

Management Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

Purpose: The Bhagavad Gita is considered an important text within the tradition of Indian knowledge systems, and it provides philosophical insights that can be interpreted in consideration of contemporary management and organisational behaviour. The main implication of the study is to explore management lessons that are included in the Bhagavad Gita to develop ethical decision-making, leadership understanding, emotional intelligence, employee motivation and organisational effectiveness and responsibility. The purpose is to examine the principles of the Gita that will help in contemporary management thinking.

Methods: The qualitative interpretive conceptual design was chosen for the study, and 16 scholarly sources were reviewed, which were published between 2014 and 2026. A set of relevant criteria was used to select sources and analyse them with the help of thematic coding. The comparative analysis produced six themes that related Bhagavad Gita principles to modern leadership, motivation, decision-making and organisational behaviour.

Findings and discussion: The findings of the study show that the Bhagavad Gita provides an understanding of emotional stability, control of mind and senses, practising ethical leadership, and encourages purposeful work with collective welfare. The text helps make decisions during organisational crisis and uncertainty and is helpful in connecting self-leadership with organisational culture, ethics, motivation, and meaning at the workplace.

Summary: The study concludes that the Bhagavad Gita grounded framework for thinking about management by considering beyond performance orientation and economic approaches. The teachings of the text are not just a direct substitute for contemporary management theories, but they can complement philosophical, ethical and human-centred dimensions that are required in modern organisations.

Keywords

Bhagavad Gita, Employee motivation and decision-making process, Ethical leadership, Indian Knowledge Systems, Karma, Yoga.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the Management Theory are developed by taking into consideration concepts such as organising, planning, motivation, control, leadership and performance. However, modern organisations are facing challenges regarding employee stress, leadership uncertainty, and workplace conflict, and there is a need to balance social responsibility and organisational performance [1]. These issues have led these scholars to derive alternative knowledge traditions that can provide a broader understanding of management. Bhagavad Gita is an important source of knowledge, and this text provides instances of the battle of the Mahabharata. The dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna is seen that explains morality, uncertainty, duty, action and self-realisation.

The teachings from the Gita can be interpreted through management and leadership, and scholarly researchers have considered this link to development team dynamics, motivation, servant leadership, integrity, and self-leadership with meaningful purpose that is required in maintaining organisational culture [2]. The relevance of the Gita is pertinent as it emphasises ethical conduct, self-control, responsible action and detachment from excessive concerns with negative outcomes. Contemporary management scholars have taken into consideration the Gita as a source of

value-based leadership and management development. Therefore, the main implication of the research is to explore specific principles such as Nishkama Karma to interpret the understanding of management lessons and their relevance in contemporary organisations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study has stated that the relationship between management and the Bhagwat Gita has increasingly brought about scholarly attention. The authors have argued that the Gita provides an understanding of Management education lessons that concern leadership, motivation, knowledge, action and effective decision-making. Interpretation of the Gita is done by the authors through the use of a hermeneutic perspective, and this has suggested that this teaching is important as it contributes to management education. As the management environment is characterised by organisational complexity and uncertainty, the Gita can embody the philosophy and ethics needed in the modern business environment [3].

Leadership lessons from the Gita are connected with its philosophical insights and managerial practice [4]. The work of the authors highlighted the importance of leadership qualities based on self-development, ethical conduct, and

responsibilities. [5]. that the Gita is inspired by and linked to the leadership model needed in the modern business environment. Gita-linked Leadership Model is developed with motivation, team dynamics, organisational culture, servant leadership, integrity, virtue, meaning and purpose. This is a demonstration of the fact that the Gita, as a text, can be identified as not a simple spiritual document; rather, it is considered a source of leadership concepts that are needed in the modern business environment.

Working on the Bhagavad Gita, have demonstrated that self-mastery, self-knowledge, communication, ethical leadership empowerment, corporate social responsibility and stress management are quintessential [6]. These approaches conceptualise the understanding of effective management strategies with the implications of the development of the artistry of individual managers rather than just focusing on the external organisational systems [7]. It carefully shown that there is a relationship between modern management and Gita Philosophy. The research review has identified that contemporary approaches of motivation, leadership and the decision-making process can be parallelly related to *Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga*. This research review has argued that the Bhagavad Gita is the source of leadership and management principles that are needed in Indian Knowledge Systems [8].

The study has identified a central theme, and it demonstrates that the Gita does not promote achievement without any responsibility. Rather, the Gita text takes into consideration the encouragement of individuals to perform their duties in a conscientious manner, and this helps in avoiding any kind of psychological dependence on the individual outcomes that are necessary in organisational contexts. This kind of principle helps in guiding the management interpretation by focusing on ethics and the quality of managerial actions, but in the meantime, it recognises the organisational outcomes that are impacted by the concepts of karma and dharma. The literature mainly focuses on the Bhagavad Gita as having potential relevance to ethical leadership, values-based management, emotional resilience, employee motivation, and responsible decision-making [9].

The framework relates the main Bhagavad Gita principles with modern management processes and organisational performance. Karma Yoga encourages responsible practice, Dharma teaches responsible leadership, self-mastery enhances emotional intelligence, and reflective judgement encourages the common good. These pathways make up a human-centred approach to management; the arrows are not statements of causality but merely conceptual.

Research Gap

The extant literature develops general connections between the Bhagavad Gita and leadership, motivation, management education and organisational ethics. Much of this literature, however, looks at individual teachings on an individual basis or looks at the general unified similarities with current management theories.

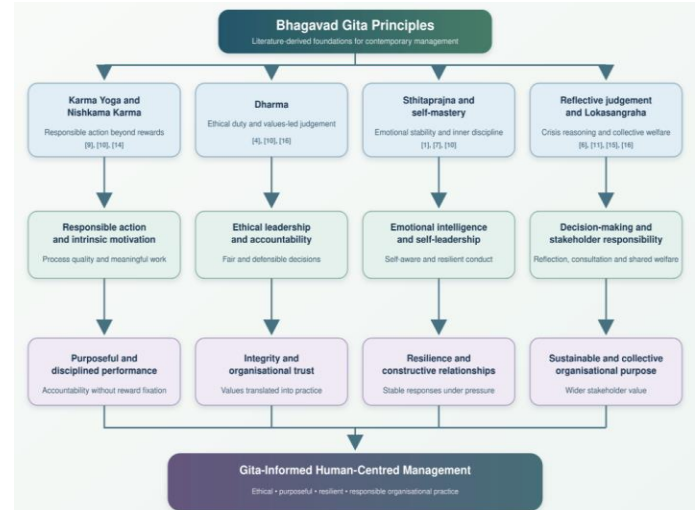


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's Creation

It fails to sufficiently elaborate on how Karma Yoga, Dharma, Sthitaprajna, reflective judgement and Lokasangraha work in combination to form an integrated management structure. It is also not clear how these principles can influence managerial behaviour and organisational performance. More so, prior research is mostly based on conceptual interpretation without a clear demonstration of relevancy of teachings-selection, coding and synthesising. This curtails the traceability of their conclusions and can assume ancient ideas as the precise analogies to current theories. Thus, the current study uses thematic interpretation in an orderly form to relate Gita principles to the idea of responsible action, ethical leadership, emotional self-regulation, motivation, decision-making and the overall welfare of the organisation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative interpretive conceptual design to investigate lessons of management that are related to the Bhagavad Gita. The corpus reviewed included the 16 scholarly articles in the list of references, which were published in the period 2014-2026. Google Scholar and reference-list searches, with the help of combinations of “Bhagavad Gita”, “management”, “leadership”, “Karma Yoga”, “Dharma”, “motivation”, “emotional intelligence” and “decision-making”, were used to identify sources. When books, journal articles, literature reviews and scholarly interpretations in the English language had a direct relationship between Gita principles and management, leadership or organisational behaviour, then the materials were included. There were duplicate, inaccessible and irrelevant materials to the context were left out. The work examined academic management exegeses of the Gita as opposed to verse-by-verse biblical exegeses.

The literature chosen was analysed using manual thematic analysis. Offerings pertinent passages were placed in an extraction matrix noting input, Gita concept, management understanding and suggested organisational implication.

Preliminary codes were discussed on a cross-source basis and clustered into six themes, which were responsible action and duty; ethical leadership; self-mastery and emotional intelligence; performance and motivation; decision-making under uncertainty; and organisational purpose and collective welfare. The themes were cross-referenced with various sources to make sure that it was the literature that they reviewed and not the postulation of one particular author. The comparison was not out of context and did not consider ancient philosophical ideas as the literal translators of modern management theory. Rather, it did assess the ways

these ideas could enhance contemporary leadership and organisational behaviour.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A thematic analysis produced six related management lessons from the literature reviewed. These are only conceptual syntheses and not literal empirical findings or line-by-line analysis of the Bhagavad Gita. The themes were formulated from the sources (directly relevant to management and leadership) and interpreted carefully.

Table 1: Thematic Coding

Literature-based concepts	Initial codes	Analytical category	Final theme
Karma Yoga and Nishkama Karma	Duty, committed action, reduced outcome attachment, accountability	Responsible work behaviour	Responsible Action and Duty
Dharma	Righteous conduct, moral responsibility, fairness, stakeholder consideration	Values-based management	Ethical Leadership
Sthitaprajna and self-mastery	Emotional stability, self-awareness, mind control, resilience	Personal regulation	Self-Mastery and Emotional Intelligence
Purposeful work and non-attachment	Meaningful contribution, self-development, intrinsic reward, sustained effort	Internal work motivation	Performance and Motivation
Arjuna–Krishna dialogue	Uncertainty, reflection, guidance, clarity, informed judgement	Reflective managerial judgement	Decision-Making under Uncertainty
Lokasangraha and exemplary conduct	Collective welfare, role modelling, social responsibility, stakeholder welfare	Organisational responsibility	Organisational Purpose and Collective Welfare

Responsible Action and Duty

Karma Yoga is a management-education literature approach that relates duty, responsible action and disciplined performance [9]. Gita-based leadership reviews also read Nishkama Karma as determined action without over-reliance on either rewards or direct results [10]. This does not imply neglect of targets and accountability in management. Rather, it refocuses on the areas of performance that can be controlled, such as preparation, effort, ethical behaviour, learning and collaboration [11]. This connotation can be used by managers in workplaces that are goal-oriented, and managers are afraid to fail because their judgement is impaired. Managers might focus on the quality of processes and responsible work and still assess the results. But poor performance should not become the order of things, nor should it deprive the employee of their due merit. The theme is thus a supplement to performance management since it balances the accountability of outcome and disciplined and ethically based action.

Ethical Leadership

Studies that relate the Bhagavad Gita to contemporary management views Dharma as moral obligation, due behaviour, and responsibility in relation to self-interest that is not self-focused [4]. Literature on Gita-based principles of leadership relates Dharma with integrity and values-based judgement [10], whereas literature on corporate governance relates managerial accountability with these principles [12]. This theme applies in cases where leaders strike a balance among the welfare of the employees, customer interests, the organisation's performance, the environment and the expectations of the stakeholders. However, the universal rule of managerial rule cannot be applied to Dharma since the conflict of duties and the organisational contexts are different. Leaders still need law, standards of profession, consultation and transparent governance. The contribution of Dharma is thus an ethical perspective through a reflective approach through which managers can analyse the viability and justifiability of other courses of action. It adds to but does not displace modern systems of ethical leadership and governance.

Self-mastery and Emotional Intelligence

Studies of personal management recognise self-knowledge, disciplined behaviour, and self-management as key teachings of the Gita [1]. Gita management models relate personal growth to leadership and business operations [7], whereas the reviews tend to focus on emotional stability and self-control [10]. The combination of these results leads to the conclusion that Sthitaprajna is a conceptual representation of consistent judgement under the influence of emotional turmoil. Managers are often forced into action when facing uncertainty, conflict, and performance pressure; reflection can assist managers to see emotional reactions, not to make decisions rashly, and to express themselves in a constructive manner. But self-control need not imply a forced subjugation of feeling or a personal toughness as a remedy against overworking or unhealthy working environments. Self-mastery needs to go hand in hand with conducive organisational policies. The theme thus connects inner discipline to thoughtful behaviour in the workplace without necessarily portraying Sthitaprajna to the present-day emotional-intelligence theory as the same.

Performance and Motivation

The appropriate reviews relate Karma Yoga, purpose and meaningful action and motivational and organisational behaviour. Studies of the Gita-based corporate development also locate the individual purpose and disciplined performance in broader organisation development [13]. Collectively, these sources indicate that employees can be more committed when they realise the importance of their work and its impact towards achieving organisational goals. Managers might facilitate this with significant roles, independence, rewarding and, growth and intent [8]. However, philosophical calls to duty should not be used to enforce too much work, no pay and no proportional pay [9]. There is still a need to have fair compensation and objective measures based on performance. The contribution based on Gita thus is the introduction of an ethical purpose and meaning to traditional practice of motivation and not elimination of external incentives.

Decision-making Process under Uncertainty

The study of Gita-informed governance looks at its applicability to policymakers and rulers in a crisis situation [6]. Works on leadership crises view the reasoning process described in the Gita as an aid to handling uncertainty [14], whereas the professional-leadership literature relates its teachings to responsible judgement [15]. These sources help to develop the conversation of Arjuna and Krishna as an abstract scheme of reflection in the case of moral dilemmas and emotional distortions. When applying to management, leaders ought to spell out duties, consult on alternatives and relate contentious decisions to values as opposed to commands alone. Nevertheless, modern decisions are also based on the need for reliable information, risk analysis, consultation and legal compliance. Evidence cannot be replaced with philosophical reasoning. The theme is thus the

most effective as a reflective layer of structured decision processes in facilitating a serene exploration of purpose and responsibility and analytic processes in evaluating feasibility and risk.

Organisational Purpose and Collective Welfare

Research associates Gita-informed leadership and managerial example, ethical purpose and organisational practice. Corporate-development and governance studies extrapolate these guidelines to organisational development and virtuous institutional behaviour [7]. These books justify Lokasangraha as a guideline towards action in the best interest of the common good. Organisationally, it means the focus on employees, customers, communities and other stakeholders as opposed to the focus on the individual benefit or shareholder benefit only [16]. Legitimate cultural expectations could also be based on consistent integrity, discipline and respect. But collective welfare is not a formula but an ethical concept to solve the conflicting interests. Clear priorities, discussion and quantifiable responsibility is still needed. The theme thus enlarges the organisational purpose whilst acknowledging the fact that contemporary governance systems need to put philosophical values into organisational action.

CONCLUSION

Modern organisations take into consideration central principles such as Dharma, Karma Yoga, Self-mastery, purposeful action, and emotional stability to develop psychological and ethical dimensions. The six management lessons can be taken from the Bhagavad Gita: intrinsic motivation, emotional regulation, leadership with collective welfare, ethical leadership, responsible action and a reflective decision-making process. The concept of *dharma* forms a strong foundation of value-based leadership and research from Gita-based management; it mainly emphasises humility, fairness, honesty, integrity and responsibility, as these are parameters of managerial effectiveness. Thus, it is seen that the Gita challenges the transactional concept of management; rather, it encourages leaders to consider the moral consequences of the organisational decision-making process.

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