

## KARMA YOGA: A CONCEPTUALIZATION AND VALIDATION OF THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHY OF WORK

Zubin R. Mulla and Venkat R. Krishnan

Xavier Labour Relations Institute

The doctrine of Karma Yoga forms the core of the Indian philosophy of work. By doing a content analysis of the Bhagavad-Gita and studying commentaries on the Gita, we identified two dimensions of Karma Yoga—duty orientation and absence of desire for rewards, and we prepared scales for the measurement of core beliefs in Indian philosophy and Karma Yoga. These scales were tested on a set of 75 executives and results compared with two facets of the personality trait of conscientiousness, viz. dutifulness and achievement striving, using hierarchical regression and a test for moderation. We found that a belief in Indian philosophy enhanced duty orientation, and absence of desire for rewards enhanced life satisfaction. There was moderate support for our hypothesis that dutifulness was more strongly related to Karma Yoga when achievement striving was low than when it was high.

For enduring and sustainable progress of societies, it is important that leaders identify and build on the core components of the cultural ethos and customize some of the cultural artifacts to suit modern times (Krishnan, 2003). The relationship between humankind and work has been elaborated in India through the Bhagavad-Gita. The Gita, which is part of the epic Mahabharata, explains the philosophy of right action or *karma yoga* using the situation of Arjuna, a warrior on the battlefield who finds himself helpless when he is called to action. The text of the Gita is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna where Krishna explains the meaning of life, the place of work within life, and the right way in which to work. This paper attempts to develop the karma yoga construct and then empirically validate it by analyzing its relationships with some relevant variables. Before we explore the concept of karma yoga, it is important for us to understand some of the fundamental beliefs of Indian philosophy, which form the foundation of karma yoga.

### Fundamental Beliefs of Indian Philosophy

Despite the numerous schools of thought, three beliefs are fundamental to Indian philosophy (Dasgupta, 1991, p. 71). First, the belief in the karma theory i.e. all actions that are done have the power to ordain for their doers joy or sorrow in the future depending if the action is good or bad. Often, individuals may be required to take birth in another body to experience fully the joy or suffering that is due to them because of their past actions. The second belief is in the existence of a permanent entity, called *atma* or soul, which is our true unknown nature, pure and untouched by the impurities of our ordinary life. The third belief is about the doctrine

of *mukti* or salvation. Since actions lead us through this endless cycle of birth and death, if we could be free of all such emotions or desires that lead us to action, there would be no fuel (in the form of joys or sorrows to be experienced) to propel us into another birth and we would be free of this eternal cycle. The Gita builds on these three beliefs and suggests a way out of the cycle of birth and death by selflessly performing one's duties depending on one's position in society. Another unique feature of Indian philosophy is that multiple paths are accepted as leading to the same ultimate destination, and each individual is given the freedom to select the path most suited to his or her temperament (Vivekananda, 1907/1999).

### **What is Karma Yoga?**

The word *karma* comes from the Sanskrit root *kri*, which means *doing*, *affairs*, or *activity* and includes all actions that a person performs whether they are of body, speech, or mind. The word *yoga* comes from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means, *to join*. However, in the Mahabharata it is used in three ways: as a special skill, device, intelligent method, or graceful way of performing actions (Gita chapter 2, verse 50); as equability of mind towards success or failure (Gita chapter 2, verse 48); and as the device for eliminating the natural tendency of karma to create bondage (Gita chapter 2, verse 50). Since the later two definitions of yoga speak of the relationship of yoga with action, the terms "yoga" and "karma yoga" are used interchangeably at various instances in the Gita (Tilak, 1915/2000). For the purpose of our paper, we will use the word "yoga" to mean "device" or "intelligent method" and hence the term "karma yoga" would be "a technique for intelligently performing actions."

Since the ultimate goal of all beings is to free the soul from the cycle of birth and death, any method that enables release from this perpetual cycle is preferable to any other method that is likely to bind the human soul to the cycle. Hence, whether we define karma yoga as "a technique for intelligently performing actions" or "a technique for performing actions in a manner that the soul is not bound by the effects of the action" we mean the same thing (Tilak, 1915/2000).

### **What Causes Bondage of Actions?**

According to the Gita chapter 2, verse 14, the senses interact with the material objects of the world and because of these interactions; there is perception of happiness or pain in the mind of the person experiencing the sense objects. The perception of happiness or pain leads to desire, which is nothing but a wish to experience again or avoid something that has once been experienced by the senses. This leads to further interactions of the senses with material objects. Thus, even when the object of desire is enjoyed, our desires are not extinguished; instead, the desires grow like a fire on which oil has been poured (Tilak, 1915/2000).

One way out of this perpetual cycle of desire is the complete annihilation of all desires by the renunciation of all actions. Another method is to be able to control in one's mind the experience of pain and happiness i.e. being neutral to the experiences of our senses (Tilak, 1915/2000).

According to the Gita, when one does what one has to do, with perfect mental control and after giving up the desire for the result and with a frame of mind that is equal towards pain and happiness, there remains no fear or possibility of experiencing the unhappiness of actions. If one can perform actions with such a spirit, it does not become necessary to give up actions. Hence, the Gita recommends that we keep our organs under control and allow them to perform the various activities, not for a selfish purpose, but apathetically, without desire, and for the welfare of others (Tilak, 1915/2000).

### **Dimensions of Karma-Yoga**

When one is convinced of the law of universal cause and effect, the existence of an eternal soul, and the objective of life as liberation of the soul from the eternal cycle of birth and death, one seeks opportunities for eternal salvation. Indian philosophy suggests that the path to be selected for liberation must be suited to the temperament and disposition of the seeker. Karma yoga provides one such path for freedom from the cycle of birth and death, which is suited for people with an active temperament who have chosen to remain in the world and aspire for liberation.

In order to understand the dimensions of karma yoga, each of the verses of the Gita (Gandhi, 1946/2001) was read by us and the verses were categorized into activities prescribed to reach the ideal state (69 verses); description of the ideal state of a person (145 verses); and outcomes on achieving the ideal state (76 verses). Karma yoga is the path to reach the ideal liberated state through work and hence we looked into the types of activities prescribed to reach the ideal state. Five types of activities were described in the Gita: devotion to god or seeing god in all beings (22 verses); performing actions without attachment (16 verses); meditation or focusing on the soul (10 verses); being neutral to opposites, or keeping senses under control (10 verses); and doing one's duty in society (8 verses).

Indian philosophy prescribes four equivalent paths to reach the ideal state viz. raja yoga (the path of meditation), jnana yoga (the path of knowledge), bhakti yoga (the path of devotion), and karma yoga (the path of action). When we categorized each of the above five elements, we found that "devotion to god" referred to bhakti yoga and "meditation or focusing on the soul" referred to raja yoga or jnana yoga. From this we deduced that karma yoga must be described by one or more of the remaining three items viz. performing action without attachment, doing one's duty, and being neutral to opposites.

The essence of karma yoga is given in the Gita (Radhakrishnan, 1948 / 1993) chapter 2, verse 47, which says, "To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction." This verse of the Gita is also mentioned by Tilak (1915/2000 p 895) as giving the entire import of karma yoga in a short and beautiful form. Later in the Gita (Radhakrishnan, 1948 / 1993, chapter 3, verses 12, 13, and 16), Arjuna is told that persons who survive on this earth and use its resources without working are living in sin, and hence man is obliged to work selflessly in order to fulfill his duty towards the world. Hence, based on the results of our content analysis and the interpretation of the Gita verses, we take karma yoga as made up of two dimensions: a sense of obligation or duty towards others and an absence of desire for rewards.

The third element found in our content analysis about being neutral to opposites was not taken up as an essential part of karma yoga because we were not certain whether this was a prerequisite to any spiritual life on any of the four paths or it was a part of one of the four paths.

### ***Sense of Obligation or Duty towards Others***

The body has a natural tendency to act; the Gita states that actions motivated by a desire bind the soul into the cycle of birth and death. Hence, the only way one can effectively function in society is by developing a sense of obligation or duty towards others. In this manner, all actions become a repayment of a debt and the actor is free of any motive for the actions.

The belief in the law of cause and effect makes us realize that we are placed in a particular situation because of unfulfilled past obligations on our part and we develop a sense of connectedness with all beings. When our belief in the law of cause and effect is coupled with the belief in the doctrine of salvation, it makes us strive to live a moral life for the benefit of society. The sense of connectedness coupled with our striving to live a moral life for the benefit of society, creates in us a sense of duty or obligation towards others.

### ***Absence of a Desire for Rewards***

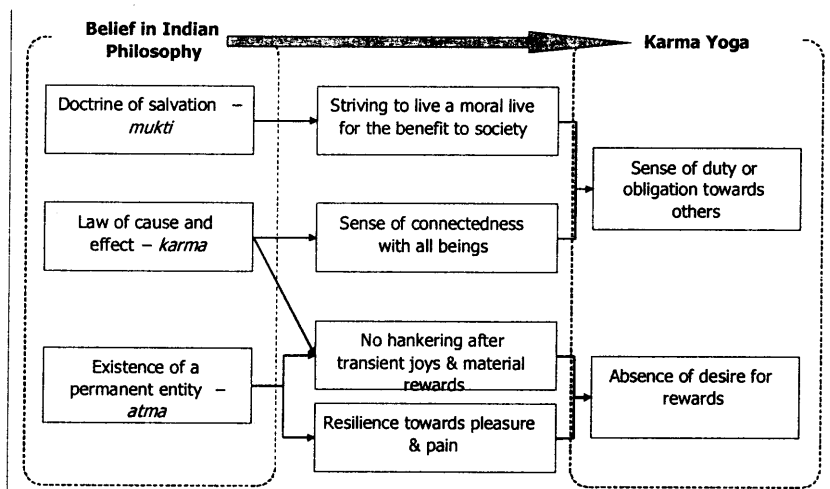
When an individual is able to discriminate between what is eternal (soul) and what is transient (the body) and is able to increasingly identify with the soul, one's actions are more spontaneous and not motivated by any material gratification. Besides, reduced identification with the body creates resilience towards physical pleasures and pain. As a result of this, there arises in the individual, an absence of desire for rewards.

In addition, since the outcomes of one's actions are dependant on an elaborate chain of cause and effect, all that is in the individual's control is performance of that action. Hence, one ceases to have a feeling of ownership towards one's actions and believes that the actions happen

naturally and the bodily organs are just an instrument for their execution. This lack of ownership for actions coupled with the sense of obligation to others creates a complete disinterest in the mind of the seeker for any form of material or social rewards.

The Gita (chapter 3, verse 3) explains that there are two paths, which lead to the goal of liberation and each is suited for a person of a particular temperament (Radhakrishnan, 1993, p. 132). The path of renunciation, meditation, and intellectual inquiry is prescribed for persons whose natural tendency is to explore the inner life of the spirit while the path of action is for persons who are involved in the affairs of the world. For a person who does not renounce the world and is a part of the society, karma yoga naturally evolves from the fundamental beliefs of the Indian worldview (refer Figure 1).

Figure 1  
Belief in Indian Philosophy leads to Karma Yoga



Hence, we hypothesized that for individuals who are part of society, the extent of their belief in the fundamental tenets of the Indian worldview will be positively related to their karma yoga orientation (Hypothesis 1).

Since the practice of karma yoga is defined as a lifestyle or a disposition, the closest correlate to an existing construct in organizational behavior is that aspect of personality that relates to the disposition of a person towards work.

### Personality

The Big-Five model of personality, a model based on analyses of adjectives and factor analyses of various personality tests is one of the dominant models of personality today (McCrae & Costa, 1985; McCrae & Costa, 1987). It describes extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness,

neuroticism, and openness as the five personality traits. Goldberg (1990) demonstrated that the Big-Five model could be generalized by showing how the analysis of any reasonably large sample of English trait adjectives in either self or peer descriptions elicited a variant of the Big-Five factor structure and hence how virtually all such traits could be represented within this model. Peabody and Goldberg (1989) even showed how trait objectives could be viewed as blends of five major features relating to power, love, work, affect, and intellect. Since conscientiousness is the dimension amongst the Big Five, which relates to work disposition it is most likely to capture the essence of the construct karma yoga.

### ***Conscientiousness or Work Disposition***

Costa and McCrae (1995) described six specific facet scales for each of the five broad domains. The facets identified for conscientiousness were competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation.

Some authors (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge, Martocchio & Thoresen, 1997; Stewart, Carson, & Cardy, 1996) have used conscientiousness as a broad trait, and have described conscientious individuals as purposeful, strong willed, determined, punctual, and reliable (Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997). These authors have described conscientiousness as either a stable tendency to be organized, efficient, goal oriented or persistent (Stewart, Carson, & Cardy, 1996) or characterized by personal competence, dutifulness, self-discipline, and deliberation (Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997).

Others (Ashton, 1998; Digman & Inouye, 1986; Hough, 1992) have used the different facets of conscientiousness to explain workplace behavior. Moon (2001) differentiated the personality factor of conscientiousness into two elements "duty," which is an "other-oriented" construct and "achievement striving," which is a self-centered construct and used the escalation of commitment decision dilemma to capture the two different motives. He defined duty as work done based on concern for the welfare of the department while achievement striving was work done based on the individual's concern for the advancement of his or her career.

Our conceptualization of karma yoga described as a combination of a sense of obligation or duty towards others and an absence of desire for rewards is very similar to the facet of dutifulness, which is described as strictly adhering to one's ethical principles and scrupulously fulfilling one's moral obligations. Hence, persons who are high on karma yoga are likely to be high on dutifulness. All the facets of the personality trait of conscientiousness are likely to be highly correlated in an individual and hence it is not prudent to define a variable in terms of one facet alone, without considering the impact of the other five facets. The facets of competence, order, self-discipline, and deliberation seem to be neutral to karma yoga; however, the facet of achievement striving must be looked

at more closely. Achievement striving is described as having high aspiration levels, and as such this seems to be in conflict with one of the dimension of karma yoga, which talks of an absence of desire for rewards. It is likely that our description of karma yoga as high dutifulness may hold only when achievement striving is low.

Hence, we hypothesized that, individuals high on dutifulness will be high on karma yoga, and this relationship will be moderated by achievement striving in such a way that the relationship between dutifulness and karma yoga will be stronger in the presence of low achievement striving (Hypothesis 2).

### ***Karma Yoga, Personality Disposition and Life Satisfaction***

For a person who is high on karma yoga, the Gita (Radhakrishnan, 1948/1993) predicts a number of positive outcomes like the end of sorrow (chapter 2, verse 65); peace (chapter 2, verses 66, 70, & 71); happiness (chapter 2, verse 66); bliss (chapter 2, verse 72); and satisfaction (chapter 3, verse 17). The state of a karma yogi is described as one who is completely satisfied with his or her current state and is not hankering after any other state of existence. Such a state can be reached only when one is completely satisfied with ones life.

Our content analysis of Mahatma Gandhi's commentary on the Gita (Gandhi, 1946/2001) showed that the effects of karma yoga were described as four outcomes viz. freedom from the karmic law of birth and death; attainment of oneness with god; happiness; and peace. Of these four outcomes, the first two describe spiritual states while happiness and peace are psychological states, which can be tested empirically. The closest variable to the states of happiness and peace described in the existing literature is life satisfaction or subjective well being.

Life satisfaction is defined as an evaluative summary of one's liking or disliking one's life (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). Authors have distinguished between two perspectives determining life satisfaction. The top-down or the dispositional perspective emphasizes the role of broad individual differences in personality in satisfaction, whereas the bottom-up approach focuses on the role of situations, events, and contexts in overall satisfaction (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). Significant evidence has been found to support the claim that life-satisfaction is significantly caused by top-down factors like genetics (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, & Abraham, 1989) or personality dispositions (McCrae & Costa, 1991; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002). Dispositional measures accounted for the stability in job attitudes (Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986; Staw & Ross, 1985) and life-attitudes (Costa, McCrae, & Zonderman, 1987) over periods of five and ten years respectively.

An explanation for the relative stability of life-satisfaction has been that individuals adapt to significant life circumstances like health, wealth,

marriage, residence, and privilege thereby maintaining a relatively stable level of life satisfaction (Costa, McCrae, & Zonderman, 1987).

Studies by Costa, McCrae, and Zonderman (1987), and McCrae and Costa (1991) have already shown that the trait of conscientiousness can affect life satisfaction. The facet of achievement striving is characterized by ambition and goal seeking behavior. As predicted by Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman, (1978), extrinsic rewards trigger a cycle of contrast and habituation, which has a dual effect. Firstly, they do not significantly increase life satisfaction over a period and secondly they reduce the individual's ability to derive satisfaction from comparatively lesser mundane joys. Individuals who are high on karma yoga will be low in achievement striving; hence they are people who are not likely to be hankering after rewards. Even if these individuals receive rewards, they are not likely to give them much significance and hence are not likely to fall victims to this cycle.

Hence, we hypothesized that karma yoga will be positively related to life satisfaction (Hypothesis 3).

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Seventy-five executives from ages 21 years to 55 years (Median=33 years), across more than 10 companies in India were studied. The sample included 63 male and 12 female respondents, 55 of the respondents were married, and 20 were single. The work experience of the respondents ranged from less than a year to 30 years with a median of 10 years, and 28 were graduates, 45 were postgraduates, and two were Ph.D.s.

### *Measures*

A scale to measure the belief in Indian philosophy was built based on the fundamental beliefs in Indian philosophy. The scale contained five items of which two items checked the belief in the law of karma, one item checked the belief in the presence of a soul, one item checked the belief in liberation, and one item checked the belief in spiritual growth through work.

For conceptualization of karma yoga, we used the content analysis of Gandhi's (1946/2001) commentary on the Gita. For development of the karma yoga scale, we drew from the verses of the Gita, which described the two elements of duty orientation and absence of desire from rewards. We created a five-item scale describing duty orientation and a seven-item scale describing absence of desire from rewards.

The facets of the trait of conscientiousness, viz. dutifulness and achievement striving were measured using a 10 item scale for each facet based on the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) prepared by P. T. Costa, Jr. and R. R. McCrae (1992) and items for the scale were taken from an internet website, International Personality Item Pool (2001).



Items representing dutifulness, achievement striving, and karma yoga were incorporated into a questionnaire and respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement on a five-point scale (1 strongly disagree; 2 disagree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 4 agree; 5 strongly agree). The mean rating on the items comprising a factor was taken as the score for that factor.

Life satisfaction was measured using the question, "How happy are you at present with your life as a whole?" on a zero (*totally unhappy*) to 10 (*totally happy*) scale. The answer to this question was taken as "life satisfaction" because it referred to a reflection of life as a whole rather than the experience of pleasant emotions (Fujita & Diener, 2005).

## RESULTS

### ***Factor Analysis and Scale Validation for Belief in Indian Philosophy and Karma Yoga***

The five item scale for beliefs in Indian philosophy was reliable (Cronbach Alpha=.70) and a factor analysis using principal component analysis with varimax rotation showed that all the five items loaded onto a single factor.

Of the five items initially selected for karma yoga-sense of duty, we could get a single factor loading with only two items i.e. Item Numbers 1 and 3. Hence, the other items were dropped from the scale giving a Cronbach Alpha of .56.

Out of the seven items selected for karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards, two items, viz. Item 3 and Item 4 were removed to get a single clean factor. Cronbach Alpha for this scale was .64.

Since correlation between the two factors of karma yoga was not significant, we treated them as separate variables and not a single variable as conceptualized earlier.

### ***Facets of Conscientiousness-Dutifulness and Achievement Striving***

For the facet of Dutifulness, we selected items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 9. Items 3, 5, 8, and 10 were dropped and we got a Cronbach Alpha of 0.77 for the six selected items. For the facet of Achievement Striving, we dropped items 8 and 9 and got a Cronbach Alpha of 0.76 for the eight selected items.

### ***Tests of Hypothesis–Dutifulness, Achievement Striving, and Karma Yoga***

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of the variables of interest are reported in Table 1. To test our hypothesis of the moderating effect of achievement striving on the relationship between dutifulness and karma yoga, we conducted a regression analysis. Since we could not combine the two hypothesized dimensions of karma yoga,

we performed the regression for each dimension separately. The facets of conscientiousness viz. dutifulness and achievement striving were centered (i.e. by subtracting the mean from each score), and the interaction terms as well as the main effects were based on these centered scores. Table 2 and Table 3 show the results of regression on karma yoga-sense of duty and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards respectively. The interaction term was moderately significant ( $p < .1$ ) for karma yoga-sense of duty and not significant for karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards.

Table 1  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Intercorrelations*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Belief in Indian Philosophy	3.79	.66	(.70)					
2. Karma Yoga-Sense of Obligation or duty towards others	4.26	.50	.34**	(.56)				
3. Karma Yoga-Absence of a desire for rewards	2.71	.64	.21	.14	(.64)			
4. Conscientiousness-Dutifulness	4.20	.54	.24*	.24*	.45**	(.77)		
5. Conscientiousness-Achievement Striving	4.23	.41	.23*	.31**	.28*	.45**	(.76)	
6. Life Satisfaction	7.05	1.77	.07	.00	.43**	.27*	.39**	-

Note: Coefficients alphas are in parenthesis along the diagonal *N* varies from 68 to 74.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2  
*Results of Regression Analysis to check the interaction effect of facets of conscientiousness on Karma Yoga-sense of obligation or duty towards others*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	95% CI		$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper			
Constant	4.227	.06	4.10	4.37		70.11	.00
Dutifulness × Achievement Striving	.36	.21	-.06	.78	.18	1.68	.09
Dutifulness	.13	.11	-.09	.36	.14	1.14	.25
Achievement Striving	.30	.15	-.04	.61	.24	1.96	.05

Note: *N* varies from 68 to 74.

To investigate the interaction further, we did a median split of the sample on achievement striving. Dutifulness was not related to karma yoga-sense of duty when achievement striving was low and was significantly related to karma yoga-sense of duty ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ) when achievement striving was high (greater than the median). Although dutifulness was related to karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards both

when achievement striving was low ( $\beta = .38, p < .05$ ) and when achievement striving was high ( $\beta = .41, p < .01$ ), the relationship became more pronounced when the achievement striving was high. These results are exactly opposite to our hypothesized relationship between the facets of conscientiousness and the dimensions of karma yoga; therefore Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 3

*Results of Regression Analysis to check the interaction effect of facets of conscientiousness on Karma Yoga- absence of desire for rewards*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	95% CI		$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper			
Constant	2.69	.07	2.54	2.84		36.64	.00
Dutifulness $\times$ Achievement Striving							
Striving	.26	.26	-.26	.79	.10	1.00	.31
Dutifulness	.51	.14	.22	.80	.43	3.59	.00
Achievement Striving	.13	.19	-.24	.51	.08	.71	.47

*Note.* *N* varies from 68 to 74.

Results of regression analyses to check the impact of belief in Indian philosophy, dutifulness, and achievement striving on karma yoga-sense of duty and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards are shown in Table 4 and Table 5 respectively. Belief in Indian philosophy was significantly related to karma yoga-sense of duty but not to karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards and hence Hypothesis 1 was only partly supported.

Table 4

*Results of Regression Analysis to check the effect of facets of conscientiousness on Karma Yoga- sense of obligation or duty towards others*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	95% CI		$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper			
Constant	2.15	.62	.91	3.40		3.46	.00
Belief in Indian Philosophy	.22	.08	.04	.39	.29	2.53	.01
Dutifulness	.02	.11	-.20	.25	.02	.19	.85
Achievement Striving	.27	.15	-.03	.57	.22	1.79	.07

*Note.* *N* varies from 68 to 74.

### **Tests of Hypothesis –Karma Yoga and Life Satisfaction**

We performed a forward regression to check the effects of belief in Indian philosophy, karma yoga-sense of duty, and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards on life satisfaction and found that only karma yoga-

absence of desire for rewards significantly predicted life satisfaction. Results of the forward regression are reported in Table 6.

Table 5

*Results of Regression Analysis to check the effect of facets of conscientiousness on Karma Yoga- absence of desire for rewards*

Predictor	b	SE b	95% CI		$\beta$	t	p
			Lower	Upper			
Constant	-.16	.78	-1.73	1.40		-.21	.83
Belief in Indian Philosophy	.10	.10	-.11	.32	.10	.94	.34
Dutifulness	.45	.14	.16	.75	.38	3.13	.00
Achievement Striving	.13	.19	-.25	.51	.08	.69	.49

Note. N varies from 68 to 74.

Table 6

*Results of Forward Regression Analysis of Belief in Indian Philosophy, Karma Yoga-sense of duty, and Karma Yoga-absence of desire for reward on Life Satisfaction.*

Predictor	b	SE b	95% CI		$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	t
			Lower	Upper			
Constant	3.885	.82	2.24	5.52			4.72**
Karma Yoga-Absence of Desire for Reward	1.159	.29	.56	1.74	.43	.19	3.92**

Note. N varies from 68 to 74.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 7

*Results for factor analysis of Achievement Striving*

Item Description	Component
2. I work hard	.75
4. I plunge into tasks with all my heart	.68
5. I do more than what's expected of me	.65
3. I turn plans into actions	.62
10. I put little time and effort into my work (-ve)	.61
1. I go straight for the goal	.56
6. I set high standards for myself and others	.54
7. I demand quality	.51

Out of the two dimensions of karma yoga, only the dimension of karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards shows high and significant

positive correlation with life satisfaction; therefore Hypothesis 3 was partly supported.

## Discussion

All our hypotheses were partly supported. We found a relationship between beliefs in Indian philosophy and karma yoga-sense of duty; however, we did not see any relationship between beliefs in Indian philosophy and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards. There could be two reasons for this.

Firstly, our conceptualization of karma yoga as two factors may need some refinement. One of the dimensions revealed in the content analysis was being neutral to opposites or keeping senses under control. It is likely that belief in Indian philosophy may have an impact on the dimensions of karma yoga only in the presence of this factor i.e. being neutral to opposites. Further studies must include this as one of the variables in order to understand its role fully.

Secondly, since karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards depends on the extent to which a person identifies with the soul and not with the body, it is not sufficient for us to measure the belief in the existence of the soul. Perhaps we must introduce another variable to measure the extent to which the individual identifies himself or herself with being the soul and not the body. Thus having believed in the existence of the soul, only to the extent that a person identifies with the soul and not the body, will the person be high on karma yoga.

Our conceptualization of karma yoga being described as the facet of dutifulness was partly supported since dutifulness showed a high correlation with at least one of the factors of karma yoga i.e. an absence of a desire for rewards. However our hypothesis that high achievement striving would weaken the relationship between dutifulness and karma yoga was not supported. There could be two reasons for this. Firstly, the facet of achievement striving described in the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) prepared by P. T. Costa, Jr. and R. R. McCrae (1992) includes an element of hard work and an element of pure achievement. While these terms may be viewed as the same by a western audience, our findings suggest that Indian executives may view these two terms as different. Our factor analysis of the selected items of the facet of achievement striving supports this argument. Item numbers 1, 6, and 7 which describe the sub-facet of pure achievement received a relatively low factor loading (.56, .54, and .51 respectively) as compared to Item numbers 2, 4, 5, 3, and 10 (.75, .68, .65, .62, and .61 respectively) which describe the sub-facet of hard work in the facet achievement striving.

When we tested the relationship of the two sub-facets, hard work (Cronbach Alpha .58) and pure achievement (Cronbach Alpha .69) with each of the other variables, we found that the two sub-facets showed significantly different relationships with life satisfaction, beliefs in Indian

philosophy, and the dimensions of karma yoga. Specifically the sub-facet of hard work was more strongly related to life satisfaction ( $r=.41$ ,  $p<.01$  for hard work as compared to  $r=.25$ ,  $p<.05$  for pure achievement). Similarly, hard work was significantly related to karma yoga-sense of duty ( $r=.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards ( $r=.35$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while pure achievement was not related to either of the dimensions of karma yoga.

When we checked for the interaction effect of dutifulness with pure achievement, we found that the interaction term in a regression was moderately significant ( $p<.1$ ) for the dependant variable karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards and not significant for the dependant variable karma yoga-sense of duty. When we tested for moderation, we found that dutifulness was more strongly related to karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards ( $\beta=.48$ ,  $p<.01$ ) when achievement striving was low as compared to the relationship between dutifulness and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards ( $\beta=.44$ ,  $p<.01$ ) when achievement striving was high (greater than the median). These numbers support the hypothesis that the moderating effect of pure achievement acts on the relationship between dutifulness and karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards in a manner that the strength of the relationship reduces as pure achievement increases. The results also indicate that there is a case for splitting the facet of achievement striving into the sub-facets of hard work and pure achievement in the Indian context. Hence, in further studies we must ensure that we measure pure achievement independent of the sub-facet of hard work.

Another reason for the weak support for Hypothesis 2 could be social desirability, which was neither measured nor controlled. Persons who are high on social desirability like to be seen as being persistent and hence are likely to rate higher on achievement striving than they actually are (Moon, 2001). Hence, it is possible a number of persons while not actually high on achievement striving, scored high on this facet because of socially desirable responses. Future studies must either control for social desirability or find more ingenious methods of measuring the true level of achievement striving.

Our third hypothesis studying the relationship between karma yoga and life satisfaction was partly supported with one dimension of karma yoga showing a positive relationship with life satisfaction. Individuals who scored high on karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards also scored high on life satisfaction while there was no significant relationship between karma yoga-sense of duty and life satisfaction. There could be two reasons for this.

Firstly, our sample was biased towards persons involved in manufacturing and operations. Hough (1992) found opposing relationships between duty, achievement striving and performance for managers-executives as compared to health care workers. It is likely that in our sample, persons did not see any association between duty orientation

and life satisfaction. A more balanced sample having a mix of executives involved in service as well as operations may provide better results.

Secondly, our measure of life satisfaction did not capture the stable aspect of life satisfaction and could have been impacted by situational (bottom up) factors. Further studies must use a more long-term measure to capture the predominant state of life satisfaction rather than the immediate level of life satisfaction.

## **Conclusion**

The objective of this study was to understand the concept of karma yoga by developing a scale to measure it and then validating the scale using an existing construct. Our scales for belief in Indian philosophy and karma yoga showed reasonable reliability and provide a direction for future development of more comprehensive measures. Our hypothesized definition for karma yoga was partially supported by the data both while validating against personality facets and while validating against the outcome of life satisfaction. Our study shows that beliefs in Indian philosophy and the practice of karma yoga can coexist with facets of conscientiousness. Indian culture is made up of two parts, the traditionally idealized values, and operative values (Sinha, 1997). While some operative values created because of historical and social factors may have caused inefficiency in work, our traditionally idealized values are not inconsistent with today's demands for a highly productive and efficient business enterprise. Specifically the dimension of karma yoga-sense of duty may be extremely useful in developing a customer service orientation in employees and the dimension of karma yoga-absence of desire for rewards may be useful in increasing life satisfaction and thereby creating a more stress-free workforce.

The most interesting finding of our study is the bifurcation of the facet of achievement striving into the sub-facets of hard work and pure achievement. There is a case for these two sub-facets to be separately defined and studied in the Indian context. Assuming these two to be the same, and measuring our low achievement orientation, some western authors (McClelland, 1961; Weber, 1958) have held Indian cultural beliefs responsible for the slow economic development of our country and have hailed the Protestant work ethic as the best paradigm for material development. In the light of our findings it is more likely that they did not differentiate hard work from achievement striving and they wrongly assumed that Indians' low achievement striving implied low interest in hard work.

The segregation of hard work and achievement striving also has implications for practices like performance appraisal and compensation design which today are directly adapted from the west. More understanding is required into the relationship between achievement and hard work in the Indian context before these western practices can be applied to Indian executives.

Managers in Indian businesses are facing the onslaught of multinationals and with it, the impact of foreign cultures. At a time like this, there is likely to be a tendency to secularize the workplace and make it free of all cultural artifacts in the mistaken belief that these are barriers to progress. Instead of blindly relying only on alien techniques, managers must leverage concepts like karma yoga, which are part of our cultural heritage to adapt and modify global practices to best suit the needs of their people.

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## APPENDIX

### **Scale for Belief in Indian Philosophy**

1. If I do good deeds, I will get good results either in this life or in the next.
2. Joys and sorrows experienced by me are a result of my actions in this life or earlier lives.
3. There exists a permanent entity called "soul" within me.
4. The goal of life is to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.
5. It is possible to grow spiritually by performing one's worldly duties selflessly.

***Scale for Karma Yoga-sense of duty or obligation***

1. I am aware of my obligations to society.
2. I willingly perform all duties, which are allotted to me.
3. I feel it is my duty to contribute to society.
4. I wish I do some better work rather than what I am currently doing. (-ve)
5. I hesitate to do what is expected for me. (-ve)

***Scale for Karma Yoga-absence of desire for reward***

1. I strive to be selfless in whatever activity I undertake.
2. I am disappointed when the outcomes of my efforts do not yield the results I expected. (-ve)
3. I get a sense of achievement from a job well done. (-ve)
4. I am very concerned about showing good results in my work. (-ve)
5. I work in order to get some personal benefits. (-ve)
6. While working, I keep thinking about success or failure. (-ve)
7. I expect to be rewarded for good work done. (-ve)

Xavier Labour Relations Institute  
Jamshedpur 831 001