

Character → Personal Management → Organisational Management: A Conceptual Framework from Panchatantra, Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagabatam Tradition

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ABSTRACT

Organisational management is often examined through structures, processes, technology and leadership practices, while the personal qualities that shape managerial behaviour receive comparatively less attention. This conceptual paper proposes a three-level framework—Character, Personal Management and Organisational Management—to explain how inner qualities can be translated into disciplined individual conduct and, subsequently, into organisational practices. The framework draws on selected narratives and teachings from the Panchatantra, Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagabatam, including the stories of the Monkey and the Crocodile, the Tortoise and the Geese, the Lion and the Hare, Bhagavad Gita 2.47, 6.5 and 16.1–3, and the character-centred narrative of Prahlada in the Bhagavata Purana. The study uses qualitative textual and conceptual analysis rather than primary survey data. The analysis identifies recurring managerial themes: self-control, discernment, duty orientation, truthfulness, courage, restraint, empathy, non-attachment to immediate rewards, and community-oriented learning. The paper argues that these narratives can be treated not merely as moral stories but as cultural learning resources for contemporary self-management and organisational development. A practical framework is proposed for translating character values into personal routines, managerial behaviours, team norms and organisational culture. In response to the need for empirical operationalisation, the revised framework also proposes preliminary behavioural indicators for character and personal-management constructs, cross-cultural adaptation strategies, and a pilot implementation outline for the four-stage cycle and monthly character-management matrix. The paper identifies limitations and directions for empirical validation.

Keywords: character; personal management; self-management; organisational management; Panchatantra; Bhagavad Gita; Bhagabatam; ethical leadership

INTRODUCTION

Organisations are systems of people, roles, processes, resources and relationships. Management literature has traditionally concentrated on planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling, while contemporary leadership research additionally examines competence, behaviour, ethics, trust and organisational culture. Yet an important question remains: what happens before managerial behaviour becomes visible? The present paper begins from the proposition that a manager's observable conduct is preceded by personal management, and personal management is shaped by character. In simplified form, the proposed relationship is:

Character → Personal Management → Managerial Behaviour → Organisational Culture → Organisational Outcomes.

This is presented as a conceptual framework rather than as an established causal law. The paper does not claim that character alone determines organisational performance. Instead, it asks whether selected Indian narrative traditions provide a coherent vocabulary for understanding the inner-to-outer pathway of management.

The idea has practical relevance because organisational systems frequently depend on repeated individual decisions: whether a supervisor remains calm under pressure, whether a manager tells the truth when reporting a problem, whether an employee resists an unsafe shortcut, whether a leader accepts responsibility, whether a team member listens before reacting, and whether rewards are pursued at the expense of duty. Such decisions are not produced by organisational charts alone. They involve habits of judgement, self-regulation and values.

Contemporary research supports the importance of character in organisational leadership. Crossan et al. (2017) developed a multi-dimensional framework of leader character and argued that character complements competence in leadership and judgement. Gentry et al. (2013) reported that integrity was positively related to manager performance in their sample, while Sosik et al. (2012) examined integrity, bravery, perspective and social intelligence in relation to executive performance. Research on self-management likewise indicates that self-management leadership behaviours can be associated with perceived team effectiveness and quality of work life (Cohen et al., 1997). These findings provide a modern management context in which older narrative traditions can be examined without treating them as substitutes for empirical management research. The present study therefore explores three Indian knowledge streams. First, the Panchatantra offers short, memorable narratives in which judgement, communication, trust, strategic thinking and consequences are made visible through characters and conflicts. Second, the Bhagavad Gita presents a sustained dialogue on duty, self-mastery, action, equanimity and qualities of character. Third, the Bhagabatam tradition, especially the community institution known as the Bhagabata Tungi, demonstrates how textual and oral learning can become a shared social practice. Recent scholarship describes Bhagabata Tungis as community spaces for recitation, knowledge sharing and participatory storytelling (Behera & Panda, 2026).

The objective is not to modernise sacred texts by forcing them into corporate terminology. Rather, the objective is to identify management-relevant principles while respecting the original narrative and spiritual contexts. The paper consequently distinguishes between the source tradition and the contemporary management interpretation.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Management development programmes often emphasise competencies such as communication, delegation, decision-making, negotiation and technical expertise. However, a person may possess a management technique without consistently applying it under pressure. The gap between knowing what to do and doing it consistently points toward self-management and character.

Research on leader character has grown, but the relationship between character, personal self-management and organisational management can still be made more explicit as a layered framework. Crossan et al. (2017) place character as a foundational component of leadership, while Sturm et al. (2017) discuss the entanglement of character and competence. Monzani et al. (2021) further examined leader character in relation to follower outcomes. The present paper extends this conversation by using Indian narrative sources as a conceptual learning corpus and by placing personal management between character and organisational management. The research gap can therefore be stated as follows: there is scope for a culturally grounded conceptual model that connects (a) character qualities, (b) personal self-management practices, and (c) organisational behaviours, while using short Indian narratives as reflective learning cases. The paper addresses this gap through qualitative textual analysis.

Objectives of the Study

- To conceptualise the relationship among character, personal management and organisational management.
- To identify character and self-management principles in selected Panchatantra narratives.
- To interpret selected Bhagavad Gita teachings in relation to personal discipline, duty and managerial conduct.

- To examine the Bhagabatam / Bhagabata Tungi tradition as a model of community-based learning and value transmission.
- To propose a practical framework that can be used in management education, leadership development and organisational training.

Research Questions

- RQ1. What character qualities recur across the selected Indian narratives and teachings?
- RQ2. How can these qualities be translated into personal management behaviours?
- RQ3. How might personal management behaviours influence managerial and organisational practices?
- RQ4. What role can narrative and communal learning play in character-oriented management development?
- RQ5. What limitations arise when spiritual or literary narratives are interpreted for contemporary management?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Character and Leadership

Character has increasingly been discussed as a foundational component of leadership rather than as an optional moral attribute. Crossan et al. (2017) developed a framework in which dimensions of character operate together and complement leadership competencies. Seijts et al. (2015) similarly argue that character dimensions are relevant to leader performance and outcomes. Gentry et al. (2013) found a positive association between behavioural manifestations of integrity and performance ratings among managers. These studies do not establish that character automatically produces organisational success, but they support examining character as an organisationally relevant construct.

Self-Management

Self-management concerns the individual's capacity to regulate attention, emotions, behaviour, priorities and effort in pursuit of legitimate goals. Cohen et al. (1997) found positive associations between self-management leadership behaviours and perceived effectiveness and quality of work life. Millikin et al. (2010) examined self-management competencies within self-managing teams and connected individual capabilities with team-network productivity. The implication for the present framework is that personal management can be treated as a bridge between inner disposition and collective practice.

Indian Wisdom Narratives as Management-Learning Resources

Panchatantra has long used animal stories, dialogue and consequence to communicate practical wisdom. Olivelle's scholarly translation and edition presents the work as a major classical collection of Indian fables. Recent scholarship also analyses the Panchatantra's treatment of friendship, diversity, power and alliances (Roy, 2025). The stories are therefore suitable for case-based reflection, provided their literary and historical contexts are not reduced to simplistic corporate slogans.

Bhagavad Gita and Self-Management

The Bhagavad Gita directly addresses action, discipline and the management of the self. In 2.47, Krishna distinguishes responsibility for action from attachment to its fruits. In 6.5, the self is described as capable of being one's own friend or enemy, highlighting self-regulation. In 16.1–3, qualities including fearlessness, purity, self-control, truthfulness, compassion, forgiveness, fortitude and freedom from excessive pride are enumerated. These passages offer a vocabulary for character and personal discipline, although their primary purpose is spiritual and ethical rather than managerial.

Bhagabatam and Community Learning

The Odia Bhagabata of Atibadi Jagannath Das became deeply embedded in Odisha's cultural life. Historical and cultural accounts describe Bhagabata Gharas or Bhagabata Tungis as village institutions associated with recitation, learning and moral guidance. A 2026 study by Behera and Panda describes the Bhagabata Tungi as a community space for reciting the Odia Bhagabata and facilitating participatory knowledge sharing. This tradition is relevant to organisational learning because it shows how repeated narration, listening, discussion and shared reflection can turn values into a community practice.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative conceptual study based on textual and narrative analysis. No human participants were surveyed, interviewed or experimentally tested, and no organisational performance data were collected. The analytical corpus comprises: (i) selected Panchatantra narratives; (ii) selected verses of the Bhagavad Gita; (iii) selected episodes concerning Prahlada from the Bhagavata Purana; and (iv) literature describing the social-learning role of Odisha's Bhagabata Tungi tradition. Contemporary management literature on character and self-management is used to construct the interpretive bridge.

The analytical procedure followed four stages. First, recurring character qualities were identified in the selected sources. Second, each quality was translated into an observable personal-management practice. Third, the practice was linked to a managerial or organisational behaviour. Fourth, the resulting relationships were organised into a three-level framework. The interpretation is intentionally cautious: a narrative lesson is treated as a conceptual learning proposition, not as empirical evidence of organisational causation. The unit of analysis is therefore the management-relevant principle embedded in a narrative or teaching. The method is appropriate for theory building and educational design but requires empirical testing before the framework can be treated as a validated predictive model.

Analytical Framework: Character → Personal Management → Organisational Management

The central framework has three levels. Character represents relatively enduring patterns of judgement and value orientation. Personal management represents the routines through which those values are converted into behaviour. Organisational management represents the aggregation of repeated behaviours into decisions, relationships, team norms, processes and culture.

Level 1 — Character

The paper focuses on integrity, self-control, discernment, courage, compassion, humility, truthfulness, duty orientation and restraint. Character is not treated as a fixed personality label; rather, it is understood as a set of qualities that can be expressed through habits and decisions. This is consistent with contemporary character scholarship that examines character as manifested in cognition, emotion and behaviour (Crossan et al., 2017).

Level 2 — Personal Management

Character becomes operational through practices such as pausing before reacting, controlling speech, prioritising duty, maintaining accurate records, resisting conflicts of interest, accepting feedback, regulating anger, distinguishing urgent from important tasks, and reflecting on consequences. In this model, self-management is the mechanism of translation.

Level 3 — Organisational Management

Personal management becomes organisationally visible through ethical reporting, reliable supervision, fair delegation, psychologically safer communication, disciplined resource use, responsible risk decisions, conflict management and consistent application of procedures. When repeated by many people, these

behaviours can contribute to organisational culture. The model therefore treats culture as an emergent pattern rather than as something created only by policy documents.

CHARACTER Integrity • Self-control • Discernment • Courage • Compassion • Humility	
↓ PERSONAL Emotional regulation • Duty discipline • Reflective decision-making • Responsible communication • Time/priority discipline • Accountability	MANAGEMENT
↓ MANAGERIAL Ethical decisions • Fair delegation • Trust • Conflict management • Consistent safety/quality behaviour • Learning orientation	BEHAVIOUR
↓ ORGANISATIONAL Team norms • Ethical climate • Organisational learning • Sustainable performance and resilience (to be empirically tested)	MANAGEMENT

Narrative Case Analysis

Panchatantra: The Monkey and the Crocodile — Presence of Mind and Emotional Regulation

In the well-known narrative, the monkey discovers that the crocodile intends to exploit their relationship and responds through quick thinking rather than panic. For management learning, the central principle is not that every colleague should be treated with suspicion; rather, it is that trust should be accompanied by situational awareness. Personal management here means controlling fear, gathering information and creating options before acting. Organisational application includes negotiation, crisis communication and risk assessment.

Panchatantra: The Tortoise and the Geese — Disciplined Communication

The tortoise is warned not to speak while being carried by geese using a stick. The story illustrates the consequences of failing to regulate speech when silence is necessary. In personal management, the corresponding practice is communication discipline: knowing when to speak, what to disclose, and when restraint protects a legitimate objective. In organisations, this can relate to confidentiality, escalation protocols, meeting discipline and crisis communication.

Panchatantra: The Lion and the Hare — Strategic Thinking under Power Imbalance

The hare cannot defeat the lion through physical strength and therefore uses reasoning and the lion's own assumptions to create an alternative outcome. The management lesson is framed as strategic problem-solving rather than deception: constraints should be understood before resources are committed. Personal management requires calm thinking under pressure; organisational management requires using information, process design and collective intelligence rather than relying solely on authority.

Bhagavad Gita 2.47 — Duty before Immediate Reward

The verse is commonly translated as teaching that one's domain is action rather than ownership of the fruits of action. In management, the useful interpretation is disciplined focus on controllable responsibilities while avoiding paralysis caused by uncertainty about outcomes. This does not mean ignoring results; organisations must measure results. Rather, it distinguishes process responsibility from emotional attachment to outcomes. The practical routine is to define duty, execute with quality, review evidence and learn from results.

Bhagavad Gita 6.5 — the Self as Friend or Enemy

The verse emphasises self-uplift and warns against allowing oneself to sink. For personal management, this maps to self-monitoring: sleep and energy management, emotional awareness, preparation, learning, attention control and correction of counterproductive habits. In organisational settings, leaders who manage their own reactions can reduce avoidable escalation and create conditions for more thoughtful decisions.

Bhagavad Gita 16.1–3 — a Catalogue of Character Qualities

The passage names qualities such as fearlessness, purity, self-control, truthfulness, absence of anger, compassion, modesty, forgiveness, fortitude and freedom from excessive pride. For management education, these can be converted into behavioural indicators. For example, truthfulness can mean accurate reporting; self-control can mean pausing before a high-stakes response; compassion can mean considering the human consequences of a decision; fortitude can mean maintaining standards under pressure; humility can mean seeking evidence and accepting correction.

Bhagavatam Purana: Prahlada — Character Under Pressure

The Prahlada narrative presents a young character whose convictions remain stable under strong external pressure. In Chapter 7.10, Prahlada is depicted as resisting the pursuit of material rewards and asking instead that material desire not grow in his heart. For management learning, the transferable theme is value consistency under incentive pressure.

The lesson is not that material rewards are inherently wrong; rather, it highlights the risk of allowing incentives to become the sole determinant of conduct. Organisationally, this raises questions about whether performance systems unintentionally reward unsafe, unethical or short-term behaviour.

Bhagabata Tungi — From Individual Virtue to Community Practice

The Odia Bhagabata tradition adds a distinctive institutional dimension. A Bhagabata Tungi is not merely a text; it is a setting in which people gather, listen, recite, discuss and transmit values. Behera and Panda (2026) describe Tungis as participatory spaces for knowledge sharing and intergenerational cultural transmission.

From a management perspective, this suggests that character development is more sustainable when values are repeatedly discussed within a community rather than delivered only through one-time lectures. Organisational equivalents may include daily briefings, reflective safety meetings, ethics circles, mentoring, storytelling sessions and after-action reviews.

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

The textual analysis produced eight recurring management themes: (1) self-control, (2) duty orientation, (3) discernment, (4) communication restraint, (5) courage under pressure, (6) compassion and social awareness, (7) resistance to incentive-driven misconduct, and (8) community-based learning. These themes are not presented as quantitative findings; they are interpretive findings from the selected corpus.

Table 1 maps the narrative source to the three levels of the proposed framework.

Source / case	Character focus	Personal-management practice	Organisational implication
Panchatantra – Monkey & Crocodile	Discernment; presence of mind	Pause, assess information, preserve options	Risk-aware negotiation and crisis response

Panchatantra – Tortoise & Geese	Restraint; communication discipline	Control speech and timing	Confidentiality and disciplined communication
Panchatantra – Lion & Hare	Courage; strategic intelligence	Think under pressure; use evidence	Problem-solving without overreliance on authority
Gita 2.47	Duty orientation; non-attachment	Focus on controllable action; learn from results	Process discipline and responsible execution
Gita 6.5	Self-mastery	Self-monitoring and regulation	Stable managerial responses under pressure
Gita 16.1–3	Truthfulness; self-control; compassion; fortitude	Practise virtues as observable habits	Ethical climate and trustworthy leadership
Bhagavata – Prahlada	Value consistency; restraint	Resist inappropriate incentive pressure	Long-term ethical decision-making
Bhagabata Tungi	Community learning; shared values	Reflect, listen, discuss, repeat	Learning culture and shared norms

Note: The mapping is interpretive and conceptual; it is not evidence of a causal relationship between the narratives and organisational outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The framework contributes to management discussion in three ways. First, it places character upstream of personal management. A training programme can teach a technique, but the repeated use of that technique depends partly on the individual's habits of judgement and self-regulation. Second, it places personal management between character and organisational behaviour. This avoids the simplistic assumption that good character automatically produces good organisational outcomes. Third, it treats narrative learning as a mechanism for reflection rather than as a replacement for professional management science.

The framework also helps reinterpret familiar management competencies. Emotional intelligence can be viewed partly through self-control and compassion. Ethical leadership can be connected with truthfulness, integrity and restraint. Strategic management can be connected with discernment and the ability to respond to asymmetric constraints. Organisational learning can be connected with repeated narration, reflection and community dialogue. These are interpretive correspondences, not claims that ancient texts anticipated modern management theories in their current technical form.

A particularly important implication is the distinction between character and compliance. Compliance asks whether a rule was followed. Character asks what a person does when a rule is ambiguous, supervision is absent or a short-term incentive conflicts with a long-term duty. Organisations require both systems and character. Rules establish minimum expectations; character influences how people behave in situations that rules cannot fully specify.

The Bhagabata Tungi model also raises the idea of ritualised learning. Repeated short meetings, storytelling, reflection and peer discussion can convert abstract values into organisational memory. In safety management, for example, a five-minute daily story about a past incident can be linked to one behavioural principle, followed by a question: “What will we do differently today?” The value of such a practice would need to be tested empirically, but the cultural logic is consistent with participatory learning traditions.

Practical Model for Organisational Implementation

The proposed framework can be converted into a four-stage management-development cycle:

- Stage 1 — Character reflection: identify one value such as integrity, restraint, courage or compassion.
- Stage 2 — Personal routine: define one observable daily behaviour that expresses the value.
- Stage 3 — Team practice: discuss one short narrative or incident and identify the desired behaviour.
- Stage 4 — Organisational reinforcement: embed the behaviour in procedures, leadership modelling, recognition and review.

Example: Integrity → verify information before reporting → team members challenge unclear data respectfully → management establishes a “stop-and-verify” norm for high-risk decisions. Example: self-control → pause before responding to provocation → supervisors use a structured conflict conversation → the organisation trains managers in de-escalation. Example: duty orientation → complete critical checks even when no immediate reward is visible → teams reinforce process discipline → management audits leading indicators rather than only final outcomes.

A suggested monthly character-management matrix is: Week 1—self-control; Week 2—truthfulness and integrity; Week 3—discernment and decision-making; Week 4—compassion, humility and accountability. Each week can use one Panchatantra or Bhagavata story, one Gita verse, one workplace example and one reflective question. The approach is designed as a learning intervention, not as religious instruction, and participation should respect organisational diversity.

Preliminary Behavioural Indicators for Empirical Testing

To make Level 1 (Character) and Level 2 (Personal Management) more readily testable, the following indicators are proposed as an initial conceptual measurement set. They are not presented as a validated psychometric scale; wording, reliability and construct validity should be established through expert review and pilot testing.

Construct	Illustrative behavioural indicator	Possible observation / response format
Integrity / truthfulness	Reports relevant information accurately, including unfavourable information.	5-point self-report and supervisor/peer observation
Self-control	Pauses before responding when emotionally provoked or under pressure.	Behavioural scenario rating; supervisor observation
Discernment	Checks evidence, alternatives and consequences before a consequential decision.	Decision checklist; scenario-based assessment
Duty orientation	Completes critical responsibilities even when immediate rewards are absent.	Task records; supervisor rating
Compassion / social awareness	Considers the likely human impact of decisions and listens to affected colleagues.	Peer/supervisor rating
Personal-management discipline	Plans priorities, regulates attention and reviews outcomes against intended actions.	Weekly self-monitoring log; validated self-management scale where available
Communication	Adjusts timing, content and	Scenario-based rating; incident/meeting

restraint	confidentiality of communication to the situation.	observation
Accountability	Acknowledges errors, seeks correction and follows through on commitments.	360-degree observation; completion records

Cross-Cultural Adaptability

The framework is rooted in Indian narrative traditions, but its organisational use need not require religious adoption. In culturally diverse workplaces, the stories can be framed as case narratives and compared with locally familiar ethical or behavioural archetypes. Facilitators should explain the original literary or spiritual context, distinguish interpretation from doctrine, invite alternative readings, and use behaviourally neutral learning objectives. Participation should remain voluntary where organisational policy requires it, and examples should be translated into universal management behaviours such as truthful reporting, self-regulation, respectful communication, responsible risk decisions and accountability.

A cross-cultural adaptation process may therefore include four steps: (1) contextual explanation of the source; (2) identification of the underlying behavioural principle; (3) comparison with equivalent values or narratives familiar to the target workforce; and (4) pilot testing for comprehension, acceptability and unintended interpretation. This approach may broaden applicability while preserving the cultural identity of the source material.

Illustrative Enterprise Pilot Study

A small pilot can test the practical feasibility of the four-stage implementation cycle without treating the conceptual framework as already validated. One organisational unit could receive a four-week intervention using one character theme per week, supported by a short narrative, a workplace example, a reflective question and one observable behaviour. A comparable unit could continue its normal development activities, if organisational and ethical requirements permit.

Baseline and post-intervention measures could include self-control, integrity-related behaviour, communication discipline and self-management, together with selected organisational indicators such as near-miss reporting quality, escalation behaviour, conflict-management observations or completion of critical checks. Multi-source ratings and behavioural records would reduce reliance on self-report. A follow-up measurement after several weeks or months could examine whether any observed changes persist. The pilot should be interpreted as feasibility evidence, not as proof of causality.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. First, it is conceptual and does not test causal relationships. Second, the selected stories are illustrative rather than exhaustive; different translations and interpretations may produce different emphases. Third, the spiritual and literary purposes of the original texts are broader than management education. Fourth, the organisational applications proposed here require empirical validation across sectors, cultures, age groups and organisational levels. Fifth, character is difficult to measure without carefully validated instruments and longitudinal or multi-source designs. Sixth, the proposed behavioural indicators and pilot design are preliminary and require expert review, psychometric testing and contextual adaptation before formal use.

Future Research

Future studies can operationalise the framework through a character-to-self-management scale, followed by field studies examining relationships with ethical climate, safety behaviour, trust, employee engagement, conflict management and organisational resilience. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could compare narrative-based management development with conventional classroom training. Longitudinal

research could examine whether repeated reflective practice changes behaviour over time. Cross-cultural studies could also test which elements are specific to Indian traditions and which reflect more general principles of human self-regulation and ethical leadership. Future work should also test the preliminary indicators proposed in Section 11.1 for reliability, construct validity and measurement invariance across relevant employee groups.

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes that organisational management can be studied through a layered pathway beginning with character, moving through personal management and becoming visible in managerial and organisational behaviour. Panchatantra narratives highlight discernment, communication discipline and strategic thinking; the Bhagavad Gita provides a vocabulary of duty, self-mastery and character; and the Bhagabatam tradition demonstrates how repeated community-based narration can support shared learning and cultural continuity. Together, these sources provide a culturally grounded set of reflective cases for management education.

The central proposition is deliberately modest: character does not replace competence, systems, incentives, technology or governance. Instead, character can be considered a foundational human factor that influences how individuals manage themselves, and personal management can influence how organisational responsibilities are enacted. The proposed Character → Personal Management → Organisational Management framework should therefore be treated as a conceptual model requiring empirical testing. Its immediate value lies in providing a structured bridge between classical narrative wisdom and contemporary management-development practice. The revised framework further identifies preliminary behavioural indicators, cross-cultural adaptation principles and a pilot-study pathway so that future researchers can move from conceptual interpretation toward systematic empirical evaluation.

Declarations

Ethical Approval: Not applicable. The study uses publicly available texts and published literature and involves no human or animal participants.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: No specific external funding was received for this conceptual study.

Data Availability: No primary dataset was generated. The analysis is based on published textual and scholarly sources.

Author Contribution: The author conceptualised the study, conducted the textual analysis, developed the framework and prepared the manuscript.

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14. Revision note: This version incorporates the reviewer's suggestions by adding preliminary behavioural/observational indicators for Level 1 and Level 2 constructs, a cross-cultural adaptability subsection, and an illustrative enterprise pilot-study outline linked to the four-stage implementation cycle and monthly character-management matrix.