

CASE STUDY

Do We Have the Leadership Capability to Deliver Our Strategy?

Most organisations answer that question by looking at leadership development, succession planning, promotion, workforce planning and talent management separately.

This case study demonstrates what became visible when one organisation chose to examine them as a single leadership capability system, using Leadership & Talent Architecture™.

Leadership capability is not created by leadership development, succession planning or promotion alone. It emerges from the interaction between systems that are governed separately, by design.

As argued in Building Leadership Capability as a Strategic Organisational Asset, Nudge Position Paper 001, this is a governance condition, not a development one. What follows is evidence of that condition in one organisation.

The evidence

Sector	UK public sector, emergency service
Engagement	Leadership & Talent Architecture™ SLT Diagnostic
Diagnostic period	Ten months, evidence drawn from 2019 to 2026

One organisation illustrates this precisely. For several years, a UK emergency service had been told the same thing in different ways. Inspection cycles raised concerns about promotion transparency and future leadership development. Internal diagnostics flagged inconsistent confidence in progression. Culture surveys and exit data surfaced questions about fairness and career visibility. Workforce planning activity pointed to future leadership supply risk.

Each of these was treated, reasonably, as a separate issue. Separate interventions were commissioned. Separate improvement plans were written. And yet the same themes kept resurfacing, cycle after cycle, despite genuine and sustained effort to address them.

Read separately, each signal looked manageable. Read as a system, they pointed to something structural. The question was not what to fix next. It was whether this was one risk or six, and whether they were connected.

The diagnostic approach

Nudge was engaged to produce an SLT-grade diagnostic report: a governance instrument, not a development programme. The brief was to make leadership and talent risk visible to the Board with enough rigor that the conclusion could be trusted and enough restraint that it would not be mistaken for a recommendation to act.

The diagnostic assessed risk across the six domains of Leadership & Talent Architecture™:

- Context and Strategic Reality
- Leadership Capability and Capacity
- Talent Systems and Decisions
- Culture and Informal Power
- Individual Energy, Identity and Trajectory
- Outcomes, Risk and Sustainability

Evidence was drawn from twenty-three structured stakeholder interviews across operational and corporate leadership, inspection findings across three cycles, culture survey and exit data, promotion diagnostics, workforce planning documentation and organisational benchmarking. No material finding was based on a single source. Every emerging or material risk judgment was corroborated across at least two independent evidence streams.

This is the part that most diagnostic exercises skip: for every conclusion reached, the report states what alternative interpretation was considered, why it was not adopted, and what evidence would need to exist for that alternative to hold instead. Where evidence was partial, that is stated explicitly. No conclusion was drawn beyond what the evidence supported.

What the Heatmap showed

Read in isolation, no single domain looked severe. Read together, a clear pattern emerged.

- Strategic awareness of the challenges was strong. The organisation understood the problem
- Talent Systems and Decisions carried the most significant risk. Workforce planning, promotion, leadership development and talent identification existed but operated as independent processes rather than one system
- Leadership Capability, Culture and Outcomes were each amplified by that same gap
- Individual-level career uncertainty was real, but localised rather than systemic

LEADERSHIP & TALENT ARCHITECTURE™

How risk moves between domains

Risk in one domain rarely stays there. It amplifies, or is buffered by, the domains around it.

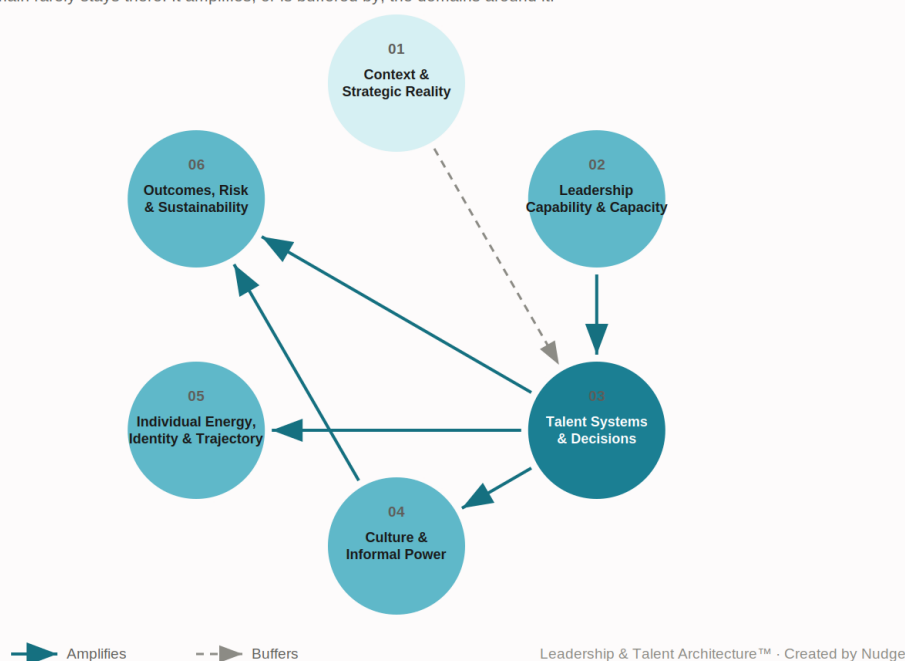


Figure 1. How risk moved between domains in this diagnostic.

The significance was not that four domains carried elevated risk. The significance was that those risks amplified one another. Talent Systems and Decisions was the point through which most of that amplification passed, into leadership continuity, workforce confidence and recurring external scrutiny simultaneously. That is a structural condition, not a collection of unrelated problems.

The issue was never promotions. It was the absence of a mechanism connecting workforce planning, leadership capability, talent identification, development, succession and progression into one architecture.

The governance conclusion

The diagnostic reached one of three possible conclusions available in the Leadership & Talent Architecture™ framework: no further work warranted, developmental action sufficient, or architectural intervention required. In this case, the evidence supported architectural intervention required.

Importantly, the report also recognised that the organisation had already begun that shift. Strategic workforce planning, promotion reform, a leadership capability framework and an integrated talent management framework were all in early implementation at the point of assessment. The diagnostic did not tell the organisation something it had never considered. It confirmed, with evidence, that the direction it had begun to take was the right one, and named clearly what still needed to be resolved.

The report was explicit about the limits of its own conclusion. Confidence in the findings relating to talent systems and progression was high. Confidence relating to succession architecture and future leadership supply was moderate, because the data needed to assess it did not yet exist. That gap was stated rather than papered over.

The Strategic Leadership Team was not asked to approve a programme. It was asked to receive the evidence and decide, on the basis of it, what should follow.

The diagnostic record

The finding above is the argument. This is the evidence artefact behind it: the Heatmap Pro™ view used with the Board, showing each domain's risk state against the governance threshold.

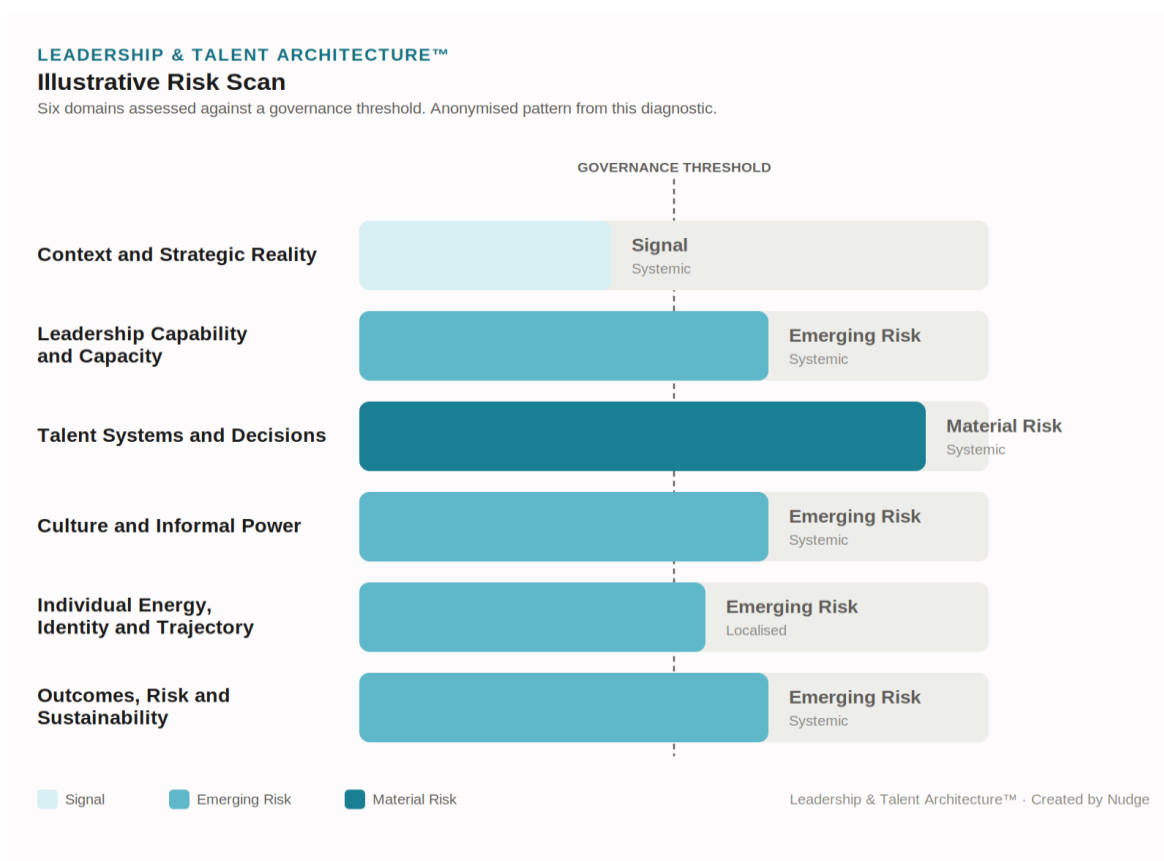


Figure 2. Leadership & Talent Architecture™ Heatmap Pro™ summarising the diagnostic judgment.

Why this matters for other organisations

This case illustrates the condition Leadership & Talent Architecture™ is built to surface. A risk keeps reappearing across inspection cycles, engagement surveys and promotion reviews. Each function addresses its own part competently, yet no one is accountable for how those parts connect. That is why no single intervention resolves it. No single intervention was ever going to be enough.

If your organisation recognises this pattern, the relevant question for your Board or Executive Team is not whether another development initiative is needed. It is whether the risk sitting across your leadership and talent decisions is visible, and whether it is being treated as a governance issue or a series of unconnected local problems.

Where to start

Leadership & Talent Architecture™ begins with visibility, not intervention. The Leadership & Talent Risk Heatmap™ is the entry point: a structured diagnostic that surfaces where risk is accumulating across leadership, succession and talent decisions, and whether it is contained or systemic.

[Explore the Leadership & Talent Risk Heatmap™](#) | [Speak to Nudge about a diagnostic](#)