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Strategic Development of Managerial Potential of Leaders: Theoretical Foundations, Methodological Challenges, and an Integrated Conceptual Framework

Rafikova Ziyodakhan Akmaljonovna

1. PhD in Management, Senior Lecturer, Department of Preschool Education Management, Institute for Retraining and Advanced Training of Directors and Specialists of Preschool Educational Organizations
- * Correspondence: ziyodaabdurahimova0311@gmail.com

Abstract: This study develops an integrated theoretical and methodological framework for the strategic development of managerial potential among leaders. The research addresses a persistent gap between managerial assessment and subsequent development: organizations frequently measure competencies, performance, and leadership behaviours, yet the resulting evidence is not systematically converted into individualized development trajectories, practice-based assignments, succession decisions, and longitudinal reassessment. Drawing on strategic human resource management, competency theory, dynamic capabilities, leadership development, performance management, and public-service capability literature, the study distinguishes managerial potential from current competence, leadership behaviour, human capital, and achieved performance. A conceptual six-dimensional architecture is proposed, comprising strategic-analytical capability, decision-making capability, leadership and human capital management, digital and innovation capability, adaptive change capability, and performance accountability. The article also introduces a continuous development cycle that links assessment, diagnosis, individualized development, practice-based challenge, monitoring, and reassessment. The scientific novelty lies in reconceptualizing managerial potential as a dynamic and developable latent capability rather than a static set of competencies or a retrospective performance score. The framework provides a basis for future empirical validation, weighting of indicators, predictive modelling, and the design of evidence-based leadership development systems across organizational and institutional contexts.

Keywords: managerial potential; leaders; leadership development; strategic human resource management; dynamic capabilities; competency framework; performance management; human capital; digital leadership; succession management.

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1. Introduction

Leadership quality is a critical determinant of organizational adaptability, institutional performance, and the capacity to translate strategic priorities into sustained results. Contemporary leaders operate under technological acceleration, data abundance, public scrutiny, workforce heterogeneity, uncertainty, and complex stakeholder expectations. Under these conditions, organizations require more than evidence of prior experience or current performance; they need a systematic understanding of managerial potential as the capacity to learn, adapt, integrate information, mobilize people, make high-quality decisions, and perform in progressively more complex roles.

The competency tradition provides an important starting point because it links effective managerial performance to identifiable behavioural characteristics and

underlying competencies [1]. Strategic human resource management broadens this view by positioning human-capital development within organizational strategy rather than treating individual HR practices in isolation [2]. Dynamic-capabilities theory adds a future-oriented perspective by emphasizing the ability to sense change, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources when environments shift [3]. Together, these perspectives imply that managerial potential should reflect not only what a leader can do now, but also the capacity to renew and redeploy capabilities as role complexity increases.

Managerial potential nevertheless remains conceptually distinct from current performance. Performance management focuses on the achievement, monitoring, and improvement of results and therefore provides essential evidence about current effectiveness [4]. Leadership-development research, however, shows that growth also depends on developmental processes, identity, experience, feedback, and the capacity to learn across changing situations [5]. Developmental challenge is particularly important because difficult assignments can generate leadership learning when sufficient learning orientation and feedback are present [6].

Research on high-potential identification further demonstrates that managerial potential cannot be reduced to a single competency score. Consensus-based models emphasize multiple indicators of future leadership potential and the need to distinguish potential from current role effectiveness [7]. The literature also warns that identifying high potentials involves both benefits and methodological risks, especially when organizations rely on poorly specified criteria or equate past performance with future readiness [8]. International executive research similarly indicates that future potential involves attributes that become visible when individuals face unfamiliar, complex, or cross-context assignments [9].

Learning agility is therefore central to a future-oriented interpretation of managerial potential. It describes the willingness and capability to learn from experience and apply that learning in new or first-time conditions [10]. Subsequent conceptual work has emphasized that learning agility must be clearly differentiated from adjacent constructs and measured with stronger theoretical precision [11]. This is important because organizations frequently use the language of agility in succession and talent systems without consistently defining how it should be assessed or developed.

The strategic talent-management literature also highlights the importance of identifying pivotal positions, building differentiated talent pools, and linking talent systems to organizational performance [12]. In public institutions, the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability stresses forward-looking leadership, merit, continuous learning, and systematic capability development [13]. More recent OECD guidance emphasizes flexible workforce management, mobility, learning, and adaptive public-service capability [14]. These perspectives reinforce the need for a framework that connects assessment evidence to individualized development and succession decisions rather than treating assessment as an endpoint.

Digitalization adds another layer to the construct. A review of leadership in digitalized organizations shows that technology reshapes communication, decision processes, virtual collaboration, innovation, and ethical responsibilities, requiring leaders to develop capabilities beyond traditional supervisory competence [15]. At the same time, leadership assessment must recognize potential derailment risks and behavioural limitations rather than focusing only on desirable characteristics [16]. Contemporary leadership theory also supports a multidimensional view in which effective leadership integrates task, relational, change, and contextual demands [17].

Despite the breadth of this literature, a practical and theoretical gap remains. Assessment systems commonly generate competency profiles, 360-degree feedback, psychometric results, assessment-centre evidence, and performance ratings, but development systems may operate separately. This separation can turn assessment into a terminal judgment rather than a diagnostic input into a longitudinal process of individualized development, workplace challenge, monitoring, and reassessment. The literature also tends to address competence, learning agility, leadership development, talent management, performance, and digital capability as related but partly separate

streams. A more integrated model is therefore needed to explain how these elements jointly constitute and develop managerial potential.

Accordingly, this study aims to develop a theoretically coherent and practically usable framework for the strategic development of managerial potential among leaders. It clarifies the conceptual boundaries of managerial potential, identifies core dimensions from established theoretical streams, constructs an integrated development cycle linking assessment with development and performance evidence, and formulates methodological implications for future empirical validation. The central research question is: How can managerial potential be conceptualized and developed as a dynamic, measurable, and strategically relevant capability rather than as a static collection of competencies? The article is conceptual rather than empirical and therefore proposes a testable framework instead of causal estimates or population-level claims.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a conceptual integrative-review design. The purpose of the design is not to estimate an intervention effect but to synthesize established theoretical constructs and derive a logically coherent model suitable for later empirical testing. The analytical corpus consists of major scholarly streams relevant to leadership and managerial capability: competency theory, strategic human resource management, leadership development, dynamic capabilities, performance management, human capital theory, succession management, and public-service leadership capability.

Sources were selected purposively on the basis of conceptual relevance, disciplinary influence, and applicability to leadership development. Foundational works were combined with contemporary guidance from international organizations. The analysis used four stages. First, conceptual differentiation was applied to distinguish managerial potential from adjacent constructs. Second, thematic coding was used to identify recurring capability domains. Third, structural synthesis grouped these domains into a parsimonious architecture. Fourth, conceptual modelling was used to connect assessment evidence with development activities, workplace application, monitoring, and reassessment.

To strengthen methodological transparency, each proposed dimension had to satisfy three inclusion criteria: it had to be theoretically grounded, relevant across multiple leadership contexts, and observable through more than one assessment method. Dimensions that were overly role-specific or represented outcomes rather than capabilities were excluded from the core architecture. Performance was retained as an accountability dimension only where it reflects the leader's capacity to convert goals into measurable outcomes, not as a substitute for the entire construct of potential.

The resulting framework should be interpreted as a hypothesized measurement-development model. It requires subsequent validation. Suitable empirical procedures include expert content validation; exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis; reliability testing; criterion and predictive validity analysis; multi-source assessment; and multi-criteria weighting methods such as the Analytic Hierarchy Process, Best-Worst Method, or entropy-based weighting. Longitudinal designs are especially important because managerial potential is future-oriented and cannot be validated solely against contemporaneous performance.

3. Result

3.1. Conceptual differentiation of managerial potential

The first result is a clearer distinction between managerial potential and related constructs. Table 1 summarizes the conceptual boundaries used in this study.

The distinction has two methodological implications. First, high current performance should not automatically be interpreted as high future potential. Results may depend on context, resources, team quality, market position, institutional support, or the relative stability of the role. Second, potential assessment should incorporate evidence of learning,

adaptation, decision quality, and capability to operate at a higher level of complexity. A robust system therefore requires triangulation rather than dependence on a single score.

Table 1. Conceptual differentiation of managerial potential and adjacent constructs.
Source: developed by the author from the theoretical synthesis.

Construct	Core question	Primary time orientation	Typical evidence	Primary use
Managerial competence	What can the leader perform effectively now?	Current	Behavioural indicators, knowledge, skills	Role effectiveness
Managerial potential	What level of future complexity can the leader master after development?	Current + future	Learning agility, capability profile, simulation, multi-source evidence	Succession and development
Leadership behaviour	How does the leader influence people and relationships?	Current	360-degree feedback, observation	Team leadership
Human capital	What knowledge, experience, and capabilities have accumulated?	Cumulative	Education, experience, expertise	Resource value
Performance	What results has the leader achieved?	Retrospective	KPIs, outcomes, targets	Accountability

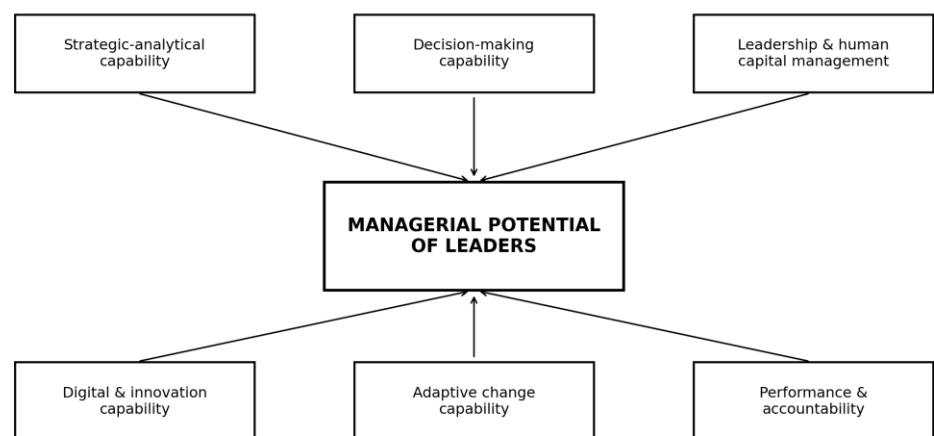
3.2. Six-dimensional architecture of managerial potential

The integrative synthesis produced six core dimensions. Together they represent a balanced architecture that connects cognition, people leadership, technology, adaptation, and accountability.

Table 2. Six-dimensional architecture of managerial potential. Source: author's conceptual synthesis.

Dimension	Definition	Observable indicators	Development mechanisms
Strategic-analytical capability	Ability to interpret complex systems, detect patterns, anticipate consequences, and establish priorities.	Systems thinking; scenario analysis; strategic reasoning; problem framing.	Foresight exercises; strategic cases; cross-functional projects.
Decision-making capability	Ability to evaluate alternatives and make timely,	Judgment quality; risk calibration;	Decision labs; simulations;

Dimension	Definition	Observable indicators	Development mechanisms
	evidence-based decisions under uncertainty.	evidence use; decisiveness.	after-action reviews.
Leadership and human capital management	Ability to mobilize people, delegate, develop talent, create trust, and manage performance.	Team climate; feedback quality; delegation; coaching; conflict management.	360-degree feedback; coaching; mentoring; team leadership assignments.
Digital and innovation capability	Ability to use data, digital tools, and innovation methods to improve decisions and processes.	Data literacy; digital judgment; experimentation; innovation adoption.	Digital leadership modules; analytics projects; innovation labs.
Adaptive change capability	Ability to learn, adjust, and lead change in volatile and ambiguous conditions.	Learning agility; resilience; change leadership; stakeholder adaptation.	Action learning; rotation; stretch assignments; crisis simulations.
Performance and accountability	Ability to convert strategic goals into measurable results while maintaining responsibility and transparency.	Goal clarity; execution discipline; monitoring; accountability.	Performance reviews; outcome dashboards; goal contracts.



Assessment → Diagnosis → Individual Development → Practice-based Challenge → Monitoring → Reassessment

Figure 1. Integrated conceptual framework for the strategic development of managerial potential. Source: developed by the author.

3.3. From assessment to development: an integrated cycle

The second major result is the proposed continuous development cycle. The cycle begins with multi-source assessment and ends with reassessment, thereby transforming

evaluation from a terminal judgment into the entry point of development. Its six stages are: assessment, diagnosis, individualized development planning, practice-based challenge, monitoring, and reassessment.

Assessment should combine complementary sources of evidence. Depending on context, these may include structured behavioural interviews, situational judgment tests, cognitive and psychometric measures, assessment-centre exercises, 360-degree feedback, performance indicators, project results, and expert evaluation. No single method is sufficient to capture the multidimensional nature of potential. Multi-method triangulation reduces method-specific bias and provides a richer profile of strengths, risks, and development priorities.

Diagnosis translates raw scores into a developmental interpretation. Instead of simply labelling leaders as 'high' or 'low' potential, the diagnostic phase identifies dimension-specific gaps, contextual strengths, derailment risks, and readiness for greater complexity. The next phase converts this profile into an individual development plan. Development interventions should be linked to the diagnosed gap and should include real-work challenges, not only classroom learning.

Practice-based challenge is essential because managerial potential becomes meaningful only when capabilities are exercised under realistic conditions. Stretch assignments, cross-functional projects, rotations, strategic initiatives, crisis simulations, mentoring responsibilities, and innovation projects allow leaders to demonstrate learning transfer. Monitoring then evaluates behavioural change and work outcomes. Reassessment closes the loop by comparing the updated profile with the original baseline and adjusting the next development cycle.

3.4. Proposed measurement logic

For future empirical research, managerial potential may be represented as a weighted composite index after the dimensional structure has been validated:

$$MPI = \sum (w_i \times D_i), \quad i = 1, \dots, 6; \quad \sum w_i = 1$$

where MPI denotes the Managerial Potential Index, D_i represents the standardized score for dimension i , and w_i represents the validated weight assigned to that dimension. The formula is deliberately presented as a methodological proposition rather than an empirically estimated index. Weights should not be assigned arbitrarily. They may be derived through expert judgment, AHP/BWM, regression-based predictive validity, or latent-variable modelling, depending on the study design and data structure.

A further methodological refinement is the use of a readiness matrix. Leaders may be classified not through a single rank ordering but according to the degree of readiness for future complexity: ready now, ready with targeted development, and not yet ready for the next role. Such categorization should be evidence-based and transparent, with explicit developmental criteria and an appeal or review mechanism where assessment has significant career consequences.

3.5. Comparison of traditional and strategic development approaches

Table 3. Traditional versus integrated strategic approaches to managerial-potential development. Source: author's synthesis.

Criterion	Traditional approach	Integrated strategic approach
Purpose of assessment	Determine current suitability	Diagnose current capability and future readiness
Evidence base	Single or limited methods	Multi-method and multi-source triangulation
Development	Standard training programmes	Individualized, gap-based development trajectory
Workplace transfer	Often implicit	Practice-based challenge and observable transfer

Criterion	Traditional approach	Integrated strategic approach
Monitoring	Periodic or fragmented	Continuous longitudinal monitoring
Succession	List of candidates	Readiness profile + development passport + evidence trail
Outcome	Assessment score or certificate	Capability growth and improved readiness for complexity

4. Discussion

The proposed framework extends competency-based management rather than replacing it. Competency frameworks remain useful for clarifying expected behaviours and performance standards. However, managerial potential requires additional attention to learning agility, adaptation, future-role complexity, and the capacity to reconfigure one's behavioural repertoire. This view is consistent with dynamic-capabilities theory, which emphasizes renewal under changing conditions rather than static resource possession [3].

The framework also addresses a recurring weakness in leadership-development practice: the separation between measurement and development. 360-degree feedback, psychometric instruments, assessment centres, and performance reviews can generate high-quality information, but their value is limited if they are not linked to development decisions. In the proposed model, evidence is converted into an explicit development hypothesis: a specific capability gap is matched with a specific intervention, an expected behavioural change, and a later reassessment criterion. Experiential leadership-development evidence likewise supports the value of challenge and feedback when development is tied to real work [6].

A second contribution is the separation of potential from retrospective performance. Performance remains important, but it is an imperfect proxy for future readiness. A leader may produce strong results in a familiar environment yet struggle when role complexity, stakeholder diversity, uncertainty, or strategic scope increases. Conversely, a leader with moderate current performance may possess high learning agility and strong future potential if current constraints are developmental rather than structural. Therefore, organizations should avoid using KPI results as the sole basis for high-potential identification. This distinction is consistent with research that treats leadership potential as a forward-looking construct rather than a simple reflection of current performance [7].

Third, the inclusion of digital and innovation capability reflects the changing nature of managerial work. Digital leadership is not equivalent to technical expertise. It involves the ability to interpret data, ask appropriate questions of analytical systems, understand algorithmic limitations, manage digital transformation, and preserve accountability when technology influences decisions. This capability is increasingly relevant across sectors, not only in technology-intensive organizations. The importance of digitally mediated leadership capability is also supported by the literature on leadership in digitalized organizational environments [15].

Fourth, the framework highlights the importance of ethics and governance in potential assessment. High-stakes leadership assessments may affect appointments, succession opportunities, and career trajectories. Therefore, assessment systems should provide transparency regarding criteria, ensure data quality, prevent discriminatory proxy variables, protect confidentiality, and separate developmental feedback from punitive use where appropriate. Human judgment should remain accountable even when digital or AI-assisted tools are introduced. Attention to derailment risk is consistent with research showing that leadership assessment should consider potentially dysfunctional behavioural tendencies as well as strengths [16].

The framework also has limitations. It is conceptual and has not yet been psychometrically validated. The six dimensions may vary in relative importance across organizational levels, sectors, and institutional environments. Some dimensions may overlap empirically. Future research should therefore test discriminant validity, measurement invariance, and predictive validity across samples. Longitudinal studies are

particularly necessary because future potential can only be meaningfully validated by observing later role complexity and sustained performance.

For empirical development, a staged research programme is recommended. Phase 1 should establish content validity through expert panels. Phase 2 should pilot a multidimensional instrument and conduct exploratory factor analysis. Phase 3 should use confirmatory factor analysis and reliability testing. Phase 4 should test criterion and predictive validity against role progression, behavioural outcomes, and performance over time. Phase 5 may integrate multi-criteria weighting and machine-learning prediction, but only after the construct and measurement model are sufficiently stable.

4.1. Practical implications

First, organizations should introduce a Managerial Potential Development Passport that records the current profile, development priorities, target levels, assigned development activities, evidence of workplace application, and reassessment dates. This transforms assessment reports into living development documents.

Second, succession pools should distinguish between current performance and future readiness. A transparent readiness framework can prevent the common error of promoting the best current performer without sufficient evidence of capacity for increased complexity.

Third, leadership development should prioritize experiential mechanisms. Formal training is valuable for conceptual knowledge, but stretch assignments, rotations, cross-functional projects, mentoring, coaching, and action learning create the conditions in which potential can be demonstrated and developed.

Fourth, organizations should link every identified development gap to an observable target behaviour and an evidence source. For example, a strategic-thinking gap may be linked to scenario analysis, a cross-functional strategy project, and later evaluation of decision quality.

Fifth, multi-source triangulation should become the default principle for high-stakes assessment. Psychometric tools, 360-degree feedback, simulations, structured interviews, performance data, and expert judgment should be treated as complementary rather than competing methods.

Sixth, digital systems should support—not replace—professional judgment. A leadership analytics platform can integrate assessment evidence, monitor development activity, and generate longitudinal profiles, but career decisions should remain explainable, reviewable, and accountable.

5. Conclusion

This article argues that managerial potential should be understood as a dynamic, future-oriented, and developable capability rather than as a static competency profile or retrospective performance score. Through conceptual synthesis, six interdependent dimensions were identified: strategic-analytical capability, decision-making capability, leadership and human capital management, digital and innovation capability, adaptive change capability, and performance accountability.

The main scientific contribution is the integration of these dimensions with a continuous strategic development cycle linking assessment, diagnosis, individualized development, practice-based challenge, monitoring, and reassessment. This cycle provides a methodological bridge between leadership assessment and leadership development and offers a stronger foundation for succession management and evidence-based talent decisions.

The framework is suitable for later empirical development. Future studies should validate the factor structure, establish measurement reliability and invariance, estimate the relative contribution of each dimension, examine predictive validity for higher-complexity roles, and assess whether digital or AI-supported analytics can improve prediction without weakening transparency and fairness. In this way, managerial-potential research can move from fragmented assessment practices toward a coherent evidence-based system of strategic leadership development.

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