

How to cope with changes?¹

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The only constant thing that happens to every one of us is change. We face several changes in our personal life and work life. One of the biggest pre-occupations of management all over the world is making changes in organizations. Organizations identify new practices and methods of doing work, so they want to implement these changes. Employees are asked to learn new methods and do things differently. Sometimes the way the management chooses to measure the performance of employees undergoes changes. There are many more examples of changes. The reporting relationship of employees are changed, the recruitment and promotion policy changes, the products and services offered also change. The list is indeed endless. In a vast majority of these situations, the basic premise for making changes is to improve the state of affairs and make things much better for everyone including the employees, supervisors, managers and customers. Despite this our track record in implementing changes as well as coping with them is lack lustre.

Perils of introducing change

A vast majority of managers will agree that this is the most painful job and is fraught with a lot of risks, tensions and challenges. A good number of changes introduced fail on account of bad change management forcing the leadership to restore status quo. The fact of the matter is that nobody wants change be it in the organization that they work or in their personal life. We are so comfortable with status quo that this is seen as rocking the boat and a needless intervention in our affairs. Whenever a change is introduced, it calls for an intensive phase of learning and adjustments on the part of the people in the organization. Sometimes skills acquired over a long period of time become irrelevant and in the process the power balance shifts out of individuals and they get sidelined. New power centers emerge and they dictate new terms for others to adhere. Above all everyone has the fear of the unknown. Therefore, most people resist change when it is introduced, and in some cases even revolt. In any case they do not know how to cope with changes.

Therefore, not surprisingly, change management is a topic of great interest for organizations world over and a lot of effort goes in change management programs. These programs are directed towards people who are getting affected. The programs aim at communicating the likely changes expected, equipping them with new skills required and helping them cope with the stress as changes affect them.

Lord Krishna offers interesting perspectives to this topic. Let us look at one sloka from chapter 2 on this.

¹ **Mahadevan, B.** (2013). "How to cope with changes?", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 10 (6), February, 2013, pp 29 – 30.

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Changes are “impermanent things”

The biggest reason for people to resist change is that they develop a psychological viewpoint that the status quo is a permanent thing in their life. Consequently, they love the status quo and get emotionally engaged with the existing state of affairs. Therefore, the only way to get people out this trap is to show them the futility of this assumption. More than the people who are affected, the champions leading the change need to develop greater clarity and conviction in this thought. How well can organizations implement change and individuals cope up with changes critically hinges on this aspect.

Lord Krishna offers a philosophical angle to the problem on hand. There is an important difference between *permanent* and *impermanent* things. The notion of beginning and end, birth and death etc. do not apply to things that are permanent. On the other hand, the way to recognize impermanent things is that they need to compulsorily go through the cycle of birth and death. Those that had a beginning (जातस्य) will definitely have an end (ध्रुवो मृत्युः).

In the same way those that had end will definitely have a beginning again (ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च). All those we classify as change are nothing but the manifestation of “a pair of beginning and end” repeatedly. Therefore, by the above definition they must belong to the category of “impermanent things”. Once we appreciate this aspect the question that prominently stares on our face is why are we making such a fuss of these changes? After all, this is another wave of reality in the scheme of things which can be classified as impermanent. This is why Lord Krishna further advises Arjuna, “therefore (तस्मात्), do not worry too much (न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि) about these changes that you are going through”.

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युः ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।

तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ 2.27.

*Jaatasya hi dhruvo mrutyu dhruvam janma mrutasya ca
Tasmaath parihaaryerthe na tvam shocitum arhasi*

Coping with Changes

Lord Krishna’s perspectives offer a lot of help for us to cope with changes that occur in our professional and personal life all the time. First of all let us understand that the synonym for change is “impermanent things in life”. This very thought will take off considerable amount of stress from our mind and psychologically prepare us to face the changes as they unfold. Further, repeated contemplation of this thought will challenge our wisdom of letting these changes disproportionately affect our peace of mind. After all nobody would like to give too much importance to impermanent things and waste time and energy on such matters.

We find that very experienced and elderly people are able to more readily accommodate changes. This is because they have gone through several changes in their own life. When

another change hits them they say, “this is one more, which will come and go”. Our goal is to reach this level of maturity in coping with changes. Once we attain this level, we will have the wisdom, humility and strength of our character to welcome changes with open hands and live through them. Once we reach this plane of psychological existence, terms such as coping with stress and change management are irrelevant for us. Therefore, it augurs well to develop a philosophical bent of mind. Scriptures such as *Bhagavad Gita* can help us in this journey.