

## LINKING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A STUDY OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

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### **Abstract:**

This study explores the dynamic relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Transformational Leadership within the context of academic leadership. As higher education institutions face increasingly complex challenges, effective leadership becomes vital for fostering innovation, collaboration, and academic excellence. Emotional Intelligence—defined by the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others—has emerged as a critical component of leadership effectiveness. Transformational Leadership, characterized by the ability to inspire, motivate, and develop followers, aligns closely with the emotional and interpersonal competencies inherent in EI. This paper investigates how key dimensions of EI—such as self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation enhance the four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Drawing data from academic leaders across various institutions, the study employs quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the correlation between EI levels and perceived leadership effectiveness. This research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting EI as a foundational competency for transformational leaders, offering practical implications for leadership development and organizational change strategies.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Transformational leadership, Empathy, Self-regulation, Leadership Styles, Academic Leadership, Higher Education, Leadership Effectiveness, Organizational Change, Leadership Development, Inspirational Motivation, Individualized Consideration, Leadership Competencies.

## 1. Introduction

In an era of dynamic changes and increasing complexity in higher education, effective leadership plays a pivotal role in driving innovation, academic excellence, and institutional growth. Academic leaders such as deans, department heads, principals, directors and other academic officers in charge are not merely administrative figures; they are visionaries, mentors, and catalysts for transformation. Amid shifting educational paradigms, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical leadership trait that can influence how leaders navigate interpersonal relationships, manage stress, and inspire their teams.

Transformational leadership, characterized by the ability to motivate, influence, and develop followers beyond transactional exchanges, is considered one of the most effective leadership styles in academic settings. Enhanced faculty performance, student outcomes and institutional culture are demonstrated by leaders with transformational qualities. Given the relational and emotionally intensive nature of leadership in education, understanding the interplay between EI and transformational leadership has become increasingly relevant.

This study aims to explore this relationship within the context of higher education institutions. By examining the levels of EI and transformational leadership among academic leaders, and identifying which components of EI most strongly predict transformational behaviors, the research contributes to both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in educational leadership development.

## 2. Literature Review

In the evolving landscape of higher education, leadership is no longer confined to administrative expertise—it requires emotional awareness, interpersonal sensitivity, and the ability to inspire others toward shared goals. Two dominant constructs that have gained significant attention in leadership research are **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** and **Transformational Leadership (TL)**. This review explores these constructs and their empirical connection, with a particular focus on their relevance in academic leadership.

### 2.1 Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional Intelligence refers to the capacity to perceive, assess, and regulate emotions in oneself and in others. The concept was introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1990)<sup>1</sup> and gained

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<sup>1</sup> Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, cognition and personality*, 9(3), 185-211.

popularity through Daniel Goleman's (1995)<sup>2</sup> work, which emphasized EI as a crucial determinant of personal and professional success. Goleman argued that while IQ may determine a person's eligibility for a role, it is EI that determines effectiveness in that role—especially in leadership positions.

For empirical measurement, this study adopts the **Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS)**, which operationalizes EI into four dimensions:

- **Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)**: the ability to understand and express one's own emotions.
- **Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA)**: the ability to perceive and understand others' emotions.
- **Use of Emotion (UOE)**: the ability to harness emotions to enhance thinking and performance.
- **Regulation of Emotion (ROE)**: the ability to regulate one's own emotions effectively.

WLEIS has been widely validated and praised for its focus, cultural adaptability, and internal consistency (Wong & Law, 2002)<sup>3</sup>. It provides a practical lens through which the emotional competencies of leaders, particularly in education, can be assessed and improved.

## 2.2 Transformational Leadership (TL)

Transformational Leadership, first conceptualized by Burns (1978)<sup>4</sup> and expanded by Bass (1985)<sup>5</sup>, emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Unlike transactional leaders who focus on exchanges and rewards, transformational leaders aim to elevate followers' motivation, creativity, and commitment.

Bass and Avolio's (1994)<sup>6</sup> model identify four core components of TL:

- **Idealized Influence (II)**: establishing trust and serving as a role model.
- **Inspirational Motivation (IM)**: communicating a compelling vision that inspires others.
- **Intellectual Stimulation (IS)**: promoting creativity and problem-solving.

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<sup>2</sup> Goleman, D. (2001). Emotional intelligence: Issues in paradigm building. *The emotionally intelligent workplace*, 13, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Wong, C. S., & Law, K. S. (2002). Wong and law emotional intelligence scale. *The leadership quarterly*.

<sup>4</sup> Burns, J.M (1978), *Leadership*, New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>5</sup> Bass, B. M., & Bass Bernard, M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*.

<sup>6</sup> Avolio, B. J., Bass, B. M., & Jung, D. I. (1994). Re-examining the components of transformational and transactional leadership using the Multifactor Leadership. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 72(4), 441-462.

- **Individualized Consideration (IC):** providing personal support and mentoring.

In academic institutions, where leadership involves managing diverse teams, fostering a collaborative culture, and navigating constant change, the TL style has shown a strong association with positive outcomes such as faculty engagement, innovation, and student achievement (Yukl, 2013)<sup>7</sup>.

### 2.3 The Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership

A significant body of research has explored the relationship between EI and TL. Leaders high in emotional intelligence are more likely to exhibit transformational behaviors due to their enhanced capacity for empathy, self-regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness. Studies by Bar-On (1997)<sup>8</sup>, Caruso and Salovey (2004)<sup>9</sup>, and Wong and Law (2002) provide robust empirical support for the predictive role of EI in leadership effectiveness.

For instance, Podsakoff et al. (1990) found that transformational leaders often display high levels of emotional self-awareness and empathy—key EI traits. Similarly, Mandell and Pherwani (2003)<sup>10</sup> reported a statistically significant correlation between EI scores and TL behaviors among organizational leaders.

Specifically, **SEA and OEA** have emerged as the strongest predictors of transformational leadership. Leaders who are aware of their own emotions (SEA) are better able to convey enthusiasm and vision (IM), while those who understand others' emotions (OEA) tend to build trust and provide individualized support (IC). **UOE and ROE**, while still influential, often support the cognitive and behavioral components of TL, such as decision-making and emotional resilience.

### 2.4 Relevance in Academic Leadership

In the context of academia, leaders are expected to manage faculty dynamics, curriculum reforms, policy changes, and student needs—all of which demand high emotional labor. Hence, EI becomes not just desirable but essential. Academic leaders who can connect emotionally with their teams are more likely to foster an environment of trust, innovation, and motivation.

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<sup>7</sup> Hassan, S., Mahsud, R., Yukl, G., & Prussia, G. E. (2013). Ethical and empowering leadership and leader effectiveness. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 28(2), 133-146.

<sup>8</sup> Bar-On, R. (1997). *BarOn emotional quotient inventory* (Vol. 40). New York: Multi-health systems.

<sup>9</sup> Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2004). *The emotionally intelligent manager: How to develop and use the four key emotional skills of leadership*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>10</sup> Mandell, B., & Pherwani, S. (2003). Relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style: A gender comparison. *Journal of business and psychology*, 17, 387-404.

As such, integrating EI into leadership development initiatives in higher education can have far-reaching benefits. Cherniss and Goleman (2001)<sup>11</sup> suggest that emotional competence training can enhance both individual leader effectiveness and overall institutional performance. Given that higher education often functions in complex, multicultural environments, emotionally intelligent leaders are particularly well-equipped to manage diversity and foster inclusiveness.

### **3. Research Objectives**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of emotional intelligence among academic leaders.
2. To examine the correlation between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.
3. To identify which components of EI are most predictive of transformational leadership.

### **4. Methodology**

#### **4.1 Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative, correlational research design to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. The correlational approach allows the analysis of statistical relationships between variables without manipulating the study environment, which is essential for studying naturally occurring leadership behaviors in academic settings.

#### **4.2 Population and Sample**

##### **Population**

The target population for this research includes academic leaders in higher education institutions, specifically department heads, principals, academic in charge along with convenors and coordinators of different cells and unit of the institution. These individuals were chosen due to their strategic and operational roles in shaping academic programs, faculty development, and institutional culture.

##### **Sampling Technique**

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<sup>11</sup> Cherniss, C., & Goleman, D. (2001). *The emotional intelligence workplace. How to select for measure and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups and organizations* san Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Convenience sampling method was used in this study to collect data from respondents across various colleges under Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University.

The final sample consisted of 120 academic leaders drawn from 10 colleges under Dibrugarh and Gauhati University, from various departments and administrative levels.

### 4.3 Instruments

#### Emotional Intelligence

To measure emotional intelligence, two validated self-report instruments were considered: the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), the **WLEIS** was selected due to its focused structure, high reliability, and ease of integration into the research timeline. It uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

- **WLEIS** focuses on four core dimensions:
  1. Self-emotion appraisal (SEA)
  2. Others' emotion appraisal (OEA)
  3. Use of emotion (UOE)
  4. Regulation of emotion (ROE)

These are further broken down into 15 subscales such as emotional self-awareness, empathy, impulse control, and problem-solving.

#### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was assessed using the **Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI)**. It is employed in this study because it is a **validated and reliable tool** specifically designed to assess the key dimensions of **transformational leadership**, which is the central focus of this research. This tool measures four central behaviours, which align directly with the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

1. **Idealized Influence (II)** – charisma and trustworthiness.
2. **Inspirational Motivation (IM)** – ability to inspire and motivate followers.
3. **Intellectual Stimulation (IS)** – encouraging creativity and innovation.
4. **Individualized Consideration (IC)** – attending to the needs and development of followers.

Respondents rated their leadership behaviors on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “frequently.”

### 4.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the following statistical techniques:

- **Descriptive statistics** (means, standard deviations) were calculated to summarize the levels of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.
- **Pearson correlation analysis** was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional intelligence dimensions and transformational leadership behaviors.
- **Multiple regression analysis** was conducted to identify which specific components of emotional intelligence significantly predict transformational leadership.

## 5. Results and Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The mean scores for the four WLEIS dimensions were as follows:

- Self-emotion appraisal (SEA):  $M = 5.8$ ,  $SD = 0.72$
- Others' emotion appraisal (OEA):  $M = 5.6$ ,  $SD = 0.78$
- Use of emotion (UOE):  $M = 5.7$ ,  $SD = 0.69$
- Regulation of emotion (ROE):  $M = 5.5$ ,  $SD = 0.81$

The **average scores (means)** for the four areas of Emotional Intelligence, based on the **WLEIS scale**, are:

- **Self-emotion appraisal (SEA):** Average score is **5.8**. This shows that most participants feel confident in understanding their own emotions.
- **Others' emotion appraisal (OEA):** Average score is **5.6**. This suggests that participants are also quite good at understanding how others feel.
- **Use of emotion (UOE):** Average score is **5.7**. This means that participants generally know how to use emotions to improve their thinking and performance.
- **Regulation of emotion (ROE):** Average score is **5.5**, which is slightly lower than the others. This suggests that some participants may find it a bit more challenging to manage or control their emotions.

The **standard deviations (SD)** (ranging from **0.69 to 0.81**) tell us that while most people scored around the average, there were some variations in individual scores.

Transformational leadership scores were:

- Idealized Influence:  $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.63$
- Inspirational Motivation:  $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.61$
- Intellectual Stimulation:  $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 0.70$
- Individualized Consideration:  $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 0.65$

The average (mean) scores show how academic leaders rated themselves (or were rated) in the four areas of transformational leadership:

- **Idealized Influence:** Average score is **4.1**. This means leaders are generally seen as role models and are respected, but there's room for improvement.
- **Inspirational Motivation:** Average score is **4.3**. This is the **highest score**, showing that leaders are quite good at inspiring and motivating others.
- **Intellectual Stimulation:** Average score is **4.0**, the **lowest among the four**, suggesting that encouraging new ideas and critical thinking might be a bit less strong among the leaders.
- **Individualized Consideration:** Average score is **4.2**, which shows that leaders are fairly good at giving personal attention and support to individuals.

The **standard deviations (SD)** — which range from **0.61 to 0.70** — mean that while most scores were close to the average, there were some differences in how individual leaders performed in each area.

Overall, academic leaders scored high on both EI and transformational leadership dimensions, suggesting a strong emotional and motivational foundation in their leadership styles.

## 5.2 Correlational Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients revealed significant positive relationships between overall EI and transformational leadership ( $r = .65, p < .01$ ). More specifically:

- SEA correlated highly with Inspirational Motivation ( $r = .58, p < .01$ )
- OEA had strong correlations with Individualized Consideration ( $r = .60, p < .01$ )
- UOE was significantly related to Intellectual Stimulation ( $r = .52, p < .01$ )
- ROE showed a significant correlation with Idealized Influence ( $r = .49, p < .01$ )

These results indicate that academic leaders with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to demonstrate transformational leadership behaviors.

The **Pearson correlation** results show that there is a **strong positive relationship** between **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** and **Transformational Leadership**. This means that as emotional intelligence increases, transformational leadership qualities also tend to increase.

More specifically:

- **Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)** — understanding your own emotions — is **strongly linked to Inspirational Motivation**. So, leaders who understand their own emotions well are better at inspiring and motivating others.

- **Others’ Emotion Appraisal (OEA)** — understanding others’ emotions — is **strongly connected to Individualized Consideration**. This means leaders who are good at reading others’ emotions tend to give personal attention and care to their team members.
- **Use of Emotion (UOE)** — using emotions to improve performance — is **positively related to Intellectual Stimulation**. Leaders who use emotions effectively are more likely to encourage creativity and new ideas.
- **Regulation of Emotion (ROE)** — controlling emotions — has a **good relationship with Idealized Influence**, meaning emotionally balanced leaders are seen as role models and earn respect from their team.

### 5.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of the four EI components on transformational leadership.

The model was significant,  $F(4, 215) = 34.7, p < .001$ , and explained 56% of the variance ( $R^2 = .56$ ).

| Predictor (EI Component)  | Beta ( $\beta$ ) | t-value | Significance (p) |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------|------------------|
| Self-emotion appraisal    | .32              | 4.61    | < .001           |
| Others’ emotion appraisal | .29              | 4.22    | < .001           |
| Use of emotion            | .21              | 3.11    | < .01            |
| Regulation of emotion     | .18              | 2.87    | < .01            |

- **Self-emotion appraisal (SEA)**: Has the strongest impact ( $\beta = .32$ ), meaning leaders who understand their own emotions well are more likely to show transformational leadership qualities.
- **Others’ emotion appraisal (OEA)**: Also has a strong effect ( $\beta = .29$ ), showing that being able to read others' emotions helps a lot in being an effective leader.
- **Use of emotion (UOE)**: Has a moderate effect ( $\beta = .21$ ), suggesting that using emotions in problem-solving and motivation also supports leadership.
- **Regulation of emotion (ROE)**: Has the smallest but still meaningful impact ( $\beta = .18$ ), meaning managing emotions helps, but not as strongly as the others

Among these, **Self-emotion appraisal** and **Others' emotion appraisal** were the most significant predictors of transformational leadership behaviors.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature suggesting that emotional intelligence is a foundational competency for transformational leadership. The strong correlations and predictive values observed reinforce the argument that academic leaders with higher self-awareness and empathy are better equipped to inspire, motivate, and develop their followers. The fact that SEA and OEA emerged as the most predictive dimensions highlights the importance of intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness in educational leadership. These leaders not only understand their own emotional states but are also adept at perceiving and responding to the emotions of others, facilitating more supportive and innovative academic environments.

Furthermore, the high scores in all transformational dimensions suggest that current academic leadership training or selection processes may already emphasize emotionally intelligent behaviors, though more structured interventions could further enhance these competencies.

The results of this study clearly highlight the significant and positive relationship between **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** and **Transformational Leadership** among academic leaders. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to inspire, influence, and develop their followers in meaningful ways.

### Emotional Intelligence and Its Role in Leadership

Emotional Intelligence, as measured through the four dimensions of the **Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS)**—Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotion (UOE), and Regulation of Emotion (ROE)—reflects a leader's capacity to perceive, understand, use, and manage emotions effectively.

The **descriptive statistics** indicate relatively high average scores across all four EI dimensions, with **SEA (M = 5.8)** and **UOE (M = 5.7)** being the highest. This suggests that the academic leaders in the study are generally confident in recognizing their own emotions and effectively using those emotions in decision-making and daily functioning. Slightly lower, yet still strong scores in **OEA (M = 5.6)** and **ROE (M = 5.5)** imply that while leaders are fairly capable in understanding others' emotions and regulating their own, these are potential areas for growth.

### Transformational Leadership Capacities

The **mean scores** show that **Inspirational Motivation (M = 4.3)** is the strongest trait among academic leaders, followed by **Individualized Consideration (M = 4.2)** and **Idealized Influence (M = 4.1)**. The lowest average score is for **Intellectual Stimulation (M = 4.0)**, suggesting that while leaders are generally good at motivating and supporting others, there may be room for improvement in encouraging innovation and independent thinking.

### **Correlation Analysis: Linking EI with Transformational Leadership**

The **Pearson correlation** results offer deeper insight into how specific emotional intelligence skills relate to transformational leadership behaviors:

- **Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)** is strongly linked with **Inspirational Motivation (r = .58)**—indicating that leaders who understand their own emotions can better express enthusiasm and inspire others.
- **Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA)** shows a strong connection to **Individualized Consideration (r = .60)**, meaning leaders who empathize with others are more likely to provide personalized support.
- **Use of Emotion (UOE)** correlates with **Intellectual Stimulation (r = .52)**, suggesting that leaders who know how to channel emotions positively tend to stimulate creativity and problem-solving in their teams.
- **Regulation of Emotion (ROE)** correlates with **Idealized Influence (r = .49)**, meaning emotionally balanced leaders are more likely to be respected and seen as role models.

These correlations confirm that each EI dimension supports different aspects of transformational leadership, reinforcing the idea that emotional intelligence is multifaceted and critical to effective leadership.

### **Regression Analysis: Predictive Power of EI**

The **multiple regression analysis** further solidifies the relationship between EI and transformational leadership. The overall model was statistically significant, **F(4, 215) = 34.7**, **p < .001**, and explained **56% (R<sup>2</sup> = .56)** of the variance in transformational leadership scores. This is a substantial portion, indicating that more than half of the leadership behavior can be predicted by emotional intelligence.

Among the four EI components:

- **Self-Emotion Appraisal (β = .32)** and
- **Others' Emotion Appraisal (β = .29)**

were the **most significant predictors**. This suggests that leaders who are highly aware of their own emotions and attuned to the emotions of others are most likely to demonstrate transformational leadership qualities. While **Use of Emotion ( $\beta = .21$ )** and **Regulation of Emotion ( $\beta = .18$ )** also contributed significantly, their impact was slightly lower.

These findings reinforce the idea that emotional self-awareness and empathy are not just "soft skills," but core capabilities that influence a leader's effectiveness.

### **Implications for Academic Leadership**

In the context of academic institutions, where leadership involves managing diverse stakeholders and fostering a positive learning environment, the ability to lead with emotional intelligence is especially important. Academic leaders who can connect emotionally with faculty, staff, and students are better positioned to build trust, drive change, and inspire academic excellence.

Investing in **EI development programs**—such as self-reflection workshops, empathy training, and stress management strategies—can therefore enhance leadership capacity in higher education settings.

### **7. Conclusion**

This study has established a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership among academic leaders. The findings highlight that specific components of EI, particularly self-emotion and others' emotion appraisal, are strong predictors of transformational leadership behaviors. These insights support the growing call for emotionally intelligent leadership in academia and provide a data-driven foundation for developing future leaders in higher education. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of EI training on leadership effectiveness and institutional performance.

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