

## Executive Summary

This dissertation explores what drives technical leaders to adapt their leadership style and how they navigate authenticity in that process. Leadership isn't static—it's shaped by context, relationships, and evolving expectations. Motivated by a desire to understand how leaders balance adaptability with staying true to themselves, this research draws on insights from six technical leaders and managers in the UK. Using a Grounded Theory approach, semi-structured interviews uncovered key themes that reflect real-world leadership challenges and strategies.

### Key Findings:

1. **Data is a Guide, Not a Crutch** – Technical leaders rely on data to drive decisions and justify actions, but an overemphasis on metrics can overshadow situational awareness and interpersonal dynamics.
2. **Reading the Room is a Leadership Skill** – The ability to interpret social cues and adapt accordingly is as critical as technical expertise. Leaders who indicated strong social perception were more likely to report adapting their style, reinforcing that effective technical leadership requires understanding people as much as understanding technology systems.
3. **Authenticity is Contextual** – Some leaders viewed authenticity as consistency, while others saw it as adaptable. Those who balanced personal values with external demands found it easier to shift their leadership style without feeling compromised.
4. **Trust Needs Accountability** – Empowering teams through trust enables autonomy, but without clear accountability, it risks ambiguity and disengagement. Leaders who set expectations while fostering trust reported they achieved better results.

### Final Thoughts

This dissertation, awarded First Class Honours, offers technical leaders a chance to reflect on their own approach: how they make decisions, engage their teams, and adapt their style without compromising authenticity. The depth of participants' contributions ensured that these findings aren't just theoretical but grounded in the realities of leading in technical environments. I would like to extend my thanks to all the participants involved, along with my research supervisor, Dr Daniel Fisher, Assistant Professor in Management at the University of Sussex Business School.