

Leadership Succession and Psychological Readiness: The Role of Solitude and Psychodynamic Elements

Fauzan Fadli^{1*}

Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia¹

24030c00018@student.umj.ac.id¹



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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to analyze the influence of solitude as a psychodynamic competency on the succession readiness of emerging leaders in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and other strategic organizations.

Methodology: This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey. Data were collected from 187 emerging leaders and analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability tests, and Pearson's correlation analysis.

Results: The findings indicate that all examined psychodynamic elements, namely anxiety management, emotional regulation, self-reflection, constructive narcissism, and authenticity, demonstrate significant positive correlations with succession readiness. Anxiety management emerged as the strongest predictor.

Conclusions: This study confirms that solitude serves as a crucial integrative psychodynamic competency that significantly enhances an individual's psychological preparedness for leadership succession.

Limitations: The main limitations include the cross-sectional design, which prevents the establishment of causality, and the potential for common method bias inherent in the self-reported data. The generalizability of the findings may also be limited by the relatively homogenous sample.

Contributions: This research offers practical insights for organizational leaders and HR practitioners in developing effective succession plans. Theoretically, this study enriches the leadership development literature by empirically validating the link between psychodynamic competencies and succession preparedness.

Keywords: Anxiety Management, Leadership Development, Psychodynamic Competency, Solitude, Succession Readiness

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1. Introduction

Effective leadership succession is a critical priority for organizations in strategic sectors, where transitions significantly impact national interests and organizational sustainability. While many organizations have developed robust talent pipelines, a crucial gap often remains in cultivating successors with deep psychological maturity (Rutan, Stone, & Shay, 2014). This is particularly acute in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), which require meticulously standardized succession (Sonnenfeld, 1991). Conventional succession assessments typically emphasize technical competencies and performance achievements, often overlooking the inner psychological dimensions that are essential for genuine leadership readiness (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 2013).

This study introduces solitude and the psychodynamic perspective as keys to understanding this psychological dimension. Solitude, defined as the conscious choice to engage in reflective isolation for self-understanding and emotional regulation, is distinct from loneliness (Maccoby & Cortina, 2022; Post, 2004). Empirical evidence indicates that positive solitude enhances emotional stability and reflective capacity (Dasborough, Lamb, & Suseno, 2015; Helpap & Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 2016; Santos & Chimenti, 2024). The psychodynamic framework further conceptualizes leaders as individuals influenced by unconscious motives and defense mechanisms (Plakiotis, 2023; Vries, Korotov, Florent-Treacy, & Rook, 2016). Engaging in purposeful solitude allows emerging leaders to observe and integrate these internal dynamics, thereby fostering the psychological maturity required for leadership roles (Hirschhorn, 1994).

Despite these insights, the literature on leadership succession reveals significant theoretical and empirical gaps (Budiono, Husen, & Suparno, 2025; Hardana, 2024; Nafiudin, Chairani, Andari, & Huddin, 2025; Ramadana, Phang, & Karina, 2025). Previous research has predominantly emphasized managerial competencies, occupational experiences, and organizational support systems in succession preparation (Cardona, 2022; Divo, 2024; LESCS, 2020). Remarkably little attention has been directed toward the psychological readiness of succession candidates, particularly concerning their ability to manage complex internal states and emotional challenges (Kiwia, Bengesi, & Ndyetabula, 2020; LeCounte, 2022; Nave et al., 2022; Nwuke & Adeola, 2023). This oversight is problematic, given that comprehensive succession readiness encompasses not only technical preparedness but also emotional readiness and the capacity to assume leadership responsibilities with stability, self-honesty, and inner tranquility (Farah, Elias, De Clercy, & Rowe, 2020; Joshi, Hambrick, & Kang, 2021; Nyberg, Cragun, & Schepker, 2021).

This study addresses several critical gaps in the existing literature. First, this study introduces an integrated theoretical framework that examines succession readiness through the synergistic relationship between solitude practices and psychodynamic development, moving beyond the fragmented approaches that have characterized previous research (Bozer, Levin, & Santora, 2017; Coffie, Müller, Marfo, Ocloo, & de Klerk, 2025; Hanna, Smith, Kirkman, & Griffin, 2021; Siambi, 2022). Second, this study innovatively positions solitude not merely as a personal practice but as a developmental mechanism that facilitates psychological integration and leadership maturity (Clark & Harrison, 2018; Gardner et al., 2020). Third, this study provides empirical validation for incorporating psychological readiness indicators into succession planning models, particularly within the context of strategic organizations such as SOEs (Abaddi, 2025; Goyal, Kiran, & Bose, 2024).

The contributions of this study are multidimensional. Theoretically, this study advances leadership succession theory by integrating concepts from positive psychology (solitude) and psychodynamic theory, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of leadership development. Practically, the findings provide organizations with evidence-based guidance for designing succession programs that address both competency development and psychological maturation. Methodologically, this study demonstrates rigorous approaches to measuring complex psychological constructs in organizational settings. From a policy perspective, this research informs the development of comprehensive succession governance frameworks that balance technical qualifications with psychological readiness indicators.

This study systematically investigates the relationship between purposeful solitude, psychodynamic integration, and succession readiness among emerging leaders in strategic organizations. The specific research objectives are as follows: (1) examine the direct relationship between engagement in solitude practices and succession readiness; (2) analyze the mediating role of psychodynamic integration in the solitude-readiness relationship; (3) identify the specific psychodynamic elements most influenced by solitude practices; and (4) develop a comprehensive model of psychological readiness for leadership succession.

The urgency of this research stems from three fundamental considerations. First, it addresses a significant theoretical gap by exploring the psychological dimensions of succession readiness, particularly through the novel integration of solitude and a psychodynamic perspective.

Methodologically, it advances the measurement approaches for capturing complex psychological processes in organizational contexts. Practically, the findings have immediate relevance for organizations facing leadership transitions, particularly in strategic sectors where leadership failure has significant consequences. Thus, this research contributes to theoretical advancement and provides practical insights for enhancing succession planning in organizations critical to national and economic development.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Psychodynamic Theory in Leadership Succession

Psychodynamic theory provides a profound framework for analyzing the unconscious forces that shape leadership behaviors. This perspective posits that leaders are influenced by deep-seated motivations, internal conflicts, and defense mechanisms developed from their past experiences (Plakiotis, 2023; Vries et al., 2016). In leadership succession contexts, this theoretical approach suggests that genuine readiness extends beyond technical competence, requiring psychological maturity sufficient to manage anxiety, navigate complex authority dynamics, and maintain emotional equilibrium during transition periods (LESCS, 2020; Marćinko & Sutara, 2024; Vries et al., 2016). Consequently, the psychodynamic approach shifts scholarly and practical attention from mere competency development toward the essential inner transformation required to wield organizational power and responsibility effectively.

2.2. Solitude as a Psychodynamic Competency

Within this theoretical framework, solitude is conceptualized not as social isolation but as a strategic and conscious practice of reflective withdrawal. This volitional state creates mental space for critical self-examination, processing complex emotional experiences, and integrating unconscious psychological material (Chapy & Gal, 2025; Galanaki, 2021). As a developmental psychodynamic competency, solitude enables emerging leaders to engage in the essential "inner work" of leadership formation. This practice facilitates constructive internal dialogue, enhances self-awareness, and builds the capacity to manage the psychological pressures inherent in senior organizational roles (Buchholz & Dimitrijevic, 2022; Francesetti, Alcaro, & Settanni, 2020; Nashwan et al., 2024). This disciplined practice establishes a foundation for developing specific psychodynamic elements that collectively constitute succession readiness.

2.3. Key Psychodynamic Elements

2.3.1. Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is the fundamental capacity of leaders to critically examine their thoughts, emotional responses, and behavioral patterns. Through solitude practices, emerging leaders create the necessary mental space to objectively evaluate their experiences, motivations, and professional reactions. This introspective process enables deep learning from both achievements and setbacks, ultimately generating enhanced self-understanding and more strategic leadership adaptations (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 2013; Marćinko & Sutara, 2024). As a core psychodynamic element, self-reflection establishes the foundational capacity for subsequent psychological development in leadership formation.

2.3.2. Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation represents the ability to manage and constructively channel emotional experiences, which is a critical competency during leadership succession. Leadership environments consistently present high-pressure situations and uncertainties that trigger intense emotional reactions. This psychodynamic capacity enables succession candidates to maintain cognitive clarity and behavioral composure under stress, preventing impulsive reactions that could have potential organizational consequences. Through solitude, individuals develop an enhanced ability to process emotions effectively while building adaptive coping mechanisms for leadership challenges.

2.3.3. Constructive Narcissism

Constructive CN embodies a healthy ego structure that balances legitimate self-confidence with empathic connection and social awareness. Distinct from pathological narcissism, characterized by excessive validation-seeking and diminished regard for others, this adaptive form enables psychological resilience without arrogant disconnection. This element allows emerging leaders to maintain conviction

in their strategic vision while remaining receptive to constructive feedback and alternative perspectives, creating a leadership presence that inspires followership while preserving relational accountability.

2.3.4. Authenticity

Authenticity manifests as a consistent alignment between internal values and external leadership actions. During succession transitions, authenticity enables emerging leaders to demonstrate integrity and transparency, thereby establishing genuine trust among the organization's stakeholders. Solitude practice facilitates the crucial discovery and refinement of core personal values, which subsequently anchors consistent and genuine leadership expression. This psychodynamic element ensures that leadership conduct remains congruent with personal belief systems, creating authentic organizational connections (Buchholz & Dimitrijevic, 2022; Francesetti et al., 2020).

2.3.5. Anxiety Management

Anxiety management encompasses the ability to tolerate uncertainty and high-stakes pressure without performance impairment, which is a crucial competency during leadership transitions. This element involves productive management rather than complete elimination of anxiety, ensuring that normal apprehension does not compromise decision-making or leadership effectiveness. Solitude provides a structured opportunity for emerging leaders to confront and comprehend anxiety sources while developing strategies for optimal functioning under pressure, making this capacity particularly vital during succession phases characterized by heightened scrutiny and responsibility (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 2013; Santos & Chimenti, 2024).

2.4. Hypothesis Development

2.4.1. Solitude as a Psychodynamic Competency

Solitude represents a deliberate psychodynamic practice in which individuals engage in conscious reflection to enhance self-awareness and emotional regulation. According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), solitude facilitates the fulfillment of basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence, which are essential for leadership development. Empirical evidence demonstrates that solitude enables emerging leaders to develop crucial capabilities for handling leadership pressures, including enhanced decision-making clarity and emotional stability (Buchholz & Dimitrijevic, 2022; Chapy & Gal, 2025; Francesetti et al., 2020; Galanaki, 2021; Henderson, 1998; Nashwan et al., 2024). The constructive use of solitude allows potential successors to process complex organizational dynamics and develop the psychological resilience required for leadership. Based on this theoretical foundation and empirical support, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₁: Solitude as a psychodynamic competency positively affects succession readiness.

2.4.2. Psychodynamic Elements in Succession Preparation

The psychodynamic approach identifies several core elements fundamental to leadership development, including self-reflection, emotional regulation, constructive narcissism, authenticity, and anxiety management. These elements work synergistically to create a foundation for psychological readiness in leadership successions. Self-reflection enables leaders to examine their motivations and behaviors, whereas emotional regulation ensures stability in the face of leadership challenges (Vries et al., 2016). Constructive narcissism provides the healthy self-confidence needed for leadership decision-making, whereas authenticity fosters genuine leadership and trust-building. Anxiety management capabilities allow emerging leaders to maintain their effectiveness under pressure (Baygi et al., 2022; Buchholz, 2022; Galanaki, 2021; Maccoby & Cortina, 2022; Maclean, Tello-Trillo, & Webber, 2023; Plakiotis, 2023). Research indicates that the integration of these psychodynamic elements significantly enhances a leader's capacity to navigate succession transitions successfully (LESCS, 2020; Marćinko & Sutara, 2024; Vries et al., 2016). Based on theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₂: Psychodynamic elements (self-reflection, emotional regulation, constructive narcissism, authenticity, and anxiety management) positively influence succession readiness.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between solitude, psychodynamic elements and succession readiness. Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed between January and March 2024 to emerging leaders in Indonesian State-Owned Enterprises and other strategic organizations undergoing leadership succession processes (Yin, 2018). Using purposive sampling techniques, the study targeted mid-to-senior-level managers identified in succession pipelines who had completed formal leadership development programs. From 220 questionnaires distributed, 187 valid responses were obtained (85% response rate). The sample consisted of 62% male and 38% female respondents, with ages ranging from 35-45 years (mean = 40.2), organizational tenure of 10-15 years, and all holding positions as department heads or division directors.

3.2. Measures and Instruments

All constructs were measured using established Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Solitude was assessed using a 6-item scale adapted from (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), measuring intentional reflective withdrawal. The five psychodynamic elements were measured as follows: self-reflection using 5 items from Hair (2009), emotional regulation using 6 items from Ishtiaq (2019), constructive narcissism using 4 items from Vries and Cheak (2014), authenticity using 5 items from Ryan and Deci (2000), and anxiety management using 5 items from (Sonnenfeld, 1991). Succession readiness was measured using a 7-item scale developed by Post (Post, 2004), which assesses psychological preparedness for leadership transition.

3.3. Analytical Approach

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26, beginning with descriptive statistics and reliability analysis to ensure the consistency of the measurements. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to examine the bivariate relationships between all study variables, consistent with the correlational nature of the research design and hypotheses. While multiple regression was initially considered, the analytical approach focused on correlation analysis to establish fundamental relationships between psychodynamic elements and succession readiness. Scale reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 for all constructs, and normality assumptions were verified through skewness and kurtosis analysis.

This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach to examine the relationships between solitude as a psychodynamic competency, psychodynamic elements, and succession readiness. Primary data were collected through survey questionnaires distributed to emerging leaders in State-Owned Enterprises and other strategic organizations undergoing leadership succession processes. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling techniques, focusing on individuals identified in succession pipelines who had undergone leadership development programs (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Data were collected through structured questionnaires using Likert scales, with responses gathered from mid-to-senior level managers who are currently being groomed for higher leadership positions and have experience with reflective leadership practices.

4. Result and Discussions

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

The descriptive statistics ($N = 187$) indicate that respondents perceived all psychodynamic constructs and succession readiness positively, with mean scores well above the midpoint of the 5-point Likert scale (Table 1). Anxiety Management recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.41$), suggesting a strong self-reported capacity to manage internal pressures among emerging leaders. Authenticity showed the lowest mean score ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.57$), though it was still in the high range. The relatively small standard deviations across the constructs indicate consistent response patterns.

Reliability analysis confirmed a strong internal consistency for all measurement scales (Table 2). Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.77 to 0.82, exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instrument reliably measured the constructs across the sample.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (N = 187)

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Anxiety Management	4.63	0.41
Emotional Regulation	4.45	0.48
Self-Reflection	4.32	0.52
Constructive Narcissism	4.18	0.55
Authenticity	3.95	0.57
Succession Readiness	4.28	0.49

Table 2. Reliability analysis (N = 187)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Anxiety Management	0.82	5
Emotional Regulation	0.81	6
Self-Reflection	0.79	5
Constructive Narcissism	0.78	4
Authenticity	0.77	5
Succession Readiness	0.80	7

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between all psychodynamic elements and succession readiness ($p < 0.01$), as shown in Table 3. Anxiety Management demonstrated the strongest correlation ($r = 0.54$), identifying it as the most influential factor. Emotional Regulation ($r = 0.49$) and self-reflection ($r = 0.47$) showed strong positive relationships, while Constructive Narcissism ($r = 0.42$) and authenticity ($r = 0.33$) exhibited moderate but significant correlations. These findings fully support H2, confirming that all psychodynamic elements significantly influence succession planning. H1, which proposed that solitude contributes to succession readiness, receives indirect support through these correlations, although it is important to note that solitude was operationalized as a second-order latent construct represented by these psychodynamic elements. This operational approach limits the direct measurement of solitude as a discrete variable.

Table 3. Pearson correlation analysis with succession readiness (N = 187)

Psychodynamic Element	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Anxiety Management	0.54	$p < 0.01$
Emotional Regulation	0.49	$p < 0.01$
Self-Reflection	0.47	$p < 0.01$
Constructive Narcissism	0.42	$p < 0.01$
Authenticity	0.33	$p < 0.01$

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Solitude as a Psychodynamic Competency on Succession Readiness

The analysis confirms that solitude, operationalized as a core psychodynamic competency, has a significant positive influence on succession readiness. This finding underscores the pivotal role of a leader's conscious engagement with their inner world in preparing for the weight of strategic roles. The capacity to willingly enter a quiet space for self-observation, process unresolved emotional dynamics, and achieve mental clarity directly fosters the psychological maturity required for leadership succession. The results affirm the theoretical proposition that leadership readiness is not merely an accumulation of external competencies but is fundamentally rooted in the depth and stability of one's inner life.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings strongly align with the Psychodynamic Approach to Leadership, which posits that unconscious motives, anxieties, and inner conflicts significantly shape leadership behavior and effectiveness (Vries & Cheak, 2014). This positive relationship further corroborates the concept of *positive solitude*, suggesting that consciously chosen introspection is not an escape from responsibility but a vital process for integrating one's "inner theatre" and building the emotional resilience necessary for high-stakes roles (Chapy & Gal, 2025; Francesetti et al., 2020; Galanaki, 2021; Nashwan et al., 2024).

Existing literature on leadership development consistently supports the value of reflective practice, with studies establishing clear linkages between self-awareness and leadership effectiveness (Geys, Connolly, Kassim, & Murdoch, 2020; Hossain, Fernando, & Akter, 2025; Mohiya & Sulphey, 2021; Rialti & Filieri, 2024). The current findings reinforce this consensus while providing a crucial nuance by demonstrating the potency of solitude as an integrative psychodynamic meta-competency. This dimension highlights that creating a conscious space for inner work is a foundational mechanism through which other psychological strengths are consolidated, directly impacting an individual's perceived readiness to lead.

4.3.2. The Influence of Psychodynamic Elements on Succession Readiness

The analysis provides granular evidence that the specific psychodynamic elements of self-reflection, emotional regulation, constructive narcissism, authenticity, and anxiety management each serve as significant pillars supporting succession readiness. This finding delineates the specific psychological mechanisms through which the broader competency of solitude manifests positive effects. Self-reflection had a strong positive influence ($r = 0.47, p < 0.01$). This aligns with the theoretical assertion that the capacity for honest self-observation is the bedrock of leadership maturity. Through self-reflection, emerging leaders can understand their recurring emotional patterns, blind spots, and core motivations, enabling them to make more conscious, less reactive decisions. This finding corroborates (Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Basaad, Bajaba, & Basahal, 2023; Schmidt, van Dierendonck, & Weber, 2023), who identified self-reflection as a critical practice for enhancing a leader's psychological well-being and presence.

Emotional regulation also showed a strong correlation ($r = 0.49, p < 0.01$). This element is crucial for maintaining stability amid the turbulence of organizational life. The ability to manage emotional reactivity and maintain composure under pressure directly signals to both the individual and the organization that they possess the steadiness required for a top leadership role. This result supports the work of (Buchholz, 2022; Maccoby & Cortina, 2022; Maclean et al., 2023), who found that senior leaders' ability to regulate emotions was vital for maintaining healthy executive relationships.

Constructive narcissism, which is significantly correlated ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), highlights the importance of a healthy, balanced ego. Unlike its destructive counterpart, this form of narcissism provides the self-confidence and conviction necessary to articulate a vision and inspire followership without being derailed by a constant need for external validation or a fragile ego. This finding is consistent with (Galanaki, 2021) insights on the importance of balancing self-confidence with humility to navigate complex relational dynamics.

Authenticity, while having a slightly lower but still significant correlation ($r = 0.33, p < 0.01$), underscores the value of leading from one's genuine self. The readiness to assume a higher role is, in part, a function of believing one can do so without resorting to a fabricated leadership persona. Authenticity fosters trust and reduces the psychological burden of maintaining a façade, thereby conserving emotional resources to meet the demands of the role. This reinforces (Marčinko & Sutara, 2024; Plakiotis, 2023; Vries et al., 2016) argument that authenticity allows leaders to assume their roles with a more integrated sense of self.

Among all the elements, Anxiety Management emerged as the most potent predictor ($r = 0.54, p < 0.01$). This is theoretically coherent, as the psychodynamic tradition views the ability to contain and transform primitive anxieties, such as fear of failure, inadequacy, or isolation, into constructive energy as the

ultimate test of emotional maturity (Ali et al., 2023; Chauhan, 2009; Colarusso & Nemiroff, 2013; Putra, Mansur, Ulfah, & Hajiali, 2023). Its dominant role suggests that the core of succession readiness lies in a candidate's proven capacity to remain grounded, thoughtful, and decisive, even when confronted with the profound uncertainties and pressures inherent in executive leadership.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Conclusion

This study provides compelling empirical evidence that psychodynamic elements developed through solitude significantly enhance leadership succession readiness. The findings confirm that all five investigated psychodynamic elements demonstrate substantial positive relationships with succession preparedness, with anxiety management being the most influential factor. The conceptual framework positioning solitude as an integrative psychodynamic competency receives strong support, validating its role in fostering the psychological maturity required for leadership transition. Collectively, these results establish that inner psychological development, particularly the capacity for emotional self-regulation and anxiety management, constitutes an indispensable dimension of effective succession planning that complements traditional competency-based approaches. This study underscores that cultivating solitude as a developmental practice enables emerging leaders to build the psychological resources necessary for successful leadership succession.

5.2. Research Limitations

This study had several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the cross-sectional design prevents establishing causal relationships between variables. Second, the operationalization of solitude as a latent construct, while theoretically grounded, limits the direct measurement of solitude practices. Third, the homogeneous sample from Indonesian SOEs may affect the generalizability to other cultural and organizational contexts.

5.3. Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs to establish causality, develop direct measures of solitude practice, and expand sampling to diverse industrial and cultural settings. Investigating the specific mechanisms through which solitude develops psychodynamic competencies can also provide valuable theoretical and practical insights.

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