

Mission Karmayogi and Indian Knowledge Systems: Capacity Building for a Value-Driven Civil Service

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Abstract: The Government of India has embarked upon an ambitious reform agenda for its public service, known as Mission Karmayogi – the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building, approved by the Union Cabinet in September 2020. The primary goal of this mission is to establish a public service which can learn from global best practices while being grounded in Indian values. This paper seeks to explore the degree to which the latter part of the stated mission has been operationalized. The paper has employed a qualitative analysis of official records; official documents; media reports; and classic Indian texts to identify how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) have gone from merely a statement of intention to an active design principle, particularly within the Karmayogi Competency Framework and the IKS Initiative established by the Capacity Building Commission. The paper argues that the approach is conceptually promising because of its ability to connect competence with ethical orientation. However, the mission's claim of value development among public servants remains to be tested. Furthermore, the paper concludes that the platform's statistics reflect only exposure and not actual changes in behaviour. The paper also gives recommendations regarding evaluation; source diversity; and the connection between learning and career development.

Keywords: Mission Karmayogi; Indian Knowledge Systems; civil service capacity building; competency framework; public service ethics; iGOT

1. INTRODUCTION

As a general rule, Indian civil service reform consistently returns to a single point of conflict. One group believes that officers fail due to a lack of skills: i.e., they are placed without consideration of their abilities; their training is inconsistent; and they are primarily promoted based upon tenure. A second group, on the other hand, believes that officers are failing due to a lack of proper attitude, specifically a low level of public consciousness, a disregard for citizens, and an excessive degree of preference to personal gains. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) addressed both areas, and published reports regarding the ethical basis of governance and personnel systems (Second ARC, 2007, 2008). In reality, these two areas are often dealt with using separate mechanisms; i.e., training organizations address skill development while regulations and vigilance agencies deal with officer conduct. Mission Karmayogi, officially known as the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB), attempts to integrate both areas into one comprehensive programme. It received approval from the Union Cabinet on September 2nd, 2020.

Mission Karmayogi intends to transition human resources management from a rule-based system to a role-based system. Additionally, Mission Karmayogi intends to produce civil servants who are able to maintain a deep connection with "Indian Culture and sensibilities," while simultaneously developing best practices from leading institutions and programmes around the globe (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2020). Although the reference to Indian roots may be overlooked by some readers, this aspect connects Mission Karmayogi to another policy initiative occurring at approximately the same time. During September and October of 2020, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognized Indian Knowledge Systems as a guiding principle for education (MHRD, 2020), and in October 2020, an IKS Division was established within the Ministry of Education, located at the All-India Council for Technical Education (IMPRI, 2025). Capacity building has since become an area where IKS is being utilized beyond the traditional classroom setting, and is now being used to train individuals currently holding office.

The purpose of this study is to examine three questions. How have IKS been incorporated into the design and implementation of Mission Karmayogi? What theoretical justification exists for using IKS to develop a value-based civil service? What limitations/risks arise when utilizing IKS in this manner? The primary argument presented here is that the integration of competency and values represents the unique characteristic of Mission Karmayogi; however, there is limited evidence demonstrating that values are formed through IKS; and there appears to be a need for greater

academic/constitutional rigor in selecting/reading Indic texts than has been exhibited thus far through official communications.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Capacity building and the competency approach

The mission describes capacity building to be operating on three separate levels: the individual, institutional, and process-based levels (PIB, 2020). The individual level is resting upon the competency-based approach, which draws its intellectual heritage from McClelland's (1973) argument that an individual's job performance can be better predicted by their demonstrated competencies rather than by traditional intelligence tests. As such, Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993) later developed models of managerial performance based upon McClelland's idea; these models are currently being utilized by numerous human resources systems. Mission Karmayogi adopts this terminology directly. For every position, a Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRAC) will be created to describe each position and competencies will be divided into behavioural, functional and domain categories (DOPT, n.d.). Functional and domain competencies relate to what an official must know and do within a specific role. Behavioural competencies relate to how an official performs their duties. Questions related to values enter in the third category.

2.2 Values in public service

A value-driven civil service is primarily inspired by public purpose and have ethical orientation. Perry and Wise (1990) defined public service motivation as a set of predispositions to respond to motivations primarily found in public sector organizations; they argued that organizational practices can enhance these predispositions. Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) contrasting a service-based approach where officials assist citizens with identifying and meeting common interests with the emphasis on steering and efficiency that is characteristic of managerialism; managerialism was previously analysed by Hood (1991) as doctrine associated with the new public management. Mission Karmayogi's focus on citizen-centricity and on officials acting as facilitators for citizens and businesses (CSIR-HRDC, n.d.) resembles a service-based approach rather than a managerial one, although there are similarities between the two.

2.3 Indian Knowledge Systems

The term "IKS" is applied in multiple ways. In its broadest sense, IKS encompasses the collective knowledge of India as reflected in the languages and disciplines of India including mathematics, medicine, the arts, and statecraft (Kapoor & Singh, 2005). In the context of policy, IKS refers to the legacy that NEP 2020 refers to through concepts such as jnan, vigyan, and jeevan darshan; the Ministry of Education's IKS Division exists for the purpose of researching, preserving, and disseminating this legacy (AICTE, n.d.; MHRD, 2020).

However, this paper utilizes IKS in a narrower operational sense: the written and practical traditions that address duty, conduct and governance such as the Bhagavad Gita, Arthashastra, Tirukkural and Rajadharma teachings of the Mahabharata. This narrow application is intentional given that the Capacity Building Commission specifically identifies the Mahabharata, Arthashastra and Tirukkural as sources for its training programmes (Capacity Building Commission (CBC, n.d.-b).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND SOURCES

This paper is a qualitative, interpretative study based upon a document analysis. In this study four types of source materials were analysed : (a) official union government records (Cabinet Approval Release by PIB, DoPT Scheme Page, Parliamentary Replies and Press Releases); (b) materials produced by the Capacity Building Commission (IKS Pages and Annual Capacity Building Plan Documents); (c) Press Reports & Policy Commentary (specifically a newspaper interview with a Commissioner Member regarding the Karmayogi Competency Framework); and (d) Canonical Indian Texts in Standard Translations, along with Secondary Scholarship. Data on Platform Use extends until early 2026. Data on Platform Use is derived from Official Statements. Three caveats must be mentioned. Usage Figures are reported by the respective Implementing Agencies and therefore have not been independently audited. The description of the Competency Framework relies primarily on a single published interview as researcher was unable to access the entire framework document in citable format. Additionally, reading old texts for present-day administration is an act of interpretation. However, the author acknowledges that there can be other valid, logical, or reasonable ways to interpret the text.

4. THE ARCHITECTURE OF MISSION KARMAYOGI

The Cabinet approved the National Program for Capacity Building (NPCSCB) with a total budget of INR 510.86 crores for the next five years. The funding includes USD 50 million in multilateral support and is intended to initially benefit

approximately 46 lakh central government employees. (PIB, 2020) Later in 2022, the World Bank provided additional funding in the form of a USD 47 million loan that is believed to have supplemented the original budget (IMPRI, 2026). The institutional structure of the NPCSCB consists of four components: A Prime Minister's Public Human Resources Council; A Capacity Building Commission; government-owned Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for operating the digital infrastructure; and a Coordination Unit under the authority of the Cabinet Secretary. (PIB, 2020) The SPV, known as Karmayogi Bharat, operates as a non-profit organization administratively overseen by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) (DoPT, n.d.). The Commission was officially established on April 1st, 2021 (CBC, n.d.-a). Its primary functions include coordinating annual capacity building plans, monitoring their implementation, and providing oversight to Central Training Institutions in order to establish a common pool of faculty and resources (DoPT, n.d.).

The digital component of the NPCSCB is iGOT Karmayogi (Integrated Government Online Training). iGOT Karmayogi is designed around five interconnected hubs for Learning, Competencies, Careers, Discussion and Networking (IMPRI, 2023; Matto, n.d.). Prior to iGOT Karmayogi, iGOT-COVID was introduced on May 7th, 2020, to provide training to front-line personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic (IMPRI, 2023). Usage of iGOT Karmayogi has grown exponentially. Between January 2023 and May 2025, registered users increased from less than three lakhs to one crore. Over 60 percent of these new users were from various States and Union Territories with Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh being among the most active (ANI, 2025). On February 6th, 2026, the platform had over 1.49 crore users, offered 4,342 courses in 23 languages and completed over 7.26 crore course completions (PIB, 2026). Karmayogi Saptah (National Learning Week) was held from October 19th-27th, 2024. During this period each participant was required to complete at least four hours of competency-linked learning (PIB, 2024). A similar event called Sadhna Saptah took place in April 2026 (All India Radio, 2026). Changing from "Rules-based" positions to "Roles-based" positions has practical implications. If positions are defined based upon competencies rather than seniority alone, then postings, training and assessments can theoretically be aligned with these competencies. Khanedekar (2021) clearly states the goal of NPCSCB: To place the right person in the right role at the right time.

5. INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AS THE VALUE BASE

The title of the mission acknowledges its origins. A karmayogi, according to the Bhagavad Gita, performs actions based upon obligation, without attachment to the results of those actions (2.47 (chapter 2, verse 47)), performs actions for the good of society, or lokasangraha (3.20), and views yoga as skill in action (2.50). For a training programme, the most significant aspect of the text is that it links detachment from results with performance of high quality. It does not provide an excuse for poor performance by advocating detachment from results; it advocates focusing completely on the task at hand and being less concerned about receiving recognition for one's efforts. The formulation is well-suited for a public service environment where personal recognition and criticism are constant threats to the integrity of individual's professional responsibilities, and it supports the notion that behavioural competence and functional competence should be developed simultaneously. The Karmayogi Competency Framework was created over approximately eighteen months by the Commission and was released in late 2024. The Framework explicitly ties the concept of a karmayogi to the competencies required of public servants. According to Commission Member R. Balasubramaniam, as quoted in The Tribune (Tandon, 2024), the Framework is based on IKS and on the principles of the Gita. Furthermore, it is founded on four core values: Swadhyay (understanding self), Sahakarayata (collaboration), Rajyakarma (understanding systems and performing tasks effectively) and Svadharma (serving citizens). It defines thirteen behavioural competencies, including eight core and five for leaders, and requires each public servant to obtain 50 hours of training annually (Tandon, 2024). The core competencies include self-awareness, personal effectiveness, communication, collaboration, service orientation, and operational excellence. The leadership competencies include creative thinking, strategic thinking, collaborative thinking, team leadership and decision-making (Tandon, 2024). Two aspects of this competency framework deserve further consideration. Firstly, although the list of competencies is typical of competency dictionaries used today, the value-based language associated with it and the assertion that this value-based language is not merely decorative are unique. Secondly, the authors of the Framework describe it as a decolonization initiative, an attempt to move away from using Western-style training programmes (Tandon, 2024). The Commission also sponsors a separate IKS programme, as part of its IKS initiative. Its published work plan includes digital courses for iGOT that will incorporate material from the Mahabharata, Arthashastra and Tirukkural; workshops conducted with knowledge partners employing Indic concepts such as Guna, Svabhava and Panchamahabhutas; a series of presentations given by experts in IKS; and bi-annual decolonization action plans to be produced by central training institutions. Indicators related to IKS will also be included in the revised accreditation standards for these institutions (CBC, n.d.-b). Svadharma (duty linked to purpose) and

Panchakosha (a five-layer model of a person) are identified as organizational concepts, with a preference expressed for experiential learning and reflective learning over instruction delivered in a technocratic manner (CBC, n.d.-b). The inclusion of the Arthashastra and Tirukkural in addition to the Gita merits attention, because these two texts are concerned with institutions rather than religious devotion. Olivelle's (2013) translation of the Arthashastra describes a state comprised of positions that require selection, oversight and auditing. Book 1 of the Arthashastra describes the discipline expected of a king and how to evaluate minister's honesty through secret investigations (1.10). Book 2 catalogues methods by which government employees can steal funds, assuming that honourable behavior cannot be assumed and must be verified through inspections (Olivelle, 2013; Rangarajan, 1992). Nevertheless, the Arthashastra establishes a standard for welfare: A king's happiness is dependent upon his subjects' happiness (1.19.34). Pope's (1886) translation of the Tirukkural provides entire chapters devoted to learning, listening to advice, selecting and employing personnel. These types of texts provide content that can be utilized in developing training designs rather than relying solely on generalized exhortations. Additionally, they provide examples of temptation, supervision and personnel selection. They challenge any assumption that Indian traditions provide solely moral guidance: The Arthashastra is skeptical of virtue unless there is institutional support. Table 1 presents author's interpretation of how the four fundamental values relate to textual sources and behavioural competencies.

Table 1. Karmayogi foundational values, Indic textual reference and related competencies

Foundational value	Illustrative Indic text reference	Related competencies	behavioural
<i>Swadhyay</i> (knowing oneself)	Self-study among the qualities listed in Gita 16.1; discipline of the senses in Arthashastra, Book 1	Self-awareness; effectiveness	personal
<i>Sahakarayata</i> (collaboration and participation)	<i>Lokasangraha</i> , acting for the welfare of the world (Gita 3.20); council and deliberation in Arthashastra, Book 1	Collaboration; collaborative and team leadership	
<i>Rajyakarma</i> (capacity and service delivery)	Offices, accounts and supervision in Arthashastra, Book 2	Operational excellence; outcome orientation; solution orientation	
<i>Svadharma</i> (serving citizens)	Duty proper to one's role (Gita 3.35; 18.45–47); the people's welfare as the ruler's welfare (Arthashastra 1.19.34)	Service orientation; decision-making; communication	

Source: Author's synthesis from Olivelle (2013), Radhakrishnan (1948) and Tandon (2024).

6. A VALUE-DRIVEN SERVICE COMPARED WITH OTHER INTEGRITY FRAMEWORKS

The most well-known codified example of public service values is the British list of seven principles for public life; namely, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995). The OECD (2017) goes beyond this and states that values should be supported by a commitment from leaders to build capacity and develop risk management and accountability systems. In India, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) called for greater clarity in defining what types of values are expected of public servants and also for establishing a stronger institutional basis for ethics (Second ARC, 2007). Unlike the above examples, Mission Karmayogi does not have a codified list of values and instead defines ethics through competencies rather than rules. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. An advantage would be that an indigenous terminology could make principles feel like they belong to those whose responsibility it is to uphold them. As stated by the OECD, organizational culture plays an important role in shaping whether an individual will act with integrity. A disadvantage would be that a terminology does not enforce itself. A training programme based on "svadharma" cannot substitute for other accountability tools that exist in other areas of government. Examples include; service conduct regulations, vigilance commissions or auditing agencies. Furthermore, the Mission's public documents do not explain how the learning outcomes from the training will relate to those tools. Therefore, when viewed in this manner, IKS-based training complements an existing system of integrity and does not replace it.

7. CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

7.1 Exposure Is Not Transformation

The statistics presented in this study represent exposure given to civil servants. They represent the number of officials who signed up for training, and the number of courses completed by each official. These statistics do not represent whether the officials are acting differently. The four levels of training evaluation described by Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) - reaction, learning, behaviour and results- provide a framework for identifying the gap. The data collected from the platform falls into the first two levels. Claims about value formation fall into the third and fourth levels, where there is very little published evidence. A recent policy paper also agrees with this assessment, stating that completion numbers do not indicate improvements in service delivery, and that evaluation of the Mission requires data such as service timeliness or citizen satisfaction (IMPRI, 2026).

7.2 Incentives and Career Links

It is highly probable that learning which does not contribute to one's career will be pushed aside by everyday responsibilities. There is evidence that the Mission recognizes this. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC, n.d.), states on one of its programme pages that learning has been linked to annual performance appraisals and integrated with the SPARROW system. If these linkages are to foster values rather than compliance, performance appraisals should evaluate the application of knowledge to actual work situations and not merely the quantity of certificates earned.

7.3 Plural Sources and the Constitutional Frame

India is a constitutionally secular republic. The Supreme Court has declared secularism to be part of the basic structure of the constitution (S. R. Bommai v. Union of India, 1994). The constitution also calls upon citizens to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry (Constitution of India, art. 51A(h)). Therefore, civil servants are being trained to serve a government whose fundamental document is not the Gita. Using the Gita as the primary source invites criticism that a religious text is being used as the moral foundation of a secular service. It appears that the spokesperson for the Commission is aware of this issue. He urged that religion be put aside and the principles taken (Tandon, 2024). This is a reasonable position, however, it requires institutionalization: a formal protocol establishing a distinction between ethical reasoning and devotion, as well as a greater variety of sources. Sen (2005) reminds readers that India's intellectual legacy includes strong skeptical, Buddhist, Jain and Islamic traditions, along with a long history of public debate. A value-driven civil service could rely equally upon Ashokan views of the state's obligation to its populace, upon Bhakti and Sufi traditions of service, and upon the constitutional morality contained in the Preamble as upon any single text.

7.4 Translation and Genealogy

Two interpretive concerns require attention. The first relates to svadharma. In the Gita, svadharma is related to the obligations of an individual based upon their status within the varna system (3.35; 18.41-47). Interpreting svadharma in a training module as fidelity to one's public role is justifiable because it relates to the concept's basic notion of duty appropriate to one's position. Nevertheless, the interpretation must be explicitly stated because the earlier association with birth-based duty is exactly what a democratic administration must avoid. The second concern relates to genealogy. In the interview reported by The Tribune, emotional intelligence is identified as an idea that draws from the Gita (Tandon, 2024). The scholarly literature traces the concept back to psychological research (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). Although there may be similarities between the Gita and contemporary psychology, and Chakraborty (1995) has articulated a case for Vedantic perspectives on management, similarity and genealogy represent distinct claims.

7.5 Reach, Language and Localization

The digital design raises questions regarding access for field personnel with limited internet access. The Mission itself envisions online, face-to-face and blended forms of learning (CSIR-HRDC, n.d.), and courses are available in 23 languages (PIB, 2026). Whether IKS content is localized according to regional tradition, as the inclusion of the Tirukkural suggests it may be, remains an empirical question for which there is no available published data.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following five recommendations are derived from this study:-

- A. Design an independent outcome assessment:** The assessment should begin at the beginning of the next phase and include both behaviour and service outcomes as well as usage (with comparisons made between the groups being assessed) and the results released to the public.

- B. Establish a source protocol for IKS content:** A panel composed of representatives from various disciplines should identify and label all claims, interpretations and contemporary applications of textual content based upon their respective sources; all sources should be linked back to the Constitution; and both heterodox and non-Hindu traditions should be included.
- C. Utilize case-based, reflective teaching:** Case studies involving integrity issues related to those presented in the Arthashastra and the Kural can be adapted into scenario-based problems encountered today in the workplace and evaluated through group-facilitated discussions rather than multiple-choice examinations.
- D. Associate learning with appraisals based on quality, not quantity:** The documentation of the application of learning to daily work should be considered more important than the total number of hours certified. Therefore, the fifty-hour requirement should not simply become a ritualistic exercise.
- E. Integrate values training into accountability systems and release disaggregated data:** Training participants should understand how competency requirements relate to codes of conduct, auditing processes and grievance resolution mechanisms. Additionally, the Commission should report completion and feedback by cadre, state and course type (including uptake of IKS courses).

9. CONCLUSION

The Mission Karmayogi programme is essentially designed to bridge a long-standing gap in the training of civil servants and the expectations of their role. A combination of competency-based role definition, a national digital platform, and a commission on common standards provides the programme with the scope that was missing in previous training reform efforts- as evidenced by the number of registered users. Mission Karmayogi's incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) presents another unique claim, that competency and values can be acquired in tandem by utilizing ideas from India's traditional knowledge base. This paper argues that the IKS claim is valid conceptually. The Bhagavad Gita's emphasis on detaching oneself from work while maintaining one's skill, and the Arthashastra's realistic view of institutions, both address critical issues in public administration. However, there remain three unresolved or unproven questions regarding Mission Karmayogi: Does the training result in behavioural change? Can the diversity of knowledge bases considered in the training be expanded and regulated to accommodate the plurality of a constitutional system? Will learning be linked to career advancement in a manner that rewards knowledge rather than merely attending the training? To answer these questions, additional data/evidence needs to be collected and published by Mission Karmayogi. In the absence of such evidence, the most conservative interpretation of Mission Karmayogi is that it represents an important new vehicle for learning that is being populated with a potentially promising but currently contentious set of educational materials. Future research could assess the impact of Mission Karmayogi through cadre-specific case studies and field observations, especially at the district level, where most citizens interact with the government.

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