

From Emotional Intelligence to Academic Leadership Effectiveness in Higher Education: A Systematic and Critical Review of Leadership Style, Faculty Outcomes and Gender

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) is widely studied in leadership, yet evidence in higher education remains fragmented across measurement traditions, leadership styles, effectiveness criteria, faculty outcomes, and gender. This systematic and critical review synthesises 70 publications identified through a PRISMA-structured search of multidisciplinary databases through September 2026. The review examines EI conceptualisation and measurement, academic leadership effectiveness, leadership style as a behavioural mechanism, faculty work outcomes, gender, and methodological and contextual gaps. Overall, EI is associated with relational and transformational leadership and with effectiveness-related outcomes, but the magnitude and consistency of these associations vary by EI operationalisation, respondent source, and research design. Multi-source evidence indicates that same-source measurement can inflate observed relationships, while predominantly cross-sectional designs limit causal interpretation. Higher-education studies increasingly connect emotionally intelligent or effective leadership with faculty performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, and related work outcomes, although integrated source-separated models remain limited. Gender effects are generally modest and context-sensitive. The review proposes an integrative framework linking EI, leadership style, academic leadership effectiveness, and faculty work outcomes, with gender and methodological conditions treated as boundary influences. Future progress requires measurement-aware, multi-source, and longitudinal academic leadership research.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; academic leadership; leadership effectiveness; leadership style; faculty outcomes; higher education

1. Introduction

Leadership in higher education institutions relies on knowledge more than formal position, discipline competence, or administrative power. Academic leaders are expected to interpret complex interpersonal situations, manage disagreement, sustain collaboration, communicate difficult decisions, and maintain faculty commitment to changing institutional demands. Emotional intelligence (EI) provides a framework for explaining these abilities, with basic formulations focusing on the appraisal, use, understanding, and regulation of emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2004; Mayer et al., 2008). EI has been studied in relation to leadership for over 20 years. The early studies on the workplace consequences of EI have focused on transformational behaviour and effectiveness as a leader (Wong & Law, 2002; Gardner & Stough, 2002; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Kerr et al., 2006; Harms & Credé, 2010; Gerhardt et al., 2025; Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2026); later meta-analyses and comprehensive reviews generally had positive findings but were inconsistent in their results. The literature has never been methodically uniform, however, at the same time. EI has been operationalized as ability, trait, emotional-social competence, and self-perceived competence and leadership has been measured by self-rated, follower rated, 360 degree feedback and outcome measures. These differences are important as they can make relationships look stronger with one type of measurement than with another (Antonakis et al., 2009; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010; Schutte et al., 1998; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Law et al., 2004; Bar-On, 2006; Davies et al., 1998).

Academic leadership creates a particularly important context for this debate. Universities and colleges are professional organisations in which faculty members possess substantial expertise and autonomy, making influence, collegiality, trust, and emotional regulation central to day-to-day leadership. Higher education research has examined EI among academic leaders, deans, and university administrators in multiple settings, including India, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and China (Parrish, 2015; George & Raghavendra, 2022; Malik & Kaur, 2026; Kalakesh & Hachana, 2026; Wolle, 2022; Degebas, 2023; Baba et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2026; Nasr Saeed et al., 2026; Tabors & Brewer, 2020). These studies suggest that EI is relevant to leadership style, competence, effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, and faculty-related outcomes; however, the mechanisms and measures are not consistent across contexts.

A second source of fragmentation concerns the downstream outcomes associated with leadership behaviour. General organisational research has established meaningful links between transformational leadership, task performance, contextual performance, and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and has differentiated in-role contribution from discretionary extra-

role behaviour (Podsakoff et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Nohe & Hertel, 2017; Williams & Anderson, 1991). Higher education research similarly connects leadership with faculty performance, psychological empowerment, OCB, team performance, institutional effectiveness, and related outcomes (Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Khandelwal & Nair, 2022; Nawaz & Gomes, 2018; Sharma & Kaur, 2024; Salisu, 2022; Abuowda et al., 2024). However, these outcomes are often examined separately from leader EI and academic leadership effectiveness, limiting the ability to see how emotional capabilities may be expressed through leadership behaviour and ultimately experienced in faculty work. Recent Indian evidence also reports positive associations between emotional intelligence and employee performance in banking and between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction among university teachers, while leadership, appraisal, and training practices have been linked with employee engagement in SMEs (Shakeel & Khan, 2023; Usmani et al., 2024; Awasthi et al., 2025).

Third, gender is a concern. Meta-analytic and empirical research indicates that gender differences in leadership behaviour and EI are generally small, variable, and context-sensitive rather than universal. Women have sometimes been found to display slightly more transformational or relational leadership behaviour, while EI-related differences depend on the measure and setting (Eagly et al., 2003; Hsu et al., 2022; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Recent educational-leadership synthesis likewise describes gender effects as modest and contingent (Mugabekazi et al., 2026). Accordingly, gender is better treated as a potential boundary condition that should be tested rather than assumed.

The present review examines these disorganised streams by posing the question of how EI moves from an individual emotional capacity to observable leadership actions, perceived academic leadership effectiveness, and faculty work outcomes. This is a critical statement and not a confirmational statement. Contradictory and mixed evidence is maintained, such as studies with dimension-specific, but not uniformly positive EI-leadership relationships, and stronger multi-rater studies reporting the absence of significant associations (Palmer et al., 2001; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010). This approach is relevant because the review aims to take 'beyond mere description' of both the relationship between EI and leadership and why results are not consistent across the different measurement models, sources of respondents, settings, and research designs.

The review is also set against the backdrop of current education and HE evidence. The systematic review of the school leadership and educational leadership literatures indicates that EI relates to transformational, instructional, and relational school leadership processes, which emphasise contextual constraints and measurement heterogeneity (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Hourani et al., 2021; Mugabekazi et al., 2026). Emotional and social skills research also shows

that these skills can be learned, applied, and assessed within particular behaviours or areas of behaviour instead of as a single, generalised personal skill (Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Sadri, 2012; Schlaerth et al., 2013). These streams collaborate for an integrative yet thoughtful examination of EI in academic leadership.

1.1 Theoretical framework of the Study

1.1.1 Emotional intelligence: ability, trait, mixed and workplace perspectives

The EI literature contains several conceptually distinct traditions. The original ability-oriented formulation treats EI as the capacity to process emotion-related information, later organised around perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2004; Mayer et al., 2008). This approach has theoretical precision, but ability measurement differs from self-perceived emotional competence. Trait EI places emotion-related self-perceptions within personality space, whereas mixed and emotional-social models incorporate broader interpersonal, adaptability, and stress-management competencies (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Bar-On, 2006). Early psychometric criticism showed that some EI measures lacked adequate reliability or discriminant validity, stimulating stronger validation work (Davies et al., 1998).

For organisational research, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) became influential because it operationalised workplace EI through four concise dimensions: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Subsequent construct-validity work supported the utility of this family of measurements for management research while also showing the need to distinguish EI from personality and other individual differences (Wong & Law, 2002; Law et al., 2004). Meta-analytic work confirms that conclusions about EI depend materially on whether EI is treated as an ability, self-report, or mixed construct (Joseph & Newman, 2010; O'Boyle et al., 2011). Therefore, measurement choice is not a technical afterthought; it is part of the substantive explanation for inconsistent leadership findings.

1.1.2 Full-Range Leadership Theory and behavioural expression of EI

Leadership style provides a plausible behavioural channel through which EI may become visible to followers. Full-Range Leadership Theory distinguishes transformational, transactional, and passive or *laissez-faire* patterns. Meta-analytic results indicate that transformational and contingent-reward behaviours tend to have positive and/or beneficial relationships with positive effectiveness and performance outcomes, while passive leadership is more likely to have weaker or negative relationships (Eagly et al., 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011). Emotion recognition and regulation, empathy, and motivational communication are commonly associated

with transformational behaviour, which may aid in vision, individual consideration, and constructive influence (Harms & Credé, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2017). However, this connection is not causal. Others have found that only some of the EI dimensions are related to selected leadership dimensions, and some high-quality multi-source designs have been unable to replicate the relationships found in same-source designs (Palmer et al., 2001; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010).

Therefore, the review treats leadership style as a candidate behavioural mechanism rather than proof that emotionally intelligent leaders must be transformational.

1.1.3 Social Exchange Theory and faculty work outcomes

The downstream part of the review is informed by social exchange theory logic: when faculty experience leadership as supportive, fair, trustworthy, and effective, they may reciprocate through stronger formal performance and discretionary contribution. The distinction between in-role behaviour and OCB is important because required task contribution and voluntary citizenship behaviour are related but conceptually different outcomes (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Meta-analytic evidence shows that OCB is associated with individual and organisational outcomes, and that transformational leadership can foster OCB through relational and attitudinal mechanisms (Podsakoff et al., 2009; Nohe & Hertel, 2017). In higher education, the same logic appears in studies linking academic, resonant, transformational, and e-leadership with faculty OCB, job performance, empowerment, and institutional functioning (Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Khandelwal & Nair, 2022; Sharma & Kaur, 2024; Salisu, 2022; Abuowda et al., 2024). Related Indian organisational research further shows that workplace-oriented HRM practices can influence employee efficiency and work performance, providing additional support for treating employee outcomes as downstream consequences of organisational practices (Bajpai et al., 2022).

1.1.4 An integrative logic for academic leadership effectiveness

Bringing these perspectives together produces an antecedent-mechanism-outcome logic. EI represents the leader's emotional capability or self-perceived emotional competence; leadership style represents observable behavioural expression; academic leadership effectiveness represents followers' judgement of how well the leader performs the academic leadership role; and faculty work outcomes represent downstream in-role and extra-role contribution. Gender may shape mean levels or the strength of selected relationships, while measurement approach, respondent source, culture, and institutional context may alter observed effect sizes. This integrative logic is consistent with mediation evidence in organisational teams and with newer private-university research showing that interpersonal relationships can transmit EI into leadership-related outcomes (Hur et al., 2011; Lam & O'Higgins, 2012; Sun et al., 2026).

Table 1. Theoretical foundations and their role in the review

Theoretical lens	Core proposition	Role in this review	Principal evidence
Ability/workplace EI	Emotions can be perceived, understood, used, and regulated; workplace self-perceptions can be organised into interpretable EI dimensions.	Explains EI as an upstream leader capability and frames the measurement differences.	Salovey & Mayer (1990); Mayer & Salovey (1997); Wong & Law (2002); Law et al. (2004)
Full-Range Leadership Theory	Leadership behaviours vary from transformational and transactional to passive/avoidant patterns.	It explains how EI may be expressed through leadership behaviour and connected with effectiveness.	Judge & Piccolo (2004); Harms & Credé (2010); Wang et al. (2011)
Social Exchange Theory logic	Favourable leader–follower exchanges can be reciprocated through task and discretionary contributions.	This explains why effective academic leadership may relate to faculty in-role performance and OCB.	Williams & Anderson (1991); Podsakoff et al. (2009); Nohe & Hertel (2017)

Source: Authors' compilation of the theoretical and empirical literature

1.2 Review questions

Following the conceptual logic above, this review addresses the following six questions:

RQ1. How has emotional intelligence been conceptualised and measured in higher education leadership research?

RQ2. What does existing evidence indicate about the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic leadership effectiveness?

RQ3. What role does leadership style play in the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic leadership effectiveness?

RQ4. How is academic leadership effectiveness associated with faculty work outcomes, including in-role contribution and organisational citizenship behaviour?

RQ5. What role does gender play in the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic leadership?

RQ6. What theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps remain in the existing evidence?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

This study utilised a systematic and critical review design to capture the evidence on emotional intelligence (EI), leadership behaviour, academic leadership effectiveness, faculty work outcomes, and gender in higher education. The review was conducted in line with the reporting process of PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021), including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of eligible publications. The orientation used was critical because the aim was not simply to gather supportive evidence but to compare positive, mixed, and null evidence and to test the validity of changes in the observed EI-leadership relationships due to the use of different measurement approaches, respondent sources, study designs, and institutional contexts.

The review combined foundational theory and psychometric evidence with empirical studies, meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and higher-education investigations. Foundational sources were retained to establish conceptual and measurement origins, whereas the substantive synthesis focused on publications that contributed directly to one or more review questions. The final evidence corpus comprised 70 publications after duplicate removal, relevance screening, and full-text eligibility assessment. Comparable interdisciplinary systematic reviews have also used structured screening, explicit eligibility criteria, and critical synthesis to integrate heterogeneous evidence while retaining methodological limitations (Khan et al., 2025).

2.2 Information sources and search strategy

A systematic search approach was used to locate scholarly literature on emotional intelligence, academic leadership, leadership effectiveness, leadership style, faculty work outcomes, and gender. The search was carried out in Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, ERIC, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and Emerald. Backward reference checking, forward citation tracking, and Google Scholar searching were conducted as supplementary searches. Seven complementary search families were used: (i) emotional intelligence and academic leadership; (ii) emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness; (iii) emotional intelligence and leadership style; (iv) leadership style as a mediator and/or explanatory mechanism; (v) academic leadership and faculty work contribution; (vi) emotional intelligence, leadership, and gender; and (vii) emotional intelligence and higher education in the Indian context. Boolean operators, phrase searching, and truncation were implemented in the syntax of individual databases. Foundational theoretical and psychometric publications were also included, with a priority given to those that were necessary to establish major conceptual or measurement traditions, and empirical and review evidence were

prioritised from 2000 to September 2026. A comparable systematic literature review in the Indian technology-policy context likewise used structured literature synthesis to identify trends and formulate a future research agenda (Kumar et al., 2025).

The search identified 486 records: Scopus (n = 118), Web of Science Core Collection (n = 96), ERIC (n = 74), PsycINFO (n = 59), ScienceDirect (n = 67), Emerald (n = 42), and supplementary or citation searching (n = 30). The distribution across databases reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the topic, which spans educational leadership, organisational behaviour, psychology, management, and higher-education research.

Table 2. Information sources and record identification

Information source	Records identified (n)
Scopus	118
Web of Science Core Collection	96
ERIC	74
PsycINFO	59
ScienceDirect	67
Emerald	42
Supplementary/citation searching	30
Total	486

Source: Authors' search framework.

2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Publications were eligible if they contributed directly to at least one review question concerning emotional intelligence, leadership behaviour, leadership effectiveness, faculty or employee work outcomes, gender, or the methodological measurement of these constructs. Peer-reviewed empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses were included in the substantive evidence synthesis. Foundational books, chapters, and psychometric publications were retained where they established major theories, conceptual distinctions, or measurement instruments required for the interpretation of the empirical evidence.

Studies involving academic leaders, higher-education administrators, faculty members, organisational leaders, managers, or work teams were eligible if their findings informed the conceptual relationships addressed in the review. Higher-education evidence was prioritised because the review is concerned specifically with academic leadership effectiveness. Studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on student emotional intelligence or academic achievement without leadership relevance, examined clinical or therapeutic emotional intelligence

without an organisational or educational leadership application, lacked sufficient scholarly or methodological transparency, represented duplicate or derivative versions of an already included publication, or were otherwise unrelated to the review questions. No study was excluded solely because it reported a non-significant or contradictory finding.

Table 3. Eligibility criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded/controlled
Publication type	Peer-reviewed empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and foundational theory and psychometric sources where necessary.	Blogs, promotional material, non-scholarly commentary, and unverifiable secondary sources.
Date	Foundational theory/measurement regardless of date; empirical and review evidence prioritised from 2000 to 2026.	No automatic exclusion of seminal older sources was performed.
Population/context	Academic leaders, higher-education administrators, faculty, organisational leaders, managers, and relevant work teams.	Student-only studies without leadership relevance; clinical contexts unrelated to organisational or educational leadership.
Construct relevance	EI, leadership style/effectiveness, faculty/employee work outcomes, gender, core measurement, and methodology.	Studies that do not contribute to the review questions.
Duplicate status	Primary verified publications were retained once.	Duplicate, derivative, or repeated versions of the same evidence.

Source: Authors' review protocol and study-specific eligibility criteria.

2.4 Study identification, screening and selection

All records retrieved from the electronic databases and supplementary searches were merged into a master screening file. Duplicate records were identified through title, author, publication year, and DOI or other source identifiers. Of the 486 records initially identified, 131 duplicates were removed, leaving 355 unique records for title and abstract screening.

Screening was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were assessed against the predefined eligibility criteria. A total of 214 records were excluded because they were clearly unrelated to emotional intelligence, leadership, higher education, faculty outcomes, gender, or the methodological focus of the review. This left 141 reports to be sought for retrieval. Eleven reports could not be obtained in a form suitable for full-text assessment, leaving 130 full-text reports for detailed eligibility review.

At the full-text stage, 60 reports were excluded for documented reasons: insufficient relevance to emotional intelligence or leadership ($n = 15$), inappropriate population or organisational/educational context ($n = 16$), absence of a relevant leadership or faculty outcome ($n = 10$), insufficient methodological transparency ($n = 8$), ineligible publication type ($n = 6$), and duplicate or derivative publication identified during full-text checking ($n = 5$). The final corpus comprised 70 publications included in the systematic and critical synthesis. The identification and selection process is presented in Figure 1.

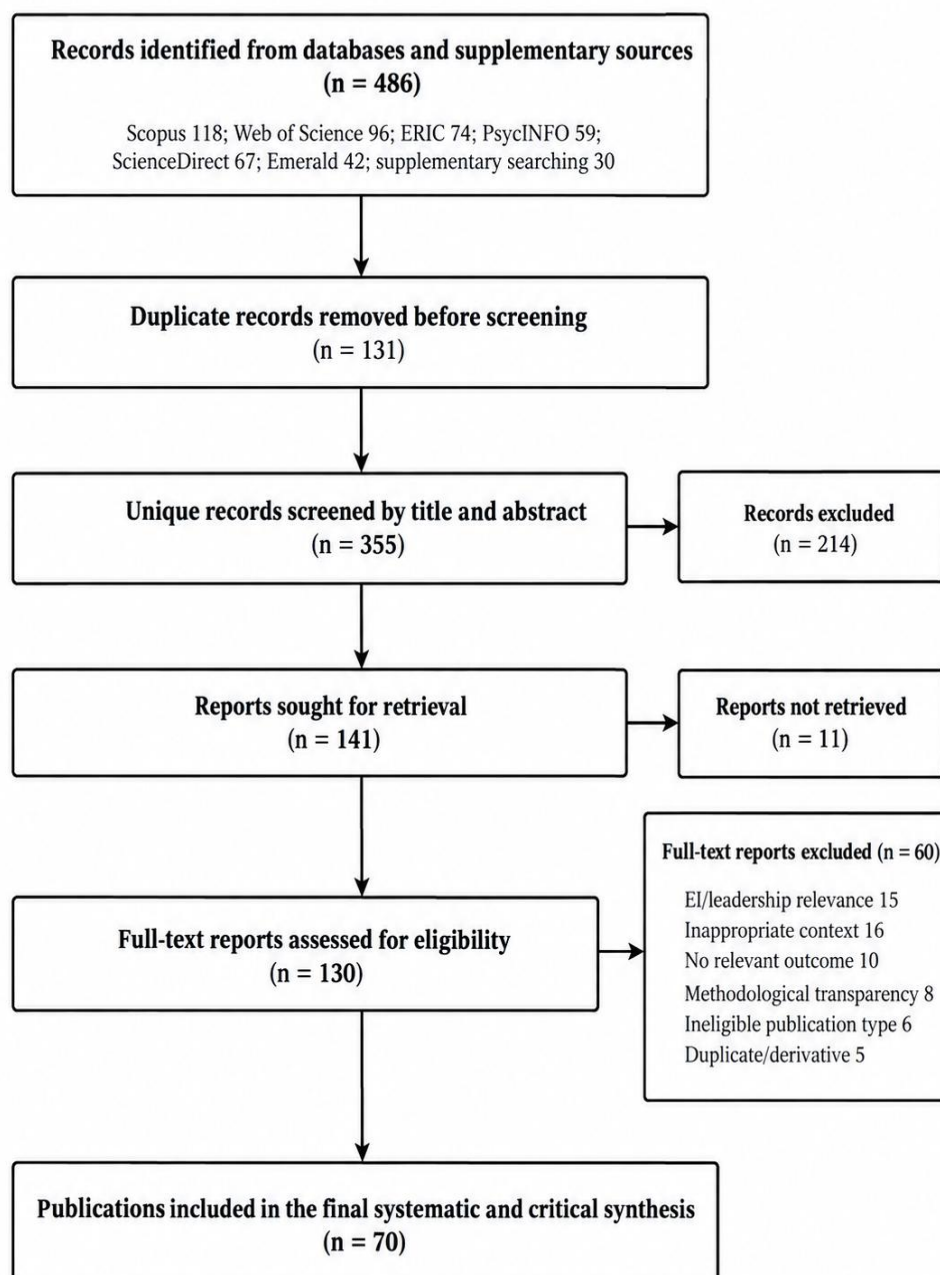


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow of study identification and selection.

Source: Authors' screening framework.

2.4.1 Screening consistency and decision rules

Screening decisions were evaluated against predefined eligibility criteria and recorded in the screening log. Title and abstract screening was followed by a full-text assessment of potentially eligible publications. Uncertain cases were re-examined according to the eligibility rules before a final decision was made. This procedure reduced arbitrary inclusion and preserved an auditable decision path from identification to the final inclusion.

2.5 Data extraction and coding

A structured extraction framework was used for all included publications. Extracted information included the author and year, country or region, organisational or higher-education context, study design, sample characteristics, respondent source, EI conceptualisation and measurement approach, leadership construct and measure, faculty or employee outcome, treatment of gender, statistical method, principal findings, and reported limitations. Each publication was also coded according to the review question and thematic stream to which it contributed.

Particular attention was given to the respondent source and measurement design because EI leadership relationships can differ substantially depending on whether the predictor and outcome measures originate from the same respondent. Studies using follower ratings, 360-degree ratings, supervisor-rated outcomes, dyadic designs, or other source-separated approaches were distinguished from studies relying predominantly on same-source self-report data. This coding made it possible to treat methodological characteristics as explanatory conditions, rather than minor reporting details.

2.6 Data synthesis

Given the conceptual and methodological heterogeneity of the included literature, a thematic and critical synthesis was used rather than a new pooled meta-analysis. Evidence was first organised according to the six review questions. Within each theme, studies were compared in relation to the direction and consistency of findings, EI measurement approach, leadership construct, respondent source, institutional setting, and research design.

Supportive evidence was considered alongside null and contradictory findings. Differences in measurement, respondent source, and context were used diagnostically to explain why apparently similar studies sometimes reached different conclusions. Higher education and Indian evidence were examined explicitly rather than assuming that findings from general organisational settings transferred unchanged to academic environments. The final stage of synthesis integrated the

evidence into a framework linking EI, leadership style, academic leadership effectiveness, and faculty work outcomes, while treating gender, measurement approach, respondent source, institutional context, culture, and research design as potential boundary conditions. Recent PRISMA-guided review and meta-analytic work further illustrates the value of transparent screening and explicit treatment of heterogeneity when synthesising diverse evidence (Mazhar et al., 2026).

2.7 Quality appraisal

Methodological quality was considered during evidence interpretation rather than assigning all publications equal evidentiary weight. Appraisal focused on conceptual clarity, appropriateness of the EI measure, appropriateness of the leadership or outcome measure, adequacy of the sample and research design, separation of respondent sources, transparency of the analytical procedure, and consistency between the stated research question and reported conclusion.

Particular interpretive weight was given to multi-source designs, longitudinal evidence, meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and studies that provided clear measurement-validity evidence. Cross-sectional and same-source studies were not automatically excluded because they constitute a substantial proportion of the available literature, but their limitations were explicitly considered when assessing the strength and consistency of conclusions. Methodological quality was evaluated independently of whether a study reported a positive, mixed, or non-significant result.

2.8 Reliability and validity of the review process

The screening log recorded the pathway from identification to final inclusion. Conceptual distinctions among EI, leadership style, and leadership effectiveness/faculty work outcomes were maintained within the review, protecting from the risk of construct validity. The review also identified same-source and source-separated evidence as different types, as common-method variance has the potential to significantly affect the associations observed. When used directly, multi-source, follower-rated, and systematic or meta-analytic evidence was treated as more interpretable, justifying its use in the review question. These processes helped to enhance the clarity and critical comparability of the evidence base.

The review also distinguished same-source from source-separated evidence because common-method variance can materially influence observed associations. Therefore, multi-source, follower-rated, and systematic or meta-analytic evidence received greater interpretive weight when directly relevant to a review question. These procedures improved the transparency and critical comparability of the evidence base.

2.9 Methodological limitations of the review

There are a number of caveats. First, the review is dominated by English-language peer-reviewed publications, and there is a potential for bias in languages and publications. Second, the second aspect of EI comes in terms of ability, trait, mixed, and workplace self-report approaches, and leadership outcomes in the form of behavioural style, competence, effectiveness, performance, and organisational citizenship behaviour. This heterogeneity makes it difficult to compare studies directly in quantitative terms.

Third, evidence on higher education remains smaller than the broader organisational literature, requiring caution when transferring findings from corporate or general managerial settings to academic leadership. Fourth, much of the available empirical evidence is cross-sectional, limiting temporal and causal inference. These limitations were incorporated into the interpretation of the evidence and into the development of future research priorities.

3. Findings and results

3.1 Characteristics of the evidence base

The final evidence corpus contained 70 unique publications. Twenty-seven were foundational or pre-2010 sources, 19 were published between 2010 and 2019, and 24 were published from 2020 through September 2026. The temporal distribution is useful because it combines the theoretical and psychometric origins of EI with recent higher-education, Indian, and private-university evidence. The corpus includes conceptual articles, scale-development and validation studies, cross-sectional surveys, qualitative studies, multi-source designs, multilevel analyses, meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and comprehensive critical reviews.

Direct higher-education evidence is geographically diverse. The corpus includes studies of academic leadership or faculty outcomes in South and North India, Ethiopia, Lebanon, China, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and other educational settings. Particularly relevant studies include academic leadership in India (George & Raghavendra, 2022; Malik & Kaur, 2026; Baba et al., 2021; Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Khandelwal & Nair, 2022; Nawaz & Gomes, 2018), university leadership and effectiveness in Ethiopia (Wolle, 2022; Degebas, 2023), private-university evidence from China and Lebanon (Kalakesh & Hachana, 2026; Sun et al., 2026), academic deans (Tabors & Brewer, 2020), university leaders and faculty satisfaction (Nasr Saeed et al., 2026), and faculty OCB or performance studies across higher-education contexts (Khassawneh et al., 2022; Sharma & Kaur, 2024; Salisu, 2022; Abuowda et al., 2024).

Table 4. Selected higher-education studies in the evidence corpus

Study	Context / sample	Focus	Main contribution to the review
Parrish (2015)	Higher education; academic leaders	EI and academic leadership	Shows the perceived relevance of empathy, guidance, and self-management to effective academic leadership.
George & Raghavendra (2022)	South India; 352 faculty	Emotionally intelligent academic leadership	Links emotionally intelligent academic leadership to constructive faculty outcomes.
Malik & Kaur (2026)	Haryana; 493 faculty/academic leaders across 12 HEIs + interviews	EI, OCB and leadership effectiveness	shows EI predicting OCB and OCB mediating the emotional intelligence-effectiveness relationship.
Kalakesh & Hachana (2026)	Private Lebanese HEI; 25 department heads	EI and leadership style	EI is described as relational/situational and transformational leadership as frequently preferred.
Wolle (2022)	Five Ethiopian universities	EI and leadership effectiveness	Leader EI predicts follower-perceived leadership effectiveness.
Degebas (2023)	Seven Ethiopian universities	EI and leadership competence	EI predicts leadership competence beyond demographic and personality factors.
Sun et al. (2026)	12 Chinese private universities; 637 academics	EI, interpersonal relationships, teacher leadership	Interpersonal relationships partially mediate EI-teacher leadership association.
Tabors & Brewer (2020)	Academic deans	EI and leadership effectiveness	EI is a significant indicator of the leadership effectiveness of deans.
Ludwikowska et al. (2025)	India; 826 educators	Academic leadership, OCB and performance	It links academic leadership and job performance through OCB.

Source: Authors' compilation

3.2 RQ1: Conceptualisation and measurement of emotional intelligence in higher-education leadership research

The literature reflects multiple conceptual and measurement traditions of emotional intelligence. Foundational ability theory defines EI in terms of emotion-related information processing, particularly perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Salovey &

Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2004; Mayer et al., 2008). Trait EI focuses on self-perceptions associated with emotions in the context of personality space (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), and the Bar-On model broadens the construct to emotional-social functioning, adaptability, and stress management (Bar-On, 2006). This is significant because a common EI label is cited in the field of leadership studies, and different psychological constructs are operationalised. In addition, psychometric evidence also records the evolution of the construct. There were a few early concerns raised by Davies et al. (1998) regarding the reliability and discriminant validity of several EI measures, while Schutte et al. (1998) provided an early self-report instrument, and Wong and Law (2002) later provided a concise workplace-oriented EI four-factor measure was provided by Wong and Law (2002). Evidence for construct and criterion validity of the EI construct in management studies was later reported by Law et al. (2004). Furthermore, ability, self-report, and mixed EI streams are distinct, as demonstrated in a meta-analytic synthesis by Joseph and Newman (2010), which highlights the importance of specifying exactly what is being measured; not all EI scores are the same.

This measurement diversity extends to leadership research. Some studies use ability-oriented emotion recognition or MSCEIT-type measures; others use self-report workplace or trait-based instruments; still others study emotional and social competencies. Côté et al. link EI with leadership emergence in small groups; Rubin et al. focus on emotion recognition and personality; Ryan et al. analyse emotional, social, and cognitive competencies among high-performing executives; and Clarke examines EI alongside transformational leadership and project-management competence (Côté et al., 2010; Rubin et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2009; Clarke, 2010). Riggio and Reichard further conceptualise effective leadership through emotional and social skill domains (Riggio & Reichard, 2008).

Higher-education studies similarly vary in EI operationalisation. This measurement heterogeneity has two important implications. First, apparent differences in effect size may reflect measurement rather than substantive context. Second, self-reported EI is best interpreted as perceived emotional competence unless an objective ability test is used. The review therefore favours precise language: ability EI, trait EI, mixed emotional-social competence, or self-perceived workplace EI. Such precision is necessary if future studies are to compare academic leaders across institutions or test measurement invariance across gender and cultural groups.

Table 5. EI conceptualisations and measurement implications

EI approach	Representative sources	Strength for leadership research	Main caution
Ability EI	Salovey & Mayer (1990); Mayer & Salovey (1997); Mayer et al. (2004, 2008)	Clear cognitive-emotional ability framework	Ability tests differ from self-perceived competence and may show different leadership associations than self-assessments.
Self-report / workplace EI	Wong & Law (2002); Law et al. (2004)	Concise organisational measurement; directly relevant to workplace self-perceptions.	Leadership is subject to self-perception and common-method effects if rated by the same respondent.
Trait EI	Petrides & Furnham (2001)	Locates emotional self-perceptions within the personality structure.	Conceptually, EI is closer to personality than to ability.
Mixed emotional-social models	Bar-On (2006)	Captures broader interpersonal, adaptability and stress-management competencies.	Breadth can reduce the discriminant precision.
Early broad self-report measures	Schutte et al. (1998)	It is historically important and widely used.	Later psychometric debates require careful interpretation of constructs.

Source: Authors' synthesis of the emotional intelligence theory, measurement, and psychometric literature included in the review.

3.3 RQ2: Emotional intelligence and academic leadership effectiveness

Across general organisational settings, the balance of evidence supports a positive relationship between EI and leader effectiveness; however, this relationship is not uniformly strong. Rosete and Ciarrochi found that EI was associated with leadership effectiveness beyond personality and cognitive ability in a senior-executive sample, while Kerr et al. reported that selected EI abilities predicted subordinate-rated leadership effectiveness (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Kerr et al., 2006). Koman and Wolff extended this discussion to team leadership, showing that emotional competencies at the leader and team levels matter for performance (Koman & Wolff, 2008).

Higher education evidence generally points in the same direction. Parrish identified empathy, inspiring and guiding others, and responsible self-management as highly relevant to effective academic leadership (Parrish, 2015). Wolle reported that leader EI is strongly related to and predictive of subordinate-perceived leadership effectiveness across Ethiopian universities, while Degebas found that EI positively predicts leadership competence in higher education (Wolle, 2022; Degebas, 2023). Tabors and Brewer similarly identified EI as a significant indicator of

academic deans' leadership effectiveness (Tabors & Brewer, 2020). Indian evidence links emotionally intelligent academic leadership with constructive faculty outcomes and, more recently, places OCB within the EI-leadership effectiveness relationship (George & Raghavendra, 2022; Malik & Kaur, 2026).

Comprehensive review evidence nevertheless cautions against a simple causal conclusion. Gerhardt et al. concluded that leader EI is generally associated with relational leadership styles and leader effectiveness but emphasised unresolved measurement distinctiveness and causal direction (Gerhardt et al., 2025). Antonakis et al. question whether leadership research sometimes attributes too much explanatory power to EI when cognitive ability, personality, and method variance are not sufficiently controlled (Antonakis et al., 2009). Taken together, these critiques suggest that EI should be interpreted as a potentially relevant leadership characteristic whose observed association with effectiveness is contingent on measurement and research design.

Contradictory findings reinforce this cautious interpretation. Palmer et al. reported that the overall EI-transformational leadership relationship was not uniformly strong, with only selected EI dimensions relating to selected leadership components (Palmer et al., 2001). Lindebaum and Cartwright (2010), using a stronger multi-rater design, found no EI-transformational leadership relationship and demonstrated how common method conditions can shape conclusions (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010). Thus, academic leadership effectiveness should ideally be rated by followers or other observers rather than inferred from the leader's self-assessment of leadership.

Table 6. Synthesis of EI and leadership-effectiveness evidence

Evidence stream	Overall pattern	Key qualification
General leader effectiveness	Mostly positive associations between EI and effectiveness-related outcomes were found.	Samples and EI measures vary, and many studies remain correlational.
Higher education	Positive evidence from academic leaders, deans, and university contexts.	Leadership competence/effectiveness measures are not standardised across studies.
Multi-source evidence	Follower/360-degree designs provide a stronger outcome separation.	Effects can be smaller than the same-source estimates.
Critical evidence	Null and dimension-specific findings were also observed.	Method variance, EI operationalisation, and omitted traits can alter conclusions.

Source: Authors' synthesis of the reviewed evidence on emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness.

3.4 RQ3: Leadership style as a behavioural mechanism between EI and academic leadership effectiveness

Leadership style is the most extensively examined behavioural mechanism linking EI with leadership outcomes. Gardner and Stough reported a strong positive relationship between EI and transformational leadership dimensions among senior managers (Gardner & Stough, 2002). Barling et al. similarly associated higher EI with idealised influence, inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, and contingent reward, although not every leadership dimension is related to EI (Barling et al., 2000). Leban and Zulauf showed that EI abilities contribute to transformational leadership style and are also linked with project performance, while Rubin et al. identified emotion recognition, positive affectivity, and agreeableness as predictors of transformational behaviour (Leban & Zulauf, 2004; Rubin et al., 2005).

Meta-analytic and review evidence confirms an overall positive EI-transformational leadership relationship but also reveals source sensitivity and heterogeneity. Harms and Credé (2010) show that associations are much stronger when EI and leadership are rated by the same source than when different sources are used (Harms & Credé, 2010). The results of most empirical studies are positive, although Kim and Kim (2017) note measurement issues, and a large minority of the studies dispute the relationship, with part of the reason for the inconsistencies being due to measurement and methodological differences (Korakis & Poulaki, 2025). Paredes-Saavedra et al. (2026) report positive pooled relationships between EI, transformational leadership, and team effectiveness, as well as moderate-to-high levels of heterogeneity. The mediation models compare the predictive power of leadership behaviours and how much this accounts for the overall correlation between EI and selected outcomes.

Hur et al. (2011) find that transformational leadership mediates the EI relationships with leader effectiveness and service climate, although not all team outcomes (Hur et al., 2011). Lam and O'Higgins (2012) similarly report full mediation of EI to job satisfaction through transformational leadership, but not across every employee outcome (Lam & O'Higgins, 2012). These findings suggest a plausible pathway rather than a universal mechanism. Cross-sectional mediation cannot establish temporal causation, and different outcomes may be transmitted through different interpersonal processes.

Higher education research is beginning to address this mechanism. Baba et al. found that EI is significantly associated with transformational leadership among academic leaders in institutions of higher learning (Baba et al., 2021). Kalakesh and Hachana showed that leaders in a private

Lebanese HEI describe EI as a relational and situational competence intertwined with leadership style, with transformational leadership frequently preferred (Kalakesh & Hachana, 2026). Sun et al. showed in Chinese private universities that EI predicts teacher leadership and that interpersonal relationships partially mediate the association (Sun et al., 2026). Although the mediator is not leadership style, this study demonstrates that EI can reach leadership outcomes through an interpersonal mechanism in private higher education.

Gender also intersects with leadership styles. Mandell and Pherwani (2003) reported that EI significantly predicted transformational leadership and that EI differed by gender; however, their EI-by-gender interaction did not significantly predict transformational leadership (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Hsu et al. identified EI as one pathway associated with the modest female transformational leadership advantage, while emphasising that the indirect advantage is small and complex (Hsu et al., 2022). This evidence supports the notion of treating gender as a potential boundary condition rather than assuming that one gender is inherently more emotionally intelligent or effective.

Additional evidence identifies leader–member exchange, conflict management, and developmental leadership as further relational expressions associated with EI. Sears and Holmvall showed that supervisor and subordinate EI jointly influence leader–member exchange (Sears & Holmvall, 2010). Schlaerth et al. reported a meta-analytic relationship between EI and constructive conflict management (Schlaerth et al., 2013), while Sadri discussed EI in leadership development (Sadri, 2012). These streams reinforce the idea that the behavioural expression of EI is relational; it can appear through influence, exchange quality, conflict management, and developmental leadership, not only through a transformational-leadership score.

Table 7. Leadership style as a behavioural mechanism

Mechanism evidence	Finding	Implication for higher education
EI → transformational leadership	Generally positive results have been reported across many studies and reviews.	Emotionally competent academic leaders may express EI through vision, consideration, and motivational behaviour.
Same-source vs different-source	The associations were stronger under same-source measurements.	Faculty-rated style is preferable when leaders self-rate their EI.
Transformational leadership mediation	Indirect effects appear for some outcomes, but not all.	Leadership style should be tested as a mechanism and not assumed to mediate.

Mechanism evidence	Finding	Implication for higher education
Interpersonal relationships in private universities	Partial mediation between EI and teacher leadership	Supports broader relational pathways in private higher HEIs.
Null / mixed evidence	Some multi-rater studies have reported weak or non-significant EI-style links.	Critical synthesis and measurement control are thus necessary.

Source: Authors' synthesis of reviewed evidence on emotional intelligence, leadership style, and mediating mechanisms.

3.5 RQ4: Academic leadership effectiveness and faculty work outcomes

Faculty outcome research extends leadership evaluation from follower perceptions to behavioural consequences, including formal task performance and discretionary citizenship behaviour. A useful starting point is the distinction between formal in-role performance and discretionary extra-role or citizenship behaviours. Williams and Anderson (1991) demonstrated that supervisor-rated in-role behaviour and forms of OCB are empirically distinguishable, providing a measurement basis for treating faculty work contributions as multidimensional (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Podsakoff et al. (2009) showed meta-analytically that OCB is meaningfully related to individual performance evaluations and organizational-level outcomes (Podsakoff et al., 2009).

Meta-analytic evidence also associates EI with employee task performance and discretionary work behaviour. O'Boyle et al. (2011) report positive associations between different EI streams and job performance (O'Boyle et al., 2011), while Miao et al. (2017) find that EI is positively related to OCB and negatively related to counterproductive behaviour (Miao et al., 2017). A cross-cultural meta-analysis further indicates that leader EI predicts subordinate task performance and OCB, with the strength of relationships varying across cultures (Miao et al., 2018). These results support the broader proposition that emotional capabilities can matter downstream, but they do not specify whether academic leadership effectiveness is the intervening leadership outcome.

Leadership research provides complementary evidence linking leader characteristics and behaviours with employee and faculty outcomes. Wang et al. report that transformational leadership is positively related to performance across criteria and levels, with particularly meaningful links to contextual performance (Wang et al., 2011). Nohe and Hertel show that transformational leadership relates positively to OCB through relational and attitudinal mechanisms (Nohe & Hertel, 2017). Miao et al. additionally demonstrate that leader EI is associated with subordinate job satisfaction through mediator and moderator processes (Miao et al., 2016). Together, these studies support a sequence in which leader characteristics and

behaviours are experienced by followers and then reflected in attitudinal or behavioural contributions.

Higher-education studies reinforce the relevance of this downstream logic. George and Raghavendra linked emotionally intelligent academic leadership with constructive faculty outcomes in South India (George & Raghavendra, 2022). Khassawneh et al. reported significant relationships between EI dimensions and educator performance (Khassawneh et al., 2022), while Nasr Saeed et al. showed that faculty perceptions of leaders’ emotional and social intelligence are associated with job satisfaction (Nasr Saeed et al., 2026). These studies connect emotional competence with faculty outcomes but use different causal ordering and rating sources.

A second cluster of higher-education studies focuses directly on leadership and OCB. Kranthi et al. connect resonant leadership with psychological empowerment and learning-organisation outcomes among Indian faculty (Kranthi et al., 2024). Ludwikowska et al. report that academic leadership is associated with job performance, with OCB operating as an explanatory mechanism (Ludwikowska et al., 2025). Khandelwal and Nair find that teacher OCB is positively related to perceived institutional effectiveness across state and private universities (Khandelwal & Nair, 2022), while Nawaz and Gomes connect OCB with team performance in Indian higher education (Nawaz & Gomes, 2018). Sharma and Kaur, Salisu, and Abuowda et al. likewise report positive links between leadership forms and OCB in higher-education settings (Sharma & Kaur, 2024; Salisu, 2022; Abuowda et al., 2024). Lee et al. further show that transformational leadership relates to OCB through trustworthiness and trust in team leaders (Lee et al., 2024).

The direction of these models varies. Some position OCB as a mediator from leadership to performance; others treat OCB as a predictor of institutional effectiveness; still others examine leadership as an antecedent of OCB. This variation means that a review should not collapse “faculty outcomes” into one causal chain. A more defensible conclusion is that effective, trustworthy, and relational leadership is consistently associated with stronger discretionary contribution, while the temporal order among effectiveness, OCB, and performance remains under-tested in longitudinal higher-education research.

Table 8. Leadership and faculty work outcomes

Outcome stream	Representative evidence	Synthesis
In-role / task performance	Williams & Anderson (1991); O'Boyle et al. (2011); Wang et al. (2011); Miao et al. (2018)	Task contribution is distinct from OCB and is positively associated with EI and leadership in several settings.

Outcome stream	Representative evidence	Synthesis
OCB / contextual contribution	Podsakoff et al. (2009); Miao et al. (2017); Nohe & Hertel (2017)	OCB is meaningfully related to leadership and organisational outcomes.
Indian higher education	George & Raghavendra (2022); Kranthi et al. (2024); Ludwikowska et al. (2025); Khandelwal & Nair (2022); Nawaz & Gomes (2018)	Leadership, empowerment, and OCB are connected with faculty and institutional outcomes.
Other HEI contexts	Salisu (2022); Abuowda et al. (2024); Malik & Kaur (2026)	Leadership and EI are linked to lecturer/faculty OCB and effectiveness-related outcomes.

Source: Authors' synthesis of reviewed literature on in-role performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, and related faculty work outcomes.

3.6 RQ5: Gender in emotional intelligence and academic leadership relationships

Gender evidence is best characterised as modest, variable, and contingent. Eagly et al.'s meta-analysis shows women to be slightly more transformational and contingent-reward oriented and men somewhat more passive or laissez-faire, but the differences are generally small (Eagly et al., 2003). Mandell and Pherwani find gender differences in EI but not in transformational-leadership scores, and their interaction test does not show gender significantly changing the EI-transformational leadership relationship (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). These results caution against inferring moderation merely because mean EI scores differ.

Hsu et al. provide a more nuanced meta-analytic model in which EI contributes to a modest female advantage in transformational leadership, but the indirect pathway is small and complex rather than deterministic (Hsu et al., 2022). Recent educational leadership synthesis similarly concludes that gender-related EI patterns exist in some contexts but are modest and context-dependent (Mugabekazi et al., 2026). Therefore, future academic leadership research should address three questions: whether EI differs by gender; whether effectiveness differs by gender; and whether the structural relationship between EI and effectiveness differs by gender. The third question requires formal group comparison or moderation procedures and, where latent constructs are used, measurement invariance.

Higher-education evidence does not justify essentialist claims about male or female leaders. Academic leadership is shaped by role expectations, institutional culture, disciplinary norms, and opportunities for leadership development. Baba et al. reported demographic influences on perceptions of academic leaders' EI and transformational leadership; however, the study did not establish that gender changed the EI-effectiveness path (Baba et al., 2021). Therefore, this review treats gender as a boundary condition to be tested, not a fixed explanation.

3.7 RQ6: Theoretical, methodological and contextual gaps

Six gaps recurred across the evidence. The first of these is conceptual integration. There is more than just bivariate associations between EI and leadership; the more substantive gap is between the integration of EI, leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and faculty outcomes. The narrower gap relates to the weak integration of EI, leadership style, academic leadership effectiveness, and faculty contribution under a unified program, especially in higher education (Gerhardt et al., 2025; Malik & Kaur, 2026; Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2026). The second is the mechanism. Research in organizational settings has explored transformational leadership as a mediator between leader and follower EI and academic leadership effectiveness; the concept of interpersonal mediation has been validated in newer research conducted in private universities; however, the specific pathway between leader EI and follower-rated academic leadership effectiveness is relatively under-tested (Hur et al., 2011; Lam & O'Higgins, 2012; Sun et al., 2026).

The third is respondent source. Same-source designs can materially inflate EI-leadership associations (Harms & Credé, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Lindebaum and Cartwright's multi-rater work shows why stronger source separation can change substantive conclusions (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010). A leader self-rating EI while faculty rate leadership style and effectiveness is therefore methodologically preferable to having leaders self-rate every construct.

The fourth gap concerns outcomes. General organisational research already connects EI and leadership with performance and OCB, and higher education evidence increasingly does the same. The underdeveloped question is how follower-perceived academic leadership effectiveness connects with faculty work contribution when the contribution is rated by a separate source (Miao et al., 2018; Ludwikowska et al., 2025).

The fifth gap concerns contextual specificity. Indian higher education evidence is now established, but integrated multi-source models remain limited. Studies from South India, North India, and broader Indian HEI samples address emotionally intelligent academic leadership, transformational leadership, OCB, psychological empowerment, job performance, and institutional effectiveness (George & Raghavendra, 2022; Malik & Kaur, 2026; Baba et al., 2021; Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Khandelwal & Nair, 2022; Nawaz & Gomes, 2018). Accordingly, a defensible contribution must be framed as a specific integration of model, source separation, and institutional context rather than as the discovery of EI in Indian higher education.

The sixth gap concerns causal language. Most studies are cross-sectional. Even sophisticated SEM or bootstrapped mediation cannot establish temporal causation without an appropriate

design. Therefore, the field needs more longitudinal, intervention, and repeated-measures work, especially in academic leadership contexts (Gerhardt et al., 2025).

Table 9. Critical gap synthesis

Gap	What is already established	What remains under-developed
Conceptual	EI relates to leadership style and effectiveness across many settings.	Integrated EI → style → academic effectiveness → faculty outcome models.
Mechanism	Transformational/interpersonal mediation has been studied in some studies.	Source-separated tests of leadership style as an academic mechanism
Methodological	Same-source inflation is well-documented in the literature.	Dyadic/multi-source academic leadership designs
Outcome	Leadership is related to performance and OCB.	Follower-rated effectiveness linked to leader-rated faculty contributions.
Gender	The mean/style differences are generally modest and context-sensitive.	Formal tests of gender as a boundary condition after the measurement invariance.
Context	Evidence from Indian HEI exists.	Private HEI, regionally specific, integrated multi-source evidence.
Causal interpretation	Cross-sectional associations are also common.	Longitudinal and intervention-based academic leadership research

Source: Authors' critical synthesis

4. Discussion

This systematic and critical review examined how emotional intelligence (EI) is conceptualised and measured in leadership research, how it relates to academic leadership effectiveness, whether leadership style operates as a behavioural mechanism, how leadership is connected with faculty work outcomes, and how gender and methodological conditions shape the observed relationships. The findings do not support a simple claim that higher EI automatically produces more effective academic leadership. Rather, the evidence indicates a layered and method-sensitive relationship in which emotional capabilities may influence leadership behaviour, follower perceptions of effectiveness, and downstream faculty outcomes, while the magnitude and consistency of these associations depend on construct definition, respondent source, institutional setting, and research design.

4.1 Integration with theoretical frameworks

This review supports a layered interpretation of EI in academic leadership. Ability-oriented EI theory explains emotional information processing, including the perception, use, understanding, and regulation of emotion (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2004; Mayer et al., 2008). Workplace and self-report approaches, including the WLEIS tradition, capture leaders' perceived competence in understanding and managing emotions in organisational settings (Wong & Law, 2002; Law et al., 2004). Trait and emotional-social models broaden the construct toward personality-related self-perceptions, adaptability, interpersonal functioning, and stress management (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Bar-On, 2006). These traditions are related but not interchangeable, and the review confirms that conclusions about EI and leadership partly depend on which tradition is used.

Full-range leadership theory provides the behavioural layer of the proposed explanation. Transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership patterns describe how a leader behaves rather than what the leader possesses psychologically. This distinction is important because EI should not be treated as synonymous with transformational leadership. Emotionally competent leaders may be more capable of empathy, motivational communication, and constructive relationship management, yet the translation of these capabilities into observable leadership behaviour remains an empirical question rather than a theoretical certainty (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Harms & Credé, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2017).

Social Exchange Theory provides the downstream logic connecting leadership with faculty contributions. When faculty members perceive their academic leader as fair, trustworthy, supportive, and effective, reciprocal processes may encourage stronger formal task performance

and discretionary contributions. This interpretation is consistent with the distinction between in-role behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and with meta-analytic evidence linking transformational leadership, trust, and OCB (Williams & Anderson, 1991; Podsakoff et al., 2009; Nohe & Hertel, 2017; Lee et al., 2024). In higher education, this logic is especially relevant because academic work combines formal duties with substantial discretionary effort in mentoring, collaboration, curriculum development, institutional service, and collegial support.

Taken together, the three theoretical perspectives are complementary. EI explains an upstream emotional capability, Full-Range Leadership Theory explains the behavioural expression of leadership, and Social Exchange Theory explains how effective leadership may be reciprocated through faculty contributions. The value of the integrative model therefore lies in linking the frameworks while preserving discriminant boundaries among the constructs.

4.2 From emotional intelligence to academic leadership effectiveness

The central substantive conclusion is that EI is plausibly relevant to academic leadership effectiveness, but its contribution is conditional rather than universal. Evidence from academic leaders, university administrators, and deans indicates that emotion-related capabilities are associated with leadership effectiveness, competence, relationship management, and constructive faculty outcomes (Parrish, 2015; Tabors & Brewer, 2020; Wolle, 2022; Degebas, 2023; George & Raghavendra, 2022). Recent evidence from Indian and international higher education settings extends this pattern by linking EI with organisational citizenship behaviour, interpersonal relationships, and leadership-related outcomes (Malik & Kaur, 2026; Sun et al., 2026; Nasr Saeed et al., 2026). Within the Indian context, emotional intelligence has also been positively associated with employee performance in banking and job satisfaction among higher-education teachers, extending its relevance beyond leader ratings to employee and faculty outcomes (Shakeel & Khan, 2023; Usmani et al., 2024).

At the same time, the review does not support treating EI as a sufficient explanation of effective leadership. Critical studies demonstrate that cognitive ability, personality, measurement overlap, and common-method variance can influence observed EI-leadership relationships (Antonakis et al., 2009; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010). Accordingly, EI is best understood as one leadership-relevant capability among several rather than as a substitute for academic expertise, strategic judgement, integrity, professional credibility, or institutional knowledge.

This qualification is particularly important in higher education. Academic leaders frequently exercise influence in settings where formal authority is constrained by professional autonomy and

disciplinary expertise. The emotional demands of collegial leadership, conflict resolution, and faculty engagement may therefore make EI especially relevant; however, these same environments also require technical, strategic, and governance competencies that cannot be reduced to emotional capability. The practical implication is that leadership selection and development should integrate EI with broader academic and managerial competence rather than using EI as a stand-alone screening criterion.

4.3 Leadership style as the behavioural pathway

Leadership style emerges as the most plausible behavioural mechanism connecting EI with effectiveness. Transformational leadership has received the strongest empirical attention. Its emphasis on vision, inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, and constructive influence is conceptually compatible with emotion appraisal, regulation, and interpersonal sensitivity. A substantial body of empirical and meta-analytic research reports positive EI-transformational leadership associations (Barling et al., 2000; Gardner & Stough, 2002; Leban & Zulauf, 2004; Harms & Credé, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2017; Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, this relationship is neither uniform nor methodologically neutral. Harms and Credé (2010) show that EI-leadership relationships are markedly stronger when both variables are obtained from the same source. Lindebaum and Cartwright (2010), using a stronger multi-rater design, report non-significant associations, while Palmer et al. (2001) find only dimension-specific relationships. These results indicate that leadership style should be treated as a testable behavioural pathway rather than assumed to be the inevitable expression of EI.

This review also supports a full-range rather than transformational-only perspective. Effective academic leadership can require contingent reinforcement, monitoring, boundary setting, corrective action, and decisive intervention, as well as inspirational and relational behaviour. Transactional behaviour may therefore be adaptive in selected academic situations, while passive or avoidant leadership is generally less compatible with effective functioning. Restricting the analysis to transformational leadership risks conflating one favourable behavioural style with the broader construct of leadership effectiveness.

Mediation evidence strengthens but does not prove the proposed behavioural pathway. Hur et al. (2011) and Lam and O'Higgins (2012) show that transformational leadership can transmit EI to selected outcomes, whereas Sun et al. (2026) demonstrate an interpersonal mediation process in private universities. These findings justify testing indirect effects; however, because much of the evidence remains cross-sectional, mediation should be interpreted as statistical consistency with a proposed mechanism rather than as evidence of temporal causation.

4.4 Faculty outcomes and social exchange

Faculty outcomes extend the importance of EI and leadership beyond evaluations of the leader. Leadership is consequential when it shapes the conditions under which faculty teach, conduct research, collaborate, mentor, perform administrative responsibilities, and voluntarily contribute to institutional life. The distinction between in-role performance and OCB is therefore theoretically and practically important. In-role behaviour captures expected job responsibilities, whereas OCB represents discretionary behaviour that supports colleagues and the institution beyond minimum formal requirements (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

The broader organisational literature shows that EI and leadership are related to task performance, OCB, job satisfaction, and contextual performance (O'Boyle et al., 2011; Miao et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2017; Miao et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2011; Nohe & Hertel, 2017). Higher-education evidence is increasingly consistent with this pattern. Studies from India and other university settings link academic or resonant leadership with faculty performance, empowerment, OCB, and institutional effectiveness (Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Khandelwal & Nair, 2022; Nawaz & Gomes, 2018; Sharma & Kaur, 2024; Salisu, 2022; Abuowda et al., 2024). Recent Indian evidence similarly links leadership, performance appraisal, and training and development with employee engagement in SMEs and shows that workplace HRM strategies can contribute to employee performance (Awasthi et al., 2025; Bajpai et al., 2022).

However, the causal ordering of these variables remains unsettled. Some studies treat OCB as an outcome of leadership, others position it as a mediator between leadership and performance, and some examine OCB as a predictor of institutional effectiveness. Therefore, a defensible synthesis is that favourable, trustworthy, and effective leadership is associated with stronger faculty contribution, while the precise temporal sequence among leadership effectiveness, OCB, and performance requires longitudinal and source-separated research.

For future empirical work, the strongest design would avoid asking a single respondent to evaluate EI, leadership effectiveness, and faculty outcomes at the same time. A leader may report their own EI, faculty members may rate the leadership style and effectiveness, and work contribution may be assessed through a separate source. Such source separation would directly address one of the most persistent methodological weaknesses identified in this study.

4.5 Gender as a boundary condition

Gender findings are best characterised as modest, variable, and context-sensitive. Meta-analytic evidence indicates relatively small differences in leadership style, with women sometimes displaying slightly more transformational or contingent-reward behaviour and men somewhat

more passive or *laissez-faire* behaviour (Eagly et al., 2003). EI-related gender differences are similarly dependent on the measure, context, and role expectations (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Hsu et al., 2022; Mugabekazi et al., 2026).

A critical distinction is required between mean differences and moderation. A statistically significant difference in the average EI between gender groups does not establish that gender changes the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness. Moderation requires a formal comparison of relationship strength across groups, and latent variable comparisons should ideally establish measurement invariance before structural paths are compared.

The review rejects categorical assumptions that one gender is inherently more emotionally intelligent or more effective in academic leadership. Observed differences may reflect socialisation, institutional opportunity, role expectations, disciplinary representation, or organisational culture. Gender is consequently better conceptualised as a possible boundary condition whose effects should be tested and interpreted with effect sizes, confidence intervals, and contextual sensitivity.

4.6 Why findings differ across studies

The critical synthesis discusses five consistent explanations of divergent results. First, none of these types of EI measures operationalise the same construct — ability, trait, mixed, or self-report. The association that the study with an objective or performance-based EI measure may give, then, could be different from that of a study with a measure of self-perceived emotional competence. Second, the relationships may be overestimated because of shared method variance (when leaders rate their own EI and leadership behaviour). Third, sometimes leadership style is considered synonymous with leadership effectiveness. Transformational behaviour is a leadership style, and effectiveness is an outcome judgement about the actions of the leader in the job. Merging the two leads to greater conceptual overlap and can yield spurious relationships. Fourth, one's culture and institutional context affect expectations with regard to emotional expression, authority, collegiality, and acceptable leadership behaviour. Therefore, the results cannot be simply transferred to academic institutions.

Fifth, the predominance of cross-sectional research limits causal interpretations. Structural equation modelling and bootstrapped mediation can estimate direct and indirect statistical relationships, but they do not establish that EI temporally precedes leadership behaviour or that leadership behaviour causes faculty outcomes when all variables are measured at one point in time. These methodological explanations are consistent with critical and comprehensive reviews

of EI and leadership (Antonakis et al., 2009; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Gerhardt et al., 2025; Korakis & Poulaki, 2025; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The implication is that apparent disagreement in the literature should not automatically be interpreted as a theoretical failure. Much of the inconsistency can be understood as a consequence of differences in construct definition, measurement source, outcome specification, and research design. Future research should therefore focus less on repeatedly asking whether EI is 'important' and more on identifying the conditions under which EI becomes behaviourally relevant to academic leadership.

4.7 Integrative evidence framework emerging from the review

The evidence supports an integrative framework in which EI is positioned as an upstream emotional capability, leadership style represents the behavioural expression of that capability, academic leadership effectiveness represents follower-experienced performance of the leadership role, and faculty work outcomes represent downstream contribution. Gender is positioned as a potential boundary condition rather than a deterministic antecedent. The measurement approach, respondent source, institutional context, research design, and culture operate as methodological or contextual influences capable of strengthening, weakening, or altering the observed relationships.

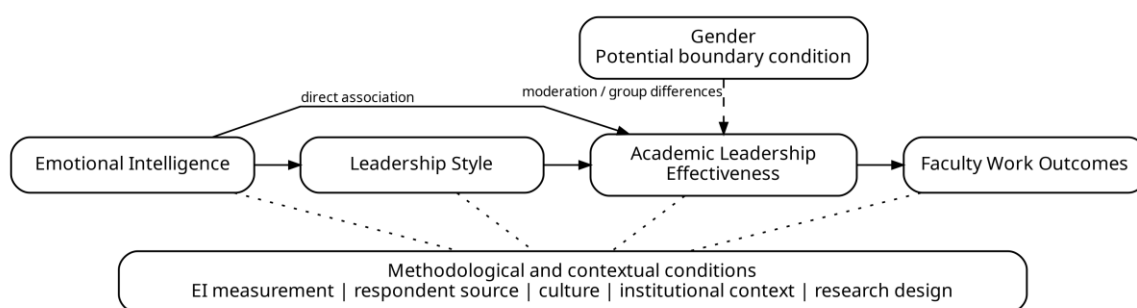


Figure 2. Integrative evidence framework emerging from the review

Source: Authors' synthesis of the reviewed literature and critical findings of the present review.

The framework is intentionally non-causal in wording. The directional sequence represents a theoretically ordered set of relationships that future empirical research should test rather than causal effects already established in the literature. This distinction is important, especially in the light of the fact that many of the current evidence is cross-sectional, and that mediation has often been estimated without temporal separation. The framework also outlines the role of this review. Its novelty is not that it is the first time that EI or academic leadership has been a topic of study. Rather, it combines several evidence streams that are partially disconnected into a coherent

antecedent-behavioural model based on effectiveness-faculty outcome, and explicitly considers methodological conditions that help account for the discrepancies in previous research. As a holistic view, it serves directly as a basis for new studies in private higher education and other fields of academic education.

A multi-source design in which leaders report EI, faculty members evaluate leadership style and effectiveness, and faculty contribution is obtained from a separate source would provide a stronger test of the proposed sequence than the same-source cross-sectional designs that currently dominate this field. Longitudinal or repeated-measures studies would further strengthen the inference by establishing temporal ordering among the constructs.

5. Implications, limitations, originality and conclusion

5.1 Practical and policy implications

The findings of this review have direct implications for the selection, development, and evaluation of academic leaders in higher education. The evidence does not justify treating emotional intelligence (EI) as a substitute for academic expertise, strategic judgement, professional credibility, or governance competence. Instead, EI is better understood as a complementary leadership capability that may strengthen self-awareness, emotion regulation, interpersonal sensitivity, constructive conflict management, and relationship building. Leadership-development programs should therefore integrate emotional and relational competencies with the wider responsibilities of academic leadership rather than presenting EI as an isolated personal attribute (Sadri, 2012; Schlaerth et al., 2013; Parrish, 2015). Evidence from Indian organisational settings also indicates that training and development can improve perceived job effectiveness, reinforcing the practical value of structured developmental interventions alongside leadership development (Singh et al., 2023).

A second implication concerns leadership assessment. The review consistently shows that associations between EI and leadership outcomes are sensitive to the respondent source. Leader self-assessment can support reflection and developmental feedback, but it should not be the sole basis for judging leadership style or effectiveness. Where feasible, higher-education institutions should combine leader self-assessment with faculty ratings, peer feedback, 360-degree assessment, or other source-separated indicators. This recommendation is particularly important because same-source measurement can inflate EI-leadership associations, while stronger multi-source studies often report more conservative relationships (Harms & Credé, 2010; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Third, leadership evaluation should extend beyond satisfaction with the leader to the work environment and faculty outcomes associated with leadership practice. In-role performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) capture different but complementary dimensions of faculty contributions. Evidence from higher education indicates that academic, resonant, transformational, and e-leadership are associated with faculty performance, psychological empowerment, OCB, and institutional effectiveness (Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Khandelwal & Nair, 2022; Nawaz & Gomes, 2018; Sharma & Kaur, 2024; Salisu, 2022; Abuowda et al., 2024). Institutions should therefore consider academic leadership development and faculty-development systems as interconnected rather than separate human-resource functions.

Fourth, leadership-development initiatives should be sensitive to the institutional context. The reviewed evidence spans India, Ethiopia, Lebanon, China, Saudi Arabia, and other educational settings, demonstrating that EI and leadership are embedded in cultural, structural, and organisational conditions (George & Raghavendra, 2022; Wolle, 2022; Degebas, 2023; Kalakesh & Hachana, 2026; Sun et al., 2026; Nasr Saeed et al., 2026). Programmes developed for private universities should therefore be different from those developed for public universities or professional colleges, for example, in terms of governance, workload, faculty autonomy, disciplinary norms, and accountability, and not be a generic package of leadership development. Lastly, there is no evidence of gender stereotyping in the selection and development of academic leaders. The differences between genders in terms of EI and leadership behaviour are small and situation-dependent. Institutions should focus on equal opportunities for leadership roles, developmental support, reducing bias, and competency-based assessments, not on the assumption of one gender's greater emotional intelligence or effectiveness (Eagly et al., 2003; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Hsu et al., 2022; Mugabekazi et al., 2026).

5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations define the scope of the present review and identify priorities for future research. First, the literature remains conceptually heterogeneous. EI is operationalised through ability, trait, mixed emotional-social, and workplace self-report approaches, while leadership outcomes include transformational style, leader-member exchange, competence, effectiveness, performance, and OCB. These constructs are related but not equivalent. Future research should therefore specify the EI tradition and leadership outcomes precisely and avoid treating different measurement families as interchangeable.

Second, a large proportion of the evidence is cross-sectional. Cross-sectional structural equation modelling and bootstrapped mediation can estimate direct and indirect statistical

associations but cannot establish temporal precedence or causal direction. Longitudinal, repeated-measures, quasi-experimental, and intervention designs are required to determine whether changes in EI-related capability precede changes in leadership behaviour and whether changes in leadership behaviour subsequently influence faculty outcomes. This is especially important for claims that leadership style mediates the relationship between EI and effectiveness.

Third, the same-source measurement remains a persistent methodological concern. Future studies should separate predictor, mediator, and outcome sources where the research question permits. A particularly strong higher-education design would allow academic leaders to report their own EI, faculty members to evaluate leadership style and academic leadership effectiveness, and faculty work contribution to be assessed by the leader, an independent supervisor, or objective institutional indicators. Such source separation would reduce common-method covariance and provide a stronger test of the proposed antecedent-mechanism-outcome sequence.

Fourth, measurement validity requires greater attention. Studies comparing gender groups, institutional types, or cultural settings should establish measurement invariance before interpreting differences in latent means or structural paths. Similarly, future research should distinguish leadership style from leadership effectiveness and in-role performance from OCB through confirmatory measurement models rather than assuming that conceptually related constructs are empirically identical.

Fifth, more evidence is required from private higher education and under-represented regional settings. Indian higher-education research is expanding, so future contributions should not claim that EI and academic leadership are absent from the Indian literature. More robust contributions can be made on the specific forms of institutions, specific geographical arrangements, and the arrangement of respondents and sources, as well as on integrated models which are still under-tested (George & Raghavendra, 2022; Baba et al., 2021; Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025; Malik & Kaur, 2026). It would also be interesting to compare work across private and public institutions to determine if organisational context affects the relevance of EI and/or leadership style. Sixth, future studies should be more focused on the effect size, confidence intervals and substantive importance than just statistical significance. The gender literature makes this point clear: there can be a statistically significant difference between genders but it may be a very small one in practice. Likewise, the apparent relationship between EI and leadership should be seen in light of the measurement method, the source of the respondents, and the model specification. Lastly, there is a need for more focused meta-analyses on more uniform measurement families. Combining pooling, ability EI, trait EI, and mixed EI, along with self-reported workplace EI, into a single overall effect can mask potentially important conceptual distinctions. Meta analysis could

be more focused to compare effect sizes by EI measure, leadership outcome, source arrangement, and education sector.

5.3 Originality and contribution of the review

The main strength of this review is bringing together disparate evidence in a unified antecedent-behavioural-mechanism-effectiveness-faculty outcome. This framework bridges the existing body of work on emotional intelligence and academic leadership while maintaining a clear delineation of emotional capability, leadership behaviour, effectiveness, and faculty contribution. Next, this review links EI measures and leader outcomes to possible behavioural mechanisms, namely leadership style. Second, it takes the conversation off the leader to also include faculty in-role and extra-role contributions. Thirdly, it considers gender as a potential boundary condition, not just a demographic description. Fourth, it highlights respondent-source separation as an important substantive methodological question that has the potential to alter the nature of the apparent strength of EI-leadership relationships. This positioning distinguishes the Review from other syntheses of educational leadership literature that group evidence around leadership styles, barriers, training, or professional development (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Mugabekazi et al., 2026). It also provides a general organisational review, focusing on the unique relationality of higher education and connects the effectiveness of leadership with faculty work contribution. The review thus serves at three levels. In theory, it brings together the concepts of Emotional Intelligence theory, Full-Range Leadership Theory, and Social Exchange Theory without collapsing the constructs. The methodologically, it has been seen that the conditions that affect reported relationships are: the respondent source, construct validity, and research design. In practice, it offers a structure to support academic leadership selection, development, and evaluation and to create a clear agenda for multi-source and longitudinal empirical testing.

5.4 Conclusion

Accumulating evidence supports emotional intelligence as a relevant but method-sensitive component of academic leadership. Ability, trait, mixed, and workplace self-report approaches represent different conceptualisations of EI, and these distinctions materially affect the interpretation of leadership findings. Across organisational and higher-education settings, EI is generally associated with relational and transformational leadership behaviour and effectiveness-related outcomes; however, the strength and consistency of these associations vary according to the measurement approach, respondent source, and context.

Leadership style provides a plausible behavioural pathway through which EI may become visible to followers. Transformational leadership has received the strongest support, but the

evidence does not justify equating EI with transformational leadership or assuming that transformational behaviour always mediates the EI-effectiveness relationship. Transactional and passive/avoidant behaviours remain relevant to a full-range understanding of leadership, and mediation should be tested, rather than presumed.

Faculty outcomes extend the significance of the topic beyond evaluations of the leader. Higher education evidence increasingly links leadership with task performance, OCB, empowerment, trust, job performance, and institutional functioning. However, the direction and temporal ordering of these relationships remain insufficiently established. Stronger multi-source and longitudinal research is required to determine how leader emotional capabilities are translated into leadership behaviour and how that behaviour ultimately influences faculty contribution.

Gender findings are generally modest and context-dependent, supporting formal tests of group differences and moderation rather than categorical assumptions. Likewise, the review shows that the measurement approach, common-method conditions, culture, institutional setting, and research design act as important boundary influences on the relationships reported in the literature.

The integrative framework emerging from the review positions EI as an upstream emotional capability, leadership style as behavioural expression, academic leadership effectiveness as follower-experienced performance of the leadership role, and faculty work outcomes as downstream contribution. Gender and methodological or contextual conditions can strengthen, weaken, or alter the observed relationships. Future progress will depend on theoretically precise, measurement-aware, source-separated, and longitudinal designs that clarify how emotional capabilities translate into leadership behaviour and how that behaviour influences faculty and institutional outcomes.

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