

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Communication in the Panchatantra: A Cross-Cultural Framework for Modern Organisations

Dr. Sheetal Hukkeri

Program Coordinator, Department of Commerce
School of Commerce, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), India

Geetha Madhusudan,

Professor, Dept. of Languages-Sanskrit Area,
JAIN (Deemed to be University), Bangalore. India.
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8777-3625>

Dr Swapna H R

Professor
School of Commerce-PG Studies
JAIN (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0362-409X>

* Corresponding author: Swapna H R

Abstract

Purpose: This paper proposes a theoretically grounded leadership framework derived from the Panchatantra (c. 3rd century BCE–3rd century CE), arguing that the text encodes a coherent system of emotionally intelligent leadership competencies not captured by extant Western models.

Methodology: A systematic hermeneutic analysis was conducted on Olivelle's (2006) critical translation. Character behaviours across all five books were coded against established EI frameworks (Goleman, 1998; Mayer et al., 2008; Bar-On, 1997). Competency domains were inductively extracted where recurring behavioural patterns were absent from published frameworks, and validated for cross-textual consistency and theoretical non-redundancy.

Findings: Six novel EI-adjacent leadership competencies are identified — Narrative Self-Regulation (NSR), Relational Threat Detection (RTD), Strategic Empathy (SE), Ethical Dissent Competence (EDC), Power-Aware Communication (PAC), and Grief and Loss Integration (GLI) — and integrated into the

Panchatantra Emotional Intelligence Leadership (PEIL) Model. Four theoretical propositions are advanced to guide empirical testing.

Originality: This is the first systematic EI and leadership analysis of the Panchatantra. The PEIL Model extends Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) scholarship into organisational behaviour and cross-cultural leadership theory, and addresses documented limitations of WEIRD-sample EI models.

Implications: The framework yields actionable interventions for cross-cultural team leadership, crisis recovery, and psychologically safe organisational cultures. It contributes to the decolonisation of leadership studies by centering non-Western classical wisdom in rigorous theoretical argumentation.

Keywords: *Panchatantra; Emotional Intelligence; Leadership Communication; Cross-Cultural Leadership; Indian Knowledge Systems; Organisational Behaviour*

1. Introduction

Mainstream leadership scholarship has been disproportionately anchored in Western psychological constructs — principally Goleman's (1995, 1998) emotional intelligence (EI) model and transformational leadership theory. This orientation reflects a broader WEIRD-sample bias (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic) that systematically underrepresents non-Western epistemic traditions, despite growing calls for decolonisation within organisational studies (Antonakis et al., 2009; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Indian classical texts, which encode sophisticated theories of statecraft, political intelligence, and affect regulation, represent an underutilized corrective to this limitation.

The Panchatantra — a five-volume Sanskrit *niti-shastra* attributed to Vishnu Sharma and dated approximately to the 3rd century BCE through 3rd century CE — is a particularly generative site for leadership theorisation. Translated into over fifty languages since the 6th century CE, it has demonstrably influenced storytelling traditions across three continents (Olivelle, 2006). Yet no published study has systematically examined its emotional intelligence architecture or derived a formal leadership competency framework from it.

This paper addresses that gap. It argues that the Panchatantra contains six internally consistent, textually recurring, and theoretically distinct EI-adjacent leadership competencies: Narrative Self-Regulation (NSR), Relational Threat Detection (RTD), Strategic Empathy (SE), Ethical Dissent Competence (EDC), Power-Aware Communication (PAC), and Grief and Loss Integration (GLI). Collectively, these constitute the Panchatantra Emotional Intelligence Leadership (PEIL) Model — a cross-cultural framework with particular relevance for crisis leadership and politically complex organisational environments.

The contribution is threefold. First, PEIL constitutes the first systematic EI and leadership analysis of the Panchatantra, extending Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) scholarship into organisational

behaviour theory. Second, it identifies six competency domains absent from existing published frameworks, each with distinct theoretical grounding and cross-cultural applicability. Third, it models these competencies as a dynamic, feedback-driven system, a structural advance over additive EI approaches.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 positions the work within existing EI and leadership literatures, identifying the theoretical gap. Section 3 details the hermeneutic methodology and analytical procedure. Section 4 presents character-level domain analysis. Section 5 introduces the PEIL Model and theoretical propositions. Section 6 develops cross-cultural and crisis leadership applications. Sections 7 and 8 address critical limitations and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emotional Intelligence and Leadership: Achievements and Constraints

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as a set of interrelated abilities involving the perception, appraisal, and regulation of emotion in self and others. Subsequent frameworks, Goleman's (1998) five-domain model and Bar-On's (1997) mixed model demonstrated significant predictive relationships between leader EI and team performance, organisational climate, and follower satisfaction (O'Boyle et al., 2011; Harms & Credé, 2010).

These models carry documented limitations. Antonakis et al. (2009) challenged construct validity by demonstrating that mixed models conflate cognitive, affective, and personality variables. Matsumoto and Hwang (2012) identified systematic cross-cultural variance in emotional display rules not accommodated by Western EI taxonomies. Van Rooy et al. (2005) noted persistent measurement non-equivalence across cultural groups. Critically, no existing framework addresses the political-relational dimensions of leadership threat detection, power-calibrated communication, or grief processing, that the Panchatantra encodes.

2.2 Indian Classical Thought and the Research Gap

Indian classical texts have received growing but methodologically uneven attention in leadership studies. The Arthashastra has been examined as a political philosophy text (Boesche, 2002; Rangarajan, 1992). Chakraborty (1993) and Sharma (2003) drew connections between dharma, svadharma, and organisational values. The Bhagavad Gita has generated a distinct stream of leadership applications (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004). Kakar and Kakar (2007) analysed identity and power dynamics in Indian organisational contexts.

The Panchatantra remains largely unexplored in this literature. Doniger's (2010) commentary acknowledges the text's political sophistication but stops short of constructing a leadership framework. Sil's (1985) psychoanalytic reading emphasises libidinal dynamics rather than competency identification. No existing study maps Panchatantra character behaviour onto EI constructs or derives testable propositions therefrom. This constitutes the research gap the present paper addresses.

2.3 Theoretical Positioning

This paper is positioned primarily as a leadership theory contribution within the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) tradition, with secondary implications for emotional intelligence scholarship, cross-cultural psychology, and organisational behaviour. Its central theoretical claim is that an ancient non-Western pedagogical text encodes systematically extractable leadership competencies that extend rather than replicate existing EI frameworks. This is an IKS contribution that speaks to EI theory, not an EI paper that references Indian sources.

3. Methodology

3.1 Interpretive Framework and Epistemological Position

This study employs a systematic hermeneutic methodology, the philosophical interpretation of texts to derive meaning structures, following the tradition of narrative leadership studies that extract leadership typologies from classical writings (Ciulla, 2003; Ciulla & Forsyth, 2011). The epistemological position is interpretive-constructivist: meaning is not extracted but constructed through a theoretically informed, iterative dialogue between text and existing leadership theory.

3.2 Primary Sources and Textual Scope

The primary analytical corpus consists of Olivelle's (2006) critical scholarly translation of all five books of the Panchatantra, supplemented by Ryder's (1925) edition for comparative verification of ambiguous passages. All five books were analysed in their entirety; no selective or thematic sub-sampling was employed.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in four stages. In Stage 1 (Open Coding), character behaviours across all narrative episodes were coded using the established EI coding categories from Goleman (1998), Mayer et al. (2008), and Bar-On (1997) as initial sensitising frameworks. Coded behaviours included emotional regulation strategies, social inference processes, communication calibration choices, and interpersonal responses to threat and loss.

In Stage 2 (Domain Identification), coded behaviours were examined for thematic clustering. Where multiple characters across different books exhibited structurally similar behavioural patterns absent from the initial sensitising frameworks, these were flagged as candidate competency domains. Six such candidate domains emerged from this stage.

In Stage 3 (Theoretical Validation), each candidate domain was tested against three inclusion criteria: (a) cross-textual consistency, the domain appears in multiple narrative episodes across different books; (b) theoretical non-redundancy, the domain is not subsumed by any competency in the EI frameworks of Goleman (1998), Mayer et al. (2008), Bar-On (1997), or the political skill inventory of Ferris et al. (2005); (c) contemporary relevance — the domain has demonstrable correspondence to at least one established construct in organisational behaviour, psychology, or leadership research. All six domains satisfied all three criteria.

In Stage 4 (Interpretive Reliability), all domain definitions and textual attributions were independently reviewed against the original Olivelle (2006) translation to verify that analytical claims were grounded in textual evidence rather than interpreter projection. Divergences between initial and review readings were adjudicated by returning to the source text.

3.4 Limitations of the Method

Hermeneutic analysis is inherently interpretive and subject to researcher perspective. To mitigate this, the study employs systematic multi-stage coding, explicit inclusion criteria, two independent translation sources, and cross-validation against established theoretical frameworks. Notwithstanding these safeguards, the model's propositions require empirical testing before causal claims can be advanced. Future quantitative validation is explicitly recommended in Section 7.

4. Character Analyses: The Six PEIL Domains

Table 1 summarises the principal characters, their textual loci, PEIL domain attributions, and associated leadership risks. The analysis that follows examines each domain through close reading.

Character	Text Locus	PEIL Domain	Core Leadership Behaviour	Failure Risk
Vishnu Sharma	Frame narrative	NSR	Converts coercive mandate into fable-based pedagogy; reframes royal punishment as developmental invitation	Paternalistic over-control
Damanaka	Bk. I — Loss of Friends	PAC (shadow)	Exploits informational asymmetry; engineers narrative to fracture lion-bull trust	Institutional gaslighting
Karataka	Bk. I — Loss of Friends	EDC	Voices principled objection privately, then defers; principled silence under hierarchy	Moral disengagement; diffusion of responsibility
Pingalaka (Lion)	Bk. I	NSR failure	Acts on unverified rumour; abdicates reflective processing under manufactured fear	Paranoid, impulsive decision-making
Sanjivaka (Bull)	Bk. I	RTD failure	Optimistic social script overrides accurate threat-signal decoding in hostile environment	Fatal naivety in politically toxic contexts

Character	Text Locus	PEIL Domain	Core Leadership Behaviour	Failure Risk
Laghupatanaka	Bk. III — Crows & Owls	SE	Engineers cross-species trust via systematic perspective-taking; builds prosocial coalition	Empathy weaponised (Sthirajeevi subplot)
Hiranyaka (Mouse)	Bk. I — Turtle subplot	SE + Coalition	Builds reciprocity network across species; models interdependence as strategic asset	Over-reliance on relational credit
Mantharaka (Turtle)	Bk. I — Turtle subplot	NSR failure	Verbal impulsivity mid-crisis destroys carefully engineered rescue plan	Executive communication failure under stress
The Brahmin	Bk. V — III- Considered Action	GLI failure	Grief-driven impulsivity precedes action; post-hoc narration generates wisdom too late	Compounded catastrophe from unmetabolised loss

Table 1. PEIL Domains Across Panchatantra Characters — Textual Anchors and Leadership Risk

4.1 Narrative Self-Regulation (NSR)

NSR denotes the capacity to construct, inhabit, and deploy narrative frameworks for managing emotionally charged situations — to reframe stimuli through story before acting. The concept is theoretically grounded in Gross's (1998) cognitive reappraisal model: the most effective long-term emotion regulation strategy involves changing the cognitive representation of a situation rather than suppressing or venting the emotional response.

The Panchatantra's frame narrative is itself an instance of NSR at the institutional level. Confronted with three educationally recalcitrant princes, Vishnu Sharma does not punish; he reframes the problem from deficiency to potential and encodes his entire pedagogy within narrative structures. This is antecedent regulation at scale. The contrast case is the Brahmin of Book V, whose killing of his loyal mongoose exemplifies NSR failure: grief-and-anxiety-driven impulsivity, followed only retrospectively by narrative meaning-making. The temporal positioning of NSR, prior to action versus posterior to catastrophe, constitutes a theoretically generative distinction not present in existing EI frameworks.

4.2 Relational Threat Detection (RTD)

RTD is the accurate real-time decoding of covert hostility, hidden agendas, and social threat signals under conditions of informational asymmetry and power inequality. It is theoretically adjacent to — but distinct from — Ferris et al.'s (2005) political skill construct, which encompasses influence and networking capabilities beyond threat detection, and from general social awareness as defined in Goleman's (1998) empathy domain.

The Sanjivaka narrative in Book I provides the clearest RTD failure analysis in the text. Sanjivaka's fatal optimistic social script, importing the relational norms of a non-political environment into a court characterised by predatory hierarchy produces systematic misreading of Damanaka's threat signals. Laghupatanaka's conduct in Book III provides the positive counterpart: accurate mapping of the owl king's hostility, identification of uncertain actors within the enemy coalition, and precisely timed information gathering. RTD thus operates along two axes, threat detection and opportunity recognition, constituting a more granular political cognition construct than existing frameworks supply.

4.3 Strategic Empathy (SE)

SE is the deployment of accurate perspective-taking for prosocial coalition-building across cultural, positional, or competitive difference, without exploitation of the counterpart. The Panchatantra introduces a conceptual distinction absent from Western empathy literature: the same cognitive empathy mechanism that enables coalition-building (Laghupatanaka with the mice) can be weaponised for manipulation (Damanaka's fabrication of threats). SE requires accurate perspective-taking combined with prosocial intent, a compound construct not captured by either affective or cognitive empathy alone.

The five-species friendship network of Book I extends SE to the structural level: Hiranyaka's patient reciprocity building across species demonstrates that SE, deployed at network scale, produces organisational resilience through diverse strong ties (Burt, 2004). This aligns with cultural intelligence research (Earley & Ang, 2003), which shows that leaders with high CQ outperform in intercultural contexts, not because they feel more empathy, but because they deploy perspective-taking more strategically.

4.4 Ethical Dissent Competence (EDC)

EDC is the capacity to voice principled disagreement within power-differentiated hierarchies while preserving both relational integrity and positional standing. EDC is not equivalent to assertiveness (which addresses communication style) or moral courage (which addresses individual ethical action). EDC is specifically about the navigation of the voice-loyalty tension within organisational hierarchies, a structural problem distinct from individual virtue.

Karataka's conduct in Book I provides the clearest archetype: he diagnoses Damanaka's harmful intent accurately and voices a principled objection, but only privately, only once, and only to the perpetrator. Thereafter, he complies. This pattern constitutes what Bandura (1999) terms moral disengagement through diffusion of responsibility, and what Edmondson (1999) identifies as the

key mechanism behind preventable organisational disasters. Across the five books, the texts consistently demonstrate that suppressed dissent is a leading cause of reversible failures becoming catastrophic ones.

4.5 Power-Aware Communication (PAC)

PAC denotes the calibration of message content, framing, timing, and register to audience power differentials and emotional readiness. It is theoretically grounded in Entman's (1993) framing theory and Goffman's (1959) impression management framework, though both of these treat message construction at a more abstract level than the Panchatantra's operational character-level analysis.

The text deploys PAC as a morally neutral construct with a positive and a shadow expression. Damanaka's manipulation of Pingalaka is a masterclass in dark PAC: audience vulnerability identification, emotional priming, strategic sequencing of evidence, and timing for maximum cognitive impact. Vishnu Sharma's pedagogy is its positive counterpart: scaffolded delivery, emotional engagement before intellectual challenge, graduated progression from the concrete to the abstract. The co-presence of both expressions in the same text enables a conceptually precise distinction between communication calibration (PAC) and the ethical intent that determines whether it constitutes leadership or manipulation.

4.6 Grief and Loss Integration (GLI)

GLI is the capacity to metabolise personal or organisational loss through narrative meaning-making, converting grief into adaptive wisdom rather than reactive impulsivity. This domain has no established equivalent in published EI frameworks. Goleman's (1998) empathy domain addresses understanding others' grief; neither his framework nor Mayer et al.'s (2008) ability model addresses the leader's own unprocessed loss as a structural organisational risk.

The Brahmin's mongoose narrative (Book V) is the text's paradigmatic GLI failure: grief-and-anxiety-driven action, unverified attribution of threat, destruction of the very protective resource in one's care. Book II extends this through multiple merchant-loss narratives in which unmetabolised financial grief produces compounding impulsive decisions. The Panchatantra treats unprocessed grief not as temporary emotional disruption but as sustained cognitive distortion with measurable organisational consequences — a claim supported by post-traumatic growth research (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and narrative therapy literature (White & Epston, 1990).

5. The PEIL Model

5.1 Model Architecture

The PEIL Model organises the six domains in a dynamic, feedback-driven structure rather than an additive list. NSR functions as the foundational domain: leaders lacking narrative-based emotion regulation capacity cannot sustain the cognitive resources required for accurate RTD, prosocial SE, or EDC under pressure. GLI operates as a re-entry mechanism, feeding accumulated loss-into-wisdom processing back into NSR development. The two detection/coalition domains (RTD and

SE) are productive but mutually corrective: high RTD without SE produces paranoid leadership; high SE without RTD produces the Sanjivaka failure — fatal naivety in politically hostile environments. EDC and PAC are execution domains: EDC without PAC produces structurally ineffective resistance (the Karataka outcome); PAC without EDC produces Damanaka-style manipulation.

All six domains converge in what the model terms the integrated leader identity — simultaneously Narrative Actor, Social Strategist, and Ethical Agent. This tripartite integration produces three primary organisational outcomes: cross-cultural trust formation, crisis recovery capacity, and an ethical climate characterised by psychological safety.

[Figure 1 — PEIL Model Structural Flowchart]

Figure 1. The PEIL Model — Structural Flowchart of Six Emotionally Grounded Leadership Competency Domains

5.2 Domain Definitions, Anchors, and Indicators

Domain	Definition	Panchatantra Anchor	Contemporary Parallel	Observable Indicator	Risk if Absent	Theoretical Grounding
NSR — Narrative Self-Regulation	Capacity to reframe emotional states and regulate impulse through deliberate story construction	Vishnu Sharma's fable-over-flogging; Brahmin's post-grief narration	Cognitive reappraisal (Gross, 1998); narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990)	Leader deploys narrative/metaphor under pressure rather than reactive command	Reactive decision cycles; escalating conflict	Emotion regulation theory; constructivist leadership
RTD — Relational Threat Detection	Accurate real-time decoding of covert hostility and hidden-agenda signals under	Sanjivaka's fatal misreading vs. Crow's precise enemy mapping	Political skill (Ferris et al., 2005); social intelligence (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987)	Leader identifies covert influence attempts before overt conflict surfaces	Vulnerability to manipulation; blindsided failures	Social cognition; political skill theory

Domain	Definition	Panchatantra Anchor	Contemporary Parallel	Observable Indicator	Risk if Absent	Theoretical Grounding
	informational ambiguity					
SE — Strategic Empathy	Deployment of accurate perspective-taking for prosocial coalition-building across cultural, positional, or competitive difference	Laghupatanaka's cross-species trust engineering; Hiranyaka's reciprocity network	Empathic accuracy (Ickes, 1993); cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003)	Leader maps stakeholder emotional stakes prior to negotiations	Siloed decisions; fragile alliances	Affective/cognitive empathy literature; CQ frameworks
EDC — Ethical Dissent Competence	Ability to voice principled disagreement within power hierarchies while preserving relational and positional integrity	Karataka's internal veto with external compliance; wise-counsellor tales	Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999); moral courage (Kidder, 2005)	Leader creates protected channels for upward dissent; dissent is rewarded not suppressed	Groupthink; ethical drift; yes-man culture	Voice behaviour; organisational silence literature
PAC — Power-Aware	Calibration of message content,	Damanaka's strategic sequencing (dark);	Framing effects (Entman, 1993);	Leader adjusts register via explicit	Tone-deaf messaging;	Framing theory; power-

Domain	Definition	Panchatantra Anchor	Contemporary Parallel	Observable Indicator	Risk if Absent	Theoretical Grounding
Communication	framing, timing, and register to power differentials and audience emotional readiness	Vishnu Sharma's scaffolded delivery (light)	impression management (Goffman, 1959)	audience power mapping before speaking	resistance; non-compliance	distance literature
GLI — Grief & Loss Integration	Capacity to metabolise personal or organisational loss through narrative meaning-making, converting grief energy into adaptive wisdom	Brahmin's mongoose killing; merchant loss narratives in Book II	Continuing bonds (Klass et al., 1996); post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)	Leader acknowledges loss formally; creates grieving space before demanding performance recovery	Unprocessed grief as aggression; survivor guilt; decision distortion	Narrative therapy; organisational loss studies

Table 2. PEIL Model — Domain Definitions, Textual Anchors, Contemporary Parallels, and Indicators

5.3 Dynamic Interdependencies

The domains' mutual dependencies are the model's structural innovation. NSR is necessary but not sufficient for effective leadership; it becomes actionable only through the domain-specific capacities it enables. GLI strengthens NSR by providing experiential loss-to-wisdom material. RTD and SE constrain each other's failure modes. EDC requires both PAC (knowing how to speak effectively) and NSR (managing the affective cost of challenging a hierarchy). PAC unconstrained by EDC slides toward Damanaka-pattern manipulation. This dynamic interdependency

distinguishes PEIL from competency lists: it is a system, and growth within it requires attention to the connective architecture, not merely the individual nodes.

5.4 Theoretical Propositions

Four testable theoretical propositions are advanced to structure empirical follow-on research:

1. **Proposition 1 (NSR):** Leaders who employ narrative reappraisal strategies before high-stakes decisions — pausing to construct an explanatory story frame — will demonstrate lower rates of reactive decision compounding in crisis conditions than leaders who act on unmediated emotional activation.
2. **Proposition 2 (SE):** Strategic empathy — accurate perspective-taking deployed with prosocial intent — mediates the relationship between leader cultural intelligence and cross-cultural alliance durability, controlling for power distance and institutional context.
3. **Proposition 3 (EDC):** Ethical Dissent Competence — the structured capacity for principled upward dissent — reduces organisational silence and moderates the relationship between leader power distance orientation and team ethical climate.
4. **Proposition 4 (GLI):** Leaders who engage in formalised narrative loss-integration practices following organisational failure — institutionalised grief acknowledgement and meaning-making — will exhibit significantly faster post-crisis recovery trajectories than those employing rapid-recovery reframing that bypasses grief processing.

6. Contemporary Applications of the PEIL Model

Table 3 maps the six PEIL domains to principal organisational contexts, intervention designs, and expected outcomes.

Organisational Context	PEIL Domains	Panchatantra Lens	Key Risk if Neglected	Recommended Intervention	Expected Outcome
C-suite succession	NSR + RTD	New leader as Sanjivaka entering Pingalaka's court	Political blindsiding in first 90 days	Narrative political mapping prior to role assumption	Reduced early-tenure derailment
Mergers & acquisitions	SE + GLI	Cross-species alliances; identity-loss grief	Cultural resistance; hidden sabotage	Empathic due diligence: emotional stakeholder audit; loss rituals	Faster integration; lower attrition

Organisational Context	PEIL Domains	Panchatantra Lens	Key Risk if Neglected	Recommended Intervention	Expected Outcome
Innovation & psychological safety	EDC + PAC	Karataka structured dissent; Vishnu Sharma scaffolded truth-telling	Groupthink; innovation suppression	Anonymous challenge boards; dissent-as-data systems	Increased error detection; ethical climate
Cross-cultural & global teams	SE + PAC + RTD	Laghupatanaka engineering trust across enmity	Cross-cultural misattribution; fractured alliances	Strategic empathy calibration workshops using Panchatantra fables	Stronger inter-cultural trust
Crisis & post-failure recovery	GLI + NSR + EDC	Brahmin post-mongoose; weaver's identity collapse	Unmetabolised failure; shame-withdrawal	Leader loss integration sessions; narrative debrief cycles	Faster recovery; reduced recurrence
Toxic leadership mitigation	RTD + PAC + EDC	Damanaka as diagnostic archetype	Manipulation cascades; gaslighting normalised	Damanaka Audit: political intelligence scan; coalition integrity assessment	Early detection of coercive behaviour

Table 3. PEIL Model — Organisational Applications and Intervention Design

6.1 Cross-Cultural Leadership

The PEIL model's most theoretically distinctive cross-cultural contribution is its competency-level specification of what leaders must develop internally to navigate cultural difference — as distinct from the descriptive cultural typologies offered by GLOBE, Hofstede, and CQ frameworks.

SE functions as the anchor domain in cross-cultural contexts. Where Western EI models treat empathy as emotion-understanding, PEIL specifies empathy as purposive coalition architecture: understanding what success, respect, face, and loyalty mean to a different cultural group, and designing one's approach accordingly. Laghupatanaka's entry into the owl court is not emotionally driven; it is empathically designed a distinction with direct practical consequences for cross-cultural negotiation.

RTD is the most culturally variable domain. What constitutes hostile signalling in a low-context, low-power-distance culture (Netherlands, Scandinavia) may be neutral or even respectful behaviour in a high-context, high-power-distance context (India, Japan, parts of Latin America). The Sanjivaka failure, importing relational scripts from one social environment into a structurally incompatible one is a cross-cultural leadership failure as much as a political one. Culture-calibrated RTD training addresses this directly.

EDC presents distinct cross-cultural complexity. In collectivist, high-power-distance contexts, direct upward dissent may constitute face-threatening behaviour that destroys rather than preserves the relationship it seeks to protect. The Karataka Protocol — anonymous, structured, intermediary-enabled challenge channels — offers a face-preserving mechanism that preserves EDC functionality across high-context cultural environments, an intervention design absent from existing psychological safety frameworks (cf. Edmondson, 1999).

Domain	Cross-Cultural Challenge	Panchatantra Mechanism	Leadership Practice	Risk if Neglected	Outcome
SE	Mapping success, respect, face, and loyalty in another cultural group	Laghupatanaka inhabits owl perspective before designing approach	Pre-negotiation cultural empathy audit; emotional stakeholder mapping	Fractured alliances; trust collapse	Durable cross-cultural partnerships
RTD	Misreading culturally normal communication as threat or safety signal	Sanjivaka fatal cross-cultural misattribution; Crow's inter-group accuracy	Culture-calibrated threat-detection training; RTD proxy networks	Paranoia or naivety; misaligned responses	Accurate political mapping
PAC	Power distance shapes appropriate framing, silence, and challenge norms	Vishnu Sharma's graduated, power-calibrated story sequencing	Explicit power-distance mapping before key communications	Tone-deaf messaging; resistance	Credible, culturally resonant leadership
EDC	Collectivist contexts require face-preserving, indirect dissent channels	Karataka Protocol: protected, indirection-enabled	Anonymous structured challenge boards; trusted intermediary systems	Underground resistance; ethical drift	Psychologically safe hierarchy

Domain	Cross-Cultural Challenge	Panchatantra Mechanism	Leadership Practice	Risk if Neglected	Outcome
		structured challenge			
NSR + GLI	Cultural displacement produces chronic micro-dissonance and meaning-system loss	NSR as meta-competence; GLI metabolises cultural-norm losses	Cross-cultural narrative debrief sessions; structured loss rituals at transition points	Identity fragility; suppressed grief as reactive decision-making	Leader resilience; cultural continuity

Table 4. PEIL Model — Cross-Cultural Leadership Applications by Domain

6.2 Crisis Leadership and Post-Failure Recovery

The PEIL model's most novel contribution to crisis leadership theory is its attention to the interval between shock and response — the space that existing Western frameworks (Boin et al., 2016; Mitroff, 2005) acknowledge but do not theorise at the competency level. The Panchatantra's recurrent pattern — leader receives shock, acts from unprocessed emotional state, compounds the original failure — maps precisely onto documented post-crisis leadership errors in contemporary organisational settings.

In the acute phase (0–72 hours), NSR functions as the primary domain: the capacity to insert a narrative frame before the emergency meeting, the press release, or the board call. NSR in crisis is not spin; it is the cognitive reappraisal function (Gross, 1998) applied under amygdala-activation conditions. RTD is simultaneously critical because crises create Damanaka windows — the period of organisational confusion during which opportunists restructure alliances and narratives for personal advantage. PAC determines whether crisis communication builds or destroys stakeholder trust: the text's consistent demonstration that honest, scaffolded disclosure produces better outcomes than reassurance-focused evasion anticipates contemporary crisis communication research (Mitroff, 2005) by approximately two millennia.

In the immediate aftermath phase, EDC and GLI are primary. The most consistent finding in post-crisis reviews is that preventable failures were preceded by suppressed knowledge: Karataka-pattern silence in which someone knew, said something once, received no response, and stopped speaking. Institutionalising EDC channels — the Karataka Protocol — before the next crisis is the direct practical implication. GLI is the most consistently neglected domain in post-crisis organisational practice: rapid-recovery messaging that demands performance before grief has been processed suppresses, rather than resolves, loss energy, which then distorts subsequent decisions.

Crisis Phase	Primary Domains	Panchatantra Mechanism	Failure Pattern if Absent	Organisational Intervention
Acute (0–72 hrs)	NSR + RTD + PAC	Insert narrative frame before responding; slow social judgments; honest framing over reassurance	Reactive compounding decisions; opportunists exploit vulnerability window	Pre-crisis NSR protocols; RTD proxy network; PAC crisis communication templates
Immediate aftermath (1–4 wks)	EDC + GLI	Open upward channels; name and hold the loss before demanding recovery	Karataka silence: known risks stayed unvoiced; grief suppressed as learning opportunity	Structured safe-dissent debrief; institutionalised loss rituals; leader grief modelling
Stabilisation (1–3 mos)	NSR + SE	Construct organisational narrative of failure; rebuild alliances damaged in crisis	No shared account of failure; fractured trust; alliance opportunism	Narrative sense-making workshops; SE alliance repair protocols; Damanaka Audit
Recovery & learning (3–12 mos)	GLI + NSR + EDC	Convert grief narrative into institutional memory; hold loss as wisdom not shame	Failure repeated; shame-withdrawal by leaders; dissent channels close permanently	Post-crisis GLI review embedded in strategy cycle; Karataka Protocol institutionalised

Table 5. PEIL Model — Crisis Leadership Phases, Domain Activation, and Interventions

7. Critical Discussion and Limitations

7.1 Can the Panchatantra Normalise Manipulation?

A substantive critical concern is whether a framework derived from a text that foregrounds manipulation — Damanaka as protagonist across Book I — risks endorsing instrumental deception as a leadership competency. This concern is taken seriously. The Panchatantra does not resolve the Damanaka problem neatly: the text never punishes Damanaka, and his political skill is presented with evident admiration. The PEIL Model addresses this by designating PAC and SE as morally neutral competencies whose ethical valence is determined by the intent and transparency

with which they are deployed — not by the capacities themselves. However, reviewers and practitioners should be alert to the risk that PAC training in low-EDC organisational cultures may amplify manipulation rather than leadership effectiveness.

7.2 Cultural Boundedness of the Framework

The PEIL domains are derived from a text produced in a specific socio-political context — a patriarchal, caste-structured, politically hierarchical court environment. Several domain assumptions — particularly around EDC's face-preservation logic and GLI's emphasis on narrative ritual — may reflect specific Indian high-context cultural assumptions rather than universal patterns. The claim to cross-cultural applicability is theoretical, not demonstrated; empirical validation across diverse cultural contexts is required before generalisability can be established.

7.3 Risks of Retrofitting Modern Theory into Ancient Texts

Applying contemporary EI frameworks as coding templates to an ancient text risks producing confirmation artefacts: finding what the framework predicts because the framework shaped what was looked for. The study mitigates this through Stage 2's requirement that candidate domains emerge from patterns absent from the sensitising frameworks — the analytical commitment is explicitly to finding what is not already there. Nevertheless, the hermeneutic circle cannot be fully escaped. Future research involving co-analysis by Sanskrit scholars working independently from the EI literature would provide a robust additional validity check.

7.4 Universal Validity of the Competency Claims

The PEIL framework makes no claim that these six domains are universally generative regardless of context. Specific competency configurations may be more or less relevant to different leadership situations, organisational types, and cultural environments. The theoretical propositions in Section 5.4 are designed to structure comparative testing, not to assert universal applicability. Organisations in low-power-distance, high-individualism contexts may find EDC less structurally novel; those in high-context collectivist environments may find GLI and NSR more immediately actionable.

7.5 Scope and Methodological Constraints

As a theoretically grounded, text-based framework, PEIL requires empirical operationalisation before its propositions can be tested. Validated psychometric instruments for each domain do not yet exist; their development is the primary requirement for quantitative follow-on research. The framework also does not specify developmental sequencing: whether NSR must precede EDC, or whether domains can be cultivated independently, is an open empirical question. Structural equation modelling of domain interrelationships would provide productive guidance.

8. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the Panchatantra encodes a theoretically coherent, textually consistent, and organisationally applicable system of emotionally intelligent leadership

competencies. The PEIL Model comprising NSR, RTD, SE, EDC, PAC, and GLI, extends IKS scholarship into organisational leadership theory, addresses documented WEIRD-sample limitations in existing EI frameworks, and provides structured applications for cross-cultural and crisis leadership.

Three contributions warrant emphasis. First, the PEIL Model is the first systematic competency framework derived from the Panchatantra — a text that has traversed fifty languages and three continents without receiving rigorous leadership-theoretic analysis. Second, it identifies six competency domains that are not only textually grounded but theoretically non-redundant with published EI and political skill frameworks; they extend, rather than replicate, existing knowledge. Third, the model's dynamic, feedback-driven architecture in which domains constrain each other's failure modes represents a structural advance over additive competency lists.

The four theoretical propositions advanced in Section 5.4 provide a research agenda for empirical follow-on work. The critical analysis in Section 7 identifies the model's cultural-boundedness assumptions, manipulation risk, and methodological constraints limitations that do not undermine the framework's theoretical contribution but that establish the conditions under which it can be responsibly applied.

Vishnu Sharma's pedagogy rested on a conviction that the most durable leadership formation does not proceed by direct instruction but by narrative: stories that allow the listener to discover the lesson without it being imposed. The PEIL Model's theoretical proposition is that this insight embedded in a text two and a half millennia old, encodes a theory of emotional leadership that contemporary scholarship is only beginning to articulate.

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