

COPING WITH RESISTANCE TO CHANGE - *THE GITA* WAY

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The entire world that incorporates human beings is aware of the unuttered sound of change. Change is a persistent process. When the earth was made it started changing to make nature and various living beings. Every day, everywhere various kinds of changes are taking place. As a result, one must accept the change and act accordingly. One thing is for sure that all of us should be ready to accept and incorporate change. Accepting and incorporating change require changing the mindset of the individual i.e., one must get ready to incorporate the proposed change in day-to-day life.

In context of an organisation, Organisational change refers to any “significant alteration of the behavior patterns of a large number of the individuals who constitute the organisation” (Dalton 1970, p.231). Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly (1988) defined organisational change as “the planned attempt by management to improve the overall performance of individuals, groups and the organisation by altering structure, behaviour, and processes” (p.19). Thus, these definitions not only highlights the importance of change but also emphasizes that change revolves around people and establishes that change is people centric i.e., any type of change initiative warrants the involvement and active participation of the people. Organisational members often witness low magnitude or sometimes high magnitude changes in terms of policies, structure, management, technology, procedure, strategic moves like mergers and acquisitions, takeover. Thus, it is evident that change is present everywhere and one must learn to cope with it enthusiastically instead of resisting it.

Acceptability to change is one of the traits of an individual which is not just limited to the bodily changes but change in the mindset, not just to accept change but rather becoming the pioneer to initiate change.

Initiation of change requires acceptance to it and an individual become skeptical when confronted with the change in real life as it challenges the status quo and sometimes may pose threat to culture, beliefs, values and philosophy. Furthermore, it may involve financial pressure, time adjustments, mental peace etc. So, it is apparent that a layman would avert change as the disadvantages associated with it would come to his mind before thinking of any kind of change. However, developing a positive bent of mind and focusing on the benefits along with whole hearted efforts to lead change may take one to the right path of change.

Organisational change is a key to survival and development. But while accepting or initiating change one encounter many apprehensions, doubts such as:

- Why and how to Change?
- Whether we will be able to adjust in the changed scenario?
- Is our future secure?
- Will it hamper our core values?
- What are the pros and cons of the proposed change?

Organisational change draws attention of various management thinkers and philosophers who endeavour to uncover different reasons for understanding resistance towards change and thereby provide various models for managing organisational change.

It is true that resistance to change occurs as a counterattack against its implementation. It may take the form of a serious threat for an organisation if left unnoticed and unattended. Thus it is imperative for an organisation to spot and fix it as soon as possible. It is easier to detect or spot resistance to change which is overtly visible through strikes, decreased productivity, regressive behaviour than covert resistance to change which acts as slow poison and is manifested by loss of interest, indifference, employees' absenteeism, turnover etc.

Hence it is essential to understand various reasons for resistance to change before employing suitable strategy to manage it. Change could be resisted by individual, group as well as by organisation.

Reasons for Individual Resistance to Change

- **Loss of Job**

If an organisation undertakes any kind of change such as structural, technological, mergers and acquisitions it is apparent that it may lead to job loss for an unsuitable employee who does not fit or could not adapt to the changed scenario.

- **Fear of the Unknown**

Change is likely to create apprehension in the minds of employees if they are not educated well about the change programme and how it will proceed. It creates ambiguity and generates a feeling of insecurity towards future. So, it increases anxiety or fears which become a reason for resisting change.

- **Maintenance of Status quo**

It refers to the ease and comfort that an individual is enjoying in the present state of affairs. An individual, who has developed his/her own ways of working, learned how to deal with day-to-day problems and is quite comfortable with the existing structure, task, relationship, power. In

this situation any kind of change would definitely going to affect the status quo and therefore individuals strive their best towards resisting change.

- **Social Dislocation**

Individuals' reaction to change is influenced by their sociological needs as well. Thus, when organisation introduces change it may disturb the social relationship, e.g., mergers and acquisitions may lead to transfers, creation of new departments, assignment of different roles and responsibilities which in turn affect social structure of an organisation and may lead to social dislocation for an individual. Therefore, people resist changes that would hamper their social relationship.

- **Incorrect Timing**

If an organisation introduces change without concerning the best time for its implementation, then all the efforts may go waste. For instance, during recession if an organisation increase the target of the sales department as a consequence of innovation of new products. Then it would be severely resisted by everyone involved in increasing sales because changes are introduced at an inappropriate time.

- **Lack of Communication**

Change should never be imposed upon human beings it should be acceptable to everyone or be made acceptable. Here comes the role of communication i.e., people should be well versed with the reasons for change, how it is going to be implemented, what are its pros and cons before actually executing it. Thus, failure to communicate well with the employees during the change process may increase employees' anxiety and fear which will lead to resistance.

Reasons for Group Resistance to Change

- **Group Cohesiveness**

According to Griffin (1997) "it is the extent to which members are loyal and committed to the group; the degree of mutual attractiveness within the group" (p.578). Sometimes an individual accept change but if it is not accepted by his group members then he/she is forced to resist change in order to remain in the group.

- **Organisation Structure**

Some organisations follow bureaucratic structure where jobs are narrowly defined, lines of authority are clearly spelled out, the flow of information is stressed from top to bottom (Rao & Narayana, 1987, p. 579). In this type of structure any change would disturb its equilibrium and would not be entertained at the cost of structure. Even if an organisation does not follow a bureaucratic system, it still avoid changes if it can, since any change would challenge the present state of equilibrium of an organisation and challenge its structure.

- **Cultural Shock**

Changes often high magnitude, such as transitional and transformational often necessitates changing the mindset of individual. They demand inculcating new habits, beliefs, ideas, norms, values, ways of performing task i.e., reshaping the culture of the organisation. This gives cultural shock to everyone in the organisation and therefore has become a reason for resistance to change.

- **Power Maintenance**

Change is not only resisted for valid reasons but even for invalid or void reasons, like maintenance of power. Change is mostly introduced for advancement, fostering new ideas and behaviour that has global advantages. It rules out traditional behaviour and approaches of accomplishing task which is a big reason for spread of terms like women empowerment, participative decision-making, human resource development, 360-degree feedback etc. Thus, change poses a big threat to some people or managers who are the only decisive authorities, as it may result into distribution of power or authority on the basis of skill and targets achieved rather than on seniority and experience. Thus, those attaining higher ranks and perceived to be the main sponsor of change, resist change which results into a major barrier to change.

- **Departmental Conflict**

It is the moral responsibility of every department or team to work in harmony with other units operating in the organisation for accomplishment of organisational objective. But in reality, every team or functional unit thinks about themselves rather than the whole organisation, therefore changes which are perceived as beneficial to one department may be viewed as threat to others which again poses resistance to change.

Reasons for Organisational Resistance to Change

- **Resource Constraints**

Limited resources put a question mark on organisation's decision to commence change. In order to implement change an organisation requires adequate financial resources. Thus, if an organisation does not have sufficient resources to execute change, then it resists.

- **Sunk Costs**

Sunk cost refers to the investment that has been made earlier and cannot be retrieved back or recovered. Sunk cost refers the huge capital that is blocked either in fixed assets such as plant and machinery, building, material etc., or intangible assets such as employees. Thus, sometimes organisations could not respond to the market threat as well as changing tastes of consumers due to the fear of sunk cost and soon it lost its leadership position as well as market share.

- **Inter-organisational Agreement**

An organisation sustains in the environment with the help of certain other organisations that may include either suppliers or major clients and some agencies that provide financial assistance etc. It is natural that organisation make several agreements or commitment with them as part of agreement policy. Therefore, a change programme which is necessary for organisation but is in opposition to the desires of other organisation or agencies has to be dropped or postponed by the organisation.

To cope with resistance to change appropriate change management strategy can be employed. Various authors and academicians have suggested various coping strategies to manage organizational change. (Kotter, 1996) Dr. John Kotter professor at Harvard business school has given his eight-step model of implementing change in the organisation. According to him this model will help organisations to execute change successfully without missing any important aspect. It is the best possible solution available to the organisations going through phase of major changes such as transformation. Following are the eight steps:

STEP 1 Create a sense of urgency

It denotes creating an urge or necessity for change by involving every individual in the task of organisational change. In this stage the leader or the change agent must thoroughly understand the nature of the organisational problem and identify the opportunities available outside the organisation. Thus, it entails generating knowledge or awareness among employees about the importance of change and ignites the urgency for change.

STEP 2 Building Guiding Coalition

Major change initiatives cannot be managed by a single person thus this stage calls for mobilising a group of people to direct or lead the change plan.

STEP 3 Establish a Change Vision

Vision refers to the future image of the organisation i.e., it reflects the future intention of the organisation. Thus, the guiding coalition must create its vision that would clear the purpose of the proposed change and helps everyone in developing strategy to implement that vision.

STEP 4 Communicate the Change Vision

Creating a vision does not entail its implementation or execution thus it has to be communicated well to all the employees. So, the vision must be administered to all the functions of organisation whether it is recruitment, advertising, financing, production etc.

STEP 5 Empowering Action

It is apparent that any change is likely to be resisted since it demands great amount of commitment, alteration and risk-taking ability. To be successful in implementing change the change agent or the guiding coalition must remove all the hindrances that come in its way. Those who help in bringing change should be rewarded.

STEP 6 Creating Short Term Wins

No doubt major change initiatives require a long-term effort but smart individuals lay down achievable short-term goals in addition to long term goals to keep the pace and spirit of change undying. These short – term wins are essential to ensure that the change drivers are not deviating from their vision. Moreover, it will elevate the morale of employees who come forward and shown trust in the change exercise.

STEP 7 Never Letting-up

In this phase the change agent or the guiding coalition must strive towards producing as much change as possible. This calls for:

STEP 8 Incorporating Change into the Culture

A change programme will be a real success if the employees are motivated to cement the new habits and behaviour into the corporate culture i.e., it should become a permanent element of the organisation. The new behaviour which is the outcome of training, education, communication, socialisation and motivation must be firmly embedded into the culture of the organisation. The guiding coalition must make every possible effort to convert the newly learned behaviour into a regular routine for everyone.

Lewin recommended that the process of change should be administered in an organised and well planned manner. Consequently, he has given his model of planned change which is composed of three steps as shown below:

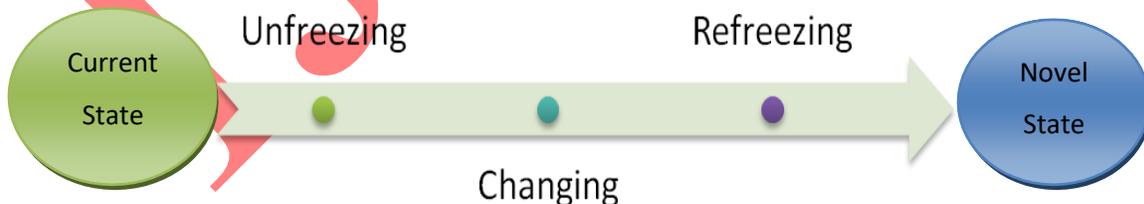


Fig. 8: Kurt Lewin Model of Implementing Change

- **Unfreezing:**

This stage is concerned with imparting knowledge about the necessity of change. It is concerned with creating dissatisfaction with the present behaviour or attitude, processes, policies and approach as they have become antiquated and will not serve the purpose of organisation. It also involves communicating about the benefits or rewards of the new behaviour, system, processes etc. and their suitability to the current situation. In other words, it involves increasing the driving forces of change and reducing the resisting forces of change.

Thus, unfreezing implies eradication of old behaviour, practices and creating readiness to change by launching new behaviour, relationships, attitudes that are most appropriate to the present scenario.

- **Changing**

It involves ascertaining new behaviour pattern, processes, and practices from the range of alternatives available or presented to an individual. Thus, after employees are being fully persuaded and are in favour of change then organisation commence change which may consist of changing all the organisation elements i.e., individuals, task, structure, know-how or some of them. For example, if an organisation introduces new machinery, then it creates the need to impart training to the employees who will be working on the new machinery. Consequently, it can lead to structural as well as technological changes. Thus, this phase is characterized by learning new habits, behaviour and dropping of the old traditions and attitudes of performing the task in order to move to the new state of affairs.

- **Refreezing**

It is a general practice people resort to their old ways of doing things after some time. Therefore, the change agent or the person responsible for introducing change must make every effort to incorporate change into the culture of the organisation. The newly learned behaviour, practices should be embedded permanently and gel smoothly with other traditions. One way to internalize change is by rewarding those employees who perform according to the newly learned behaviour or attitudes.

Change is the outcome of internal and external forces that are operating in the environment. The one thing that needs to be tackled or need a special attention is fear for change. This article attempts to utilize few verses of the Bhagvad Gita known as “the song of God” a 5000-year-old epic of Hindus which explains not only the crux of all spiritual knowledge but is considered to be one of the most acknowledged tools in the field of management.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita was written at some point between 400 BCE and 200 CE and is found in the monumental, historical epic Mahabharata written by Vedvyasa. (Violatti, September 2013). Gita the song of lord is composed of 700 sanskrit verses and is divided into 18 chapters.

“Many great thinkers such as Albert Einstein, Mahtama Gandhi and Albert Schweizer as well as Madhvacharya, Sankara and Ramanuja from bygone ages have all contemplated and deliberated upon its timeless message” (All Glory to Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga, 2015).

Here efforts are made to incorporate some of the most eye-catching and evergreen verses from Bhagvat Gita to explain the importance of accepting change and managing it successfully.

Managing Resistance to Change Through Gita

“One of the greatest philosophical and religious dialogues known to man took place just before the onset of war, a great fratricidal conflict between the hundred sons of dhrtarastra (Kaurvas) and on the opposing side their cousins pandavs” (Prabhupada, 1972). Pandavas has lost their kingdom in the gambling match which was manipulated by kaurvas and served thirteen years in exile as a punishment. After returning from exile their request for kingdom have been explicitly refused by Kaurvas that has eventually made war inevitable.

Here the dialogue between Arjuna and Lord Sri Krishna who is the guide and charioteer of Arjuna took place before the beginning of the battle and is segregated into two parts the first part lay emphasis on resistance to change and the second part is devoted to managing it through the transcendental knowledge given by Lord to his devotee Arjuna.

PART-1

1. Social Distress

यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभोपहतचेतसः ।
कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रदोहे च पातकम् ॥३७॥
कथं न ज्ञेयमस्माभिः पापादस्मान्निवर्तितुम् ।
कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्विर्जनार्दन ॥३८॥

“O Janardhan, although these men, their heart overtaken by greed, see no fault in killing one’s family or quarreling with friends, why should we who can see the crime in destroying a family, engage in these acts of sin?”

Here in this verse Arjuna the son of Kunti has been challenged by Duryodhana and his party to fight for kingdom or else loose his share. Being a great warrior, he cannot escape to fight battle with them. Arjuna considered that the other party might be blind to the effects of such a challenge and whose evil consequences are apparently visible to Arjuna. Considering the Pros and Cons Arjuna decided not to fight.

Thus, it could be very well established that Arjuna was in a shock and was considered about the ill effects of change because of his narrow vision. Since Arjuna sees only one side of the

coin and hence was inclined towards taking a wrong decision. Similarly, when organisations deal with the sudden demand for change they sometimes lack to envision the future benefits and lay more emphasis on its ill effects that are apparent in terms of disequilibrium, stress, withdrawal from routine work, anxiety, financial burden etc.

2. Avoidance of Conflict and Consequent Change

यदि मामप्रतीकारमशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।
धार्तराष्ट्रा रणे हन्युस्तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥४५॥

“Better for me if the sons of Dhrtarastra, weapons in hand, were to kill me unarmed and unresisting on the battlefield”

The above verse shows a sheer unacceptance for change even at the cost of one's (Arjuna's) life. Here Arjuna said that he is unwilling to fight with his dear ones and even if he is attacked unarmed which is against the war customs he won't fight.

This situation can be related in real life and points out to those organisations who have partially or totally rejected the necessity and pace of change in order to maintain their core values and due to that the leading organisations of the past are failures of today. Examples may include HMT watches which use to be the dominant player in manufacturing mechanical watches and captures around 70 % market during 1980s did not respond to the threat that has been coming from other competitors who started manufacturing quartz analog watches and has lost its share to other players due to poor organisational culture, ignorance of consumer tastes and preferences, slow decision-making etc. Thus other players like Titan, Swatch, Tag Heuer has kept pace with the market requirements and remain competitive.

3. Undue attachment With Status Quo and resultant resistance To Change

न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्या-
द्यच्छोकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।
अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमुद्धं
राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥५॥

“I can find no mean to drive away this grief which is drying up my senses. I will not be able to dispel it even if I win a prosperous, unrivaled kingdom on earth with sovereignty like the demigods in heaven.”

Although Arjuna wanted to follow the path of truth, but he is skeptical in choosing between what is right and what is wrong. He was unable to accept change that he has to fight for the prevalence of truth and establishment of dharma i.e., truthfulness as he was struggling with the artificial sorrow due to family affection. This is the point that he requires the help of a spiritual master,

here Lord Sri Krishna who could guide and show the right path to fulfill his duty in a changed scenario that has put up a question mark on his duty.

Thus, it could be concluded whenever a person is faced with the changing situation in life the first thing that comes to mind is the fear of unknown i.e., one is unaware of the dark future. In other words what will happen in future if i accept this change?

PART-2

In order to vent out the apprehensions arising in Arjunas mind Sri Krishna took the position of a spiritual master and said the following verses to Arjuna

1. Establishing a Change Vision

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥१४॥

“O son of Kunti, the non-permanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of summer and winter seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharta, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.”

Here Arjuna who has lost his decision-making power and became directionless is being reminded by Sri Krishna about proper fulfillment of virtuous duty is the prime responsibility of every creature even in the changed circumstances. In this verse Lord Krishna explains that as a woman performs her duty to cook food even in the hottest part of the summer season (May and June) and a religious person takes bath in the morning at all times of the year even though it is too cold. In the same way Arjuna is supposed to change as environment is asking arjuna to change his attitude and execute his obligation to fight and thereby develop a learning attitude towards the non-permanent appearance of happiness and distress. Since every creature in this world must perform his duty irrespective of the level of difficulty encountered therefore one must learn to tolerate them without being upset. In the same way to fight is the duty of a warrior and therefore one should not deviate from his prescribed duty, no matter whether the person is his relative or friend. Only then one is able to cherish the path of true knowledge and devotion.

Thus, successful organizations are those who fight against all the odds and make themselves flexible enough to change according to the need of the hour and thereby delivering their best to the society and become learning organisations. But to achieve this end organisation should be capable to manage resistance to change which is considered a major barrier if not attended efficiently.

2. Change is the Law of Nature

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
 नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
 तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा-
 न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥२२॥

“As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old ones.”

This particular verse is one of the most famous verses of Gita as it signifies the law of life i.e., change. Here Lord Krishna explains the real truth which highlights the continuity of change even after death. He explains the concept of bodily changes from childhood to boyhood and then from boyhood to adulthood and then to old age. Subsequently soul changes his body and is transferred to another body after death. Thus, a soul is eternal as no one can kill it and is present in every creature along with the Supersoul Sri Krishna, so Arjuna should not mourn to kill his dear ones in the righteous battle. As by doing so he will free them through all bodily miseries of life and they may be promoted to the higher status of life.

This particular verse explains the nature of change and therefore has its practical importance in the field of management. It provides exact grounds to organisations and their member that how one should react when confronted with the unforeseen demand for change which may sometimes involve undesirable changes viz., downsizing, lay-offs, retrenchment, closure of unprofitable units, takeover, divesture, disinvestment of government companies as well as organisational transformation which is considered to be a high magnitude change for example, conversion of government company into public-private-partnership (PPP) model etc. In the same way as per the environmental threat and opportunities one has to change accordingly as is suggested by Lord Krishna in Gita.

3. Learning detachment to the result and performing prescribed duty in the spirit of change

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
 मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥४७॥

“You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.”

Here Sri Krishna reminds Arjuna that he should not run away from his prescribed duty. One should always perform his duties without attaching himself or herself to the results of action.

Since engaging in the act of inaction is also termed as attachment which is considered sinful. Therefore, one should not hide away from the challenges that come in life rather one must perform his best role and leave the result in the hands of almighty. Even if one fails there will be no regret as one has executed his prescribed duty and followed the auspicious path.

Thus the essence of this verse lies in the fact that one should follow the righteous path by being detaching oneself from the result. In the context of an organisation when an organisation introduces change a change model is designed with some predetermined objective one should concentrate more on work and the duty to be performed while keeping an eye on the objective so that one should not deviate from the right path. But as human being one attaches themselves to the result and are more in which may lead to organisational stress as human beings are surrounded by affection, doubts, apprehensions, fear of unknown and instead of performing one's duty, most of the people engage in the process of "inaction" in other words passive resistance. The major reason behind such resistance is that people want to attach themselves to the old tabus and customs, they want to remain in the comfortable zone and maintain the false status quo which is no longer viable and thus become the victim of various kinds of diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, depression, loss of appetite, mental imbalance, insomnia etc due to stress.

In the end it could be very well established that Bhagwad Gita- the song of Lord Sri Krishna could be utilized in this modern era to cope with resistance to change which is like a joke that has become the cause of many undesirable circumstances and a major hurdle in the course of development. By understanding the crux through the various verses of Gita one could realize the necessity of change and how one can overcome resistance to change.

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