# THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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## Abstract

*This study measured the emotional intelligence (EI) as determined by the MSCEIT in 7 presidents of a college/university in the Central and Eastern Pennsylvania. The data revealed that most presidents scored in the average ranges of emotional intelligence and that there were no significant correlations between demographic factors and the EI.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Higher Education

## *1. Introduction*

Higher education is at the crossroads and the landscape of higher education is rapidly changing. As a result, higher education institutions are now under constant pressure to increase enrollments and become as flexible as possible in delivery methods to adapt to the needs of their customers—the students. Eddy and Murphy argued that "advanced and improved leadership practices for higher education are needed in the 21st century if universities and colleges are to raise standards, status, and improve overall campus environment" (1997, p. 327). Along the same lines, in 1998 Zusman stated that "during the difficult period that lies ahead, higher education will need greater leadership at all levels: administrative, faculty, trustees, student, and public. Yet the exercise of effective leadership may become more difficult" (as cited in Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 1998; p. 109).

These predicted times are now here, and given the turmoil in which the higher education environment is currently under, it has become imperative that university and college leaders/presidents effectively manage the necessary change(s) that will adapt these institutions to the 21st century's demands. The success of planning these changes, communicating them effectively, and implementing them ultimately depends on the president's leadership and his/her leadership effectiveness.

Mayer and Caruso's believe leaders "who can think about emotions accurately and clearly may often be better able to anticipate, cope with and effectively manage change" (2002, p. 1). Leadership theory has focused in recent years on the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in effective management. According to Goleman (1998a) high IQ is not the only ingredient a successful leader needs, but rather a high EQ (emotional intelligence quotient) predicts effective leadership. Cherniss and Goleman (2001) stated that emotional intelligence (EI) has an influence on organizational effectiveness in multiple areas: employee recruitment and retention, development of talent, teamwork, employee commitment, morale and health, innovation, productivity, efficiency, sales, revenues, quality of service, customer loyalty, and client or student outcomes.

The problems facing the university/college presidents lie in the fact that they concomitantly deal with multiple stakeholders: the students, the administrators, the faculty, the community, and the board of trustees; that each one of these stakeholders is difficult to manage in that they have mostly and frequently conflicting goals; and that the presidents do not always have the power to control all these stakeholders, if any at all, yet they are also the leaders of institutions that need to stay financially healthy if they are to survive while maintaining their academic standards, integrity, and institutional reputation. Traditional leadership theories have seemed to fail these leaders, as they are facing today an even stronger leadership crisis due to the drastic changes of the higher education landscape. According to Sosik and Megerian (as cited in Palmer, Gardner, & Stough, 2003) one variable that has gained popularity in predicting effective leadership is emotional intelligence.

And, according to Goleman "effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of emotional intelligence . . . . my research along with other studies clearly show that emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership" (1998a, p. 94). He further stated that "the higher the rank of a person . . . . the more emotionally intelligent capabilities showed up as the reason for his or her effectiveness" (p. 94).

***2. Literature Review***

According to R. K. Cooper and Sawaf, "If the driving force of intelligence in the twentieth-century business has been the IQ, then-according to growing evidence—in the dawning twenty-first century it will be EQ, and related forms of practical and creative intelligence" (1997, p. xxvii). E. L. Thorndike was the first to research emotional intelligence which he labeled as *social intelligence* and defined it as the "ability to understand and manage people" (Thorndike & Stein, 1937, p. 275). Gardner, next, defined and studied the concept of emotional intelligence, defining the concept of multiple intelligences, primarily intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence and how they are related to one's individual emotions. Starting in 1988, Bar-On talked about the notion of emotional quotient (EQ) a measurement used to assess one's key emotional and social functionings that were related to one's well-being. Bar-On (2000a) defined EI "in terms of an array of emotional and social knowledge and abilities that influence our overall ability to effectively cope with environmental demands." (as cited in Cherniss & Goleman, 2001, p. 17)

Mayer and Salovey (as cited in Cherniss & Goleman, 2001) discussed the concept of emotions and how emotions relate to leadership, concepts that led to them defining the notion of emotional intelligence. They defined Emotional Intelligence (EI) as "the ability to perceive and express emotions, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion in the self and others" (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, as cited in Cherniss & Goleman, p. 4). Furthemore, in their 1990 article "Emotional Intelligence," Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence "as the subset of social intelligence that involved the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (pp. 186–189). They conceptualized emotional intelligence as a mental process that included: appraising, expressing, and regulating emotions in the self and others, and using emotions in adaptive ways. In Salovey's model of emotional intelligence individuals utilize emotions through flexible planning, creative thinking, mood redirected attention, and motivating emotions.

In a later study on emotion-related abilities, Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios (2001) divided emotional intelligence into four difference areas called branches. These four branches are accuracy in perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions in a way that enhances personal growth and social relations. And finally, Goleman described emotional intelligence as

> The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. It describes abilities distinct from, but complementary to, academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ. (1998b, p. 317)

In his view, emotional intelligence initially consisted of five basic social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. After more research, he restructured these five categories into four categories of: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills/relationship management. These four categories represent two sets of competencies: the self-awareness and self-management represent a set of personal competencies as they relate to recognition and regulation respectively, and social awareness and relationship management represent a set of social competencies for recognition and regulation as well (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Each one of these four capabilities has its own cluster of traits. Self-awareness encompasses emotional self-assessment, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence; self-management consists of self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative, and optimism; social awareness includes empathy, organizational awareness, and service; and finally, social skill/relationship management means inspiration, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, and teamwork and collaboration (Goleman et al., 2002). Relationship management drives organizational performance and competencies that are in this category are used by effective leaders to inspire organizations to greatness.

In *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager*, Caruso and Salovey suggested "that emotion is not just important, but absolutely necessary for us to make good decisions, take optimal actions to solve problems, cope with change, and succeed" (2004, p. ix).

Furthermore, they argued that "integration of rational and emotional styles are key to successful leadership" (p. 3). Along the same lines, in *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace,* Goleman argued that "evidence suggests that emotionally intelligent leadership is key to creating a working climate that nurtures employees and encourages them to give their best" (as cited in Cherniss & Goleman, 2001, p. 40).

A number of authors and researchers like Bennis, Goleman, Gill, Dulewicz, and Higgs suggested that "there is a strongly emerging view, from different streams of work, that emotional intelligence (EI) is a critical factor in the effective leadership of twenty-first century organizations. (Dulewicz and Higgs 2003, p. 194) Furthermore, in *What Makes a Leader,* Goleman stated that through his research he "found that the most effective leaders are alike in one crucial way; they all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. (1998a, p. 94) He also indicated that emotional intelligence is even more evident and important at higher levels of an organization's management, levels where technical skills are of lesser importance and mostly negligible and where there is ample evidence of emotional intelligence capabilities resulting in leadership effectiveness, even though he stated in a future article that no leader possesses all the EI competencies. (Goleman et al., 2002) In researching the relationship between leadership effectiveness and emotional intelligence, George (2000) stated: "Emotional intelligence has the potential to contribute to effective leadership in multiple ways [and] the special relevance to leadership revolves around the fact that leadership is an emotion-laden process, both from a leader and follower perspective" (2000, p. 1046).

According to Tack "Post-secondary education will experience profound changes in the next millennium . . . . Those who will lead the academe in the future must also change in order to accommodate the demands that will be placed on them (1991, pp. 1–2). She continued with describing the "essential qualities that higher education's leaders must exhibit during the upcoming millennium" (1991, p. 2). These are a set of clear, positive, and rationally defensible values that these leaders understand and on which they rely when making decisions; the courage to focus on quality in everything they do; they must be willing and able to take calculated risks to capitalize on new opportunities; and they must be able to balance the competing, often consuming demands of their work and their personal lives (Tack, 1991). She suggested that the higher education leaders of the future will have to include other constituencies from across campuses in the decision-making process, such that "leaders must empower those with whom they work to use all their talents constructively to ensure organizational success . . . they must be 'change masters'" (Tack, p. 4).

These qualities for the future leaders of higher education exemplify most aspects of what Goleman (1998a, 1999, 2000) called "emotional intelligence." Today's higher education institutions are facing numerous challenges "stimulated by a variety of social, political, economic, and technological forces" (Marshall, Adams, Cameron, & Sullivan, 2000, p. 42) evident in the larger and more diverse student population, new research and teaching method, larger and more competitive arenas of operation, a larger range of academic programs, and increased selectivity and concentration of research activity.

According to Milliken, "A good leader in higher education is one who can induce change through democratic consensus, obtaining very good results from his or her collaborators while maintaining consistently high morale and a feeling of individual accomplishment" (1998, p. 505). In conclusion, as Cherniss stated "Educational leaders . . . always needed people skills but today they need them more than ever . . . . In short, educational leaders need to be more emotionally intelligent. (as cited in Cherniss & Goleman, 2001, p. 26)

## *3. Methodology*

To identify/quantify how emotionally intelligent today's college/university presidents are, we used the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). In addition, we used a Demographic Information Questionnaire (DIQ ) (Appendix A) to explore if there is a relationship between certain demographic factors and emotional intelligence scores/levels.The MSCEIT was distributed along with the DIQ to 61 college and university presidents in Central and Eastern Pennsylvania. Seven presidents responded of which only six completed both, the MSCEIT and the DIQ. Therefore, only these six were included in the final study

The first test, the MSCEIT, measures emotional intelligence on an overall performance level given by the total score—the Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EIQ), two subareas of experiential (EEIQ) and strategic (SEIQ) emotional intelligence scores, four branch scores: perceiving emotions (PEIQ), facilitating thought (FEIQ), understanding emotions (UEIQ), and managing emotions (MEIQ), and finally eight task scores.

The second survey, (DIQ), identified demographic data that were of interested: age, gender, highest degree and field of study, type of institution, years in office, and whether they presided before or if this was their first presidency. For the purpose of this article, only the overall EIQ is discussed.

The MSCEIT developed by Mayer et al. is "a measure based on the ability model of emotional intelligence" (2002, p. 7) and consists of 141 items that form eight subscales that can be scored using the "general consensus" or "expert consensus" scoring method. It can be used in variety of settings including educational, and can be administered through a test booklet or via the Internet.

The MSCEIT has a full scale reliability of .91, experiential area reliability of .90, and strategic area reliability of .85; the test-retest reliability for the full scale MSCEIT V2.0 (used for this study) is $r$ = .86 with an $N$ of 62. The face validity of the MSCEIT, according to Pusey (as cited in Mayer et al., 2002), is good and the MSCEIT V2.0 possesses content (sampling) validity. It also has a good predictive validity and excellent construct validity. This test surpasses that of any other scales used to measure EI (Mayer et al.).

In terms of validity for the test, Mayer et al. stated that "for the MSCEIT there is evidence of content validity, structural validity, and predictive validity" (2002, p. 5). Mayer et al. also argued that research into their MSCEIT resulted in the statement that their findings "suggest that those who use MSCEIT can feel more confident about the quality of the measurement tool to assess EI" (2002, p. 104).

The DIQ was created based on demographic information we were interested in using to compare EI scores based on age, gender, and so forth. The nine questions on the DIQ asked the presidents to identify their age group, gender, highest degree obtained, the field of study for their highest degree, what type of institution they are leading, how many years they have presided at this institution, if this was their first presidency, what position they held right before the current presidency, and what other academic leadership positions they previously held (Appendix A).

## *4. Limitations of the Study*

This study has two major limitations that affect the generalizability of the findings—the size of the sample population and the self-reported data. First, the population consisted of 61 university/college presidents from Central and Eastern Pennsylvania that were not randomly selected. Therefore, the data set that was obtained through the MSCEIT and DIQ and that was statistically evaluated (using descriptive statistics) led to undefined results.

## *5. Results*

MSCEIT scores are interpreted "on a normal curve with an average score of 100 and a standard deviation of .15. Table 1 represents the MSCEIT scores (Mayer et al., 2002, p. 18).

Table 1. EIQ Scores and Significance

| EIQ score | Significance |
|---|---|
| 69 or less | Consider development |
| 70–89 | Consider improvement |
| 90–99 | Low average score |
| 100–109 | High average score |
| 110–119 | Competent |
| 120–129 | Strength |
| 130+ | Significant strength |

*Note.* From *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test MSCEIT: Users' Manual* (p. 18), by J. D. Mayer, P. Salovey, and D. R. Caruso, 2002, Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Multi-Health Systems Inc. Copyright 2002 by Multi-Health Systems Inc. Adapted with permission.

### *5.1 MSCEIT Total EIQ Scores by Participant*

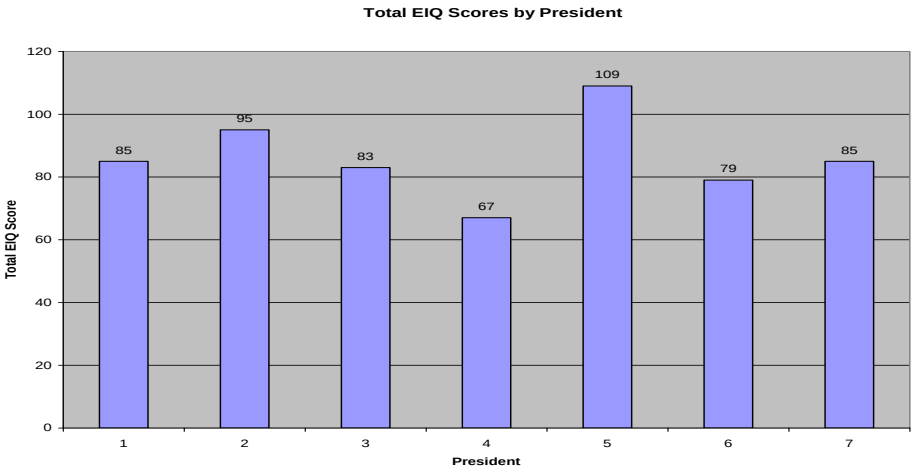
The total EIQ score measures the overall emotional intelligence level and it "compares an individual's performance on the MSCEIT to those in the normative sample. The score is a good place to start when analyzing a respondent's level of emotional intelligence" (Mayer et al., 2002, p. 18).

The scores range from a high score of 109 to a low score of 67. Two scores were above the mean and five scores were below the mean. One score was in the consider development score range, four scores were in the consider improvement score range, one score was in the low average score range, and one score was in the high average score range. The time to complete the MSCEIT ranged from approximately 14 minutes to approximately 71 minutes. Table 2 and Figure 1 present the overall emotional intelligence scores (EIQ) for all seven participating presidents.

Table 2. Total EIQ Scores for EachPresident

| President | Score |
|---|---|
| President 1 | 85 |
| President 2 | 95 |
| President 3 | 83 |
| President 4 | 67 |
| President 5 | 109 |
| President 6 | 79 |
| President 7 | 85 |

Figure 1. Total EIQ scores by president




*5.2 Demographic Information Questionnaire (DIQ) Results*

Six presidents completed the DIQ, but the age and gender of the seventh president was available from the MSCEIT; therefore the data has seven participants for the age and gender category and only six for the remaining categories. *The DIQ (Demographic Information Questionnaire) results are presented in Table 3 in a narrative form to preserve the identity and confidentiality of the participants due to the small sample; questions 8 and 9 are presented separately in narrative form due to the variation in responses. Table 3 represents the occurrences of each value of the DIQ by category represented in the sample*

**Table 3. DIQ Results by Category**

| Category | Number of occurrences | Mean EIQ scores |
|---|---|---|
| Age | | |
| 51–60 | 3 | 79 |
| 61–70 | 4 | 92 |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 3 | 82 |
| Male | 4 | 89 |
| Field of study | | |
| Education | 3 | 90 |
| Liberal Arts | 1 | n/a |
| Other | 2 | 83 |
| Type of institution | | |
| 4-year private | 4 | 81 |
| 4-year public | 2 | 97 |
| Years as president | | |
| Less than 4 years | 1 | n/a |
| 5–10 years | 2 | 79 |
| Over 10 years | 3 | 86 |

## *6. Data Analysis and Discussion*

### *6.1 Research Question 1*

What is the level of emotional intelligence in the College/University Presidents surveyed as given by their total emotional intelligence score (EIQ)?

*MSCEIT Total EIQ Scores*

The data showed that most presidents had an average total EIQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient) score with one president having a fairly low score and one president having a fairly large score (67 and 109, respectively). The EIQ measures one's overall emotional intelligence level. The scores were interpreted base on the guidelines given by MHS Inc. The total EIQ scores were, in order of score value: 67, 79, 83, 85, 85, 95, and 109. Two scores were above the mean and five scores were below the mean. Considering that an average score for the MSCEIT is 100 (Mayer et al., 2002), six presidents scored below this average and one scored above this average. Based on these scores alone we cannot draw any significant conclusions, except that six of the seven presidents that participated in this study had a less than average score.

### *6.2 Research Question 2*

Is the emotional intelligence score (EIQ) related to selected demographic factors?

Out of the seven participants four (57%) were male and three (43%) were female; four (57%) presidents were in the age group of 61–70 years old and three presidents (43%) were in the age group of 51–60.

All seven presidents hold a doctoral degree (100%) with three (43%) holding an Education doctorate, three holding an "other" doctorate (43%), and one (14%)holding a Liberal Arts doctorate. Five (71%) of the seven presidents lead a four-year private institution and two (29%) lead a four-year public institution. Three presidents (43%) were more than 10 years in office at their respective current institutions, three (43%) between five and 10 years, and one (14%) less than four years. All seven presidents (100%) were in their first presidency. The most significant finding was that the one president that was holding office for less than four years scored highest in the overall MSCEIT EIQ score. This president's total EIQ was above the average of 100 (given by MHS) and above the mean for this study's EIQ scores.

This leads to the conclusion that length of tenure as president is inversely correlated to emotional intelligence ability and skills, in contradiction to research that states that emotional intelligence skills are directly correlated to experience (Fisher et al., as cited in Fisher & Koch, 1996). The other significant finding was that the presidents of the two four-year public institutions had a mean score higher and the two highest scores for the MSCEIT total EIQ score than the other five presidents of the four-year private institutions.

One potential reason for this is that presidents of public institutions are more accountable to the public, a larger audience, while the private school presidents are not accountable to the public at large. The fact that the younger-age category total EIQ scores were lower than the higher-age category total EIQ scores supports the research of Mayer et al. (2002) when they state that observations indicated that young adults (< 25) scored significantly lower than older groups. Even though they only identify the category of 50+ as their last observed category it is evident that even at categories past the age of 50, the younger individuals present lower scores than older individuals.There was no significant difference between the genders as female presidents had a mean of 82 and male presidents had a mean of 89; thus both mean scores fall in the category of "consider improvement." Also, the two presidents mentioned above (the two highest scores) represented both genders. However, this does contradict the findings of Mayer et al. that "women scored slightly higher than men on all of the scales" (2002, p. 30). In fact, the highest total EIQ score for this study was found in a male president.

There was no significant finding in terms of field of doctoral studies and total EIQ scores as the two highest scores and the lowest total EIQ scores were for presidents with doctoral degrees in Education. The results were inconclusive at best for the type of doctorate the presidents hold.

*6.2.1.MSCEIT EIQ Total Scores and Age*

Out of the seven presidents that participated, the mean EIQ score for the age category 51–60 was 79 and the mean score for age category 61–70 was 92. There were two presidents in the age category of 51–60 that scored above the mean and one that scored below the mean; and there were two presidents in the age category of 61–70 that scored above the mean and two that scored below the mean.

*6.2.2 MSCEIT EIQ Total Scores and Gender*

Out of the seven presidents that participated, the mean score for the female presidents was 82 and the mean score for the male presidents was 89. There were two female presidents that scored above the mean and one below the mean; there were two male presidents that scored below mean and two above mean.

*6.2.3 MSCEIT EIQ Total Scores and Years in Current Position*

Out of the six presidents that participated, the mean score for presidents in their current leadership position for over 10 year is 86 with one score above the mean and two scores below the mean; the mean score for presidents in their current leadership position for five–10 years is 76 with one score above the mean and one score below the mean; and the mean scores for presidents in their leadership position for less than four years was not applicable as there was only one participating president that held the position for less than four years.

*6.2.4 MSCEIT EIQ Total Scores and Type of Institution*

Out of the six presidents that participated, the mean score for the four-year public institution presidents is 97 with one score above and one below the mean, and the mean score for the four-year private institution presidents is 81 with two scores above the mean and two scores below the mean.

*6.2.5 MSCEIT EIQ Total Scores and Type of Highest Degree*

Out of the six presidents that participated, three presidents had a doctorate in Education; two in other fields, and one in Liberal Arts. The mean EIQ scores for the presidents with doctoral degrees in Education was 90, with one score below the mean and two scores above the mean. The mean EIQ score for presidents with doctoral degrees in "other" was 82, with one score below the mean and one scores above the mean. There was only one president with a doctorate in Liberal Arts; therefore, the mean calculation does not apply. For questions 8 and 9 that asked the presidents about the position held right before the current presidency and list other leadership positions held before the presidency, the answers were as follows: for question 8—position held right before the presidency, the data collected showed various positions ranging from provosts/academic vice presidents to vice presidents and senior vice presidents of different functions within academe, academic and administrative deans, and department chairs. For question 9—other academic leadership positions held, the data collected showed various positions ranging from department chairs, to academic and administrative deans. Academic leadership positions were the majority with administrative leadership positions found only in two of the six presidents that completed the DIQ.

## *7. Implications*

Caruso and Salovey stated that "emotion is not just important but absolutely necessary for us to make good decisions, take optimal actions to solve problems, cope with change, and succeed" (2004, p. ix).

They suggested the following skills that need to be developed: reading people by identifying emotions, getting in the mood as using emotions, predicting the emotional future and understanding emotions, and doing it with feelings through managing emotions. They further stated that the following six principles are the reasons why leaders should develop or improve their emotional intelligences. That is because emotions represent information, we cannot ignore them because it does not work, we cannot hide them well, because decisions need to incorporate emotions to be effective, emotions do follow a logical pattern, and because emotions universals exist but so do specifics.

Another important aspect of the college and university presidency is the need to deal with many constituencies that most of the times have conflicting needs: students, faculty, staff, trustees, public, donors, and so forth. Emotional intelligence can prove to be the key skill in dealing with all of them and reducing conflict within their institutions.

As such the implications for this study are:

1. For presidents to develop or continue developing their emotional intelligence skills though reading, training, and practice.
2. For presidents to lead by example, mentor, and instill a need to develop emotional intelligence in their followers and create an emotionally intelligent work environment by providing seminars and workshops for their employees.
3. For the use of emotional intelligence testing in the screening process for future presidential candidates.

### *8. Recommendation for Further Research*

The findings of this study suggest the following recommendations for future research:

1. To continue this study with a much larger sample and combine it with a leadership effectiveness assessment tool. This proposed research could lead to a better understanding of the relationship, if any, between the level of emotional intelligence in the college/university president and his or her leadership effectiveness.
2. To continue this study with a much larger sample size and include other demographic factors. This proposed research could lead to a better understanding of the relationship, if any, between demographic factors, emotional intelligence, and leadership effectiveness.
3. To continue this study with emphasis on two demographic factors of the DIQ: length in office and degree field of study, factors not yet studied by other researchers.

### *9. Conclusion*

In conclusion, past research and theory suggests a strong relationship between high degrees of emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness, as Goleman stated Effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of emotional intelligence . . . my research along with other studies clearly show that emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won't make a great leader. (1998a, p. 94) He further stated that "the higher the rank of a person . . . the more emotionally intelligent capabilities showed up as the reason for his or her effectiveness" (p. 94).This study did not prove nor disprove this statement. Some data collected during this study, such the qualitative data from the interviews, did support this statement; however, given the small sample size and the nature of this research one cannot conclude either way. Some data did contradict previous findings, such as that females score slightly higher than males. This research indicated the exact opposite, as the highest score belonged to a male president. And finally, it is important for college and university presidents to become more skilled in emotional intelligence so that they may be able to achieve a balance between their IQ and EQ and to be able to deal with their many constituencies and the changing landscape of higher education.

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