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A Six-Criteria Framework for Evaluating Leadership Development Models

Peter Thomond[1] and Hein Scheffer[2*]

[1]*CEO of Clever Together, United Kingdom*

[2]*Director of Strategy, Transformation & Governance at East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, and Honorary Associate Professor at East Anglia University, United Kingdom*

[*]**Corresponding author**
Hein Scheffer, Director of Strategy, Transformation & Governance at East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, and Honorary Associate Professor at East Anglia University United Kingdom.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper presents a six-criteria evaluation framework for assessing the quality, coherence, and sustainability of leadership and management development models. The aim is to support the design and selection of frameworks that are both theoretically rigorous and practically effective in equipping leaders for current and future organisational challenges.

Methodology: An integrative literature review was undertaken to develop the evaluation framework, synthesising established and emerging theories from leadership and organisational studies. Its applicability was tested by evaluating twelve leadership development frameworks produced by the UK National Health Service (NHS) between 2010 and 2024.

Findings: Analysis revealed wide variation in the quality and consistency of NHS leadership frameworks, with only two of the twelve meeting all six criteria. Frameworks grounded in theory, explicitly future-oriented, structured around staged development, and embedded in practical application were more likely to support the development of capable and adaptive leaders.

Research Implications: The framework offers a literature-informed basis for evaluation but has so far been applied only within the NHS context. Future research should examine its utility across other sectors and international settings and test its capacity to predict leadership outcomes empirically.

Practical Implications: The paper provides practitioners, policymakers, and organisational designers with a structured tool for designing and assessing leadership frameworks. Applying the criteria can help ensure that models are conceptually coherent, strategically aligned, adaptable to context, and sustainable in practice.

Keywords: Education, Development, Framework, Leadership, Management, Training, NHS Leadership Development Frameworks

Introduction

Leadership and management are widely recognised as critical to organisational success, particularly in today's complex environments where coordinated action is essential [1-4]. A substantial and expanding body of research reinforces this view, much of it focused on identifying the capacities and competencies that underpin effective leadership and management [5-10]. As a result, numerous frameworks have been developed across health, public, and private sectors to guide the growth of leaders and managers [11-13].

Within the National Health Service (NHS), leadership development frameworks have proliferated over the past decade. Yet, a review of frameworks produced between 2010 and 2024 (see Table 1) revealed significant variation in their conceptual clarity, consistency, and practical application. In other words, not all frameworks are created equal.

The aim of this paper is therefore twofold: first, to present a six-criterion model for evaluating leadership frameworks, and

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second, to reflect critically on its strengths, limitations, and future potential. This model provides a structured means of assessing whether frameworks are both theoretically sound and practically useful, with the overarching goal of supporting more effective, consistent, and sustainable approaches to leadership development.

Table 1: NHS Leadership Frameworks, 2010–2024

NHS Leadership Development Frameworks [2024 – 2010]	
	Leadership Framework
1.	Leadership Competency Framework for Board Members [2024]
2.	Health inequalities (board assurance tool) Leadership Framework [2021/2022]
3.	We are the NHS: The People Plan [2020/2021]
4.	The Interim People Plan [2019]
5.	The NHS, Provider Chair Development Framework [2019]
6.	The 'Simplified KSF' Knowledge and Skills Framework, [2019]
7.	The Aspire Together Competency Framework [2018]
8.	Developing People, Improving Care [2016]
9.	The Public Health Skills and Knowledge Framework [2016]
10.	The Healthcare Leadership Model [2014]
11.	The Leadership Framework [2011]
12.	The Medial Leadership Competency Framework [2010]

Specifically, the paper seeks to:

1. Explain the intellectual foundations underpinning the six evaluation criteria we have applied in recent years, namely:
a. distinguishing between **leadership and management**.
b. grounding frameworks in **a logic model**.
c. emphasising **future orientation** and anticipation of emerging challenges.
d. specifying clear **competencies** and observable **behaviours**.
e. incorporating staged or **maturity-based** development pathways; an
f. ensuring practical **utility for individuals and organisations**.
2. Reflect on where these criteria may be strong, insufficient, or in need of revision.
3. Explore emerging ideas and pose the broader question: *Do we need a radical rethink of how leadership and management are understood and developed for the future*?

Schematically, the six criterions could be explained as follows, considering its worth, risk/limitations and areas for refinement, offering stronger focus:

Table 2: Summary of Six Evaluation Criteria for Leadership Frameworks

Criterion	Why it Matters	Risks / Limitations	Refinement / Stronger Focus
1. Distinguishing Leadership & Management	Clarifies distinct but complementary functions: leadership = vision/change; management = stability/ process. Ensures development addresses both.	Overstates dichotomy; risks undervaluing management or exaggerating leadership. Real-world roles often blend both.	Assess how frameworks integrate leadership and management functions contextually, rather than treating them as rigidly separate.
2. Grounding in a Logic Model / Theory of Change	Makes assumptions explicit; shows how activities lead to outcomes; supports accountability and evaluation.	Can become too rigid or prescriptive; may not reflect adaptive/emergent leadership needs.	Require logic models that are clear yet flexible, balancing conceptual clarity with adaptability.
3. Emphasis on Future Orientation & Strategic Foresight	Prepares leaders for volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) environments; fosters vision and long-term thinking.	Risk of neglecting short-term operational needs; foresight more relevant in some contexts than others.	Evaluate how frameworks balance immediate responsiveness with long-term vision.
4. Clear, Observable Competencies & Behaviours	Provides actionable guidance; supports recruitment, appraisal, and targeted development.	Risk of reductionism; behaviours can oversimplify complex relational dynamics.	Ensure competencies are behaviourally specific but still capture relational and adaptive aspects of leadership.
5. Staged Development / Maturity Models	Recognises leadership growth as a journey; tailors' development to current stage; supports long-term capacity building.	Models may be too linear; not all leaders progress sequentially; context shapes development differently.	Encourage staged growth but allow for non-linear, context-sensitive pathways.
6. Practical Utility & Real-World Application	Ensures frameworks are usable for self-assessment, coaching, training, and succession planning.	Risk of oversimplification; popular models may lack theoretical depth.	Evaluate frameworks for both usability and adaptability across diverse contexts without losing conceptual integrity.

Assessment Basis

Each of the six criteria in our assessment is discussed in turn, drawing on relevant literature, evidence, and theory to explain why it serves as a useful benchmark for evaluating leadership and management frameworks.

Distinguishing Leadership and Management

A long-standing theme in the leadership literature is the distinction between leadership and management. Scholars such as Zaleznik (1977), Kotter (1990), Day (2000), and Ham (2011) have consistently argued that effective frameworks must make this distinction explicit [11, 1416]. While the terms are often used interchangeably in everyday language, research demonstrates that they describe different, though complementary, functions. Leadership is associated with vision, change, and inspiring people, whereas management is linked to stability, planning, and control. For example, Zaleznik described leaders as agents of change who shape values and commitment, while managers safeguard stability and focus on authority and task execution. Kotter (1990) distinguished leadership as the ability to cope with change, and management as the ability to cope with complexity [14, 15]. Ham similarly defined management as the execution of policies and procedures, while Day highlighted that leadership requires both self-development and the capacity to build others, combining "an intelligent head and an intelligent heart" [11, 16].

In practice, organisations require both strong leadership and strong management. Neither is inherently superior; rather, each fulfils distinct functions essential to success. Frameworks that blur this distinction risk confusion—for instance, training programs may overemphasise administrative competence while neglecting visionary leadership, or vice versa. High-quality frameworks should therefore delineate leadership and management competencies clearly, ensuring individuals understand when they are expected to lead (e.g., innovate, inspire, set direction) and when they are required to manage (e.g., plan, organise, allocate resources). This clarity allows organisations to design more targeted development strategies [17].

At the same time, the distinction has been critiqued as overstated. Azad et al. (2017) argue that portraying leadership as inherently superior undervalues management, when in reality effective practitioners often integrate both skill sets [18]. Mintzberg (2023) similarly warns that frameworks which overemphasise charismatic leadership while neglecting managerial rigour risk becoming impractical [19]. From this perspective, leadership and management are best understood as complementary dimensions that frequently coexist within the same role.

What is often missing, therefore, is contextual nuance. The balance between leadership and management varies by sector, culture, and organisational level. A refined framework should not insist on a rigid separation but instead explore how the two functions interact—for example, how management processes can support leadership outcomes, or how visionary leadership is translated into practice through effective management. Thus, the stronger criterion is not merely whether leadership and management are differentiated, but whether their relationship is articulated in a way that is coherent, context-sensitive, and useful in practice.

Logic Model Foundations

A second key criterion for evaluating leadership and management frameworks is whether they are underpinned by a clear **logic model or theory of change**. Such models provide a conceptual roadmap that explains how a framework works and why its approach offers a credible solution to the challenges it seeks to address. The Kansas University Centre for Community Health and Development describes a logic model as a tool that links activities to expected results, creating a shared language and reference point for stakeholders [20]. Similarly, McLaughlin and Jordan (2015) emphasise that logic models clarify causal pathways by connecting inputs (e.g., leadership training, defined competencies), with activities (e.g., coaching, feedback loops, job assignments), and outcomes (e.g., stronger leadership effectiveness, improved team performance, organisational innovation) [21].

The strength of this criterion lies in its ability to anchor frameworks in cause-and-effect reasoning. By compelling designers to make linkages explicit, it ensures that each component is grounded in theory and evidence rather than in trends or assumptions. For instance, a competency such as emotional intelligence should be tied to specific outcomes like enhanced collaboration or improved decision-making. This prevents frameworks from becoming collections of buzzwords and instead positions them as actionable strategies with transparent logic. In addition, logic models support evaluation: stakeholders can test whether assumed linkages hold true (e.g., "If competency X improves, do we observe outcome Y?"). Program evaluation research suggests that logic models enhance planning, accountability, and alignment by clarifying intentions and expected results [20].

However, this criterion also exposes weaknesses. Many leadership frameworks rely on implicit or overly simplistic models that assume development follows a linear pathway from individual skill-building to organisational transformation. In reality, leadership outcomes are often emergent and influenced by context, such as culture, politics, or external pressures. Rigid models risk being reductive, while frameworks that fail to disclose any explicit theory of change leave their assumptions hidden and their effectiveness difficult to assess.

Recent scholarship advocates for a more adaptive approach. Frantzen et al. (2023) argue that programs should "adapt, don't abandon" logic models—retaining the clarity they provide but revising them as evidence and context evolve [22]. In this view, the most credible frameworks are those that articulate a clear theory of change, make assumptions explicit, and acknowledge complexity by identifying contextual conditions and feedback loops.

For assessment purposes, this means valuing frameworks that balance clarity with adaptability: they provide a transparent rationale for how leadership development is expected to work while recognising that outcomes are iterative and context dependent. Such models align with current calls for more intentional, theory-driven, and evidence-informed leadership development practices.

Future Orientation and Anticipatory Leadership

MacBeath, Moss, and Riley (1996) emphasised that we live in an ever-changing world [23], making a forward-looking

perspective essential in leadership and management frameworks. Effective leaders do more than respond to immediate demands; they anticipate emerging challenges, trends, and opportunities. This requires strategic foresight, vision, and the capacity to prepare organisations for what lies ahead. Russell and Stone (2002) described anticipatory vision as a critical leadership attribute, stressing that leaders must recognise how evolving markets, technologies, and stakeholder expectations can reshape organisational contexts [24]. Likewise, Schoemaker et al. (2013) frame strategic leadership as the ability to anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align, and learn—placing anticipation first among essential skills [25].

Empirical studies reinforce this emphasis. Kouzes and Posner (2010) found that being forwardlooking consistently ranks among the most admired leadership traits [26], while Sinek (2009) argued that articulating an inspiring vision motivates followers by linking daily tasks to longterm goals [27]. Research on corporate foresight further supports this perspective: Van der Laan (2010) and Rohrbeck (2011) both demonstrate that organisations without adequate anticipation risk lagging behind change, undermining adaptability and employee motivation [28, 29].

In practice, future-oriented leadership translates into competencies such as environmental scanning, innovation, long-term planning, and change leadership. These can be expressed as observable behaviours—for example, scanning the horizon for emerging trends or developing contingency plans for different scenarios. Such competencies are vital in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, where acting proactively is often the difference between thriving and falling behind. Moldoveanu and Narayandas (2019) highlight that rapid technological and societal shift demand leadership skills fundamentally different from those of the past [30]. Similarly, Senge (2006) argues that effective frameworks should cultivate learning agility, scenario planning, and systems thinking to equip leaders for disruption [31].

The strength of this criterion lies in its insistence that frameworks prepare leaders not only for present demands but also for uncertain futures. However, weaknesses emerge when "futurethinking" is left vague or superficial. Some frameworks adopt fashionable terms such as "visionary" or "agile" without embedding foresight into measurable competencies or curricula. Others risk chasing fads, equating readiness with the latest trend rather than with evidencebased practices. Future-orientation, if treated superficially, can become a wish list of traits ("innovative, flexible, strategic") that are difficult to develop or evaluate.

Another challenge is contextualisation. Many frameworks identify generic future-oriented skills but neglect sector- or culture-specific challenges. For instance, public-sector models may need to anticipate demographic change or civic technology, while corporate frameworks may focus on digital transformation and sustainability. Bolden et al. (2003) argue that without contextual grounding, the call to be "future-oriented" risks becoming too abstract to guide meaningful development [32].

For these reasons, the most credible frameworks integrate foresight into well-defined competencies, balance ambition with evidence, and tailor future-oriented elements to the context in which leaders operate. In doing so, they not only "future-proof" their organisations but also build resilience and adaptability into leadership itself.

Competencies and Behaviours Specified

A high-quality leadership and management framework must clearly define the competencies and behaviours that constitute effective leadership. Numerous studies (e.g., Young & Dulewicz, 2009; Bolden & Gosling, 2003, 2006; Ruben, De Lisi, & Gigliotti, 2016) highlight the value of such clarity [5, 32-34]. Well-defined competencies provide a common standard and shared language for what leadership looks like in practice. For instance, a framework might identify "strategic thinking," "emotional intelligence," or "results orientation," and translate these into observable behaviours such as "coaches and mentors others" or "manages change effectively." This level of specificity allows leaders to understand expectations, while enabling organisations to assess and develop capacity more reliably.

Competency models emphasise that leadership should be expressed as observable, measurable behaviours—concrete actions that can be evaluated and developed [5]. These extend beyond abstract traits to include interpersonal effectiveness, task management, cognitive abilities, and personal attributes [34]. By breaking broad qualities into actionable behaviours, frameworks become practical tools for growth, helping leaders and coaches identify which behaviours to start, stop, or continue. When articulated clearly, competencies can also serve as an integrative system: aligning recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and promotion around consistent expectations, thereby shaping organisational culture and reinforcing strategic goals. Empirical evidence supports this emphasis: Yukl and Gardner (2020) found that leaders who know precisely which behaviours constitute effective leadership can target their development more effectively, while organisations are better able to measure progress [35].

Yet the competency approach is not without weaknesses. Bolden and Gosling (2006) describe competency frameworks as offering an "illusory promise" of simplification, capturing only fragments of leadership's complexity [33]. Lists of discrete traits risk reducing leadership to a checklist, neglecting deeper qualities such as ethical values, contextual judgment, and the relational dynamics of leadership. Overly detailed catalogues can also overwhelm users, enumerating dozens of competencies without prioritisation and diluting focus. Moreover, traditional models often overemphasise individual attributes, underplaying the ways leadership is distributed across teams and shaped by situational factors.

High-quality frameworks avoid these pitfalls by streamlining competencies into a critical few, often organised into domains (e.g., self, others, organisation) and grounded in established theory or empirical research. They also provide behavioural indicators—concrete examples that make competencies measurable in practice, while supplementing lists with situational elements such as cultural intelligence in global contexts or community-building in public service. Bolden and Gosling (2003, 2006) further advocate a discursive approach, encouraging dialogue about the assumptions underpinning competencies [32, 33].

Ultimately, clarity is valuable only if coupled with relevance and comprehensiveness. Robust frameworks link competencies to organisational values and strategy, include both hard and soft skills, and acknowledge ethical and relational dimensions. The best models achieve precision without oversimplification, providing a practical structure while recognising leadership as complex, contextual, and evolving.

Staged Development and Maturity Models

Nicholson's (1984) theory of work-role transition highlights that leadership and management capabilities mature over time and can be described in stages or levels [36]. Accordingly, a key criterion for evaluating leadership frameworks is whether they account for progressive development. Maturity models, often referred to as vertical development frameworks in contrast to horizontal skill-building, provide a structured pathway for growth, mapping how leaders evolve from novice perspectives toward more complex and holistic mindsets. For example, Kegan (1982) identified qualitatively different stages of meaning-making, ranging from egocentric outlooks to more strategic and visionary orientations [37]. Similarly, Rooke and Torbert's (2005) Leadership Development Framework describes seven "action logics" from Opportunist to Alchemist, each representing increasingly effective ways of interpreting and engaging with the world. While only a minority of leaders reach the highest stages, research shows that those who do are far better equipped to handle complexity and change [38].

Integrating maturity models into leadership frameworks has clear benefits. At the individual level, they provide milestones that guide leaders in understanding their development journey and help organisations tailor interventions such as training or stretch assignments. At the organisational level, they enable benchmarking of collective leadership maturity, identifying prevailing stages and what is required for future challenges. A widely adopted example is Charan, Drotter, and Noel's Leadership Pipeline (2001), which maps transitions from managing oneself to managing others, leading managers, and eventually enterprise leadership. Each transition requires leaders to unlearn outdated behaviours while acquiring new skills, time horizons, and values [39]. This staged approach has been hailed as one of the most influential ideas in leadership development because it links growth directly to organisational needs at each level.

Nonetheless, maturity models also present limitations. Leadership development does not always fit neatly into staged levels, and rigid application can oversimplify or create false hierarchies (e.g., labelling someone a "Level 3 leader"). Some models lack empirical validation or imply a one-way path to "fully mature" leadership, when in reality growth is multidimensional and context dependent. Others risk cultural bias, privileging Western, individualist conceptions of advanced leadership. For instance, Collins' "Level 5 Leader" (combining fierce will and humility) became highly influential, yet applied rigidly it risks excluding alternative, equally effective leadership styles. A further limitation is that many frameworks outline stages without clarifying how leaders can move between them, leaving development pathways ambiguous [39].

High-quality frameworks address these weaknesses by using maturity concepts constructively and grounding them in evidence. Strong models integrate insights from adult development theory, such as Kegan's (1982) work on meaning-making or Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning [37,41], ensuring that stages reflect genuine developmental shifts. They also balance depth and breadth, recognising that a leader may be advanced in technical expertise yet novice in people leadership. Contemporary thinking emphasises both horizontal development (building skills) and vertical development (transforming mindsets). Thus, the most robust frameworks support progression from egocentric to systemic perspectives, while offering developmental tools such as coaching, feedback, and stretch assignments.

In essence, maturity models add value when they are research-informed, culturally sensitive, and applied flexibly. Used in this way, they avoid becoming rigid ladders and instead provide a roadmap that frames leadership growth as an ongoing journey, aligning with current scholarship that views development as continuous, dynamic, and contextually grounded.

Practical Utility and Application

The final criterion for evaluating leadership frameworks is their practical utility, whether they deliver real value for leaders and organisations. However robust a model may be in theory, it must ultimately be accessible, actionable, and relevant in practice. Strong frameworks act as a bridge between abstract concepts and day-to-day leadership, ensuring that ideas translate into tangible behaviours and outcomes.

For individuals, practical utility means the framework provides a clear roadmap for development. Leaders can use it to self-assess, identify growth areas, and track progress, particularly when paired with tools such as assessments or 360-degree feedback. Ruben et al. (2016), for instance, found that competency models support both individual coaching and group facilitation, inspiring reflection and more intentional leadership behaviours [34]. For organisations, utility lies in how well the framework supports core talent processes such as recruitment, succession planning, training design, and performance evaluation. Competencybased approaches can align leadership development with strategic priorities, ensuring initiatives meet organisational needs. Research by Lacerenza et al. (2017) and others confirms that leadership programs are most effective when built on well-defined, contextually relevant competencies [5,7-10,32,38,40]. While generic "one-size-fits-all" frameworks risk superficiality, those tailored to organisational context provide sharper guidance and measurable impact.

This criterion is particularly important because it guards against models that look elegant on paper but fail in practice. Practical utility requires that frameworks are not only conceptually sound but also usable: they should be accessible, jargon-free, and accompanied by implementation support such as behavioural examples, training modules, and assessment instruments. Aligning frameworks with daily management processes (e.g., performance reviews, promotion systems) helps ensure integration rather than isolation, closing the "knowing–doing gap" that has long undermined leadership development.

At the same time, practical usefulness can reveal weaknesses. Frameworks may falter if they are too complex for busy leaders to apply, or conversely, too generic to guide meaningful behaviour. Sustainability is another challenge, initial enthusiasm often fades if new practices are not reinforced by organisational culture, incentives, and accountability structures. Moreover, many frameworks lack empirical evidence of impact (e.g., improved retention or performance), making their claims of effectiveness difficult to verify. Transferability also matters models designed for Western corporate settings may not resonate in public sector, nonprofit, or non-Western contexts.

Strengthening this criterion requires focusing on implementation support and evidence of effectiveness. Key questions include: Does the framework come with clear guidelines and tools for adoption? Are there case studies or evaluations demonstrating measurable benefits? Beer et al. (2016) argue that leadership development often fails because it is not embedded in organisational systems or reinforced through follow-up [41]. The most useful frameworks therefore provide mechanisms for sustaining new behaviours, such as coaching, feedback loops, and accountability structures, and they are adaptable to different contexts. Models refined through practitioner input and iterative testing are particularly valuable, as they are more likely to resonate with real-world users.

In conclusion, practical usefulness is the ultimate litmus test of a framework's relevance. Highquality models are simple enough to be usable, robust enough to drive improvement, adaptable across contexts, and backed by evidence of positive outcomes. By promoting sustainable, onthe-job learning and cultural alignment, such frameworks move beyond one-off training to support enduring improvements in leadership practice.

Reflections

Taken together, the six criteria model, offering clear differentiation between leadership and management, a sound logic model foundation, a future-oriented perspective, well-defined competencies and behaviours, a staged maturity model, and proven practical usefulness, propose a comprehensive basis for evaluating and strengthening leadership and management frameworks. Each is grounded in international research and practice, ensuring that a strong framework is both conceptually rigorous (anchored in theory and evidence) and pragmatically relevant (able to guide action and development across contexts).

Table 3: NHS Leadership Frameworks, 2010 – 2024 evaluated against the 6-point framework

NHS Leadership Development Frameworks [2024 – 2010]								
	Leadership Framework	Evaluation Criteria and Score						Assessment Conclusion
		A	B	C	D	E	F	
1.	Leadership Competency Framework for Board Members [2024]	3	2	3	3	3	3	Strong ~ Meets the criteria with an overall rating of 3
2.	Health inequalities (board assurance tool) Leadership Framework [2021/2022]	1	1	1	1	0	2	Some good elements with an overall rating of 1
3.	We are the NHS: The People Plan [2020/2021]	1	0	3	3	1	3	Several good elements with an overall rating of 2
4.	The Interim People Plan [2019]	1	0	3	2	1	3	Several good elements with an overall rating of 2
5.	The NHS, Provider Chair Development Framework [2019]	3	0	3	2	1	3	Several good elements with an overall rating of 2
6.	The 'Simplified KSF' Knowledge and Skills Framework, [2019]	2	0	1	2	2	1	Some good elements with an overall rating of 1
7.	The Aspire Together Competency Framework [2018]	1	0	2	2	0	3	Some good elements with an overall rating of 1
8.	Developing People, Improving Care [2016]	1	3	3	2	1	3	Several good elements with an overall rating of 2
9.	The Public Health Skills and Knowledge Framework [2016]	1	0	2	1	0	3	Some good elements with an overall rating of 1
10.	The Healthcare Leadership Model [2014]	1	0	2	3	1	3	Several good elements with an overall rating of 2
11.	The Leadership Framework [2011]	3	1	2	3	3	3	Strong ~ Meets the criteria with an overall rating of 3
12.	The Medial Leadership Competency Framework [2010]	3	1	2	2	3	3	Several good elements with an overall rating of 2

A framework meeting these criteria is more likely to cultivate leaders and managers who can navigate present complexities while preparing for future challenges. When this six-point framework was applied to current NHS leadership frameworks, the following observations emerged. Considering the current NHS Leadership Frameworks reflected on at the start of this paper, the following was noted when the six-point framework was applied.

Reflections and Enhancements

Table 3 lists twelve leadership frameworks created in the NHS over the past fourteen years.

Applying our six-point criteria model, reveals that only two, **The Leadership Competency Framework for Board Members**

(2024) and The Leadership Framework (2011), fully meet the standard. This limited success likely reflects the fragmented way NHS frameworks are produced, often by separate institutions, consultants, or academics, without consistent attention to quality, coherence, or sustainability.

Although our analysis has drawn examples from healthcare, corporate, and education sectors, we argue that the six criteria are universal. These criterions capture fundamental principles of how leadership and management can be understood, developed, and improved across contexts.

That said, while the six-criteria model provides structure and rigour, its application has limitations. It risks oversimplifying the complexity of leadership, treating diverse contexts as if one size fits all, and assuming all criteria carry equal weight. Assessments may be subjective, and frameworks can score highly on the criteria yet still fail to deliver results or impact in practice. Moreover, leadership theory continues to evolve, so a static model could become outdated if not regularly adapted. Thus, the six criteria should be viewed as a guiding heuristic rather than a definitive standard.

Enhancing the Six-Point Framework

While the six criteria remain a strong foundation, several enhancements would strengthen their relevance in contemporary settings:

- **Integrative Perspective** ~ Frameworks should be assessed not only on individual criteria but on how these elements connect. For instance, does the logic model (criterion 2) link competencies (criterion 4) to future challenges (criterion 3), with a developmental pathway (criterion 5) leading to practical impact (criterion 6)? Research on holistic leadership development highlights the importance of alignment between vision, skills, and context.
- **Context and Culture Sensitivity** ~ Leadership is shaped by organisational, sectoral, and national cultures. A new criterion could evaluate whether frameworks adapt to different environments—for example, public vs. private sector, or Western vs. nonWestern contexts. Models such as GLOBE illustrate how cultural dimensions shape leadership effectiveness, while Ncube (2010) emphasises decolonial perspectives that challenge Western-centric assumptions [42].
- **Ethical and Values Foundation** ~ Ethics were not explicitly addressed in the six criteria, yet integrity, inclusivity, and social responsibility are now central to credible leadership. Drawing on research in authentic and servant leadership, a criterion could be added to assess whether a framework explicitly incorporates ethical values.
- **Evidence and Validity** ~ Frameworks should be evaluated on their empirical grounding. Was the model built on rigorous research or validated through practice? Evidence-based frameworks, supported by peer-reviewed studies or outcome data, provide greater confidence in their effectiveness.
- **Learning and Feedback Mechanisms** ~ Finally, frameworks gain practical utility when they embed continuous learning loops, such as 360-degree feedback, coaching, or action learning projects. These mechanisms ensure leadership development is iterative and sustainable rather than a one-off intervention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the six-point framework provides a robust foundation for evaluating leadership and management models, combining conceptual rigour with practical relevance. Distinguishing leadership from management, requiring a sound logic model, future orientation, clear competencies, a developmental pathway, and practical utility are all essential features supported by contemporary research.

The enhancements proposed, attention to integration, context, ethics, evidence, and feedback, would further strengthen the framework. By adopting this enriched evaluative lens, organisations can design and select leadership models that are not only theoretically sound but also adaptable, values-driven, and effective in practice. In this way, leadership development efforts are more likely to deliver meaningful, lasting impact.

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