E-ISSN: 2583-9667
Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
https://multiresearchjournal.theviews.in

Received: 02-11-2025
Accepted: 11-12-2025
Published: 16-01-2026

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCE RESEARCH IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Volume 4; Issue 1; 2026; Page No. 259-263

Duty-Centred Ethical Leadership in Hindu Scriptures and Modern Management: A Comparative Textual Study

[1]Mahendra Kumar Mishra and [2]Dr. Rajeev Kumar

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Management, Monad University, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Management, Monad University, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21367742

Corresponding Author: Mahendra Kumar Mishra

Abstract

This paper examines the leadership and ethical management implications of selected Hindu scriptures with particular attention to the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Arthashastra and the Manusmriti. The purpose is not to treat scriptural texts as direct business manuals, but to evaluate their conceptual relevance for contemporary management concerns such as ethical leadership, self-regulation, stakeholder responsibility and meaningful work. The paper is based on qualitative textual analysis supported by a structured coding framework and descriptive statistical interpretation of management-related themes. The findings show that ethics, leadership and decision-making appear as highly visible themes in the analysed corpus. Ethics accounts for 18.21 percent of coded units, while leadership and decision-making each account for 15.36 percent. The Bhagavad Gita demonstrates particular strength in leadership, duty-centred action and motivational discipline, while the Upanishads contribute strongly to self-management, reflective judgement and inner restraint. The results indicate substantial to strong coding reliability, with Cohen's kappa values ranging from 0.75 to 0.84 across major themes. The paper argues that scripture-informed management thinking can enrich modern leadership theory when interpreted through inclusive, secular and humanistic standards. It contributes to culturally grounded management scholarship by showing that modern management can benefit from ethical and spiritual insight without compromising critical reasoning, equality or organisational professionalism.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, Hindu scriptures, Bhagavad Gita, self-management, corporate social responsibility, management by values

1. Introduction

Modern management is usually explained through concepts such as planning, organising, leadership, control, motivation and performance. These concepts remain essential for understanding how organisations function, yet they do not fully address the ethical and inner dimensions of managerial action. In many organisations, leaders are technically competent but struggle with questions of responsibility, restraint, public trust, fairness and the moral use of authority. This gap has renewed interest in culturally grounded management knowledge, especially traditions that discuss the relationship between action, duty, self-control and wider welfare.

Hindu scriptures offer a rich conceptual base for examining these questions. The Bhagavad Gita discusses action, duty, steadiness, self-mastery and leadership by example. The Upanishads emphasise self-knowledge, restraint and reflective awareness. The Arthashastra focuses on prudence, counsel, governance and strategic judgement. The Manusmriti, although requiring careful critical treatment because of its normative and hierarchical assumptions, contains discussions of duty, order and responsibility that can be examined through a modern equality and dignity filter. The usefulness of these texts lies not in literal transfer to business practice, but in their ability to widen the moral vocabulary of management.

This paper therefore asks how selected Hindu scriptures contribute to a duty-centred and ethical understanding of modern leadership. It connects scriptural ideas with modern theories such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, stakeholder theory, emotional intelligence and ethical management. The paper argues that modern leadership is strengthened when efficiency and performance are balanced with self-governance, moral responsibility and concern for collective welfare.

2. Literature Review

Classical management thought provided the first systematic language of formal organisational control. Taylor (1911) [21] treated work as a problem of efficiency, time discipline and task standardisation. Fayol (1949) [9] identified administrative functions such as planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling. Weber (1947) [22] emphasised bureaucracy, rules and legitimate authority. These approaches helped organisations build order and productivity, but they also tended to view the worker mainly through functional and procedural categories.

Later management thought moved towards the human side of organisation. Barnard (1938) [1] understood organisations as cooperative systems, while Drucker (1954) [8] argued that management should connect objectives with responsibility and performance. Transformational leadership theory, especially in the work of Burns (1978) [4] and Bass (1985, 1990) [2, 3], shifted attention towards inspiration, values, motivation and development. Greenleaf's (1977) [12] concept of servant leadership further placed humility, service and ethical responsibility at the centre of leadership. Goleman (1995) [11] brought emotional intelligence into leadership discussion by showing the importance of self-awareness, empathy and emotional regulation.

Indian management scholarship has also argued that values, self-discipline and social responsibility should be integrated into organisational life. Chakraborty (1991, 1993) [6, 7] presented management by values as a way of connecting managerial effectiveness with moral and cultural grounding. Srinivasan (2008) [20] interpreted the Bhagavad Gita as a source of leadership insight, particularly through duty, selfless action and disciplined conduct. Radhakrishnan's translations and interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads provide a philosophical base for understanding self-mastery, knowledge and right action. These strands indicate that management need not be seen only as a technical discipline; it can also be viewed as a moral and developmental practice.

However, the literature also requires caution. Sacred texts belong to religious, philosophical and historical contexts and cannot be applied directly to contemporary organisations. Modern organisations are governed by constitutional values, labour rights, diversity norms and stakeholder expectations. Therefore, any scripture-informed management model must be selective, critical and inclusive. The aim is to draw ethically relevant principles, not to reproduce exclusionary or hierarchical social arrangements.

3. Methodology

The paper is based on qualitative textual analysis combined with structured thematic coding. The texts considered are the Bhagavad Gita, the Arthashastra, selected Upanishadic teachings and the Manusmriti. These texts were selected because they cover action, governance, self-knowledge, duty, ethics and social order. The modern comparison includes classical administrative theory, transformational leadership, servant leadership, stakeholder theory, emotional intelligence and corporate social responsibility.

The coding process identified management-related units and grouped them under seven themes: leadership, strategy, decision-making, ethics, governance and control, motivation and development, and social responsibility. Each coded unit was interpreted in relation to its scriptural context and then compared with a relevant modern management concept. To strengthen trustworthiness, the analysis used theme definitions, cross-text comparison and reliability interpretation. The statistical results used in this paper are descriptive and interpretive rather than survey-based. They help summarise the coded textual evidence and show the relative emphasis of themes across the selected corpus.

Table 1: Coding framework used for scripture-management comparison

Theme	Scriptural lens	Modern comparison	Analytical question
Leadership	Dharma, example and steadiness	Transformational and servant leadership	How is responsibility exercised?
Ethics	Right action, restraint and welfare	CSR and stakeholder theory	How is moral responsibility defined?
Decision-making	Reflection, counsel and prudence	Bounded rationality and judgement	How is choice made under uncertainty?
Motivation	Purposeful action and self-discipline	Intrinsic motivation and meaningful work	How is action sustained beyond reward?

The method is suitable for this paper because the main research problem is conceptual and interpretive. It does not attempt to measure managerial behaviour in organisations. Instead, it examines whether traditional texts contain concepts that can enrich contemporary leadership and ethical management. This makes qualitative analysis appropriate, while the coded statistics provide transparency and structure to the findings.

4. Results and Analysis

The analysis shows that ethical and leadership-related themes are strongly represented across the selected corpus. Ethics has the highest number of coded units, with 51 instances and a share of 18.21 percent. Leadership and decision-making follow closely, each with 43 coded units and a share of 15.36 percent. This distribution suggests that scriptural management insight is not limited to abstract spirituality; it also contains practical reflection on action, responsibility, judgement and the use of authority.

Table 2: Major ethical and leadership-related coded themes

Theme	Coded units	Share of corpus (%)	Mean intensity	Mean alignment
Ethics	51	18.21	4.20	61.40
Leadership	43	15.36	3.82	63.62
Decision-making	43	15.36	3.88	58.98
Motivation and development	33	11.79	3.32	51.15
Social responsibility	33	11.79	3.80	55.08

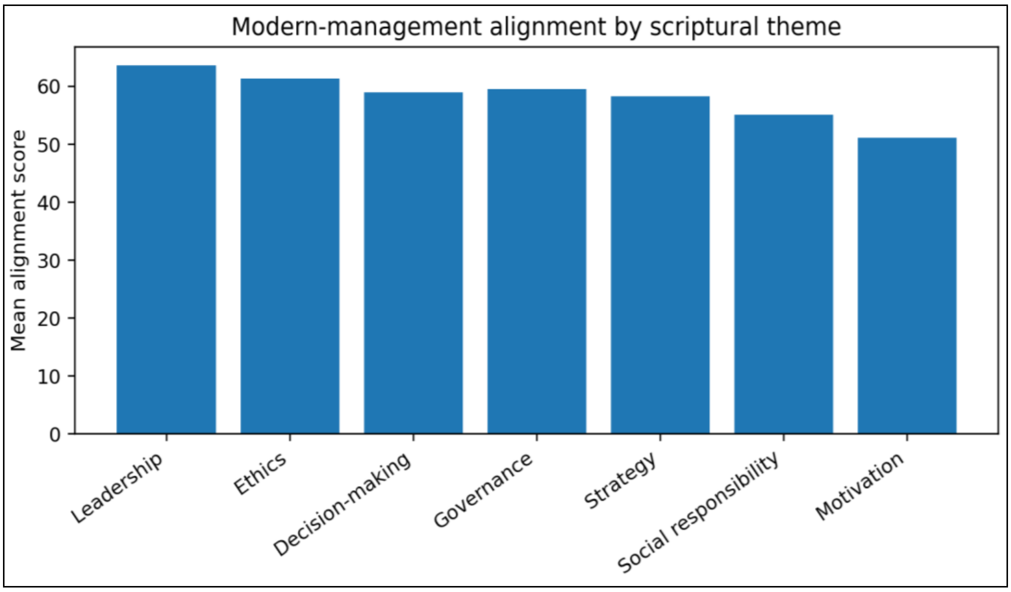

Fig 1: Mean alignment scores of selected scriptural management themes

The Bhagavad Gita is especially relevant to leadership because it frames action through duty, steadiness and self-control. Leadership in this view is not merely positional influence. It is a disciplined form of responsibility in which the actor must perform necessary work without ego-centred attachment. This principle has clear parallels with servant leadership and ethical leadership. A manager guided by this view is expected to act with clarity, restraint and concern for the effect of action on others. The emphasis is not withdrawal from work, but a purified understanding of work.

The Upanishadic contribution is more internal and reflective. It supports leadership by emphasising self-knowledge, restraint and awareness. Modern leadership literature often treats self-awareness as a competency, but the Upanishadic lens treats it as a deeper discipline of knowing one's motives, limits and responsibilities. This idea is closely connected with emotional intelligence and mindful leadership. It suggests that a leader who cannot govern inner impulses is unlikely to exercise outer authority responsibly.

The reliability indicators strengthen the credibility of the coding process. Cohen's kappa is 0.78 for leadership, 0.84 for ethics, 0.75 for decision-making and 0.83 for social responsibility. These values indicate substantial to strong agreement. The consistency of coding is important because textual analysis can become subjective if themes are not clearly defined. The reliability results show that leadership and ethics were not imposed randomly on the texts; rather, they emerged with sufficient consistency to support comparative interpretation.

Table 3: Reliability and selected theory-alignment indicators

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Cohen's kappa for leadership	0.78	Substantial reliability
Cohen's kappa for ethics	0.84	Strong reliability
Cohen's kappa for social responsibility	0.83	Strong reliability
Leadership alignment with Bass	0.91	Very high conceptual convergence
Ethics alignment with Carroll	0.92	Very high CSR relevance

The alignment scores further show that scriptural themes are comparable with modern management theories. Leadership has a high alignment with Bass's transformational leadership framework, recorded at 0.91. Ethics aligns strongly with Carroll's corporate social responsibility model, recorded at 0.92, while social responsibility shows an even stronger connection with Carroll at 0.94. Motivation and development aligns closely with transformational leadership at 0.86. These figures do not prove historical borrowing, but they do show conceptual convergence between traditional ethical thought and modern management categories.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that Hindu scriptural thought can contribute meaningfully to leadership studies if it is interpreted as a source of ethical reflection rather than as a prescriptive religious code. The strongest contribution lies in duty-centred leadership. In many modern organisations, leadership is associated with charisma, control, performance pressure and strategic influence. The scriptural perspective adds that leadership must also involve self-restraint, responsibility, humility and welfare orientation. This enriches transformational leadership by placing moral discipline before influence.

A second contribution concerns motivation. Modern motivation theories often focus on needs, rewards, satisfaction and performance outcomes. The Bhagavad Gita introduces a different but relevant perspective: work gains dignity when it is linked to duty and purpose rather than only to personal reward. This does not mean that organisations should ignore fair pay or material conditions. Rather, it means that ethical management should create work environments where individuals can experience responsibility, meaning and contribution. Purpose cannot be used as a substitute for justice; it must be combined with fair treatment.

A third contribution concerns the relation between leadership and self-management. The Upanishadic emphasis on inner awareness provides a strong foundation for leadership development. Contemporary leadership programmes often include personality tests, communication skills and performance coaching, but they may give less attention to moral introspection. Scripture-informed leadership development can include reflective exercises, ethical case analysis and self-regulation practices, provided these are framed inclusively and not as religious instruction.

The critical caution is equally important. Traditional texts emerged in historical social orders that do not always match modern democratic values. Any use of scriptural ideas in management must reject discrimination, hierarchy, gender inequality and coercion. A modern organisation cannot justify unethical or exclusionary practice by citing tradition. The proper use of these texts is interpretive and critical: values such as duty, welfare, restraint and accountability may be retained, while oppressive assumptions must be rejected.

6. Implications for Modern Management

The practical value of this analysis lies in leadership training, corporate ethics and management education. First, organisations can use duty-centred leadership cases to help managers examine the moral consequences of decisions. Such cases may ask how a manager balances performance targets with fairness, how authority can be exercised without arrogance, and how personal ambition can be controlled when stakeholder welfare is at risk.

Second, management education can include Indian knowledge traditions alongside Western theories. This would not replace Fayol, Taylor, Drucker, Bass or Porter. Instead, it would show students that management knowledge has multiple cultural sources and that ethical concerns have long been part of human reflection on organisation and authority. Such inclusion can make management curricula more culturally grounded and socially relevant.

Third, human resource development can draw from the idea of self-management. Training in emotional regulation, reflective judgement, empathy and responsibility can improve organisational culture. These practices should be voluntary, secular and professional. Their purpose should be to strengthen ethical judgement and interpersonal responsibility, not to impose belief systems on employees.

7. Conclusion

This paper concludes that selected Hindu scriptures provide useful conceptual resources for modern ethical leadership and management. The strongest themes emerging from the analysis are ethics, leadership, decision-making, self-management and social responsibility. The Bhagavad Gita contributes to duty-centred leadership and meaningful action, while the Upanishads deepen the understanding of self-awareness and reflective judgement. The findings align with modern theories of transformational leadership, servant leadership, emotional intelligence and corporate social responsibility.

The contribution of the paper lies in presenting scripture-informed management as a critical, inclusive and culturally grounded field of study. It does not argue for a religious model of business management. Rather, it argues that ancient ethical insights can enrich contemporary leadership when interpreted through modern standards of equality, dignity and organisational responsibility. Future research may empirically test whether duty-centred leadership values influence ethical decision-making, employee trust and responsible organisational behaviour in contemporary institutions.

Future research can move in three directions. First, survey-based studies can examine whether managers who value duty, self-restraint and stakeholder welfare show higher ethical judgement and employee trust. Second, case studies of Indian organisations can explore whether value-centred leadership practices are actually used in decision-making, conflict handling and human resource development. Third, curriculum-based action research can test whether including Indian knowledge traditions in management education improves students' ability to analyse ethical dilemmas. These future directions would extend the present paper from conceptual relevance to practical and empirical validation.

A third limitation relates to the selective use of scripture. The paper focuses on principles that can be ethically translated into contemporary organisational language. It deliberately rejects any idea that would conflict with equality, dignity, democratic rights or workplace inclusion. This selective approach is necessary, but it also means that the study is not a complete theological or philosophical reading of Hindu scriptures. Future research can develop stronger ethical filters for using traditional knowledge in management education, especially where texts contain both valuable insight and historically problematic assumptions.

A second limitation concerns translation and interpretation. The selected texts have multiple translations, commentarial traditions and philosophical readings. A term such as dharma, for example, cannot be reduced to one English equivalent. It may refer to duty, moral order, role responsibility, right conduct and social welfare, depending on context. This paper uses management-oriented interpretations, but alternative readings are possible. Future studies can compare different translations and commentaries to examine whether the same leadership and ethical themes remain stable across interpretive traditions.

The study is limited by its textual and conceptual design. It does not claim that scriptural principles automatically improve leadership behaviour in real organisations. The evidence is based on coded themes and interpretive comparison, not on employee surveys, organisational case studies or performance indicators. Therefore, the paper should be read as a conceptual contribution that prepares the ground for empirical work. The findings indicate relevance, but the actual effect of duty-centred leadership on trust, motivation and ethical conduct must be tested in organisational settings.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The social relevance of this argument is clear in the present organisational climate. Workplaces face increasing problems of burnout, unethical competition, distrust, weak accountability and excessive performance pressure. A duty-centred leadership model can help managers see employees, customers and communities as moral stakeholders rather than merely as resources or markets. If applied critically, the scriptural emphasis on self-restraint and responsible action can support more humane leadership, better workplace relationships and stronger ethical cultures.

The originality of the paper lies in combining a culturally rooted reading of leadership with a structured management framework. Many discussions of scripture and management remain inspirational, while many management studies remain purely functional. This paper attempts to bring the two together through defined themes, reliability indicators and theory alignment. It shows that values such as duty, self-control, welfare and responsibility can be discussed in a scholarly management language without reducing them to slogans or devotional statements.

9. Originality and Social Relevance

For Indian management scholarship, the paper is also socially relevant because it allows local intellectual traditions to enter professional education in a balanced way. Students can learn that management is not only a matter of imported models, targets and techniques. It is also a field concerned with character, responsibility and the ethical use of power. When handled inclusively, this approach can strengthen cultural confidence while avoiding religious exclusivity or uncritical traditionalism.

The paper therefore supports a middle path. It neither rejects modern management theory nor romanticises the past. It proposes that leadership knowledge becomes richer when technical competence, cultural insight and ethical reflection are studied together. Such an approach is particularly useful for societies where business education must respond to global standards while remaining connected to local values and social realities.

Overall, this makes the paper suitable for management scholars who wish to connect ethical leadership, Indian knowledge systems and contemporary organisational practice in a careful, professional and socially useful manner.

10. References

1. Barnard CI. *The functions of the executive*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; c1938.
2. Bass BM. *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York (NY): Free Press; c1985.
3. Bass BM. *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications*. 3rd ed. New York (NY): Free Press; c1990.
4. Burns JM. *Leadership*. New York (NY): Harper & Row; c1978.
5. Carroll AB. The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: Toward the moral management of organizational stakeholders. Business Horizons. 1991;34(4):39-48.
6. Chakraborty SK. *Management by values: Towards cultural congruence*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; c1991.
7. Chakraborty SK. *Managerial effectiveness and quality of worklife: Indian insights*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill; c1993.
8. Drucker PF. *The practice of management*. New York (NY): Harper & Row; c1954.
9. Fayol H. *General and industrial management*. London: Pitman; c1949.
10. Freeman RE. *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston (MA): Pitman; c1984.
11. Goleman D. *Emotional intelligence*. New York (NY): Bantam Books; c1995.
12. Greenleaf RK. *Servant leadership*. New York (NY): Paulist Press; c1977.
13. Northouse PG. *Leadership: Theory and practice*. 9th ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications; c2021.
14. Olivelle P, translator. *Upanisads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; c1996.
15. Olivelle P, translator. *The law code of Manu*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; c2004.
16. Prasad LM. *Principles and practice of management*. New Delhi: Sultan Chand & Sons; c2017.
17. Radhakrishnan S, translator. *The Bhagavadgita*. London: George Allen & Unwin; c1948.
18. Radhakrishnan S, translator. *The principal Upanishads*. London: George Allen & Unwin; c1953.
19. Robbins SP, Judge TA. *Organizational behavior*. 18th ed. Harlow: Pearson; c2019.
20. Srinivasan N. The Bhagavad Gita and modern management: A conceptual interpretation of leadership, duty and action. Journal of Human Values. 2008;14(1):1-10.
21. Taylor FW. *The principles of scientific management*. New York (NY): Harper & Brothers; c1911.
22. Weber M. *The theory of social and economic organization*. New York (NY): Free Press; c1947.