

A Humanistic Framework for Meaningful Labor: Integrating the Ethical Triad of the Guru Granth Sahib into Modern Management Theory

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Abstract: This paper addresses the increasing "mechanization" of work in the modern transactional economy by proposing a non-Western, human-centric conceptual framework for organizational purpose. While modern management literature focuses on productivity-driven metrics, this study interrogates the theoretical gap between organizational branding and lived ethics. Utilizing a thematic analysis of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, the research explores how the ethical triad of Kirat Karo (honest labour), Naam Japo (mindful awareness), and Vand Chhako (sharing) transforms work from a survival-based transaction into a vehicle for human dignity and social harmony. By synthesizing these ancient principles with contemporary constructs like **Self-Determination Theory** and the **Triple Bottom Line**, the paper analyses the **Tata Group** as a successful institutionalized model of this triad. The findings suggest that integrating gratitude and interdependence into organizational structures offers a sustainable route to reducing worker alienation and fostering psychological safety.

Keywords; Humanistic Management, Workplace Spirituality, Guru Granth Sahib, Organizational Ethics, Tata Group, Meaningful Work

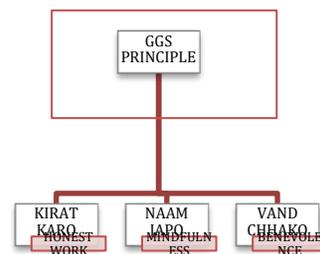
Introduction

Every human life, regardless of its cultural or economic setting, is driven by a deep-seated need for a foundational direction: purpose. The practical execution of tasks—the specific jobs, sectors, and duties that constitute our work—is continually being redefined by global forces and technological advancement. Yet, the essential search for meaning remains an unchanging constant. Work that is decoupled from this core purpose, even if materially profitable, descends into a state of mechanistic activity that leads to alienation. The modern economic landscape is defined by relentless complexity, driven by globalization, rapid technological change, and intense, unceasing competition. These forces have fundamentally reshaped the nature of employment, often compelling organizations to prioritize efficiency, scalability, and measurable output. Consequently, work is frequently reduced to a transactional activity—a set of quantifiable tasks and

responsibilities—where its value is judged purely by productivity metrics and short-term financial gains. This hyper-focus on output has created a pervasive professional environment where individuals can easily feel disconnected, treating their labour as merely a means of survival.

This paper asserts that this transactional view fails to capture the inherent dignity of human effort. We propose that while work serves as the necessary substance of life, providing the physical means and activities, it is the purpose that conveys its essential essence. Purpose is the overarching, values-driven framework that gives coherence and direction to existence. Without it, work is in danger of becoming a mechanistic, alienating routine, lacking both personal satisfaction and deeper social significance. The quest for purpose, therefore, is not a professional luxury but a fundamental human necessity.

The argument presented here demonstrates that the enduring purpose of human endeavour transcends variations in job titles, cultures, and economic systems. It is anchored in universal principles: humanity, care, gratitude, and benevolence towards others. To articulate and ground this claim, we turn to the ancient, yet timeless, ethical wisdom contained within the Guru Granth Sahib. Its comprehensive ethical triad—Kirat Karo (honest work), Naam Japo (mindful awareness), and Vand Chhako (sharing with others)—provides a profound and practical framework for converting prosaic, daily labour into meaningful, virtuous action.



This paper will reflect on this triad to show how purpose-directed work remains the only sustainable route to both individual fulfilment and shared social harmony in the modern age. This paper will reflect on this triad to show how purpose-directed work remains the only sustainable route to both individual fulfilment and shared social harmony in the **modern age**. The central challenge in contemporary organizational behaviour is the decoupling of work from its foundational purpose, leading to a state of "mechanistic activity" and professional alienation. While Western models of management emphasize efficiency and measurable output, they often fail to capture the inherent dignity of human effort. This paper addresses this theoretical gap by proposing that the Guru Granth Sahib provides a practical framework for converting daily labour into virtuous

action. The research question asks how this ethical triad can provide a non-Western alternative to current transactional views of labour.

2. Literature Review

Modern management literature recognizes that meaning and purpose are critical to sustainable performance. Purpose-driven organizations align individual motivation with collective good (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2021). Research demonstrates that employees who find purpose in their work exhibit higher engagement and resilience (Bailey & Madden, 2016). Yet most organizations still treat purpose as a branding statement rather than a lived philosophy.

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as innate human needs. These resonate with moral and relational dimensions emphasized in the Guru Granth Sahib: independence through honest labour, excellence in duty, and connection.

Scholars of workplace spirituality propose that meaningful work arises when individuals integrate inner values with outer performance (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Studies link such integration to trust, empathy, and reduced burnout (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Indian management thinkers have long sought indigenous ethical frameworks; the Guru Granth Sahib provides one rooted not in dogma but in universality—emphasizing equality, service, and authenticity (Singh, 2019). The Guru Granth Sahib provides one rooted not in dogma but in universality—emphasizing equality, service, and authenticity (Singh, 2019). This framework extends existing management theories by providing a moral anchor to psychological needs. For example, while Self-Determination Theory identifies autonomy and competence as essential, the GGS framework adds a "truth-oriented" dimension to independence through Kirat Karo. Furthermore, where workplace spirituality often treats inner values and outer performance as separate, the GGS triad integrates them, suggesting that work itself is the substance that nourishes purpose.

3. Insights from the Guru Granth Sahib

It is mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib that life has a significance only when a work is done in the realm of truth and service. This concept abolishes the division of spiritual and material labour categorisation; it refers to any work done with a sincere and mindful action as virtuous.

GGs Principle	Management Application	Scholarly Contribution	Organizational Outcome
Kirat Karo (Honest work)	Ethical Governance	Recasts profitability as an indemnity of ethics rather than just financial gain.	High Internal Trust & Reduced Corruption

Naam Japo (Mindfulness)	Emotional Intelligence	Encourages "sacred stewardship" where leadership is defined by humility and empathy.	Authentic Leadership & Low Burnout
Vand Chhako (Benevolence)	Stakeholder Capitalism	Moves beyond voluntary charity toward a structural model of interdependence.	Social License & Brand Equity

Figure 1: The Humanistic Management Framework of the GGS Triad

3.1 Kirat Karo: The Ethics of Honest Work

The scripture also repeatedly reinforces the idea to “earn by one’s own effort and share with others.” It implies that the work should be according to the truth and reflex not ostensibly disrupting dependence. These firms are characterised by the firm's adherence to its transparency, accountability, and obligation to stakeholders in an immediate sense. When we see, Kirat Karo being applied to companies, it stands for both governance integrity & fair reward structure. Any company that pays workers fairly and eliminates exploitation are applying this ethic. Accordingly, profitability is recast through this principle as an indemnity of ethics.

3.2 Naam Japo: Mindfulness and Inner Awareness

Here, the Guru Granth Sahib philosophy links awareness with purposeful performance. Existence lived with continual consciousness so long as Divinity is in our hearts Naam Japo introduces to the early 21st century a conversation which is around emotional intelligence and ethical decision making. Naam Japo thus means it is the executive who shows up every morning to these reflections, empathetically listens and valued humility.

3.3 Vand Chhako: Sharing and Benevolence

Giving of whatever you have is connotative of the social facet of purpose. In a broader sense, work is truly purposeful when one’s harvest goes beyond their shelf. Avarice is frowned upon because it puts into focus community well-being. This is the true management application of this philosophy, a triple bottom line issue. Here the importance employee-oriented, profit-minded and planet-conscious issue is surrounding this philosophy, i.e. Vand Chhako. By corporate world Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropy is rooted in this philosophy. Vand Chakho’s efficacy is based on the fact that it is both interdependence and near equality approach that is not meant to be charity

4. Real-Life Applications and Indian Context

4.1 Ethical Enterprises and Social Responsibility

Indian business history provides eloquent parallels to the principles of the Guru Granth Sahib. The Tata Group stands as an epitome of a successful commercial enterprise built on deep-rooted values. Their guiding mission, "To improve the quality of life of the communities we serve globally, through long-term stakeholder value creation based on Leadership with Trust," directly manifests the ethical triad.

Kirat Karo (Honest Work and Integrity): This principle is institutionalized through the Tata Code of Conduct (TCOC), which mandates transparency and ethical governance, often setting standards ahead of legal requirements. For instance, Tata Steel introduced welfare measures like Maternity Benefits and Welfare Departments decades before they became Indian law. The group views employees not as mere resources, but as co-creators of value, offering pioneering, gender-neutral policies in areas like adoption assistance, childcare facilities, and flexible work models. This commitment to dignity and fair remuneration operationalizes the 'truth-oriented' labour ethics of Kirat Karo.

Vand Chhako (Sharing and Benevolence): The most tangible application of the sharing principle is the ownership structure itself: over 66% of Tata Sons' equity capital is held by philanthropic trusts (Tata Trusts). The Tata Group serves as a primary case for the institutionalization of this triad. Unlike organizations that treat Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as an external add-on or a marketing tool, Tata's ownership structure—where 66% of equity is held by philanthropic trusts—manifests **Vand Chhako** as a core business identity rather than a peripheral activity. This structural commitment ensures that wealth is continually cycled back for public benefit, transforming wealth accumulation into a direct conduit for collective good rather than mere private gain. From a management perspective, this demonstrates that spiritual ethics are not merely individual values but can be embedded into the legal and financial architecture of a global enterprise, effectively resolving the tension between profit and social purpose. This ensures that the wealth generated—what "came from the people"—is continually cycled back for public benefit, supporting vast initiatives in health, education, and livelihood generation. Specific, measurable programs like 'Aarogya' (combating malnutrition), 'Kaushalya' (skill training for unemployed youth through a 'Learn and Earn' model), and 'Vasundhara' (environmental conservation and massive tree plantation drives) demonstrate a commitment to the Triple Bottom Line—focusing on People, Planet, and Profit. By making CSR spending well above the mandated minimum, the group transforms wealth accumulation into a direct conduit for collective good.

5. Discussion: Integrating Philosophy and Management

5.1 Purpose beyond productivity

In a labour market that is enveloped by modern organizational measurement through output metrics, The Guru Granth Sahib speaks of 'Nishkam Karma' (selfless action). That even action without purpose is likely empty. There is no justification for work that lacks gratitude, justice and compassion. Gratitude, justice, and compassion when integrated into a goal-setting framework nurtures organically self-replicating organizational cultures - units in which employees find purpose and tribes w/o. An organization that has a purpose-oriented outlook views employees not just as resources but as co-creators of value. The margins of this sort of orientation results in attrition levels that are several times lower - a relatively larger impact on psychological safety, which is well substantiated by organizational-behaviour research today.

5.2 Gratitude and leadership

At the heart of the scripture's world-view is gratitude. It kills arrogance, nourishes humility and calls attention to our inter-dependencies. A deeply grateful leader is mindful of empathy and authorizes trust. For Emmons, a token of gratitude is an assertion of authority. A manager who is grateful to the team of subordinates is not reinforcing the authority system, but rather the collective purpose - the power transforms into sacred stewardship. A daily prayerful state defended by the Guru Granth Sahib blurs the servant leadership mark: where the leader's ultimatum is serving the other. From gratitude comes power, Power gets transformed into moral authority.

5.3 Work as harmony

Harmony is one distinctive common thread that runs through the Grand Book of Guru Granth Sahib: in between internal intent and external action; amid self and society and in between endeavour and ethics. Work is not then conceived as ambition vs restraint, or competition absent cooperation. Where organizational eco-systems are constantly rife with conflicts and stress, The Guru Granth Sahib preaches harmony. Through this we also extend this notion to not only environmental harmony but that primarily it is human beings

The integration of gratitude and harmony into the workplace directly impacts psychological safety. By viewing employees as co-creators of value rather than mere resources, purpose-oriented organizations foster "tribes" characterized by high trust and significantly lower attrition rates. This suggests that the GGS framework is not merely a moral ideal but a practical, evidence-based strategy for organizational resilience in the modern age.

5.4 Critical Perspectives and Counter-Arguments

A common critique of spiritually-grounded management models is that they are idealistic and incompatible with the profit-maximization mandates of modern corporations. Critics of humanistic management argue that shifting focus toward "benevolence" (Vand Chhako) may compromise competitive advantage. However, this paper contends that the "profit vs. purpose" debate is a false dichotomy. As seen in the Tata Group case, an ethical anchor creates "Systemic Resilience." By internalizing social costs and fostering deep stakeholder trust, the GGS framework acts as a risk-mitigation strategy, moving the firm from "short-term extraction" to "long-term value creation".

6. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the "true measure of work" is not found in financial metrics alone, but in the degree to which labour sustains our common humanity. By applying the ethical triad of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, this paper provides a non-Western conceptual framework that addresses the theoretical gap between transactional labour and ontological purpose.

The analysis of the **Tata Group** illustrates that these spiritual principles—Kirat Karo, Naam Japo, and Vand Chhako—are not merely normative ideals but can be successfully institutionalized into corporate governance and ownership structures. This integration offers a practical pathway for modern organizations to mitigate worker alienation, foster psychological safety, and achieve a state of "harmony" where internal values and external actions are aligned.

Ultimately, while technologies and economic systems continue to evolve, the fundamental mission of the enterprise remains the preservation of human dignity. This study concludes that by shifting from a "productivity-first" model to a "human-centric" framework, management can reclaim work as a vehicle for shared social good and individual fulfilment.

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