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CRITERIA, INDICATORS, AND DIAGNOSTIC METHODS FOR ASSESSING THE INNOVATIVE ACTIVITY OF LEADERS

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The acceleration of technological development, digital transformation, increasing competition, and continuous changes in the external environment have significantly increased the importance of innovative leadership in modern organizations. This issue is particularly relevant in higher education, where leaders are required to respond rapidly to changes in educational technologies, research priorities, labor-market demands, digital learning environments, and international standards. Under these conditions, a leader should not only perform administrative and managerial functions but also initiate new ideas, support experimentation, create conditions for creativity, use data and digital technologies in decision-making, and mobilize employees toward organizational transformation. Consequently, innovative activity is becoming an important indicator of professional leadership competence. At the same time, developing innovative activity requires an appropriate assessment system that can determine its current level, identify strengths and weaknesses, and provide an evidence-based foundation for professional development.

Innovative activity of a leader can be defined as a purposeful, proactive, and result-oriented form of managerial behavior aimed at searching for, developing, supporting, implementing, and evaluating new ideas, methods, technologies, and organizational solutions. Innovative activity is broader than creativity because generating a new idea does not necessarily lead to innovation. A leader becomes innovatively active when an idea is transformed into practical action and contributes to measurable organizational improvement. Therefore, innovative activity incorporates the leader's motivation to innovate, knowledge of innovation processes, creative thinking, initiative, willingness to experiment, ability to manage risks, digital competence, communication skills, leadership capacity, and ability to achieve practical innovation outcomes. This multidimensional nature makes it necessary to assess innovative activity through a system of interconnected criteria rather than through a single quantitative indicator.

Assessment of leaders' innovative activity serves both diagnostic and developmental purposes. From an organizational perspective, assessment makes it possible to determine whether managers possess the competencies and behavioral characteristics required to implement strategic innovation objectives. From an individual perspective, diagnostics help leaders understand their own strengths, identify competence gaps, and develop targeted professional development plans. Assessment results can also be used when designing leadership training programs, forming innovation teams, selecting managers for strategic projects, developing mentoring systems, and improving performance management. However, the assessment should not be viewed primarily as a mechanism of administrative control. Its most important function is developmental: diagnostics should answer not only the question "How innovative is the leader?" but also "Which competencies and conditions should be improved to increase the leader's innovative activity?"

A criterion represents a relatively broad dimension through which a leader's innovative activity can be evaluated, while an indicator represents a measurable manifestation of that criterion. For a comprehensive assessment, it is appropriate to distinguish motivational, cognitive, creative, activity-based, digital, communicative, leadership, reflective, and result-oriented criteria. The motivational

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criterion reflects the leader's interest in innovation, willingness to initiate changes, readiness for continuous learning, and internal motivation for professional development. The cognitive criterion characterizes knowledge of innovation management, strategic management, project management, digital transformation, and contemporary leadership approaches. The creative criterion reflects the ability to identify problems from different perspectives, generate original ideas, develop alternative solutions, and challenge ineffective traditional practices. The activity-based criterion demonstrates the extent to which knowledge and ideas are converted into actual innovation projects and managerial changes. Digital, communicative, leadership, reflective, and result-oriented criteria complement these dimensions and enable the organization to evaluate innovative activity as an integrated professional characteristic.

Indicators should provide observable and, where possible, measurable evidence of innovative leadership behavior. Quantitative indicators may include the number of innovation proposals initiated by a leader, the share of proposals implemented, the number of innovation projects managed, employee participation in innovative initiatives, the number of digital solutions introduced, project completion rates, cost or time savings generated through innovation, and the scale of external innovation partnerships. Qualitative indicators are equally important because the number of innovations does not necessarily reflect their quality or organizational value. Qualitative indicators may include the originality of proposed solutions, the leader's openness to experimentation, ability to motivate employees, effectiveness in managing resistance to change, quality of strategic decision-making, willingness to learn from unsuccessful initiatives, and ability to disseminate successful practices. Therefore, an effective assessment model should combine quantitative performance indicators with qualitative behavioral indicators.

Table-1

Criteria, Indicators, and Diagnostic Methods for Assessing Leaders' Innovative Activity

Assessment criterion	Main indicators	Recommended diagnostic methods
Motivational criterion	Interest in innovation; willingness to initiate change; continuous learning orientation; readiness to take reasonable risks	Questionnaire, structured interview, self-assessment, 360-degree feedback
Cognitive criterion	Knowledge of innovation management; strategic thinking; understanding of project management and organizational change	Knowledge tests, case analysis, interview, situational tasks
Creative criterion	Generation of new ideas; originality of solutions; flexibility of thinking; ability to identify alternatives	Case studies, creativity tasks, expert assessment, problem-solving exercises
Activity-based criterion	Number and quality of innovation initiatives; participation in innovation projects; implementation of new management methods	Portfolio analysis, observation, project documentation analysis, KPI assessment
Digital criterion	Use of digital platforms; data-driven decision-making; application of AI and analytical tools; digital	Digital competency test, practical tasks, system-use analytics, expert assessment

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	communication skills	
Communicative criterion	Knowledge sharing; stakeholder engagement; cross-functional cooperation; openness to feedback	360-degree feedback, interviews, observation, peer assessment
Leadership criterion	Ability to inspire employees; support for innovative ideas; delegation; change management; creation of an innovative climate	360-degree feedback, employee survey, expert evaluation, behavioral interview
Reflective criterion	Self-analysis; learning from experience; response to failure; adjustment of managerial practices	Reflection reports, self-assessment, coaching interview, portfolio analysis
Result-oriented criterion	Effectiveness of implemented innovations; improvement in quality, efficiency, cost, time, or stakeholder outcomes	KPI analysis, benchmarking, project evaluation, organizational performance data

Motivation represents the internal driving force of innovative activity because even a highly knowledgeable leader may demonstrate limited innovative behavior when there is insufficient interest in change or a strong preference for maintaining established routines. Motivational diagnostics should therefore identify the extent to which the leader perceives innovation as a professional value, actively seeks opportunities for improvement, demonstrates willingness to learn, and accepts reasonable uncertainty associated with experimentation. Questionnaires and structured interviews can be used to explore these characteristics, while 360-degree feedback can provide additional evidence regarding how the leader's motivation is perceived by colleagues and subordinates. Combining self-assessment with external assessment is especially important because leaders may overestimate or underestimate their own willingness to innovate.

The cognitive dimension of innovative activity reflects whether a leader possesses sufficient knowledge to understand and manage innovation processes, while the creative dimension demonstrates the ability to use this knowledge in new and non-standard situations. These two dimensions should be evaluated together because knowledge without creativity may reproduce existing management practices, while creativity without sufficient professional knowledge may produce ideas that are difficult to implement. Knowledge tests can be supplemented with management cases, situational tasks, and problem-solving exercises. For example, a leader may be presented with a situation involving declining organizational performance, resistance to digital transformation, or inefficient resource allocation and asked to develop several alternative solutions. Experts can then evaluate the proposed solutions according to originality, feasibility, strategic relevance, resource requirements, and potential impact.

The activity-based criterion occupies a central position in the diagnostic system because innovative activity must ultimately be manifested through practical behavior. Assessment should therefore determine whether the leader regularly transforms ideas into projects, experiments, new processes, or managerial improvements. Portfolio analysis can be particularly effective for this purpose. A leadership innovation portfolio may include descriptions of initiated projects, implemented digital solutions, organizational changes, partnerships, project outcomes, and documented lessons learned. Such evidence makes it possible to distinguish between leaders who merely express positive attitudes toward innovation and those who systematically translate innovative intentions into practical actions.

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Digital competence has become an increasingly important component of innovative leadership. A contemporary leader should be capable of using digital communication platforms, management information systems, analytical dashboards, data visualization tools, and, where appropriate, artificial intelligence technologies. However, digital competence should not be measured simply by the frequency of technology use. The key issue is whether a leader can use digital tools strategically to improve decision-making, communication, resource management, monitoring, and organizational performance. Diagnostic methods may therefore include practical digital tasks, analysis of digital-system usage, case-based assessment, and expert evaluation. Particular attention should be paid to data literacy, critical evaluation of AI-generated information, information security awareness, and the ability to integrate technological opportunities with organizational objectives.

One of the most useful methods for assessing innovative leadership behavior is 360-degree feedback, which collects evaluations from several groups interacting with the leader, including supervisors, colleagues, subordinates, and, where appropriate, external partners. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture than self-assessment alone. For example, a manager may perceive themselves as highly supportive of new ideas, while employees may report that they hesitate to propose innovations because unsuccessful experiments are criticized. Such differences between self-perception and external perception provide valuable diagnostic information. Nevertheless, 360-degree feedback should be implemented in a psychologically safe and confidential environment, and its primary purpose should be professional development rather than punishment or administrative pressure.

Expert evaluation is particularly appropriate when innovative activity involves complex qualitative characteristics that cannot be captured through numerical indicators alone. Experts may assess innovation portfolios, project outcomes, leadership behaviors, and strategic initiatives using standardized criteria and rating scales. Behavioral interviews can complement this method by asking leaders to describe actual situations in which they initiated an innovation, encountered resistance, managed risk, involved employees, or responded to unsuccessful outcomes. Questions based on real past behavior provide stronger evidence than hypothetical statements about what a leader believes they would do. For greater reliability, expert judgments should be based on predefined indicators, common scoring rubrics, and multiple sources of evidence.

The result-oriented dimension of innovative activity can be assessed using key performance indicators linked to innovation outcomes. Depending on the organization, these may include the percentage of innovation initiatives successfully implemented, improvement in process efficiency, reduction in administrative costs, growth in digital service usage, increased employee participation in innovation, expansion of external partnerships, improvements in stakeholder satisfaction, or successful scaling of pilot projects. In higher education institutions, indicators may additionally include the introduction of innovative educational technologies, digitalization of administrative processes, research commercialization initiatives, interdisciplinary projects, new partnerships, and improvements in educational or research performance. However, KPI-based assessment should be used carefully because excessive emphasis on numerical targets may encourage leaders to prioritize easily measurable innovations instead of strategically important but complex transformations.

For a comprehensive assessment, no single diagnostic instrument should be considered sufficient. A leader may achieve high scores on a theoretical knowledge test but demonstrate low innovative initiative in practice; similarly, a high number of innovation projects may conceal weak team leadership or limited sustainability of outcomes. Therefore, the principle of diagnostic triangulation should be applied, meaning that conclusions are based on several independent sources of evidence. An integrated diagnostic sequence can be organized as follows: self-assessment → competency testing → 360-degree feedback → behavioral interview → innovation portfolio analysis

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→ KPI and project-result analysis → expert evaluation → individual development plan. The combination of these methods increases the validity of assessment and allows organizations to identify not only the current level of innovative activity but also the factors limiting its further development.

Based on diagnostic results, leaders' innovative activity can be classified into four developmental levels: low, moderate, sufficient, and high. At the low level, a leader tends to rely on established management practices, demonstrates limited initiative, and requires substantial support to implement innovations. At the moderate level, the leader recognizes the importance of innovation and may participate in new projects but does not yet demonstrate systematic innovative behavior. At the sufficient level, the leader regularly initiates improvements, uses modern management and digital tools, supports employee initiatives, and successfully manages innovation projects. At the high level, innovative activity becomes an integral part of leadership behavior: the leader systematically identifies future opportunities, creates an innovative organizational culture, mobilizes teams around change, builds external partnerships, evaluates innovation outcomes, and disseminates successful practices throughout the organization.

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