddhir, jnana-yoga-vyavasthitih;
danam damas ca yajnas ca, svadhyayas tapa arjavam
ahimsa satyam akrodhas: tyagah santir apaisunam,
daya bhutesv aloluptvam; mardavam hrir acapalam, tejah
ksama dhrtih
saucam; adroho nati-manita, bhavanti sampadam daivim,
abhijatasya bhārata'*

The meaning is depicted in the following chart.

An interpretation of spiritual competency traits for an exemplary work culture is given in the following table:

Table 1: Spiritual Competency Traits for Work Culture

Abhayam	Fearlessness than diplomacy
Sattva-samsuddhir	Mental purity
Vignana yoga	Perseverance in self knowledge
Danam	Charity
Dama	Sense- control
Yagna	Sacrifice
Svadhyaya	Study of scriptures
Tapah	Penance
Arjavam	Uprightness
Ahimsa	Non-violence
Satya	Truthfulness
Akrodhah	Freedom from wrath
Tyagah	Renunciation
Santih	Tranquility
Apaisunam	Absence of envy
Daya	Kindness
Bhuteshu Alolupat- vam	Kindness to living beings
Mardavam	Gentleness
Hrih	Modesty
Achapalam	Dignity
Tejah	Splendor
Kshama	Patience
Dhrtih	Vigor
Saucham	Cleanliness
Adrohah	Cleanliness

Source: Srimad Bhagavad Gita Bhashya of Shankaracharya by Warriar, published by Ramakrishna Mutt,

“In seventeen verses, from the 56th to the 72nd, Krishna described in the second chapter the characteristics of the ‘*sthitaprajna*’ or the person of a steadfast mind which is

determinant for leadership discipline and the excellence of that stage.

SPIRITUAL COMPETENCIES OF A STHITHA PRAJNA

The spiritual competencies of *Sthitha Prajna* or a steadfast person are experiencing the joy of communion with the Ultimate Consciousness, giving up all desires for sense gratification, absence of any attachment, mastery of the senses, mastery of the mind, constant contemplation of the supreme truth, accepts whatever comes on its own accord, devoid of feeling of my-ness and doership, and free as well from the feeling of I-ness towards the body and senses (Gita, Chapter 2-Slokas 52to 56).

SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

One underlying principle that leadership is lacking today is the value our society places exclusively on material capital. It is factual that any kind of venture requires some kind of financial capital if it needs immediate success in the short term. But to encourage long-term sustainability leaders need to chase two additional forms of assets as well: social and spiritual capital. Leaders should make right choices. To make right choice, he should know his true nature. When you make choices without knowing your true nature, problems arise.

A Leader should be someone who has absolute control over his/her senses and mind. He has experienced himself as an individual consciousness different from the body. He has a shared vision, strong character, compassion and work without expecting any results, perform beyond expectations with incredible energy and work with unconditional love. *Karma yoga*, in fact, emphasizes that one should perform one's activity without expectation and craving for results. It doesn't mean that one should not aim for goals. If the desired objectives are not achieved one should not weep over it (Gita 2.47). The essence of *Karma yoga* fortifies one not to lose self confidence in times of crisis.

The duty of a leader is to maintain a vision-centric perspective. Sri Krishna demonstrated transformational leadership traits in mentoring Arjuna to victory in the war. Wherever there is a powerhouse of spiritual intelligence, a leader like Krishna and a mind of Arjuna who has constant access to this entire wisdom that partnership is highly protected and is prosperous, successful, fair and just.

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Enlightened leaders with strong roots in spirituality make the moral fabric of any organization. An organizational culture based on spirituality has a well-built moral range,

and a convincing undertaking that creates values for clients, workers, shareholders and the public. The leaders and the staff align themselves to workplace spirituality with a broad vision of working towards the welfare of the mankind as a whole and the leader generates value for an organization.

Workplace spirituality creates virtuous organizations as a connective integrated whole and their business plans translate the vision of *Lokasangraha* - a popular concept in Gita which means welfare of the common mankind and welfare of anyone that touches the business (Nair, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Organizational crisis, leadership crisis and the crisis of the individual are the offshoots of unbridled consumerism and a race for becoming number one in the scheme of things. The barrenness of life in the busy pace of business is visible in different walks of life. Developing spiritual competencies is the key for Self-awareness and to remain with composure and equanimity. Bhagavad-gita offers a platform for an enriching and collaborative human experience in organizational dynamics and thereby for leading a peaceful co-existence for all stakeholders. Workplace spirituality is about making difference to our lives for the welfare of all.

Spiritual Leadership traits highlighted in Bhagavad-gita offer solution to the questions of 'identity crisis', 'effective diversity management', 'turbulence management', 'emotions management', 'anger management', 'success and failure management', 'negativity management' and one can strive in achieving excellence under any turbulent times. The spiritual quotient of dispassionate involvement at work without expecting any results and compassion towards all is gathering momentum in corporate circles than work done with a reward centric passionate work.

The authentic Indian model of spiritual leadership has always been that of the *Rajarshi*-(*Raja + Rishi*) - the leader who sees beyond-transcends. Spiritual Leadership style of Bhagavad-gita provides a backbone rooted in *Sanathan dharma*, the everlasting principles of values which contradict today's leadership's short-term focus on achieving profit alone. When the leader acts like a *Rajarshi*, he or she transcends all barriers and boundaries and creates a global vision that encompasses profit, process, people and planet in such a way that the synergy talks a sustenance story. By integrating spiritual quotient with managerial dynamics, the uncertainties of emotional turbulence can be overcome for the betterment of the self and the organization as a whole.

REFERENCES

Beaudan, E. (2002). Leading in turbulent times. *Ivey Business Journal*, 66, 22-26.

Bhattathiri, M. P. (27th August, 2016). Bhagavad-gita and Management, World Management Lessons. Retrieved from <http://www.vinayahs.com/dropbox/Bhagavad%20Gita%20and%20Management.pdf>

Catherine New. (2016). Every baby born today owes more than 13000 dollars in debt, Huffington post.

Cameron, K. S. (1998). Strategic organizational downsizing: An extreme case. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 20, 185-229.

Dass, H. C. (1805-1905). *Mahabharata*, Edited by Manmatha N. Dutt, 18(11). Calcutta.

Gita 2.47, Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana, Ma Karmaphalaheturbhurma Te Sangostvakarmani. Retrieved from <http://www.swamivivekanandaquotes.org/2014/05/bhagavad-gita-chapter-2-verse-47.html>

Gordon, J. (2007). *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy*. John Wiley & Sons, Canada.

Hill, W., & Douglas, P. (1928). *Bhagavad-gita*. London: Oxford University Press.

Hill, W., & Douglas, P. (1882). Bhagavad-gita. *Sacred Books of the East*, 8. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hyatt, M. (2012, Dec 9th). *Five Characteristics of a Strong Mind*. Platform- Get Noticed in a Noisy World', Thomas Nelson Publications.

Llopis, G. (2013). *Seven Reasons Employees Don't Trust Their Leaders*. Retrieved from www.forbes.com

Muniapan, B. (2005). *The Philosophy of Bhagavad-Gita and its Relevance to Human Resource Development in the 21st Century*. International Conference on Cultural and Religious Mosaic of South and Southeast Asia: Conflict and Consensus through the Ages, 1st South and Southeast Asian Association of Study of Religion (SSEASR) Conference under UNESCO, New Delhi, India, 27-30 January.

Muniapan, B. (2006). Can the Bhagavad-gita be used as a Manual for Management? Development of Indian Managers Worldwide? *5th Asia Academy of Management Conference, Asian Management: Convergence and Divergence*. Tokyo, Japan, December 19-21, 2006.

Mahadevan, B. (2014). Gita for contemporary management: Holy text with secular advice. *International Journal of Scientific Research*, 3(11).

Nair, A. (2016). Transcendent Leadership for a Virtuous Organization: An Indian Approach. *International Journal of Recent Advances in Organizational Behaviour and Decision Sciences*, 1(1), 663-672.

Peterson, C. (2000). The future of optimism. *American Psychologist*, 55, 44-55.

- Prabhakaran, P. (2008). *National security: Imperatives and challenges*. Tata McGraw-Hill Publications.
- Prabhupada, B. S. (1972). *Bhagavad-gita as it is*. MacMillan.
- Roe, K. (2014). *Leadership: Practice and Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.
- Singh, R. (2015, June 14). How Baba Ramdev has built a Rs 2,000 crore ayurvedic FMCG empire & plans to take on multinational giants. *Economic Times*.
- Warrier Krishna, A. G. (2008). *Srimad Bhagavad Gita Bhashya of Shankaracharya with text and English translation*, Ramakrishna Mutt.
- Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (2001). *SQ: Spiritual Intelligence. The ultimate intelligence* (1st ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Zohar, D. (1997). *Rewiring the Corporate Brain: Using the New Science to Rethink How We Structure and Lead Organizations* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.