



Management Lessons from Indian Knowledge Systems

In recent years, the field of management has increasingly recognized the limitations of a purely Western centric approach to leadership, governance and organizational development. While the Western framework emphasizes efficiency, rationality, and individualism, they have undeniably contributed to the growth of modern corporations, but they also revealed inherent shortcomings when confronted with ethical dilemmas, sustainability crisis, and mental health challenges that define the 21st century business environment. The relentless pursuit of short-term results has sometimes come at the cost of long-term sustainability, the focus on profitability has often overshadowed ethical responsibility, and the emphasis on individuality has occasionally eroded the collective spirit of collaboration and empathy that organizations require to thrive in this context. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), while it's just rooted in ancient times, philosophical and strategic tradition offer a valuable counterbalance. IKS provides a holistic worldview that integrates material prosperity with ethics, duty, well-being, and social harmony, reminding us that economic activity is not an isolated pursuit, but part of a larger human endeavor shaped by responsibility, community, and moral integrity.

The idea of drawing management lessons from IKS is not about reviving the past in a romantic or nostalgic way, nor is it about positioning Eastern traditions as an alternative superior to Western models. Instead, it is about identifying timeless principles embedded in text, such as Bhagavad Gita, Arthashastra, Vedas, and Upanishads, and translating them into actionable insights for contemporary organizations. These sources offer frameworks that balance strategic acumen with ethical responsibility, resilience with compassion and profit with purpose. The Bhagavad Gita, with its discourse on duty, detachment and selfless action, equips leaders with the tools to navigate moral ambiguity and emotional turbulence in decision making. The Arthashastra, with its emphasis on governance, strategy and statecraft highlight the structural and institutional dimensions of leadership that are as relevant to corporate organizations as they were to ancient kingdoms. The Vedas and Upanishads with their exploration of self-conscious and interconnectedness remind us that leadership is as much about inner discipline as it is about external influence. Together, these sources challenge the reductionist view of management as a purely instrumental activity and instead present it as a comprehensive philosophy of life, where economic prosperity, social responsibility and personal growth are woven together into a coherent whole. By reexamining management through the lens of IKS, it becomes possible to create a more

balanced and sustainable paradigm that addresses not only the material needs of globalization, and technological change, but also the deeper socio-political complexities and ethical imperatives of our age.

At its core, the Indian knowledge system stands as a living testimony to the inheritance of wisdom that harmonizes the material with the spiritual, the immediate with the eternal, and the individual with the collective. It is not a closed tradition confined to history, but a living, evolving dialogue that has persisted across centuries, adapting to new challenges while holding firmly to its foundational values in a world where speed often outpaces reflection. There is a pressing need to revisit sources of knowledge that inspires stability, resilience and a deeper sense of responsibility. The pressures of global capitalism, technological disruption and social fragmentation have often led to an excessive focus on what products to create, what services to deliver, what technology to adopt, while neglecting the how and why i.e. how we live by what we know and why we pursue certain goals over others. IKS compels us to pass and reconsider this imbalance, for it insists on asking not merely what we know, but how we embody the knowledge in our conduct, our institutions, and our societies. The reservoir of IKS spanning philosophy, science, governance and spirituality provide precisely the balance that contemporary management requires. It encourages leaders to develop clarity of purpose without losing passion, to pursue growth without sacrificing sustainability, and to engage in competition without eroding the fabric of collective welfare. Engaging with IKS is therefore not an abstract academic exercise, but a profoundly practical one. When we read the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna's dilemma reflects our experiences as leaders, employees and citizens caught in conflicting duties and ambiguous choices under pressure. Similarly, Arthashastra compels us to recognize that strategy, governance and diplomacy are not merely technical skills, but moral acts demanding foresight, prudence and accountability to all stakeholders. The Upanishads call for self-knowledge resonates with the modern need for emotional intelligence and mindfulness in leadership, reminding us that self-mastery is a foundation of effective influence. The pluralistic ethos celebrated in text like the Vedas, as well as in the later interpretations, such as those discussed in Shashi Tharoor's *Why I Am a Hindu* that foregrounds inclusivity, humility before complexity and respect for diversity.

This issue of *Ushus Journal of Business Management* is dedicated to exploring precisely these intersections where ancient wisdom dialogues with contemporary management factors. The contributions included here not only recount the heritage of Indian thought but actively reinterpret it to address present day challenges of leadership, strategy, well-being and governance. Readers will encounter discussions that posit Bhagavad Gita

as a manual of organizational resilience, drawing lessons on decision making, ethics, and emotional intelligence. For the corporate boardroom, they will find explorations of spiritual intelligence, demonstrating constructs like swadharma (duty), karma yoga (selfless action), kritagyata (gratitude), sthitaprajna (equanimity), and raja yoga (discipline of mind) that can enhance mental health, empathy and resilience, thereby addressing one of the pressing concerns of well-being in today's workplace. They will also engage with reflections on Arthashastra highlighting how frameworks such as saptanga (seven limbs of governance), shadgunya (six-fold policy), and yogakshema (welfare and security) can be mapped onto modern corporate governance, sustainability practices, and stakeholder trust building.

Subhabrata Mitra and Anirban Sarkar's article, *From Battlefield to Boardroom*, reimagines the Bhagavad Gita as a manual of leadership, ethics, and organizational resilience, drawing lessons for decision-making, governance, and emotional intelligence in the contemporary corporate world. What emerges is not merely a philosophical exercise but a compelling argument that the Gita offers a holistic paradigm for modern management, where ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, and resilience replace short-term gain and transactional success.

Kritika Kumari's work, titled *Spiritual Intelligence through the Lens of the Bhagavad Gita*, expands this dialogue into the area of well-being by demonstrating how spiritual intelligence, which is rooted in ancient philosophy, enhances mental health, builds resilience, and promotes personal growth. Drawing on constructs such as swadharma (duty), karma yoga (selfless action), kritagyata (gratitude), sthitaprajna (equanimity), and raja yoga (discipline of mind), the article highlights how these ancient practices help cultivate balance, empathy, and purpose in life.

"Strategic thinking in Arthashastra and its corporate relevance: An exploration of ancient Indian wisdom for modern business" by Gunjan Jain foregrounds Kautilya's Arthashastra as a seminal text that continues to inform contemporary corporate strategy. Through frameworks such as Saptanga, Shadgunya and yogakshema, the study highlights how ancient models of governance and leadership resonate with present day imperatives of ethical decision making, sustainability and stakeholder trust. The application to India's Tata Group provides a compelling case of how traditional wisdom can align with environmental, social and governance metrics in creating long term value.

Complementing this is the paper “The Guru and the CEO: A Comparative Analysis of Indian and Western Management Thoughts” by Jayshree Roongta, which examines the intersections and Divergences between Indian philosophical traditions and Western management theories. By addressing fundamental concerns of ethics, leadership, motivation, and organizational design, the study advocates for hybrid paradigms that merge cultural insights with global managerial practices. Its emphasis on ethics in technological innovation and cross-cultural competencies speaks to the demands of today's interconnected business environment.

Sharath Menon B’s review of Shashi Tharoor’s *Why I Am a Hindu* situates the Indian Knowledge System in the vital dialogue between faith, politics, and identity, portraying Hinduism as pluralistic, questioning, and ethically imaginative. By showing how its principles, freedom of conscience, humility before complexity, and cultural resilience, can enrich democracy and public life, the review highlights both the strengths of Tharoor’s vision and the unfinished tasks of addressing caste and political distortion.

Taken together, these five contributions illuminate how IKS provides a rich and multifaceted foundation for rethinking management in the 21st century. From Bhagavad Gita’s timeless call for ethical decision making, resilience and spiritual intelligence (Mitra & Sarkar; Kumari) to Kautilya's Arthashastra offering frameworks of governance, strategy and stakeholder responsibility (Jain), we see how ancient wisdom continues to guide corporate purpose and leadership. Roongta’s comparative lens further demonstrate that Indian traditions, when integrated with Western paradigms, can generate hybrid models of leadership that are both globally competitive and culturally grounded, extending beyond corporate boardrooms’ maintenance.

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