

Karma Yoga as a Contemporary Framework for Management

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Abstract: *A fundamental spiritual concept in the Bhagavad Gita is Karma Yoga, which is described as performing one's obligations with detachment (*niskama karma*). Selfless activity cleanses the mind, promotes spiritual freedom, and unlocks innate knowledge, whereas traditional deeds motivated by selfish wants (*sakama karma*) result in mental bondage. This age-old knowledge provides a revolutionary paradigm for current corporate governance. The main objectives of this study are: 1. To assess the applicability of Karma Yoga to contemporary management techniques. 2. To investigate how these spiritual ideas can be used to create long-lasting business structures. The methodology used in this study is qualitative. It analyses particular *slokas* from the Bhagavad Gita with a strong focus on human experiences and social settings. To derive insightful conclusions for contemporary organisations. According to the study, including karma yoga into management procedures successfully synchronises corporate goals with workers' spiritual development. Duty without expectation develops vital leadership qualities, increases intrinsic motivation, and fosters a harmonious workplace that encourages innovation. Additionally, Karma Yoga's ethical code of conduct offers a strong basis for long-term management. By encouraging environmental and societal sustainability, gender equality, comprehensive ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) approaches, carbon footprint reduction, and a highly ethical corporate culture, it provides practical answers to today's business concerns.*

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Karma Yoga, Niskama Karma, sustainable management, corporate governance, leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gita's teachings on Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action, provide a timeless solution to the conflicts that contemporary managers have between internal well-being, personal ambition, ethical quandaries, and performance pressure. In this ancient literature, Krishna tells Arjuna that although detached, duty-oriented work becomes a path to liberation and higher knowledge, work done with attachment to outcomes confines the individual. Literally defined as the "path of selfless action," Karma Yoga is derived from the profound teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, a book that has influenced human behaviour for more than two millennia. According to recent studies, this age-old concept offers a foundation for improved performance, emotional health, and moral leadership that has been empirically verified (Mulla & Krishnan, 2014; Kumar & Kumar, 2013). Long before management theorists, the foundation of management ideas was established by the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita takes a different stance on management concepts. The Bhagavad Gita sheds light on management strategies that resolve disputes, boost output, inspire motivation, and uphold work ethics. The fundamental level of human thought is where the management concepts of vision, planning, leadership, motivating, obtaining excellence, and achieving goals originate. The Bhagavad Gita offers a comprehensive grasp of man-material existence, management principles, and fundamental management techniques (M.P. Bhattathiri, 2012). With its worldwide appeal, the Bhagavad Gita provides guidance on issues about management in general and business management in particular. Acharya (2015).



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Karma Yoga construct and positive outcomes (Navare & Pandey, 2022) framed Karma Yoga as an indigenous model of workplace spirituality and demonstrated positive connections with mindfulness, self-transcendence, thriving, psychological capital, flourishing, and reduced burnout.

Integrated Karma Yoga Model and Systematic Review (Pallathadka & Roy, 2025). The Integrated Karma Yoga Model (IKYM) was proposed after 47 peer-reviewed studies and classical texts were synthesised. It was concluded that when Karma Yoga is practised, it greatly enhances individual well-being, organisational performance, and societal harmony (Pallathadka 2025).

Workplace spirituality through yoga (Joshi et al., 2025) discovered that Karma Yoga was the best predictor of organisational commitment, work-life balance, and job happiness, accounting for 59% of the variance in outcomes. The study developed a workplace spirituality scale based on four yoga routes.

Holistic management with the Bhagavad Gita (Pithadiya & Swati, 2024) demonstrated how Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and the three gunas may enhance contemporary management with moral leadership, self-control, and a comprehensive Indian ethos through a thorough literature analysis and case studies (Jayantibhai, 2024).

Karma Yoga and employee performance (Adnyana & Kusuma, 2020) revealed that the idea of Karma Yoga and spiritual intelligence are related to employee performance using PLS-SEM on local financial institutions, positioning Karma Yoga as a useful performance that enhances local value (Adnyana, 2020).

Karma Yoga and servant leadership (Wididana, 2020) conceptualise Karma Yoga as a service attitude that underpins servant leadership and is characterised by patience, love, courage, responsibility, diligence, honesty, and loyalty. It was argued that this attitude aids leaders in achieving organisational goals (Wididana 2020).

Spirituality at work and the efficiency of organisations (Sharma & Singh, 2020) supported the notion that spiritually grounded practices (like Karma Yoga) might enhance effectiveness across demographics by providing empirical evidence that workplace spirituality positively connects to organisational effectiveness among academics (Sharma, 2020).

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the significance and practicality of Karma Yoga concepts in management practice, demonstrating how they might direct organisational life and managerial behaviour.
2. To investigate how Karma Yoga might help with corporate culture and environmental, social, and governance aspects of sustainable management.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: KARMA'S TYPOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

4.1 The Metaphysical Basis for Knowledge and Action

The Bhagavad Gita's first six chapters form a fundamental triad: devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jnana), and action (karma). The work presents Karma Yoga, or the yoga of selfless action, as the necessary psychological precondition for Jnana, or self-knowledge, rather than as mutually exclusive. The mind's addiction to material results is the root cause of existential misery and human servitude. By practising Niskama Karma (desireless action), one systematically destroys the ego and purifies the interior consciousness (Antahkarana Shuddhi).

This process is beautifully encapsulated in **BG 2.47**:

*karmany-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi.*

This crucial verse reveals a fundamental practical fact about human agency: a person has complete control over their efforts but no control over the results of those efforts. The Gita makes it clear that a result is the result of a confluence of many factors, such as individual work, external circumstances, systemic luck, other people's efforts, and cosmic destiny (Prarabdha).



Decoupling effort from expectation is Karma Yoga's psychological breakthrough. A person's cognitive bandwidth is totally freed to concentrate on completing the current task when they stop worrying about the unpredictable future, which paradoxically produces better outcomes.

4.2 Analysing the Three Gunas and Doership

The delusion of doership (Kartritva) is a major obstacle to reaching a pure state of Karma Yoga. The self-deluded ego wrongly asserts ownership over activities that are actually solely motivated by Prakriti (nature), functioning through the three cosmic behavioural modes, or Gunas, as BG 3.27 emphasises:

- **Sattva:** Defined by balance, lightness, purity, and constructive development.
- **Rajas:** Distinguished by extreme desire, restlessness, passion, and fruit-driven behaviour.
- Lethargy, ignorance, delusion, and harmful stagnation are traits of **tamas**.

The soul (Atman) falsely believes it is the main player, impairing its judgment through association with the physical body. A person can change from an anxious, stress-driven actor (Sakama) to an objective, self-realised witness (Sakshi) by realising that the body and mind are only tools through which nature plays out. Most importantly, the Bhagavad Gita strongly denounces inaction (Akarma). Arjuna is informed by Shri Krishna that withdrawing from one's structural responsibilities due to fear or uncertainty is a spiritual failure; genuine renunciation (Sannyasa) is the giving up of selfish desire within work rather than the giving up of work itself (BG 6.1).

V. TYPOLOGICAL STRUCTURE: KARMA'S EIGHT DIMENSIONS

Indian philosophy provides a sophisticated categorisation system to comprehend how individual destiny and organisational behaviour are determined by action. Both the moral realm and personal psychology are governed by these eight types of karma:

- 1. Aichhika Karma (Voluntary Action):** Intentional acts motivated by self-awareness and intentional decision-making. This is an example of strategic decision-making in management.
- 2. Anichhika Karma (Involuntary Action):** Unconscious or reflexive behaviour. These become ingrained organisational habits or automated biases with repetition.
- 3. Pareccha Karma (Other-Driven Action):** Behaviour motivated by the wishes, demands, or directives of other parties, similar to an employee just carrying out a supervisor's orders.
- 4. Sanchita Karma (Accumulated Potential):** The enormous storehouse of all previous deeds whose results have not yet developed. In terms of psychology, it creates subconscious impressions (Samskaras) that mould a person's natural tendencies.
- 5. Prarabdha Karma (Allotted Destiny):** The particular part of Sanchita Karma that has matured and needs to be addressed in this incarnation. It appears as unchangeable situations that need to be handled calmly, including market crashes, unexpected windfalls, and abrupt disasters.
- 6. Kriyamana/Agami Karma (Current Action):** Actions carried out with a clear purpose in the present. Future Agami outcomes will directly result from the seeds sown by present Kriyamana decisions.
- 7. Sakama Karma (Attached Action):** Work done only for extrinsic rewards, worldly pleasures, and personal gain. According to the Gita, this is the main cause of corporate burnout and psychological servitude.



8. Niskama Karma (Detached Action): Duty carried out without ego-driven expectations and with complete selflessness. This kind of behaviour is the route to ultimate release and mental cleansing.

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research reveals that **karma yoga** is not just a spiritual concept but a practical framework for modern professional excellence. The following key insights emerged from the study:

6.1 The Foundation: Ego and Attachment.

Sakama Karma (Attached Action): Work done only for extrinsic rewards, worldly pleasures, and personal gain. According to the Gita, this is the main cause of corporate burnout and psychological servitude.

Niskama Karma (Detached Action): Duty carried out without ego-driven expectations and with complete selflessness. This kind of behaviour is the route to ultimate. According to the research, Karma Yoga is a useful framework for contemporary professional achievement as well as a spiritual idea. The study produced the following important findings:

6.2 The Basis: Attachment and Ego

The sacrifice of the ego is at the heart of karma yoga. This entails carrying out one's responsibilities in the workplace with a disciplined mentality, free from the compulsive demand for incentives or self-validation. A person can cultivate a more positive and self-assured relationship with their employment by changing their attention from "what will I get?" to "what must I do?"

6.3 The Balance of "Right Action"

"Right action" is not limited to the workplace. According to the study, a real karma yogi strikes a balance between four essential duties:

Individual Welfare: Sustaining both mental and physical health.

Family: Carefully carrying out household tasks.

Society: Giving back to the neighbourhood.

Environment: Taking care of the natural world.

6.4 Use in Contemporary Business and ESG

Maximising wealth is no longer the only indicator of success in today's market. Karma Yoga offers a sustainable management roadmap, urging companies to implement the following:

- **Social Equity:** Encouraging underprivileged groups and putting gender equality first.
- Actively lowering carbon footprints is an example of environmental stewardship.
- Integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) objectives into a company's core values is known as holistic governance.

6.5 Effects on Culture at Work

When these lessons are put into practice, both the company and the employee benefit. When employees and management stop worrying about the outcome, they report:

- **Reduced Stress:** Having no fear of failing makes the task more enjoyable.
- **Increased Efficiency:** Concentrating on the current work inevitably results in excellence and ongoing improvement.
- **Improved Leadership:** Managers who set a good example and do not have an ego are better at inspiring their staff.



VII. CONCLUSION

According to the study's findings, Karma Yoga is an effective tool for contemporary management. Sakama Karma, or desire-driven action, frequently results in stress and professional "bondage," whereas Niskama Karma, or unselfish action, provides a route to high performance and professional emancipation.

Managers may handle the highs and lows of the economic cycle with composure if they concentrate on the task itself rather than external rewards like power, prestige, or bonuses. This strategy helps employees attain a true work-life balance, develops work ethics, and resolves internal issues in addition to increasing profitability. In the end, the Bhagavad Gita provides a comprehensive management philosophy that synchronises the accomplishment of organisational objectives with the individual path of self-realisation.

Comparing Different Work Styles

We may examine how a manager's performance is affected by the two distinct work styles to better comprehend these findings:

Feature	Sakama Karma (Result-Oriented)	Niskama Karma (Process-Oriented)
Primary Driver	External incentives (titles, bonuses)	Internal responsibility and excellence
Stress Level	High (fear of failing or failing to meet goals)	Low (equanimity in every outcome)
Decision Making	Frequently self-serving or egotistical	Focused on society and objective
Sustainability	Short-term profits	Long-term organisational well-being

Finally, Karma Yoga redefines work as a deliberate process of self-realisation rather than an anxious means to an end. Creating a "good karma" culture is a very effective strategy for modern business. It provides current managers with a timeless foundation for moral, long-lasting, and exceptionally successful leadership, replacing fear with purpose and striking a balance between performance and psychological well-being.

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