

Management Paradigms from Bhagavad Gita (MPBG) Course Outline

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1. Introduction

Business Management curriculum provides a variety of theoretical inputs that enables an individual to take decisions for effective running of an organization. In the current state of affairs these inputs are characterized by two peculiar aspects. Firstly, these are based mainly on the western paradigm of the “world view”. While this is one aspect of the knowledge, it is worthwhile to understand alternative “world views”. Secondly, the current management theories are by and large prescriptions for the business organizations. Even when issues pertaining to individuals are addressed they are in the context of organizational performance. For instance, theories on motivation are developed to improve the organizational performance. This overwhelming focus on organizations has over time pushed the “individuals” to the residual in the equations.

It is increasingly felt that the current ideas do not adequately cover all the issues of major concern to individuals and organizations. Many feel the need for alternative perspectives on the problems and possible solutions. Ancient Indian wisdom has a set of ideas that present a different perspective of the problems that individuals and organizations face and proposes alternative ways of understanding several aspects pertaining to the domain of management. This course is an attempt to bring these perspectives using Bhagavad Gita as the main reference frame for culling out ideas from Ancient Indian wisdom.

2. Objectives

The course is designed with the following main objectives:

- a) To identify some of the commonly felt problems that individuals, organizations and the society faces
- b) To illustrate the usefulness of Gita in addressing some of these problems
- c) To demonstrate how alternative world views and paradigms of management could be developed with a knowledge of Ancient Indian wisdom such as Gita
- d) To provide a good introduction to Ancient Indian wisdom using Gita as a vehicle

3. Pre-requisites

This course is a little different from the current crop of MBA courses offered. Therefore, students must be ready for a slightly different approach to learn. There are four pre-requisites for attending this course:

- This course critically depends on the *self-interest* and *self-regulation* of the course participants. This is a major pre-requisite for the course.
- This course will heavily draw from the original sources of Gita, Upanishads and other such Ancient Indian wisdom. Therefore many may think that good knowledge of Sanskrit is required. While it may be an added advantage, it is not required. Familiarity with the *Devanagari* script (Hindi Script) may be useful at times.
- Another major pre-requisite is a sense of openness with which the ideas need to be received. A "*reflective and intuitive mind*" is more likely to benefit greatly than a pure "*logical or analytical mind*".
- The other major pre-requisite is a sense of deep commitment to the basic idea of exploring alternate perspectives present in Ancient Indian wisdom. Without this basic commitment students may find it difficult to maintain the motivation level as the course proceeds.

4. Readings

This course will have two sets of readings. One set corresponds to the contemporary literature pertaining to the topics discussed in the sessions. These have been identified in the respective sessions. In addition to this, specific sections from the Gita will be used as the second set of material. There are a number of commentaries available for Bhagavad Gita. These provide a good basis to understand Gita. However, a number of short articles on Gita and Management are available in the following source, which will be used in the context of the course:

- Mahadevan, B. Writings on Gita & Management, <http://www.iimb.ernet.in/webpage/b-mahadevan/bhagavad-gita-amp-management>

For the interested readers some (suggested) additional readings pertaining to Bhagavad Gita are given below:

- Swami Ranganathananda, (2001), "Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita", 3 Volumes, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.
- Swami Dayananda Saraswati, (2007), "The value of values", Arsha Vidya Research & Publication Trust, Chennai.
- Swami Chinmayananda, (1996), "Holy Geeta", Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai.

5. Overall Organisation of the Sessions

Session No.	Topic
Module 1: Spirituality in Business and Workplace	
1	Current Challenges in Business Management & Society
2	Relevance of Ancient Indian Wisdom for contemporary society
3	Spirituality in Business
4	The notion of Spirituality
5	An introduction to Bhagavad Gita & its relevance

Module 2: Perspectives on Leadership and Work	
6	Failed Leadership: Causes & Concerns
7	Leadership Perspectives in the Gita ¹
8	Axioms of Work & Performance
9	The Notion of Meaningful Work

Module 3: Perspectives on Self-Management	
10	Mind as a key player in an individual
11	Meditation as a tool for self-management
12	Role of Yoga in addressing stress & burnout of managers
13	Mind as a key player in an individual
14	Self-Management by understanding the world within
15	Values & their role in Self-management
16	Shaping the personality through Trigunas

Module 4: Perspectives on Life and Society	
17	Perspectives on Sustainability
18	Death as a creative destruction process
19	Law of Conservation of Divinity
20	Conclusions

¹ This class will be rescheduled. Alternative schedule will be decided in the first week of the course.

6. Detailed Session-wise plan

Module 1: Spirituality in Business and Workplace

Session 1: Current Challenges in Business Management & Society

- Current problems in Business Management
- Issues of personal satisfaction, motivation & inspiration
- Societal Challenges
- Way forward...

In this session, the participants are required to come prepared with two major problems that individuals or organizations or society face today that requires some useful view points and solutions to address.

Readings

- **Geus, A. (1997)**, “The Life Span of a Company: Chapter 1 in The Living Company”, *Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London*, pp. 7 – 19.

Session 2: Relevance of Ancient Indian Wisdom for contemporary society

- Some aspects of learning and understanding Ancient Indian Literature
- Three dimensional nature of Ancient Indian Literature

The study of ancient Indian wisdom is complicated by some gross misconceptions pertaining to the literature and its relevance. In this session, these issues will be addressed in some detail. An attempt will be made to show “how” and “how not” to read the Ancient texts. This will provide the basis for the approach to be taken in using Gita as a reference material for the rest of the course.

Readings

- 📖 **Beer, S. (1994)**. “May the Whole Earth be Happy: Loka Samastat Sukhino Bhavantu”, *Interfaces*, **24** (4), 83 – 93.

Session 3: Spirituality in Business

The motivation for exploring the role of spirituality in business is the repeated occurrence of events in recent business history that challenges the moral and ethical fabrics of leadership. While there is renewed interest in exploring the role of spirituality in business management, the business community and the society at large face several challenges in understanding the subject matter. This session provides a case-in-point as to how spirituality can indeed be practiced in business.

Readings

- 📄 **Mahadevan, B. (2013).** “Spirituality in Management: Sparks from the Anvil”, *IIMB Management Review*, **25** (2).

Session 4: The notion of Spirituality

- The notion of Spirituality
- Reconciling the “world outside” with the “world within”
- The conceptualization of God – Universe – Living Beings

The notion of spirituality will be introduced so that some larger issues can be understood in an overall framework. The session will conclude with how the relationship between God, Universe and the Living beings has been conceptualized in Ancient Indian Wisdom.

Readings

- 📄 **Houston, D.J. and Cartwright K.E. (2007),** “Spirituality and Public Service”. *Public Administration Review*, Jan. – Feb., 2007, 88 – 102.
- 📄 **Payne, S.G. (2010).** “Leadership and spirituality: Business in the USA”, *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services*, **6** (2), 68 – 72.
- 📄 **Poole, E. (2007).** “Organizational Spirituality – A literature review”, *Journal of Business Ethics*, **84**, pp. 577 – 588.

Session 5: An introduction to Bhagavad Gita & its relevance

- Positioning of Gita in our Ancient Literature
- Gita’s influence on Great Leaders
- Issues discussed in Gita: A broad structure of the text
- Relevant Thoughts & Relevant Questions

A brief introduction to Gita will be provided as the course may not cover the entire 18 chapters. The session will also position Gita in the overall scheme of things in the country, the impact it has created on various leaders and its main contributions.

Readings

- 📄 **Bhattathiri, M.P.** “Bhagavad Gita and Management”
- 📄 **Mahadevan, B. (2009).** “Shrimad Bhagavad Gita – Ideas for Modern Management”, One day Seminar on “Towards a New Paradigm of Business management: Alternative Perspectives from Ancient Indian Wisdom”, IIM Bangalore, December 12, 2009.
- 📄 **(2012).** “Bhagavad Gita and Management”, Arsha Vidya News Letter, April 2012, 23 – 30.

Module 2: Perspectives on Leadership & Work

Session 6: Failed Leadership: Causes & Concerns

- Arjuna's predicament and arguments for no war
- Krishna's response
- Issues & implications for Leadership

Generally, chapter 1 of the Bhagavad Gita is mostly ignored as a general introductory chapter. However, we will analyze the situation on hand and understand why the entire teachings were necessitated. The session will point to the challenges leaders face while creating a high performance organization.

Readings

- 📄 **Ancona, D., Malone, T.W., Orlikowski, W.J. and Senge, P.M. (2007)**, "In praise of the incomplete leader", Harvard Business Review, **85** (2), 92 – 100.

Session 7: Leadership Perspectives in the Gita

- Existing theories in Leadership
- Level 5 leadership (Jim Collins)
- Inspirational Leadership ideas in Gita

Existing leadership theories will be initially briefly introduced and in the context of these ideas pertaining to leadership available in the Gita will be explored. The notion of inspirational leadership as evident in the Gita will be introduced in this session.

Readings

- 📄 **Mahadevan, B., (2013)**. "Inspirational Leadership: Perspectives from Gītā", Chapter 13 in Sanskrit and Development of World Thought, Kutumba Sastry V. (Ed.), D K Print World, New Delhi, pp 199 - 210.

Sessions 8 – 9: Alternative Perspectives on Work & Performance

- Gita's Paradigms on Work
- The Paradox of Work & No work
- Discovering the Joy of Work

One of the major contributions of Gita is the unique paradigm of work. The issue of what constitutes work, what to expect out of work, what it means to enjoy work etc. are discussed in some detail. While these ideas directly challenge our current paradigms of work, motivation, satisfaction etc., a deeper introspection of these ideas can help find new paths in addressing these issues. These issues will be discussed in this session.

Readings

- 📄 **Mehrotra, R. (2010).** “Work Builds, Charity Destroys”, Chapter 8 in Ennoble, English course book, Second Year Pre-University, The Karnataka Text Book Society, pp. 63 – 70.
- 📄 **Michaelson, C. (2009).** “Teaching Meaningful Work: Philosophical Discussions on the Ethics of Career Choice”, *Journal of Business Ethics Education*, **6**, pp. 43 – 68.

Module 3: Perspectives on Individuals

Sessions 10 – 11: Mind as a key player in an individual

- The problem of mental stress
- Understanding the mind & its ways
- Diagnosing some of the personal problems that we face
- Notion of building stronger inner-self

One of the major issues that every individual faces in personal, professional and public life is the issue of mental stress, agony etc. These issues are addressed in varying dimensions by the modern psychology field. This is another area where ancient Indian wisdom has different perspectives. This session will introduce these aspects.

Readings

- 📄 **Corner, P.D. (2008).** “Workplace Spirituality and Business Ethics: Insights from an Eastern Spiritual Tradition”, *Journal of Business Ethics*, **85**, pp. 377 – 389.

Session 12 – 13: Meditation & Yoga as tools for self-management

- Role of Meditation in winning over the mind
- Role of Yoga in improving managerial performance

It is increasingly acknowledged in the business domain that yoga and meditation can play a significant role in improving the wellness of individuals. Further, it also helps in improving the organization performance. In these sessions, these issues will be introduced. The students will undergo practical sessions in addition to certain conceptual background behind mediation and self-management.

Readings

- 📄 **Adhia, H., Nagendra, H.R. and Mahadevan, B. (2010).** “Impact of Adoption of Yoga Way of Life on the Emotional Intelligence of Managers”. *IIMB Management Review*. **Vol. 22 (1&2)**, pp. 32 – 41.

Guest Speaker: Mr. Sridhar Deshmukh, Wellness Consultant

Session 14: Self-Management by understanding the world within

- The issue of winning over the mind
- Understanding the “World within”

Continuing the theme of the earlier session, in this session, the issue of winning over the mind will be considered. Specific challenges individuals face with respect to mediation will be discussed based on the ideas available in the Gita. Based on these ideas, implications for self-management will be drawn.

Readings**Session 15: Values & their role in Self-management**

There is renewed interest in issues such as values and ethics in business. The Gita provides a set of 20 values that can help individuals improve their self-management. These values will be discussed in this session in some detail.

Readings

- **Swami Dayananda Saraswati. (2007).** “The value of values”, *Arsha Vidya Research & Publication Trust, Chennai*, pp. 1 – 54.

Session 16: Shaping the personality through Trigunas

Gita provides a framework for understanding the mechanism by which individuals develop their value systems and shape their personality. The three gunas play a fundamental role in this and this session will address various issues pertaining to this from the Gita.

Readings

- 📄 **Biswas, M. (2010).** “In search of personality inventory for Indian managers: an application of structural equation modelling”, *Journal of Services Research*. 10 (1), pp 101 – 123.

Module 4: Perspectives on Life and Society**Session 17: Perspectives on Sustainability**

- The Vexing problem of Sustainability
- The Paradigm of Yajna: The cardinal principle of sustainability
- Implications for Business, Environment & Ecology

Sustainability is a major issue for both business and society. The current western thinking on this aspect is limited. Ancient Indian wisdom and Gita provide a comprehensive framework

to understand the notion of sustainability. Our ancestors had a different understanding of these issues. This session will discuss these in some detail.

Readings

- 📄 **Capra, F. (2004)**, “Life and Leadership in Organizations: Chapter 4 in Hidden Connections”, *Anchor Books, New York*, pp. 97 – 128.
- 📄 **Amory B. Lovins, A.B., Lovins, L.H. and Hawken, P. (2007)**. “A Road Map for Natural Capitalism”, *Harvard Business Review*, **85** (4), 172 – 183.
- 📄 **Ehrenfeld, J. R. (2005)**. “The Roots of Sustainability”, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, **46** (2), pp. 23-25.

Session 18: Death as a creative destruction process

- The notion of death
- Unique assumptions about death & its relevance for living
- Implications for Business, Innovation, Change Management and Growth

One of the biggest challenges in Business is change management. Closely connected to this is the issue of innovation. Ancient Indian wisdom has some interesting perspectives on this and this stems out from the notion of death. The ideas from Gita on this will be discussed in this session.

Readings

- 📄 **David Elrod II, P. and Tippett, D.D. (2002)**. "The “death valley” of change", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, **15**(3), pp. 273 – 291.

Sessions 19: The Law of Conservation of Divinity

Gita provides larger perspectives to life and sense making for an individual as he/she is in the midst of the eco-system consisting of people and other living and non-living entities. This session introduces this through a notion of Law of Conservation of Divinity.

Readings

- 📄 **Mahadevan, B, (2014)**. The Law of Conservation of Divinity

Sessions 20

Conclusions

7. Pedagogy

The ideas are largely from Bhagavad Gita. Therefore, the sessions will be mainly lecture oriented. However, the lectures will be classroom and discussion oriented. The usual audio visual aids will be made use of during the sessions.

8. Evaluation

Individual Submission	: 30 points
Group Submission	: 20 points
Class Participation	: 10 points
Final Exam	: 40 points
Total	: 100 points

9. Experiential Learning through the course

The topics discussed in this course are mostly applicable to individuals. Therefore it has the potential to add value only when the students are able to contemplate on the ideas, make personal reflections and connect it to their experiences. Moreover, it greatly adds value when the students are able to try out small experiments on some of the concepts and develop their own insights from these. The submissions required for the course are based on this philosophy. There are two types of submissions required; one individual and the other group. The details are as follows:

(a) Individual submission

Each student is expected to make two submissions.

- One submission is a final write up on their overall reflections on various issues discussed during the course. This will be a write up of not less than 800 words and not more than 1000 words. In order to make this a fruitful exercise, it is highly recommended that each student maintains his/her own learning diary to capture learnings from each class so that a final submission is a less involved and an effective exercise. This will carry a **weightage of 15 points**.
- There are some ideas and frameworks proposed in this course, which are not part of our current day practices. Therefore, the only way to know the value of these or otherwise is to set up our own small experiments to test out the real impact and meaning of these concepts. Five major ideas have been listed below and the students can feel free to select any of them for their own experimentation:
 - Heart Vs Brain Dichotomy
 - World Within Vs World Outside
 - Facing up to the World of Duality

- Delinking Work and Results
- Mind Control Exercises
- Role of Meditation

The required inputs for these would have been covered by week 6 of the course. 2014. Therefore using a two-week window for this phase of learning, a submission is to be done. The submission will be based on a direct experimentation, reflection on the experience gathered through the experiment and culling out implications for personal and professional life in the process. This will be a write up of not less than 800 words and not more than 1000 words. This will carry a **weightage of 15 points**.

Simple experiments could be tried. For instance, as far as mind control is concerned, one can try the idea of no gadgets (TV or mobile etc.) for 2 – 3 days, skipping something that is generally considered to be indispensable etc. Some of the decisions could be taken with the explicit effort to keep brain as the seat of decision making or heart as the seat to understand the brain – heart dichotomy. These are mere suggestions. There is enormous value in identifying the nature of experimentation to be done.

(b) Group Submission

Group submission is an effort in which the value systems, assumptions and perspectives on some of the concepts could be shared, cross-checked and discussed within the group and a collective view on the concepts discussed in the course and their application developed. To facilitate this process, certain videos have been identified and each group is to **view two videos** out of the list and make a write up on how the video connects to the ideas in the course. Furthermore, the write up must also focus on the central issue taken up in the video for sharing and relate it to one's own managerial or professional practice as well as personal life. This will be a write up of not less than 500 words and not more than 700 words. This submission will carry a **weightage of 20 points**.