



# Emotional Intelligence in Public Administration: A Buddhist Approach

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**Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in public administration, as decisions impact millions of lives in the society. Even while emotions are a natural aspect of being human, effective leadership in governance is really defined by one's capacity to control and direct them. This article explores the critical role that emotional intelligence plays in public administration, going beyond simple emotional responses so as to promote understanding, empathy, and wise decision-making through the perspective of Buddhist philosophy.**

Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.

*ARISTOTLE, The Nichomachean Ethics*



**R**esearchers have shown that a high level of EI guarantees more success in the development of an organisation.

Emotional intelligence provides a nuanced approach to decision-making that is grounded in self-awareness and empathy. It includes the capacity to recognise, control, and understand one's own feelings as well as those of others.

### Emotional Intelligence and Public Administration

The question here arises: Why do we need to discuss EI in Public Administration. If we try to understand the very nature of the term 'Public Administration', it says it is people-oriented administration. 'Public Administrators are not just administrators, and they are not just managers. They are also leaders who have a responsibility to share democratic values, represent a broad range of social groups, and view themselves as more accountable to much broader constituencies than before.'<sup>3</sup>

In order to create communications that successfully appeal to citizens' emotions and concerns and increase public trust and cooperation, EI is essential for a public administrator.

### Emotional Intelligence and Buddhist Philosophy

EI cannot be developed unless and until we try to understand which types of mental activities are truly conducive to one's own and others' well-being and which ones are harmful, especially in the long run.

The better way to understand human nature and how one can develop EI is getting delved into the Indian philosophical thought. The hallmark of the ancient Indian systems of thought is their careful inquiry into the nature, function and trainability of the human mind, with the Buddhist philosophical tradition especially excelling in this domain. In order to foster more inner peace, Buddhist teachings cover a variety of methods for regulating the emotions and training the mind.

Emotions influence people's words, thoughts, and actions, and they can sometimes help people seek short-term satisfaction and contentment. But according to Buddhism, some feelings are beneficial for enduring, genuine happiness while others are not.

Understanding how emotions arise, how they are experienced, and how they eventually impact oneself and others is crucial in this regard. Furthermore, one also acquires the capacity to transform and eventually overcome all afflictive states. It is necessary to cultivate and refine the ability to critically evaluate one's own mental processes in order to understand the difference between disruptive and nondisruptive ideas and feelings. In the *Abhidharma Samuccaya*, the nature of the mind and the various mental afflictions are distinguished as non-virtuous (*akusala*) from virtuous (*kusala*).

Buddhist writings on mind science examine the nature of ignorance and how ignorance, which is a distorted form of cognition, leads to inappropriate attention, which in turn leads to afflictions like attachment and aversion. Additionally, it also examines how attachment and aversion lead to other negative emotions such as pride, jealousy, and so forth that disrupt the mental equilibrium. In brief, the Buddhist sources list more than a hundred different mental factors and describe how some of them function as counteragents to other factors. They also explain how the law of contradiction in the mental world makes it possible to eradicate some afflictions by strengthening the potency of their counteragents.

It cannot be the case that mental factors or emotions arise out of nothing. There are definitely certain mental afflictions that work behind it. If we try to understand mental afflictions as defined in the book: *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics*: "Mental affliction is a mental factor that functions to disturb the mind stream of the person in whose continuum it occurs."<sup>4</sup> So, our emotions are a reflection of what is happening in our mind.

They have pointed out that there are six root mental afflictions:

- Attachment
- Anger
- Pride
- Afflictive ignorance
- Afflictive doubt
- Afflictive view

The term *klesha* that is used in Buddhism refers to the mental afflictions that cause suffering. The Buddhist method of eradicating suffering centres



on how we deal with mental afflictions like ignorance, craving, and aversion in order to lessen and ultimately eliminate them. The methods used to train the mind fall into two categories:

- gradually lowering the intensity of negative mental states, such as attachment disorders, and
- establishing positive mental states, such as love, compassion, and wisdom, as habits.

The various methods suggested are the practice of wisdom, mindfulness, meta-awareness, regulating attention, the calm-abiding technique, and many others.

Given the significance of EI in public administration, one of the many techniques for mental training that are taught in Buddhist teachings is how to develop equanimity in the face of the eight worldly concerns. The 'Questions of Ratnacūda Sūtra' discusses 'the eight worldly concerns as: gain, and loss, fame and disrepute, pleasure and pain, and praise and disparagement.'<sup>5</sup> We frequently see that those working in public administration encounter circumstances where their decisions are influenced by these worldly concerns. The Buddhist teachings have also suggested how one deal with such worldly concerns that are mentioned below:

Material gain, as we know, immerses pleasure, which tends to generate interest to gain more and more till it threatens the peace of mind. As an antidote, be happy with whatever you have by limiting your wants. There must be a way to navigate and manage the growing wants. How to balance the feeling of disliking loss materially? It can be contained by limiting the desire to have the minimum possible, and that can be its antidote. How can one balance liking fame and disliking disrepute? One always strives for fame to get food for a happy life by avoiding disrepute in the process of a decent life. Corrections are required day to day after thorough introspection of attitude and approach to life. How to develop a balance between great liking for pleasant feelings and disliking for painful feelings? One has to start introspecting by thinking if there is a means to change the thing that I dislike, I can do so, and there is no need to be upset; if not, there is absolutely no profit in being unhappy about that unpleasant thing. By overlooking the painful feelings, one can become happy and pleasant. How to develop a balance

between praise and disparagement? It is obvious that one derives pleasure when receiving praises from different quarters; that does not insulate one from getting disparaged. Sometimes unsolicited comments help others build a decent life.

With all these methods we can definitely train our mind for the greater good and act intelligently as public administrators. The application of Buddhist ways of training the mind will be extremely important. □

## Endnotes

- 1) Peter Salovey, John Mayer, *Emotional Intelligence. Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, Vol.9 (3), Pg-185-211.
- 2) J. O Neil, *On Emotional intelligence: A conversation with Daniel Goleman. Education Leadership*, 1996, 54(1), 6-11.
- 3) Robert Kramer, —Beyond Max Weber: Emotional Intelligence and Public Leadership], *Researchgate*, (January:2002)
- 4) Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics, Vol 2, *The Mind*, Ed. By Thupten Jinpa Contextual Essays by John D. Dunne
- 5) Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics, Vol 2, *The Mind*, Ed. By Thupten Jinpa Contextual Essays by John D. Dunne, Pg. 445

## References

1. Bodhi, Bhikkhu Yanamoli and Bhikkhu, trans. n.d. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*.
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3. Galmangoda, Prof. Sumanapala. 2012. "An Analytical and Creative Study of the Buddhist Theory and Practice of Psychotherapy." *The International Association of Buddhist Universities*.
4. Kellner, Birgit. 2019. "Buddhist Philosophy and the Neuroscientific Study of Meditation." *Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 19.
5. J O Neil, *On Emotional intelligence: A conversation with Daniel Goleman. Education Leadership*, 1996, 54(1)
6. Jinpa, Thupten, ed. 2020. *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics*. Translated by Dechen Rochard and John D. Dunne. Vol. 2. Simon and Schuster.
7. Peter Salovey, John Mayer, *Emotional Intelligence. Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, Vol.9
8. Robert Kramer, Beyond Max Weber: Emotional Intelligence and Public Leadership], *Researchgate*, (January:2002)
9. Silva, Padma De. 2005. *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.