

The Development of Human Resource Middle-level Executives' Potential Model in Public Limited Companies for Business Competitiveness in the Digital Era

JEERAPAT PATTANAWATCHARAKUL, PAWINEE BOONYASOPON,
SOMNOEK WISUTTIPAET, TERAUVUTI BOONYASOPON
Industrial Business and Human Resource Development,
King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok,
1518 Pracharat 1 Road, Wongsawang, Bang Sue, Bangkok 10800,
THAILAND

Abstract: - The rapid advancement of digital technologies and artificial intelligence has increased governance complexity and workforce transformation in Thailand's public limited companies. This study aims to (1) identify the key competency components of human resource (HR) middle-level executives, (2) develop a potential model, and (3) propose a development guideline to enhance business competitiveness in the digital era. We employed a mixed-methods design that combined documentary analysis, a three-round Delphi technique with 18 HR executives from five industry sectors, and a focus group with 14 experts. Data were analyzed using median (≥ 3.50) and interquartile range (≤ 1.50) criteria. The findings reveal a competency model based on the knowledge-skills-attributes (KSA) framework, comprising 3 dimensions, 13 main components, and 26 sub-components. A T-R-U-S-T development framework was also formulated to guide implementation. Experts validated the model, and it showed strong applicability for Thailand's public limited companies.

Key-Words: - potential model development, HR middle-level executives, public limited company, digital era, Delphi method.

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1 Introduction

Between 2024 and 2025, the number of active public limited companies in Thailand rose slightly from 1,482 to 1,505 [1]. Of these, 922 are listed on the SET, subjecting them to mandatory compliance with international financial reporting standards, rigorous disclosure obligations, adherence to SEC regulations, and sustained accountability to a diffuse, public shareholder base [2]. The companies are further affected by digital disruption and the accelerating integration of AI that have elevated the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) and brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible (BANI) aspects [3] in defining features of the organizational environment. For public limited companies in Thailand, these pressures create a necessity for a different type of leadership at the HR middle-executive level.

Operating within this structure, HR middle-level executives have a direct influence over an organization's performance in three areas. They must ensure that they acquire skilled staff to add to the workforce in an increasingly competitive talent

market. The workforce must be ready to use digital technology to promote the growth and profitability of the company. Capacity building, if necessary through upskilling and reskilling initiatives for the workforce, will enable effective collaboration with digital technologies

In Thailand, public limited companies in sectors strongly affected by digital disruption have increasingly embedded digital systems into their core operations. These include banking companies using AI-driven credit scoring and digital lending platforms, retail companies adopting omnichannel workforce management systems, manufacturing companies applying automated performance monitoring on the shop floor, and energy companies using digital workforce planning for distributed operations. These changes have changed the expectations placed on HR middle-level executives. Their role now involves connecting board-level digital transformation policies with practical HR responsibilities, including workforce planning, talent development, performance management, and regulatory compliance within Thailand's business and governance context.

Earlier studies on HR competency [4], [5] have looked at the topic broadly, while research on digital HR [6] often treats technology adoption as a separate matter. Neither specifically addresses the strict rules and regulations that affect public limited companies. In this study, we will fill that gap by using an approach focused on technology, combined with those rules and regulations, to help HR executives reach their full potential. It uses the proven methods based on evidence [7], [8] to solve human capital problems. The aims of the research are to: (1) identify what makes successful HR middle-level executives in public limited companies; (2) develop a model to measure the potential; and (3) write a handbook, based on the model, to develop these executives.

2 Problem Formulation

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Our study is organized around the knowledge–skills–attributes (KSA) competency framework [9]. This framework holds that an executive's capability comes from three components: what a person knows (knowledge), what they can do (skills), and how they usually behave (attributes). It draws on several earlier works. The POCCC process — planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling [10] — gives the structural backbone for the skills dimension, while the Hawthorne studies [11] and the two-factor motivation theory [12] inform the attributes dimension. The Harvard human resources management (HRM) framework [13], together with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles [14], runs across all the KSA dimensions, reflecting the governance accountability obligations of listed companies. In the digital era, it is imperative that a good leader has digital and sustainability skills [7], [8].

Contemporary digital HR frameworks also support this position. Recent competency models identify technology literacy as a core HR leadership capability, and six HR competency domains have been outlined [4] — one of which, the technology component, closely parallels K2 in our model. But the framework in [4] was designed for HR professionals in general, not for middle-level executives working under the rigid governance of publicly listed companies. Our study therefore extends [4] in two key ways rather than applying it directly. First, it focuses specifically on middle-level executives in public limited companies and, secondly, it emphasizes that the ESG principle of governance must include digital literacy and the

accountability obligations of listed companies as core elements of the KSA framework, rather than as supplementary compliance obligations.

2.2 Research Methodology

For this study, we employed a mixed-methods research design that integrates documentary analysis, the Delphi method across three iterative rounds, and a focus group discussion. The reason for our choice of the Delphi method is that the topic requires practical expertise from people who are currently working in these roles, not just theoretical knowledge [15].

The key informants were 18 HR executives from public limited companies in Thailand, each possessing a minimum of five years of managerial experience, who were selected through purposive sampling. To make sure that the panel represented different types of industries, the executives were from five different sectors: manufacturing (6 people), financial services (4 people), retail and consumer goods (3 people), energy and utilities (3 people), and real estate and property development (2 people). All of them held senior or executive-level HR positions with direct experience of working in SEC/SET-governed organizations. This sample size meets the criterion [16] which states that a panel of 17 or more experts brings the Delphi margin of error below the required threshold of ≤ 0.25 . Five more experts checked the accuracy of the model, while a further 14 took part in the focus group discussion to evaluate and formally approve the draft model.

Our research was carried out in three successive steps. In the first, we studied the existing literature to create a 99-item questionnaire based on the KSA framework. For the second step, we used the Delphi method in three rounds: in the first round, we carried out in-depth interviews and analyzed the information that was provided; then, in the second and third Rounds, we used five-point Likert-scale questionnaires, which were analyzed using the median and IQR. We retained items with a median score of ≥ 3.50 and a narrow range of answers (IQR) of ≤ 1.50 . These standards are based on established conventions for the use of the Delphi method [15]: a median score at or above 3.50 indicates that a majority of the experts regard the item as at least “high” in importance, while an IQR score of 1.50 or lower shows that most of the experts share the same opinion. We considered that there was a consensus when both conditions were met at the same time for all 18 executives within a single Delphi round. To make sure that the analysis of the qualitative data from Delphi Round 1 was trustworthy, it was assessed using Cohen's kappa method. Two coders

worked separately on the Round 1 interview data; when their analyses were compared, the kappa coefficient came out at $\kappa = 0.87$, a level of agreement that gave us confidence the categorization was sound rather than researcher-driven. Then, we sent the draft of the model to a group of 14 experts; they checked it, and all approved it.

However, we must acknowledge that there are several limitations to the methodology that we used. First, as with all Delphi-based research, the findings reflect the knowledge, experience, and professional backgrounds of the experts; although multi-round iteration helped reduce individual bias, it might not eliminate it entirely. Also, the study focuses on the specific rules and regulations for Thailand's public limited companies; this makes it valid for Thailand but might limit its application in other countries. Furthermore, because the model has not yet been tested in practice, more research will be needed to establish how successful it is in the real world. Finally, the Delphi method establishes which factors are the most important in the view of the experts, but it does not prove that these factors, in fact, lead to better business performance or HR results.

3 Problem Solution

3.1 Research Findings

The study shows that the HR Resource Middle-level Executives' Potential Model comprises 3 dimensions, which include 13 main components and 26 sub-components.

Dimension 1: Knowledge (K) centers on three main components: K1) Organizational Business Knowledge, which is understanding how a business works; K2) Digital Technology Knowledge for HR Enhancement, which is the use of technology to improve HR processes; and K3) Legal Standards and Corporate Governance Knowledge, which involves knowledge of a company's rules and the laws of the country. This section ensures that the model understands business, technology, and legal rules. It is noticeable that emphasis on legal standards and corporate governance reflects a finding that was consistent throughout the study: knowledge of the rules and regulations that relate to public limited companies is vital for the effective application of business and digital knowledge.

Dimension 2: Management Skills (S) contains seven main skills which speak for themselves: S1) Strategic Planning and Business Analysis; S2) Change Management and Sustainability; S3) Organizational Design and Human Resource

Development; S4) Leadership and Communication for Collaboration; S5) HR Performance Monitoring and Development; S6) Governance and Sustainability; and S7) Relationship Management. We were not surprised that the emphasis on the first two and last two skills indicates that HR middle-level executives are expected not only to implement routine HR functions, but also to take action on organizational strategy, follow regulatory requirements, achieve sustainability expectations, and oversee digital transformation goals. In this sense, management skills are a bridge between executive knowledge and the performance of an organization.

Dimension 3: Personal Attributes (A) is concentrated on three main elements, which are: A1) Ethics and Accountability as a Business Owner; A2) Professional Self-Development and Change Drive, involving growth and adaptability; and A3) Building Organizational Unity. These attributes ensure that knowledge and management skills are exercised with honesty, responsibility, and flexibility to build trust with everyone in the organization. The 18 executives particularly emphasized the importance of ethics and accountability. This suggests that, in public limited companies, the personal attributes of HR executives are equally as important as their management skills.

The data indicated that all dimensions scored at the "high" to "highest" levels and that the results were consistent. As shown in Table 1 (Appendix), the items with the highest consensus ($Mdn = 5.00$, $IQR = 0.00$) are in ethics, transparency, and foundational governance sub-components. This pattern is the same for all three KSA dimensions. This pattern in Table 1 (Appendix) is worth examining closely. Ethics and transparency items consistently scored $Mdn = 5.00$ with $IQR = 0.00$ — meaning all experts agreed at the highest level with no variation at all. It is unusual for people to agree this much in a Delphi study, suggesting that these items represent a shared baseline assumption among HR practitioners in Thailand's public company sector.

In every group, the item related to digital technology was ranked lowest. Cybersecurity knowledge (K2) and AI-supported decision-making (S1) recorded the lowest median scores at $Mdn = 4.00$. This pattern does not mean that digital capabilities are unimportant — in fact, all digital items were rated highly. However, it should be looked at more closely and not just accepted at face value.

We changed the draft model subsequently based on the recommendations of the focus group. All 14

qualified experts completely agreed that the model is correct, academic, and useful.

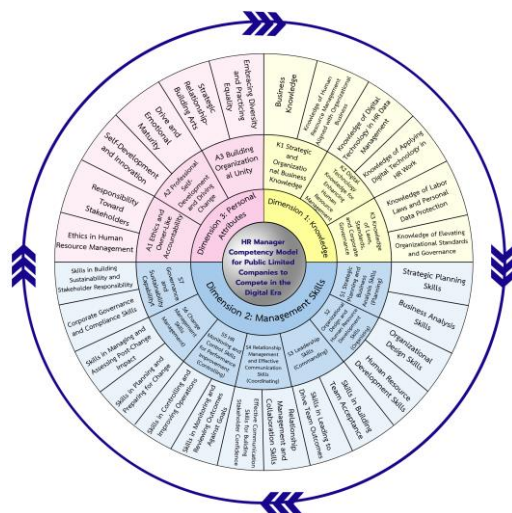


Fig. 1: Digital HR-Era Management Skills for Public Limited Companies

Source: created by the authors

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the HR Resource Middle-level Executives' Potential Model. The model has three inner-to-outer layers based on KSA in the center layer. Knowledge (K) includes, in its middle layer, understanding of business, digital technology, and laws/rules. In the middle layer of Management Skills (S), there are the seven practical skills components ranging from strategic planning and change management to governance, performance monitoring, and relationship management. The outer layer for Personal Attributes (A) contains its six sub-components, which range from embracing diversity and practicing equality to ethics in human resource management. These KSA dimensions combine to create a leadership profile that is ideally suited for executive-level management and the digital changes that are happening in Thailand's public limited companies. The T-R-U-S-T method, detailed in Section 3.2, uses this three-layer structure divided into five practical steps. This helps organizations to use the model for leadership training, succession planning, and performance reviews.

3.2 Development of the Potential Guideline Handbook

The potential development guideline handbook was developed by combining the results of a tested model, expert opinions (the Delphi analysis), and feedback from focus group discussions. The handbook uses the T-R-U-S-T Model — a mnemonic for the five growth steps or pathways:

Pathway T — Transformational Business Understanding: Pathway T focuses on

understanding business. Executives need to grasp how their organization fits into the capital market, how corporate strategy is set, and how HR planning connects to business goals. This pathway aligns with K1 and S1.

Pathway R — Regulatory Governance and Digital Readiness: Pathway R covers regulatory governance and digital readiness. It is essential for those concerned with governance obligations and public accountability demands to be aware of their responsibilities and to be capable of using digital technology to meet those obligations and demands. This pathway is aligned with K2, K3, S6, and A1.

Pathway U — Unified Organizational Leadership: Pathway U, which aligns with S2, S4, A2 and A3, involves the ability to take the lead in both the transformation of an organization and the inclusion of other cultures.

Pathway S — Strategic HR Architecture and Performance: Pathway S is concerned with the ability to plan, organize, and use data to create effective HR digital technology and is aligned with S3, S5 and S7.

Pathway T — Talent and Sustainability Integration: In alignment with S6, A1, and A3, Pathway T develops the capacity of the executives to embed ESG principles into the acquisition and development of the workforce.

Collectively, the five developmental pathways of the T-R-U-S-T Model make an integrated architecture for advancing HR middle-level executive potential across all three KSA dimensions. The pathways are not meant to be used in isolation. They work together in a specific order: first, executives learn the basics of business and management; then they build skills in leadership, HR, and sustainability. The T-R-U-S-T model's development map is illustrated in Figure 2.

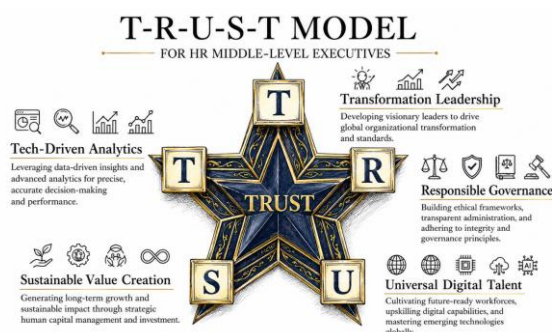


Fig. 2: An illustration of the development map for the T-R-U-S-T model for HR Middle-Level Executives

Source: This figure was generated using artificial intelligence (Gemini, Google) and subsequently reviewed and edited by the authors.

4 Conclusion

Based on our research, the model for middle-level HR managers in public limited companies has 3 dimensions, divided into 13 main components, and 26 sub-components within the KSA framework. When considering each dimension, we found that the items relating to ethics and accountability received the highest level of agreement; in several cases, everyone gave exactly the same score with $Mdn = 5.00$ and $IQR = 0.00$. This result is different from those relating to SEC/SET HR governance requirements and cybersecurity knowledge, which received a score for the $Mdn = 4.00$ with the IQR ranging from 1.00 to 2.00. We believe that this pattern shows that most of the HR practitioners in Thai public limited companies think that personal integrity is treated as a minimum standard, while regulatory knowledge is seen as something that can be acquired through training. This pattern is consistent with earlier work on emotional intelligence [18], which argued that in organizations with strong governance expectations, managing relationships and maintaining trust is a key part of effective work performance, not just a personal trait.

One finding that we consider is worth examining separately is the exclusion of item 10, which was about the recruitment procedures for foreign labor. This item received a score of $Mdn = 3.00$ and was the only item that did not meet the criteria for retention. The expert panel was drawn from five different industries — manufacturing, financial services, retail and consumer goods, energy and utilities, and real estate. It is possible that the recruitment of foreign workers was not considered a common concern for all of the industries. However, the researchers acknowledge that this may not reflect the situation in industries that rely more heavily on migrant workers, and further study may be needed.

Regarding the focus group discussion results, the 14 experts suggested several important refinements to the model. In particular, they emphasized that middle-level HR managers in public limited companies are expected to prepare formal employee reports for submission to their boards of directors, which is beyond the ordinary HR administrative role. This expectation is in line with the argument [5] that HR can contribute as an organizational co-architect only when managers have real business expertise must also include an understanding of the capital market and how to be accountable to investors. These special skills are not usually mentioned in standard HR frameworks like [4].

All the items relating to digital skills met the requirements, but they still ranked lower than those for governance and ethics. For example, AI-

supported decision-making under S1 and cybersecurity knowledge under K2 both received a score of $Mdn = 4.00$. We do not interpret this result as a rejection of digital capability. Rather, it may reflect the professional backgrounds of the experts, many of whom developed their HR careers before digital technology became central to HR work. This interpretation is in line with earlier findings [8] showing that resistance to digital transformation in organizations is often related more to the lack of leadership culture and organizational readiness than to technological factors. At the same time, the researchers recognize that this explanation cannot be fully confirmed from the present data alone, and future research that includes HR managers at different career stages may provide a clearer picture.

In the T-R-U-S-T model, the five development pathways were not designed in advance as a framework. We created them by grouping together common themes that resulted from the Delphi analysis and the focus groups' discussions. Pathway S (Strategic HR Architecture and Performance) is related to both K1 and S1, which is consistent with the framework [6] on HR's contribution to strategic decision-making; it also matches the view [5] that business expertise is a necessary foundation for strategic HR partnership. Pathway T shows that the experts agreed people analytics and AI tools for HR decisions will become very important for listed companies, [8], [17]. However, they also emphasized that these tools should be applied within a governance framework rather than on their own.

We want to say clearly that there are several limitations to this research. The Delphi technique depends on the judgment of experts, and although the process of three iterative rounds helped to reduce individual bias, the results are based on the experts' opinions rather than on evidence of a direct cause-and-effect relationship. The inter-rater reliability check using Cohen's kappa showed $\kappa = 0.87$, which indicates strong agreement between coders, but this applies only to the qualitative coding process, not to the whole competency model. In addition, the model was developed specifically to take account of the law relating to Thailand's public limited companies and may require adaptation before being applied in other countries or organizational settings. Most importantly, the model has not yet been tested against actual performance outcomes of HR executives. Future research should examine if the model works over time; there should be a check to find if the executives who have trained with this method show real improvements in strategic planning, following rules and regulations, and using digital tools for HR decisions.

In short, this study adds to existing research on HR skills. We have created a model for Thai public limited companies that shows that they must improve governance, digital knowledge, and business understanding all at the same time, not separately.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

All authors took part in preparing this article and approved the final manuscript. The first author was responsible for setting the research idea, reviewing related literature, designing the research method, collecting data from the Delphi rounds and focus group discussions, analyzing the data, and writing the first draft of the article. The co-authors helped check and improve the theoretical framework, research instruments, interpretation of the results, competency model, and T-R-U-S-T potential development framework. They also gave comments and revised some parts of the manuscript to make the content more correct and suitable for the research context.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Summary of Key Components and Expert Agreement (Delphi Round 2, 18 people)

Dimension	Main Component	Highest-Priority Item	Mdn (IQR)	Lowest-Priority Item	Mdn (IQR)
Knowledge (K)	K1: Organizational Business Knowledge	Business goal and organizational direction knowledge	5.00 (0.00)	Knowledge of manpower productivity's effect on ROI	5.00 (1.00)
	K2: Digital Technology Knowledge for HR Enhancement	HR data analytics techniques	5.00 (1.00)	Cybersecurity for HR data protection	4.00 (1.00)
	K3: Legal Standards and Corporate Governance	Labor law knowledge	5.00 (1.00)	SEC/SET HR governance requirements	4.00 (1.00)
Management Skills (S)	S1: Strategic Planning and Business Analysis	Aligning HR KPIs with organizational strategy	5.00 (0.00)	AI and digital tools for management decisions	4.00 (1.00)
	S2: Change Management and Sustainability	Change management capability	5.00 (0.00)	HRD aligned with ESG principles	4.00 (1.25)
	S3: Organizational Design and HRD	Talent acquisition aligned with investment goals	5.00 (0.25)	HR workforce planning aligned with digital technology	4.00 (1.00)
	S4: Leadership and Communication	Communicating work goals for team acceptance	5.00 (0.00)	Coordinating with external networks	4.00 (1.00)
	S5–S7 (all exceeded threshold)	<i>All items: Mdn ≥ 4.00, IQR ≤ 1.25</i>	—	—	—
Personal Attributes (A)	A1: Ethics and Accountability	Integrity and transparency in operations	5.00 (0.00)	Role-modeling strict regulatory compliance	5.00 (1.00)
	A2: Self-Development and Change Drive	Lifelong learning and continuous self-development	5.00 (0.00)	Design Thinking Mindset	5.00 (1.00)
	A3: Building Organizational Unity	Acceptance of diversity and equal treatment	5.00 (0.25)	Strategic relationship building across stakeholders	5.00 (0.25)

Note: All items exceeded the Delphi retention threshold (Mdn ≥ 3.50 ; IQR ≤ 1.50), with the exception of item 10 (knowledge of foreign labor recruitment procedures; Mdn = 3.00), which was excluded from the final model.

Source: created by the authors