

Does Education Shape the Emotionally Intelligent Technology Leader? Educational Attainment, Emotional Intelligence, and Leadership Styles Among IT Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This article examines educational attainment as a demographic dimension of emotional intelligence and leadership among IT professional leaders.

Methodology - The dissertation analyzed 185 usable surveys using the MLQ 5X, SSEIT, and demographic controls. Education was reported as some college, college degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, or other/professional certification, with sparse categories collapsed in the original analysis.

Findings - The sample was highly educated: 47.0% held master's degrees and 41.6% held college degrees; 7.6% reported some college, 2.2% doctoral degrees, and 1.6% other/professional certification. Education did not emerge as a significant demographic predictor in the dissertation's reported final model summaries.

Originality/value - The paper questions a common assumption in technical organizations: that greater formal educational attainment necessarily corresponds to emotionally intelligent or transformational leadership. The findings support separating academic credentials from leadership and emotional competencies while identifying clear secondary analyses for a stronger empirical test.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Formal education is a central credential in technology careers. Degrees signal technical preparation, persistence, specialized knowledge, and access to professional networks. As technical professionals move into leadership, however, the competencies that determine success broaden to include communication, influence, coaching, conflict management, self-regulation, and organizational judgment.

This creates a practical question with significant implications for succession planning: does more formal education correspond to stronger emotional intelligence or a more transformational leadership profile? The dissertation offers an unusually appropriate setting for this question because nearly nine in ten respondents held either a college or master's degree, while the study simultaneously measured four emotional-intelligence components and three full-range leadership styles.

Contemporary high-tech research makes this question timely. Wu (2024), studying 139 leaders in Taiwanese high-tech companies, found that leaders with higher education levels reported greater self-awareness and empathy. Yet educational credentials are not universally equivalent to interpersonal competence, and effects may depend on the type of education, occupational context, culture, and leadership experience. The present article therefore asks what the dissertation's IT sample contributes to this debate.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Formal education and leadership capability

Education can support leadership by developing analytical reasoning, communication, disciplinary knowledge, and exposure to diverse ideas. Graduate education may also increase experience with teamwork, presentations, case analysis, and organizational theory. Nevertheless, leadership theory does not define transformational leadership as an academic credential. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are behavioral patterns, not degree classifications.

In technology organizations, this distinction is particularly important because promotion into management often follows technical accomplishment. A highly educated engineer, analyst, cybersecurity specialist, or enterprise-system professional may be technically exceptional while still needing development in people leadership.

2.2 Education and emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is generally conceptualized as the capacity to perceive, regulate, and use emotional information. Unlike formal educational attainment, EI is not simply a measure of accumulated academic knowledge. It can develop through social experience, mentoring, reflection, leadership practice, and deliberate training.

Recent evidence in the high-tech sector is noteworthy. Wu (2024) found education-related differences among high-tech leaders, with higher education associated with greater self-awareness and empathy. That result suggests education can be relevant to specific EI dimensions, but it does not establish that advanced degrees universally produce higher overall EI or more effective leadership.

The dissertation provides a useful counterpoint because education was included as a control across multiple EI and leadership models but did not emerge as a significant predictor in the reported summary tables.

2.3 Education in the digital and AI era

Digital transformation and AI adoption complicate traditional credential assumptions. Technical knowledge can become outdated quickly, increasing the importance of continuous learning and adaptability. At the same time, human capabilities such as communication, trust building, emotional regulation, and change leadership remain important in technology-intensive organizations.

Recent work on digital leaders' EI emphasizes its role in communication, transparency, trust, and mitigating technostress (Ertiö et al., 2024). Kaur and Chauhan (2025) similarly emphasize EI in hybrid IT performance. These developments suggest that leadership pipelines should evaluate formal education and emotional competence as complementary rather than interchangeable forms of human capital.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What was the educational profile of the IT professional leaders in the dissertation sample?

RQ2: Did educational attainment emerge as a significant demographic predictor in the dissertation's reported EI and leadership models?

RQ3: What does the observed pattern imply for the use of educational credentials in selecting and developing technology leaders?

4. METHOD

This quantitative, correlational study examined 185 usable surveys from information technology professional leaders recruited through convenience and snowball sampling from the researcher's professional network. A total of 230 surveys were collected and 45 incomplete responses were excluded.

Leadership style was measured with 36 items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X), representing transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership. Emotional intelligence was measured with the Schutte

Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), organized in the dissertation into perception of emotion, managing own emotions, managing others' emotions, and utilization of emotion.

The demographic variables were gender, age, ethnicity, education, and leadership tenure. Multiple regression models entered demographic variables before the focal leadership or emotional-intelligence variables. Because the study was cross-sectional and self-report, all associations should be interpreted as statistical relationships rather than causal effects.

4.1 Education measurement

Participants reported their highest educational level. The original categories were some college, college degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, and other. The 'other' responses represented professional certification. Because the doctoral and other categories were small, the dissertation also presented a collapsed distribution combining those categories.

5. RESULTS

The educational profile was highly credentialed. Fourteen participants (7.6%) reported some college, 77 (41.6%) held a college degree, 87 (47.0%) held a master's degree, 4 (2.2%) held a doctoral degree, and 3 (1.6%) reported another credential, described as a professional certificate. In the collapsed distribution, doctoral degrees and professional certificates were combined into an Other category representing 7 participants (3.8%).

Thus, 91.0% of the sample held at least a college degree, and nearly half held a master's degree. This concentration means the study primarily reflects highly educated IT professional leaders and contains relatively limited variation at the lower and upper ends of educational attainment.

Education was included among the demographic controls throughout the dissertation's regression analyses. In the final results summaries, education was not marked as a significant predictor of the four EI components or of transformational, transactional, or passive-avoidant leadership.

The reported result supports only a limited conclusion: within these models and this highly educated sample, educational category did not add a statistically significant unique contribution to the outcomes. It does not establish that education is unrelated to every EI component or leadership behavior, and it does not substitute for direct mean comparisons across education groups.

6. DISCUSSION

The absence of education as a significant control is practically important because technology organizations often use credentials as shorthand for leadership potential. The dissertation suggests that academic attainment should not be assumed to explain emotionally intelligent or transformational leadership once other variables are considered.

The high overall educational level also offers one explanation for the null pattern. Restricted range can reduce the ability to detect relationships. With almost nine out of ten respondents holding college or master's degrees, educational differences may have been too compressed to account for substantial variance.

The result also complements, rather than necessarily contradicts, Wu's (2024) high-tech findings. Wu identified differences on particular EI dimensions such as self-awareness and empathy. The dissertation used a different EI instrument, different component structure, different cultural and occupational sample, and multivariable regression controls. These methodological differences reinforce the need for replication rather than simplistic comparison.

For leadership-development practice, the implication is straightforward: formal education is valuable, but it should be supplemented by direct assessment and development of emotional and interpersonal competencies. A master's degree can signal advanced study; it does not by itself demonstrate individualized consideration, emotion regulation, conflict management, or inspirational leadership.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR AI-ERA LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

AI is increasing the premium on continuous learning. Degrees remain valuable foundations, but leaders must repeatedly update technical understanding while guiding employees through uncertainty and reskilling. This creates a distinction between educational attainment and learning agility.

Organizations can respond by designing leadership-development portfolios that combine formal education, technical certification, mentoring, emotional-intelligence development, project leadership, and feedback from followers. Such a portfolio approach is better aligned with the mixed technical and human demands of contemporary IT leadership.

Universities and professional programs may likewise strengthen technology-management curricula by integrating emotional intelligence, communication, leadership simulations, conflict management, and change leadership alongside technical content.

8. LIMITATIONS AND SECONDARY ANALYSES

The sample was nonrandom and heavily concentrated in college and master's degree categories. Doctoral and professional-certificate groups were too small for reliable standalone inference. Educational categories also do not capture field of study, institution type, degree quality, continuing education, or professional certification history in detail. When the dataset is recovered, recommended analyses include EI and leadership means by educational category; ANOVA/ANCOVA where assumptions and group sizes permit; ordinal or dummy-coded regression models; collapsing categories in theoretically defensible ways; and testing whether education moderates the EI-transformational leadership relationship. Because of sparse cells, doctoral-level conclusions should be made only with great caution.

9. CONCLUSION

The IT leaders in the dissertation were highly educated, yet educational attainment did not emerge as a significant demographic predictor in the study's reported final models. The result challenges the assumption that academic credentials alone define emotionally intelligent or transformational technology leadership. Education should be viewed as one form of human capital, while emotional intelligence and leadership behavior require direct attention. A full secondary analysis of the original dataset could turn this descriptive finding into a stronger contribution on how formal education and relational leadership competencies interact in technology careers.

Data and Publication Note

This article is developed from the same dissertation dataset used in companion manuscripts. The present paper is designed around a distinct demographic research question. It does not invent subgroup findings that were not reported in the dissertation. The current manuscript is a defensible dissertation-grounded draft. A journal submission centered specifically on educational differences should ideally include new participant-level group comparisons or moderation analyses once the dataset is located. Any eventual submission should disclose the shared dataset and any related published or submitted papers in accordance with the target journal's policies.

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