

BLACKRIDGE EXECUTIVE EVIDENCE GUIDE • 2026

How Do You Know Someone Is Ready for Promotion?

A research-grounded framework for replacing promotion intuition with role-relevant evidence—without reducing a consequential human decision to a score.



1 Future role to define	5 Evidence standards	4 Responsible decision paths	90 Days to examine the move
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Promotion readiness is not a claim about a person’s worth. It is a bounded judgment about the match between a person, the work that changes, the evidence available, and the conditions into which responsibility will move.



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The Promotion Evidence Guide

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strongest promotion decision begins by refusing the wrong question.

The question is not “Who deserves the opportunity?” It is “What responsibility will change, and what evidence shows that this person is preparing to carry it?”

Organizations rarely promote people at random. They promote people who perform, solve difficult problems, earn sponsorship, show ambition, and become trusted. Those are meaningful signals. They are also incomplete whenever the next role changes the source of value, the relationships through which results are produced, or the scale and consequence of judgment.

Research consistently warns against assuming that success in one role transfers automatically into another. Prior employee performance has limited and context-dependent value for predicting later leader performance; experience is often overread; and even well-designed selection procedures remain probabilistic rather than certain.¹⁻³

Define the delta	Structure the inquiry	Observe behavior	Interpret context	Track trajectory
Name what the next role requires that the current role does not.	Use common constructs, comparable probes, and anchored evaluation.	Gather evidence in work that resembles the responsibility ahead.	Separate individual preparation from authority, support, and opportunity.	Examine whether behavior strengthens, transfers, and holds over time.

⚡ **Executive Finding**

A defensible promotion case is not a stack of favorable opinions. It is an explicit argument connecting future-role demands to multiple sources of behavioral evidence, interpreted with limitations and organizational conditions visible.

01

THE PROMOTION PROBLEM

Organizations are often selecting the right person for the wrong evidence.

Promotion systems usually recognize excellence. The failure occurs when evidence of excellence in one role is treated as evidence of readiness for different work.

The evidence substitution

When future-role evidence is weak, panels substitute what is available: performance ratings, reputation, tenure, urgency, sponsorship, or confidence. The decision can feel rigorous because the discussion is detailed—even when the evidence does not match the work ahead.

Current-role performance

Becomes a potential label

Becomes a promotion case

Without testing the role delta

What is valid

Performance, trust, and experience matter. They should enter the case as specific evidence—not as automatic transfer.

What is missing

The panel needs evidence tied to the decisions, relationships, pressure, and scale of the next role.

What creates risk

Urgency compresses inquiry. A vacancy can turn “best available” into “ready” without anyone naming the substitution.

What improves the decision

Make the inference visible: requirement → evidence → interpretation → limitation → condition.



► WHAT PAST SUCCESS CAN CARRY

Current Performance Is Evidence—But It Is Evidence of the Current Role

Past performance should not be discarded. It shows that a person can meet standards, learn a domain, earn trust, and produce results under known conditions. The mistake is asking it to answer a different question without examining what will change.

A systematic review by Schleu and Hüffmeier found that the relationship between employee performance and later leader performance is not sufficiently established to justify simple performance-based promotion. The core issue is criterion mismatch: the behaviors that make someone exceptional as an individual contributor may overlap only partially with the behaviors required to direct, develop, and coordinate others.¹

The broader selection literature provides a parallel warning. A meta-analysis of prehire work experience found only weak relationships between typical experience measures and later job performance. That evidence is not identical to internal promotion, but it reinforces the danger of treating time, exposure, or title history as proof that future performance will follow.²

Available signal	What it can support	What it cannot establish alone	Better panel question
High performance	Execution, expertise, reliability, standards	Delegation, authority, people development, enterprise judgment	Which parts of the success are relevant to the role ahead?
Tenure	Context knowledge, relationships, pattern recognition	Adaptability, motivation to lead, capacity to release prior work	What has the person learned—and applied—as conditions changed?
Sponsorship	Observed trust and organizational credibility	Comparable evidence or freedom from sponsor bias	What behavior has the sponsor observed, and under what conditions?
Confidence	Willingness to act and accept responsibility	Accuracy of judgment, listening, composure, or learning	How does confidence change when the person encounters disconfirming evidence?
Potential label	A hypothesis worth investigating	Readiness for a named transition at a named time	What evidence would confirm or challenge the label?

⚡ Decision Point

Do not eliminate past performance from the case. Bound it. State exactly which future requirement it informs—and where new evidence is still required.

► NAME THE WORK THAT CHANGES

Readiness begins with the role delta—not the candidate.

Before evaluating a person, define the new source of value, the relationships that change, the decisions that become theirs, and the consequences the organization is asking them to carry.

SHIFT

From doing the work to producing results through others

Evidence focus: ownership of team outcomes, delegation, decision confidence, composure, and renegotiation of former-peer relationships.

ARENA

From managing a team to leading through leaders

Evidence focus: proxy agency, manager development, cross-functional influence, standards across teams, and disciplined distance from direct execution.

ASCENT

From functional success to organizational direction

Evidence focus: systems thinking, integration, strategic patience, organizational navigation, and development of other managers.

EDGE

From organizational leadership to enterprise stewardship

Evidence focus: consequential judgment, capital and risk architecture, system trade-offs, external influence, and institution-level direction.

Role analysis should produce

Four to six observable demands; realistic situations in which those demands appear; consequences of weak execution; and the authority, information, relationships, and support the role requires.

Role analysis should avoid

Generic leadership competency lists that could describe every job, idealized executive traits, and criteria added after decision-makers already know whom they favor.

BlackRidge position: readiness is relational to the next role. The same leader may be ready for one transition, underprepared for another, and constrained by a receiving environment that would prevent effective application.

⚡ Role Finding

If the panel cannot explain what becomes different after promotion, it cannot know whether the evidence it is reviewing is relevant.

► WHAT DESERVES WEIGHT

Five tests for promotion evidence.

Evidence becomes decision-worthy when the panel can describe why it is relevant, how it was observed, what it means, what limits it, and whether the pattern is stable enough to act on.

1 • Role relevance Does the evidence resemble the responsibility, relationships, and judgment of the next role?	2 • Behavioral specificity Can the panel identify what the person actually did—not merely an adjective assigned to them?	3 • Multiple sources Does the pattern appear across observation, structured inquiry, work artifacts, and credible raters?	4 • Context visibility Were authority, information, incentives, support, pressure, and opportunity considered?	5 • Trajectory Is the behavior forming, strengthening, holding, plateauing, or blocked across time?
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Evidence statement	Standard not met	Decision-worthy revision
“She is strategic.”	No behavior, situation, or role connection	“In two cross-functional decisions, she identified downstream effects, made assumptions explicit, and changed the plan when new evidence emerged.”
“Everyone trusts him.”	Reputation is not defined	“Former peers accepted a changed standard after he clarified authority, heard objections, and followed through consistently.”
“He has been here ten years.”	Exposure is substituted for learning	“Across three operational changes, he revised routines, documented what failed, and transferred the learning to a new setting.”
“She did well in the assessment.”	One method is treated as a verdict	“Simulation evidence aligned with structured interview examples and workplace observation; limitations and context remain documented.”

⚡ Evidence Finding

The purpose of a standard is not to make judgment mechanical. It is to force the reasoning behind judgment into a form that can be examined, challenged, and improved.

02

FROM ASSERTION TO OBSERVATION

Not all evidence should carry the same weight.

The closer the method comes to the work ahead—and the more clearly the behavior can be observed and scored—the stronger its contribution to the promotion case.

Observed workplace behavior over time

Repeated role-relevant behavior, credible raters, visible context, and documented outcomes or follow-through.

High-fidelity simulation or bounded stretch assignment

Realistic responsibility, structured observation, common standards, and opportunity to examine behavior under pressure.

Structured behavioral or situational interview

Common constructs, comparable questions, anchored scoring, and evidence-specific probing.

Work artifacts, multisource input, and performance history

Useful when role relevance, rater opportunity, and limitations are made explicit.

Reputation, self-confidence, tenure, and unsupported labels

Signals that may generate hypotheses but should not close the case.

Triangulation

No single method resolves readiness. Strong cases look for convergence and contradiction across methods, occasions, raters, and conditions.

Disconfirmation

A panel should actively ask what evidence would make its preferred interpretation less likely. Advocacy without disconfirmation becomes sponsorship, not evaluation.

⚡ Weighting Principle

Give the greatest weight to behavior that most closely resembles the next role, was observed under interpretable conditions, and can be examined by more than one credible source.

► ASK COMPARABLE QUESTIONS

Structure Improves the Conversation—It Does Not Replace Judgment

Interviews feel informative because they create narrative, immediacy, and interpersonal data. Without structure, however, different candidates may be asked different questions, receive different opportunities to demonstrate evidence, and be evaluated against criteria that shift during the conversation.

Meta-analytic revisions of personnel-selection validity continue to rank structured interviews among the strongest available methods, while also warning that prediction is less certain than some older summaries implied.³ Research on leadership-focused structured interviews suggests that leadership behavior constructs can be assessed meaningfully and can add information about consequential outcomes.⁴ A 2024 meta-analysis further found that interview-based assessments of task and contextual constructs show useful but imperfect criterion-related validity, with structured scoring particularly important for contextual performance.⁵

Design element	Weak practice	BlackRidge evidence practice
Construct	“Leadership presence” or “executive fit”	Four to six observable demands derived from the role delta
Question	Improvised prompts based on résumé interest	Common behavioral and situational questions mapped to each demand
Probe	More help for candidates the panel already likes	Defined probes for situation, action, reasoning, consequence, and learning
Scoring	Overall impression after the meeting	Behaviorally anchored notes recorded before panel discussion
Interpretation	One compelling story becomes proof	Patterns, contradictions, opportunity, context, and missing evidence remain visible

Five promotion questions worth standardizing

1 • Responsibility

Tell us about a time you became accountable for an outcome you could not produce alone.

2 • Decision

Describe a consequential decision made before certainty was available. What did you make explicit?

3 • Relationship

When did a relationship need to change because your responsibility changed?

4 • Learning

What evidence caused you to revise a successful approach that no longer fit?

Fifth question: What conditions, authority, or support would you need to demonstrate this behavior consistently in the role ahead?

► BUILD EVIDENCE BEFORE THE MOVE

Whenever possible, observe the work before assigning the title.

Realistic practice gives the organization a better question than “Has this person done the job before?” It asks, “How does this person reorganize behavior when the work begins to resemble the job?”

Assessment-center research supports the value of observing candidates in managerial exercises, while also showing that validity is meaningful rather than perfect. A 2007 meta-analysis reported a corrected relationship of approximately .28 between overall assessment ratings and supervisory performance ratings.⁶ Research comparing assessment centers and cognitive tests within the same samples has also shown that higher-fidelity methods can contribute distinctive criterion-related information.⁷

Future demand	Developmental evidence experience	What observers record	What remains uncertain
Produce results through others	Delegate a meaningful deliverable with real constraints	Clarity, guardrails, ownership transfer, monitoring, response to error	Whether behavior will sustain with full workload and authority
Set direction under uncertainty	Lead a scenario with incomplete and conflicting information	Assumptions, trade-offs, timing, stakeholder effects, revision	How organizational politics and real consequences will alter behavior
Reset a peer relationship	Conduct a difficult standards conversation with a former peer	Respect, authority, listening, clarity, consequence, follow-through	Whether the relationship will remain workable over time
Lead through managers	Coach a manager without taking back the problem	Diagnostic questions, patience, standards, development ownership	Whether time pressure will trigger direct-execution relapse

Evidence should be developmental

Participants should know the demands being examined, receive feedback, and gain an opportunity to strengthen behavior. Hidden tests undermine the learning architecture.

Evidence should remain bounded

A simulation is a sample—not the role. Treat it as one source, document limitations, and resist turning observed behavior into deterministic prediction.

⚡ Observation Finding

Simulation is valuable because it makes behavior visible—not because it removes uncertainty from a human decision.

► ASSEMBLE THE CASE

A promotion panel needs an evidence matrix—not a stronger advocate.

The matrix keeps requirements, evidence, interpretation, contradictions, missing information, and organizational conditions in the same field of view.

Future-role demand	Evidence observed	Source and occasion	Contradiction or limit	Context condition	Next evidence action
Delegation with ownership	Transferred a client deliverable and maintained standards without reclaiming execution	Work artifact; manager observation; project retrospective	Only one occasion; low time pressure	Current manager protected the assignment	Repeat under competing deadlines
Decision confidence	Made a bounded decision, stated assumptions, and adjusted after feedback	Simulation; structured interview example	Workplace sponsor reports occasional delay	Decision rights in current role remain unclear	Clarify authority and observe a live decision
Peer navigation	Reset expectations with two peers while preserving working relationships	Peer input; candidate evidence; manager follow-up	One peer relationship remains unresolved	Former manager still bypasses the candidate	Establish reporting boundary and revisit
Developing others	Coached a colleague to solve a recurring problem independently	Colleague observation; work outcome	Candidate still solves high-risk issues personally	No formal opportunity to manage	Assign a bounded coaching responsibility

Evidence strength

How directly does the evidence match the demand? How observable, repeated, and credible is it?

Evidence coverage

Which role demands have meaningful evidence, and which remain assumptions or blank cells?

Evidence conflict

Where do methods, raters, occasions, or contexts point in different directions?

Evidence action

What can be learned before the decision, and what must become a condition of the move?

Control: Record evidence and preliminary interpretations before the panel discussion. Otherwise, social influence can cause individual observations to converge around the most senior or forceful voice.

⚡ Matrix Finding

The matrix is not the decision. It is the structure that prevents the panel from hiding missing evidence behind a polished narrative.

► MAKE THE REASONING VISIBLE

The calibration room should challenge the case—not perform certainty.

A well-run panel separates what was observed, what is inferred, what context explains, what remains missing, and who owns the final employment decision.

01

Independent review

Panelists examine common evidence and record preliminary ratings or narratives before group discussion.

02

Evidence round

Each future-role demand is discussed using observed behavior, source, occasion, and limitation—not advocacy.

03

Contradiction round

The panel identifies conflicting evidence, missing occasions, rater opportunity, and interpretations that depend on assumption.

04

Context round

Authority, sponsorship, information, workload, incentives, relationships, and development support are reviewed.

05

Decision conditions

The panel states what must be true before the move, during transition, and at the first evidence checkpoint.

06

Audit the rationale

The organization preserves the reasoning, intended use, limitations, and accountable decision owner.

Fairness controls

Use job-relevant criteria, common opportunities to provide evidence, structured scoring, trained panelists, privacy controls, and ongoing review for subgroup differences and adverse effects.

Human authority

Assessments and AI-supported tools may organize evidence. They should not silently become the decision-maker, conceal scoring logic, or override authorized human review.

⚡ Calibration Finding

Calibration is not consensus at any cost. It is disciplined disagreement resolved through evidence, intended-use boundaries, and accountable judgment.

03

ACT WITHOUT PRETENDING CERTAINTY

Four responsible promotion paths.

A strong system does not force every case into yes or no. It distinguishes preparation, evidence sufficiency, timing, organizational conditions, and the risk the organization is prepared to carry.

PATH 01

Proceed with explicit support

Role-relevant evidence is sufficiently strong for the organization to act. Name onboarding support, decision rights, sponsor responsibilities, and early evidence checkpoints.

PATH 02

Prepare against named gaps

The case is promising but specific demands remain underdeveloped. Build targeted practice, feedback, and repeated evidence before changing the title.

PATH 03

Pause because conditions are wrong

The person may be preparing, but authority, sponsorship, workload, reporting relationships, or role clarity would make the transition structurally fragile.

PATH 04

Gather better evidence

The available case is too thin, contradictory, or reputation-dependent. Create a fair, bounded opportunity to observe the work rather than rewarding the strongest narrative.

Language control: These are decision pathways for authorized leaders—not psychometric classifications, automated recommendations, or promises of future success.

⚡ Decision Finding

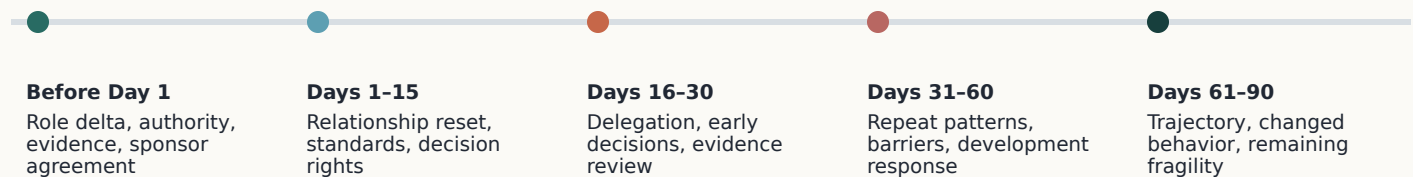
Responsible uncertainty is stronger than false precision. State what is known, what remains uncertain, who owns the risk, and what evidence will be examined next.

► THE ORGANIZATION IS PART OF READINESS

The promotion decision does not end when the title changes.

The receiving environment determines whether new behavior has authority, opportunity, information, reinforcement, and enough time to become stable.

Receiving condition	Question before promotion	First evidence after promotion
Authority	Which decisions actually transfer, and who will stop bypassing the new leader?	Decisions are made at the intended level without silent reversal or shadow management.
Role clarity	What work must be released, retained, and newly owned?	The leader spends increasing time on the new source of value rather than carrying both jobs indefinitely.
Sponsor behavior	Who will create access, air cover, feedback, and escalation support?	The sponsor reinforces the new relationship contract and does not rescue every difficult decision.
Workload and resources	Does the role provide enough capacity to lead, learn, and develop others?	Urgency does not permanently collapse the leader back into direct execution.
Feedback and opportunity	Where will the leader practice the hardest new behaviors?	Evidence is available across real situations, not only during formal review.



Ask at 30 days

What has changed in the work? Which former-role pull is strongest? What evidence is beginning to appear?

Ask at 60 days

Which behaviors repeat without prompting? What context is enabling or blocking the move?

Ask at 90 days: What has strengthened, what remains fragile, and what support or structural change is now required?

⚡ Trajectory Finding

The organization should evaluate both the leader's movement and the conditions it created. Otherwise, system failure will be mislabeled as individual unreadiness.

► RESEARCH AND BOUNDARIES

What this guide is—and is not.

This guide translates research on performance-based promotion, structured interviews, assessment centers, learning agility, and transfer into the BlackRidge transition-readiness architecture. It is designed to improve a human promotion process—not to automate it.

It is: a bounded, research-informed framework for defining future-role demands, gathering behavioral evidence, interpreting conditions, and planning development.

It is not: a validated selection procedure, legal opinion, guaranteed predictor, or authorization to use a BlackRidge developmental diagnostic as a standalone promotion test.

Selected research

- ¹ Schleu, J. E., & Hüffmeier, J. (2020). Simply the best? A systematic literature review on the predictive validity of employee performance for leader performance. *Human Resource Management Review*, 100777.
- ² Van Iddekinge, C. H., Arnold, J. D., Frieder, R. E., & Roth, P. L. (2019). A meta-analysis of the criterion-related validity of prehire work experience. *Personnel Psychology*.
- ³ Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C. M., & Lievens, F. (2022). Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
- ⁴ Heimann, A., Ingold, P. V., & Kleinmann, M. (2020). Tell us about your leadership style: A structured interview approach for assessing leadership behavior constructs. *The Leadership Quarterly*.
- ⁵ Wingate, T. G., Bourdage, J. S., & Steel, P. (2024). Evaluating interview criterion-related validity for distinct constructs: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*.
- ⁶ Hermelin, E., Lievens, F., & Robertson, I. T. (2007). The validity of assessment centres for prediction of supervisory performance ratings: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*.
- ⁷ Sackett, P. R., Shewach, O. R., & Keiser, H. N. (2017). Assessment centers versus cognitive ability tests. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
- ⁸ De Meuse, K. P. (2019). A meta-analysis of the relationship between learning agility and leader success. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*.
- ⁹ Blume, B. D., Ford, J. K., Baldwin, T. T., & Huang, J. L. (2010). Transfer of training: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Management*, 36, 1065–1105.
- ¹⁰ Hughes, A. M., Zajac, S., Woods, A. L., & Salas, E. (2020). The role of work environment in training sustainment: A meta-analysis. *Human Factors*, 62, 166–183.

BlackRidge working-paper foundation

Leadership Readiness as a Measurable Construct	SSRN 6903318 · Three-layer architecture and intended state-to-trait trajectory.
The SHIFT Readiness Gap	SSRN 6545619 · DOI 10.2139/ssrn.6545619 · First leadership transition.
ARENA · ASCENT · EDGE	SSRN 6648383 · 6733581 · 6812343 · Transition-specific future-role demands.

Author: Danyell Stoutamire · BlackRidge Institute · ORCID 0009-0000-7203-1613. BlackRidge papers are working papers and have not undergone formal peer review. The Leadership Readiness Diagnostic is developmental and should be used only within its authorized intended-use and validation boundaries.

PROMOTION READINESS

Do not ask one role to predict another without examining what changes.

Define the responsibility. Structure the inquiry. Observe the behavior. Interpret the conditions. Track what changes after the move.

BUILD THE PROMOTION CASE FROM EVIDENCE—NOT MOMENTUM.

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