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MEASURING CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP: DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOTAL LEADERSHIP INDEX AS A 100-POINT EXECUTIVE MATURITY ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

Leadership assessment often oscillates between subjective reputation, outcome-based appraisal and broad competency or style measures. These approaches are valuable, but they do not consistently reveal how senior leaders regulate pressure before decision, sequencing, reflection and institutional speech. This conceptual paper develops the Total Leadership Index (TLI) as a 100-point executive maturity architecture comprising four equally weighted pillars: Decision Stillness and Pressure Containment; Timing and Sequence Discipline; Structured Reflection and Root-Cause Honesty; and Governed Speech and Institutional Consequence. Each pillar contains five behaviorally anchored indicators scored from 0 to 5, producing twenty indicators and a total score from 0 to 100. The model complements personality inventories, transformational, ethical, authentic and servant-leadership scales, competency frameworks, 360-degree feedback and performance scorecards by adding a pre-decisional, evidence-governed maturity lens. Distinctive design features include evidence-before-number scoring, a pillar-profile interpretation rule, an evidence-confidence overlay, multi-source moderation, maturity bands, a provisional balance rule and red-flag safeguards. The paper proposes six testable propositions and a staged validation agenda involving expert content review, item development, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, reliability, criterion and incremental validity, measurement invariance and longitudinal intervention studies. Practical illustrations show how TLI may support executive coaching, succession, crisis review, board oversight and public-sector governance. No empirical findings are claimed; the framework is advanced as a falsifiable research architecture whose weights, thresholds and predictive utility require cross-sector and cross-cultural testing.

Keywords: *Total Leadership Index; conscious leadership; executive maturity; leadership measurement; decision stillness; timing discipline; structured reflection; governed speech; 360-degree feedback; institutional trust; scale development; leadership governance.*

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1. Introduction

Organizations routinely quantify financial performance, operational delivery, safety, compliance, customer experience and project progress. They are markedly less disciplined in measuring the quality of executive conduct that precedes and shapes those outcomes. Leaders are described as visionary, decisive, strategic, ethical, calm or dynamic, but such labels often remain impressionistic. They do not show what a leader actually does when evidence is incomplete, deadlines are compressed, stakeholders are anxious, subordinates hesitate to speak, timing is contested and a few words can stabilize or destabilize the institution.

This gap is not resolved merely by adding another personality inventory or a generic list of competencies. Established leadership measures have generated substantial knowledge about transformational behavior, authenticity, ethical conduct, service orientation, leader–member exchange, communication and adaptability. Multi-rater feedback has also widened the evidentiary lens by comparing how different constituencies experience a leader. Yet the practical governance question remains: can an organization assess how a leader converts pressure into a defensible sequence of perception, decision, communication and institutional action?

The present paper develops the Total Leadership Index (TLI) as a 100-point executive maturity architecture for that purpose. Conscious leadership is defined here in a diagnostic rather than metaphysical sense: observable and evidence-supported conduct through which a leader contains pressure, stabilizes facts, acts in the right sequence, confronts root causes honestly, communicates with restraint and accepts institutional consequence. The unit of interest is not the leader's declared values or permanent identity, but behavior demonstrated during a specified assessment period and in relation to a defined role.

The TLI is grounded in The Inner Engine Framework™, which conceptualizes leadership failure and maturity in the interval before formal action. Pressure enters a decision system; the leader may regulate or transmit it, verify or assume, sequence or rush, reflect or scapegoat, and communicate responsibly or carelessly. These pre-decisional acts influence psychological safety, decision quality, execution reliability, learning and trust. The index translates this sequence into four measurable pillars: Decision Stillness and Pressure Containment; Timing and Sequence Discipline; Structured Reflection and Root-Cause Honesty; and Governed Speech and Institutional Consequence.

The contribution is not the numerical score in isolation. The contribution is an evidence-governed architecture that links construct boundaries, observable indicators, scoring anchors, maturity interpretation, confidence reporting, safeguards and development action. Scores can discipline observation and support coaching; they can also create false precision, surveillance anxiety or unjust labeling. TLI is therefore proposed as a developmental and research instrument, not as an automatic truth machine. Its equal weights and thresholds are theoretically justified starting points that must remain open to empirical revision.

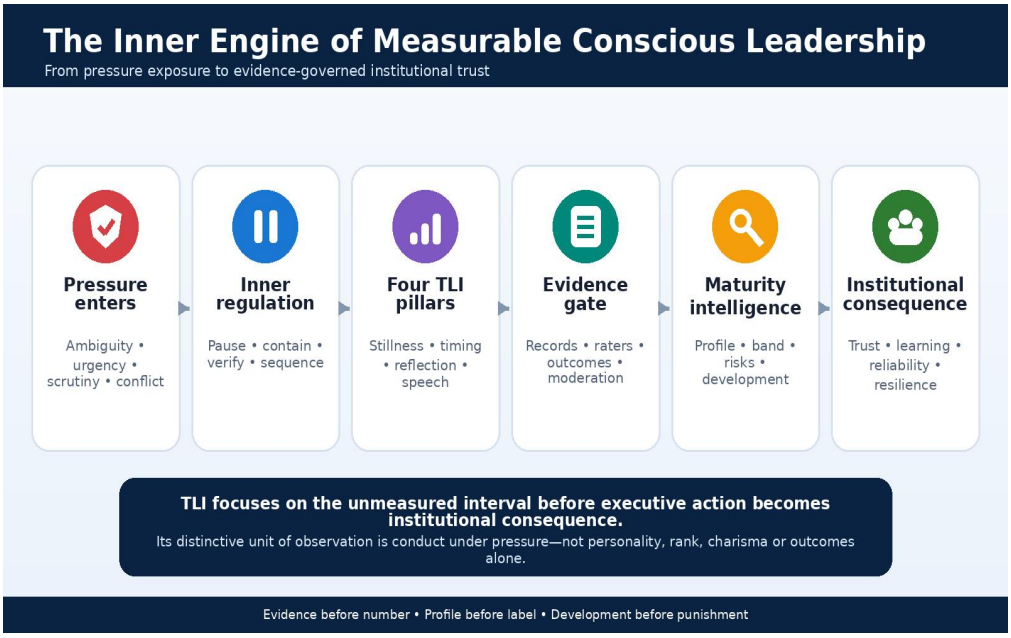

Figure 1. The Inner Engine logic converts pressure exposure into evidence-governed maturity intelligence and institutional consequence.

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2. Literature Review and Conceptual Positioning

2.1 From leadership styles to measurable behavior

Leadership research has developed influential measures of transformational and transactional leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership and servant leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Brown et al., 2005; Liden et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2008). These instruments have advanced theory by defining latent constructs and linking leadership perceptions to follower and organizational outcomes. However, style measures and maturity measures answer different questions. A style instrument asks which patterns of influence or relationship are perceived; a maturity architecture asks whether critical disciplines remain integrated when pressure threatens judgment, timing, learning and speech.

Recent measurement studies reinforce the importance of behavioral specificity. Leader Attentive Communication was developed to capture attentive conversational behavior from the employee's perspective, showing how communication can be operationalized rather than presumed (Decuypere & Pircher Verdorfer, 2022). Adaptive leadership research has similarly emphasized the need for instruments that align what leadership-development programs teach with what their assessments actually measure (Nöthel et al., 2023; Shams et al., 2025). These studies support the TLI design principle that broad ideals must be translated into observable, testable conduct.

2.2 Multi-rater feedback, self-awareness and evidence discipline

360-degree feedback improves coverage by including superior, peer, subordinate, stakeholder and self-ratings, but multi-source data do not automatically become valid development intelligence. Raters observe different situations, possess different incentives and may apply different standards. Self–other disagreement can itself be diagnostically useful, especially for self-awareness, but only when the instrument, rating context and moderation process are sufficiently clear (Fleenor et al., 2010; Bracken et al., 2016). Research on developing self-awareness also emphasizes reflection, feedback and coaching while warning that introspection without accurate information can become unproductive rumination (London et al., 2023).

TLI does not compete with 360-degree feedback. It supplies a shared architecture into which multi-source observations can be mapped. The same decision episode can be examined through records, stakeholder experience and leadership self-explanation; disagreements can then be moderated at indicator level rather than collapsed into one impression. This evidence discipline is central because a leader may be popular but vague, technically capable but impulsive, or calm in routine circumstances but destabilizing during crisis.

2.3 Learning, adaptability, crisis and organizational trust

Leadership maturity has consequences beyond individual performance. A systematic review of learning-oriented leadership found broad associations between leadership and learning at individual, team and organizational levels, while also identifying conceptual overlap, limited causal evidence and the need for clearer operationalization (Lundqvist et al., 2023). Crisis-leadership scholarship similarly emphasizes sensemaking, communication, coordination, ethics and learning under conditions of threat and uncertainty (Riggio & Newstead, 2023). These domains are directly relevant to Decision Stillness, Timing and Sequence Discipline, Structured Reflection and Governed Speech.

Trust is both relational and institutional. Workplace trust research demonstrates that trust cannot be reduced to a single attitude; it evolves through expectations, vulnerability, relationships and organizational conditions (Dirks & de Jong, 2022). The TLI treats institutional trust as a plausible downstream consequence rather than an automatic output. A trustworthy score must therefore examine how decisions were made, how explanations were communicated, whether inconvenient evidence was suppressed and whether corrective learning followed.

2.4 Complementarity and the distinctive measurement gap

Few existing approaches simultaneously integrate four requirements: first, observation of the pre-decisional interval under pressure; second, balanced assessment of stillness, timing, reflection and speech; third, evidence governance through triangulation, moderation and confidence reporting; and fourth, translation of the profile into maturity bands and institutional development actions. TLI is proposed to occupy this measurement gap. It should be used alongside—not instead of—technical competence, integrity checks, role performance, established leadership measures and context-specific assessment.

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How the Total Leadership Index Complements Existing Assessment Families

TLI adds a pre-decisional, evidence-governed maturity lens rather than replacing established tools

Assessment family	Primary question	Typical evidence	What TLI adds
Trait / personality inventories	What stable tendencies characterize the individual?	Self-report psychometrics	**Separates maturity conduct from personality; tests behavior under consequential pressure.**
Transformational, ethical, authentic and servant scales	What leadership style or relational behaviors are perceived?	Follower ratings; self/other surveys	**Integrates pause, sequence, reflection and speech into one balanced operating architecture.**
Competency frameworks and assessment centres	Can the leader demonstrate role-relevant competencies?	Simulations; interviews; assessor ratings	**Adds evidence rules, maturity bands, red-flag overrides and institutional consequence.**
360-degree feedback	How do multiple constituencies experience the leader?	Superior, peer, subordinate and stakeholder ratings	**Provides a common pillar structure for mapping, moderating and interpreting multi-source evidence.**
Performance scorecards	What results were delivered?	Financial, operational, customer and compliance metrics	**Examines how results were produced, especially the pre-decisional conduct affecting trust and risk.**

Distinctive contribution: pre-decisional conduct + balanced maturity + evidence governance + trust consequence

Hybrid Table 1. Comparative positioning of the Total Leadership Index in relation to established leadership-assessment families.

3. Theoretical Foundation: The Inner Engine as a Measurement Construct

3.1 The pressure-to-consequence sequence

The theoretical premise is that visible leadership action is preceded by an internal and interpersonal sequence. Pressure first enters the leader's cognitive and emotional field. The leader then interprets the situation, regulates or transmits anxiety, defines what counts as evidence, decides whether and when to act, frames causality, allocates responsibility and communicates direction. These acts shape the environment in which others speak, withhold, comply, challenge, learn and execute. Leadership failure can therefore begin before the formal decision appears; it begins when pressure is converted into haste, blame, selective evidence or ungoverned speech.

This mechanism is compatible with process perspectives that locate leadership in events, interactions and cycles rather than in stable traits alone (Eberly et al., 2013). It is also consistent with crisis-leadership and mindfulness-at-work literatures that distinguish attention and self-regulation from passivity or withdrawal (Good et al., 2016; Riggio & Newstead, 2023). The Inner Engine formulation adds a governance emphasis: the quality of the pre-decisional sequence should be visible enough to audit, develop and institutionalize.

3.2 Construct definition

The Total Leadership Index is defined as an evidence-governed composite measure of executive maturity demonstrated under pressure across four interdependent capabilities: (1) stabilizing self and system before action; (2) acting in a defensible sequence and at an appropriate cadence; (3) examining causes, assumptions and responsibility honestly; and (4) communicating truthfully, proportionately and with awareness of institutional consequence.

The construct is formative in its practical architecture: the four pillars jointly constitute the maturity profile, and weakness in one pillar may not be compensated fully by strength in another. Empirical research must nevertheless test whether the indicator structure behaves as a formative composite, a reflective higher-order factor, a bifactor model or another plausible configuration. The paper therefore separates the operational scoring architecture from the eventual statistical model.

3.3 Construct boundaries

TLI is not a measure of personality type, charisma, popularity, spiritual status, seniority, permanent moral worth or technical competence alone. It does not infer motives from outcomes without evidence, and it does not assume that calm appearance equals disciplined stillness. It measures demonstrated conduct during a defined period and role context. A technically excellent leader may require development in governed speech; a well-liked leader may require stronger timing discipline; a high performer may still create institutional risk through misinformation or retaliation against dissent.

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Figure 2. The balanced four-pillar architecture of the 100-point Total Leadership Index.

4. Research Problem, Questions and Contributions

The research problem is the absence of a concise but sufficiently governed architecture for measuring conscious executive maturity under pressure. Organizations measure outcomes and often measure perceived leadership style, but they seldom integrate the quality of pressure containment, timing, root-cause reasoning and institutional communication into one evidence-based profile.

The paper addresses five research questions:

1. RQ1. How can conscious leadership be defined as an observable and measurable executive maturity construct?
2. RQ2. Which behavioral dimensions and indicators are necessary to represent this construct without collapsing it into personality or performance?
3. RQ3. How can a 100-point score remain interpretable while avoiding impressionistic judgment and false precision?
4. RQ4. How does TLI complement established leadership assessments and what incremental explanatory value should it demonstrate?
5. RQ5. Which empirical designs are required to validate the architecture across sectors, cultures, leadership levels and development interventions?

The manuscript contributes by: (a) specifying a pre-decisional unit of leadership analysis; (b) converting four conscious-leadership disciplines into twenty scoreable indicators; (c) integrating evidence confidence, moderation, balance and red-flag governance; (d) differentiating maturity assessment from style, trait and outcome assessment; and (e) presenting a staged, falsifiable validation and application agenda.

5. Methodology: Conceptual Framework and Measurement-Architecture Development

5.1 Conceptual design logic

This is a conceptual framework-development paper. It uses theory synthesis and instrument-design logic rather than empirical hypothesis testing. The development sequence involved: identifying the practical assessment gap; defining the focal construct and its boundaries; specifying the pressure-to-consequence mechanism; translating the construct into dimensions and indicators; designing score anchors and interpretation rules; positioning the model against established assessment families; identifying ethical and governance risks; generating research propositions; and specifying an empirical validation program.

The approach follows accepted scale-development principles that emphasize precise construct definition, content validity, item generation, pilot testing, dimensionality, reliability and validity (Hinkin, 1998; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021; Boateng et al., 2018). The present paper stops before item-level validation. The indicator labels and scoring architecture are provisional specifications for future research, not a claim that a finalized psychometric instrument already exists.

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5.2 Design principles

- Behavioral observability: every indicator must be inferable from conduct, records or credible multi-source observation.
- Pressure relevance: evidence should include consequential or ambiguous situations, not routine behavior alone.
- Balance: no single capability should dominate the maturity interpretation.
- Evidence governance: scores require source notes, triangulation, moderation and an appeal route.
- Developmental utility: the result must identify specific practices that can be improved and reassessed.
- Context sensitivity: the generic architecture must permit role- and sector-specific evidence without changing construct meaning.
- Falsifiability: weights, thresholds, dimensionality and outcome relationships remain open to empirical confirmation or revision.

6. Total Leadership Index Architecture

6.1 Scoring model

The TLI contains four pillars, each with five indicators. Each indicator is scored on a six-point behavioral scale from 0 to 5. The score for pillar p is the sum of its five indicator scores; the total TLI is the sum of the four pillar scores:

$$P_p = \Sigma_{i=1}^{5} s_{pi} \quad \text{and} \quad TLI = \Sigma_{p=1}^{4} P_p, \quad \text{where } s_{pi} \in \{0,1,2,3,4,5\}$$

The resulting range is 0–25 per pillar and 0–100 overall. The score should never be reported alone. The minimum report includes the four-pillar profile, the evidence period, source distribution, evidence-confidence rating, unresolved disagreements, red flags and development priorities.

6.2 Why equal weighting is the conceptual starting point

Equal weighting is deliberate but provisional. Conscious leadership requires integrated capability. Calmness without timing can become delay; speed without reflection can accelerate error; analysis without governed speech can destroy trust; articulate speech without pressure containment can mask instability. Equal weights avoid prematurely privileging one discipline before empirical evidence is available. Future studies should compare equal weighting with empirical, expert-derived and role-specific weighting schemes.

6.3 Evidence-Confidence Index as a reporting overlay

A score based on thin or homogeneous evidence should not carry the same authority as a score based on triangulated, recent and role-relevant evidence. The framework therefore proposes an Evidence-Confidence Index (ECI) reported separately from the TLI. ECI can summarize four elements: source diversity, evidence specificity, recency and triangulation. It does not inflate or deflate the maturity score automatically; it qualifies how confidently the score should be interpreted. A report may therefore state: TLI 72/100; ECI 84/100; strongest pillar—Structured Reflection; role-critical gap—Governed Speech.

7. The Four Pillars and Their Indicators

7.1 Pillar 1: Decision Stillness and Pressure Containment

Decision Stillness is the capacity to stabilize the internal and organizational environment before irreversible action. It does not mean indecision, delay or emotional detachment. It means creating sufficient cognitive and relational space to distinguish verified signal from pressure noise. In high-stakes systems, a short governed pause can prevent prolonged institutional damage.

The five indicators are: pause discipline; emotional containment; evidence stabilization; team pressure regulation; and non-escalation under ambiguity. Low scores reflect impulsive instruction, blame-first reactions, rumor acceptance, transmission of anxiety and panic amplification. High scores reflect calm command presence, fact verification, proportionate tasking, protection of psychological safety and explicit separation of known facts from assumptions.

7.2 Pillar 2: Timing and Sequence Discipline

Timing and Sequence Discipline assess whether action occurs at the right moment and in the right order. Organizations frequently confuse urgency with haste. Premature commitments can generate rework, claims,

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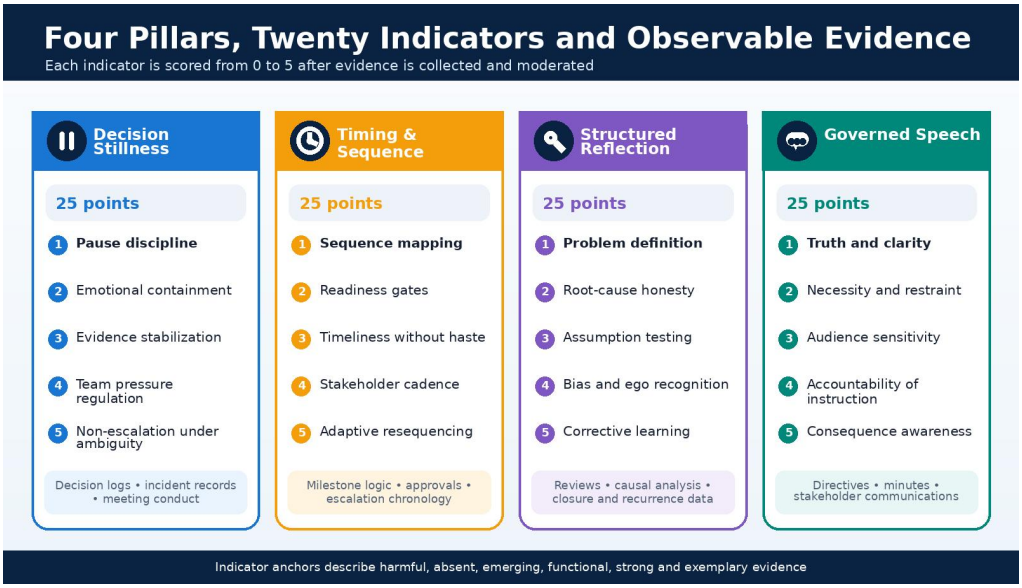
compliance failure, safety exposure and public credibility loss; delayed decisions can create drift, opportunity loss and governance vacuum. Mature timing therefore means responsible acceleration—the earliest action defensible through evidence and readiness.
The five indicators are: sequence mapping; readiness gates; timeliness without haste; stakeholder cadence; and adaptive resequencing. Low scores indicate premature announcement, wrong-order execution, avoidable delay, escalation for display, or failure to adjust when dependencies change. High scores indicate clear dependencies, defensible gates, timely escalation, disciplined stakeholder rhythm and transparent resequencing.

7.3 Pillar 3: Structured Reflection and Root-Cause Honesty

Structured Reflection is the capacity to examine facts, assumptions, causal chains, motives, ethical implications and system consequences before reaching a final interpretation. Root-Cause Honesty is the moral center of this pillar: reviews are not mature when they protect senior decisions by relocating blame downward or when they describe symptoms as causes.
The five indicators are: problem definition; root-cause honesty; assumption testing; bias and ego recognition; and corrective learning. Low scores reflect scapegoating, selective evidence, confirmation bias, defensive narratives and repeated failures. High scores reflect truth-friendly review, explicit examination of leadership contribution, alternative causal hypotheses, closure tests and conversion of learning into changed standards, processes or behavior.

7.4 Pillar 4: Governed Speech and Institutional Consequence

Governed Speech treats executive communication as institutional action. It assesses whether speech is truthful, necessary, timely, clear, humane, accountable and consequence-aware. A leader's words can mobilize resources, create fear, conceal risk, clarify responsibility, preserve dignity or damage public trust. The relevant unit is therefore not eloquence alone but the effect of communication on understanding, action, accountability and the institution's ethical climate.
The five indicators are: truth and clarity; necessity and restraint; audience sensitivity; accountability of instruction; and institutional consequence awareness. Low scores include vague, misleading, humiliating, excessive or responsibility-free speech. High scores include verified claims, proportionate disclosure, clear ownership, realistic commitments, listening, correction of error and communication that enables challenge without retaliation. Recent work on attentive leader communication supports the importance of observable listening and conversational attention as distinct leadership behaviors (Decuypere & Pircher Verdorfer, 2022).



Hybrid Table 2. Operationalization of the four TLI pillars into twenty indicators and representative evidence sources.

8. Scoring Anchors, Maturity Bands and Interpretation Rules

8.1 Behavioral anchors

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Each indicator uses six anchors: 0 = contrary or harmful evidence; 1 = absent or rarely demonstrated; 2 = emerging but unstable; 3 = functional and usually consistent in routine conditions; 4 = strong and reliable under pressure; and 5 = exemplary, transferable and increasingly institutionalized. The anchors deliberately distinguish routine competence from pressure-tested maturity.

8.2 Maturity bands

The provisional score bands are: Reactive Hazard (0–25), Fragmented Executor (26–50), Strategic Manager (51–75) and Conscious Visionary (76–100). These are diagnostic categories, not social ranks or permanent identities. The purpose of the band is to summarize the dominant pattern and guide development, not to erase the pillar profile.

8.3 Balance and red-flag rules

A total score can conceal a critical weakness. Accordingly, the pilot architecture proposes that the top band requires a total score of at least 76, no pillar below 15 and no unresolved severe red flag. Red flags include deliberate misinformation, retaliation against truth-tellers, manipulation or concealment of material evidence, public humiliation, safety compromise, discriminatory or abusive instruction and concealed conflict of interest. A severe red flag triggers special governance review and may suspend normal band interpretation regardless of the total score.

8.4 Avoiding false precision

The difference between 71 and 73 is rarely meaningful without examining the evidence and measurement error. Reports should therefore emphasize ranges, confidence, pillar patterns and qualitative evidence. Inter-rater agreement and reliability must be examined empirically; disagreement should be surfaced and moderated, not hidden through automatic averaging (LeBreton & Senter, 2008).

Hybrid Table 3. Six-point behavioral anchors, score formula, maturity bands and provisional balance safeguards.

9. TLI as a Complement to Existing Leadership Assessment Models

TLI is designed to complement five major assessment families. First, personality and trait inventories describe relatively stable tendencies; TLI assesses behavior in specified pressure episodes. Second, transformational, ethical, authentic, servant and adaptive-leadership scales examine important styles and behaviors; TLI integrates four cross-cutting disciplines into a maturity profile and tests whether they remain balanced. Third, competency models and assessment centers evaluate role capability; TLI adds evidence governance, maturity bands and institutional consequence. Fourth, 360-degree feedback supplies multiple perspectives; TLI supplies a common interpretive architecture. Fifth, performance scorecards describe what was achieved; TLI asks how decisions and communications produced those outcomes.

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The distinctive contribution is therefore not a claim that TLI is universally superior. Its contribution must be demonstrated through incremental validity. Future studies should test whether TLI explains variance in decision quality, recurrence reduction, psychological safety, trust and stakeholder confidence after controlling for established leadership measures, personality, technical competence and performance. Failure to demonstrate incremental validity would require refinement of the construct or narrowing of its claims.

10. Research Propositions

P1. Decision Stillness and Pressure Containment will be positively associated with decision clarity and negatively associated with panic transmission, blame escalation and premature commitment.
P2. Timing and Sequence Discipline will be positively associated with milestone reliability, dependency closure and stakeholder coordination, and negatively associated with avoidable rework and escalation noise.
P3. Structured Reflection and Root-Cause Honesty will be positively associated with corrective-learning quality and negatively associated with recurrence of preventable defects or governance failures.
P4. Governed Speech and Institutional Consequence will be positively associated with psychological safety, instruction clarity, stakeholder trust and willingness to report inconvenient information.
P5. The balanced four-pillar TLI profile will predict institutional trust and resilience more strongly than the total score alone; critically weak pillars and red flags will explain disproportionate risk.
P6. TLI will demonstrate incremental validity beyond established leadership style measures, multi-rater feedback and performance metrics when predicting pressure-sensitive governance outcomes.

11. Evidence-Governed Assessment Protocol

The correct sequence is evidence before number. An assessor should not begin with a global impression and search retrospectively for supporting examples. The assessment process should declare its purpose, unit and period; identify role-critical risks and episodes; collect documentary and multi-source evidence; code evidence to indicators; score independently; moderate disagreements; assess evidence confidence; apply balance and red-flag rules; interpret the profile; and agree development and reassessment actions.
Evidence sources may include decision records, meeting minutes, incident and audit reports, escalation chronology, approved communications, stakeholder correspondence, outcome data, simulations, structured interviews and multi-rater observations. Self-report is valuable for understanding reasoning and development intent but is insufficient as the sole source. The protocol should preserve source confidentiality, distinguish direct observation from inference and allow the assessed leader to correct factual error without controlling legitimate ratings.

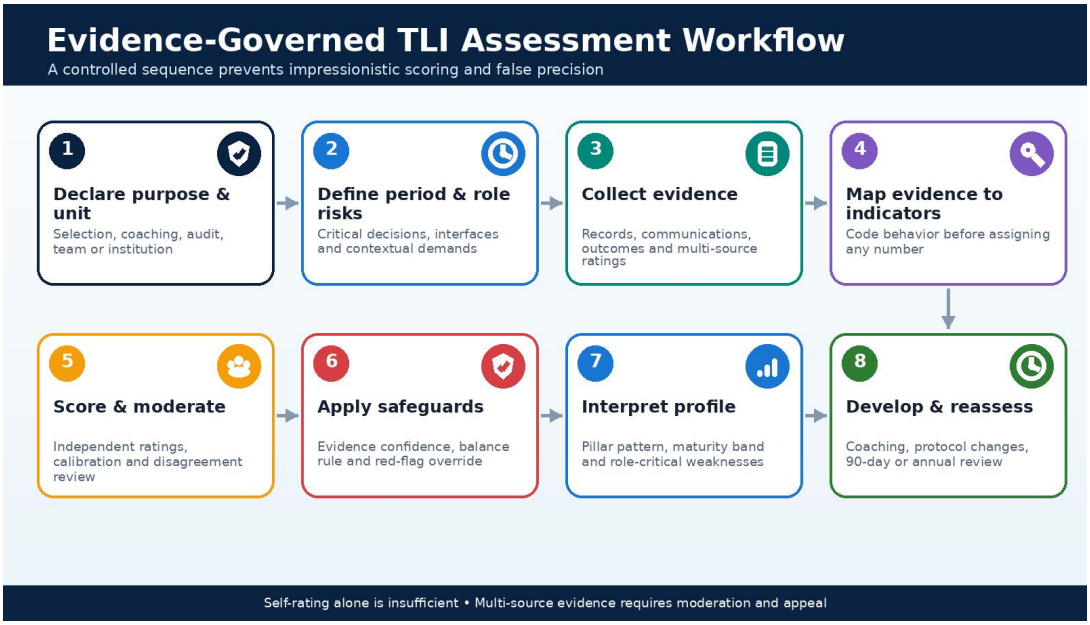

Figure 3. Evidence-governed sequence for collecting, scoring, moderating, interpreting and reassessing TLI evidence.

12. Empirical Validation Agenda Across Organizational Settings

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12.1 Phase 1: Domain specification and content validity

A multidisciplinary Delphi panel should examine construct definition, domain coverage, redundancy, cultural wording, ethical risk and role relevance. Panels should include leadership scholars, psychometricians, organizational psychologists, executive coaches, board or governance practitioners and leaders from public, private and nonprofit settings. Content-validity indices and qualitative challenge should be used to refine the indicator and item pool.

12.2 Phase 2: Item generation and cognitive testing

Items should be derived deductively from the four-pillar theory and inductively from critical incidents, decision records and interviews. Cognitive interviews should test whether respondents interpret terms such as pause, restraint, readiness, root cause and institutional consequence consistently. Social desirability, double-barreled wording and role-specific jargon require explicit control.

12.3 Phase 3: Exploratory and confirmatory studies

An initial multi-sector sample can support exploratory factor analysis, item reduction and assessment of response distributions. A separate and adequately powered sample should then test competing confirmatory models. Because observations may be nested within leaders, teams and organizations, multilevel modeling may be required. Common-method bias should be reduced through source separation, temporal separation and objective or archival outcomes where available (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

12.4 Phase 4: Reliability and rater calibration

Internal consistency should be examined using coefficient omega and alpha while recognizing their assumptions. Inter-rater reliability and agreement should be tested at item, pillar and total levels; test–retest analysis should distinguish maturity change from measurement noise. Assessor training and calibration scenarios should be evaluated because the practical architecture depends on consistent application of behavioral anchors.

12.5 Phase 5: Validity network and incremental value

Convergent validity should be examined in relation to ethical, authentic, adaptive, mindful, communication and coaching-based leadership measures. Discriminant validity should be assessed against personality, social desirability, technical competence and general performance. Criterion and predictive validity should use decision quality, project or milestone reliability, incident recurrence, psychological safety, trust, stakeholder confidence and learning outcomes. Incremental validity is essential: the TLI must explain meaningful variance beyond existing instruments if its distinctive claims are to be retained.

12.6 Phase 6: Invariance, fairness and longitudinal sensitivity

Measurement invariance should be tested across sectors, cultures, languages, leadership levels, gender, assessment modes and public versus private settings. Differential item functioning and adverse-impact analysis should identify unfair items. Longitudinal studies and controlled or quasi-experimental coaching interventions should examine sensitivity to development, stability over time and whether changes in TLI precede changes in institutional outcomes. Recent validated leadership measures demonstrate the value of multi-study and multi-context development programs that the TLI should emulate (Decuypere & Pircher Verdorfer, 2022; Curseu & Schruijer, 2024; Shams et al., 2025).

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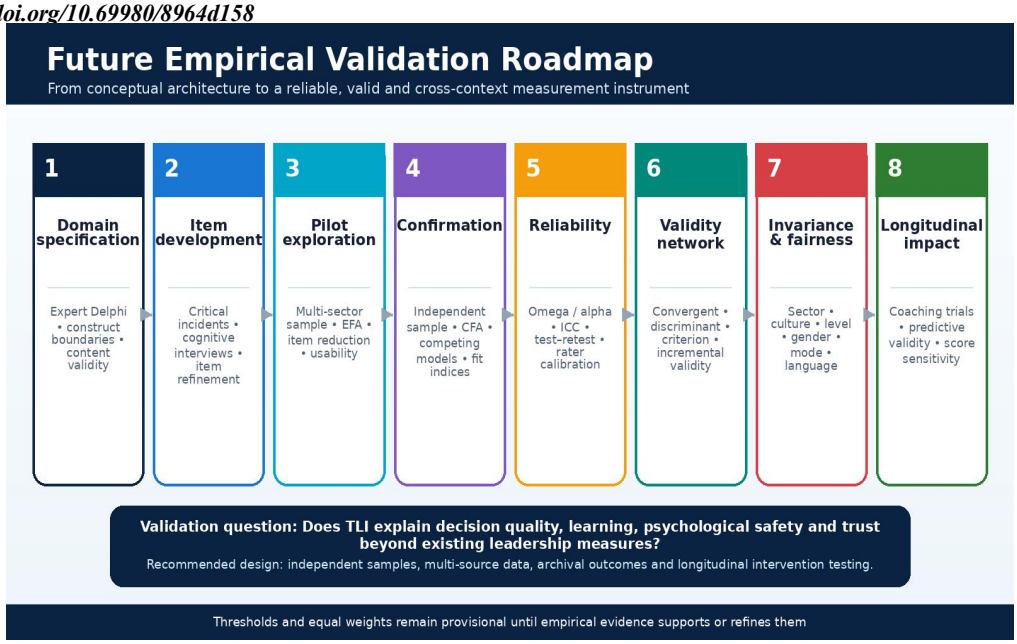

Figure 4. Multi-phase research agenda for psychometric validation, fairness testing and longitudinal outcome evaluation.

13. Practical and Managerial Implications

13.1 Executive coaching example

Consider an executive who achieves strong delivery results but receives repeated evidence of vague directives, public correction of subordinates and premature assurances to stakeholders. A conventional performance review may rate the executive highly; a communication workshop may remain generic. TLI would identify a high Timing score, moderate Reflection and Stillness, and a role-critical weakness in Governed Speech. The coaching plan could require written decision briefs, directive-comprehension checks, recorded reflection after difficult meetings and a 90-day reassessment using the same behavioral anchors.

13.2 Succession and selection example

Two candidates may possess similar technical qualifications and performance histories. Candidate A responds rapidly but transmits pressure and commits before readiness; Candidate B stabilizes evidence, sequences decisions and communicates uncertainty responsibly. TLI can make this maturity difference visible through simulations, structured evidence and multi-assessor moderation. It should remain one input alongside integrity, technical eligibility, role experience and performance—not a standalone appointment gate.

13.3 Crisis and incident governance example

After a safety, technology or reputational incident, organizations often focus on the immediate operational cause and final outcome. A TLI-informed review examines the leadership sequence: Were facts stabilized? Was escalation timely? Were root causes obscured by blame? Were public and internal statements verified? Did the review change protocols? This converts leadership behavior into institutional learning without reducing the incident to personality criticism.

13.4 Board and public-sector governance example

Boards and public authorities can review aggregate pillar patterns to identify systemic capability. For example, repeated low Timing scores across a portfolio may indicate unclear readiness gates rather than individual weakness; low Governed Speech across units may indicate a culture of ambiguity or fear. Aggregate dashboards should protect confidentiality and avoid league tables. The objective is to improve governance conditions, training and protocols while preserving individual due process.

13.5 Leadership academies and development programs

Leadership academies can use TLI in case analysis, simulations, reflective journals, observed role plays and post-program follow-up. Learning-oriented leadership research underscores the need to connect leadership

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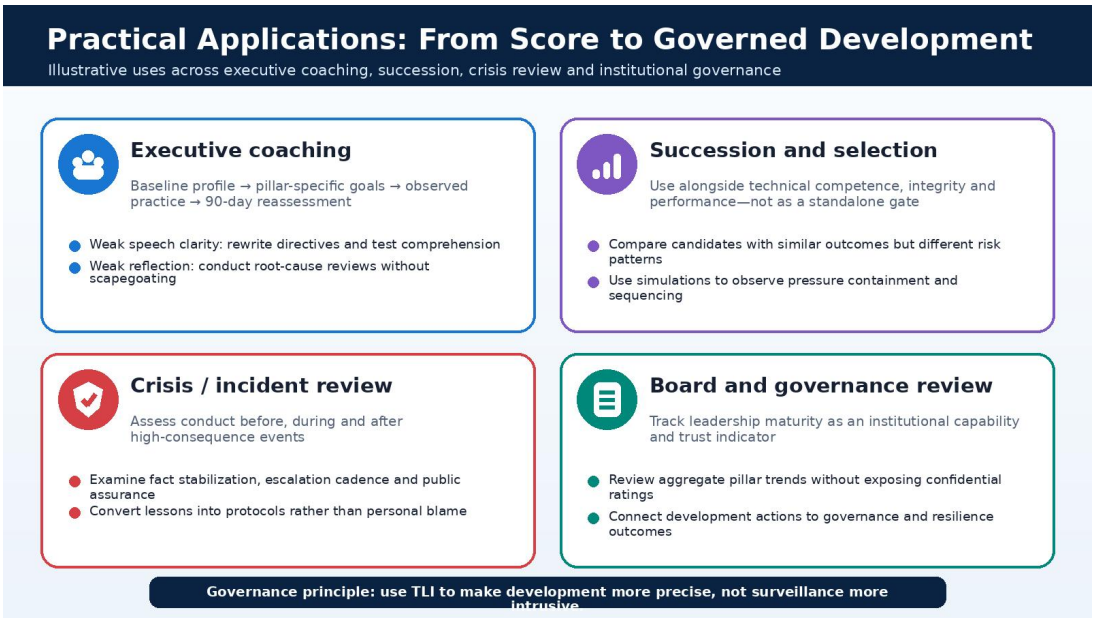
behavior with actual learning processes and to test causal claims rather than assume them (Lundqvist et al., 2023). A TLI program should therefore assess observed change and workplace transfer, not attendance or satisfaction alone.



Hybrid Table 4. Illustrative practical applications translating TLI profiles into governed development and institutional learning.

14. Ethical, Legal and Governance Safeguards

Any leadership instrument can be misused. TLI should not become a mechanism for punishing dissent, rewarding conformity, legitimizing predetermined personnel decisions or creating continuous surveillance. A leader who respectfully challenges an unsound decision may score strongly in Structured Reflection and Governed Speech even when the message is uncomfortable. The index rewards disciplined truth, not obedient silence.

Responsible deployment requires a declared purpose; informed participation appropriate to the organizational context; role-specific evidence standards; confidentiality and data minimization; separation of development and disciplinary processes where feasible; trained assessors; moderation; access control; retention limits; documented interpretation rules; an appeal mechanism; and independent review for severe red flags. Automated scoring or AI-assisted text analysis should never replace human judgment and should be audited for bias, privacy and contextual error.

Aggregate reporting should avoid identifiable small groups. The assessment period and evidence sources should be disclosed to the leader, subject to legitimate confidentiality protections. Organizations should also evaluate whether the instrument creates adverse impact across protected or culturally distinct groups. The governance of the score is as important as the score itself.

15. Limitations

The TLI remains conceptual and unvalidated. The four pillars and twenty indicators require expert review, item generation and psychometric testing. Equal weighting and band thresholds are theoretically convenient starting points rather than empirically established cutoffs. The model may be vulnerable to halo effects, retrospective rationalization, organizational politics, uneven evidence availability and cultural variation in communication and authority. High-pressure episodes are diagnostically useful but may be rare, role-specific or ethically difficult to simulate.

The causal relationship between TLI maturity and institutional trust cannot be assumed. Trust is influenced by organizational history, systems, fairness, competence, external events and stakeholder expectations. Moreover, a composite score may obscure nonlinear relationships or interactions among pillars. Future studies should compare alternative structures, test boundary conditions and determine whether some roles require hard gates rather than adjusted weights.

16. Conclusion

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Leadership maturity is frequently admired but insufficiently specified. Organizations may praise calmness, decisiveness, reflection, ethical communication and institutional vision without converting these qualities into observable evidence, balanced interpretation and development action. The Total Leadership Index addresses this gap through a 100-point architecture based on Decision Stillness, Timing and Sequence Discipline, Structured Reflection and Governed Speech.

The central contribution is not arithmetic. It is disciplined visibility. TLI requires assessors to define the unit and period, collect evidence before scoring, examine the pillar profile, report evidence confidence, surface red flags, moderate disagreement and convert results into development and governance action. It complements established leadership measures by focusing on the pre-decisional interval in which pressure becomes decision, speech and institutional consequence.

The framework should now be challenged empirically. Its dimensions, items, weights, thresholds, fairness, predictive value and sensitivity to intervention must be tested across sectors and cultures. A mature organization should neither leave leadership quality to reputation nor reduce it to an ungoverned number. The proposed TLI is a research agenda for making executive conduct visible enough to improve, accountable enough to govern and balanced enough to support institutional trust.

Declarations

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Conflict of interest	The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Ethics statement	No human participants, personal data or animal subjects were involved; ethics approval was not required.
Data availability	No empirical dataset was generated or analyzed for this conceptual paper.
Trademark note	The Inner Engine Framework™ and Total Leadership Index terminology are used as the authors' conceptual framework designations; empirical validation is not implied by such designation.

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