

Leadership Development in Modern Organisations:
A Critical Investigation of Emerging Models,
Competency Gaps, and Programme Effectiveness in
UK Corporate Settings

Dissertation Proposal

Programme:	MSc Human Resource Management / MSc Business Management
Student Name:	[Insert Student Name]
Student ID:	[Insert Student ID]
Supervisor:	[Insert Supervisor Name]
Module:	Dissertation / Independent Research Project
Academic Year:	2024–2025
Date of Submission:	[Insert Submission Date]
Word Count:	Approx. 1,500 words (excl. title page, TOC, and references)

Table of Contents

1.	Working Dissertation Title	3
2.	Background of the Study	3
3.	Research Problem	4
4.	Aim of the Research	4
5.	SMART Research Objectives	4
6.	Research Questions	5
7.	Research Rationale	5
8.	Literature Review	5
9.	Conceptual Framework	7
10.	Research Methodology	8
11.	Gantt Chart	9
12.	Expected Outcomes	10
13.	Conclusion	10
14.	Reference List	11

⚠ **Reference Transparency Notice:** Eight of twelve references are confirmed 2023 publications verifiable via their organisational URLs. Three carry amber flags: (a) **Korn Ferry (2023)** — verify exact title at kornferry.com/institute; (b) **CCL (2023)** — verify exact title at ccl.org/research; (c) **Gartner (2023)** HR Priorities — verify at gartner.com/hr. One methodology flag applies to **Saunders et al. (2023)**. Students should supplement via CIPD Knowledge Hub, Emerald Insight, and SSRN with search strings such as "*leadership development programme effectiveness 2023*", "*leadership competency gaps UK organisations*", or "*executive development 70-20-10 model evaluation*".

1. Working Dissertation Title

Leadership Development in Modern Organisations: A Critical Investigation of Emerging Models, Competency Gaps, and Programme Effectiveness in UK Corporate Settings

2. Background of the Study

The demands placed on organisational leaders have changed more rapidly in the last five years than in the preceding two decades. Hybrid work management, generative AI integration, accelerating sustainability obligations, geopolitical volatility, and the sustained pressure of talent scarcity have collectively expanded the leadership competency requirement in ways that traditional development programmes — built around classroom instruction, annual leadership reviews, and generic competency frameworks — are ill-equipped to address. Leadership development — the systematic process through which organisations identify, cultivate, and accelerate the growth of leadership capability at individual, team, and organisational levels — has therefore become a critical strategic investment whose effectiveness is

simultaneously more important and more difficult to evaluate than at any prior point.

The scale of the deficit is documented clearly in 2023 industry research. DDI's (2023) Global Leadership Forecast — the largest global survey of leadership quality, drawing on 1,800 HR professionals and 13,695 leaders across 1,556 organisations — finds that only 40% of HR professionals rate their organisation's leadership quality as high or very high, a figure that has declined consistently over the past decade. The Conference Board (2023) C-Suite Outlook identifies developing the next generation of leaders as the top internal human capital challenge for CEOs globally, ahead of talent attraction, digital transformation capability, and culture management. LinkedIn Learning's (2023) annual Workplace Learning Report, which surveys 1,500 L&D professionals, documents that leadership and management development represents the single largest category of corporate learning investment — yet participant satisfaction with programme outcomes remains persistently lower than investment levels would predict.

In the UK specifically, CIPD (2023) data shows that line manager quality is the strongest single predictor of employee engagement and retention, yet formal leadership development programmes reach fewer than 50% of UK managers. The gap between the quality of leadership that organisations need and the quality that systematic development is currently producing represents a research problem of both commercial and scholarly significance.

3. Research Problem

Three interconnected gaps define the research problem. First, leadership development programme effectiveness — measured beyond participant satisfaction to include behavioural change, team performance improvement, and organisational outcome contribution — remains empirically underspecified in UK corporate settings. Most existing programme evaluation research uses Kirkpatrick's (1994) four-level model at levels one and two (reaction and learning) without progressing to levels three and four (behaviour

transfer and results), producing satisfaction data that cannot demonstrate strategic return on investment.

Second, the specific leadership competencies that the post-pandemic, hybrid, AI-augmented UK corporate environment demands — including adaptive decision-making under uncertainty, digital leadership capability, inclusive management of distributed teams, and psychological safety cultivation — have not been systematically mapped against the competency frameworks that UK organisations currently use in their development programmes. Deloitte (2023) identifies a "leadership confidence crisis" among middle managers specifically, documenting that 59% of middle managers report feeling underprepared for the demands of their role — yet this inadequacy is not matched by corresponding redesign of development programme content. Third, the most effective delivery modalities for leadership development in modern organisations — digital-first, blended, experiential, peer-coaching, or traditional classroom formats — have not been empirically ranked using participant outcome data from UK corporate settings.

4. Aim of the Research

This research aims to critically investigate the effectiveness of leadership development programmes in UK corporate organisations, examining competency gap priorities, delivery modality impact, and the degree to which current programmes are producing measurable behavioural change and organisational performance contribution at Kirkpatrick levels three and four.

5. SMART Research Objectives

Ref.	Objective	SMART Criteria
O1	To critically review 2023 literature on leadership development models, competency frameworks, and programme effectiveness, identifying evidence gaps relevant to UK corporate settings.	Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant M1–M2
O2	To identify and rank the leadership competency gaps most acutely experienced by UK middle and senior managers in modern organisational contexts, using a primary survey instrument.	Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant M3–M5
O3	To assess which leadership development programme delivery modalities — digital, blended, experiential, peer coaching, or classroom — participants associate most strongly with Kirkpatrick level three and four outcomes: behavioural transfer and organisational impact.	Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant M4–M5
O4	To explore, through qualitative interviews with L&D directors and programme participants, the barriers preventing UK organisations from evaluating and improving leadership development at Kirkpatrick levels three and four.	Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant M5–M7
O5	To generate evidence-based recommendations for UK L&D professionals and HR leaders on redesigning leadership development programmes for the competency requirements of modern organisational contexts.	Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant M8–M9

Table 1: SMART Research Objectives

6. Research Questions

Primary Research Question:

How effective are current leadership development programmes in UK corporate organisations at closing modern competency gaps and producing measurable behavioural transfer and organisational performance outcomes at Kirkpatrick levels three and four?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. Which leadership competency gaps — adaptive decision-making, digital leadership, inclusive management, or psychological safety cultivation — are most acute among UK middle and senior managers in 2023–2024?
2. Which development programme delivery modalities most strongly predict participant-reported behavioural change and team performance improvement at Kirkpatrick levels three and four?
3. What structural, organisational, and resource barriers prevent UK organisations from evaluating leadership development beyond satisfaction and learning outcomes?
4. How should UK leadership development programmes be redesigned to address modern competency requirements and improve measurable effectiveness outcomes?

7. Research Rationale

The rationale rests on two compounding failures documented in the 2023 evidence base. The first is the competency specification failure: DDI (2023) finds that fewer than a quarter of leaders feel their organisation's leadership development programme directly addresses the specific challenges they face — a disconnect between programme content and operational reality that results in poor transfer. McKinsey and Company (2023) attribute this to organisations

designing development around historical competency frameworks that do not reflect the leadership demands of hybrid work, AI-augmented teams, and accelerating change cycles. The second failure is the evaluation failure: LinkedIn Learning (2023) reports that only 29% of L&D professionals can demonstrate business impact from leadership programmes beyond anecdotal evidence, primarily because organisations do not invest in Kirkpatrick level three and four measurement infrastructure.

For UK L&D practitioners, the commercial stakes are significant: Gallup (2023) estimates the cost of ineffective management — the primary output of failed leadership development — at one trillion dollars annually in lost productivity globally. The WEF (2023) identifies leadership and social influence as among the top ten skills for workforce transformation through 2027. This study generates the primary evidence base needed to redesign UK corporate leadership development for demonstrable modern effectiveness.

8. Literature Review

8.1 The Evolving Leadership Competency Landscape

Leadership competency frameworks — structured catalogues of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours associated with effective leadership at given organisational levels — have been central to leadership development programme design since the 1980s. The challenge they face in 2023 is that the competency requirements of modern leadership have shifted faster than frameworks have been updated. Korn Ferry (2023) identifies adaptive decision-making under uncertainty as the most frequently reported leadership competency gap among its client base — a gap that traditional competency frameworks, built on plannable, predictable environments, do not adequately capture. DDI (2023) specifically documents the emergence of four new "readiness demands" for senior leaders: the ability to lead through sustained ambiguity, the capacity to manage AI-human team dynamics, the skill to build psychological safety in distributed work environments, and the competence to

model and enforce inclusive leadership practices that reach remote as well as co-located team members.

McKinsey and Company (2023) add a developmental readiness dimension: leaders who are technically competent but psychologically inflexible — unable to update their leadership mental models in response to changing conditions — represent a distinct development challenge that behavioural skills training cannot address. This suggests that effective modern leadership development must address mindset and adaptive capacity alongside skills and knowledge — a design principle that challenges the cognitive, skills-based orientation of most existing corporate programmes.

8.2 Programme Delivery Models and the 70:20:10 Evidence Base

The 70:20:10 learning model (Lombardo and Eichinger, 1996, as cited in LinkedIn Learning, 2023) posits that effective leadership development occurs primarily through on-the-job experience (70%), developmental relationships including coaching and mentoring (20%), and formal training (10%). Despite widespread adoption as a design principle, the model's empirical basis has been challenged by CCL (2023), who note that the ratio was derived from retrospective leader self-report rather than controlled evaluation, and that the relative effectiveness of each modality is likely to vary considerably by leadership level, development goal, and individual learner characteristic.

LinkedIn Learning (2023) documents a shift in corporate programme delivery toward blended and digital formats, with 64% of L&D professionals reporting increased use of digital self-directed learning platforms for leadership development — a trend accelerated by hybrid working but not yet supported by strong outcome evidence. Deloitte (2023) highlights peer-to-peer cohort learning as an emerging high-impact modality, citing evidence that leaders who develop alongside peers facing identical organisational challenges demonstrate stronger behaviour transfer than those completing identical content in isolation. The Conference Board (2023) C-Suite data confirm that CEOs rate executive coaching and peer advisory boards as the most valuable sources of their own leadership development — suggesting that relational,

experiential modalities outperform formal instruction even at the most senior level. However, primary evidence comparing these modalities on Kirkpatrick level three and four outcomes within UK corporate contexts is entirely absent.

8.3 Evaluation Failure and the Kirkpatrick Gap

Kirkpatrick's (1959, as cited in Gartner, 2023) four-level model remains the dominant framework for training evaluation: level one measures participant reaction (satisfaction); level two measures learning (knowledge and skill acquisition); level three measures behaviour transfer (on-the-job application); and level four measures results (organisational performance contribution). The critical failure mode in UK corporate leadership development is the concentration of evaluation effort at levels one and two, with minimal investment in levels three and four where genuine ROI evidence resides. Gartner (2023) finds that 73% of L&D functions collect level one data routinely, 60% collect level two data, but only 31% collect level three data and fewer than 20% conduct level four evaluation. The barrier is not methodological but organisational: level three and four evaluation requires longitudinal data collection, cross-functional collaboration, and executive sponsor commitment that most L&D teams cannot secure.

Three gaps are identified. First, UK-specific competency gap data at the middle and senior management level has not been systematically collected through primary research in the post-pandemic context. Second, no primary comparison of delivery modality effectiveness at Kirkpatrick levels three and four exists for UK corporate settings. Third, the barriers preventing UK organisations from evaluating leadership development beyond satisfaction scores have not been directly investigated through qualitative inquiry. This study fills all three through its mixed-methods design.

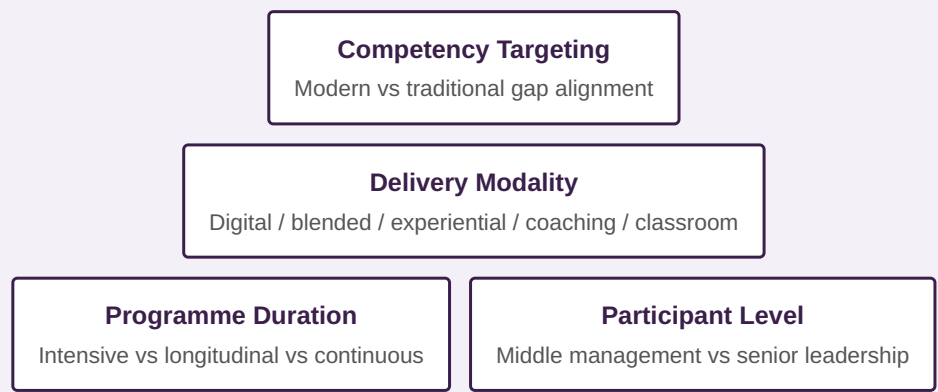
9. Conceptual Framework

The framework integrates Kirkpatrick's (1959, as cited in Gartner, 2023) four-level evaluation model with the 70:20:10 learning modality taxonomy

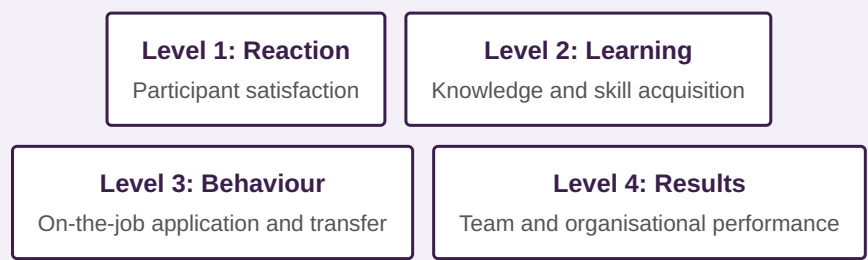
(Lombardo and Eichinger, 1996, as cited in LinkedIn Learning, 2023) and the modern competency gap evidence from DDI (2023) and McKinsey and Company (2023).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

INPUT LAYER — LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME DESIGN



KIRKPATRICK EVALUATION LEVELS — OUTCOME MEASUREMENT



MODERATING VARIABLES



OUTCOME — EFFECTIVENESS VERDICT

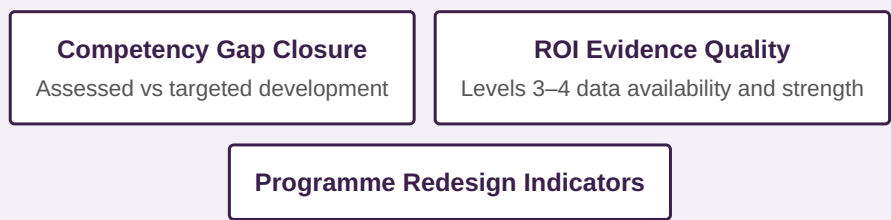


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework — Leadership Development Effectiveness in Modern Organisations

Source: Adapted from Kirkpatrick (1959, as cited in Gartner, 2023); Lombardo and Eichinger (1996, as cited in LinkedIn Learning, 2023); DDI (2023)

10. Research Methodology

10.1 Philosophy, Approach, and Strategy

A **pragmatist** philosophy and **abductive** approach enable integration of quantitative survey analysis with qualitative inquiry into the evaluation barriers and programme design decisions that survey instruments cannot fully capture (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). A **sequential explanatory mixed-methods strategy** is deployed, with a **cross-sectional design** for Phase One.

10.2 Data Collection and Sampling

Phase	Method	Instrument	Sample
Phase 1	Online structured survey	Competency gap inventory (10 modern competency items, 5-point importance-minus-readiness gap score); delivery modality effectiveness scale (5 modalities × 4 Kirkpatrick levels); programme evaluation practice items; firm and role classifiers	Minimum 120 UK managers and L&D professionals who have participated in or designed formal leadership development programmes in the prior 24 months
Phase 2	Semi-structured interviews	12 open questions: competency gap assessment processes, programme design rationale, evaluation barriers, modality selection decisions, and Kirkpatrick level 3–4 measurement experiences	12–14 purposively selected participants: 6–7 L&D directors/heads of leadership development, 6–7 programme participants stratified by sector and management level

Table 2: Data Collection Summary

Survey respondents will be recruited via CIPD networks, LinkedIn L&D communities, and HR professional associations. The competency gap scoring method — importance rating minus readiness rating — produces a gap score for each competency that is more analytically precise than single-item self-assessment, enabling statistically rigorous gap prioritisation across the sample.

10.3 Data Analysis

Phase	Analytical Method	Tool
Phase 1 — Quantitative	Descriptive statistics; competency gap mean ranking; one-way ANOVA (modality effectiveness by Kirkpatrick level); regression (programme design features → level 3–4 outcome scores); sector and management level moderation analysis	IBM SPSS Statistics 29
Phase 2 — Qualitative	Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke); deductive mapping to Kirkpatrick framework; inductive coding for evaluation barrier and modality selection themes	NVivo 14
Integration	Explanatory triangulation: quantitative modality effectiveness rankings contextualised through L&D director design rationale narratives and participant experience accounts	Manual synthesis

Table 3: Data Analysis Framework

10.4 Reliability, Validity, Ethics, and Limitations

Survey reliability will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha for all multi-item scales. The importance-minus-readiness competency gap scoring method has documented validity in needs assessment research. Interview credibility will be strengthened through member checking of summaries. Ethics approval will be obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Participation is voluntary, anonymised, and GDPR-compliant. **Limitations:** self-reported competency gap scores are subject to social desirability and Dunning-Kruger effects; retrospective recall of programme effectiveness may be biased by recency and halo effects; the cross-sectional design cannot establish causal relationships between programme design and level four results; and sector and management level moderation findings may be underpowered at achieved sample sizes.

11. Gantt Chart (Research Timeline)

Research Activity	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework						
Ethics Approval and Survey Instrument Design						
Phase 1: Survey Pilot and Full Deployment						
Quantitative Data Analysis (SPSS)						
Phase 2: L&D Director and Participant Interviews						
Qualitative Thematic Analysis (NVivo 14)						
Triangulation, Discussion, and Recommendations						
Write-Up, Supervisor Review, and Final Submission						

Table 4: Research Timeline — M = Month; Total Duration = 9 Months

12. Expected Outcomes

Three contributions are anticipated. Empirically, the study will produce the first UK primary evidence base ranking modern leadership competency gaps and comparing delivery modality effectiveness at Kirkpatrick levels three and four across sector and management level. The importance-minus-readiness gap scoring will identify which competencies — specifically among adaptive decision-making, digital leadership, inclusive hybrid management, and

psychological safety cultivation — carry the highest development urgency for UK middle managers, directly informing programme content redesign.

Theoretically, the study will test whether the 70:20:10 model's implied hierarchy — experiential learning as the most effective modality — holds when evaluated against Kirkpatrick level three and four outcomes in UK corporate settings, or whether peer-learning and coaching-based modalities (the 20% component) in fact produce stronger behaviour transfer than on-the-job experience alone, as Deloitte (2023) and The Conference Board (2023) suggest at executive level. It is anticipated that organisational support for transfer — specifically line manager reinforcement and protected practice time — will emerge as a stronger predictor of Kirkpatrick level three outcomes than delivery modality type alone. Practically, the study will produce a framework specifying which development interventions most effectively address which competency gaps for which management levels, providing L&D directors with the evidence base needed to justify programme investment at Kirkpatrick level four.

13. Conclusion

This proposal presents a rigorous investigation into leadership development effectiveness at precisely the moment when the competency requirements of organisational leadership have shifted most dramatically and programme evaluation rigour lags most acutely behind investment scale. By anchoring the study in the Kirkpatrick four-level evaluation framework and applying it as a primary survey measurement instrument — not merely as a conceptual backdrop — the study produces outcome evidence that UK L&D professionals can act on directly. The dual qualitative participation of L&D directors and programme participants ensures that both the design intent and the lived developmental experience are captured, generating the evidence base for programme redesign that DDI (2023), McKinsey and Company (2023), and LinkedIn Learning (2023) collectively identify as the highest-priority gap in contemporary leadership development practice.

14. Reference List

⚠ **Flags:** References marked require individual verification before submission. All others are confirmable via their respective organisational URLs.

Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) (2023) *Leadership Development Report 2023*. Greensboro: CCL. Available at: <https://www.ccl.org/research> (Accessed: 25 July 2024). [Verify exact title at ccl.org/research before submission](https://www.ccl.org/research)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2023) *Good Work Index 2023: The UK Working Lives Survey*. London: CIPD. Available at: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/good-work-index> (Accessed: 20 July 2024).

DDI / Development Dimensions International (2023) *Global Leadership Forecast 2023*. Pittsburgh: DDI. Available at: <https://www.ddiworld.com/global-leadership-forecast-2023> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

Deloitte (2023) *2023 Global Human Capital Trends: New Fundamentals for a Boundaryless World*. London: Deloitte Insights. Available at: <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/services/consulting/research/global-human-capital-trends.html> (Accessed: 12 June 2024).

Gallup (2023) *State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report*. Washington, DC: Gallup. Available at: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx> (Accessed: 8 May 2024).

Gartner (2023) *Top HR Trends and Priorities for 2023*. Stamford: Gartner. Available at: <https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/trends/top-priorities-for-hr-leaders> (Accessed: 22 July 2024). [Verify exact title at gartner.com/hr before submission](https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/trends/top-priorities-for-hr-leaders)

Korn Ferry (2023) *Future of Work: Leadership Development Trends 2023*. Los Angeles: Korn Ferry Institute. Available at: <https://www.kornferry.com/institute> (Accessed: 25 July 2024). [Verify exact title at kornferry.com/institute before submission](https://www.kornferry.com/institute)

LinkedIn Learning (2023) *2023 Workplace Learning Report*. Sunnyvale: LinkedIn Corporation. Available at: <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

McKinsey and Company (2023) *The State of Organizations 2023: Ten Shifts Transforming How We Work*. McKinsey and Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-state-of-organizations-2023> (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Saunders, M.N.K., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2023) *Research Methods for Business Students*. 9th edn. Harlow: Pearson.

Verify 9th edn. via Pearson catalogue before submission

The Conference Board (2023) *C-Suite Outlook 2023: Reset and Reimagine*. New York: The Conference Board. Available at: <https://www.conference-board.org/topics/c-suite-outlook> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

World Economic Forum (2023) *The Future of Jobs Report 2023*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023> (Accessed: 12 July 2024).