

Integrating spiritual wisdom into occupational health practice: Insights from the Bhagavad Gita

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the teachings of Bhagavad Gita contribute to enhance occupational health and safety of the employees in the workplace. Modern occupational health and safety (OHS) practices have become effective in addressing physical and psychosocial risks. However, they fail to deal with emotional challenges faced by employees. Hence, the spiritual approaches have drawn the attention of both employer and employees to enrich workplace resilience and integrity. This study answers how the spiritual teachings of the Bhagavad Gita contribute to promoting holistic approaches for the safety of employees and their ethical culture. The research seeks to integrate core Gita's teachings into modern OHS frameworks with a view to enhancing emotional resilience and ethical behavior of employees. The teachings such as dharma (righteous duty), vairāgya (detachment), abhyāsa (practice), ātma-jñāna (self-knowledge), and sthita-prajña (emotional stability) offer deep insights in order to foster mental health, ethical conduct and purposeful action in high-pressure occupational settings. The study develops a psychospiritual model for occupational health and safety. The study draws its reference from Eknath Easwaran's translation of the Gita. It also focuses recent research in positive organizational psychology, mindfulness-based stress reduction and psychosocial risk frameworks. This interdisciplinary study illustrates how ancient wisdom can complement modern practices. The proposed model emphasizes inner transformation as a foundation for external well-being. It offers a holistic approach to OHS that includes ethical clarity, emotional regulation, resilience and self-transcendence. Ultimately, this article argues that the Bhagavad Gita, acting as a practical manual for cultivating occupational health in the modern era, makes a paradigm shift toward psychospiritual integration in workplace policies, training and leadership development.

Keywords: Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), Psychospiritual Well-being, Workplace Mental Health, Ethical Leadership, Mindfulness and Resilience

Introduction

Occupational health and safety (OHS) focuses on a one-dimensional approach to addressing workers' physical stresses. However, it has failed to address their emotional disorder. It is believed that the Gita presents only myth and historical details of the ancient society. However, the Gita's teachings offer frameworks for resolving

employees' inner conflicts through the dialogues between Arjuna, a warrior prince, and Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Its teachings highlight universal moral dilemmas, stress and loss of mental equilibrium. Arjuna's inter- and intrapersonal conflict is the byproduct of his contradiction between emotion and duty.

Krishna employs a counsel model that serves as therapy for resolving contradiction. Gita's teachings offer a spiritually robust framework for addressing employees' health and ethical safety issues. In contemporary settings, employees face stress and ethical dilemmas and thus suffer from mental and emotional disorders. Modern science has focused solely on physical safety, sidelining psychological and ethical guidelines. We can apply these Gita guidelines to resolve inner conflict under pressure. This study, therefore, aims to explore how the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita can contribute to nurture holistic framework for occupational health and safety. Early scholarly interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita emphasize its religious-philosophical doctrines of *dharma* (duty), *vairāgya* (detachment), and *ātma-jñāna* (self-knowledge). Edgerton's critical edition has been framed the text as a synthesis of Indian religious philosophy, while Radhakrishnan underscores its ethical and metaphysical dimensions.^{1,2} These foundational works set the stage for later explorations of the Gita's psychological and practical applications. By the late 20th century, Eknath Easwaran began presenting the Gita's teachings as practical tools for modern life, interpreting Karma Yoga as a discipline for equanimity, stress reduction and purposeful action.³ In parallel, Western occupational health research—such as Cooper and Marshall's early stress models and Karasek's demand-control framework—focuses on workplace strain and psychosocial risks but largely excludes spiritual perspectives.^{4,5} In the 2000s, Indian management scholars initiated explicit linkages between the Gita and organizational well-being. Nur Khalisah emphasized rational discernment as a foundation for emotional intelligence and effective decision-making.⁶ Concurrently, global organizational psychology emphasizes mindfulness and emotional regulation. Goleman integrates contemplative traditions into the construct of emotional intelligence and Hülsheger et al. demonstrate the positive effects of daily mindfulness on job performance, emotional exhaustion, and work–family conflict.^{7,8} These approaches resonate with the Gita's focus on *abhyāsa* (consistent practice) and self-mastery.

Post-2020, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted renewed interest in spiritual approaches to resilience. Rarick suggests that the Bhagavad Gita provides guidance for coping with stress and ethical dilemmas, while Dhiman highlights its role in fostering resilience and ethical clarity in contemporary workplaces.^{9,10} Integration with global psychosocial risk models such as the World Health Organization's guidelines on mental health at work,¹¹ and frameworks like positive organizational psychology,¹² signals a growing synthesis of Eastern and Western paradigms. Despite this momentum, scholarship still lacks a comprehensive interdisciplinary framework that fully integrates Gita-based psychospiritual principles into occupational health and safety (OHS) standards. This study seeks to bridge that gap by proposing a holistic approach to workplace well-being that systematically combines the Gita's teachings with contemporary OHS models.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore mechanisms that address workers' emotional disorders. The primary analysis is based on selected verses from the translated version of the Bhagavad Gita by Eknath Easwaran. The study will interpret Gita's teachings such as *dharma*, *vairāgya*, *abhyāsa* and *ātma-jñāna*. These findings from the teachings will be integrated into contemporary occupational health scenarios in order to discover new frameworks that can address employees' emotional problems resulting from burnout. The study further draws on information from various research articles to substantiate the research claim. It aims to formulate a hybrid framework for holistic occupational health and safety.

Results

Bhagavad Gita introduces different ideas such as *dharma* (righteousness), *vairāgya* (detachment), *abhyāsa* (practice) and *triguṇa* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*). The principle of *dharma* (duty) encompasses moral obligation, ethical responsibilities and virtue. *Vairāgya* (detachment) focuses on maintaining inner balance, self-control and devotion to duty without being attached to the results. The concept of *abhyāsa* (regular discipline) emphasizes deep

concentration, restraint and decreasing exhaustion. The *triguṇa* framework (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) explains human behavior and nature. *Sattva* refers to harmony, purity and balance in human life. *Rajas* denotes restlessness driven by desire, and *Tamas* denotes darkness and ignorance. The following discussion analyses these findings in relation to contemporary Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) principles, focusing on their relevance in the contemporary working environment.

Discussion

The Bhagavad Gita presents the concept of *dharma*, which encompasses moral obligation, righteousness, and ethical integrity. Krishna advises Arjuna to fulfill his *svadharma* (personal duty) and not to withdraw from action even in moments of difficulty. This teaching underscores the importance of adhering to one's own ethical responsibilities regardless of challenging circumstances. They enhance workers' and leaders' capacity to perform their job responsibilities and-
* adhere to ethical codes and safety rules, even under pressure. Krishna, through Arjuna, instructs individuals to perform their own duty, even imperfectly, rather than do another's duty. Following another person's path can lead to confusion and harm.³ Krishna's concept aligns with Gunningham and Sinclair's ethical system theory. Their idea underscores responsibility, accountability and proactive moral engagement.¹³ If the individuals emphasize results not embracing moral regulations, ethical failures occur. *Svadharma*, a dynamic ethical phenomenon, aligns with one's role and societal impact. This empowers workers to make their tasks meaningful, encouraging ethical diligence even in mundane roles. Fernández-Muñiz et al. emphasize that organizational safety cultures thrive when individuals feel morally invested in their roles.¹⁴ Krishna's worldview emboldens this internalization in order to uphold righteousness and moral obligation.

Arjuna becomes physically and mentally distressed after witnessing his relatives gathered on the battlefield. His limbs weaken, his mouth dries and his clarity begins to fade. His condition

reflects mental stress, emotional paralysis and burnout. He confesses, "O Krishna, I see my own relations here anxious to fight, and my limbs grow weak; my mouth is dry, my body shakes, and my hair is standing on end".³ This closely parallels the symptoms of work-related stress and anxiety disorders in contemporary settings. Krishna guides Arjuna compassionately towards resilience, self-awareness and inner strength. Krishna consoles, "You speak words of wisdom, but you grieve for those beyond grief. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead."³ This response reflects an approach similar to cognitive restructuring and meaning-making strategies used in preventive stress management programs.¹⁵ Krishna further encourages Arjuna to transcend identification with transient emotional states and to act with greater awareness. Krishna teaches Arjuna the notion of detachment to be liberated from anxiety resulting from the quest of outcomes. Krishna stresses that one should perform one's duties without expecting results.³ This corresponds with the principle of control in occupational psychology that emphasizes attention towards controllable factors such as effort and behaviors, rather than uncontrollable outcomes like promotion, recognition and job security. Ganster and Rosen argue that work stress can be reduced when employees experience greater autonomy and control over their work.¹⁶ Krishna also emphasizes the principle of equanimity in both successful and failed* outcomes. He encourages individuals to maintain mental equilibrium regardless of success or failure. This approach reduces psychological distress by shifting focus from external results to internal regulation and purposeful action. It is consistent with resilience models in positive psychology.

Burnout results from over-identification with the results, over-ambition, and relentless striving. The Bhagavad Gita offers a preventive remedy for* burnout through the principle of *nishkama karma*. *Nishkama Karma* refers to a selfless act, giving up attachment to results. Krishna urges Arjuna to perform his duty without being motivated by expectations. Krishna preaches that individuals should perform their duties without being driven by results and not withdraw from action.³ His notion captures the essence of *vairāgya*,

detachment. Detachment keeps an individual from becoming obsessively engaged* with results and promotes equanimity of mind. However, in modern workplace psychology, burnout has been linked to excessive workload, lack of control and over-involvement in work roles.¹⁷ Externally controlled outcomes fuel chronic stress and eventual disengagement. Schaufeli et al. emphasize the cultivation of intrinsic motivation against the clinging to results, acting for the value of the work itself.¹⁸ The Gita precisely highlights service-oriented action instead of reward. Krishna's teachings provide a spiritual framework that makes even mundane work significant and psychologically sustainable. Incorporating *vairāgya* into occupational health frameworks fosters resilience by emphasizing effort over outcomes, limiting identity attachment to result-oriented phenomena, and preventing emotional exhaustion.

The Gita presents the concept of leadership that encapsulates empathy, morality and strategic thinking. The text advocates the democratic exercise of power against authoritarianism. Krishna employs counsel and empowerment techniques to enhance the leadership quality of human beings. Krishna states that the behavior of leaders establishes standards that are internalized and replicated by others.³ His concept emphasizes that leader should play a role to set workplace culture and norms. One should demonstrate ethical behavior through example. This reflects the concept of psychologically safe leadership in occupational health literature, where leaders foster trust, open communication and ethical responsibility.¹⁹ Brown and Treviño highlight that ethical leadership embodies fairness, integrity and people-centered values. It reduces workplace abnormality and increases employee morale.²⁰ Krishna's leadership approach focuses on wisdom (*buddhi*), compassion and long-term vision. Arjuna learns wisdom from Krishna's teachings that remove Arjuna's confusion. Then Arjuna becomes ready to move for action. Organizations can adhere to Krishna's concept to foster cultures based on trust, emotional intelligence and clear purpose.

The Gita offers *abhyāsa* (repeated practice) and *yoga* (mental unification) as powerful tools to soothe mental stress of the workers. Krishna instructs Arjuna that mental balance comes from sustained effort and detachment. Krishna suggests that the restless mind can be cultivated through practice (*abhyāsa*) and detachment (*vairāgya*).³ This resonates with Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction technique, which emphasizes regular attention training to develop awareness, reduce reactivity and improve task engagement.²¹ Workplace studies indicate that mindfulness enhances concentration, emotional regulation and decision-making, all of which are essential for occupational safety.⁸ The Bhagavad Gita's notion of equanimity as a yogic practice resonates with contemporary interpretations of mindfulness. Through the integration of structured practice and internal tranquility, individuals can foster mental resilience and mitigate cognitive fatigue. Gita's yoga serves as a mechanism for both meditative engagement and interaction with the external environment. It harmonizes awareness, equilibrium and concentrated action, representing an optimal approach for demanding professional contexts. The Bhagavad Gita offers composure, empathy and understanding as powerful internal and external conflict resolution tools. Arjuna's crisis in the battlefield represents both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict. Intrapersonal conflict arises from moral confusion marked by fear and grief. His interpersonal conflict results from his duty towards his relatives. This dual struggle resonates with the emotional and relational tensions often experienced in contemporary workplace environments. Krishna encourages Arjuna to transcend reactionary behavior and cultivate equanimity. Krishna asserts that a person demonstrates true strength when they remain balanced in both praise and criticism, as well as in honor and dishonor.³ Krishna's idea helps to deescalate conflict in the present scenario. Lipsky et al. argue that effective conflict management systems require both formal resolution mechanisms and the development of interpersonal skills, including empathy, composure and clarity.²² Krishna's counsel offers a blueprint for the resolution of conflict in the

modern-day workplace environment. Furthermore, the Gita's idea of non-attachment and self-control (*ātma-vashyā*) helps to reduce emotional disorder that creates disputes in workplace. De Dreu and Weingart show that relationship conflict, rather than task conflict, undermines team performance and mental health.²³ The Gita transforms such conflicts by shifting emphasis from ego-driven competition to collaboration rooted in awareness. Incorporating Gita's values such as *titikṣā* (forbearance) and *karuṇā* (compassion) into workplace training strengthens psychological safety and fosters relational harmony.

The Gita, advocating for spiritual humanism, challenges discrimination based on caste, creed and social identity. It stands against external status by showing value towards the intrinsic quality of all beings. Krishna stands against social inequality based on background and position. Krishna teaches that a wise person behaves all beings with equal regard, irrespective of their status, background and form.³ This concept creates a spiritual foundation for introducing diversity and inclusiveness into the workplace. In the context of occupational health, it parallels inclusivity that nurtures equal treatment, going beyond gender, caste, race, age and ability. Contemporary OHS frameworks emphasize the role of equitable treatment in enhancing psychological safety. Cox and Blake suggest that cultural diversity enhances problem-solving and innovation, particularly when organizations foster genuinely inclusive environments.²⁴ Similarly, Shore et al. demonstrate that inclusive climates correlate with higher job satisfaction, engagement and retention.²⁵ Krishna claims that all beings are manifestations of the same universal consciousness (Brahman). He sets a spiritual logic to dispel bias and embrace compassion-led leadership. Organizational and mental health flourish only when employees feel inherently respected and valued.

The Bhagavad Gita introduces three *gunas* (modes of nature) such as *sattva* (harmony), *rajas* (restlessness) and *tamas* (confusion). These *gunas* determine human behavior, emotion and mental health. Krishna describes that *sattva* gives rise to

knowledge, *rajas* to desire and greed and *tamas* to confusion and delusion.³ The *triṣṇa* framework can be understood as an early psychological model that helps individuals recognize and regulate their mental states in the workplace. In modern terms, these *gunas* can be loosely compared to balanced, overactive and depressive states of mind. Linley et al. suggest that fostering positive affect and meaning at work, analogous to *sattvic* qualities, enhances both mental health and productivity.¹² In contrast, excessive *rajas* beget burnout. *Tamas* contributes to disengagement and safety risks. Organizations can learn negative impacts of these forces. They can develop stress management techniques by adopting the Gita's notion of *satva*.

Prompt decision-making capacities are the fundamental aspects of occupational health and safety, even under pressure. Krishna guides Arjuna about the precise decision-making process amid emotional and ethical conflict. Workers face such challenges when they are in dilemmas during unsafe practices. Krishna addresses this moral paralysis by encouraging *gyana-yoga*—the yoga of discernment. Krishna suggests that one has to transcend duality of mind to be free from conflicting knowledge and external influences.³ This parallels James Reason's concept of situational awareness in high-reliability organizations, where clarity of judgment and moral responsibility are prioritized over rigid adherence to protocol.²⁶ Krishna warns against decisions driven by uncontrolled emotions. He explains that anger disrupts clarity, leading to confusion, loss of judgment and ultimately harmful outcomes.³ This chain illustrates the psychological degradation that poor emotional regulation can cause, leading to unsafe or unethical choices. If Krishna's advice were applied to Modern OHS training programs, modern workers would benefit from learning how to develop emotional intelligence, stress inoculation, and moral clarity. Integrating ethical norms, self-awareness and clear judgment into decision-making models, organizations will be thrived to ensure safety, dignity and long-term sustainability.

The Gita introduces *ātma-jñāna*, the knowledge of the true self, a permanent and unchanging entity.

It is neither unaffected by success, nor by failure. It does not succumb to birth and death, rather it continues to exist beyond the body.³ This realization creates the spiritual bedrock of equanimity, resilience and purpose. These qualities are essential for mental health in occupational settings. Self-awareness is the foundation of effective interpersonal skills, conflict management and leadership.⁷ The Gita claims that self-knowledge liberates people from fear, anxiety and ego-attachment. Ashkanasy and Daus indicate that individuals with higher emotional awareness are better able to regulate their behavior and maintain composure in stressful work environments.²⁷ Krishna's teachings closely align with contemporary mindfulness and self-reflection practices used to improve well-being at work. If a person gets absorbed in his/her job, they face a mental disorder. To be free from this case, the Gita offers a path to return to inner calm and self-awareness. When individuals are enlightened through *ātma-jñāna*, they can handle stressful situations with complete calm and integrity.

Conclusion

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This article has explored the convergence between the Bhagavad Gita's spiritual teachings and the evolving field of occupational health and safety. The Gita provides practically applicable insights to address mental stress and ethical dilemmas. It also offers prompt decision-making approaches and teaches us how to develop serenity of mind and handle emotional disorders at work. It presents a vision of *dharma* that promotes integrity and ethical responsibility of the workers. It highlights the key role of *nishkama karma* as a remedy for employee and employer burnout. Moreover, the Gita emphasizes *samatvam*, which helps to maintain emotional balance among workers. It highlights the significance of *ātma-jñāna*, self-awareness, which helps nurture the highest occupational integrity. It provides a psychospiritual framework that enhances both individual and organizational health. Its teachings do not replace scientific notions; rather, they complement science by integrating ancient wisdom into the contemporary working environment. This integration helps to create humane, ethical, and spiritually conscious workplaces in addition to productivity.

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