

The Spiritual Theory of Human Pursuits

An Integrative View of Four Life Goals

Sukhada Sukhada · Shatrunjay Rawat · Sharda Nandram

IIT (BHU), Varanasi · International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad · Nyenrode Business Universiteit

CENTRAL PROPOSITION

Four pursuits.
An integrated life.

Dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa form a connected account of the purposes and means of living.



Read the research

01 Background and question

Human beings seek happiness through many activities, yet their goals can be treated as disconnected. The paper returns to Sanskrit sources to examine how four human pursuits form an integrative theory of life.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do the four human pursuits relate, and what can this relationship contribute to management thinking?

02 Conceptual framework

Human pursuits

Dharma · artha · kāma · mokṣa.

Integration

Consider means and ends together.

Dharma supplies an ethical basis; artha concerns the means of living; kāma concerns desire and fulfilment; mokṣa concerns liberation. Their relationships matter as much as their separate meanings.

03 Evidence and method

Hermeneutic study of selected Sanskrit philosophical sources, especially Nītiśāstras.

The authors use an ongoing dialogue between text and interpreter, presenting original passages, transliterations and translations alongside their analysis. An application to knowledge-creation theory illustrates the framework’s potential; it is not an empirical test.

04 An original management application

Table 1 applies the four pursuits to knowledge creation. Both parts of the source table are reproduced below.

Table 1	Illustration of enhancing existing theory with the four human pursuits
Human pursuit	Expanding knowledge creation theory
Dharma	<i>Ethical knowledge creation:</i> Emphasise moral and social responsibilities in knowledge creation. <i>Ethical guidelines:</i> Develop principles guiding ethical knowledge creation within the organisation
Artha	<i>Economic viability:</i> Emphasise how knowledge creation contributes to wealth generation and overall prosperity. <i>Investment in knowledge capital:</i> Encourage organisations to view knowledge as a valuable asset
Kāma	<i>Intrinsic motivation:</i> Recognise the joy and satisfaction derived from learning, discovery, and innovation. <i>Recognition and Rewards:</i> Implement systems acknowledging the pleasure and fulfilment in successful knowledge creation
Mokṣa	<i>Transformational knowledge creation:</i> Frame knowledge creation as a journey toward intellectual liberation and enlightenment. <i>Integration of learning and self-realisation:</i> Encourage viewing knowledge creation as a means of personal growth and self-realisation.

Original Table 1, [1], p. 17: four pursuits as lenses on knowledge-creation theory.

Table 1	Illustration of enhancing existing theory with the four human pursuits (continued)
Human pursuit	Expanding knowledge creation theory
Integrative view of all four	<i>Holistic approach:</i> Emphasise a balanced approach to knowledge creation aligning with dharma, prosperity, pleasure, and enlightenment. <i>Cultural Integration:</i> Integrate values into the organisational culture for a purpose-driven knowledge creation process.

Original Table 1, continued, [1], p. 18: integrating the four pursuits within organisational culture.

05 Findings and contributions

A A relational account of goals

The pursuits are examined as an interdependent whole, rather than isolated alternatives.

B Responsibility within aspiration

Material means and desire have a place in life when considered alongside ethics and liberation.

C A management illustration

The four pursuits broaden knowledge creation to include ethics, value, motivation and self-realisation.

06 Discussion

The SECI knowledge-creation illustration connects socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation with a wider account of purpose. It invites reflection on why knowledge is created and whose development it supports.

07 Limitations and next steps

The theory rests on interpretation of selected texts. Its relevance across traditions, workplaces and lived experiences requires further research, including careful study of practical applications.

CONCLUSION

An integrative theory of life connects human aspirations with ethical purpose, material means and the possibility of liberation.

SELECTED REFERENCES

[1] Sukhada, S., Rawat, S., & Nandram, S. (2026). The spiritual theory of human pursuits: an integrative view of four life goals. International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management, 38(1), 1-19. doi:10.1504/IJCBM.2026.154071.

[2] Gadamer, H.-G. (2013). Truth and Method. Bloomsbury.

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