

Work & Executorial Excellence¹

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Every one of us engage in work, whether it is in office, or at home or when we do some public service. As we keep engaging in such work, we often think it would be indeed good if we could execute the work better. If we ask people what is a good way to conclude that the work was executed better, a vast majority will tend to link it to how efficiently we performed the work. What we understand by efficiency is executing a work in lesser time and with fewer resources. If employees in an organization could perform work in minimum time, they can produce more results in the total available time. This will enable the organization to take up more work which may result in more revenue and at times more money in the hands of the employee as well. On the other hand, when an individual does a work faster it releases free time in the hands of the person doing the work. It may allow him/her to use the free time for other things. Therefore, it is no wonder that everyone would like to believe that a good measure for executorial excellence is efficiency.

Efficiency – A means for measuring executorial excellence?

The focus naturally shifts to concentrating on this aspect of doing work. In our normal understanding, efficiency is the ratio of output to input. For example if a person takes 8 hours to complete a job, whose work content is equivalent to 6 hours, we say that he/she is working with a 75% efficiency ($6/8 = 0.75$). When we say we are able to complete the work faster we mean that we work more efficiently. In this example, if the same person works better, then perhaps he/she may need only 7 hours to finish the same work. In this case his/her efficiency improves to 87.5% ($7/8 = 0.875$). Expectedly, all organizations desire to improve the efficiency at their workplace.

In this definition of executorial excellence, the way to improve the efficiency is to bring down the time required for the execution of the task. When a machine is used for executing the task this method works well. Change some parts of the machine, add some more attachments and speed it up, the task will be executed faster resulting in better efficiency. If the machine is getting heated up, add some oil to lubricate, install an A/C and cool it up so that it continues to work faster. If the parts of the machine are wearing out faster, change the parts. Finally, if the machine is ageing faster and unable to respond to the requirement placed on it, eventually dispose off the machine and buy a new one. With more output (and more money) one can justify buying another one easily.

In today's management we use exactly the same approach to improve the efficiency of work done by the human beings as well. Managers and employees are asked to speed up continuously and they are given some additional software and gadgets to help this process. Extra time and additional pays are given as a lubricating mechanism to ease the friction and heat generated (both at office and home). After some time the employees are asked to leave as they are unable to cope with the mounting demand as they wear out faster.

¹ **Mahadevan, B.** (2012). "Work and executorial excellence", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 10 (3), November, 2012, pp 19 – 20.

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Unfortunately, this measure efficiency and ways of achieving it is at best damaging. It will not work with employees and will vitiate the atmosphere and create a situation of mistrust between the owners (& their representatives) and workers. It has the potential to shatter the psychology of individuals, disturb their sensitivities and bruise their ego. Above all, it can instill a great sense of fear (of losing the job any time). We are already seeing this in many organizations today. This will make organizations more vulnerable for failures in the long run and prevent it from building very loyal and committed employees.

This raises the basic question of whether improvement of efficiency is the same as improvement of executional excellence. One of the dimensions that we get from the *Bhagavad Gitā* is that the notion of executional excellence is a much larger and a deeper issue than efficiency. Therefore it may call for some other ways of looking at this issue.

The meaning of executional excellence in action

Lord Krishna suggests that in order to have executional excellence (*karmasu kauśalam*), we need to have *Yoga Buddhi* and be constantly be guided by this frame of mind (*tasmādyogāya yujyasva*) while we engage in work. The notion of doing work with a yogic frame of mind was discussed in some detail in the previous ten *ślokas* in *Gitā*. Therefore, it provides us two important implications pertaining to executional excellence; engaging in work with *yoga buddhi* will ensure that we achieve executional excellence and we need to measure executional excellence differently.

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।

तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥ 2.50

buddhi-yukto jahātīha ubhe sukrta-duṣkrte
tasmādyogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam

Unlike the current thinking, executional excellence is not merely about using resources and time better, it is also about the process of achieving this. Through this *śloka* Lord Krishna enlarges the notion of executional excellence by suggesting that qualitative enrichment must co-develop with quantitative enrichment. Otherwise, after years of productive efficiency one could become a broken person. It is all about productive efficiency in the world outside and spiritual efficiency within.

Achieving a greater sense of equanimity is an important fallout of developing *yoga buddhi*. When we achieve this, we are not easily distracted by the ups and downs of work and the results arising out of it. In such a condition, thoughts and psychic energies of an individual do not get wasted unnecessarily. With improved focus and attention span, it is possible to get the same improvement in efficiency. However, this method of improving efficiency comes out of a much better frame of mind. Therefore, it does not introduce bad effects in the long run. Employees will be less fearful, may not get stressed too much and will be able to balance their work and family life. This in turn will add to the virtuous cycle and the situation is likely to get better in the future.

Spirituality – A Catalyst for Executional Excellence

If we take the *Gītā* prescriptions, executional excellence is at its best when individuals are able to discover their true self in the process of doing work. The joy of contributing to a lasting change in an organization which can transform things in his/her surroundings is a matter of spirituality. It cannot be measured by comparing the input and the output of an individual alone. Nor its potential to convert executional excellence into a way of life should be simply ignored. A spiritually evolving person will bring greater energy at play while at work and demonstrate that work is joyful. His love for greater things in life, and the joy of making that happen will have a noticeable impact on the workplace. It will truly be contagious also as he can inspire people around him to bring out their best. These aspects are indeed various facets of executional excellence.

The narrow measures of efficiency improvements and incentives tied to these will pale in comparison in their ability to breed an environment of executional excellence. Organizations must ensure that Individuals increase their spiritual quotient over time by way of doing work. With more spirituality, they will respond to the *call of duty* much better as they indeed learn to respond to the *call of their inner self*. Lord Krishna is pointing to such a possibility to us.