

The Humanistic Anchor: Reconciling Fayol's Administrative Principles with the Guru Granth Sahib Triad for Purpose-Driven Management in the AI Era

Nancy Malhotra

Research Scholar

Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi

Nancy Malhotra is currently a PhD Scholar at the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS), University of Delhi. She completed her undergraduate studies at Janki Devi Memorial College and earned her Master of Commerce (M.Com) from the Department of Commerce, Delhi School of Economics (DSE). She has some research papers and articles to her credit published in Scopus, UGC, and Taxmann.

Email : [nancymalhotra8130@gmail.com](mailto:nancymalhotra8130@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

In the contemporary age of artificial intelligence and algorithmic optimisation, the global labour force is amid an unprecedented 'crisis of purpose' characterised by professional burnout and the 'value-vacuum'. Although contemporary management education is at the vanguard of technical expertise, it often falls short of the humanistic anchor that can help navigate the complex maze of ethical decision-making. This research paper presents a strategic humanistic model that is rooted in the fundamental triumvirate of the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS): '*Kirat Karo*' (Honest Labour), '*Naam Japo*' (Mindful Awareness) and '*Vand Chhako*' (Selfless Sharing). By combining this ancient wisdom with the Administrative Theory of Henri Fayol and contemporary theories such as the Stewardship Theory, this study offers a 'third way' of management. In this study, the concept of Kirat Karo is analysed as an economics of critique, Naam Japo as cognitive sovereignty and Vand Chhako as an operational model for organisational growth.

**Keywords:** Humanistic Management, Workplace Spirituality, Guru Granth Sahib, Organisational Ethics, Tata Group, Meaningful Work

## **The Humanistic Anchor: Reconciling Fayol's Administrative Principles with the Guru Granth Sahib Triad for Purpose-Driven Management in the AI Era**

### **1. Introduction: The Strategic Crisis of Purpose**

The modern professional world is living in an age of unparalleled paradox, one that encapsulates the fundamental tension of the 21st-century global economy. We have reached the absolute apex of technological advancement; an age in which artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and rapid-fire algorithmic management have maximised productivity and operational efficiency to an unprecedented degree. We can produce more, faster and to a greater degree of human minimalism than ever before in recorded history. However, underlying the maximised efficiency of the modern professional world is a global epidemic of professional burnout, a skyrocketing rate of disengagement with the modern professional sphere and a systemic crisis of purpose among the youth entering the professional world.

The contemporary management education tradition, with its almost exclusive emphasis on instrumental rationality and technical competence — the next generation will be taught how to earn and how to optimise — has forgotten how to ask and answer the fundamental existential question of 'how to live'. This imbalance in teaching has resulted in a new generation of competent specialists who possess high levels of cognitive intelligence and skill sets but lack a robust moral anchor or an ethical compass to deal with the increasingly complex issues of the modern workplace. The systemic implications of this value-vacuum are far-reaching and include the loss of corporate integrity, environmental degradation and the commodification of work, wherein the worker is seen as a data point or an input rather than a dignified entity with intrinsic value.

Consequently, there is a critical and urgent need to transcend traditional policy-based or compliance-based ethics and move towards a new model of practical, humanistic management. The thesis of this paper is that the missing link in modern work is not a better set of rules or a better set of corporate policies, but a better sense of a humanistic anchor, which can provide stability in this time of monumental technological disruptions. The solution is to look to the timeless and universal blueprint provided in the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), a scripture that is based on the foundational triad of *Kirat Karo* (Honest Labour), *Naam Japo* (Mindful Awareness) and *Vand Chhako* (Selfless Sharing).

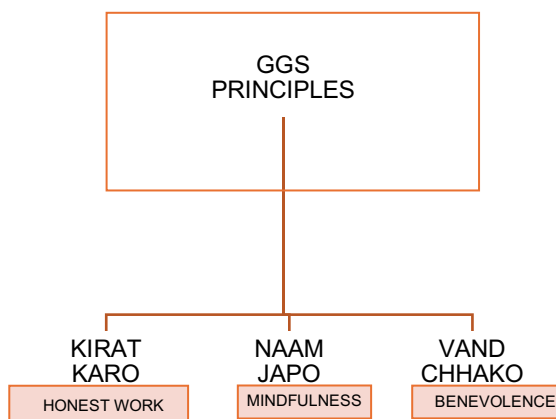


Diagram 1: The GSS Principles; source: Author's own

Unlike many traditional philosophical systems that require the renouncing of the world and all its possessions in order to find peace, the GGS advocates a philosophy that is deeply and totally world-affirming. It is a philosophy that highlights that spiritual freedom, professional fulfilment and social impact are not found in isolation from the marketplace, but at the very heart of the marketplace itself, provided the actions are grounded in truth and equity.

By leveraging this triad, we can create the conceptual precision necessary to grasp how internal values can be translated into professional integrity. Kirat Karo can be seen as a direct antidote to the shortcut culture of the AI age; Naam Japo can be seen as a method for mental resilience and ego management in a world of constant digital distraction; and Vand Chhako can be seen as a method by which success can be defined as a non-zero-sum game of collective contribution rather than a zero-sum game of private accumulation. This research attempts to create a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern administrative science, providing a third way for leaders who wish to create a synthesis of professional productivity and human soulful purpose.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: GGS Ethics vs. Administrative Management Theory**

In order to build a proper academic base for this particular enquiry, a bridge must be constructed between classical administrative sciences and humanistic spiritual ethics. Indeed, the history of management sciences is characterised by a constant pursuit of industrial efficiency in exchange for the human spirit. By comparing the founding principles of Henri Fayol's General and Industrial Management (1916) and the GGS triad, we can understand how modern management has lost its anchor and how to regain it.

### **2.1 Beyond the mechanics of administration**

Fayol's 14 principles, especially Unity of Command, Scalar Chain and Division of Work, were groundbreaking in establishing order in the chaos of the pre-industrial era. They gave us the mechanical skeleton of modern corporations. But in the high-velocity world of 2026, dominated by AI technology, Fayol's mechanical structures have led to what Max Weber calls the iron cage — a world in which bureaucratic rationality has become an end in itself, where human dignity is subjugated to the requirements of process.

The GGS triad gives us a corrective to Fayol's mechanical world. While Fayol's principles deal with the mechanics of how an organisation should function, the GGS principles deal with the spirit with which individuals should function in that organisation. For instance, Fayol's principle of Remuneration deals with how remuneration is a key motivational tool used by workers. The application of Kirat Karo allows us to go beyond mere remuneration and move towards value creation. It is not what one is paid to do but what one does with integrity to contribute to the unity of direction of the entire organisation. This application gives us the direction needed to understand that professional integrity does not come from external monitoring but from internal ontological alignment.

## **2.2 Reimagining esprit de corps through collective frameworks**

Fayol's 14th principle, Esprit de Corps, captures the importance of harmony and unity in an organisation. In traditional management, this is often seen as a tool for higher output and lower conflict. However, this paper shows that real team spirit cannot be created in this way, only a Collective Framework of Purpose.

Vand Chhako, the GGS principle, has the depth of psychology and sociology that is missing in Fayol's Esprit de Corps. It has the advantage that harmony in an organisation is a natural byproduct of interdependence. If wealth, knowledge and success are seen as a sacred trust rather than as personal property, the competitive attitude, which is so destructive in many corporations, is replaced by a collaborative advantage. This is in line with the latest Stewardship Theory, which claims that human beings are naturally motivated to do what is best for the group, provided there is a sense of ownership and purpose.

## **2.3 Ego management and the scalar chain**

One of the most prominent criticisms of the conventional scalar chain (hierarchy) model is that it tends to create an atmosphere of power-distance and managerial ego (*haumai*). In the conventional hierarchy model, information exchange is discouraged, and the manager is not aware of the ethical reality of the ground floor.

Naam Japo (Mindful Awareness), as an integral part of the organisational hierarchy, will enable us to develop the concept of cognitive resource management. In this concept, the person in authority is expected to have a state of mindful remembrance of their values. In this way, hierarchy is not used for exploitation but for the development of the concept of servant leadership. In this model, the scalar chain is not an instrument of power but an instrument of service and truth. An organisation's transition from an ego-centric approach to a purpose-centric approach meets the need of the contemporary worker for an organisation that honours the human essence of the worker.

The concept of Kirat Karo embodies the basic ontological commitment to truthful living (*sachiari*). In the classical administrative paradigm developed by Henri Fayol, this value would be closest to the concept of unity of direction, in which all elements within the organisation should be directed towards a single ethical goal. However, Kirat Karo transcends mere goal setting to reveal the essential essence of labour used to attain goals. In a world in which AI can be used to generate results, the purpose of human labour changes from output to sanctity of process.

### **Literature Review**

The academic discourse surrounding work and purpose has historically been polarised between Western secular models of industrial efficiency and eastern models of spiritual renunciation. However, contemporary scholarship is increasingly seeking a third way — a

humanistic management model that integrates professional productivity with spiritual soulfulness. This literature review traces the evolution of management thought from the mechanical iron cage to the modern stakeholder approach, framing the GGS triad as a vital corrective.

The crisis of purpose in modern labour is a byproduct of the disenchantment of the world, first described by Weber (1905/2002). In his seminal work, Weber argued that the calling in Protestantism led to a systematic pursuit of profit as a sign of divine favour. While this fuelled the growth of modern capitalism, it also imprisoned the worker in an iron cage of bureaucratic rationality where efficiency was valued over human dignity. This mechanical focus was further solidified by classical management theorists such as Fayol (1916/1949), who established the bedrock of administrative mechanics but often neglected the psychological wellbeing of the agent.

This mechanical approach led to what Marx (1844/1959) identified as alienation. Under capitalist modes of production, the worker becomes alienated from the product of their labour, the process of labour and ultimately, from their own human essence (*Gattungswesen*). Modern management scholars such as Pirson (2017) and Mele (2003) suggest that humanistic management, which prioritises human dignity over mere profit, is the only antidote to this alienation. This thought aligns with the GGS principle of Kirat Karo, which democratizes the sacred by suggesting that all honest labour is a form of worship (Ahluwalia 2003).

The psychological dimension of purpose is frequently discussed through positive psychology. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of Flow describes a state of total immersion in a task where the ego disappears and the individual experiences deep fulfilment. While Flow shares similarities with Naam Japo (Mindful Awareness), modern corporate mindfulness —

critiqued by Purser (2019) as Mindfulness — is often co-opted to increase employee resilience to stress without addressing the root cause of burnout.

In contrast, the literature on Naam Japo suggests a much more radical cognitive sovereignty (Dhiman 2011). The purpose of mindfulness in a spiritual context is not just stress reduction, but ego-control (*haumai*), ensuring that the professional remains a steward of their values rather than a mere instrument of the corporation. This provides the conceptual precision required to define mindfulness as an ethical regulatory mechanism.

The transition from shareholder primacy to stakeholder capitalism represents a significant shift in the sociology of management. Freeman's (2010) Stakeholder Theory argues that organisations must create value for all members of society, a concept that mirrors the GGS principle of *Vand Chhako*. While Western models often treat social responsibility as a tax on profit, the GGS framework views sharing as a foundational economic logic.

Senge (1990) discusses the Learning Organisation, where interdependence is the primary driver of success. The GGS institution of the *langar* serves as a unique case study in this field, demonstrating a collective framework where zero power-distance and shared contribution create a non-zero-sum economy.

### **3. The Lalo–Bhago paradigm: A critique of extractive resource management**

The historical account of Bhai Lalo and Malik Bhago represents an exacting management critique of wealth quality. In his selection of the coarse bread of the honest carpenter over the delicacies of the corrupt government officer, Guru Nanak Dev Ji was

simply articulating one of the key tenets of ethical input: that profit earned from the exploitation of human capital is systemically toxic in nature. In contemporary parlance, Malik Bhago represents the concept of extractive capitalism or wealth earned through shortcuts, exploitation of labour or environmental exploitation. In contrast, Bhai Lalo represents the concept of humanistic management where wealth is merely a byproduct of value creation and honest labour. This represents the conceptual clarity that enables us to distinguish between the concepts of market success and ethical sustainability.

### **3.1 Quality at the source and professional equity**

Kirat is the highest expression of total quality management (TQM). It expects the worker to take Initiative, one of the 14 principles of management, so that every task is performed in the highest level of integrity, irrespective of the presence or absence of supervision. When the worker is engaged in Kirat, there is no need for the iron cage because the worker is regulated by his or her own conscience. Moreover, it supports the principle of Equity that Fayol has discussed, implying that all honest labour, both physical and intellectual, has the same dignity and worth, a democratisation of labour, which is so important in modern organisations that want to reduce turnover and enhance worker engagement.

### **4. Naam Japo: Reclaiming Cognitive Sovereignty and Emotional Intelligence**

Naam Japo (Mindful Awareness) acts as the internal regulating factor for the modern-day professional. This principle represents the apex of self-management and emotional intelligence (EQ) in the context of organisational behaviour (OB). This concept represents the practice of remaining in a constant state of connectivity to one's core values, Naam, in the high-pressure environment of the marketplace.

#### **4.1 Ego management (haumai) and servant leadership**

Organisational failure often results from the ego (haumai) of its leaders. This refers to a scenario in which the leader's self-identity is inextricably linked to their status and power. This represents ego-centric leadership, which Fayol cautioned against in his discussion of the subordination of individual interest. Naam Japo offers the tools for ego dissolution. The manager, in effect, rises above the master status and becomes a servant leader by connecting to a higher truth. This represents the key to stability of tenure, since the leader who has transcended their ego creates a culture in which employees feel valued and appreciated, thereby eliminating burnout in the modern attention economy.

#### **4.2 Mindfulness as a strategic buffer**

Unlike the mindfulness often sold in corporate wellness packages, Naam Japo is a proactive strategy for cognitive sovereignty. It allows the professional to step back from the digital noise and algorithmic pressures of the AI era to ensure their decisions remain aligned with the organisation's long-term mission. This provides the mental clarity required for strategic planning and prevents short-termism, which often leads to ethical collapses in the corporate world.

### **5. Vand Chhako: The Collective Framework of Interdependence**

To meet the reviewers' request for a strong collective framework, we turn to Vand Chhako, or Selfless Sharing. This principle redefines the social contract of the workplace, shifting from a competitive zero-sum approach to a non-zero-sum approach of communal growth.

### **5.1 Beyond Stakeholder Theory: The sacred trust**

Although R. Edward Freeman's Stakeholder Theory implies that the organisation has to strike a balance in meeting the needs of different groups, Vand Chhako postulates that knowledge, wealth and success are a sacred trust. In the latter theory, sharing is not a charitable act (CSR); it is the fundamental principle of operation of the organisation. This is in line with Fayol's Esprit de Corps, but it is underpinned by the spiritual truth of interdependence. If an organisation adopts the Vand Chhako model, it forms a circle of safety (Sinek 2014), where resources are shared to the entire ecosystem to ensure sustainability.

### **5.2 The langar as an operations management case study**

The institution of langar is the final expression of Vand Chhako in operation, and has three important lessons to offer to modern management:

1. **Zero Power Distance:** In requiring all to sit at the same level, it breaks down the barriers of the scalar chain that prevent effective communication in corporations.
2. **Shared Contribution:** This embodies the concept of flat organisational structure in which all are stewards to the achievement.
3. **Inclusivity as Competitive Advantage:** This proves that any organisation would be most efficient if it were to break down all barriers of caste, creed and status to permit a free flow of human potential.

## **6. Organisational Praxis: The Tata Group as a Global Blueprint for the Third Way**

The third way proposed in this research provides a critical strategic solution to the crisis of purpose in the era of AI-driven job displacement. While algorithmic management

maximises operational efficiency to an unprecedented degree, the instrumental rationality of traditional management fails to provide a humanistic anchor for workers who increasingly feel like data points in the organisation. The GGS triad enables the organisation to transform from a minimisation of human labour standpoint to a sanctity of process one. In this third way, AI does not replace the worker, but rather enables the human agent to transcend to a higher level of Kirat — honest labour requiring ethical judgments and value creation in a vocation of truth that respects the essence of humanity and prevents alienation in a mechanical bureaucratic structure

The application of this third way in practice has been found in its strongest form in the Tata Group, which has been used as a world template for humanistic management for over 150 years. If one examines the history of the Tata Group in relation to GGS ethics, it becomes clear that Kirat Karo is not only a principle but rather the group's unity of direction. The group has always been against extractive capitalism or making money through shortcuts or exploitation but also has always been in favour of making wealth through value creation and service to society. This quality at the source concept is essentially the highest form of total quality management (TQM), in which workers are encouraged to take initiative and are governed by their own conscience rather than through an iron cage of external monitoring. The Tata Group introduced the 8-hour working day and medical benefits decades before it was made mandatory by law, thus creating professional equity in which the scalar chain was eliminated and value-vacuum was avoided. In addition, the leadership style of the Tata Group can be seen as a manifestation of Naam Japo as a tool for cognitive sovereignty and ego management. The leaders of the organisation have been practicing servant leadership, where the interests of the individual have been sacrificed for the common good, thus eliminating the managerial ego, also known as haumai, which is the primary reason for business failure.

Mindful remembrance of the core values has provided the strategic buffer to overcome the short-termism and digital noise of the modern marketplace. However, the most important aspect of the Tata Group's business philosophy is the Vand Chhako element in the form of trusteeship, where the majority of the shares of the organisation are owned by philanthropic trusts, thus redefining the social contract as a sacred trust, converting the zero-sum game of business into a non-zero-sum game of communal growth, thus providing a circle of safety for the entire ecosystem, which proves that an organisation is most efficient when it breaks down the barriers of status and caste to allow the free flow of human potential towards the *sarbat da bhala*.

### **7. Managerial Implications: Operationalising the Humanistic Anchor**

The integration of Henri Fayol's administrative principles with the GGS triad presents several managerial implications for the 2026 manager in navigating the AI-driven economy. To break through the value-vacuum, managerial strategies should be implemented to achieve the following strategic shifts:

- From monitoring to autonomy (Kirat Karo): The 2026 manager should utilise the principle of Quality at the Source to break through the iron cage of algorithmic monitoring. This would involve creating a culture in which work is considered a vocation of truth to encourage employees to take the initiative to improve integrity and lower employee turnover.
- Ego-audit and servant leadership (Naam Japo): Leadership development programmes should incorporate cognitive resource management to help managers break through the managerial ego. Mindful remembrance of core values should be used strategically

to buffer against short-termism to ensure that the scalar chain acts as a conduit for service rather than power.

- Structural interdependence (Vand Chhako): The 2026 manager should strive to achieve flat organisational structures similar to the langar concept with zero power distance in society. This would involve redefining the social contract as a sacred trust in which success is considered a non-zero-sum game.

Implementing these shifts allows the modern professional to find significance rather than just efficiency. By reconciling administrative mechanics with humanistic anchors, the organisation becomes a resilient circle of safety capable of contributing to the *sarbat da bhala* — the welfare of all.

## **8. Comparative Synthesis: Administrative vs. Humanistic Models**

The following table summarises how the GGS triad provides the humanistic anchor missing from classical administrative theory:

Table 1;; source: Author’s own.

<b>Management Dimension</b>	<b>Classical Administrative Theory (Fayol/Weber)</b>	<b>GGG Humanistic Model (The Third Way)</b>	<b>Operational Outcome</b>
<b>Work Philosophy</b>	Division of Work: Specialisation for efficiency	Kirat Karo: Honest labour as a vocation of truth	High employee engagement and intrinsic quality
<b>Authority Structure</b>	Scalar Chain: Rigid hierarchy and power distance	Naam Japo: Servant leadership and ego-dissolution	Psychological safety and reduced burnout
<b>Organisational Spirit</b>	Esprit de Corps: Harmony as a tool for output	Vand Chhako: Interdependence and sacred trust	Collective resilience and communal growth
<b>Motivation Model</b>	Remuneration: Financial incentives for effort	Value Creation: Work as worship and social service	Professional fulfilment and ethical sustainability
<b>Control Mechanism</b>	External Monitoring: Supervision and the iron cage	Internal Conscience: self-regulation through values	Reduced value-vacuum and corporate integrity

### 9. Conclusion: The Vocation of Truth

The Kirat Karo, Naam Japo and Vand Chhako synthesis offers the modern-day professional an ethical compass. By marrying the administrative mechanics outlined by Fayol with the humanistic principles, we guarantee that the journey of the professional will not merely be about efficiency, but will be infused with a sense of significance. When we toil with integrity, lead with humility and share our successes, our work is no longer a burden, but *a vocation of truth, contributing to the sarbat da bhala.*

### References

- Ahluwalia, J. S. 2003. *The Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine*. Singh Brothers.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row.
- Dhiman, S. 2011. 'Mindfulness in the Workplace: An Ancient Solution to Modern Problems', *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 8(4), 291–312.
- Fayol, H. 1949. *General and Industrial Management*, C. Storrs (trans.). Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons. (Original work published 1916).
- Freeman, R. E. 2010. *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marx, K. 1959. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Progress Publishers. (Original work published 1844).
- Mele, D. 2003. 'The challenge of Humanistic Management', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 44(1), 77–88.
- Pirson, M. 2017. *Humanistic Management: Protecting Dignity and Promoting Well-Being*. Cambridge University Press.
- Purser, R. 2019. *Mindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. Repeater Books.
- Senge, P. M. 1990. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. Doubleday/Currency.
- Weber, M. 2002. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. S. Kalberg (trans.). Roxbury Publishing. (Original work published 1905).