

# Revisiting the Origins of Workplace Spirituality: An Indian Philosophical Perspective on Karma Yoga, Meaningful Work, and Human Development

Sudhakar Dwivedi<sup>1\*</sup>, K. K. Choudhary<sup>2</sup>, Pooja Jain<sup>3</sup>, SPS Chauhan<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract:** The construct of workplace spirituality has developed into a well-established concept in organisational behaviour, leadership, and human resource management studies over the last three decades, with scholars focusing on themes such as meaningful work, connectedness, value congruence, and inner life. While the existing literature provides ample information regarding what workplace spirituality is and what outcomes it brings about, there is a shortage of theories that explain how workplace spirituality may be cultivated in practitioners. The current paper contends that while the developmental process that is currently absent from organisational Western scholarship was developed by ancient Indian philosophers many centuries ago, through the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and specifically through the teachings of the doctrine of Karma Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita, along with the concepts of Svadharma, Nishkama Karma, Lokasaṃgraha, Samatvam, and Dharma. Relying on the Bhagavad Gita, major Upanishads, Yoga Sutras of Patañjali, and writings of Swami Vivekananda, the paper outlines the developmental process that includes disciplined and non-attached actions leading to Citta Shuddhi (mental purification), which in turn leads to workplace spirituality, spiritual intelligence, awareness expansion, ethical leadership, and self-realisation. Furthermore, the paper will compare the developed Indian framework with prevalent Western frameworks such as spiritual leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and positive psychology, developing a unified conceptual model that regards workplace spirituality as not an organisational state but a developmental stage within a continuum.

**Keywords:** workplace spirituality; Karma Yoga; Indian philosophy; Bhagavad Gita; spiritual intelligence; ethical leadership; self-realization

## INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, workplace spirituality has become a key area of investigation in organisational behaviour, leadership, and human resource management. As researchers have begun to understand, the economic motivation of employees is not all there is; employees also desire meaningful work, moral organisations, authentic interpersonal relationships, and personal development (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Fry, 2003; Milliman et al., 2003). Although the construct is of fairly recent origin, it gained traction in the 1990s when scholars and practitioners started to critically review instrumental views of the worker and consider the meaning of engaging the "whole person" rather than merely their work.

While the concept of workplace spirituality is itself relatively new, this paper contends that its principles have been expounded much earlier, in the classical Indian philosophical literature, namely the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras, and Swami Vivekananda's writings. The concepts of Karma Yoga, Svadharma (one's own duty), Nishkama Karma (work for its own sake), Lokasaṃgraha (world welfare), Samatvam (equanimity), and Dharma (righteousness) prefigure in their totality many dimensions of the current notion of workplace spirituality (Radhakrishnan, 1993; Vivekananda, 1989). While the organisational literature tends to define the construct of workplace spirituality and enumerate its effects, Indian philosophy tells us how it arises out of ethical and disciplined action.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore whether the principles of workplace spirituality have been articulated in the classical Indian philosophical tradition before the appearance of the organisational construct, and to advance the idea of Karma Yoga as the developmental foundation of workplace spirituality and human potentials which derive thereof. In pursuit of this aim, the paper traces the evolution of the organisational field of workplace spirituality, explores the concepts of the same field in Indian philosophical tradition (the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras, and the writings of Swami Vivekananda),

compares the Western and Indian views, formulates the developmental foundation of workplace spirituality in the notion of Karma Yoga, and presents an integrative conceptual framework which connects action and self-realization.

Three features can be identified in the paper's significance. First, it re-evaluates the concept of workplace spirituality historically, tracing its conceptual origins back to the tradition which predates modern organisational scholarship by over two thousand years. Second, it provides a developmental view of the concept, based on the notion of Karma Yoga. Finally, it combines organisational psychology, leadership studies, and Indian philosophy into one conceptual framework, thus providing a truly interdisciplinary line of empirical inquiry.

As a methodological point, the paper should be considered as a conceptual and interpretive synthesis and not an empirical study. In doing so, it makes use of primary Indian philosophical texts – namely, the Bhagavad Gita, the major Upanishads, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali – supplemented with their scholarly translations and commentary, along with the explanatory writings of Swami Vivekananda, the only modern interpreter who succeeded in making these classical ideas understandable in the organisational context. These sources are read together with the current Western literature on workplace spirituality, spiritual leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and positive psychology, using a comparative-hermeneutical method which allows finding the points of conceptual convergence and divergence in both traditions and, based on this comparative reading, an original and testable developmental model. This methodology belongs to the well-established tradition of cross-cultural organisational scholarship which employs classical philosophical materials in theory building rather than as mere context (Morgan, 2007), but remains sensitive to the risk of reading anachronistically into these texts, which were written for very different purposes than contemporary management theory.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents the evolution of workplace spirituality as an area of organisational scholarship and synthesises the major definitions of the construct. Section 3 explores the philosophical roots of Karma Yoga, Svadharma, Nishkama Karma, Samatvam, Lokasamgraha, and Dharma as articulated in the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras, and the writings of Swami Vivekananda. Section 4 formulates the theoretical core of the paper, which is the idea that Karma Yoga is the developmental process underlying workplace spirituality, and proposes the specific developmental sequence leading from ethical action to self-realisation. Section 5 systematically compares this Indian framework with the principal Western theories outlined in Section 2. Section 6 integrates the preceding analysis into one conceptual framework, and Section 7 restates the main theoretical idea of the paper as a definition of workplace spirituality in terms of Karma Yoga. Sections 8 and 9 deal with the implications of the framework for organisational theory and practice and the limitations of the approach, and Section 10 concludes.

## **2. Workplace Spirituality in Contemporary Organisational Scholarship**

Modern workplace spirituality has largely evolved as a response to the increase in stress levels in the modern workplace environment, the prevalence of unethical behaviours within organisations, and the realisation that people pursue meaning and purpose and desire relationships and not just money in the workplace environment (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Mitroff and Denton (1999) have provided one of the earliest empirical definitions of workplace spirituality, where they define it as the search of an individual for his ultimate purpose of life, building strong relationships with his co-workers and those with whom he interacts in the workplace, and making his personal core beliefs consistent with the values of the organisation. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) have presented another empirical definition of workplace spirituality wherein the authors have argued that individuals have an inner life that gets sustained by doing meaningful work and interacting with the community. Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson (2003) have defined workplace spirituality in much the same way by identifying meaningful work, community and alignment of personal and organisational values as three defining elements of the construct.

Other writers have explored the concept of workplace spirituality from alternative viewpoints. Fry (2003), from the perspective of organisational leadership, has defined workplace spirituality as the values, attitudes, and behaviours that motivate people intrinsically because of calling and membership in the group. Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) have presented a values-based model according to which an organisational culture promotes transcendence through work and connectedness, leading to completeness and joy. Marques (2005) has emphasised trust, honesty, openness, and mutual respect as the basis of an ethical workplace,

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whereas Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2006) have characterised 'spirit at work' in terms of engagement in work, community, spiritual connectedness and peak experiences. Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) have identified purpose, meaning, and interconnectedness as central components of workplace spirituality in their attempt to define the construct.

The definitions presented above are different from each other in terms of focus but have converged in identifying certain central aspects such as meaningful work, community, values alignment, inner life, ethical behaviour, authenticity and self-transcendence as constituent elements of workplace spirituality. Empirical research has found workplace spirituality to be related positively to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, engagement, ethical decision making, creativity, resilience, psychological well-being and organisational citizenship behaviour (Milliman et al., 2003; Fry, 2003; Pawar, 2009).

The convergence of the definitions of workplace spirituality has, on its part, led to the convergence in measurement of workplace spirituality. Milliman et al. (2003) have operationalised workplace spirituality based on meaningful work, sense of community and alignment with organisational values, whereas Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) scale too captures inner life, meaningful work and community as independent yet correlated aspects. The measures have helped in moving from purely definitional discussions to empirical tests of the construct's effects on various organisational outcomes but at the same time have resulted in viewing workplace spirituality as a measurable state rather than as a developmental process.

The appeal of workplace spirituality is also linked with the growing interest in meaning and flourishing within contemporary psychology. Frankl's (1963) logotherapy, which was based on his clinical observation of human need for meaning even under adverse circumstances, anticipated many of the contemporary interests in meaningful work. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) discussion of the state of flow, which is a complete immersion in meaningful work, provides a psychological understanding of the kind of work identified by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) and Milliman et al. (2003) as a central aspect of workplace spirituality. Koenig's (2012) survey of the relationship between religion, spirituality and health links workplace spirituality with a large body of empirical literature showing the positive effect of spiritual engagement on psychological and even physical well-being.

Despite its theoretical richness, however, this literature suffers from two related limitations. In the first place, the literature usually traces workplace spirituality back to the organisational scholarship of the 1990s and later without sustained examination of the older philosophical traditions that have articulated closely related concepts. In the second place, and more relevant to this paper, the literature usually talks about workplace spirituality as a state or an experience rather than developing an explanation of how an employee experiences it. Researchers have been somewhat more successful in cataloguing what workplace spirituality is like and what it brings about but less successful in explaining how an employee experiences workplace spirituality in the first place. This is the gap that classical Indian philosophy can help us fill, because a lot of the qualities that are currently associated with workplace spirituality such as meaningful duty engagement, connectedness, ethical alignment, and self-transcendence correspond to ancient Indian concepts such as Svadharma, Karma Yoga, Nishkama Karma, Dharma, Lokasamgraha and Samatvam, which Indian philosophy explains as products of disciplined ethical practice rather than mere unexplained states.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that the historical claim made in this paper about the articulation of principles of workplace spirituality by classical Indian philosophy is neither without precedent nor free of controversy. Scholars operating in the interface of comparative philosophy and management have periodically argued that non-Western intellectual traditions have anticipated and, in some ways, surpassed the conceptual tools of modern Western social science (Morgan, 2007). Such an approach, however, calls for avoiding the methodological pitfall of both uncritical assimilation of ancient texts as if they prefigured twentieth-century organisational concepts and uncritical dismissal of such comparisons as merely rhetorical. The methodological approach taken in this paper is that the correspondence between Indian philosophical concepts and contemporary organisational constructs can serve as a basis for theory development exactly because it is close and the older tradition can provide an explanatory resource that is lacking in the latter literature.

### 3. Philosophical Foundations in Indian Thought

Well before the emergence of organisational psychology as a field, the tradition of Indian philosophical literature was rich in terminology describing the relationships between work, ethics, and inner growth. The Bhagavad Gita, written as a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna, focuses on the problem of how one is to act in the world without being obsessed with the anxiety over results.

The core of the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita is contained in the doctrine of Nishkama Karma, or action carried out without attachment to results. As it is written in one of the most frequently quoted lines from the text: "Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits" (Bhagavad Gita, 2.47). The idea embodied in this line transforms work from a transaction carried out with the prospect of some return into a discipline, performed just for its own sake – long before the advent of interest in intrinsic motivation and meaningful work (Deci & Ryan, 2000) in contemporary organisations.

The doctrine of Nishkama Karma presupposes the idea of Svadharma, one's own duty determined by one's natural endowment and position in life. According to the Bhagavad Gita, it is better to do one's own duty poorly rather than somebody else's duty well, an interpretation of which is usually reduced to the defense of the established social hierarchy, but which may also be interpreted, using an organizational perspective, as an argument in favor of authenticity of vocation: meaningful work comes as a result of harmony between one's occupation and one's abilities and characteristics, rather than imposition from the outside. Dharma in general is righteous conduct, an ethical obligation that ties the individuals to one another and to the broader social order, thus functioning in the Bhagavad Gita as the horizon for Karma Yoga.

Another key idea in the Bhagavad Gita is Samatvam, or evenness of mind when facing successes and failures, pleasures and pains, honour and dishonour. In the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga is identified with Samatvam: "Yoga is evenness of mind" (Bhagavad Gita, 2.48). Samatvam describes the psychological state that allows the performer to act skillfully and ethically regardless of external results, which is obviously relevant to modern organisational interests in resilience and stress management. Another important idea is Lokasaṃgraha, or "the welfare of the world," or "holding people together": the Gita argues that even the enlightened people work for the sake of maintaining and preserving the welfare of the community, and not out of necessity. Thus, Lokasaṃgraha anticipates, in a broader context, the modern organisational interest in service, welfare of stakeholders, and social responsibility.

It is worth noting the narrative context in which the teaching on Karma Yoga is provided, since this context is also organizationally relevant. Arjuna, the main character of the Gita, is not a renunciate, thinking of withdrawal from the world, but a leader, ready to act, paralysed by conflicting obligations, anticipatory grief, and the uncertainty of consequences of one's actions, a situation not unfamiliar to modern leaders facing decisions in the conditions of ethical ambiguity. Krishna addresses Arjuna as a leader responsible for the welfare of other people, and the doctrine of Nishkama Karma is offered not as a metaphysical claim but as a tool of decisive and ethical action in these very conditions. Under this perspective, the Bhagavad Gita turns not into a book on comparative religion, but into an extended case of a study in leadership in uncertainty, whose core recommendation is to act according to one's duty, to detach oneself from the results of action, and to maintain Samatvam – and all these three ideas anticipate by thousands of years the contemporary organizational interest in decision-making in stressful conditions and the psychological resources that support ethical judgment in these conditions.

The Upanishads, written even earlier than the Bhagavad Gita, provide the metaphysical basis for this ethical approach. Their core idea is the relationship between the individual self (Atman) and the universal ground of being (Brahman), and the identification of the two. This metaphysics is relevant to the current argument, since it provides a transcendental basis for Lokasaṃgraha and interconnectedness: if the deepest self of the individual does not differ from the deepest self of the other person, then serving others is not an act of self-sacrifice in an ordinary sense, but the extension of self-interest. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali provide the psychology of mental purification, defining yoga as "cessation of the fluctuations of the mind" (Yoga Sutras, 1.2) and describing a graded practice of ethical restriction (yama), observance (niyama), and meditative absorption through which this cessation and clarity of mind that results from it is achieved. Such a graded practice is a plausible psychological mechanism for the phenomenon described in this paper as Citta Shuddhi, the process of purification of mind, which is an intermediary between ethical actions and higher awareness.

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The Yoga Sutras develop the above-mentioned psychology of purification through the eightfold path of yoga (Aṣṭāṅga Yoga), starting with the ethical restrictions of yama, such as non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-possessiveness, and observances of niyama, such as purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and surrender, and continuing with posture, breath regulation, and gradually becoming more subtle stages of concentration and absorption. What is important for the current argument is not the entire technical apparatus of classical yoga practice, the major part of which is irrelevant for organizational application, but the logic of the practice: ethical restriction and observance are necessary preconditions of mental clarity, rather than optional virtues imposed upon some other cognitive or perceptual process. This logic of ethics first and clarity of mind second is exactly the logic of Citta Shuddhi that this paper ascribes to it, and this is the difference between the Indian approach and many Western approaches to mindfulness and attention, which were used in the organisational context in recent decades mostly as stress reduction and focus techniques, without their ethical foundation.

The Upanishadic idea of the identity of Atman and Brahman also influences the way Dharma should be understood. Dharma is often translated as "duty," but this term implies the wider meaning of cosmic and social order, the right relationships that are necessary for the existence of an individual and the community to which the individual belongs. Acting according to one's Dharma is, thus, not obedience to the rule from the outside but participation in an order that is continuous with the individual's deepest nature. This has direct influence on the idea of authenticity that appears throughout the modern literature on meaningful work and authentic leadership: while Western interpretations of authenticity emphasise self-expression and congruence between inner states and actions (George, 2003), Indian interpretation is based on the alignment with a cosmic and ethical order that transcends individual preferences, and this has direct influence on the idea of "meaningful work."

Swami Vivekananda, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, did more than any other modern interpreter in making Karma Yoga comprehensible to the global, and specifically working, audience. In his lectures on Karma Yoga, later compiled and published in his collected works, he insisted that work, performed with the right attitude, is a direct way to spiritual freedom, no less legitimate than renunciation and meditation. As one of the characteristic formulations goes: "the whole secret of existence is to have no fear," an idea that immediately becomes linked with the fearlessness and lack of attachment to results that allows work to be done perfectly (Vivekananda, 1989). Vivekananda's major innovation is the democratisation of the discipline: Karma Yoga, according to him, does not require the withdrawal from ordinary economic and social life, but only the transformation of the way in which this life is conducted. He was quite clear that the labourer who works without selfish motives reaches the same spiritual result as the ascetic who renounced the world completely. Thus, Karma Yoga becomes a discipline practised in ordinary working life, not in a monastery, and it is this understanding of Karma Yoga that makes it a natural candidate for the development of the theory of workplace spirituality, distinguishing Vivekananda's synthesis from the otherworldly readings of Indian asceticism which might appear irrelevant for the modern organisational context.

All these four texts, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras, and the synthesis of Swami Vivekananda, provide the vocabulary for the model of development proposed below: Nishkama Karma and Svadharma as the starting point in behavior; Chitta Shuddhi, informed by the Yoga Sutras, as the psychological mechanism of purification; Samatvam as the intermediate state of inner stability; Lokasamgraha, grounded in Upanishadic non-duality, as the motive for engagement with the world; and Karma Yoga of Vivekananda as the connection between this ancient vocabulary and the demands of modern working life.

#### 4. Karma Yoga as the Developmental Basis of Workplace Spirituality

Karma Yoga is proposed to provide the mechanism for development that allows cultivating workplace spirituality, thus directly filling the identified gap from Section 2. While Western organisational literature provides explanations about what workplace spirituality is, Indian philosophy explains the process through which it is developed via disciplined actions and transformations of the individual consciousness.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, Karma Yoga is not a mere technique but a holistic approach including ethical actions, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and spiritual development. Actions performed without desire for personal benefit become, according to Karma Yoga, a tool for character formation rather than just the means to achieve external rewards: "Let right deeds be thy motive, not the fruit which comes from them" (Bhagavad Gita, 2.47). This paper proposes the sequence through which Karma Yoga develops: Karma is followed by Citta Śuddhi (purification of mind); Citta Śuddhi brings reduced ego and desire; reduced ego and desire result in Samatvam (inner stability); Samatvam leads to self-awareness expansion; self-awareness matures into Atma-Jñāna (spiritual wisdom); and finally, spiritual wisdom leads to Moksha (self-realisation).

Chitta Shuddhi (purification of mind) is a key element in the above-described sequence. It describes the decrease of selfish desires and reactive emotions resulting from disciplined selfless actions. As desire and ego-attachment decrease, one's ethical evaluation becomes sharper, emotional regulation becomes better, and skills like compassion and self-control become stronger correspondingly. In organisational terms, disciplined engagement in selfless actions and meaningful work can be seen as the process through which the practitioner's motivational structure becomes transformed from purely self-interested calculations to an ethical orientation, which aligns with the literature on intrinsic motivation and flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Seligman, 2011).

Extending the sequence described above, the paper also proposes the following development path specifically designed for organisational purposes: duty-based ethical performance produces selfless motivation; selfless motivation produces inner purification; inner purification produces workplace spirituality; workplace spirituality, when practised consistently, develops spiritual intelligence; spiritual intelligence expands into self-awareness; and finally, expanded self-awareness expresses itself in actions as self-realisation.

The above model does not contradict existing organisational theories but complements them with a developmental aspect. It complements Self-Determination Theory's concept of autonomous motivation, Positive Psychology's concept of flourishing, and Spiritual Leadership Theory's concepts of vision, hope, and altruistic love by providing a developmental framework through which intrinsic motivation, flourishing, and ethical leadership are achieved rather than treated as a fixed trait or an endowment.

This model sheds light on another frequent confusion regarding the causality in the existing literature. When most of the empirical studies treat workplace spirituality as an independent variable predicting the outcomes such as engagement, commitment, and citizenship behaviour (Milliman et al., 2003; Fry, 2003), the Karma Yoga framework implies that workplace spirituality is itself an outcome, the product of non-attached ethical actions. Many variables used as the consequences of workplace spirituality in the organisational literature – engagement, resilience, ethical decision making, for example – might better be considered co-occurring markers of the same developmental process rather than effects linearly resulting from workplace spirituality. This reframing does not negate the empirical associations found in the existing literature; instead, it proposes that these associations are best explained by the same developmental antecedent, sustained Karma Yoga practice, rather than by considering workplace spirituality as an independent variable.

The theoretical value of the above reframing is precisely in this transition from descriptive statements to explanation. Instead of seeing workplace spirituality as a condition that exists or does not exist, the Karma Yoga framework sees it as an intermediate stage of a longer developmental process with identifiable behavioural antecedents (disciplined, non-attached actions) and identifiable downstream consequences (spiritual intelligence, expanded awareness, ethical leadership). This means that for the organisation's workplace, spirituality cannot be simply installed through policies; instead, it must be cultivated through sustainable practices, ethical decision-making, meaningful task design, opportunities for reflective practice, service-oriented leadership, continuous self-development, and social responsibility.

## 5. Comparative Analysis: Western Organisational Theories and Indian Philosophical Perspectives

Comparing contemporary organisational theory and classical Indian philosophy highlights commonality of issues addressed by the two traditions as well as their specific contributions. As discussed in Section 2, workplace spirituality focuses on the meaningfulness of work, social community and value congruence; Karma Yoga explains how all those qualities develop in virtue of ethical behaviour without desire for personal profit. While Western theory is not concerned with the issue, the Indian material provides an answer. Similarly, spiritual intelligence as it is theorised by Emmons (2000), King (2008) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) can be considered in relation to Indian concepts of Vichara (inquiry), Svadharma, and Atma-

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Jnana (self-knowledge). Both traditions discuss an ability to construct meanings and reason based on values that goes beyond common cognitive and emotional intelligence; in addition to that, Indian philosophy outlines the disciplined practice through which such abilities are developed. The idea of spiritual intelligence as a separate human capability is grounded in the earlier broadening of intelligence theories by Gardner (1983) and Goleman (1995); these authors introduced a wider definition of intelligence and created the space for considering interpersonal sensitivity, self-regulation and later, spiritual intelligence, as separate psychological constructs that should be measured. Spiritual intelligence theory of Zohar and Marshall (2000) was explicitly presented as a continuation of this trend – the intelligence that allows people to address and resolve the problems of meaning and value. Although this branch of literature did not yet manage to achieve measurement consensus like emotional intelligence had, the rich phenomenology of Vichara and Atma-Jnana offered by the Indian philosophy, along with the related techniques of contemplation, could prove to be a valuable resource for future studies of spiritual intelligence. Positive psychology, following the tradition of Seligman (2011) and previous humanistic psychologists like Maslow (1971), is focused on flourishing, resilience and optimal human functioning; Indian philosophy extends this focus onto the broader goal of achieving lasting inner peace (Shanti), equanimity (Samatvam) and self-realisation (Moksha).

A similar pattern of convergence with additional depth applies to leadership theories. Servant leadership of Greenleaf (1977), which considers the primary responsibility of the leader to be serving his followers, is similar to Lokasamgraha, but Indian philosophy expands the scope of interests of the leader from service to followers to welfare of the society and universal moral order. Authentic leadership by George (2003), Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) stresses self-awareness, relational transparency and integrity of the leader; Indian philosophy extends this interest through the concept of Satya (truthfulness) and the realisation of one's true Self (Atman) at a metaphysical level. Spiritual leadership theory by Fry (2003) focuses on vision, hope or faith and altruistic love as antecedents of workplace spirituality and organisational commitment; it is similar to the Indian concept of Dharma – righteous conduct, but again, the Indian tradition emphasises that such leadership starts with mastery, wisdom, compassion and disciplined conduct of the leader before it could be extended onto other people.

The above comparative exercise shows that the modern organisational theory and the classical Indian philosophy share conceptual convergence rather than contradiction. The main difference between the two is their orientation: Western theories are empirical, measurable and practically applicable, while Indian philosophy provides a foundation, a clear mechanism of development, contemplative practices and an expanded vision of goals of human development. Based on this analysis, the paper suggests that the sequence Karma Yoga → ethical discipline → Chitta Shuddhi → workplace spirituality → spiritual intelligence → expanded awareness → ethical leadership → self-realisation can be used as a comprehensive framework of development, which will allow integrating the empirical findings of Western organisational psychology into the field and provide it with the theoretical depth which is currently lacking.

The comparative exercise also makes it clear what the Indian material does not suggest. It does not say that the Western organisational theories are somehow incomplete or flawed in terms of their own frameworks; spiritual leadership theory, servant leadership, authentic leadership and positive psychology are all empirically grounded, have valid measurement tools and practical organisational applications which could not be replicated solely by conceptual material of Section 3. Instead, the comparison indicates that these theories suffer from an underlying explanatory gap: the explanation of antecedent development that was provided directly in the philosophical tradition; and this explanation is sufficiently specific and convergent with the constructs used in those theories to serve as a basis for expansion of the latter. The suggested relationship is thus complementary rather than competitive: Western theories provide rigour, measurement and empirical grounding, while Indian philosophy provides the depth of development and an explanation of practices which allow cultivating the qualities described by the theories.

### 6. An Integrated Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical background and comparative analysis developed in the previous section, in this section an attempt is made to integrate the ideas of Indian philosophy and current organisational

psychology into a unified conceptual framework. The central idea is that workplace spirituality needs to be seen not as an organisational phenomenon per se but as a process of development, which starts with ethical actions and culminates in ethical leadership and self-realisation.

Current theories see workplace spirituality, spiritual intelligence, ethical leadership, and psychological well-being as separate constructs. Each of them has been the subject of its own set of measurement tools and empirical studies. The proposed framework tries to integrate these constructs in a developmental process based on Karma Yoga, which is supported by the following five assumptions: humandevelopment is continuous rather than static; work itself can be used as the means of psychological and ethical transformation; ethical actions transform one's character over time rather than just reflect it; workplace spirituality is a progressive process rather than sudden occurrence; professional life, when done right, can contribute towards the achievement of the ultimate goal of self-realization according to the Indian tradition.

The development sequence suggested as the key organizing element of the proposed integrated model is as follows: Karma Yoga is the beginning of the process through behaviour; Chitta Shuddhi acts as the psychological mediator of that process – the gradual purification of mind that disciplined and non-attached action brings about; workplace spirituality appears as an intermediate stage of this process – meaningful work, community, and value congruence as discussed in the organizational literature; spiritual intelligence and expanded awareness are the next, more advanced developmental outcomes – the expansion of the practitioner's identity beyond his or her narrow self-interests; ethical leadership becomes the behavioural outcome of that wider identity – service-oriented, self-aware, and focused on the collective good; self-realization is the final developmental goal that the whole sequence strives for even though it rarely, if ever, can be achieved within the usual work environment.

There are a few implications of the proposed framework for organisational theory. First, it gives a developmental origin to the concept of workplace spirituality that was absent in other theories; secondly, it brings together several different concepts from such theories as spiritual leadership theory, positive psychology, self-determination theory, servant leadership and authentic leadership; thirdly, the introduction of expanded awareness is an important addition to this list of developmental processes as it is the link between spiritual development and the development of ethical behaviour. For organisational practice, it means that an organisation that wants to develop workplace spirituality in its employees should pay attention to ethical decision-making, the creation of truly meaningful work, provision of structured reflective practice, service-oriented leadership models, value-based organisational culture and the continued development of employees' personalities because only in this way can the necessary conditions for Karma Yoga and further developmental sequence be recreated.

The framework has a number of implicit boundary conditions that should be explicitly stated. This sequence of development is not expected to develop identically and at the same speed in every type of occupation and among every individual. There might be some kinds of jobs that would provide better opportunities for this kind of non-attached and service-oriented actions, which are the starting point of the suggested framework, and some that would hinder its development due to their individualistic nature. Organisational culture, leadership examples, and autonomy of actions on the job provided by employers are the factors that would moderate the development process. Thus, the framework should not be interpreted as a prediction of the fact that workplace spirituality, spiritual intelligence and ethical leadership will appear automatically due to mere experience on the job; it should be seen more precisely as a prediction of the fact that these outcomes are the results of a particular type of interaction with work – non-attached, ethically disciplined, and focused on other people's well-being, and it is up to the employer to facilitate or hinder this development process.

Future research should empirically test the proposed development sequence using longitudinal designs, structural equation modelling of the assumed mediators, the development of validated psychometric scales measuring concepts like Karma Yoga orientation and expanded awareness and cross-cultural comparison of the sequence of the development of workplace spirituality, spiritual intelligence and ethical leadership proposed from an Indian philosophical point of view.

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## 7. A Karma Yoga–Based Definition of Workplace Spirituality

Whereas the conceptual framework presented above leads to a definition of workplace spirituality that is distinct both in nature and emphasis from the ones reviewed in Section 2, current definitions of workplace spirituality being either meaningful work, sense of community, value congruence, inner life or transcendence and all of which view the phenomenon as a state, the present framework provides a process mechanism explaining the development of workplace spirituality and its developmental trajectory. Workplace spirituality may therefore be defined as a

*“Workplace Spirituality is a conscious practice of Karma Yoga in an organisation (work performed with non-attachment, integrity, compassion, dedication and intensity, following Dharma) which transforms work into a spiritual discipline leading to a multidimensional developmental process in which individuals come to see their work as an occasion for selfless service (Nishkam Karma), ethical excellence, inner development and higher purpose. By performing selfless and value-based action, one purifies the mind, leading to the development of spiritual intelligence, strengthening of human capacities, expanded awareness and the individual advances in their personal development process towards Self-Realisation (Atma-Jnana).*

In this regard, workplace spirituality can be seen as part of the greater process described in Sections 4 and 6: through the practice of Karma Yoga, workplace spirituality emerges as a transformative process through which spiritual intelligence is developed as an emerging competence which further enables broader human development in terms of expanded awareness and, in the Indian tradition, ultimate self-realisation and liberation (Moksha). While re-conceptualising workplace spirituality as a transformational process rooted in Indian philosophy, this reframing integrates the ancient discipline of Karma Yoga with the modern interest in organisational spiritual intelligence and presents a theoretically sound and empirically testable model for further empirical investigation.

Developmental Sequence can be represented as follows

**Karma Yoga (Practice) – Workplace Spirituality (Transformation) – Spiritual Intelligence (Capacity) – Unmesha (Expanded awareness) – Atma Jnana (Self-realisation) – Moksha (Liberation)**

## 8. Discussion

From this discussion, it is apparent that workplace spirituality should not be seen as a static trait of an organization or as an organizational characteristic but as a developmental process, and that it emerges through the processes of ethics, discipline, emotional regulation, and selfless service – precisely the characteristics of maturity in worldly activity that have long been recognized in classical Indian philosophy and the practice of Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga, therefore, offers the missing developmental process through which ethical action gives rise, through Citta Śuddhi, to workplace spirituality, spiritual intelligence, expanded awareness, and ethical leadership.

In this way, the contribution made by the paper lies at the intersection of two bodies of literature that, until now, have had little connection with one another. Organisational psychology brings rigorous empirical methods and measures along with organisational applications, while Indian philosophy brings ethics, an explicitly developmental process, a series of spiritual practices, and a clearly stated description of the spiritual ends to which human development is oriented. This framework neither excludes nor replaces any of the established theories of leadership, including transformational leadership (inspirational vision), (Bass & Avolio, 1994), servant leadership (service to followers), (Greenleaf, 1977), authentic leadership (self-awareness and integrity), (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and spiritual leadership (vision, hope, and altruistic love), (Fry, 2003). Instead, it provides a way of understanding the process through which the essential qualities that underlie each of these approaches actually develop.

An additional contribution of the framework is the concept of expanded awareness, which lies between spiritual intelligence and ethical leadership. Expanded awareness refers to a broadening of self-identity from purely selfish interest to a concern for all of humanity and for universal ethics. This state cannot be described solely in terms of existing models of spiritual intelligence or in terms of existing leadership theories, but in this framework, it would appear to be a required intermediary for the development of true other-oriented ethical leadership.

What follows for organisational behaviour from this perspective is that an organisation interested in promoting workplace spirituality needs to consider integrity, responsibility, compassion, reflection, learning, service orientation, and character development as ongoing activities rather than interventions. For leadership development, there is a need to incorporate managerial skills with ethical discipline, self-awareness, emotional regulation, detachment, intrinsic motivation, and service orientation.

It should be noted clearly that the framework outlined above remains a conceptual rather than an empirically validated model; the Indian philosophical literature upon which it relies is based primarily on Advaita Vedanta and the Bhagavad Gita, and the other traditions of Indian philosophy will likely provide different and sometimes conflicting emphases; and the concepts that lie at the center of this framework – Karma Yoga orientation, Citta Śuddhi, and expanded awareness – need to undergo systematic psychometric development before the developmental sequence it proposes can be tested with the rigor required of contemporary organizational science. The directions for future research should therefore include developing scales for these concepts, testing the hypothesised mediating relationships using structural equation modelling, carrying out longitudinal and cross-cultural tests of the sequence, and where possible, evaluating organisational interventions to foster Karma Yoga within the workplace

### 9. Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

This developmental framework raises many tangible implications for organisational practice, leader development, human resources, and management education. Organisational practices conducive to workplace spirituality include meaning-focused work, ethical responsibility, teamwork, compassion, reflective practice, and service culture; as such, ethics should be transformed into an everyday practice, embedded into decision-making, rather than a compliance-oriented training delivered periodically. Leader development should combine technical skill set with ethics, self-awareness, emotion regulation, humility, compassion, service orientation, and non-attachment to personal recognition; all these characteristics should be developed through the process of becoming a leader rather than treated as innate qualities of a leader. Human resources practices should facilitate this developmental process through mentoring, reflective learning, values-oriented performance reviews, ethical leadership training, and creation of meaningful work tasks. Management education should include ethics, self-reflection, responsible decision-making, and resilience training along with Indian philosophies – not as exotic supplements to management, but as a substantial contribution to contemporary organisational theories.

Specifically, some of the possible applications of the framework in organizational setting may include the following actions. Task design needs to be evaluated to preserve the element of connection between a role and its higher goal, rather than reduce a task to a series of discrete and purely transactional outputs; because it is only the presence of this element that creates conditions for non-attached, meaningful action in accordance with the Karma Yoga framework. A performance management system needs to reward process integrity and ethical behaviour, not just outcomes; it will reduce the level of narrow, reward-oriented incentive structure that is identified in the Gita as hindering the process of ethical engagement. Reflection practice should be integrated into the everyday workflow, not left for occasional off-sites, because it is through such everyday reflection practice that Citta Śuddhi evolves according to the Karma Yoga framework. Finally, organisational leadership development and succession processes should be designed in a way to select people who already possess self-awareness, non-attachment to recognition, and proven commitment to the welfare of the whole organisation, rather than just relying on performance metrics.

There are certain limitations to the framework that should be taken into account when interpreting its implications. Firstly, the model still remains conceptual, not an empirically validated one. Secondly, it uses Bhagavad Gita and Advaita Vedanta as main sources and its claims need to be validated across cultures and organisations outside India. Thirdly, the framework requires dedicated psychometric validation of such constructs as Karma Yoga orientation, Citta Śuddhi, and expanded awareness, as no validated scales are measuring these variables in organizational setting yet. Future studies should focus on developing appropriate measurement scales, testing the proposed developmental model using structural equation modelling, conducting longitudinal and cross-cultural research in order to validate its generalisability, and exploring, if methodologically feasible, the neuroscientific bases of ethical development and expanded awareness.

## Revisiting the Origins of Workplace Spirituality: An Indian Philosophical Perspective on Karma Yoga, Meaningful Work, and Human Development

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, the framework has one implication related specifically to organisations working within the Indian cultural and institutional context from which it is borrowed. Indian public sector organisations, family-owned companies and increasingly professional private companies still function in an environment where such concepts as Dharma, Seva, and Svadharma have wide usage outside academia and religion and employees already possess cultural knowledge of the terminology that is used in this paper to build organisational theories. Therefore, the Karma Yoga framework can provide not only a theoretical perspective for organisational practices, but also an articulation of ethical assumptions embedded in the culture of these organisations, an articulation in the language of contemporary organisational theories. As a result, any spiritual interventions based on Karma Yoga principles can be more easily understood and accepted by employees compared to imported interventions without any adaptation from Western organisational psychology. It is not to say, however, that the framework is culturally bound in its applications; the comparative analysis provided in Section 5 was specifically aimed at showing its convergence with Western theories that are developed independently from Indian tradition. Rather, it is worth noting that the framework's practical application will depend on how familiar the vocabulary of the framework is; and this aspect should influence future empirical studies of the model in the selection and interpretation of organisational samples.

One additional methodological limitation of the framework is associated with self-report measurement of workplace spirituality that is widely used in existing research. Podsakoff et al. (2003) showed that the measurement of constructs like meaningful work, community, and value congruence using single-source self-reports is subject to common method bias, which leads to inflated relationships between predictor and outcome variables. Any future empirical study of the Karma Yoga-based developmental sequence proposed in this paper should therefore include multivariate measures and, whenever possible, longitudinal and behavioural measures, rather than only cross-sectional self-reports, in order to conduct an actual test of the developmental model rather than a measurement artefact.

Broadly, the framework adds value to several adjacent literatures – organisational behaviour, leadership studies, positive psychology, organisational ethics, and philosophy of management – by incorporating Indian philosophical thinking into contemporary organisational scholarship. It defines professional work not just as economic activity, but also as an opportunity for ethical development and responsible leadership; and such a definition, if supported empirically, will have substantial implications for how organisations design their work, develop leaders, and define their purposes.

### 10. Conclusion

It has been suggested that workplace spirituality results from the development of individuals along a particular trajectory and that Karma Yoga offers precisely such a trajectory – one which begins with disciplined ethical action and ends with self-realisation. In this sense, workplace spirituality becomes part of a larger developmental process that encompasses organisational psychology, leadership studies and Indian philosophy into one explanatory framework.

The theoretical contributions of this paper can be summarized as follows: it offers a new historical interpretation of the roots of workplace spirituality; it offers Karma Yoga as a developmental foundation of workplace spirituality and the capacities associated with it; it develops an integrative developmental framework relating disciplined ethical action to spiritual intelligence, expanded awareness, ethical leadership and self-realization; it offers expanded awareness as a new developmental concept; and it places organizational research into dialogue with Indian philosophy, rather than using Indian philosophy only for illustration purposes.

In terms of practical applications, it is suggested that the organisational practices of developing employees' ethical leadership and increasing their well-being can include creating a meaningful work environment, reflection, service orientation and character development, all of which are not stand-alone programs but an organisational practice similar to that of the individual's Karma Yoga. In terms of future organisational research, it will be necessary to develop valid measurement tools for Karma Yoga orientation, Citta Śuddhi and expanded awareness and to conduct empirical testing of the suggested developmental framework longitudinally, cross-culturally and using structural equation modelling.

As has been demonstrated in this paper, the most appropriate way to conceptualise workplace spirituality is in the context of a developmental journey, not in the context of an organizationally-defined state. Karma Yoga provides a practical and philosophically grounded framework connecting disciplined ethical action to spiritual intelligence, expanded awareness, ethical leadership and self-realisation. Thus, this paper finds that Karma Yoga provides a developmental connection between ethical work and workplace spirituality which has thus far been missing from organisational scholarship.

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