

Bridging the GAP: Challenges in Measuring Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership in Hybrid Workplaces

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges in assessing emotional intelligence (EI) and transformational leadership (TL) within hybrid work environment, two variables which are becoming increasingly common in contemporary enterprises. Hybrid environments, integrating conventional on-site work with remote arrangements, determine leaders to modify their approaches while concurrently complicating evaluation methods. Thus, the precise measurement of EI and TL is rendered difficult, significantly affected by adaptable work structures. Most previous studies focused solely on traditional on-site or totally virtual contexts. Thus, this theoretical paper seeks to review and compare the frameworks for measuring EI and TL in order to be adapted to hybrid work environments.

The paper supports the trait viewpoint, operationalized via the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), recognizing that trait-based assessments generally demonstrate more robust associations with leadership behaviors than ability-based models. The hybrid work perspective serves as the new and distinguishing element of the research, predicated on the premise that such a context influences both TL behaviors and the perception of EI within teams. In the end, measurement challenges and future research directions are presented.

Keywords: *emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, hybrid work, TEIQue, MLQ, measurement*

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1. Introduction

Following a global migration to hybrid work models, where employees alternate between remote and on-site environments, businesses have novel obstacles in evaluating and cultivating leadership efficacy. Two concepts that have received considerable attention in this context are Emotional Intelligence (EI) and

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Transformational Leadership (TL) which correlate with favorable organizational results, nevertheless, accurately assessing these variables in hybrid settings presents challenges.

Hybrid workplaces integrate in-person and virtual interactions (Ebojoh and Högberg, 2024), potentially transforming the way people experience and perceive leadership behaviors. Thus, a leader's inspiring appeal or individualized consideration, which are characteristics of TL, may be seen differently by team members who work on-site compared to those who work in a hybrid settings. Similarly, a leader's emotional signals or empathy (components of EI) may be less discernible in digital communication, complicating the assessment of their EI in practice. Consequently, as hybrid work becomes the common ground, researchers and practitioners are eager to "bridge the gap" in assessing EI and TL in these new frameworks. Extensive research over decades has confirmed EI as an essential skill for effective leadership and collaboration. TL, initially defined by Bass (1985) denotes a leadership style that refers to a leader's ability to inspire and intellectually engage followers, encourage them towards a common vision, and address their particular needs.

Recent meta-analyses demonstrate that TL is extensively effective, demonstrating significant positive associations with team and organizational performance metrics (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023). In the above-mentioned review study, the authors discovered that emotionally intelligent, transformational leaders enhance both behaviors and business outcomes within their teams while also positively influencing team members' attitudes. Nonetheless, assessing these variables in a meaningful and reliable manner poses issues that are exacerbated in mixed work environments. EI is a complex phenomenon characterized by numerous competing theoretical frameworks (Singh and Shweta, 2024) and measuring tools, whereas TL actions can be evaluated from diverse sources: leader self-awareness (alternative self-assessment) (Bratton *et al.*, 2011), subordinate evaluations (Rahman *et al.*, 2020), objective metrics (Sasere and Matashu, 2024), each possessing inherent limits. EI can be understood in two distinct ways: as an ability (Mayer and Salovy, 1997) or as a characteristic (Petrides, 2011), with each perspective possessing its own assessment instruments and psychometric challenges. Similarly, evaluating transformative leadership frequently depends on subordinate input (e.g., the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), which may exhibit bias or inconsistency in a hybrid environment. Given the complexity of these concepts and the difficulties of measurement in hybrid contexts, this study offers a theoretical analysis that aims to clarify the research objectives, delimit the methodology used, and substantiate the conceptual framework.

Therefore, this theoretical paper's scope is to review and compare the fundamental frameworks for measuring EI and to connect these measurement approaches to TL theory within hybrid work environments. The paper objectives refer to: a. Clarify the differences between trait-based and ability-based models of EI including specific instruments presentation (TEIQue, MSCEIT). b. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of EI measurement approaches regarding their correlation

with TL. c. Investigate the implications of hybrid work settings for the evaluation of EI and TL. The originality of the study is to integrate literature about the conceptualizations of EI and TL and to connect their measurement approaches within hybrid work environments.

2. Analytical Approach

This study analyzes the theoretical links between distinct types of EI (trait and ability) and leadership behaviors, with a specific focus on TL. The paper focuses on the theoretical review and comparison of conceptual theories and findings. This approach seeks to clarify the measurement and interpretation of EI and TL within the context of hybrid work, highlighting the distinct challenges faced by organizational researchers and practitioners. This study, based on a comparative literature analysis methodology, reviews and compares theoretical models and measurement instruments for EI, while examining their reported relationships with outcomes of TL. We examine commentary and studies on leadership in hybrid work environments to identify contextual factors influencing measurement.

Our approach resembles a conceptual review, utilizing existing peer-reviewed literature, such as meta-analyses, validation studies, and theoretical articles, instead of gathering new data. Relevant and recent key sources were selected, emphasizing works from the past decade, while incorporating classic foundational theories as needed. The standards for choosing literature for this comparative analysis were newness, relevance, and scholarly rigor. Sources were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English from 2013 to 2025, thereby covering the most recent decade of research and mirroring current findings. This timeframe was chosen to exemplify modern developments while facilitating the inclusion of important prior contributions that are essential to the topic. The exclusion criteria were set up to protect the integrity of the research and make sure it was relevant to the questions being asked. As a result, materials that were not scholarly or peer-reviewed were not considered, as well as the publications that were not in English. Furthermore, studies that did not explicitly concentrate on EI measurement methodologies or leadership-related outcomes were omitted. For example, studies discussing the benefits of EI without examining leadership implications were excluded. Using these inclusion and exclusion criteria, the literature selection focused on high-quality, relevant sources that have a direct impact on the comparative analysis of EI models and TL in hybrid workplace settings.

This synthesis of findings aims to determine the relative strength of the association between trait EI and ability EI in relation to TL. We examine several factors contributing to the observed phenomena, including the source of ratings—specifically, the implications of common-source bias when both EI and leadership are self-reported compared to multi-source assessments. Additionally, the interplay with personality traits and the distinctions between what various EI tests measure,

such as typical behavior versus maximal capacity, are evaluated. Finally, our methodology includes an analysis of literature relating to hybrid and virtual leadership. This review examines conceptual papers on e-leadership and empirical studies on remote team leadership to identify factors influencing the manifestation and measurement of EI and TL. This involves examining comparative studies on leadership in face-to-face and virtual environments, as well as recent research concerning hybrid teams. Also, we aim to identify prevalent themes and challenges highlighted by researchers in this field, such as trust and communication in virtual leadership, the absence of informal cues, and the necessity for new leadership competencies in hybrid environments (Contreras et al., 2020). Through the comparison of these literary streams, our methodology facilitates the integration of insights and the identification of gaps. This comparative approach aligns with the theoretical objectives of the paper, allowing for an evaluation of the merits of various measurement methods and their contextual relevance in parallel.

3. Literature Review

3.1 EI Measurement

Choosing a measurement framework for EI is challenging due to the presence of multiple theoretical frameworks (Table 1). However, EI has been conceptualized in two dominant paradigms: *trait* EI and *ability* EI. *Trait* EI, assessed through instruments such as the TEIQue (Petrides, 2011), reflects self-perceived emotional capabilities and is aligned with personality constructs. The measures exhibit high reliability (internal consistency) and demonstrate strong correlations with broader personality traits. Specifically, trait EI is negatively associated with neuroticism and positively associated with extraversion and conscientiousness across numerous studies. In contrast, ability EI - represented by the MSCEIT (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) - evaluates emotional processing through task-based assessments. The scoring of ability tests is complex, often depending on expert or consensus evaluations to determine the "correct" emotional response. While ability EI aims to capture actual emotional competence, it has been criticized for low reliability and subjectivity in scoring (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

In organizational contexts, elevated EI in leaders correlates with improved team relationships and results; emotionally intelligent leaders may discern nuanced emotional responses and utilize that insight to influence and inspire others (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Transformational leaders enhance followers' commitment and performance by exemplifying ideal behavior, articulating an inspiring vision, questioning existing norms, and offering guidance and support. This leadership style has reliably correlated with favorable results, including increased employee happiness, dedication, innovation, and performance across various work environments.

Relevant studies for EI measurement

Table 1

Authors (year)	EI framework	Instrument	Measurement focus	Bias / Limitations	Relevance
Petrides (2011)	Trait	TEIQue	Self-perceived EI	Personality measurement	Correlates with leadership
Mayer & Salovey (1997)	Ability	MSCEIT	Emotional tasks	Complex scoring	Reduced replicability
Miao et al. (2018)	Meta-analysis	Mixed	EI → Leadership	Common-source bias	Direct comparison
O'Boyle Jr. et al. (2011)	Meta-analysis	Mixed	Job performance	Trait > ability Task performance	Supports TEIQue

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Trait EI measures generally demonstrate stronger and more consistent correlations with TL compared to ability EI. This may be attributed to their closer alignment with personality traits and leadership behaviors, as well as common-source bias when leaders self-report both EI and leadership style. Evidence indicates that trait-based EI assessments generally demonstrate stronger predictive correlations with leadership criteria compared to ability-based EI tests, as highlighted in a study from 2011 (O'Boyle Jr. *et al.*, 2011). Meta-analyses indicate that self-report (trait) EI exhibits greater criterion validity for job performance and leadership effectiveness compared to performance-based (ability) EI (Miao *et al.*, 2018). In predicting everyday leadership style, the former demonstrates an advantage due to its alignment with habitual behavior. Secondly, common-method variance may be a contributing factor for validity challenges. Numerous studies evaluate TL through subordinate assessments and EI through self-reports from leaders (Pillay *et al.*, 2013; Mešterová *et al.*, 2015), however there are also studies that utilize the same source to rate both the leader's EI and leadership (Lindebaum and Cartwright, 2010; Stănescu and Cicei, 2012). Trait EI self-reports may reflect the leader's perspective on their emotional competencies, potentially aligning with their leadership evaluations or the followers' perceptions of the leader's emotionally intelligent behaviors. Ability tests, which are scored objectively, do not align with leadership ratings from a rater's perspective, potentially resulting in lower correlations. However, this situation may also lead to inflated correlations for trait EI due to same-source bias when leadership is self-rated. Despite considering methodological effects, the literature typically asserts that trait EI possesses greater practical relevance for leadership research (O'Boyle Jr. *et al.*, 2011). Trait EI predicts TL ratings and associated outcomes such as leader effectiveness, subordinate satisfaction, and team performance, frequently surpassing the predictive power of cognitive intelligence or personality alone (Miao *et al.*, 2018).

3.2 TL Measurement

Measuring TL using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) remains the dominant tool for assessing TL behaviors (Bass and Avolio, 1994) (Table 2). In this setting, subordinates evaluate the leader based on criteria including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. A different method involves leaders assessing their own leadership style (Barbuto, 2005) however, these self-assessments frequently diverge from the perceptions held by their followers (Felfe and Schyns, 2006).

On the other hand, hybrid work introduces fragmentation: leaders interact differently with employees in a virtual environment as opposed to an in-office one, which may result in inconsistent leadership perception and rating variability. The MLQ score for a hybrid leader may exhibit greater variance, which may not only indicate measurement error but rather reflect authentic differences in the quality of leader-follower interactions across various modalities. It is recommended to segment follower ratings by context or to ensure a balanced representation of hybrid and fully on-site respondents in leadership surveys from a measurement perspective. Another concern is that transformational behaviors may change in hybrid settings; for instance, “intellectual stimulation” may manifest through collaborative digital tools and written brainstorming instead of traditional meeting room discussions. Researchers have identified the necessity to revise leadership assessment methods for virtual environments, often referred to as “e-leadership” assessment (Contreras *et al.*, 2020).

Relevant studies for TL measurement

Table 2

Author (Year)	Instrument	Measurement focus	Assessment Specificity	Limitations
Bass & Avolio (1991)	MLQ	TL (4 factors)	Subordinates	Perceptual bias
Contreras <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Adapted MLQ	E-leadership	Remote focus	Need for further evaluation
Salcedo Mireles <i>et al.</i> (2024)	MLQ	Hybrid TL	Moderate work context (students)	High applicability

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Other findings from studies on virtual teams, including those in non-traditional contexts such as online gaming teams, indicate that leader EI can enhance team effectiveness through TL behaviors (Mysirlaki and Paraskeva, 2020). It is also important to consider practical measurement challenges; in a hybrid team, subordinates' evaluations of a leader's transformational behaviors may differ systematically between those who primarily interact remotely and those who engage in person, introducing variability in the results of the MLQ.

3.3 Hybrid Work as Contextual Moderator

Hybrid work environment amplifies the importance of EI in leadership effectiveness. Leaders must interpret digital cues, regulate team morale and foster engagement without physical presence. As a result, EI may become more central to TL effectiveness in hybrid contexts compared to traditional settings (Contreras *et al.*, 2020).

Research indicates that successful leadership in hybrid environments necessitates advanced abilities in communication, trust-building, and empathy (Yozi and Mbokota, 2024; Nurhidayah and Muliansyah, 2024). Traditional hierarchical or authoritarian approaches often fail in dispersed work environments. In practice, a leader's EI is critically evaluated: they must perceive team morale through digital cues (such as tone in emails or lack of interaction), demonstrate empathy and support for employees' personal situations (particularly as the boundaries between work and home become less distinct), and manage conflicts or stress without the advantage of private office discussions, all necessitating emotional awareness and regulation. It can be concluded that EI may be more essential for TL in hybrid environments compared to traditional ones (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Munir *et al.*, 2023; Korakis and Poulaki, 2025). A transformational leader exhibits individualized consideration, particularly in a hybrid environment, by being sensitive to signs of employee burnout while working remotely and by identifying when a typically engaged team member becomes unresponsive during calls. The leader's capacity to accurately interpret emotional cues and provide supportive responses is essential for ongoing transformation and team inspiration. This indicates that instruments such as TEIQue (trait EI) may serve as effective diagnostic tools for identifying managers likely to succeed in hybrid formats. In contrast, leaders with low EI may find it challenging to navigate the diminished visibility associated with hybrid work. Their lack of emotional awareness could hinder their ability to engage and motivate remote employees effectively, thereby diminishing their transformational impact.

Hybrid work settings present intriguing questions regarding the relationship between EI and TL. EI may manifest in TL behaviors variably based on contextual factors. In fully face-to-face environments, certain elements of EI are comparatively easier and often assumed. Conversely, in virtual settings, these elements become more challenging, while other strengths of EI, such as effective written communication and proactive engagement, become more prominent. Hybrid leaders must balance both responsibilities. Leaders with elevated trait EI may exhibit greater adaptability in their leadership styles across hybrid environments. They are likely to demonstrate strong in-person charisma and effective empathetic listening during online meetings, which contributes to enhanced overall TL effectiveness. Research is in the early stages of examining these nuances. A recent study on hybrid student teams indicated a positive correlation between TL and team interpersonal relations and performance, even in partially virtual settings (Salcedo Mireles *et al.*, 2024). This finding highlights the enduring positive impact of TL in hybrid formats. The study utilized MLQ instrument for TL measurement, and the relationships identified were strong, suggesting that

current measures effectively capture the essence of effective leadership in hybrid teams (Salcedo Mireles *et al.*, 2024).

Models EI – TL in context hybrid

Table 3

Context	Discover EI	Discover TL	Implications
Face-to-face	reading non-verbal language	direct charisma	classic process
Hybrid work settings	adaptation and flexibility ton of messages in virtual settings	mixt styles of leadership making leadership in writing too	EI is critic assessment challenges

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Hybrid leaders frequently need to exert additional effort in communication and trust, which are closely linked to emotional competencies. Thus, the hybrid context of work becomes a moderator, and the EI and TL exhibition vary depending on the work settings (virtual or face-to-face). Implications for leadership arise for both practitioners and research perspectives. From the practitioner's perspective, this signifies an evolution of leadership styles, digital competences development being in the middle of the evolution. While for a research perspective, the hybrid context determines adapting measurement instruments like MLQ / TEIQue for hybrid work, as well as creating new measurement instruments (eg, sentiment analysis) and new sources of data collection (eg, inputs from videoconferences, emails, social media posts, written messages, in general).

4. Discussions

This paper aimed to determine the relative strength of the association between trait EI and ability EI in relation to TL from the measurement perspective within hybrid work settings. The main measurement challenges specific to hybrid work settings are presented below.

Observer Bias and Fragmented Interactions: In hybrid environments, no individual observer, not even the leader, perceives the complete range of leadership behaviors. Subordinates may observe the leader's conduct in only one mode (online or offline). This fragmentation complicates the aggregation of evaluations and delays comprehensive measurement. It may require the integration of data from several sources or settings. In the context of EI measurement, self-reported trait EI is less problematic, as leaders are aware of their typical behaviors across various contexts. However, this limitation may impact 360-degree evaluations of a leader's emotional competence, as peers or subordinates may undervalue certain aspects if they rarely interact in person.

Adapting Survey Items: The content validity of measurement instruments may be compromised if items are not modified. An MLQ item such as “*Articulates a compelling vision for the future*” retains its relevance across various contexts, but an item like “*Spends time teaching and coaching*” may be perceived differently in a

virtual environment compared to an in-person interaction. Ensuring that respondents perceive items consistently in hybrid contexts is challenging. Comparable hesitations impact EI capacity assessments. For instance, certain emotion perception tasks may depend on in-person cues that are less relevant to text-based or even video-based emotion interpretation.

Technology Mediation: Hybrid measurement may utilize technology inherently. Certain researchers advocate for the application of digital communication analysis, sentiment analysis of emails, or video analysis to assess a leader's EI in practice, such as the frequency with which they acknowledge and suitably address team members' problems in chat. These novel methods obscure the distinction between evaluating behavior and capability. Although promising, they remain in their start and exceed the parameters of conventional surveys.

Cultural and Individual Differences: Hybrid work may amplify individual variations in responses to leadership. Some employees may need additional emotional assistance while working remotely, although others may exhibit considerable autonomy. A leader's EI may be more impactful for individuals requiring assistance while remaining unrecognized by highly autonomous employees. When assessing outcomes such as employee engagement or leadership perception, variability may rise, necessitating larger sample sizes or multilevel modelling to discern the impact of leader's EI and TL among the noise.

Theoretical Integration: By synthesizing these elements, it is evident that hybrid workplaces function as a testing ground for the interplay between EI and TL. The TL idea asserts that leaders who address the unique needs of their followers and motivate them towards a shared vision will attain superior performance. EI equips leaders with the ability to comprehend followers' needs, exhibit empathy, manage their own emotions to maintain optimism and motivation, and navigate interpersonal situations skillfully. In a stable, conventional environment, a leader with modest EI may manage adequately if the conditions do not significantly challenge those abilities.

In a hybrid environment, sudden communication failures, feelings of isolation among team members, or misunderstandings through email can frequently arise. Leaders with elevated EI are posited to manage these challenges more adeptly, thereby demonstrating greater TL in practice. This theoretical hypothesis is corroborated by recent research highlighting the significance of EI in distant leadership positions (Contreras *et al.*, 2020).

5. Limitations and future research

The paper focused on a relevant selection open access research articles that focused on EI and TL measurement and the relationship between them. A systematic literature review might have offered even a larger sample of inputs and more complex results. However, some future research directions have emerged.

In a hybrid context, MLQ and TEIQue instruments need to be adapted by introducing new items specific to online interactions or by introducing a new complementary dimension to be assessed for virtual leadership. Given the variate ways

of EI and TL exhibition in on-site and virtual environments, comparative studies using high-level statistical techniques, on leaders who manage full on-site employees and on those who manage hybrid teams, should be initiated. This way, the evolving nature of leadership styles could be captured, and specific traits and abilities could be emphasized.

Another research direction that could be considered is projecting a conceptual model (EITLHIF – EI and TL Hybrid Interaction Framework) in which EI influences TL in a hybrid work context, the latter being a moderator. At the same time, the high presence of AI in all areas of life should be considered resourceful for research, too. Thus, using digital behavior tracking instead of questionnaires might be more suitable for emotions and attitudes analysis.

6. Conclusions

The present paper highlights the necessity of EI and TL research within the emerging context of hybrid work. By comparing measurement models and synthesizing recent literature, this paper suggests that hybrid workplaces may act as moderators in the EI-TL relationship. The research showed that trait EI relates better with TL; however, little research has considered virtual environments. The originality of the study is determined by integrating literature about the conceptualizations of EI and TL and their measurement approaches within hybrid work environments.

Future research in EI and TL measurement should consider the fragmented interactions between leaders and employees in hybrid work environments, as well as individual differences in perceiving virtual leadership. In order to increase the validity and reliability of EI and TL measurement, redifining research instruments, minimizing bias by using multiple sources of data, and embracing digital analytics (eg, sentiment analysis) should be considered. Engaging employees and adopting TL behaviors that go beyond the screen/camera implies high levels of EI; thus, integrating EI assessment and digital communication skills in leadership development programs becomes a pressing need.

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