

Leadership Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita: A Model for Value-Based Management

Bharathi Karanth

Professor, Poornaprajna Institute of Management, Udupi, Karnataka State, India,
Orcid ID: 0000-0002-4456-7901; E-Mail: bharathikaranth@pim.ac.in

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Bharathi Karanth

Professor, Poornaprajna Institute of Management, Udupi, Karnataka State, India,

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To examine the leadership and management wisdom embedded in the Bhagavad Gita and to develop a conceptual model of value-based management in which ancient Indian philosophical principles are integrated with contemporary leadership theory to cultivate leaders who are simultaneously competent and conscientious.

Methodology: The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, and conceptual research design. Using an interpretive approach and an expanded narrative literature review, insights are drawn from a standard translation of the Bhagavad Gita and from peer-reviewed scholarship on value-based management, Karma-Yoga, ethical leadership, and spiritual leadership. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring constructs which are conceptually mapped onto modern management frameworks to build a theory-driven model.

Analysis: The paper analyses four foundational Gita constructs – Dharma (righteous duty), Nishkama Karma (desireless action), Samatvam (equanimity), and Atma-Jnana (self-knowledge) – and examines how each translates into observable leadership traits. These traits are then aligned with transformational leadership, servant leadership, and mindful leadership to establish points of convergence and the distinctive contributions of the Indian ethos.

Results: A four-layer conceptual model of value-based leadership is proposed, connecting foundational values to leadership traits, leadership styles, and organisational outcomes such as ethical governance, purpose-driven performance, and employee well-being. The study demonstrates that the Gita offers not merely inspirational maxims but an internally consistent leadership philosophy that repositions self-mastery as the origin of leadership rather than a peripheral virtue.

Originality/Value: The paper contributes an integrative, culturally grounded framework that bridges ancient wisdom and modern management, positioning self-awareness as the starting point of leadership and Nishkama Karma as a performance philosophy that reconciles ethics with efficiency.

Type of Paper: Conceptual / Exploratory Analysis.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Value-Based Management, Leadership Ethics, Nishkama Karma, Karma-Yoga, Dharma, Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Mindful Management, Self-Mastery, Indian Ethos.

1. INTRODUCTION :

The increasing complexity of modern organisations, coupled with escalating ethical dilemmas and intense global competition, has necessitated a decisive shift from a narrowly profit-centric conception of management to a broader, value-based understanding of leadership. Corporate scandals, environmental crises, and a persistent erosion of public trust in institutions have exposed the limitations of leadership models grounded solely in efficiency, control, and shareholder maximisation. In this context, ancient philosophical texts have re-emerged as sources of profound and durable insight, offering guidance that remains strikingly relevant to contemporary organisational life. Among these texts, the Bhagavad Gita occupies a distinctive place as a timeless guide to ethical leadership, disciplined decision-making, and self-management (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Mulla et al. (2014). [3]).

The Bhagavad Gita, a seven-hundred-verse dialogue between Lord Krishna and the warrior-prince Arjuna set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, addresses the moral and psychological conflict that

individuals confront when faced with difficult and consequential choices. Although the text is rooted in spiritual philosophy, its teachings extend well beyond the boundaries of religion and offer universal principles that are directly applicable to leadership and management. The central concepts of Dharma (righteous duty), Nishkama Karma (action performed without attachment to its fruits), Samatvam (equanimity), and self-realisation together provide a comprehensive and internally coherent framework for value-based management (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Mulla et al. (2006). [4]).

In the contemporary business environment, leadership is no longer confined to the exercise of authority and control. It now encompasses emotional intelligence, ethical integrity, and purpose-driven action. Established scholarly constructs such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, and mindful management increasingly emphasise inner development, empathy, and moral responsibility – dimensions that are deeply embedded in the teachings of the Gita (Rarick et al. (2009). [2]; Mulla et al. (2012). [5]; Menon et al. (2004). [6]). By aligning individual purpose with collective organisational goals, the Gita advocates a leadership style that balances efficiency with compassion, and accountability with a disciplined detachment from ego-driven outcomes (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]).

This paper aims to explore the leadership lessons derived from the Bhagavad Gita and to analyse their relevance to modern management practice. It seeks to establish a conceptual model for value-based management grounded in the Gita's teachings, showing how these principles can enhance leadership effectiveness, organisational sustainability, and employee well-being. The study further attempts to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary management theory, demonstrating that ethical and spiritual dimensions are not peripheral ornaments but integral determinants of long-term organisational success (Chakraborty (1995). [7]; Parekh (2008). [8]; Mukherjee (2022). [11]). In doing so, the paper responds to a growing recognition among management scholars that leadership development must attend to the character and consciousness of the leader, and not merely to technique.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER :

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

- (1) To identify and examine the key leadership principles embedded in the Bhagavad Gita, including Dharma (duty), Nishkama Karma (selfless action), Samatvam (equanimity), and Atma-Jnana (self-knowledge).
- (2) To analyse the concept of value-based management within the context of Indian philosophical traditions and to distinguish it from purely instrumental conceptions of leadership.
- (3) To establish clear conceptual linkages between the teachings of the Gita and modern leadership theories, including transformational, servant, and mindful leadership.
- (4) To evaluate the role of self-awareness and ethical decision-making in enhancing leadership effectiveness and organisational integrity.
- (5) To develop an integrative conceptual framework for value-based leadership derived from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita.
- (6) To assess the applicability of Gita-based leadership principles in contemporary organisational and managerial contexts, and to identify their implications for management education.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

The scholarship connecting the Bhagavad Gita with leadership and management has matured considerably, moving from broad philosophical interpretation toward empirically grounded and theory-linked studies. This review synthesises the principal streams of verified literature that inform the present study.

The foundational stream comprises authoritative translations and interpretive studies of the text. Radhakrishnan's translation and commentary remains the standard scholarly reference for the Gita in English, presenting it as a philosophy of self-realisation and moral duty (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]). Jeste and Vahia compare the Gita's conceptualisation of wisdom with modern psychological views, establishing that its account of balanced judgment, emotional regulation, and prosocial orientation anticipates contemporary constructs of wisdom (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]). Applied interpretations by practitioners, such as Someswarananda's treatment of management 'the Gita way', translate these philosophical foundations into organisational language (Someswarananda (2005). [12]).

A second stream situates the Gita within the tradition of value-based and Indian-ethos management. Chakraborty's work on Management by Values argues that sustainable organisational effectiveness

depends on aligning managerial practice with the ethical values of Indian philosophy, rather than importing value systems detached from their cultural roots (Chakraborty (1995). [7]). This stream establishes the conceptual space of value-based management within which the present study is located. A third and particularly robust stream concerns Karma-Yoga as a philosophy of work. Mulla and Krishnan conducted a content analysis of the Gita and its commentaries to conceptualise and validate Karma-Yoga as comprising duty-orientation, indifference to rewards, and equanimity (Mulla et al. (2006). [4]). In subsequent work they demonstrate that Karma-Yoga functions as an Indian model of moral development, empirically related to moral sensitivity, motivation, and character (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]), and they position it as a philosophy of moral development and work motivation (Krishnan et al. (2022). [13]). This body of work gives the Gita's teaching on Nishkama Karma a rigorous, measurable foundation.

A fourth stream links the Gita explicitly to modern leadership theories. Menon and Krishnan, and later Mulla and Krishnan, show that transformational leadership enhances followers' Karma-Yoga by strengthening duty-orientation and indifference to rewards, establishing an empirical bridge between the Gita and transformational leadership theory (Menon et al. (2004). [6]; Mulla et al. (2012). [5]). Rarick and Nickerson interpret the Gita as offering humanistic, inclusive, and consciousness-expanding leadership advice that anticipates the Western theory of servant leadership (Rarick et al. (2009). [2]). Radwan analyses unity, duty, and equanimity as leadership and communication themes in the Gita (Radwan (2019). [9]), while Mathur examines the text's message for leaders and managers (Mathur (2018). [10]).

A fifth stream connects the Gita to ethical and stakeholder-oriented management. Parekh argues that the Gita reinforces Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory, grounding the modern stakeholder orientation in the text's account of duty and non-attachment (Parekh (2008). [8]). Contemporary syntheses of leadership lessons from the Gita, such as Mukherjee's review of Simpson's work, confirm the continuing scholarly and practitioner interest in the text as a source of leadership development (Mukherjee (2022). [11]). Table 1 summarises the principal contributions reviewed.

A further and rapidly expanding stream applies the Gita directly to management and leadership practice. Sharma frames the text as a 'Corporate Gita', extracting from its verses a set of themes for management, administration, and leadership (Sharma (1999). [15]). Natesan, Keeffe, and Darling derive lessons from the Gita for the enhancement of global business practices (Natesan et al. (2009). [18]), while Muniapan and Satpathy interpret the concepts of Dharma and Karma as the philosophical basis of an 'inside-out' approach to corporate social responsibility (Muniapan et al. (2013). [16]). Satpathy and Muniapan draw on the Gita's teaching on the knowledge of the 'self' to inform human-capital development (Satpathy et al. (2008). [17]), and more recent work distils the text into practical leadership 'sutras' for contemporary managers (Sethi et al. (2022). [19]; Roka (2006). [30]). Together these studies confirm that the Gita is increasingly treated not as a devotional artefact but as a legitimate source of management theory.

Table 1: Summary of the verified literature on Gita-based leadership and management

S. No.	Thematic Focus	Key Contribution / Insight	Reference
1	Foundational text	Standard translation and commentary; the Gita as self-realisation and moral duty.	Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]
2	Wisdom & psychology	The Gita's conception of wisdom compared with modern psychological views.	Jeste & Vahia (2008). [14]
3	Indian ethos in management	Management by Values grounded in Indian ethical traditions.	Chakraborty (1995). [7]
4	Karma-Yoga as work philosophy	Conceptualisation and validation of Karma-Yoga (duty, indifference to rewards, equanimity).	Mulla & Krishnan (2006). [4]
5	Karma-Yoga & moral development	Karma-Yoga as an Indian model of moral development.	Mulla & Krishnan (2014). [3]

6	Karma-Yoga & motivation	Karma-Yoga as a philosophy of moral development and work motivation.	Krishnan & Mulla (2022). [13]
7	Transformational leadership	Transformational leadership enhances followers' Karma-Yoga.	Menon & Krishnan (2004). [6]; Mulla & Krishnan (2012). [5]
8	Servant leadership & consciousness	The Gita as humanistic, inclusive, servant-leadership advice.	Rarick & Nickerson (2009). [2]
9	Stakeholder theory	The Gita reinforces Freeman's stakeholder theory.	Parekh (2008). [8]
10	Leadership & communication	Unity, duty, and equanimity as leadership themes in the Gita.	Radwan (2019). [9]
11	Leaders & managers	The Gita's message for leaders and managers.	Mathur (2018). [10]
12	Applied leadership lessons	Contemporary synthesis of leadership lessons from the Gita.	Mukherjee (2022). [11]; Someswarananda (2005). [12]

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, and conceptual research design. Its purpose is to interpret philosophical insights from the Bhagavad Gita and to relate them systematically to contemporary management theory. The research is descriptive and integrative in nature, focused on understanding and synthesising existing knowledge rather than generating numerical data. The design is deliberately theory-oriented because the phenomenon under study – the moral and psychological interior of leadership – is best approached through interpretive rather than statistical means.

The study follows an interpretive approach, since it involves the close analysis of a classical philosophical text and of scholarly literature in order to derive meaningful insights into leadership behaviour and management practice. A theory-building orientation is simultaneously employed to develop a conceptual model of value-based leadership grounded in the Gita's teachings. The interpretive lens permits the recovery of meanings, values, and ethical constructs embedded within the primary text, while the theory-building orientation ensures that these constructs are organised into a coherent framework.

The research draws on secondary data. The primary text is the Bhagavad Gita, consulted through Radhakrishnan's standard translation and commentary (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]). Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books addressing value-based management, Karma-Yoga, ethical leadership, and the relationship between the Gita and modern leadership theory. Sources were selected on the basis of their relevance, credibility, verifiability, and contribution to the subject area, and each was traced to an identifiable and retrievable publication.

An expanded narrative literature review method is used to examine and synthesise existing studies. Relevant literature was identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus, and studies were selected according to their thematic relevance to leadership, ethics, and Indian philosophy of work. The review privileges critical analysis and synthesis over systematic filtering, allowing for a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the subject.

The study employs thematic analysis to interpret the material. Themes derived from the Gita – Dharma, Nishkama Karma, equanimity, and self-awareness – were identified alongside themes from the management literature, including value-based management, ethical leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership. These themes were systematically analysed and conceptually mapped to identify relationships and patterns, and on this basis a conceptual framework for value-based leadership was developed.

The scope of the study is confined to leadership insights derived from the Bhagavad Gita and their application to management education and organisational leadership; it emphasises conceptual understanding rather than empirical testing. The study is therefore subject to certain limitations: it is conceptual and qualitative and lacks fresh empirical validation; interpretations of the Gita vary across

scholars and traditions; and the findings are not directly generalisable without further empirical testing. These limitations are addressed in the concluding discussion of future research directions.

5. THE BHAGAVAD GITA: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP :

To appreciate the Gita as a source of leadership wisdom, it is necessary to understand the dramatic and philosophical setting from which its teachings emerge. The text opens at the moment of Arjuna's collapse. Standing between two armies on the field of Kurukshetra, the accomplished warrior is overcome by grief, doubt, and moral paralysis. He can see the consequences of the action expected of him, and he cannot reconcile them with his conscience. This crisis of the decision-maker – a capable leader immobilised at the very point where action is required – is the existential problem that the entire dialogue addresses (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]). It is a situation that any executive who has faced a genuinely difficult and irreversible decision will recognise.

Krishna's response is not a single instruction but a graduated education of the whole person. The Gita develops three complementary paths, or yogas, each of which speaks to a different faculty of the leader. Karma Yoga, the discipline of action, teaches how to act rightly in the world without being enslaved by the anxiety of results. Jnana Yoga, the discipline of knowledge, cultivates the discernment that distinguishes the enduring from the transient. Bhakti Yoga, the discipline of devotion, orients action toward a purpose larger than the self. Read together, these paths describe a leader who acts effectively, thinks clearly, and is anchored in a sense of meaning – a combination that contemporary leadership scholarship continues to seek (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Someswarananda (2005). [12]).

Central to the Gita's psychology is its analysis of the three gunas, or qualities of nature: sattva (clarity, harmony, and balance), rajas (activity, ambition, and restlessness), and tamas (inertia, confusion, and resistance). The text argues that leaders move among these states, and that the quality of their decisions depends upon which quality is dominant at the moment of choice. Leadership development, in this reading, is partly the cultivation of sattva – the settled clarity from which wise and unselfish decisions naturally proceed. This offers a strikingly modern account of the relationship between a leader's inner state and the quality of their judgment (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]).

The Gita also insists that the leader's most important battlefield is internal. The Kurukshetra of the text is frequently interpreted as a metaphor for the field of the human mind, where competing impulses – fear and courage, greed and generosity, ego and duty – contend for control. On this reading, the mastery that leadership requires is first of all self-mastery, and the enemy that must be conquered is not external but the disordered self. This inversion – locating the primary leadership challenge inside the leader – is precisely what distinguishes the Gita's contribution from technique-focused management training, and it grounds the model developed in the remainder of this paper.

The interpretation offered here draws on the principal English renderings and commentaries of the text, including the widely used devotional translation of Prabhupada alongside Radhakrishnan's scholarly edition (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Prabhupada (1986). [29]). Reading these traditions together helps to separate the Gita's durable ethical and psychological insights from the particulars of any single sectarian interpretation.

6. CORE LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA :

Four constructs form the ethical and psychological core of Gita-based leadership. Each is examined below and then summarised in Table 2.

6.1 Dharma – Righteous Duty as the Compass of Leadership:

Dharma is the principle of right action determined by one's role, context, and moral obligation. In the Gita, Krishna counsels Arjuna to act according to his Dharma rather than to abandon his responsibility out of fear or personal preference. For the leader, Dharma functions as an internal compass: it defines what one ought to do independently of what is convenient, profitable, or popular. This is a demanding standard, because it requires the leader to subordinate personal comfort to duty and to accept that right action may carry a cost (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Radwan (2019). [9]).

The managerial significance of Dharma lies in its capacity to supply a stable ethical reference point in situations of ambiguity. Where compliance-based ethics ask only whether an action is permitted, Dharma asks whether it is right. This distinction matters because many of the most consequential leadership decisions occur in the space that rules do not reach. A leader guided by Dharma treats ethical

conduct as a matter of identity rather than of regulation, and therefore behaves consistently whether or not oversight is present. The empirical work on Karma-Yoga captures this as a measurable 'duty-orientation' that predicts moral character (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]).

6.2 Nishkama Karma – Desireless Action as a Performance Philosophy:

Perhaps the Gita's most famous teaching is Nishkama Karma: the injunction to perform one's duty with full commitment while relinquishing attachment to the results. Krishna's instruction – that one has a right to action but not to its fruits – is frequently misunderstood as a counsel of indifference. In fact it is the opposite. It asks for maximum engagement with the work itself and the surrender only of the anxious clinging to outcomes that distorts judgment and exhausts the mind (Mulla et al. (2006). [4]). Understood correctly, Nishkama Karma is a sophisticated performance philosophy. Mulla and Krishnan operationalise it as two complementary dispositions – duty-orientation and indifference to rewards – and demonstrate that these are empirically related to moral sensitivity, motivation, and character (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]; Mulla et al. (2006). [4]). By detaching self-worth from results, Nishkama Karma frees the leader from the paralysing fear of failure and the distorting hunger for reward, both of which corrupt decision-making, and redirects attention from outcomes that cannot be fully controlled to the quality of effort that can. This produces a paradoxical strengthening of performance and reconciles two goals that management literature often treats as being in tension – ethical restraint and high performance – by grounding excellence in disciplined, non-attached action (Krishnan et al. (2022). [13]).

6.3 Samatvam – Equanimity and Emotional Balance:

The Gita defines yoga itself as equanimity – evenness of mind in the face of success and failure, gain and loss, praise and blame. Samatvam is the capacity to remain composed and clear amid the emotional turbulence that accompanies leadership. It is not emotional suppression but emotional regulation: the leader feels, but is not governed by, the fluctuations of circumstance (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]).

For contemporary organisations, equanimity is a decisive competency. Leaders who maintain composure in crisis make better decisions, communicate more credibly, and stabilise the emotional climate of their teams. Equanimity appears as one of the validated dimensions of Karma-Yoga (Mulla et al. (2006). [4]), and the Gita's account of balanced, wise judgment aligns closely with modern psychological conceptions of wisdom and emotional regulation (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]). The Gita's distinctive contribution is to root equanimity not in technique but in a settled understanding of one's purpose and duty, so that composure becomes a natural expression of inner steadiness rather than an effortful performance.

This capacity corresponds closely to the modern construct of emotional intelligence, in which self-regulation and the management of disruptive emotions are treated as core competencies of effective leaders (Goleman (1998). [27]). The Gita's account of Samatvam supplies this competency with a deeper rationale, rooting composure in an understanding of duty and the self rather than in technique alone.

6.4 Atma-Jnana – Self-Knowledge as the Origin of Leadership:

Underlying all the other principles is Atma-Jnana, self-knowledge or self-awareness. The Gita repeatedly returns to the theme that a person who does not understand their own mind, motives, and impulses cannot govern them, and a person who cannot govern themselves cannot reliably lead others. Self-knowledge is therefore not a supplementary virtue but the foundation on which ethical judgment, emotional balance, and disciplined action are built (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]).

This positioning of self-awareness as primary is one of the central arguments of the present paper. In much of the management literature, self-awareness appears as one competency among many. The Gita instead treats it as the source from which the other competencies flow: ethical reasoning presupposes an honest view of one's own motives; equanimity presupposes awareness of one's emotional states; non-attachment presupposes recognition of one's desires and fears. By making self-knowledge the point of departure, the Gita offers a developmental sequence for leadership that begins on the inside and moves outward, consistent with its psychological account of wisdom (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]).

Table 2: Core Gita principles and their leadership translation

S. No.	Gita Principle	Meaning	Leadership Translation
1	Dharma (righteous duty)	Right action according to role, context, and moral obligation.	An internal ethical compass; integrity independent of oversight; duty over convenience.
2	Nishkama Karma (desireless action)	Full commitment to duty with detachment from results.	Objectivity, resilience, freedom from fear of failure; a performance philosophy uniting ethics and excellence.
3	Samatvam (equanimity)	Evenness of mind in success and failure, praise and blame.	Emotional self-regulation; composure in crisis; a stable team climate.
4	Atma-Jnana (self-knowledge)	Awareness and mastery of one's own mind and motives.	The foundation of ethical judgment, balance, and discipline; self-mastery as the origin of leadership.

7. VALUE-BASED MANAGEMENT: CONCEPT AND RELEVANCE :

Value-based management, in the sense intended here, refers to an approach in which the values that guide a leader's decisions are treated as central rather than incidental to organisational performance. It stands in contrast to purely instrumental management, which evaluates decisions only by their measurable results and treats ethical considerations as external constraints. In the value-based view, the character of the leader and the values of the organisation are themselves productive assets, shaping trust, reputation, cohesion, and long-term resilience in ways that instrumental measures fail to capture (Chakraborty (1995). [7]).

The relevance of this approach has grown as the limitations of the instrumental model have become more visible. Organisations that pursue results without reference to values may achieve short-term gains, but they accumulate hidden liabilities: eroded trust, disengaged employees, reputational fragility, and vulnerability to ethical failure. The Gita anticipates this insight by insisting that the quality of action cannot be separated from the quality of the mind that produces it. Sustainable performance, on this reading, is a by-product of right action rather than its rival (Parekh (2008). [8]).

The value-based reading of leadership is reinforced by a broader literature on values, consciousness, and spirituality at work. Pruzan argues that organisations, like individuals, can possess values, virtues, and a form of consciousness that shapes their conduct (Pruzan (2001). [20]), and Krishnakumar and Neck show that attention to spirituality in the workplace is associated with creativity, honesty, and a heightened sense of purpose (Krishnakumar et al. (2002). [25]). These accounts resonate with the Gita's insistence that the inner orientation of the actor conditions the quality of the action, and they locate the present study within a recognised body of scholarship on values-driven management (Sharma (1999). [15]).

The Indian philosophical tradition contributes a distinctive emphasis to value-based management. Where much Western ethical theory frames morality in terms of rules to be obeyed or consequences to be calculated, the Gita frames it in terms of duty to be embodied and a self to be mastered. This shifts the locus of ethics from external compliance to internal character, and from episodic decision to continuous cultivation (Chakraborty (1995). [7]). For management education in particular, this shift implies that developing ethical leaders is less a matter of teaching rules than of cultivating awareness, discipline, and a sense of duty – a formative rather than merely informative task.

8. ALIGNMENT WITH MODERN LEADERSHIP THEORIES :

The value of the Gita for contemporary management is strengthened by its convergence with three influential leadership theories. In each case the Gita both affirms the modern theory and extends it by supplying a deeper philosophical foundation.

8.1 Transformational Leadership:

Transformational leadership describes leaders who inspire and elevate their followers toward a shared vision, stimulating them to transcend self-interest for the sake of a collective purpose. The parallel with Krishna's guidance of Arjuna is direct: Krishna does not command obedience but transforms Arjuna's

understanding, restoring his capacity to act by changing how he sees his situation and himself. Empirical research supports this connection, showing that transformational leadership enhances followers' Karma-Yoga by strengthening their duty-orientation and indifference to rewards (Mulla et al. (2012). [5]; Menon et al. (2004). [6]). The Gita extends the modern theory by insisting that genuine transformation is first internal: a leader can transform others only to the extent that they have transformed themselves, thereby adding an indispensable dimension of inner change to external influence.

These observations align with the established account of transformational leadership, in which leaders raise followers to higher levels of motivation and morality rather than merely exchanging rewards for compliance (Bass et al. (2006). [22]). The Gita's portrayal of Krishna as one who transforms Arjuna's very understanding of duty gives this modern construct an ancient and philosophically developed antecedent (Sethi et al. (2022). [19]).

8.2 Servant Leadership:

Servant leadership reframes the leader as one whose primary motivation is to serve – to attend to the growth, welfare, and needs of others before the assertion of personal power. Rarick and Nickerson argue that the Gita anticipates this Western theory, offering humanistic and inclusive leadership advice and urging managers toward a higher level of consciousness in influencing others (Rarick et al. (2009). [2]). The Gita's distinctive contribution is to ground service not as a chosen leadership style but as a moral obligation embedded in one's Dharma. Service, in this framing, is not a strategy that a leader may adopt or discard; it is an expression of duty, which deepens its ethical seriousness and makes it less susceptible to being reduced to a technique.

This reading is consistent with the foundational literature on servant leadership, which defines the leader first as one who serves the growth and welfare of others (Greenleaf (1977). [21]). Where servant-leadership theory describes the disposition, the Gita supplies its moral ground in the concept of duty, so that service becomes an obligation of Dharma rather than an elective style (Muniapan et al. (2013). [16]).

8.3 Mindful Leadership:

Mindful leadership emphasises present-moment awareness, attentiveness, and the capacity to act with clarity rather than reactivity. This aligns closely with the meditative dimensions of the Gita, which cultivate awareness, presence, and freedom from compulsive reaction, and with its psychological account of balanced, wise judgment (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]). The Gita integrates mindfulness not merely as a stress-reduction technique but as a philosophical state of being rooted in self-realisation. Where much contemporary mindfulness practice is instrumental, the Gita situates awareness within a larger account of purpose and duty, so that mindfulness becomes a way of living rightly rather than only a method of performing better (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]).

The Gita's cultivation of present-moment awareness and non-reactive clarity corresponds closely to contemporary accounts of mindfulness, which link present-centred attention to psychological well-being and balanced judgment (Brown et al. (2003). [23]). Beyond mindfulness, the text speaks to the wider family of value-laden leadership theories. Research on spiritual leadership identifies vision, hope, and altruistic love as sources of intrinsic motivation and organisational commitment (Fry (2003). [24]; Reave (2005). [28]), and work on authentic leadership treats self-awareness and an internalised moral perspective as the foundation of leader credibility (Avolio et al. (2005). [26]). The Gita anticipates each of these emphases, grounding awareness, purpose, and self-knowledge in a single account of the disciplined self, and thereby offering a unifying philosophical basis for theories that modern scholarship has tended to develop separately.

Table 3: Convergence of Gita principles with modern leadership theories

S. No.	Modern Theory	Point of Convergence	Distinctive Extension by the Gita
1	Transformational Leadership	Inspiring followers toward a shared vision (Krishna–Arjuna); enhances Karma-Yoga.	Transformation of others presupposes transformation of the self.

2	Servant Leadership	Humanistic, inclusive service to the growth and welfare of others.	Service reframed as moral duty within Dharma, not a chosen style.
3	Mindful Leadership	Present-moment awareness and non-reactive clarity.	Mindfulness as a philosophical state of self-realisation, not only a technique.

9. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF VALUE-BASED LEADERSHIP :

On the basis of the thematic analysis and the alignment established above, a four-layer conceptual model of value-based leadership is proposed. The model traces a developmental sequence that begins in the interior of the leader and issues in organisational outcomes, thereby making explicit how philosophical principles become practical results.

The first layer consists of foundational values drawn from the Gita: Dharma, Nishkama Karma, and self-awareness. These shape the leader's internal orientation and constitute the moral and psychological ground of everything that follows. The second layer comprises value-based leadership traits that develop from these foundations – ethical decision-making, emotional balance, and self-mastery. The third layer consists of leadership styles through which these traits are expressed: transformational, servant, and mindful leadership, each of which the earlier analysis has connected to the Gita. The fourth layer captures organisational outcomes: ethical governance, purpose-driven performance, and employee well-being.

The logic of the model is cumulative and directional. Foundational values give rise to traits; traits are enacted through styles; styles produce outcomes. Crucially, the sequence begins with self-awareness rather than with technique or behaviour, reflecting the paper's central argument that leadership originates in self-mastery. The model thereby serves as a bridge between ancient philosophical wisdom and modern management practice, offering a structure that is at once faithful to the Gita and legible in the vocabulary of contemporary leadership studies. Table 4 presents the model in summary form.

Table 4: Four-layer conceptual model of value-based leadership inspired by the Bhagavad Gita

Layer	Component	Description
1	Foundational Values	Dharma, Nishkama Karma, and self-awareness shape the leader's internal moral and psychological orientation.
2	Leadership Traits	Ethical decision-making, emotional balance (equanimity), and self-mastery develop from the foundational values.
3	Leadership Styles	Transformational, servant, and mindful leadership express the traits in observable leadership behaviour.
4	Organisational Outcomes	Ethical governance, purpose-driven performance, and employee well-being result from value-based leadership.

10. DISCUSSION :

The proposed model integrates ancient philosophical insight with contemporary leadership theory. This section elaborates each layer of the model, establishes connections with the verified literature, and highlights the study's distinctive contributions.

10.1 The Foundational Layer:

At the core of the model lie Dharma, Nishkama Karma, and self-awareness, which together form the ethical and psychological foundation of leadership. Dharma introduces an intrinsic moral compass, making ethical behaviour a matter of identity rather than of external regulation (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]; Radwan (2019). [9]). Nishkama Karma promotes process-oriented performance and reduces ego-driven decision-making, and its validated dimensions of duty-orientation and indifference to rewards are empirically linked to moral development (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]; Mulla et al. (2006). [4]). Self-awareness is positioned as the starting point of value-based leadership, influencing both ethical

reasoning and behavioural consistency, consistent with the Gita's psychological account of wisdom (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Jeste et al. (2008). [14]). Unlike accounts that treat these elements in isolation, the model shows how they reinforce one another.

10.2 The Development of Leadership Traits:

The second layer explains how the foundational principles translate into leadership traits. Ethical decision-making in the Gita is principle-driven rather than situational, resolving dilemmas by alignment with Dharma and thereby offering a normative alternative to consequence-based frameworks (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]). Equanimity is closely linked to emotional regulation and wisdom, equipping leaders to remain composed amid uncertainty (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]). Duty-orientation and indifference to rewards reduce susceptibility to external pressure and support rational decision-making (Mulla et al. (2006). [4]). The integration of these traits forms a holistic leadership personality that combines cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions – an area in which the model demonstrates originality by synthesising multiple domains into a unified whole.

10.3 Alignment with Modern Leadership Theories:

The model establishes strong conceptual linkages between Gita-based principles and transformational, servant, and mindful leadership (Rarick et al. (2009). [2]; Mulla et al. (2012). [5]; Radwan (2019). [9]). In each case the Gita both affirms and extends the modern theory: transformational leadership gains an emphasis on inner change and is empirically shown to enhance Karma-Yoga (Mulla et al. (2012). [5]; Menon et al. (2004). [6]); servant leadership gains an ethical grounding in duty (Rarick et al. (2009). [2]); and mindful leadership gains a philosophical foundation in self-realisation (Jeste et al. (2008). [14]). These extensions are not merely additive but corrective, addressing a tendency in contemporary practice to treat leadership virtues as detachable techniques rather than as expressions of character.

10.4 Leadership Outcomes:

The final layer highlights outcomes: ethical governance, purpose-driven performance, and employee well-being. The Gita's emphasis on Dharma and its reinforcement of stakeholder responsibility ensure that decisions are ethically grounded and attentive to a broad constituency (Parekh (2008). [8]). Purpose-driven performance emerges from Nishkama Karma, where leaders pursue excellence without anxious attachment to results, reducing stress and enhancing productivity (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]). Employee well-being follows from the resilience and empathy of leaders formed by Gita principles, who create supportive environments consistent with the contemporary emphasis on psychological well-being (Mukherjee (2022). [11]).

10.5 Original Contribution of the Study:

The study makes several original contributions. It integrates Gita philosophy with modern leadership theories into a single conceptual model; it positions self-awareness as the foundation of leadership rather than a supplementary trait; it draws on the validated construct of Karma-Yoga to present Nishkama Karma as a performance philosophy that bridges ethics and efficiency (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]; Mulla et al. (2006). [4]); and it redefines leadership as a balance between inner transformation and external effectiveness. Unlike accounts that examine these elements in isolation, the paper offers a holistic and integrative framework for value-based management (Chakraborty (1995). [7]).

11. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS :

11.1 Theoretical Implications:

The study extends the discourse on value-based management by integrating Indian philosophical perspectives (Chakraborty (1995). [7]); it provides a conceptual bridge between the Gita and leadership theory, demonstrating that ethical and spiritual dimensions are central rather than peripheral to leadership effectiveness (Parekh (2008). [8]; Mukherjee (2022). [11]); and it introduces a holistic leadership framework that combines cognitive, emotional, and ethical components. In doing so it consolidates a body of verified scholarship that positions the Bhagavad Gita as a legitimate theoretical foundation – supported by validated constructs such as Karma-Yoga – rather than merely a cultural or devotional text (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]; Mulla et al. (2006). [4]).

11.2 Managerial Implications:

The findings carry practical relevance for organisations and for management education. Leaders can adopt Gita-based principles to strengthen ethical decision-making and stakeholder-oriented accountability (Parekh (2008). [8]). The emphasis on Nishkama Karma can help organisations cultivate a process-oriented and stress-resilient work culture (Mulla et al. (2006). [4]). Incorporating self-awareness and emotional balance into leadership-development programmes can improve leadership effectiveness and employee relations (Mulla et al. (2014). [3]). Management institutions can integrate Gita-based teachings into their curricula to develop responsible, empathetic, and purpose-driven leaders (Chakraborty (1995). [7]). Taken together, these implications suggest that organisations embracing value-based leadership are better positioned to achieve sustainable growth, employee well-being, and long-term success.

12. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS :

Although the present study is conceptual, it opens several avenues for future inquiry:

- (1) Empirical validation: future studies could test the proposed model using quantitative methods and statistical tools such as structural equation modelling, building on existing validated instruments for Karma-Yoga.
- (2) Scale development: further measurement instruments could be refined for constructs such as Dharma-based leadership and equanimity, extending the established Karma-Yoga scales.
- (3) Cross-cultural studies: comparative research between Eastern and Western leadership models could examine the global applicability of Gita-based principles.
- (4) Sector-specific applications: the model could be examined within particular industries such as healthcare, education, and the corporate sector.
- (5) Experimental and longitudinal studies: the long-term impact of value-based leadership-training programmes inspired by the Gita could be assessed over time.

13. CONCLUSION :

This study set out to explore the leadership wisdom embedded in the Bhagavad Gita and its relevance to contemporary value-based management. Through a comprehensive conceptual analysis, the paper has demonstrated that the Gita offers a profound and holistic framework for leadership that integrates ethical responsibility, self-awareness, and purpose-driven action (Radhakrishnan (1948). [1]; Mulla et al. (2014). [3]). The teachings of Dharma, Nishkama Karma, and equanimity provide durable guidance for leaders navigating the complexities of the modern organisational environment.

The proposed conceptual model establishes that effective leadership is not merely a function of skills and competencies but is deeply rooted in inner transformation and moral clarity. By aligning individual purpose with organisational goals, the Gita advocates a leadership approach that balances performance with ethics and ambition with responsibility. The strong convergence identified between Gita-based principles and modern leadership theories – transformational, servant, and mindful leadership – further reinforces the universal applicability of these ancient insights (Rarick et al. (2009). [2]; Mulla et al. (2012). [5]; Radwan (2019). [9]).

In an era marked by ethical challenges, uncertainty, and rapid change, the Bhagavad Gita offers not merely philosophical inspiration but a practical roadmap for leadership excellence. By integrating timeless wisdom with modern management practice, leaders can cultivate not only organisational success but also personal fulfilment and societal well-being. The study ultimately underscores that true leadership lies in mastering oneself before leading others – a principle that remains as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago.

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