The Donald Hlahla Emotional Intelligence (EI) Development Model for the Public Service of Namibia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the Donald Hlahla Emotional Intelligence Development Model (DH-EIDM), a contextually grounded Emotional Intelligence (EI) framework designed for the Public Service of Namibia. While established EI models—most notably Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework—have been widely applied in leadership and organisational development, their generic orientation often limits contextual relevance within public sector environments characterised by ethical accountability, service delivery pressures, and national development imperatives. Using qualitative data generated from Emotional Intelligence training interventions conducted at the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management (NIPAM) between 2024 and 2025, four dominant EI perspectives emerged: Purpose, Passion, Compassion, and Peace. These perspectives were synthesised into a values-driven EI development model aligned with public service ethos and leadership practice. The study concludes that contextually grounded EI development is critical for strengthening ethical leadership, employee engagement, organisational harmony, and service delivery outcomes in the Namibian Public Service.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Public Service, Ethical Leadership, Service Delivery, Namibia

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become an increasingly significant construct in leadership and organisational effectiveness literature, particularly within environments characterised by complexity, accountability, and high stakeholder expectations. In the public service context, EI is closely linked to ethical decision-making, citizen engagement, conflict management, employee well-being, and sustained service delivery performance.

In Namibia, public servants operate under conditions of constrained resources, heightened public scrutiny, and increasing demands for ethical governance and responsiveness. While established EI frameworks such as those proposed by Goleman (1995, 1998) and Bar-On (2006) have informed training and leadership development initiatives, these models are largely universalist and insufficiently sensitive to the contextual realities, value systems, and service-oriented mandates of African public administrations.

This paper responds to this gap by proposing the Donald Hlahla Emotional Intelligence Development Model (DH-EIDM), a model derived from empirical insights gathered through structured EI training interventions within the Namibian Public Service. The model integrates emotional competencies with public service values, ethical leadership, and national development imperatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Goleman (1995, 1998) conceptualised EI as comprising self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, arguing that emotional competencies are critical determinants of leadership effectiveness. BarOn (2006) expanded this perspective by emphasising emotional-social intelligence as a set of interrelated competencies influencing individual effectiveness, adaptability, and psychological well-being.

Subsequent research has demonstrated strong associations between EI and leadership effectiveness, ethical behaviour, and organisational performance (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). However, critics caution against decontextualised application of EI models, particularly in public sector environments where values, accountability, and service orientation are central (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005).

Emotional Intelligence in the Public Sector

Public sector leadership literature increasingly recognises EI as essential for navigating political-administrative interfaces, managing citizen expectations, and maintaining ethical standards (Boyatzis, 2018). Studies indicate that emotionally intelligent public leaders are better equipped to handle role ambiguity, emotional labour, and moral complexity inherent in public service roles (Hassan, Wright, & Yukl, 2014).

Public Service Motivation (PSM) theory further underscores the emotional and values-based dimensions of public service work, emphasising commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). EI complements PSM by enabling leaders to regulate emotions, sustain motivation, and translate values into ethical action.

Ethical Leadership and EI

Ethical leadership is closely associated with emotional awareness, empathy, and self-regulation. Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) argue that ethical leaders model appropriate conduct through interpersonal relationships and decision-making processes. EI enhances ethical leadership by supporting moral sensitivity, perspectivetaking, and emotionally informed judgement, particularly in high-pressure public sector contexts.

African Leadership Perspectives

African leadership models emphasise communal values, relational accountability, human dignity, and service to the collective (Nkomo, 2011; Mbigi, 2007). Concepts such as *Ubuntu* highlight empathy, compassion, harmony, and interconnectedness as foundational leadership values. These perspectives resonate strongly with EI constructs but require contextual articulation within African public administrations.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature demonstrates strong conceptual linkages between EI, ethical leadership, public service motivation, and African leadership philosophies. However, there remains limited empirical work that integrates these strands into a coherent, context-specific EI development model for African public services. This study addresses this gap by proposing a Namibian public service–specific EI model grounded in practitioner-based qualitative insights.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative, exploratory research design appropriate for theory building and contextual model development. The research was embedded within Emotional Intelligence training programmes facilitated by the author at the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management (NIPAM).

Sample and Participants

The total sample comprised **240 participants** drawn from **12 training groups of twenty (20) participants each** who attended a **five-day Emotional Intelligence course** between **2024 and 2025**. Participants were drawn from various **Offices, Ministries and Agencies (OMAs)** of the Public Service of Namibia and occupied roles ranging from **junior to senior management**.

During training, each cohort was subdivided into **four working groups of five (5) participants** to facilitate structured reflection and group-based analysis.

Data Collection

Participants were guided to apply EI concepts learned during the course to identify key emotional and leadership challenges within their work contexts. Using structured and semi-structured group exercises, participants analysed issues emerging from the **five realms of the Emotional Intelligence framework**, namely:

- Intrapersonal Realm

- Interpersonal Realm

- Adaptability Realm

- Stress Management Realm

- General Mood Realm

Data Analysis

Qualitative data generated from group discussions, reflective exercises, and written outputs were subjected to thematic analysis. Through iterative coding and cross-group comparison, recurring patterns were identified and synthesised into **four dominant Emotional Intelligence perspectives**. These perspectives form the empirical foundation of the DH Emotional Intelligence Development Model.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Trustworthiness was enhanced through data triangulation across multiple cohorts, prolonged engagement over two years, and reflexive validation informed by the author's extensive experience in public service leadership development. Nonetheless, findings are context-specific and derived from training-based qualitative data, which may limit generalisability beyond similar public sector environments.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dominant Emotional Intelligence Perspectives

Analysis revealed four dominant EI perspectives consistently shaping leadership behaviour and service delivery outcomes: **Purpose, Passion, Compassion, and Peace**.

Perspective	Focus & Definition	Purpose in Public Service	Examples of Practical Application
1. PURPOSE	• Alignment to a higher purpose beyond self-interest • Commitment to serving citizens and the nation • Ethical consciousness and values-driven leadership	• Anchor EI in public service ethos • Promote integrity, accountability, and ethical decision-making • Foster a sense of calling rather than entitlement	• Decisions guided by public interest rather than personal gain • Ethical handling of public resources • Leaders modelling integrity and accountability • Employees understanding
Perspective	**Focus & Definition**	**Purpose in Public Service**	**Examples of Practical Application**
			how their role contributes to national development

2. PASSION	• Genuine love for one's work and role • Emotional engagement with service delivery • Patriotism and pride in serving Namibia	• Enhance motivation and resilience • Reduce burnout and disengagement • Improve service quality and productivity	• Proactive problem-solving beyond job descriptions • High energy in service delivery roles • Pride in wearing the public service identity • Willingness to innovate despite constraints
3. COMPASSION	• Ability to empathise with citizens, colleagues, and stakeholders • Understanding emotional states of others • Acting with humanity within rules and systems	• Humanise public service delivery • Improve citizen satisfaction and trust • Strengthen teamwork and inclusion	• Respectful handling of vulnerable citizens • Managers responding supportively to staff challenges • Fair conflict handling • Inclusive leadership practices
4. PEACE	• Emotional self-regulation • Constructive conflict resolution • Inner emotional balance and organisational harmony	• Reduce workplace conflict and toxicity • Promote stability, trust, and collaboration • Enable calm, rational decision-making	• De-escalation of conflict situations • Mediation and dialogue-based problem solving • Emotional restraint under pressure • Respectful engagement across ranks and departments

Purpose emerged as a foundational theme, reflecting a strong sense of ethical responsibility, service to citizens, and alignment with national development goals. Participants associated emotionally intelligent leadership with serving a higher purpose beyond personal or positional interests.

Passion reflected emotional engagement, commitment, and patriotism. Participants linked passion to resilience, motivation, and willingness to perform beyond minimum requirements despite organisational constraints.

Compassion was identified as the capacity to empathise with citizens, colleagues, and stakeholders. Participants highlighted compassion as essential for human-centred service delivery, inclusive leadership, and trust-building.

Peace represented emotional self-regulation, conflict resolution, and inner stability. Participants associated peace with calm decision-making, respectful engagement, and harmonious workplace relationships.

Critical Discussion in Relation to Literature

The emergence of **Purpose** as a foundational EI perspective aligns strongly with Public Service Motivation theory, which emphasises commitment to the public interest and ethical responsibility (Perry & Wise, 1990). Unlike conventional EI models that prioritise individual competencies, the DH-EIDM foregrounds moral purpose as the ethical anchor of emotional intelligence in public leadership.

Passion reflects affective commitment and intrinsic motivation, resonating with findings that emotionally engaged public servants demonstrate higher resilience and discretionary effort (Hassan et al., 2014). However, participants also noted tensions between passion and systemic constraints, suggesting that EI development must be supported by enabling organisational conditions.

Compassion closely mirrors both empathy constructs in EI literature and African leadership philosophies such as *Ubuntu*. While compassion enhances citizen trust and inclusion, participants acknowledged potential tensions

between compassionate responses and rigid bureaucratic rules, highlighting the need for emotionally intelligent discretion.

Peace, conceptualised as emotional regulation and harmony, extends traditional self-regulation constructs by incorporating conflict resolution and organisational climate. This perspective aligns with ethical leadership literature emphasising calm, fair, and reflective decision-making (Brown et al., 2005).

Limitations and Contextual Tensions

The study acknowledges several limitations, including reliance on qualitative, training-based data and the absence of longitudinal behavioural measurement. Additionally, tensions were identified between emotionally intelligent practices and structural constraints such as policy rigidity, workload pressures, and political administrative dynamics. These tensions underscore the importance of integrating EI development with broader organisational reforms.

The Donald Hlahla Emotional Intelligence Development Model

The DH Emotional Intelligence Development Model is a **values-driven, integrated framework** specifically designed for public service contexts. The model positions **Purpose** at the core as the ethical and moral anchor of EI. **Passion** functions as the motivational driver of engagement and resilience, **Compassion** represents the relational and human-centred expression of EI, and **Peace** serves as the regulatory mechanism ensuring emotional balance, conflict resolution, and organisational harmony.

Figure 1: DH Emotional Intelligence Development Model for the Public Service of Namibia.

Figure 1 presents the DH-EIDM as a circular, interconnected model, emphasising the dynamic interaction among the four dimensions rather than a linear progression of competencies. Purpose is positioned at the core as the ethical and moral anchor of public service leadership. Passion, Compassion, and Peace operate as mutually reinforcing dimensions that translate ethical intent into motivated action, empathetic engagement, and emotionally regulated conduct. Conceptually, the model advances EI scholarship by integrating values-based leadership, public service motivation, and African relational leadership principles into a single, contextually grounded framework aligned to Namibian public service realities.

Analytically, the model contributes to EI scholarship by integrating ethical purpose, affective motivation, relational empathy, and emotional regulation within a single, contextually grounded framework aligned to African public service realities.

CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrates that Emotional Intelligence development in the Namibian Public Service must transcend generic models and embrace contextually grounded, values-based frameworks. The Donald Hlahla Emotional Intelligence Development Model offers a culturally resonant and practically applicable approach to enhancing ethical leadership, emotional regulation, and service delivery effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Integrate the DH-EIDM into public service leadership and management development programmes.

• Align EI initiatives with ethical leadership and service delivery performance frameworks.

• Institutionalise reflective EI practices within OMAs.

• Develop leaders as role models of purpose-driven, compassionate, and emotionally regulated leadership.

• Undertake further empirical studies to quantitatively validate and refine the model.

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