



From Illusion to Insight: Śaṅkara's Sattā-Traya for Organisational Behaviour

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Abstract

This paper operationalises Advaita *Vedānta* as a conceptual lever for reimagining organisational behaviour, drawing on Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's doctrine of *sattā-traya*—the three-tiered architecture of reality encompassing the *pratibhāsika* (illusory), *vyavahārika* (empirical), and *paramārthika* (absolute). Reframed as layers of organisational consciousness, these ontological constructs inform a triadic behavioural schema articulated through *draṣṭā-bhāva* (situational awareness), *kartā-bhāva* (ethically grounded action), and *bhoktā-bhāva* (purpose-driven fulfilment). By integrating analytic strands from the six classical *darśanas*—*Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Yoga*, *Mīmāṃsā* and *Vedānta*—the study advances an indigenous paradigm for leadership cognition, moral accountability, and decision intentionality. The analysis positions the Vedāntic progression from illusion to insight as a strategic shift from reactive performance cycles to reflective, wisdom-led value creation. Through this fusion of Indian metaphysics and contemporary management thinking, the paper contributes to human values research and offers a future-ready framework for cultivating consciousness-centric organisations. **Keywords:** Advaita *Vedānta*, *sattā-traya*, organisational consciousness, Indian philosophy, leadership ethics, human values.

Keywords

Advaita-Based Leadership; Organisational Consciousness; Ethical Action Framework; Vedāntic Behaviour Model; Wisdom-Centric Management

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, organisational studies have increasingly recognised the need to integrate ethical consciousness and psychological well-being into the framework of work performance and leadership (Sharma, 1999). Amidst globalisation, technological acceleration, and the dominance of utilitarian values, contemporary organisations face a profound challenge: maintaining productivity without compromising humanity. This has led to a growing interest in non-Western paradigms of management and consciousness, particularly those rooted in Indian philosophical traditions. The resurgence of Indic thought in organisational behaviour research demonstrates a search for holistic frameworks that reconcile the instrumental with the transcendental, the pragmatic with the spiritual (Chakraborty, 1995; Pandit, 2021).

Among India's rich philosophical contributions, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's *Advaita Vedānta* stands as one of the most comprehensive metaphysical systems, emphasising non-duality (*advaita*)—the essential unity of all existence (Locklin & Lauwers, 2009). Within this tradition, Śaṅkara's doctrine of *sattā-traya* or “three levels of reality” provides a nuanced understanding of perception, experience, and truth. These are (a) *pratibhāsika-sattā*—the illusory or apparent reality, (b) *vyavahārika-sattā*—the empirical or transactional reality, and (c) *paramārthika-sattā*—the absolute

or ultimate reality (Mahadevan, 2006). Each represents not a separate world but a distinct mode of cognition through which consciousness relates to phenomena. This layered ontology also has profound implications for understanding human behaviour, ethics, and leadership.

The contemporary workplace, with its complex interplay of perception, performance, and purpose, mirrors these Vedāntic distinctions. At the *pratibhāsika* level, organisational life often operates through impressions, biases, and appearances—shaped by perception and projection. The *vyavahārika* level reflects ethical responsibility, interpersonal roles, and collective functioning—the practical sphere of decision-making and leadership (Kanungo and Conger, 1992). The *paramārthika* level, rarely explored in management discourse, points toward transcendent awareness—where work becomes selfless, integrated, and aligned with a higher consciousness (Nordlund & Garvill, 2002). In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa describes this transition from ignorance to wisdom as an evolution of vision: “*Yadā te moha-kalilam buddhir vyatitarisyati, tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*” (Gītā 2.52) “When your intellect transcends the confusion of delusion, you shall attain indifference to what has been heard and what is yet to be heard.” This movement from *moha* (delusion) to *buddhi* (clarity) parallels a movement from *pratyakṣa* (direct perception) to *paramārthika* (realisation) and serves as a guiding metaphor for organisational self-awareness.

Recent scholarship in organisational behaviour emphasises constructs such as mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2014), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), and servant leadership (Greenleaf et al., 2002), which correspond closely to the Vedāntic categories of awareness, action, and realisation. However, much of this literature remains decontextualised from its deeper philosophical roots. By revisiting *Advaita Vedānta* and the six classical *darśanas* (schools of Indian thought), a more integrative and contextually authentic framework emerges. Together, these traditions—Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta—form a comprehensive epistemological and ethical architecture. When applied to organisational contexts, they illuminate the psychological processes, moral responsibilities, and ontological insights underlying human work behaviour. The central argument of this paper is that *Advaita Vedānta*, through its concept of *sattā-traya*, offers a foundational paradigm for “organisational consciousness.” The model transcends conventional management theories by situating human action within a continuum of awareness:

1. **Cognitive clarity (*draṣṭā-bhāva*)**—the observational stance that cultivates awareness, objectivity, and self-regulation.
2. **Ethical engagement (*kartā-bhāva*)**—the doer’s attitude, emphasising responsibility, dharma, and purposeful action.
3. **Spiritual fulfilment (*bhoktā-bhāva*)**—the receiver’s attitude, characterised by acceptance, gratitude, and equanimity.

Each of these corresponds to one level of reality—illusory, empirical, and absolute—together constituting a triadic model of human functioning that integrates perception, action, and transcendence. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* expresses this dynamic unity succinctly: “*Karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana*” (Gītā 2.47) “Your right is to action alone, never to its fruits.” This principle encapsulates the Vedāntic understanding of *kartā-bhāva*: engagement without attachment, participation without possession. In organisational terms, the framework encompasses three interrelated dimensions of human work behaviour. Perceptual cognition concerns the processes by which individuals and teams construct meaning, interpret events, and shape their understanding of the organisational environment. It reflects how perception and awareness influence decision-making and relationships (Chadha, 2001). Behavioural ethics pertains to the moral orientation of action—how a sense of duty, integrity, and ethical intent governs conduct and guides choices within professional contexts. It ensures that performance remains aligned with values and collective responsibility (Newman et al., 2017). The third dimension, affective well-being, arises from self-awareness and the spirit of surrender, enabling individuals to experience inner contentment, emotional balance, and resilience amidst workplace challenges (Bakker, 2008). Together, these three aspects—cognitive, behavioural, and affective—constitute a holistic model of consciousness that harmonises perception, action, and transcendence in organisational life.

Each of these dimensions aligns with the Vedāntic vision of progressively dissolving ego-centred identity into a larger, collective consciousness. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.8.7) articulates this truth in the timeless expression: “*Tat tvam asi*” — “That thou art.”

This identity of self (*ātman*) and ultimate reality (*brahman*) underlies the spiritual foundation of all human endeavour, including the world of work. Thus, the integration of *Advaita Vedānta* into organisational behaviour studies is neither a cultural curiosity nor a mystical indulgence, but a robust intellectual endeavour that can deepen our contemporary understanding of work, ethics, and leadership. By interpreting *sattā-traya* as a behavioural continuum—illusion, engagement, and realisation—organisations can cultivate systems that promote clarity of vision,

responsibility in action, and harmony in outcomes. The following sections elaborate this conceptual foundation through two interlinked frameworks: the *Advaitic* theory of reality and the six classical *darśanas* of Indian philosophy, each offering distinct insights into human cognition and conduct within collective environments.

2. Theoretical Framework: Advaita Vedānta and Sattā-Traya

2.1 Foundations of Advaita Vedānta

Advaita Vedānta, as systematised by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in the eighth century CE, rests upon the epistemological conviction that reality (*sattā*) is one and non-dual (*advaita*). At the same time, multiplicity arises from ignorance (*avidyā*) and superimposition (*adhyāsa*). Śaṅkara's *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* articulates that the empirical world perceived through the senses is neither absolutely real nor unreal—it is conditionally real. The Upaniṣadic declaration “*Brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*” (“Brahman is real, the world is unreal, the individual self is not different from Brahman”) encapsulates this ontology. In Śaṅkara's analysis, perception itself must be evaluated at different levels of truth-value, giving rise to the triadic framework of *sattā-traya*—three orders of reality. This ontology offers a uniquely sophisticated model for understanding how individuals and organisations construct and interact with reality. Every perception, decision, and behaviour operates through one or more of these epistemic lenses. The doctrine thus offers not only metaphysical insight but also a diagnostic tool for assessing the levels of awareness that shape human conduct.

2.2 The Three Levels of Reality

2.2.1 Pratibhāsika-Sattā (Illusory or Subjective Reality)

At the *pratibhāsika* level, reality is filtered through subjectivity, emotion, and distortion. It encompasses the world of dreams, projections, and misperceptions—analogue to mistaking a rope for a snake in dim light, a classic example in Advaita epistemology (Śaṅkara, *Upadeśa Sāhasrī*). In organisational life, *pratibhāsika-sattā* manifests in cognitive bias, stereotyping, rumour, and the politics of perception. Employees often act on interpretations rather than facts, driven by affective reactions and partial knowledge (Van Bijlert, 2003). The *Bhagavad-Gītā* characterises this condition as bondage to delusion: “*Avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ, svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitaṁ manyamānāḥ*” (Kāṭha Upaniṣad 1.2.5) “Dwelling in ignorance, yet deeming themselves wise, the deluded wander about, blinded by illusion.” At this level, the appropriate response is *draṣṭā-bhāva*—the cultivation of awareness and objectivity. The observer's stance enables self-reflection, mitigating impulsive reactions and perceptual distortions. Organisational practices such as mindfulness, feedback systems, and reflective leadership align closely with this Vedāntic discipline of detached observation.

2.2.2 Vyavahārika-Sattā (Empirical or Transactional Reality)

The *vyavahārika* level represents the pragmatic order of shared experience—the domain of law, ethics, and functional relationships. Here, individuals engage in purposeful action (*karma*), governed by causality and social obligation (Rastogi & Prakash Pati, 2015). Śaṅkara acknowledges this level as *mithyā* (provisionally real), but essential for ethical and dharmic living. In the workplace, this encompasses the spheres of organisational roles, decision-making, and moral responsibility (Kaur, 2020). Ethical leadership, teamwork, and performance management operate within *vyavahārika-sattā*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa affirms this necessity of disciplined action: “*Tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara, asakto hy ācaran karma param āpnoti puruṣaḥ*” (Bhagavad-Gītā 3.19) “Therefore, without attachment, perform your prescribed duty; for by acting without attachment, one attains the Supreme.” This verse captures the essence of *kartā-bhāva*: performing one's function diligently, without clinging to personal gain. The *vyavahārika* level thus corresponds to ethical pragmatism, where performance aligns with principle, and action is informed by self-regulation. Organisationally, it is expressed through servant leadership, transparent governance, and value-based management.

2.2.3 Paramārthika-Sattā (Absolute or Ultimate Reality)

At the highest level, *paramārthika-sattā* reveals the unity of existence in Brahman—the substratum of all phenomena. Śaṅkara describes this state as realisation (*jñāna*), where the distinctions between subject and object, self and other, dissolve. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (mantra 7), this is equated with *turiya*—the “fourth” state of consciousness that transcends the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. For organisational theory, this level translates into self-transcendence within leadership and team dynamics. Individuals who operate from *paramārthika* awareness perceive

their roles as expressions of a collective whole. This aligns with the modern concept of “purpose-driven” or “conscious leadership,” where organisational goals are aligned with universal values (Enslin et al., 2023). The *Bhagavad-Gītā* (18.66) points to this final surrender: “*Sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*” “Abandon all duties and surrender unto Me alone.” In Vedāntic psychology, this does not imply passivity but the dissolution of ego-centred doership. Work becomes *seva*—an expression of the divine. The *paramārthika* stage thus represents spiritual maturity, where ethics evolve into empathy, and leadership becomes a form of stewardship.

2.3 Implications for Organisational Behaviour Theory

The *sattā-traya* framework provides a multidimensional understanding of organisational life, ranging from subjective perception (*pratibhāsika*) to pragmatic action (*vyavahārika*) to transcendent awareness (*paramārthika*). Each level offers distinct insights into how individuals and collectives construct meaning, regulate conduct, and find purpose. Table 1 summarises this triadic model in organisational terms.

Table 1. Levels of Reality and Corresponding Bhāvas in Organisational Contexts

Level of Reality	Corresponding Bhāva	Organisational Expression	Core Principle	Textual Reference
<i>Pratibhāsika-sattā</i>	<i>Draṣṭā-bhāva</i> (Observer)	Self-awareness, perception management, reflection	Awareness and clarity	<i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i> 1.2.5
<i>Vyavahārika-sattā</i>	<i>Kartā-bhāva</i> (Doer)	Ethical leadership, teamwork, and accountability	Action without attachment	<i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i> 3.19
<i>Paramārthika-sattā</i>	<i>Bhoktā-bhāva</i> (Enjoyer)	Conscious leadership, unity of purpose	Surrender and fulfillment	<i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i> 18.66

By linking epistemology with organisational psychology, *Advaita Vedānta* provides a framework that integrates cognition, ethics, and transcendence. It suggests that maturity in leadership and decision-making corresponds to movement from lower to higher levels of awareness, not merely from inexperience to expertise. The following section extends this framework by situating *sattā-traya* within the broader context of the six *darśanas*—classical Indian schools of philosophy that collectively articulate the multidimensional nature of human knowledge and action.

3. Integration with the Six Darśanas

The framework of *sattā-traya* finds deeper resonance when aligned with the broader Indian philosophical canon, the *ṣaḍ-darśanas* or six orthodox schools of thought. These systems, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta, though distinct in method and emphasis, share a common epistemological foundation and ethical orientation (Radhakrishnan, 2010). Collectively, they provide a multidimensional understanding of human cognition, motivation, and behaviour that can enrich contemporary organisational theory. Each *darśana* emphasises a unique facet of inquiry, logic, substance, consciousness, discipline, duty, and realisation that corresponds to different functions within modern organisational life.

3.1 Nyāya: Logic, Reasoning, and Decision-Making

The *Nyāya* school, founded by Gautama, focuses on valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) and the disciplined use of reasoning to arrive at truth. Its insistence on rational inquiry and analytical rigour aligns closely with the decision-making processes in organisational settings (Chandra Satish and Sukhram, 2018). The *Nyāya Sūtras* classify four primary sources of knowledge—perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*), and testimony (*śabda*). In organisational settings, *Nyāya* provides a foundation for critical thinking, evidence-based management, and rational problem-solving. Leaders employing a *Nyāya* mindset avoid hasty judgment and base decisions on valid data, logical coherence, and ethical consideration (Sinha, 2018). The *Bhagavad-Gītā* echoes this ideal in the cultivation of discriminative intellect (*buddhi-yoga*): “*Buddhi-yukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte*” (*Gītā* 2.50) “Endowed with intellect, one abandons both good and evil deeds.” This verse highlights the importance of discernment (*viveka*), a principle fundamental to both *Nyāya* reasoning and effective organisational leadership.

3.2 Vaiśeṣika: Order, Differentiation, and Organisational Structure

Kaṇāda’s *Vaiśeṣika* school complements *Nyāya* by focusing on metaphysical categorisation (*padārtha*), which

includes substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*), action (*karma*), and relation (*samavāya*). It articulates an ontology that parallels the hierarchical and functional differentiation found in organisational systems (Ganguly, 2024). Each entity maintains a unique essence (*viśeṣa*) yet contributes to the larger order. In management theory, *Vaiśeṣika* translates to principles of role clarity, structural coherence, and systemic integrity (Radhakrishnan, 2010). Organisations thrive when their elements function harmoniously, respecting both individuality and interdependence. Śāṅkara's Advaitic insight adds depth here: while differentiation is operationally necessary (*vyavahārika*), it remains unified in the substratum of *Brahman* (*paramārthika*). Thus, structural diversity in organisations reflects, rather than contradicts, ontological unity.

3.3 Sāṅkhya: Psychological Constitution and Behavioural Dynamics

The *Sāṅkhya* philosophy of Kapila delineates reality as an interaction between *Puruṣa* (pure consciousness) and *Prakṛti* (material nature). Its triadic doctrine of the *guṇas*—*sattva* (harmony), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (inertia), offers a powerful psychological model for analysing human motivation and temperament (Ray & Deshpande, 2019). In organisational terms, *sattva* corresponds to balance and clarity, *rajas* to ambition and drive, and *tamas* to stagnation and resistance to change. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* (14.6–9) vividly describes these forces: “*Sattvaṃ sukhe sañjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata, jñānam āvṛtya tu tamaḥ pramāde sañjayaty uta*” “*Sattva binds through attachment to happiness, rajas through attachment to action, and tamas through ignorance and inertia.*” Understanding the interplay of *guṇas* enables managers to identify behavioural patterns and foster environments that elevate *sattva*—clarity, cooperation, and ethical action—over *rajas* and *tamas*. Leadership training grounded in *Sāṅkhya* encourages self-awareness and adaptive regulation of work temperament.

3.4 Yoga: Self-Regulation, Mindfulness, and Discipline

Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* operationalise the *Sāṅkhya* metaphysics into a systematic discipline of self-mastery. The eight limbs (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*)—ethical restraints (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), posture (*āsana*), breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*), concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and absorption (*samādhi*) constitute a progressive framework for regulating the mind and achieving equilibrium (Vivekananda, 2004). In organisational life, *Yoga* corresponds to emotional intelligence, stress management, and mindful performance. A leader who embodies *yogic* awareness acts with calm decisiveness, striking a balance between empathy and firmness. The *Gītā* (6.5–6) articulates this ideal: “*Uddhared ātmanātmānam nātmānam avasādayet, ātmaiva hy ātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ*” “*Let a man lift himself by his own Self and not degrade himself; the Self alone is his friend, the Self alone is his enemy.*” This verse encapsulates the *yogic* insight that leadership begins with self-leadership—the disciplined alignment of inner and outer worlds.

3.5 Mīmāṃsā: Duty, Motivation, and Ethical Performance

Jaimini's *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā* focuses on *dharma*—the performance of action according to scriptural injunctions, emphasising intention (*niṣkāma karma*) and social responsibility. This doctrine aligns directly with organisational ethics and role-based accountability (Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013). *Mīmāṃsā* underscores that action, when performed with sincerity and detachment, sustains both individual and collective welfare. Śrī Kṛṣṇa echoes this principle of *niṣkāma karma* in the *Gītā* (3.9): “*Yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra loko 'yaṃ karma-bandhanaḥ; tad-arthaṃ karma kaunteya mukta-saṅgaḥ samācara.*” “*Work must be performed as a sacrifice for the Divine; otherwise, work causes bondage. Therefore, O Arjuna, perform your duty free from attachment.*” In organisational behaviour, this translates into a commitment to process excellence and moral integrity, rather than an obsession with outcomes. It fosters a culture of trust and accountability, where performance is driven by purpose rather than pressure (Bhawuk, 2020).

3.6 Vedānta: Self-Realisation and Leadership Consciousness

The culmination of Indian philosophical thought lies in *Vedānta*, particularly its non-dual form articulated by Śāṅkara. *Vedānta* views the Self (*Ātman*) as identical with the ultimate reality (*Brahman*), dissolving the apparent duality between the individual and the collective (Barua, 2023). In leadership studies, this translates into the concept of “conscious leadership”—where decision-making, vision, and ethics stem from an awareness of interconnectedness rather than ego-driven motivations. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.14.1) declares: “*Sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma*” “*All this indeed is Brahman.*” A leader rooted in this realisation perceives the organisation not as a competitive arena, but

as a shared field of consciousness, where collaboration and compassion replace rivalry and control. This corresponds to *paramārthika* awareness in organisational life—the recognition that the ultimate purpose of work is not merely profit or prestige, but participation in the unfolding of collective well-being.

3.7 Synthesis of the Darśanas in Organisational Theory

When synthesised, the six darśanas provide a holistic template for understanding and improving organisational behaviour. *Nyāya* sharpens analytical intelligence, *Vaiśeṣika* organises systemic harmony, *Sāṅkhya* explains psychological constitution, *Yoga* develops emotional balance, *Mīmāṃsā* anchors ethical engagement, and *Vedānta* culminates in transcendent awareness. Each represents a facet of human functioning—thinking, structuring, feeling, acting, and realising—unified under the *Advaitic* paradigm of non-duality. This comprehensive framework enriches modern management by integrating cognition, ethics, and spirituality into one seamless continuum of organisational consciousness.

4. Application to Organisational Behaviour

4.1 From Philosophy to Practice

The triadic behavioural model derived from Advaita Vedānta—*draṣṭā-bhāva* (the observer), *kartā-bhāva* (the doer), and *bhoktā-bhāva* (the enjoyer), translates seamlessly into the domains of organisational psychology and leadership behaviour. Each *bhāva* reflects a distinct level of consciousness and an ethical orientation toward work. Together, they represent a continuum of professional evolution, from awareness (*jñāna*) through engagement (*karma*) to fulfilment (*ānanda*). When operationalised in the workplace, these attitudes foster mindfulness, integrity, and resilience—qualities that underpin sustainable organisational performance (Rose and Palattiyil, 2020). The *Bhagavad-Gītā* provides a framework for this transformation, encouraging the worker to transcend egoistic motivation and embrace equanimity. Śrī Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna: “*Yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanāñjaya, siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate*” (*Gītā* 2.48) “Perform your duties established in yoga, abandoning attachment, and being even-minded in success and failure; such equanimity is called yoga.” This verse encapsulates the principle of *karma-yoga*, the essence of *kartā-bhāva*, which serves as the behavioural core of the Vedāntic approach to organisational life.

4.2 Draṣṭā-Bhāva: Awareness and Objectivity in Leadership

The *draṣṭā-bhāva* (observer’s stance) is the first and foundational dimension of Vedāntic work consciousness. It involves cultivating an inner witness—a reflective awareness that perceives without distortion or reactivity. In organisational behaviour, this corresponds to **mindfulness, self-awareness, and perceptual neutrality**. Managers and leaders often face cognitive biases, including confirmation bias, overconfidence, and attribution errors (Kar et al., 2023). The *draṣṭā* approach mitigates these distortions by promoting metacognition—the awareness of one’s own thought process. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.3.10–11) likens the mind to a charioteer, guiding the senses as horses, under the supervision of the Self: “*Ātmānam rathinam viddhi śarīram ratham eva tu, buddhim tu sārathim viddhi manāḥ pragraham eva ca.*” “Know the Self as the lord of the chariot, the body as the chariot itself, intellect as the charioteer, and mind as the reins.” This allegory underscores the necessity of cognitive control and introspection in navigating complex environments. Within organisations, *draṣṭā-bhāva* translates into reflective leadership—leaders who observe before acting, listen before judging, and maintain composure under pressure. It nurtures an inclusive culture that values dialogue, empathy, and evidence-based decision-making (Sinha, 2002). Practically, *draṣṭā-bhāva* can be cultivated through structured reflection, mindfulness programmes, and leadership coaching that encourage non-reactive awareness. The ability to “see clearly” becomes the first step in ethical and effective management, transforming observation into insight.

4.3 Kartā-Bhāva: Ethical Engagement and Purposeful Action

The second dimension, *kartā-bhāva*, refers to the ethical and pragmatic aspects of consciousness. Here, the individual acts responsibly within the field of social and professional obligation. *Kartā-bhāva* corresponds to **behavioural ethics, organisational citizenship, and value-based leadership**. It integrates the *Mīmāṃsā* emphasis on duty with the *Gītā*’s teaching of *niṣkāma karma*—action without attachment to outcomes. In the context of organisational

behaviour, *kartā-bhāva* embodies ethical proactivity. A manager guided by this attitude focuses on process excellence and moral integrity rather than external validation or reward (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2020). This principle underpins corporate governance, employee engagement, and social responsibility. The *Gītā* further characterises the ideal doer: “*Mukta-saṅgo ’nahaṁvādī dhṛty-utsāha-samanvitaḥ ... sātṛvikaḥ*” (Bhagavad-Gītā 18.26) — free from attachment and ego, steadfast and enthusiastic; this captures the Vedāntic union of competence with humility. The integration of skill (*kausāla*) and serenity (*śānti*) epitomises the Vedāntic ideal of efficient yet detached action. Practically, organisations can foster *kartā-bhāva* through ethical training, participative decision-making, and purpose-driven work cultures that emphasise inner motivation (*śraddhā*) over extrinsic reward.

4.4 Bhoktā-Bhāva: Joy, Acceptance, and Transcendent Engagement

The third dimension, *bhoktā-bhāva*—the enjoyer’s attitude—represents a mature consciousness that receives experiences with acceptance and gratitude. It does not imply passive enjoyment but **conscious participation** in the flow of work and life. In psychological terms, it aligns with concepts of **resilience, gratitude, and flow** (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). The *bhoktā* perceives success and failure as expressions of a larger order (*rta*), transforming outcomes into opportunities for learning. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* (12.15) describes such a person: “*Yasmani na udvijate loko lokān na udvijate ca yaḥ, harṣāmarṣa-bhayodvegair mukto yaḥ sa ca me priyaḥ.*” “He by whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world—free from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety—is dear to Me.” This verse delineates the *bhoktā*’s equipoise—emotional stability amidst turbulence. For organisations, cultivating *bhoktā-bhāva* translates to developing resilience-based leadership, wellness programmes, and appreciative cultures. It helps employees internalise work as *seva* (service) and experience satisfaction independent of material metrics. *Bhoktā-bhāva* is also the affective culmination of *draṣṭā* and *kartā*: awareness in observation and integrity in action naturally culminate in joy in being. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (2.2.8) declares: “*Bhidyate hṛdaya-granthiś chidyante sarva-saṁśayāḥ, kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi tasmin drṣṭe parāvare.*” “When the highest and the lowest are seen as one, the knot of the heart is cut, all doubts are resolved, and karma is exhausted.” This realisation is not theoretical but lived—a culmination of authentic work where self, task, and purpose merge into unity.

4.5 Triadic Integration in Organisational Context

The three *bhāvas*—*draṣṭā*, *kartā*, and *bhoktā*—are not sequential but simultaneous modes of awareness that can coexist in every professional act. They correspond respectively to **cognitive, behavioural, and affective** dimensions of workplace consciousness. Table 2 illustrates this integrative mapping.

Table 2. Triadic Integration of Bhāvas with Organisational Behavioural Outcomes

Bhāva	Organisational Parallel	Core Competency	Behavioural Outcome	Vedāntic Reference
<i>Draṣṭā-bhāva</i>	Reflective awareness	Mindfulness, perception management	Clarity and objectivity	<i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i> 1.3.10
<i>Kartā-bhāva</i>	Ethical engagement	Accountability, moral reasoning	Integrity and focus	<i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i> 2.47
<i>Bhoktā-bhāva</i>	Transcendent fulfilment	Resilience, gratitude, flow	Joy and acceptance	<i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i> 12.15

This triadic structure integrates classical Indian psychology with modern organisational behaviour. It provides a culturally grounded model for leadership development, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision-making. Leaders who embody all three *bhāvas* operate from a space of awareness, action, and surrender—transforming the organisation into what the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.5) calls “*pūrṇam idaṁ*”—the field of wholeness. Thus, Vedānta reframes the modern corporation not merely as an economic entity but as a **living system of consciousness**, where work becomes *karma-yoga*, leadership becomes *seva*, and fulfilment becomes *ānanda*.

5. Discussion and Implications

5.1 Revisiting Organisational Behaviour through Vedāntic Consciousness

Contemporary organisational behaviour (OB) theories, encompassing a range of topics from motivation and leadership to ethics and mindfulness, have sought to strike a balance between the instrumental and humanistic dimensions

of work. Yet most frameworks remain grounded in Western epistemology, privileging material, individualistic, and outcome-driven perspectives (Burrell and Morgan, 2017). The Vedāntic model of *sattā-traya* introduces an ontological depth that bridges the psychological and the spiritual, offering a multidimensional perspective on human functioning. By integrating *Advaita Vedānta* and the six *darśanas*, this framework expands OB beyond behavioural efficiency to existential awareness. The movement across *pratibhāsika*, *vyavahārika*, and *paramārthika* levels parallels the progression from reactive behaviour to responsible action to reflective wisdom. This transition echoes the Gītā's ideal of *sthita-prajñā*—a person of steady wisdom: “*Prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha mano-gatān, ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthita-prajñas tadocyate*” (Gītā 2.55) “When a person gives up all desires born of the mind and is content in the Self by the Self, such a one is said to be of steady wisdom.” The *sthita-prajñā* represents the *paramārthika* state of leadership, characterised by self-governance, equanimity, and a value-centred approach. Applying this archetype to management transforms the organisation into a site of collective self-regulation, where awareness precedes action, and intention outweighs impulse.

5.2 Managerial and Organisational Implications

From a managerial standpoint, the triadic model of *draṣṭā*, *kartā*, and *bhoktā* provides actionable insights into leadership development, employee engagement, and organisational culture.

1. **Leadership Development:** The cultivation of *draṣṭā-bhāva* develops reflective leadership—an ability to observe systems without bias. *Kartā-bhāva* refines moral courage and ethical consistency, while *bhoktā-bhāva* fosters humility and gratitude. Together, these form a triadic leadership competency model that integrates awareness, responsibility, and empathy.

2. **Employee Engagement:** Traditional engagement models focus on extrinsic motivation and performance metrics. The Vedāntic perspective reorients engagement toward inner alignment (*śraddhā*). Employees guided by *kartā-bhāva* see their work as *karma-yoga*, an offering of skill and sincerity rather than mere compliance.

3. **Organisational Culture:** At the cultural level, Vedānta promotes *samatva* (equanimity) and *seva* (service). Organisational systems inspired by *vyavahārika-sattā* balance structural order with ethical purpose, while *paramārthika-sattā* inspires a shared vision of unity that transcends individual interests. This transforms corporate environments into communities of practice—what the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* calls “*pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate*” (“From fullness, fullness arises, and even after taking away fullness, fullness remains,” 5.1.1).

4. **Conflict Resolution:** The *sattā-traya* lens also offers a diagnostic framework for managing organisational conflict. Many conflicts operate at the *pratibhāsika* level—based on misperception or ego (Suar et al., 2006). When participants elevate dialogue to the *vyavahārika* level—guided by ethics and facts—resolution becomes possible (Modh, 2014). At the *paramārthika* level, reconciliation emerges from empathy and the realisation of shared purpose.

5. **Workplace Well-Being:** Vedāntic awareness directly contributes to psychological resilience. The *bhoktā-bhāva* attitude enables individuals to maintain composure in uncertain situations and transform stress into a learning opportunity. The *Gītā* (6.7) offers a blueprint for such balance: “*Jitātmanaḥ praśāntasya paramātmā samāhitāḥ, śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoḥ.*” “For one who has conquered the mind and is tranquil, the Supreme Self remains steady in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour.” Organisations that foster *draṣṭā-kartā-bhoktā* consciousness thus cultivate employees who are both high-performing and inwardly peaceful.

5.3 Research Implications and Future Directions

From an academic vantage point, integrating Indian philosophical constructs into organisational behaviour (OB) opens a high-impact research frontier that bridges psychology, ethics, and strategic management. The triadic *Advaitic* categories of *draṣṭā*, *kartā*, and *bhoktā* can be systematically operationalised as behavioural metrics, enabling scholars to quantify states of awareness, ethical engagement, and fulfilment within leadership practice. Future empirical studies can explore how these dimensions influence critical organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, moral judgment, decision-quality, and long-term organisational commitment. This creates opportunities for designing validated psychometric instruments that capture consciousness-based leadership attributes. Beyond single-context analysis, cross-cultural comparative research can evaluate how *Advaita Vedānta* complements or advances established paradigms such as mindfulness-based leadership, positive organisational scholarship, and spiritual leadership. Such

comparative inquiry would illuminate the unique value proposition of Indian philosophical models—particularly their emphasis on non-duality, ethical intentionality, and inner regulation. Positioning *sattā-traya* alongside contemporary behavioural frameworks also strengthens theoretical legitimacy, enabling Indian management thought to move from a peripheral interest area to a mainstream analytical lens. By building robust empirical linkages, future scholarship can establish a future-ready, indigenous OB framework that integrates consciousness, performance, and ethical stewardship.

5.4 Limitations

While philosophically robust, the *Vedāntic* model must be contextualised carefully in empirical settings. Its metaphysical assumptions may not be immediately translatable into quantitative constructs. Additionally, its emphasis on consciousness and non-duality challenges traditional positivist methodologies. However, this limitation can be re-framed as an opportunity—encouraging methodological pluralism and qualitative approaches such as phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and contemplative ethnography. In summary, *Advaita Vedānta* and the six *darśanas* provide a deeply integrative framework for organisational behaviour—grounded not merely in cognition and performance but in consciousness and ethics. By bridging ancient epistemology and modern practice, the *sattā-traya* model redefines management as a moral and spiritual endeavour, restoring the missing link between efficiency and enlightenment.

6. Conclusion

The exploration of Śaṅkara’s *sattā-traya* in the context of organisational behaviour reveals that Indian philosophy, far from being abstract metaphysics, offers a practical framework for transforming the quality of work and leadership. *Advaita Vedānta* provides a spectrum of consciousness that parallels the human progression from perception to performance to realisation. The three levels of reality—*pratibhāsika*, *vyavahārika*, and *paramārthika*—and their corresponding behavioural correlates—*draṣṭā-bhāva*, *kartā-bhāva*, and *bhoktā-bhāva*—form an integrated model of awareness, ethical engagement, and fulfilment.

At the *pratibhāsika* level, individuals in organisations operate within subjective perceptions, shaped by emotion and partial knowledge. Through cultivating *draṣṭā-bhāva*, they develop the clarity to observe without distortion. At the *vyavahārika* level, ethical responsibility and purposeful action prevail; here, *kartā-bhāva* ensures a duty-bound performance without attachment to the results. Finally, at the *paramārthika* level, awareness expands into unity, where leadership transcends ego and work becomes a form of service (*seva*). This ultimate stage reflects the *Bhagavad-Gītā*’s closing synthesis of knowledge, action, and devotion: “*Yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva mad-arpaṇam*” (Gītā 9.27) “Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer or give, whatever austerity you perform—do that as an offering to Me.” This teaching captures the essence of organisational consciousness in Vedāntic terms: when all actions are performed as offerings, the workplace becomes a field of inner transformation.

In practical terms, this framework aligns cognitive clarity (*draṣṭā*), behavioural ethics (*kartā*), and emotional fulfilment (*bhoktā*) with modern organisational goals, such as mindfulness, governance, and well-being. The integration of the six *darśanas* enhances this triadic model, grounding decision-making in logic (*Nyāya*), structure in differentiation (*Vaiśeṣika*), psychology in temperament (*Sāṅkhya*), discipline in practice (*Yoga*), ethics in duty (*Mīmāṃsā*), and leadership in unity (*Vedānta*). Ultimately, *Advaita Vedānta* invites organisations to evolve from mechanistic systems into conscious collectives—where efficiency is tempered by empathy, competition by cooperation, and outcomes by awareness. It calls for a transformation of leadership from managing tasks to mastering consciousness. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (2.2.9) reminds us of this aspiration: “*Na karmaṇā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amṛtatvam ānaśuḥ.*” “Not by work, progeny, or wealth, but by renunciation alone is immortality attained.”

In organisational terms, this renunciation is not withdrawal but rather detachment from egoic identification—performing actions with awareness, excellence, and surrender. Such an approach redefines success as alignment with *rta* (cosmic order) rather than mere external reward. By integrating the insights of Śaṅkara’s *Advaita Vedānta* and the six *darśanas*, this study contributes to the emerging field of Indian management philosophy, offering a coherent paradigm of organisational consciousness that unites knowledge, ethics, and transcendence. As the *Īśa Upaniṣad* (1.1) declares: “*Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyām jagat.*”

“All this—whatever moves in this moving world—is pervaded by the Divine.”

Recognising this truth, the organisation becomes not merely an economic institution but a sacred ecosystem where the divine manifests through collective work, awareness, and harmony.

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