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BEYOND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE: TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN IT ORGANIZATIONS

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Beyond Technical Expertise: Trait Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Transformational Leadership in IT Organizations

Sergiu URSAN¹, Iraida MUSTEAȚĂ²

Abstract

The relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership has gained increasing attention due to the growing need for adaptive leadership styles in dynamic organizational environments. The present study examined the relationship between trait emotional intelligence, and transformational leadership within the Romanian IT industry. The sample consisted of 474 employees working in Romanian IT companies. Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted while controlling for socio-demographic and organizational variables, including age, gender, educational level, work arrangement, company type, professional experience, employer location, and company size. The results indicated that emotional intelligence had a positive and statistically significant effect on transformational leadership. The findings highlight the importance of emotional competencies for leadership effectiveness in technology-oriented environments and contribute to the growing literature on trait emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in the IT sector. The study also provides practical implications for leadership development and organizational management in technology-based companies.

Keywords: trait emotional intelligence; sociability; well-being; emotionality; transformational leadership; IT industry.

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Introduction

The relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership has received increasing attention in organizational research due to the growing need for adaptive and effective leadership styles in dynamic work environments. Previous studies suggest that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in leadership effectiveness and is more strongly associated with transformational leadership than cognitive intelligence. Leaders with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to be more empathetic, supportive, and responsive to employees' needs, facilitating effective communication, collaboration, and the transmission of organizational values and vision (Munir, Shakeel & Waheed, 2023). Furthermore, emotionally intelligent leaders are better able to recognize employees' emotional needs and provide support and guidance, contributing to psychological empowerment and developmental opportunities (Spano-Szekely Griffin, Clavelle & Fitzpatrick, 2016). These mechanisms are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational performance, and positive workplace climate (Munir *et al.*, 2023).

The importance of emotional intelligence becomes particularly evident in the IT industry, a sector characterized by rapid technological change, strict deadlines, high workload, and continuous pressure for innovation. In such contexts, leaders who can regulate their own emotions and manage the emotional dynamics of their teams are better positioned to motivate employees and maintain team cohesion (Dabke, 2016). Emotional regulation also facilitates conflict management, psychological safety, and effective collaboration within complex and interdependent teams (Schlaerth, Ensari & Christian, 2013). Previous research further indicates that leaders with strong emotional management abilities contribute to more productive and engaging work environments, improving employee satisfaction and organizational performance (Hur, Van Den Berg & Wilderom, 2011).

Despite the growing literature on emotional intelligence and leadership, limited research has examined how specific dimensions of trait emotional intelligence contribute to transformational leadership behaviors within the IT sector. Therefore, the present study addresses recent calls to further investigate the role of emotional intelligence dimensions in technology-oriented work environments (Zhu, Wang, Wang & Yu, 2021).

Theoretical Background

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence has become one of the most influential constructs in contemporary psychology due to its relevance for interpersonal relationships, psychological adaptation, and organizational functioning. The concept was initially introduced by Mayer, DiPaolo & Salovey, (1990), who defined emotional

intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions in ways that facilitate thinking and behavior. Over time, different conceptualizations of emotional intelligence have emerged, among which the trait-based perspective has become particularly influential. Unlike ability-based models, which assess emotional performance through objective tasks, trait emotional intelligence focuses on individuals' self-perceptions regarding their emotional competencies and dispositions. From this perspective, emotional intelligence represents a constellation of emotional self-perceptions situated at the personality level (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki, 2007).

The growing interest in trait emotional intelligence is largely explained by its ability to account for important differences in psychological and social functioning. Previous studies have consistently shown that higher levels of trait emotional intelligence are associated with greater well-being, better stress management, more satisfying interpersonal relationships, and more effective emotional regulation (Petrides, Sanchez-Ruiz, Siegling, Saklofske & Mavroveli, 2018). Because the construct reflects individuals' subjective perceptions of their emotional functioning, self-report measures are considered the most appropriate method for its assessment (Petrides *et al.*, 2007).

One of the most widely used models of trait emotional intelligence was developed by Konstantinos V. Petrides, who conceptualized the construct as a hierarchical structure consisting of 15 facets grouped into four higher-order dimensions: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability (Petrides, 2009). Well-being reflects optimism, self-confidence, and generalized positive affect. Self-control refers to stress management, impulse regulation, and emotional stability. Emotionality includes empathy, emotional expression, and awareness of emotions, whereas sociability reflects assertiveness, social competence, and interpersonal influence. Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of emotional functioning in both personal and professional contexts.

Based on this theoretical model, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) was developed as one of the most widely used instruments for assessing trait emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2009). The short version of the instrument, the TEIQue-SF, consists of 30 self-report items and was specifically designed to assess global trait emotional intelligence alongside its four dimensions (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). Although the short form primarily evaluates global trait emotional intelligence, it also allows the assessment of well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability (Cooper & Petrides, 2010). The widespread use of the TEIQue is supported by strong psychometric evidence, including high levels of reliability, convergent validity, and factorial stability across multiple cultural and occupational settings (Gutiérrez-Carrasco, Topa & Pérez-González, 2022; Yang, Zadorozhny, Petrides, Ng & Pan, 2025).

The present study employed the TEIQue-SF due to its strong theoretical foundation and suitability for organizational research. This decision is also supported

by the nature of the investigated relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. Transformational leadership involves relatively stable emotional and relational behaviors, including inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. Consequently, trait-based emotional predispositions are expected to be more strongly associated with transformational leadership than situational emotional abilities. Supporting this assumption, the meta-analysis conducted by Harms and Credé (2010) demonstrated that trait emotional intelligence is positively associated with transformational leadership and shows stronger predictive validity than ability-based measures.

The relevance of trait emotional intelligence becomes particularly evident in the information technology sector, which is characterized by rapid change, interdisciplinary collaboration, strict deadlines, and frequent virtual interactions. In such environments, leaders must rely not only on technical expertise but also on emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal competencies in order to maintain team cohesion and employee motivation. Recent research indicates that emotional intelligence is associated with relational leadership styles, increased managerial effectiveness, and positive organizational outcomes (Gerhardt, Bauwens & van Woerkom, 2026). Furthermore, meta-analytic evidence has linked trait emotional intelligence to higher job performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, as well as lower turnover intentions (Miao, Humphrey & Qian, 2017; O'Boyle Jr, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver & Story, 2011). Therefore, trait emotional intelligence provides a valuable framework for understanding leadership effectiveness and team functioning in technology-oriented organizations.

Transformational Leadership

The concept of transformational leadership was initially introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978), who distinguished transformational leadership from transactional leadership. Later, Bernard Bass (1985) expanded the model by identifying the core dimensions of transformational leadership, which were further refined by Bass and Avolio (1990, 1994) into the well-known four-factor structure. This model includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, commonly referred to as the “Four I’s” (Thompson, Buch, Thompson & Glasø, 2021).

Transformational leaders inspired and motivated employees to exceed expectations and perform better (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders with a compelling vision inspire creativity, critical thinking, and personal and professional growth (Sehgal, Balasubramanian & Chanchaichujit, 2021). Transformational leaders build trust, organisational commitment, and employee engagement through empathy, support, and communication (Waglay, Becker & du Plessis, 2020). This leadership

style promotes corporate change, creativity, and innovation by encouraging employees to think differently and solve problems (Yucel, 2021). Transformational leadership improves team performance, organizational performance, and employee outcomes (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017; Tran & Vu, 2021).

Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership in the IT Industry

In the IT sector, characterized by rapid technological development and increasing demands for adaptability and performance, the literature has increasingly emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in the development of transformational leadership and its combined impact on organizational performance. Several studies published over the last decade have highlighted the importance of emotional competencies for effective leadership in technology-oriented environments.

A study conducted in India examined the influence of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership on organizational commitment within the IT industry, revealing that both variables had a significant impact on employee commitment (Jain & Duggal, 2016). The findings further indicated that charisma, a core dimension of transformational leadership, together with relationship management, a component of emotional intelligence, represented essential factors in determining organizational performance.

Similarly, another study conducted in an Asian context identified significant relationships between emotional intelligence, creativity, transformational leadership, and job performance in the IT sector (Rahman, Ferdausy, Al-Amin & Akter, 2020). The authors emphasized the importance of developing emotional intelligence competencies among managers in order to cultivate transformational leaders capable of supporting innovation and organizational performance. The results suggested that organizations may enhance performance through the recruitment and development of leaders characterized by higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Finally, a study conducted among small and medium-sized enterprises in the Portuguese technology industry investigated the relationship between dimensions of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, revealing significant positive associations between these constructs (Moreira and Lima, 2023). More specifically, dimensions such as self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, and use of emotion emerged as relevant predictors of transformational leadership, providing a more detailed understanding of the interaction between emotional competencies and leadership behaviors in technology-based organizations.

Methodology

Research Aim

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, including its dimensions, and transformational leadership within the context of the IT industry in Romania.

Research Objectives

O1: To analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.

O2: To evaluate the influence of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership.

O3: To control for the influence of socio-demographic variables in the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Higher levels of emotional intelligence positively influence transformational leadership.

Data Collection Procedure

The sample was designed to be sufficiently large and diverse in order to ensure the statistical relevance of the findings. Participants were recruited from various types of IT companies, including product-based companies, outsourcing organizations, and IT support companies. Both non-managerial employees and individuals occupying managerial positions were included, with most participants employed in companies located in Iași, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Timișoara.

Participants were recruited through relevant professional channels, including LinkedIn, personal professional networks, email distribution, and human resources communities specialized in the IT industry. A non-probabilistic sampling procedure was employed in order to identify eligible respondents working in active IT companies in Romania.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be employed within the IT industry, possess relevant professional experience, and belong to an organization operating in Romania. Additional information regarding company type, company size, and organizational role was also collected. Based on organizational role, participants were distributed into the two components of the broader research project: non-managerial employees were included in the quantitative component, whereas individuals occupying management positions participated in the qualitative component of the study.

Participants

The sample consisted of 474 employees from the Romanian IT industry. Most participants were male (54.4%) and aged between 26–35 years (47.5%), followed by individuals aged 36–45 years (26.8%). Regarding education, 48.3% of participants held postgraduate degrees, while 46.8% held undergraduate degrees. The largest proportion reported more than 10 years of professional experience in IT (32.9%). Most respondents worked in product-based companies (55.7%), followed by outsourcing companies (32.3%). Participants were relatively evenly distributed across organizations of different sizes.

Instruments

Emotional intelligence was assessed using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQue-SF), a 30-item self-report instrument measuring global trait emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2001, 2009). Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“completely disagree”) to 7 (“completely agree”), with reverse-scored items recoded prior to analysis.

Although primarily designed to assess global trait emotional intelligence, the TEIQue-SF also evaluates four dimensions: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability (Cooper & Petrides, 2010). McDonald’s omega indicated very good reliability for the overall scale ($\omega = 0.95$).

Transformational leadership was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-6S) adopted from Vinger and Cilliers (2006). Items were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“not at all”) to 4 (“frequently, if not always”). Internal consistency was assessed using McDonald’s omega coefficient, with the results indicating very good reliability for the scale ($\omega = 0.94$).

Results

The normality of the distributions was assessed using skewness and kurtosis coefficients. According to Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt. (2022), skewness values between -1 and $+1$ indicate an approximately normal distribution, while values between -2 and $+2$ are considered acceptable. Regarding kurtosis, values close to 0 indicate normality, whereas values above $+2$ or below -2 suggest significant deviations from a normal distribution.

Table 1. Normality of data

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Std. Error		Std. Error
Emotional intelligence	-.536	.112	-.241	.224
Transformational leadership	-.499	.112	-.454	.224

The results indicated that the skewness and kurtosis values fell within the ± 2 threshold, suggesting that the data were normally distributed.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypothesis that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with higher levels of transformational leadership, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Previous studies have shown that transformational leadership may be influenced by demographic variables such as age, gender, and educational level (Balthazard, Waldman, & Warren, 2009). Therefore, these variables were controlled for, together with employer location, work arrangement, company type, professional experience in the IT sector, and company size.

Categorical variables were dummy coded prior to inclusion in the regression model. The reference categories were: participants over 55 years old, high school education, female gender, remote work arrangement, mixed companies, more than 10 years of IT experience, companies with more than 700 employees, and employers located in cities other than Iași, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Timișoara.

Table 2. Model Fit Indicators

R	R-sq	Adj R-sq	F	p	SE
.7887	.622	.6027	32.2014	.0000	5804

Note. R^2 = coefficient of determination; SE = standard error.

The results of the analysis indicated that the prediction model was statistically significant, $F(23, 450) = 32.20$, $p < .001$, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in transformational leadership ($R^2 = .62$, Adj. $R^2 = .60$). The initial regression model demonstrated statistical significance, $F(23, 450) = 32.20$, $p < .001$, accounting for 62.2% of the variance in transformational leadership, with an adjusted R^2 of .60.

Table 3. Regression Model Estimates

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-0.250	0.311	-0.804	.422	-0.862	0.362
Emotional intelligence	0.691	0.028	24.588	< .001	0.636	0.746
18–25 years	0.276	0.245	1.126	.261	-0.206	0.759
26–35 years	0.197	0.226	0.872	.384	-0.247	0.641
36–45 years	0.211	0.222	0.950	.343	-0.225	0.646
46–55 years	0.220	0.249	0.885	.377	-0.269	0.709
Undergraduate education	0.110	0.130	0.849	.397	-0.145	0.366
Postgraduate education	0.213	0.132	1.608	.108	-0.047	0.473
Iași	-0.109	0.156	-0.701	.484	-0.416	0.197
București	-0.231	0.163	-1.423	.155	-0.551	0.088
Cluj-Napoca	-0.175	0.163	-1.073	.284	-0.494	0.145
Timișoara	-0.325	0.171	-1.901	.058	-0.660	0.011
Male gender	0.215	0.059	3.655	< .001	0.099	0.331
Onsite	-0.237	0.103	-2.297	.022	-0.440	-0.034
Hybrid	-0.026	0.061	-0.424	.672	-0.147	0.095
Product-based company	-0.050	0.118	-0.426	.670	-0.283	0.182
Outsourcing company	-0.089	0.122	-0.731	.465	-0.329	0.151
IT support company	-0.068	0.158	-0.432	.666	-0.379	0.242
less than 3 years of experience	0.158	0.118	1.337	.182	-0.074	0.390
3–5 years of experience	0.077	0.090	0.855	.393	-0.100	0.255
5–10 years of experience	0.054	0.080	0.670	.504	-0.104	0.212
Fewer than 50 employees	-0.031	0.079	-0.386	.700	-0.186	0.125
51–250 employees	-0.037	0.072	-0.507	.612	-0.179	0.106
251–700 employees	-0.008	0.080	-0.101	.920	-0.165	0.149

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *CI* = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Emotional intelligence had a positive and statistically significant effect on transformational leadership ($B = .69$, $t = 24.59$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of emotional intelligence were associated with higher levels of transformational leadership. The 95% confidence interval for this coefficient [.636, .746] did not include zero, confirming that the regression coefficient was significantly different from zero. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Among the controlled socio-demographic variables, gender (male) showed a significant positive effect ($B = 0.215$, $t = 3.655$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.099, 0.331]), indicating that male employees perceived higher levels of transformational leadership compared to female employees. Additionally, onsite work arrangement had a significant negative effect on transformational leadership ($B = -0.237$, $t = -2.297$, $p = .022$, 95% CI [-0.440, -0.034]), suggesting that employees working physically onsite perceived lower levels of transformational leadership compared to remote employees.

Discussion

Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership

International research supports the existing conclusions that emotional intelligence improves transformative leadership. Research shows that emotionally intelligent leaders shape organisational processes, boost employee self-efficacy, and improve psychological well-being (Shamshad & Naqi Khan, 2022). In fast-changing workplaces, emotional intelligence is crucial for adaptability and performance. Bratianu and Paiuc (2023) stressed the importance of emotional and cultural intelligence for multicultural business leadership, while Alegre and Levitt (2014) found a strong link between trait emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. This study found that emotional intelligence predicts transformational leadership, particularly in the complex, ever-changing, and highly collaborative IT sector. Awareness and control of emotions enable transformational leadership, including intellectual stimulation and inspiration. These findings match IT industry research. Jain and Duggal (2016) found that emotional intelligence and transformational leadership increase organizational commitment, underlining the necessity of relationship management for effective leadership. Rahman *et al.* (2020) found significant relationships between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, creativity, and workplace performance, suggesting that emotional competencies facilitate and enhance its positive effects on organizational outcomes. Harry and Saidi (2025) claimed that emotional intelligence and transformational leadership are crucial for AI and digital transformation.

Practical and managerial implications

The findings highlight important practical implications for organizations and managers, suggesting that the development of emotional intelligence may strengthen transformational leadership abilities. Previous research indicates that emotional intelligence can be improved through targeted training programs, leading to better emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills (Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak and Hansenne, 2009). Organizations are therefore

encouraged to implement structured leadership development initiatives focused on self-awareness, emotional management, and social competencies. Integrating experiential learning methods, such as feedback and reflective exercises, may facilitate the practical application of these skills. Promoting emotional intelligence within organizations may also foster trust, collaboration, effective communication, and improved organizational performance.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a non-probabilistic sample primarily composed of participants from Iași and the North-Eastern region of Romania may limit the generalizability of the findings to other segments of the IT industry. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences or the examination of changes in emotional intelligence and transformational leadership over time. Additionally, although employees evaluated leaders' emotional intelligence and transformational leadership rather than relying on leaders' self-reports, perceptual biases associated with self-report measures cannot be entirely excluded.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership within the Romanian IT industry. Consistent with the research aim and objectives, the findings demonstrated that emotional intelligence represents a significant positive predictor of transformational leadership. More specifically, higher levels of emotional intelligence were associated with higher levels of transformational leadership, supporting our hypothesis.

The results contribute to the growing literature emphasizing the importance of emotional competencies for effective leadership, particularly in technology-oriented environments characterized by rapid change, complex interpersonal interactions, and high-performance demands. The findings suggest that emotionally intelligent leaders may be more capable of inspiring employees, maintaining effective communication, and fostering collaborative and supportive work environments.

The study also addressed the role of socio-demographic variables in the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. The findings indicated that certain organizational and demographic factors, such as gender and work arrangement, were significantly associated with transformational leadership perceptions, highlighting the importance of considering contextual variables when examining leadership processes in the IT sector.

Overall, the present research provides empirical support for the role of emotional intelligence in transformational leadership and highlights the relevance

of emotional competencies for leadership effectiveness within contemporary organizational environments.

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