

# Asian Resonance

## Nishkam Karma Yoga: A Tool for Managerial Effectiveness

### Abstract

Managerial effectiveness is any set of managerial actions that are optimal for identifying, assimilating and utilizing internal and external resources with the aim of sustaining the functioning of the unit for which the manager is responsible. Managerial effectiveness is deemed as an important determinant of managerial performance and hence, organizational success. But, organizational and individual constraints, along with a dynamic environment pose continuous challenges for successful managerial performance. It is therefore, imperative for a manager to possess a balanced frame of mind, so as to enable him to choose the most appropriate course of action in the presence of conflicting choices. *Nishkam Karma Yoga*, a concept taken from the Indian *darshan* and defined as the step by step process of disciplining one's self towards developing and practicing the right attitude towards performing actions, may be pursued by a manager in order to take appropriate decisions at all times. The present study enquires the impact of *Nishkam Karma Yoga* on managerial effectiveness in organizational scenario.

**Keywords :** Nishkam Karma Yoga; Managerial Effectiveness.

### Introduction

Social and behavioral sciences devote themselves to understand the dynamics of human thought and consequent behavior both individual as well as collective. In the east and in the west, scholars, philosophers and scientists have tried to study the various aspects of human thought and human behavior through scientific theories and abstract concepts. An enquiry into the classical Indian wisdom reveals that seers and thinkers in different ages have aptly and accurately put forth a clear understanding of the fundamentals of human nature that shape attitudes and behavior, be it individual, interpersonal or organizational in the form of doctrines, directives or philosophies. *Nishkam Karma Yoga* is one such ancient concept, discussed profoundly in the *Srimad Bhagvad Geeta*. The *Srimad Bhagvad Geeta* enjoys the status of an Upanishad and appears in the *Bhishmaparva* of the great Indian epic *Mahabharat* which is believed to have been documented between 800 and 500 B.C. (Sen, 2005). There is felt a need to revisit the *Nishkam Karma Yoga* and its applicability in modern management in order to attain a sustainable competitive advantage for organizations and quality of work-life for its employees. The present endeavor of revisiting the *Nishkam Karma Yoga* as described in the *Bhagvad Geeta*, aims to maintain a utilitarian rather than a spiritual approach to comprehension. This study attempts to understand the impact of doctrine of the *Nishkam Karma Yoga* on managerial effectiveness.

*Nishkam Karma Yoga* or the *Yoga of Nishkam Karma* is a composite concept; build out of three elements viz. Karma, Yoga and *Nishkam Karma*. Karma is anything that a person does, i.e., all actions of thought, speech and conduct, is karma. It also means the destiny forged by one's past incarnation or present: the store of tendencies, impulses, characteristics and habits, which determines the future embodiment and the whole of one's organization. Another meaning of Karma is that which is often used in reference to one's caste according to the varna system or position in life, is duty i.e., *svadharma* the course of conduct which one ought to follow in pursuance of the tendencies which one acquired in one's past, with a view to working them out and regaining the pristine purity of the self (Swaroopananda, 1909).

*Karma Yoga* is a strategy, or practice of the strategy of doing work in the best possible manner. The best manner is to develop a mental state of balance, which is not ruffled by emotional dualities like, joy-sorrow, pleasure-pain, success-failure, gain-loss, etc. and doing work by the



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application of one's discriminative faculty, being situated in a state of equipoise, i.e., samabuddhi. Thus, one who is in the pursuit of Karma Yoga will always work according to the best of his abilities, without attaching any personal hope with the outcomes of the work. This is Nishkam Karma, and its pursuit, i.e., the step by step process of disciplining one's self is Nishkam Karma Yoga. Thus, Nishkam Karma Yoga means, developing the right attitude towards performing actions.

A Nishkam Karma Yogi is a person who performs all actions with an equable and rational state of mind which is not biased or distracted by personal desires; does work appropriately, effectively and efficiently, to the best of his abilities; without entertaining any hope for personal gain or sense gratification from the outcome of the action; with a general sense of duty, i.e., doing something that is ought to be done, without expecting anything in return, i.e., yagnarth, and altruistically for universal welfare, i.e., loksangraharth; and having performed actions in this manner, accepts the outcomes of the actions with equipoise and equanimity. Thus, a contemporary question arises: Can a manager being Nishkam Karma Yogi have better outcome in terms of managerial effectiveness? Or in other words, can Nishkam Karma Yoga as management variable increase a manager's effectiveness?

The term management was first coined by Frederick W. Taylor, the inventor of scientific management. Management is synonymous with business management in the current era as opposed to the wide usage of the term in all disciplines and dimensions of human endeavor initially (Drucker, 1999). Management creates the vital link between economic progress and organizational effectiveness at the organizational level. In this regard, managers play a significant role in the overall success of their organizations and development of their nations (Analoui and Hosseini, 2001). Managerial effectiveness is recognized as one of the most important determinants of organizational success in a fast changing business environment. Managerial effectiveness is not an aspect of personality. It is not something that a manager has, but something that a manager produces, by handling a situation correctly. It is performance. It is not what managers do, but what they achieve (Reddin, 1987). Managerial effectiveness refers to a manager's demonstrated proficiency in a repertoire of knowledge, skills, and abilities (i.e. competencies) that promote organizational success (Boyatzis, 1982).

A successful manager of men can primarily be characterized neither as a strong leader nor as a permissive one; rather, he is one who maintains a high batting average in accurately assessing the forces that determine what his most appropriate behavior at any given time should be and in actually being able to behave accordingly. Being both insightful and flexible he is less likely to see the problems of leadership as a dilemma (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1958). Managerial effectiveness is any set of managerial actions that are optimal for

identifying, assimilating and utilizing internal and external resources with the aim of sustaining the functioning of the unit for which the manager is responsible (Campbell, 1970). It is a habit, a complex of practices that lead to getting the right things done (Drucker, 1973). Managerial effectiveness is the relationship between performance and task objectives and between achievement assessed against goals and purposes, within the constraints imposed by the manager himself, by his position in the organization and by the socio-economic environment (Langford, 1979). An effective manager is one who integrates his skills and capabilities with his role, attempts to be proactive and creative, faces problems, considers his role important, has capacity to influence important decisions, sees opportunities to grow in his role, links his job with those of others, helps others and seeks help of others and likes to contribute to something beyond his own (Pareek, 1987).

## Review of Literature

The philosophy of *Nishkam Karma Yoga* has been viewed as work ethics by different scholars, all holding more or less the same view that work should be selfless and for the greater social betterment (Rao, 1990; Sheth and Sheth, 1990; Shrivastava, 1990). Work is the central and defining characteristic of life. Attachment to the result of work may lead to stress, competition and aggression that in turn may lead to fatal medical and psychological conditions. The understanding of *Karma Yoga* and its practice would lead an individual to work with intrinsic values rather than with instrumental values. The pursuit of *Karma Yoga* will help to attain the practical aspects of positive psychology in the life of an individual by helping him to lead a pleasurable and satisfied life. Extrinsic motivation pushes one to work for results that may bring about situations that one likes or will avoid unpleasant emotions. Contrary to this intrinsic motivation inspires one to work because one enjoys the work itself. *Karma Yoga* is one such model for intrinsic motivation (Kumar and Kumar, 2013). A salesperson's *karma* orientation is useful for developing relationships with customers, enhances selling effectiveness, ethical behavior and spiritual well-being, by providing the salesperson with a sense of duty and ownership towards his work (Singh and Singh, 2012).

Moreover, the premise and the pretext of the sermon of the Geeta itself indicates that it is for those people who have immense potential within themselves, their decisions and actions have the power to affect a broad spectrum of people and even the environment, and they are desperately looking for concrete, substantial and unchanging and firmly-rooted moral principles to decide the best course of action when faced with situations of dilemma. The Geeta gives the model of NishkamKarma Yoga which when understood and brought into practice by the seeker, it ensures the necessary moral, ethical, intellectual and behavioral make up of an individual that he will never falter in taking the most appropriate course of action and also ensures that he will act when he is ought to. NishkamKarma Yoga integrates

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the samatva obtained through buddhiyoga and expresses itself in man's voluntary resolution to devote himself to nishkam karma for it is 'karmasukausalam' i.e., skill in actions. Better is a person who consciously and through great discipline, controls his organs of action and using them, embarks on karma yoga yet remaining detached. Thus, he acts without phalokam and only for the universal good or loksangraha (DeSmet, 1977).

In the application of the Geeta to leadership, results are usually intangible and invisible; work becomes worship, thus increasing the resilience in one's self to be able to see opportunities in adversities, chances in crises and adopting a positive perspective to the same situation (Rarick, 2007). A manager can become a transformational leader by adopting the principles of Karma Yoga in his working (Satpathy, 2008). The message of the Geeta can be an enduring tool for unique leadership in adverse times like the global recession (Rarick, 2007). Karma Yoga constitutes the Indian work ideal and can be harnessed by leaders to motivate their followers. Leaders who possess attributes of Karma Yoga are likely to be role models for their subordinates and thus enhance their charismatic potential. Rather than adopt the conventional western models of motivation which have an individualistic-hedonistic bias and are largely based on cognitive calculative processes (Shamir, 1991), Indian managers can use more indigenous motivational models like Karma Yoga. In case of NGOs, it was found that their overall effectiveness can be greatly enhanced through the application of Nishkam Karma Yoga among employees (Sharma, 2012).

Managers can effectively lead their team through the practice of Karma Yoga because the gist of Karma Yoga is Nishkama Karma that means, action conducted with a spirit of sacrifice. People practicing the philosophy of Nishkama Karma, work in the level of self-actualization as described in the hierarchy of needs professed by Maslow. Such people work for their commitment to the organization and the task entrusted to them. They are not motivated by the results that the task would beget, particularly of the personal variety. It leads to psychological satisfaction since the worker is devoid of egoism while carrying out the work. Such people naturally become the role model for others. Societies vary in the extent to which they inculcate in their members the importance of work relative to other life roles (Sinha, 2000). The larger societal culture may socialize the members of a society such that they remain dedicated to work without bothering about what they gain from their effort, i.e. work is a duty to be discharged. The people who are socialized in this culture consider themselves to be born with duties rather than with rights (Sinha and Kanungo, 1997).

The development of the self, the community the society and the industry is possible only through Karma Yoga (Shrivastava, 1990). Nishkam Karma Yoga emphasizes on the action itself; to perform one's duty proficiently irrespective of personal rewards. In management terms, an individual or

organization can be effective only when they have an understanding of the inner self, as opposed to the Taoist philosophy which is more manipulative and militaristic in nature. Effectiveness is created by self-actualized individuals. They are the ones who can hone organizational values and set direction in a principled and ethical way. It is a higher calling (Natesan, et. al., 2009). A manager's primary responsibility is to carry out the management process. He is the one who plans and makes decisions, organizes, leads and controls human, financial, physical, and information resources; possesses good planning skills, effective communication, good human relations, organizing ability and supervisory skills (Griffin, 1997). Managers should have physical qualities, mental qualities, moral qualities, general education, special knowledge related to specific operations and experience (Fayol, 1916). These make the effective manager a distinct personality, belonging to an elite group, enjoying respect, status authority by performing complex jobs (Murugan, 2004). Effectiveness is best seen as something a manager produces from a situation by managing it appropriately, producing the results or meeting the targets in every sphere of the activities of an organization. The manager's job is linked with three major dimensions — technical, human and conceptual. The productivity of any organization can be increased by the effective management of all the three dimensions and specially by managing the conceptual and human dimensions of management.

The Wisdom Worker Model of Managerial Effectiveness, stresses upon the fact that besides knowledge, a necessary requisite for Managerial Effectiveness is wisdom, which subsumes and transcends knowledge. The wisdom worker is an integrated personality. As opposed to modern knowledge which has an outward focus, traditional wisdom focuses on internal permanence of bliss and beauty. According to Sri Aurobindo, knowledge is the reasoned acceptance of facts while wisdom is an integration, that what the eye of divine vision sees in spirit (Chakraborty, 1987). This is because, a human being's normal consciousness is not his optimum state of awareness; therefore, judgments, decisions and conclusions originating from this imperfect state are bound to be relative, contradictory, confusing and even ineffective. Whereas, on quietening the discursive intellect, in-drawing the outgoing senses and chastening the fickle mind, the understanding is free from the limitations of time, space and causation.

The Wisdom Worker Model proposes that managerial effectiveness is to be judged by the proficiency attained in energy-processing in the psychological sense. The two principal instruments that a manager employs in energy processing for work are his mind and brain. The minds and its states have been discussed in detail in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. It is given that the mind has the following states: mudha or inert, dark; kshipta or wild, turbulent; vikshipta or agitated, scattered; ekagra or one-pointed, concentrated; and niruddha or a state beyond the mind. Thus, in order to use the mind as an

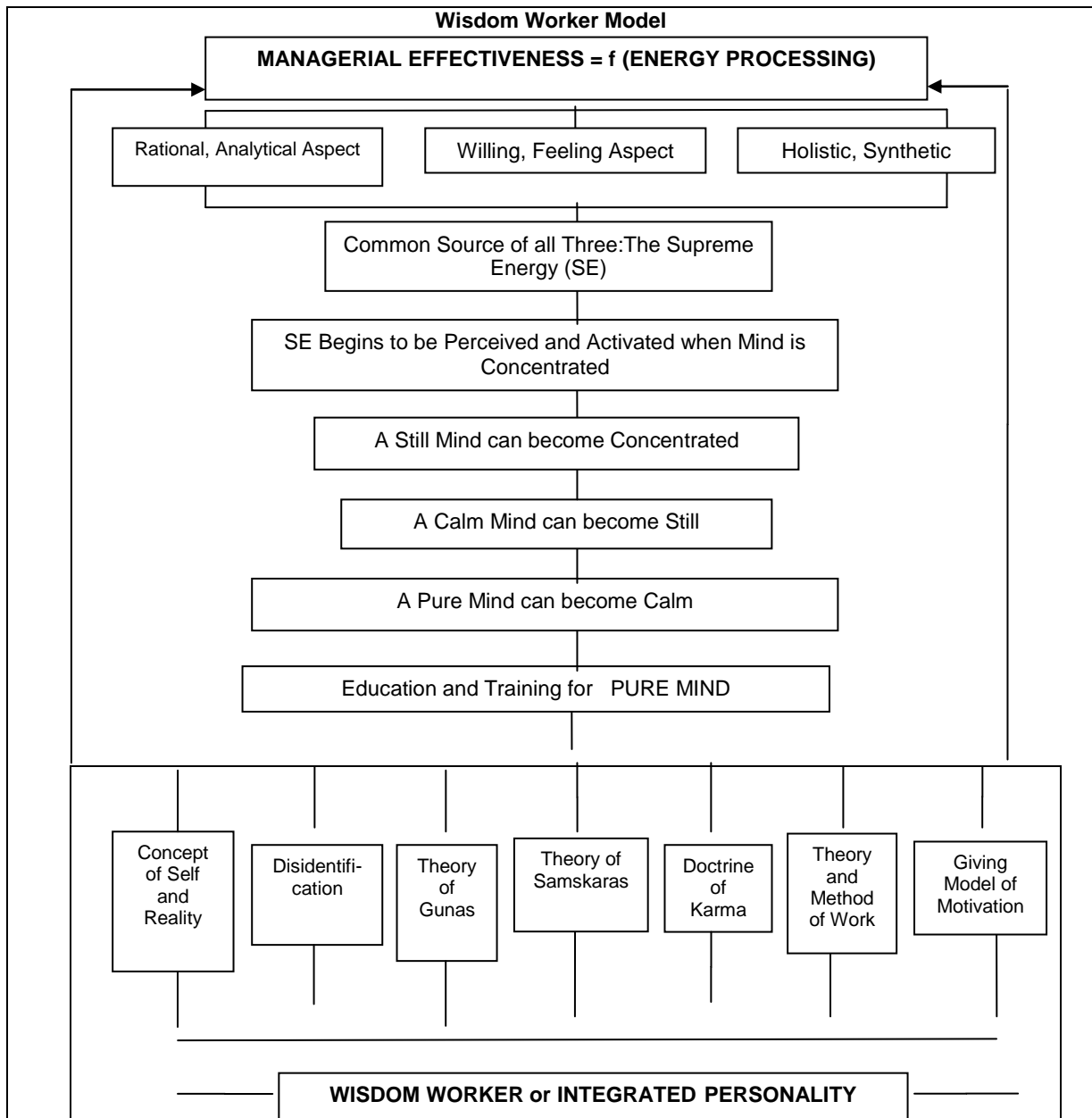
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instrument in effective action, one has to strive to gain the ability to restrain the agitations of the mind and focus it on the subject of action. The second instrument i.e., the brain has been identified to have two distinct yet complementary powers: rational, sequential, logical, segmented, inductive and analytical on one hand; and spatial, intuitive, deductive, synthetic and holistic on the other. Hence, in order to be effective, a manager has to be intuitive as well as rational in his approach.

According to the Wisdom Worker Model, a manager should exercise self-discipline in order to link his willing, thinking and feeling with his rationality and

his intuitiveness so that his mind and brain can be in unison with the Supreme Energy and yoked to the Supreme Creative Intelligence. This would enable the manager to emerge as an integrated personality i.e., a wisdom worker. The integration of mental faculties and consequent evolution of the manager as an individual employee to a wisdom worker, can be effectively facilitated by the exposure to the various bases of Indian wisdom e.g. theory of gunas, theory of samskaras, doctrine of karma, etc.

The diagrammatic presentation of Wisdom Worker Model is as follows:



Source: Chakraborty, S. K. (1987). Managerial Effectiveness and Quality of Worklife: Indian Insights. New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Co. Ltd.)

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**Rationale**

Despite being an ancient Indian philosophy, various studies on Nishkam Karma Yoga by scholars from different disciplines such as psychologists, behavioral scientists, management academicians, etc. indicate a significant relevance of Nishkam Karma Yoga to people in all walks of life, especially to employees in organizations, universally. Nishkam Karma Yoga may be treated as a managerial variable and its relationship with other behavioral and managerial variables may be empirically investigated (Chatterjee and Totala, 2015). On an extensive review of available literature, the authors were unable to find any relevant research that studied the effect of Nishkam Karma Yoga on managerial effectiveness; hence the current study was undertaken.

**Objective of the Study**

To study the impact of Nishkam Karma Yoga on managerial effectiveness.

**Methodology**

In order to see the effect of Nishkam Karma Yoga on managerial effectiveness, questionnaires on Nishkam Karma Yoga and managerial effectiveness were administered simultaneously on 200 professionals from varied fields throughout India. The responses on Nishkam Karma Yoga were collected on a questionnaire developed by the author in an earlier study; whereas responses on managerial effectiveness were taken on the questionnaire developed by E.P. Mott (Mott, 1971). The total score of each of the 200 respondents on Nishkam Karma Yoga were sorted in the descending order of values. This was then divided into three groups of high, medium and low scores. In order to make the groups discrete, 10 respondents from the higher end of the

mid-position and 10 respondents from the lower end of the mid position of the sorted responses were removed to give 3 groups of high, medium and low Nishkam Karma Yogascores of sample size 60 in each. The corresponding managerial effectiveness scores of the three groups thus formed were also arranged.

The group of managerial effectiveness scores with high Nishkam Karma Yoga scores was termed as Group 1. The group of managerial effectiveness scores with medium Nishkam Karma Yoga scores was termed as Group 2. The group of managerial effectiveness scores with low Nishkam Karma Yoga scores was termed as Group 3. Hypotheses were formulated and the groups were compared on the basis of their means on SPSS.

**Results and Discussions**

**Managerial Effectiveness between Group 1 and Group 2.**

**H<sub>0</sub>**

There is no significant difference between Group 1 and Group 2 in terms of managerial effectiveness.

**H<sub>1</sub>**

There is a significant difference between Group 1 and Group 2 in terms of managerial effectiveness.

Group Statistics					
	grp 1*2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Tot 12	1	60	30.4500	4.84479	.62546
	2	60	29.3500	5.00449	.64608

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Tot 12	Equal variances assumed	.322	.572	1.223	118	.224	1.10000	.89923	-.68072	2.88072
	Equal variances not assumed			1.223	117.876	.224	1.10000	.89923	-.68074	2.88074

The t value is 1.223 and the p value is 0.224 which is greater than  $\alpha$ : 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. Group 1 and Group 2 do not differ significantly in their managerial effectiveness. Thus, a medium Nishkam Karma Yogascore will not lessen a manager's effectiveness at the workplace as compared to a manager with higher Nishkam Karma Yogascore. Any difference that may be seen in the effectiveness of managers with high Nishkam Karma

Yogascore and those with medium Nishkam Karma Yogascore may be attributable to chance.

**Managerial Effectiveness between Group 1 and Group 3.**

Group Statistics					
	grp 1*3	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Tot 13	1	60	30.4500	4.84479	.62546
	3	60	26.9667	4.54718	.58704

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**H0**

There is no significant difference between Group 1 and Group 3 in terms of managerial effectiveness.

**H1**

There is a significant difference between Group 1 and Group 3 in terms of managerial effectiveness.

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Tot13	Equal variances assumed	.309	.580	4.061	118	.000	3.48333	.85780	1.78466	5.18200
	Equal variances not assumed			4.061	117.529	.000	3.48333	.85780	1.78459	5.18207

The t value is 1.223 and p value is 0.000 which is less than  $\alpha$ : 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Group 1 and Group 3 differ significantly in their managerial effectiveness. Thus, managers with a high Nishkam Karma Yogascore will be more effective than those with a low Nishkam Karma Yogascore.

**Managerial Effectiveness between Group 2 and Group 3.**

**H0**

There is no significant difference between Group 2 and Group 3 in terms of managerial effectiveness.

**H1**

There is a significant difference between Group 2 and Group 3 in terms of managerial effectiveness.

Group Statistics					
	grp2*3	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Tot23	2	60	29.3500	5.00449	.64608
	3	60	26.9667	4.54718	.58704

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Tot23	Equal variances assumed	1.319	.253	2.730	118	.007	2.38333	.87294	.65467	4.11200
	Equal variances not assumed			2.730	116.933	.007	2.38333	.87294	.65451	4.11216

The t value is 2.730 and the p value is 0.007 which is less than  $\alpha$ : 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Group 2 and Group 3 differ significantly in their managerial effectiveness. Thus, managers with a medium Nishkam Karma Yogascore will be more effective than those with a low Nishkam Karma Yogascore.

Thus, Nishkam Karma Yoga has a significant impact on the effectiveness of managers; although managerial effectiveness may not be affected notably

among those who have accomplished to achieve a high degree of Nishkam Karma Yoga dimensions in their character with those who are striving towards achieving such qualities; but a significant difference is seen in the effectiveness between managers with a higher Nishkam Karma Yoga dimensions than those with low Nishkam Karma Yoga dimensions in their character. The results also prove that managers who are in the pursuit of Nishkam Karma Yoga, and have succeeded in imbibing its attributes to a medium or

moderate extent in their character are not significantly different in terms of effectiveness from those who have achieved the same to a very high extent. This is in congruence with the nature of Nishkam Karma Yoga as discussed in the Shrimad Bhagavad Geeta. According to the Geeta, the philosophy of Karma Yoga (कर्मयोग) consists in the practice of the philosophy of Nishkam Karma (Pal, 2001). Furthermore, it is clearly stated in the Geeta that:

Nehabhikramanashostipratyavayonavidyate  
Svalpamasyadharmasyatrayatemahatobhayat(II/40).

Although the philosophy of Nishkam Karma Yoga as professed by the Geeta is a yogashastra, it is not strictly a step by step one, i.e. the loss of abhikram does not lead to the loss of cognitive and behavioral gains in the personality of the pursuer. Further, one who resolutely and consciously pursues the path of Nishkam Karma Yoga starts exhibiting the traits of one who has developed it to a great extent. In this path, no effort is ever lost and no obstacle prevails; even a little of this righteousness (dharma) saves from great fear. To state it simply, no step is lost, every moment is a gain. Every effort in this struggle will be counted as a merit (Radhakrishnan, 1948/2009).

## Conclusion

The doctrine of Nishkam Karma Yoga or the philosophy of Karma is contemporary, practical, has universal applicability. Though deciphered from the ancient and classical Indian wisdom, it may hold true for all management styles, conventional or modern, and in all kinds of professions and occupations. Nishkam Karma Yoga emphasizes on the action itself; to perform one's duty proficiently irrespective of personal rewards. Every man is ought to perform his duties compulsorily. None is expected to shun away from his duties. The human endeavor of developing such a duty-oriented attitude towards work is Nishkam Karma Yoga as given in the following verse of the Geeta:

Karmanyevadhikarste ma phale shu kada  
canaMa karma phalah etur bhur mates angos  
tvakarmani(Geeta: II/47).

One has ownership on his actions and accountability of how he performs them; results can never be controlled. Hence one is ought to act when duty calls, and do so with responsibility and diligence.

This study has empirically established that there is a significant effect of Nishkam Karma Yoga on a well-known and widely used managerial variable like managerial effectiveness; conclusively stating, Nishkam Karma Yoga which was deemed as a metaphysical concept, can henceforth be treated as a managerial variable and its relationship with other managerial variables can be empirically derived.

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