

nextGEN

Building a leadership
development engine
at scale



Rethinking leadership development

After a three-day offsite reviewing potential successors, a Fortune 100 CEO found herself questioning the process. While discussing with her CHRO, *she fired off a series of questions:*

Over the weekend, the CHRO combed through articles listing the many reasons why leadership development programs fail. More than ever, the CHRO realized doing nothing was not an option. Companies have evolved their strategy development processes with scenario planning and optionality—talent and leadership planning must follow suit. They needed a way to identify and develop leaders systematically, adaptively, and at scale.

By Monday morning, the CEO and CHRO were ready to act. They called their ghSMART leadership advisor, asking, “What should we do differently? How do we truly prepare leaders for an uncertain future?”

*That's where **nextGEN** comes in.*

Did we learn anything new this year, beyond the 30 people who always appear on our dashboards?

Do we know who our next 300 highest-potential leaders are?

If the future is uncertain, **what exactly** are we preparing people for?

How do we put top talent in roles that prepare them for the future?

Most companies fail at high-potential development because they start too late, overinvest in generic programs, and reinforce existing patterns – rather than equipping leaders to navigate unpredictable challenges.

“I’m a CEO today because someone bet on my potential early, putting me in stretch roles, trusting me to grow into them, and letting me fail forward. Most organizations, including ours, struggle to spot rising talent and play it safe instead of making bold bets that could accelerate their growth. ghSMART is helping us change that – we are seeing measurable impact.”

— Fortune 100 CEO

*Based on a global survey of 500+ executives

ACROSS INDUSTRIES, CEOS AND CHROs FACE A CRITICAL QUESTION:

Is our existing leadership development approach preparing us for the future?

11%

Only 11% of executives strongly agree that their leadership development programs achieve and sustain desired results.*

\$370B+

\$370+ billion is spent globally on leadership development with \$168+ billion spent in North America alone.

213%

The cost of leadership failure can be as high as 213% of salary at the C-suite level.

3.7x

High-potential leaders are 3.7x more likely to leave if not given opportunities for growth.

THE ghSMART APPROACH:

Building a scalable leadership engine

Unlike most leadership development programs that start with an off-the-shelf curriculum, we start with strategy. Leadership development isn't exclusively about accelerating individuals—it's about creating a system that can drive future business success. This process must be rooted in the company's goals.

STEP 1

The Right What

Identifying the leadership capabilities needed for future business success.

STEP 2

The Right Who

Systematically assessing and surfacing high-potential leaders with rigor and analytics.

STEP 3

The Right How

Enabling thoughtful role matching and high-impact development experiences.

nextGEN

Our *nextGEN* solution provides a systematic way to **tie the firm's future oriented-strategy to capabilities**. Grounded in those capabilities, we can then **identify and prepare leaders with the highest potential** and probability of success.

This evidence-based approach enables organizations to see patterns others miss beyond the first layer or two of leaders, unlocking hidden potential and accelerating the growth of future leaders.

The Right What

Identifying future capabilities

nextGEN begins by aligning leadership development with business strategy to define the essential skills, mindsets, and behaviors future leaders will need. Rather than relying on generic leadership models, we take a company-specific approach.

By focusing on these company-specific leadership behaviors early in the talent lifecycle, we help organizations accelerate the success of emerging leaders and ensure they are prepared to drive impact at scale.

This approach creates clear indicators of future success, sharpening the organization's focus on what it truly takes to thrive in its unique context—rather than adopting broad, one-size-fits-all leadership trends like “all future leaders need AI competence.”

Key questions we answer:

1

What are the critical seven to eight future leadership capabilities based on where the business is heading?

2

How do we ensure these capabilities reflect our unique culture and competitive advantage?

3

Are we building leaders and leadership pools for the next decade and for roles yet to be defined, not just the next promotion cycle?



The Right Who

Assessing leadership potential with greater accuracy

The process begins with a broad pool of leaders under consideration. This group is refined using a proprietary quantitative model that integrates more than 50 inputs—including 360-degree feedback, performance data, psychometric assessments, and internal data—to identify leaders with the highest potential.

These inputs are drawn from a comprehensive dataset of dozens of datapoints, some of which are outputs rather than inputs, providing exceptional precision and rigor.

The process concludes with a short list of leaders best suited for targeted development plans designed to accelerate their growth and readiness for future leadership roles.

The thorough analysis using ghSMART's proprietary Potential Model measures key markers such as:

CQ

COGNITIVE QUOTIENT

The ability to think critically and adapt quickly.

DQ

DRIVE QUOTIENT

The ambition and resilience to lead in complex environments.

EQ

EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT

The ability to engage, influence, and align teams.

DA

DEMONSTRATED AGILITY

The ability to thrive in diverse contexts with swift, effective transitions.

Harvard
Business
Review

[Read the
Research](#)

How the proprietary quantitative model works

Key questions we answer:

1

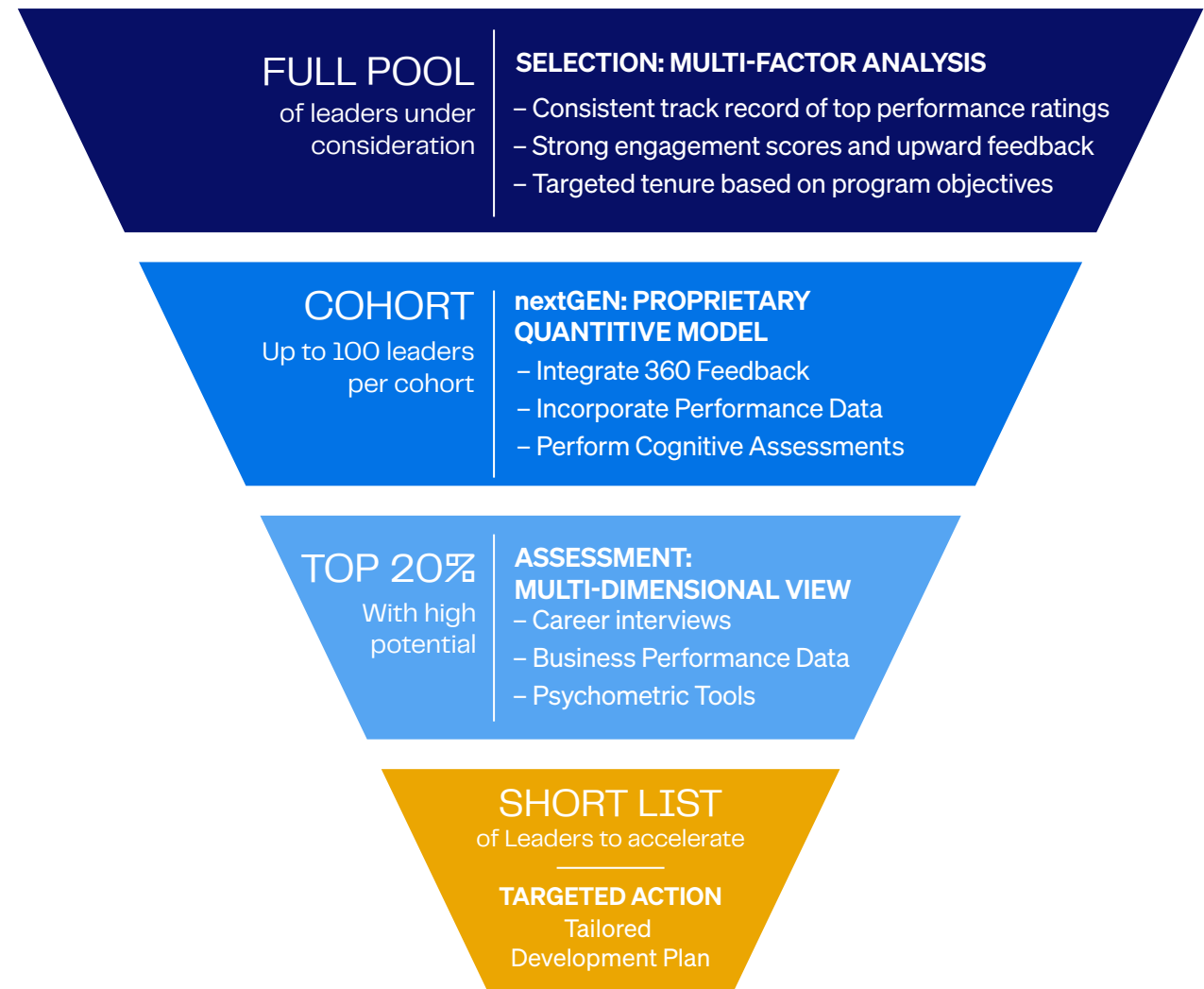
What are the critical seven to eight future leadership capabilities based on where the business is heading?

2

Are we surfacing hidden talent—leaders who don't always fit traditional molds?

Through a disciplined, evidence-based assessment, organizations can avoid subjective, biased selection criteria like “I’ll know it when I see it” or “They just seem like a natural leader.” Instead, our process surfaces high-potential talent 2-3 levels down—leaders who may otherwise be overlooked.

We use a data-driven, multi-layered model to evaluate *nextGEN* participants.



The Right How

Developing future leaders through targeted action

Leadership growth doesn't happen in a vacuum. *nextGEN* focuses on career acceleration through strategic role matching and experiential learning to prepare leaders for increasing complexity and scale.

How we do it

INDIVIDUAL 360 FEEDBACK

All *nextGEN* participants

Typical reports include qualitative colleague feedback on top differentiated strengths, most impactful development areas, future advice, etc. as well as quantitative ratings on company-specific leadership behaviors, PWR, etc.

PERSONALIZED DEVELOPMENT ROADMAP

Deep dive assessment participants

Typical reports include ghSMART overview of key strengths, development areas, leadership unlocks, supporting data from manager interviews, qualitative performance on company-specific behaviors.

ENTERPRISE TALENT PLANNING REPORT

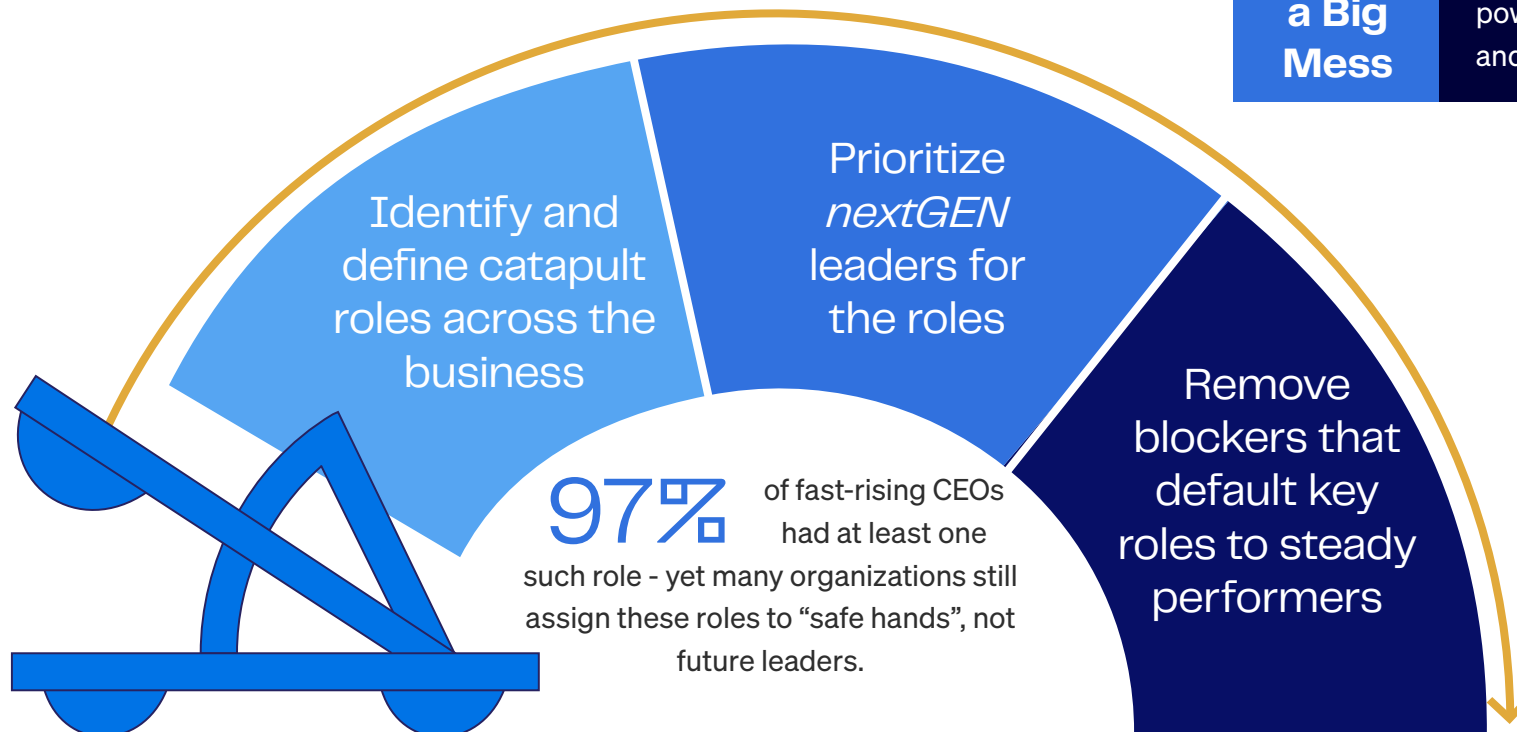
Cohort-based insights

Typical reports include potential ratings for each participant, enterprise actions to accelerate development of most promising leaders (e.g. role matching, stretch assignments, mentor pairing), cohort-wide observations to inform broader L&D efforts, etc.



Talent planning: The importance of catapult roles

Our CEO Genome research shows that leaders who rise fastest accelerate through **bold, career-defining roles**.



Three types of catapult roles:

Go Small to Go Big

Lateral or smaller roles can fast-track growth by providing hands-on leadership and building experience.

Make a Big Leap

Leaders grow faster by boldly embracing challenges beyond their experience or comfort zone.

Inherit a Big Mess

Taking on tough, messy challenges is a powerful way to prove leadership potential and prepare for a future leadership role.

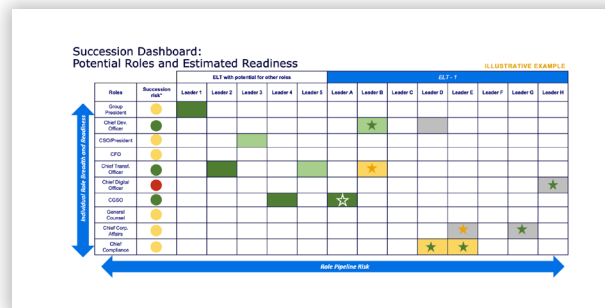
Results

Measuring and strengthening leadership intelligence over time

Leadership development should deliver measurable impact—not only for individuals, but also for the organization in providing better inputs to decision making and identifying talent risks early.

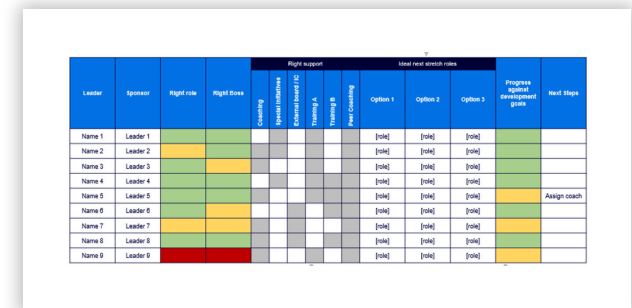
Leadership development isn't a one-time investment—it's a **continuous intelligence engine** that informs better decision-making over time.

nextGEN delivers measurable leadership impact by tracking:



LEADERSHIP BENCH STRENGTH

Where does the company have winning capabilities? Where are the vulnerabilities?



LEADERSHIP ACCELERATION TRACKER

Are future leaders adapting and thriving in new roles?

Organizational Impact

Building a robust pipeline of future enterprise leaders in healthcare

Context

Having benefited from accelerated development himself, a Fortune 50 CEO partnered with ghSMART to replicate that experience for the next generation of leaders at his organization. Noting a lack of internal focus on high-potential talent, he launched *nextGEN* to identify and invest in VPs and Directors with C-suite potential over a 7-10-year horizon.

Approach

THE RIGHT WHAT

Identified future ELT roles aligned with business strategy.

Surfaced capabilities required to lead the business, presently and in the future.

Designed a rigorous, high-potential screening process to identify a diverse pipeline of leaders to deliberately develop.

THE RIGHT WHO

Selection: Assessed 150+ leaders over 5 cohorts via a multi-factor analysis, including 360s, cognitive, and performance data.

Assessment: Conducted deep dives on 10-12 high-potential leaders per each of the five cohorts.

Targeted Action: Developed focused shortlists of 6-8 leaders per cohort to “turbocharge”, fast-tracking high potentials into c-suite roles.

THE RIGHT HOW

Developmental planning: Provided detailed feedback for each leader, with specific strengths, growth areas, and unlocks.

Coaching : Coached highest-potential leaders to accelerate readiness for critical roles.

Enterprise talent planning: Partnered with business unit and HR leaders to develop acceleration plans for high potential leaders (e.g., role matching, stretch projects, mentor pairings, training programs).

Outcomes

PROMOTIONS

50% of each cohort has been promoted within 6 months.

RETENTION

98%+ of cohorts retained year one;
90%+ retained year two

DIVERSITY

75% of leaders assessed were women and/or PoC

ENTERPRISE INSIGHTS

Identified and embedded four leadership behaviors shared among highest-potential leaders.

CAPABILITY BUILDING

Trained 40+ HRBPs on delivering feedback to high potentials; implemented targeted mentor pairings.

Individual Leader Impact

1. Finding Hidden Gems

WHAT WE FOUND

Through a rigorous, multi-dimensional assessment, the team identified a standout customer service employee who had no formal leadership experience but demonstrated exceptional problem-solving, adaptability, and growth potential

WHAT WE DID

A personalized development plan focused on enhancing her cognitive agility, emotional intelligence, influence, and strategic thinking—and supporting her with targeted mentorship.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Within three years, she was promoted to VP of Member Experience, leading digital transformation initiatives that reached millions of customers. Under her leadership, her division saw a 30% increase in employee engagement and a 20% boost in customer satisfaction.

“We had overlooked her potential for years simply because she didn’t fit the typical leadership mold. *nextGEN* helped us see beyond that and uncover her true capabilities. Her promotion wasn’t just a milestone for her—it transformed how we identify and nurture talent across the company.”

– Senior Vice President

2. Accelerating Underleveraged Talent

WHAT WE FOUND

A brilliant data scientist, a Ph.D. with extraordinary analytical skills, was stuck in an individual contributor role for over a decade. Despite being identified as high-potential, he lacked the leadership exposure needed to progress. The company recognized the risk of losing a uniquely talented but underleveraged asset.

WHAT WE DID

A personalized development plan was created to expose him to executive decision-making and cross-functional leadership roles. He was placed in cross-functional initiatives and given exposure to enterprise-wide strategy. Paired with senior mentors, he honed strategic thinking and communication, building the confidence and capability to lead at scale.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Within two years, he was promoted to CEO of a major division, where he led complex business transformations and drove innovation. Under his leadership, the division saw a 15% increase in employee engagement and a 25% rise in revenue, earning him recognition across the enterprise as a transformational leader.

“The *nextGEN* program unlocked a talent we had taken for granted. By giving him the right experiences and guidance, we transformed an exceptional contributor into a visionary leader. His rise to divisional CEO was a testament to the power of structured development and intentional leadership growth.”

– Chief People Officer



nextGEN

It's time to rethink leadership development—tailoring it to your organization's unique context, aligning it with strategy, and preparing leaders for what's next. Now is the time to cultivate the next generation of talent.

Do you know where your talent is?

Staying ahead requires more than just keeping up—it demands a deliberate approach to leadership development.

Organizations that build leadership capabilities aligned with their strategic goals will gain a powerful advantage. *nextGEN* helps companies develop future leaders with precision, agility, and impact.

To learn about how *nextGEN* can help your organization, email an expert:



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