

Corporate Behaviour and the Bhagavad Gita



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The objective of the paper is to enhance the notion of corporate behaviour in the light of the perspectives offered by the Bhagavad Gita. The Corporate world has identified three primary types of behaviour exhibited by individuals, namely, Aggressiveness, Submissiveness, and Assertiveness. According to the Bhagavad Gita, an individual is a combination of three gunas, namely, Sattva - representing knowledge and calmness, Rajas - representing activity and desire, and Tamas - representing laziness and ignorance. While the Corporate world emphasis is on inter-personal skills, the Bhagavad Gita emphasis is on intra-personal skills of individuals. The paper evolves a synthesized paradigm.

Keywords: Corporate Behaviour, Assertiveness, The Bhagavad Gita, Gunas, Synthesized Paradigm

The paper consists of three sections. Section-I deals with three types of corporate behaviour. Section-II brings out the Bhagavad Gita's approach to human behavior, dealing with the tri-gunah. In Section-III, an attempt is made to correlate between the three types of behaviour of the corporate world and the tri-gunah of the Bhagavad Gita and a synthesized paradigm is evolved.

1. The Three Types of Corporate Behaviour

Corporate behaviour may refer to the combination of legal rules, ethical codes and social responsibility that shapes, defines and differentiates a business organization from that of others. This holds for the behaviour of individuals too. Corporate culture is highly coloured by the behavior of people in the organization.

The Three Types of behaviour

Taking inputs from psychology, the corporate world have identified three primary types of behaviour exhibited by individuals, namely, Aggressive behaviour, Submissive behaviour and Assertive behaviour.

Let us now briefly see the characteristic features of the three types of behaviour.

Aggressive Behaviour: Aggressive behaviour is the type of behaviour wherein one's intent is to stand-up for one's own rights in such a way that the rights of others are willfully violated. According to Anderson & Bushman (2002), aggressive communicators dominate and try to fulfill their desires at the cost of others. When someone invades another's boundaries or individual rights that person is considered behaving aggressively. The intention of aggressive people is to dominate others to get their own way. The problem with aggressive behavior include inappropriate anger, rage or misplaced hostility, and expresses aggressive responses. This behavior restricts communication within the team. Cohesiveness and synergy becomes difficult.

Submissive Behaviour: Submissive behaviour is the type of behaviour wherein one's intent is not to stand-up for one's legitimate rights and thereby enabling one's rights to be violated by others. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2000) defines submissive behaviour as a "pervasive pattern of negativistic attitudes and passive resistance to demands for adequate performance in social and occupational situations". When people allow their ideas or rights to be restricted by another individual or situation, they are behaving passively. These people tend to keep their feelings inside. The problem with submissive/passive behavior is that they tend to keep their feelings inside and their emotions, such as fear, anxiety, depression, fatigue and nervousness may build to unsafe levels.

Assertive Behaviour: Assertive behaviour is the type of behaviour wherein one's intent is to stand-up for one's own legitimate rights in such a way that the rights of others are not violated. *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science* (2002) states that assertive behavior is an honest, direct and appropriate expression of one's feelings, beliefs and opinions. Assertiveness is the ability of team members to state and maintain a position that may be counter to the position of others, until convinced by the facts, not the authority or personality of another, that their position is wrong.

Assertive people recognize boundaries between their ideas and those of others. People responding assertively are aware of their feelings. Tensions are kept in a normal, constructive, and appropriate range. Assertive people feel empowered to speak up and do it with respect. The team leader must be able to harness the energy of assertive team members. The effective team leader advocates open and questioning communication by team members. In their interactions, effective team-members are mutually respectful to each other.

Assertive behaviour is considered as the appropriate behaviour in the corporate world.

2. The Bhagavad Gita's Approach to Human Behaviour

The Bhagavad Gita occurs in the Bhismaparva (*Chapter 23-40*) of the great epic Mahabharata, authored by Sri Veda Vyasa. It consists of 18 Chapters and 700 Verses. Even though a part of Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita is self-contained. It is considered as the Fifth Veda.

Tri-gunas

The Bhagavad Gita (*Chapter III, Verse 33*) states that every man acts in accordance with his/her own nature dictated by the combinations of the gunas. The gunas are three in number, namely, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Every individual is a combination of all the three gunas, in varying proportions. The predominance of one of the three gunas over the other two determines the dominant personality trait of a man's nature (*Chapter XIV, Verses 11-13*). The three gunas constantly act on one another. The Bhagavad Gita (*Chapter XIV, Verses 5 & 17*) defines the three gunas according to their effects, namely, Sattva represents knowledge and calmness, Rajas represents activity and desire, and Tamas represents laziness and ignorance. *The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter XIV, Verse 6) considers Sattva as an appropriate behaviour.*

3. Correlation and Synthesized

The correlation between the three types of behaviour of the corporate and the three gunas of the Bhagavad Gita brings out the following inference:

The aggressive behaviour, characterized by the attitude of domination and anger, correlates with the traits of activity and desire, as exhibited by the Rajo-guna, and reflects a state of existence where Rajas predominates over Sattva and Tamas.

The submissive behaviour, characterized by fatigue and nervousness, correlates with the traits of laziness and ignorance, as exhibited by the Tamo-guna, and reflects a state of existence where Tamas predominates over Sattva and Rajas.

The assertive behaviour correlates with the traits of knowledge and calmness, as exhibited by the Sattva-guna, and reflects a state of existence where Sattva predominates over Tamas and Rajas.

The correlation may be presented in the form of a table as below

Features	Aggressive Behaviour	Submissive Behaviour	Assertive Behaviour
Intent	To stand-up for one's own rights by willfully violating the rights of others	Fails to stand-up for one's own legitimate rights and violated by others	To stand-up for one's own rights without violating the rights of others
Feelings	A sense of false superiority	A sense of false inferiority	A sense of self-esteem and confidence
Predominance of Gunas	Rajas	Tamas	Sattva
Characteristics of Gunas	Activity and Desire	Laziness and Ignorance	Calmness and Knowledge

The Synthesized Paradigm

The corporate world considers assertiveness as the most appropriate behaviour in workplace. How is it achieved?

The corporate world emphasizes the importance of inter-personal skills for effecting the movement from a position of aggressive/submissive behaviour to that of an assertive behaviour. A little reflection on this position would bring out the fact that the change in human behaviour is influenced by predominately external factors, which may be beyond one's control.

The Bhagavad Gita considers sattva-guna as the most appropriate behaviour for man. How is it achieved?

The Bhagavad Gita (*Chapter XIV, Verse 18*) emphasizes the importance of inculcating intra-personal skills for effecting the movement from a state of tamas to rajas and from rajas to sattva. The change in human behaviour is influenced by predominately internal factors, which are under one's control.

A synthesized paradigm may be evolved, where in, appropriate behaviour is characterized by inculcating the intra-personal skill of Sattva-guna and the inter-personal skill of assertiveness. It would be a more holistic and well balanced corporate behaviour.

4. References

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