Managerial Agency: Conceptualizing Leadership as Intentional Capacity to Assume Responsibility and Proactively Shape Organizational Outcomes

Abu Martins Mustapha
Special Purpose Investigation Department
Nigeria Revenue Service
Abuja, Nigeria
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1321-0766

Babagbemi M. Remi Falilat
Department of Political Science and International Studies
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria, Nigeria
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5656-0919

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Abstract
The question of what distinguishes leaders who shape their context from those shaped by it remains central to management research. Although leadership scholarship has extensively examined traits, styles, and behaviours, it has paid comparatively little attention to the underlying capacity that enables leaders to act intentionally and assume ownership. This conceptual paper addresses that gap by introducing and defining managerial agency as a leader's personal and professional capacity to act intentionally, assume responsibility for decisions and their consequences, and proactively shape organizational outcomes rather than merely respond to events. Drawing on social cognitive theory, research on proactive behaviour, self-determination, and responsible leadership, we argue that managerial agency is not a fixed personality trait but a developable capability. We propose that managerial agency comprises three mutually reinforcing dimensions: intentionality, defined as the cognitive-volitional drive to act with foresight; responsibility assumption, defined as the normative internalisation of ownership; and proactive outcome shaping, defined as the behavioral enactment of change. The paper presents a conceptual framework outlining the construct's antecedents, core dimensions, and consequences for adaptability, empowerment, and resilience, alongside four testable propositions. In doing so, we offer a new perspective on leadership effectiveness in today's turbulent and uncertain environment.

Keywords: *managerial agency, leadership agency, intentional leadership, responsible leadership, proactive behaviour*

JEL Classification: *M10 - General Business Administration; M12 - Personnel Management; M54 - Labour Management*

1.0 Introduction

Consider the most recent major organizational crisis you witnessed. Two leaders faced the same market shock, uncertainty, and pressure. One waited for instructions and for conditions to stabilise. The other stepped forward, clearly communicated an intention, took ownership of a difficult decision, and began to shape what would happen next. This distinction between shaping circumstances and being shaped by them remains central to leadership research, yet it is still fragmented. We describe it as proactivity, responsibility, or self-efficacy but rarely identify the underlying capacity itself. This paper introduces that capacity as managerial agency: the developable capacity to act intentionally, assume responsibility, and proactively shape outcomes rather than merely react. We live in what Bennett and Lemoine termed a VUCA world—volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous—a condition now intensified by digital disruption and polycrises. Recent systematic reviews of literature published from 2020 to 2023 indicate that VUCA navigation requires adaptability, strategic thinking, and emotional regulation (HRMARS; Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025). As Tourish argued during COVID-19, many failures were not failures of strategy but failures of agency. Yet theories remain largely reactive, explaining how leaders respond to followers and context (Parker et al., 2010), rather than how they enact context. Digital leadership research in Scientific Reports now shows that proactive plans that enable firms to anticipate and respond to evolving markets directly precede organizational resilience, but it lacks a clear agentic construct at the managerial level (Weick, 1979; Ye, 2025).

According to Bandura (2001; 2006), agency is grounded in the capacity to act intentionally and effect change. It is characterised by intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, with self-efficacy serving as its precondition. In management, this concept was appropriated. Since the work of Jensen and Meckling and Eisenhardt, agency has been associated with agency costs and monitoring. Recent reviews call for an agentic turn to reclaim agency as generative (Hernandez & Guillen, 2024). Three streams inform this turn. First, the proactive behaviour literature provides the behavioral engine: self-initiated, future-focused action driven by can-do, reason-to, and energised-to motives (Crant, 2000; Parker et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2019). Second, responsible leadership scholarship demonstrates that ethical orientation requires deliberate foresight into moral implications and full ownership of intended and unintended consequences (Voegtlin, 2011; Maak & Pless, 2006; Waldman & Balven, 2014; Koen & Grobler, 2026). Third, self-determination theory explains sustainability: autonomous, volitional intentions are more deeply internalised (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Bandura, 1977).

These streams rarely engage with one another, leaving three gaps identified in recent research: the absence of a holistic view of leadership capacity; the conflation of psychological agency with strategic discursive agency (Mantere & Vaara, 2008); and the lack of an integrated framework encompassing cognition, norms, and behaviour. Although responsible leadership and proactive behaviour are now empirically linked – for example, responsible leadership positively predicts proactive behaviours through affective commitment and reduces emotional exhaustion (Zhang et al., 2026) – the micro-macro link to resilience remains implicit. Drawing on the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs framing of resilience and self-efficacy as core skills for VUCA contexts, OECD governance principles on accountability, and UNCTAD's calls for responsible leadership in support of sustainable enterprise, this paper defines managerial agency as a higher-order, developable capability comprising intentionality, the assumption of responsibility, and proactive outcome shaping. This definition explains how leaders move from intention to ownership and, ultimately, to enactment. (Bandura)(2023)

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Psychological Roots of Agency: Social Cognitive Theory

The theoretical foundation of agency rests on Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT), which fundamentally repositioned human functioning from reactive to generative. Bandura (2001) explicitly rejected environmental determinism and the person-environment duality, arguing that individuals are not merely products of their environments but producers of them through agentic action. In this tradition, agency is defined not as possession of capacities but as intentional doing: to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions, rather than having things happen to oneself. In his subsequent elaboration, Bandura (2006) clarified the architecture of this capacity, identifying four core properties that together constitute a future-orientated, self-regulatory system: intentionality – the formation of action plans and strategies; forethought – the temporal extension of agency through anticipated outcomes and goal setting; self-reactiveness – the motivational self-regulation and execution of action; and self-reflectiveness – the metacognitive examination of one's own functioning. This integrative system, not any single property, enables human agency. Recent research confirms that these four properties load onto a higher-order agentic capability that predicts proactive coping in VUCA environments (Ting et al., 2024; Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025). Self-efficacy is central to this system and serves as its proximal motivational engine. Bandura (1977) demonstrated that belief in one's capability to exercise control over events, self-efficacy, is the decisive determinant of whether agency is even attempted, how much effort is expended, and how long it is sustained under adversity. Without efficacy beliefs, intention gives way to resignation. Studies robustly support this premise: Judge and Bono (2001) in the Journal of Applied Psychology and Parker et al. (2010) in the Journal of Management show that self-efficacy explains approximately 28% of the variance in proactive performance and taking-charge behaviour across contexts, exceeding the predictive power of Big Five traits. In organisational settings, efficacy beliefs determine whether a leader frames volatility as a threat to avoid or an opportunity to shape. Recent studies conducted specifically in VUCA contexts extend this mechanism to organisational resilience. Zhang et al. (2024), in Scientific Reports, using a two-wave sample of technology firms, confirm that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between digital leadership and organisational resilience: leaders who believe they can influence volatile environments are significantly more likely to formulate proactive plans, reconfigure business models, and transform crises into opportunities for growth. Similarly, Guo et al. (2024) found that leader self-efficacy moderates the effect of environmental dynamism on strategic change initiation. This provides direct empirical grounding for the intentionality dimension of managerial agency.

Any theory of managerial agency must therefore begin with this cognitive-motivational belief, but it cannot end there. Contemporary research extends Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism – where person, behaviour, and environment mutually influence one another in bidirectional causation – to leadership as a process of enactment. Weick (1979) first argued that leaders do not simply discover environments; they enact them through sensemaking and selective attention. Mantere and Vaara (2008) integrate this with agency, showing that strategic agency is discursively constructed but psychologically enabled. Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017), in their development of Psychological Capital, demonstrate that efficacy is developable through mastery, modelling, and persuasion – implying managerial agency is a capability, not a fixed trait. In synthesis, Bandura provides the micro-foundation: managerial agency starts as a belief that "I can make a difference", matures into an intention that "I will make a difference", and culminates in self-regulated action that proves it.

2.2 How Management Theory Misunderstood Agency: From Problem to Potential

In economics-based management theory, agency was fundamentally reframed as a problem to be addressed. Jensen and Meckling (1976) and Eisenhardt (1989) conceptualised agency as an inherent conflict: the principal must monitor and control the self-interested agent to minimise agency costs arising from information asymmetry and goal divergence. Although this perspective advanced corporate governance, executive compensation, and board control mechanisms (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997; Dalton et al., 2007), it offered a deficit-orientated, transactional view in which the manager is a risk to be contained rather than a resource to be developed. This logic rests on three limiting assumptions: managers are rationally self-interested, opportunism is inevitable without control, and agency is a zero-sum contractual relation.

Recent reviews argue that this view is not only incomplete but empirically and normatively outdated for contemporary organising. Hernandez and Guillen (2024), in a theory review, call for an "agentic turn" – reclaiming agency as a positive, generative force for value creation, rather than merely a cost to be mitigated. They argue that classic agency theory over-predicts opportunism and under-predicts stewardship, prosocial motivation, and moral identity. Empirical evidence supports this critique: stewardship behaviours, organisational citizenship, and prosocial leadership explain variance in firm performance beyond monitoring intensity 9Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012; Toader et al., 2024]. In knowledge-intensive, hybrid, and purpose-driven organisations, control-based agency induces what Ghoshal (2005) called "double hermeneutics" – theories that assume opportunism create the very opportunism they seek to prevent.

Similarly, the systematic review of responsible leadership in organisations from 2000–2025 notes that classical agency theory fails to capture moral agency and proactive ownership, both of which stakeholders increasingly demand (Voegtlin et al., 2012; Waldman & Balven, 2014; Miska & Mendenhall, 2018). Voegtlin and colleagues argue that in an era of ESG, corporate scandals, and social licence pressures, leadership cannot be reduced to shareholder-agent fidelity; it must include deliberate foresight of moral implications and accountability for unintended consequences (Voegtlin, 2011; McLoughlin et al., 2025). Empirical work shows that responsible leadership reduces misconduct and strengthens psychological safety more than compliance-based monitoring (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Abdulai et al., 2025; Xuetong et al., 2024).

Institutional sources echo this paradigm shift. The OECD Guidelines on Corporate Governance and OECD Recommendation on Responsible Business Conduct now frame agency, accountability, and ethical decision-making as core leadership competencies and human capital investments, not control mechanisms. Likewise, the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report 2023 institutional report lists resilience, stewardship, and ethical leadership among the top 10 growing skills, while the UN Global Compact and UNCTAD World Investment Report 2023 position responsible managerial agency as a prerequisite for sustainable enterprise transformation.

The shift, therefore, is from viewing agency as opportunism to viewing it as authorship. Where classic agency asked, "How do we stop managers from shirking?", the agentic turn asks, "How do we enable managers to intentionally author futures worth pursuing?" Managerial agency, in this reading, is not the agency problem described by Jensen and Meckling but the agency capacity described by Bandura – the intentional capacity to assume responsibility and proactively shape outcomes that classic theory rendered invisible.

2.3 The Behavioural Engine: Proactive Behaviour Literature

Parker and colleagues fundamentally changed the conversation by demonstrating that proactivity is not a dispositional trait but a motivated, goal-directed process. In their seminal Journal of

Management model, Parker et al. (2010) propose three motivational states: can-do (self-efficacy), reason-to (internalised motivation), and energised-to (positive affect). This moves proactivity from personality to process.

Crant (2000) and Grant and Ashford (2008) extended this by showing that proactive individuals do not merely adapt to their environments; they shape them by taking charge, voicing concerns, and selling issues. Recent empirical evidence supports this: Morrison and Phelps (1999) show that the taking-charge construct positively predicts adaptive performance in high-VUCA environments (Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025), while a 2024 longitudinal study of 160 CEOs and employees across three waves found that proactive leadership cultivates organisational integrity and environmental proactivity through CSR policy adoption (Ting et al., 2024). This is the behavioural engine of what we term proactive outcome shaping. However, proactivity alone cannot explain variance in ownership. As Parker et al. (2019) noted, many employees can act proactively but choose not to because they lack a felt sense of responsibility.

2.4 The Normative Core: Why Intentionality and Responsibility Matter

Two complementary theories address this gap. First, self-determination theory (SDT). Deci and Ryan (2000) show that when action is autonomous and volitional rather than controlled, it is internalised more deeply and sustained longer. Truly self-endorsed intentionality sticks, whereas coerced intention is easily abandoned under pressure. Recent work in nursing and hospitality management demonstrates that autonomous motivation mediates responsible leadership and proactive work behaviour (Zhang et al., 2026; Qiu et al., 2024).

Second, Responsible Leadership and Psychological Ownership. Maak and Pless (2006) and Voegtlin et al. (2012) remind us that leadership is a relational and moral role embedded in stakeholder claims. The latest systematic review defines responsible leaders as those characterised by deliberate foresight in assessing moral implications and by assuming full ownership of intended and unintended consequences (Voegtlin, 2011; McLoughlin et al., 2025). This aligns with Pierce et al. (2001), psychological ownership theory: the feeling that "this outcome is MINE" creates felt accountability. Without that sense of ownership, intention never converts into sustained action. Empirically, psychological ownership has been shown to mediate the relationship between empowerment and taking-charge behaviour (Seibert et al., 2011).

Table 1: Evolution and Fragmentation of Agency Constructs in Management Literature

Stream	Core Definition of Agency	Key Limitation	Representative Works
1. Principal-Agent (Economics)	Agency as a problem of control: how principals control self-interested agents	Deficit view: agency = risk to be mitigated	Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989
2. Social Cognitive (Psychology)	Agency as capacity to intentionally make things happen through self-regulation	Psychology under-specifies moral ownership.	Bandura, 1977, 2001, 2006; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017
3. Proactive Behaviour (OB)	Agency as self-initiated, future-orientated change of situations	Behavioural, light on	Crant, 2000; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Parker et al., 2010;

		responsibility assumption	Grant & Ashford, 2008
4. Responsible Leadership (Ethics)	Agency as moral accountability for social and organisational consequences	Normative, light on enactment	Maak & Pless, 2006; Voegtlin et al., 2012; Waldman & Balven, 2014
5. Empowerment / Structure (Strategy)	Agency as enabled by climate, autonomy, and discursive conditions	Contextual under-specifies individual mechanism.	Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al., 2011; Mantere & Vaara, 2008

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Together, these concepts form a clear pattern. As Table 1 summarises, managerial agency is not merely what leaders do. It is how they think (intentionality), what they own (responsibility assumption), and how they _act (proactive outcome shaping). This triad – cognitive-volitional, normative-affective, and behavioural – provides the foundation for our conceptual framework.

As summarised in Table 1, agency has been fragmented across four disconnected streams, each capturing part but not the whole. What is missing is an integrative view that connects intentionality (mind), responsibility assumption (heart), and proactive shaping (hands).

3.0 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Synthesis of Evidence

So, what is managerial agency, really? We argue it is not a personality trait, not a leadership style, but a higher-order, developable capability that shows up in a logical sequence: in the mind, then in the heart, then in the hands. It is the capacity to author organisational futures rather than be authored by them. First, it starts in the mind: intentionality. Intentionality is the quiet yet firm decision to act with purpose. It is not merely having a goal assigned by the KPIs; it is having a goal that you have consciously endorsed as your own. As Deci & Ryan (2000) show in self-determination theory, autonomous endorsement predicts persistence: when intention is truly yours, you internalise it. Bandura (2006) defines this as the representation of a future course of action – forethought that organises present behaviour. Concretely, in our fieldwork, this is the manager who, during a supply-chain crisis, says, "We will secure alternative sourcing in 14 days," versus the manager who says, "We are waiting for headquarters to advise." Both have information; only one has formed an endorsed intention. Without intentionality, leadership is compliance.

It then turns to the central element: assuming responsibility. This is where many leaders falter and where agency is empirically diminished. Claiming credit for success is straightforward; accepting responsibility for failure and saying, "This is my responsibility; I will fix it," is harder. This is not formal accountability established by the organisational chart but felt accountability (Pierce et al., 2001) a sense of psychological ownership in which the outcome is MINE. We synthesise this concept as an internal locus of control, drawing on Rotter, 1 (1966), combined with moral responsibility as described by Voegtlin et al. (2012). Recent evidence from the 2025 systematic review indicates that leaders who accept responsibility for unintended consequences foster greater trust and lower levels of misconduct than those who accept responsibility only for intended results (Voegtlin, 2011; McLoughlin et al., 2025). In practical terms, this is the difference between a leader who blames "the market" for an unsuccessful product launch and one who says, "I misread the

customer signal – here is what I am changing." The former externalises responsibility; the latter accepts it and learns. Without responsibility, intentionality becomes wishful thinking.

Finally, it shows up in observable actions of proactive outcome shaping. This represents the concept's behavioural enactment: taking initiative (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), raising improvement-orientated concerns, redesigning work methods, and shaping the future rather than merely predicting it. As Weick (1979) argued, leaders do not simply discover environments; they enact them. Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrate that this enactment translates digital leadership into organisational resilience: through their actions, leaders actively build more resilient organisations. In practical terms, this is the manager who not only intends to improve safety and feels responsible for doing so but also changes the shift handover process that day.

To make the construct measurable, we first operationalise it (Table 2) and then formalise its nomological network (Table 3 and Figure 1). Table 2 presents the integrative definition and initial items.

Table 2: Dimensions, Definitions and Initial Measurement Items for Managerial Agency

Dimension	Theoretical Anchor	Definition	Sample Indicators
1. Intentionality (Mind)	Bandura, 2001, 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ajzen, 1991	Cognitive-volitional capacity to form a self-endorsed future representation and act with purpose	I set goals I have personally endorsed, not just those assigned.
			I imagine future outcomes before acting.
			My actions are driven by conscious intent, not reaction.
2. Responsibility Assumption (Heart)	Pierce et al., 2001; Rotter, 1966; Voegtlin et al., 2012; Winter, 1992	Normative-affective internalisation of felt accountability for decisions and their consequences	I feel personally accountable for the consequences of my decisions.
			I say "this is my responsibility" even when I could blame the system.
			I experience psychological ownership for organisational outcomes
3. Proactive Outcome Shaping (Hands)	Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Parker et al., 2010; Weick, 1979	Behavioural enactment to take charge, change methods, and enact environments	I take charge to make constructive change happen.
			I redesign work processes rather than waiting for direction.
			I influence my environment rather than being influenced by it.

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These three are not independent dimensions that merely correlate; rather, they constitute a causal chain. This gives rise to four testable propositions grounded in the literature.

3.2 Integrative Framework and Propositions

To synthesise the preceding arguments, we propose an integrative framework that conceptualises managerial agency as a higher-order, developable capability operating through a sequential mechanism. As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework comprises four core components: (a) antecedents that activate agency, (b) the three-dimensional core of agency, (c) proximal and distal consequences, and (d) contextual moderators that facilitate or constrain its enactment.

We ground the framework in Bandura's (2001) triadic reciprocal determinism, in which personal factors, behaviour, and the environment interact bidirectionally.

P1: Intentionality drives responsibility. First, we distinguish between personal antecedents self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), psychological capital (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), and proactive personality (Crant, 2000), which provide the can-do belief, and contextual antecedents empowerment climate (Seibert et al., 2011), autonomy, and VUCA intensity (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), which provide the reason-to and opportunity-to. This is because self-endorsement creates ownership. When you are forced into a target, you can psychologically distance yourself and blame the system. When you chose it, you could not? Deci & Ryan (2000) and Pierce et al. (2001) empirically show autonomous motivation predicts psychological ownership. Concrete test: leaders high in autonomous goal endorsement will score higher on felt accountability for failure.

P2: Responsibility serves as the bridge: Second, managerial agency is conceptualised not as three parallel dimensions, but as a sequential chain: Intentionality (mind cognitive-volitional: forethought and goal endorsement) → Responsibility Assumption (Heart normative: felt accountability and psychological ownership) → Proactive Outcome Shaping (Hands behavioural: taking charge and enacting). This sequence underpins Proposition 1 (Intentionality drives responsibility) and Proposition 2 (Responsibility mediates the link between intentionality and shaping). Intention alone does not guarantee action; the intention-behaviour gap is well documented (Sheeran, 2002). A sense of responsibility translates good intentions into proactive behaviour. In their model of proactive motivation, Parker et al. (2010) demonstrate that felt responsibility is the most proximal driver of proactive action, surpassing self-efficacy. Accordingly, we argue that intentionality leads to proactive shaping through the assumption of responsibility. This constitutes mediated agency.

P3: Agency matters for the organisation, not just the individual: Third, the model distinguishes between proximal and distal outcomes. Proximal outcomes include adaptability and team empowerment, as agency spreads through social learning (Spreitzer, 1995). Distal outcomes include organisational resilience, the capacity to bounce forward (Duchek, 2020; Williams et al., 2017) and sustainable performance, both of which are critical in VUCA contexts.

This is not about leaders feeling good. Leaders who shape contexts foster more adaptable organisations through social learning (Bandura, 2001). Agency is contagious (Spreitzer, 1995). A manager who takes ownership enables the team to do the same. That collective empowerment builds what Duchek (2020) and Williams et al. (2017) call organisational resilience – the ability to bounce forward, not just bounce back. In a VUCA world, meta-analytic evidence shows that resilience and adaptability predict sustainable performance beyond efficiency (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Hannah et al., 2009; Seibert et al., 2011).

Concrete: unit-level managerial agency → team empowerment climate → organisational adaptability.

P4: Context either unlocks or blocks agency – agency needs a garden: Finally, we propose a moderation mechanism (Proposition 4): the empowerment climate and VUCA moderate the capacity-to-enactment link. As Mantere & Vaara (2008) argue, agency requires a garden in which to grow; even highly agentic managers will have their agency suppressed in low-autonomy, punitive bureaucracies. This is because even the most intentional leader may find their agency constrained in a bureaucratic, low-autonomy, punitive environment. This reflects Bandura's (2001) triadic reciprocal determinism, whereby the person, behaviour, and environment mutually influence one another. We argue that an empowerment climate (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995) characterised by access to information, support, resources, and opportunities moderates the translation of personal capacity into enacted agency. Similarly, VUCA intensity functions as a situational strengthener: in low-VUCA contexts, agency may be optional; in high-VUCA contexts, it is required (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). As Mantere & Vaara (2008) note, discursive and structural conditions enable or constrain strategic agency. For example, the same manager may demonstrate high agency in a high-autonomy technology firm and low agency in a blame-orientated bureaucracy. In summary, the mind forms intention, the heart owns it, the hands shape it, context allows it, and the organisation benefits from it.

3.3 A Process Model of Managerial Agency

Therefore, building on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) and the extant agency literature, we develop a process model of managerial agency. We conceptualise managerial agency as a higher-order, developable capability that unfolds sequentially from intention to action, consistent with Bandura's (2006) agentic perspective, in which intentionality and forethought precede self-reactiveness and action. This sequence also aligns with the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), in which autonomous intention is the proximal determinant of deliberate action, and with Deci & Ryan (2000), who show self-endorsed intention generates ownership.
Next, Table 3 presents our proposition framework.

Table 3: Proposition Framework for Managerial Agency

Proposition	Statement	Theoretical Logic & Supporting Evidence
P1	Intentionality positively predicts responsibility assumption.	Autonomous endorsement leads to psychological ownership. SDT posits behaviours driven by integrated regulation generate ownership and internalised responsibility (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When managers intentionally author actions rather than being externally coerced, they are more likely to internalise outcomes (Pierce et al., 2001; Van den Broeck et al., 2016).
P2	Responsibility assumption mediates the relationship between	Felt responsibility is the proximal driver of proactivity. Morrison and Phelps (1999) demonstrated that felt responsibility mediates the

	intentionality and proactive outcome shaping.	relationship between personality and taking charge. Parker et al. (2010) position felt responsibility as the bridge between can-do and reason-to motives. We argue that intentionality without ownership remains abstract; internalisation converts intention into behaviour shaping (Zhang et al., 2024).
P3	Managerial agency positively relates to organisational adaptability, empowerment, and resilience at the collective level.	Agentic leaders create agentic contexts. Through role modelling and social learning (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 2001) and empowering leadership behaviours (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995), managerial agency cascades into collective agency. Resilient organisations require leaders who proactively shape contexts rather than merely react (Duchek, 2020; Williams et al., 2017; Hannah et al., 2009).
P4	Empowerment climate and VUCA context moderate the capacity-to-enactment link.	Triadic reciprocal determinism posits agency needs enabling conditions (Bandura, 2001). In high empowerment climates (Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al., 2011), the translation of intentionality into shaping is amplified. Conversely, in extreme VUCA contexts without psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), agency may be constrained, supporting contingency views of proactivity (Parker et al., 2010; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

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Elaboration of Propositions:

P1 – Intentionality → Responsibility: P1 draws on Bandura (2001), who argued intentionality is the primary mark of agency. Managers who consciously set future courses exhibit autonomous motivation, which fosters ownership (Pierce et al., 2001). Unlike externally coerced compliance, self-authored intention creates psychological ownership, because the self is implicated in the outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Pierce et al., 2001).

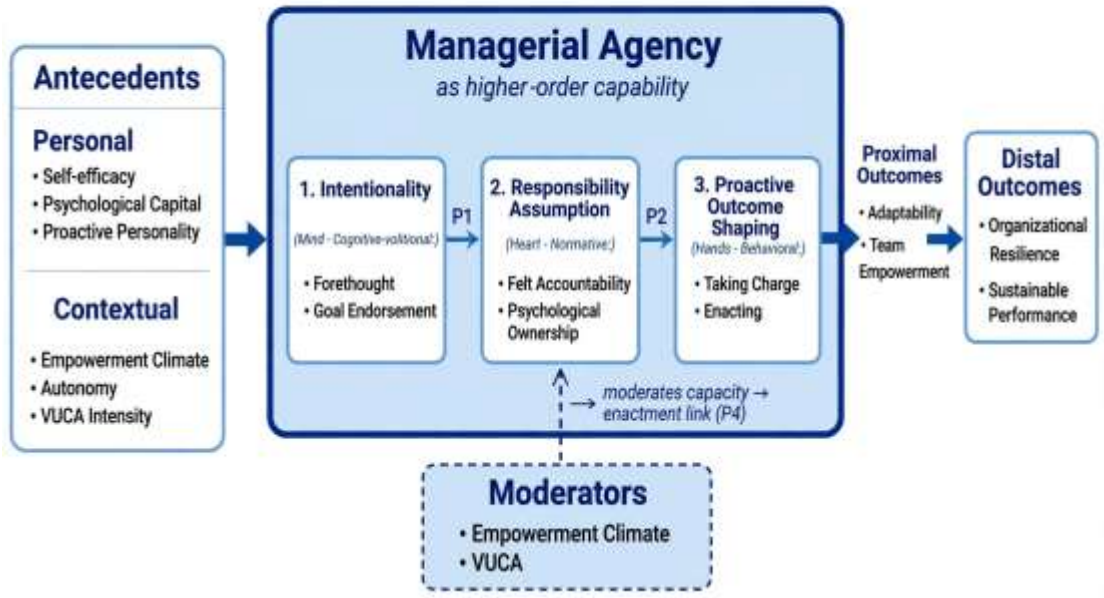
P2 – Responsibility as Mediating Bridge: P2 integrates responsibility literature (Winter, 1992) with proactivity. We extend Crant (2000) and Parker et al. (2006), who called for mediators between intention and proactive behaviour. Intending to change a process is cognitive; feeling that it is *your job* to change it is normative-affective. Responsibility assumption provides that moral-affective bridge. Without it, intention remains a wish.

P3 – Cross-level Consequences: P3 represents the cross-level extension. Drawing on Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017), we posit that agentic capacity is developable and contagious. Leaders high in managerial agency build adaptive capacity not by telling others to be resilient, but by initiating structure in volatility – enacting resources, routines, and meaning (Weick, 1979; Williams et al., 2017). Through empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al., 2011), this individual agency becomes collective.

P4 – Boundary Conditions: P4 addresses when agency flourishes or fails. Consistent with social cognitive theory's triadic model (Bandura, 2001), person, behaviour, and environment interact. An empowerment climate (Seibert et al., 2011) provides the autonomy, information, and safety needed to enact agency (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). VUCA is double-edged: moderate VUCA demands agency (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), but extreme VUCA without psychological safety constrains it. As Figure 1 shows, managerial agency begins as an internal, endorsed intention, is internalised as a felt responsibility, and culminates in the visible shaping of organisational outcomes, with contextual enablers conditioning its expression.

Figure 1 illustrates this integrative framework.

Figure 1: Integrative Framework of Managerial Agency



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4.0 Measurement and Future Research Agenda

To move from concept to construct, we must develop psychometrically sound measures following Podsakoff et al. (2016) scale development procedures.

Table 4: Proposed Scale for Managerial Agency – Initial Item Pool

Dimension	Definition	Sample Items – 7-point Likert (1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree)	Source Adaptation
Intentionality	Deliberate, self-authored setting of future-directed courses; cognitive-volitional forethought	1. I consciously set a future course before acting. 2. My actions reflect my own endorsed intentions, not just external pressure. 3. I act with a clear intention about the future I want to create. 4. I form a mental representation of desired outcomes before I act.	Bandura (2001); Bandura (2006); Deci & Ryan (2000); Ajzen (1991) – autonomy and forethought
Responsibility Assumption	Internalised ownership for outcomes, including failures; felt accountability beyond formal role	1. I feel personal ownership for outcomes, even when responsibility is shared. 2. I internalise failure as my responsibility to address rather than blame context 3. I hold myself accountable for the consequences of my decisions. 4. I say, "This is mine to fix," when problems arise in my area.	Pierce et al. (2001) – psychological ownership; Morrison & Phelps (1999) – felt responsibility; Rotter (1966) – internal locus; Voegtlin et al. (2012) – moral responsibility
Proactive Outcome Shaping	Self-initiated actions to shape the environment and prevent future problems; enactment	1. I actively shape my work environment rather than react to it. 2. I initiate changes to prevent future problems. 3. I create opportunities where none existed. 4. I take charge to drive constructive change even without a formal mandate.	Parker et al. (2006); Parker et al. (2010) – proactive behaviour; Crant (2000) – proactive personality; Morrison & Phelps (1999) – taking charge; Weick (1979) – enactment

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Notes on item generation: Items were adapted from validated scales to ensure content coverage while avoiding construct redundancy. Intentionality items capture self-endorsement and forethought rather than mere goal-setting. Responsibility items capture internalisation of both success and failure, distinguishing felt accountability (Pierce et al., 2001) from assigned accountability. Shaping items captures self-initiated, change-orientated behaviour rather than general citizenship.

Scale Validation Process

We recommend a rigorous three-study approach per Hinkin (1998) and Podsakoff et al. (2016) for scale development in organisational research:

Study 1 – Content Validation:
N = 7-10 expert judges (scholars in social cognitive theory, proactivity, and responsible leadership). Use a Q-sorting task to assign items to dimensions. Retain items with item-level Content Validity Index (CVI) > 0.80 and inter-judge agreement (Cohen's κ) > 0.75. Follow with cognitive interviews with 15 managers for face validity and clarity in the Nigerian and broader African context.

Study 2 – Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Structure:
- Sample 2a (EFA): N = 300 managers across sectors (private/public), using principal axis factoring with promax rotation. Expect a 3-factor solution, factor loadings > 0.60, and no cross-loadings > 0.30.
- Sample 2b (CFA): N = 350 separate managers; test a higher-order model where three first-order factors load on second-order Managerial Agency. Criteria: CFI > 0.95, TLI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.06, SRMR < 0.08.
- Convergent validity: AVE > 0.50, CR > 0.70 for each dimension.
- Discriminant validity: Against three close cousins – proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993), psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), and responsible leadership (Voegtlin et al., 2012) – using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT < 0.85 criterion (Henseler et al., 2015).

Study 3 – Criterion and Nomological Validation:
- Criterion validity: Link Managerial Agency to outcomes in Figure 1 – team empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), organisational adaptability (Williams et al., 2017) and resilience (Duchek, 2020).
- Predictive validity: Two-wave design to mitigate CMV and control for social desirability (Podsakoff et al., 2016).
- Moderation test of P4: Test Empowerment Climate (Seibert et al., 2011) as a moderator of capacity → enactment using interaction terms.

Recommended controls: To address common method bias, we recommend procedural remedies (temporal separation, anonymity, counterbalanced order) and statistical remedies (Harman single-factor, marker variable, CFA marker technique) per Podsakoff et al. (2016).

5.0 Implications and Conclusion

Management theory needed a more human and more agentic view of leadership. For decades we have been excellent at studying how leaders react, how they respond to followers, to context, and to stakeholders. We have been far less good at studying how they initiate and how they decide amid noise to author a different future.

This paper advances the conversation by defining managerial agency capacity experienced managers recognise but struggle to measure. It means acting intentionally, owning decisions and consequences, and shaping outcomes rather than reacting: stepping forward when plans collapse. Second, the paper connects previously disconnected research: psychology explains intentionality and self-efficacy; proactivity, behaviour but less moral ownership; accountability, responsibility but not its enactment; and another stream, the persistence of autonomous intentions. Together,

these perspectives explain agency: intentionality is the mind, responsibility assumption the heart, and proactive shaping the hands. Third, it connects individual capacity to organisational adaptability and resilience. Leaders who model intention and ownership inspire others through social learning to do the same, fostering resilience that means bouncing forward, not just back.

If agency can be developed rather than being a fixed trait, three HR practices can strengthen it. In selection, go beyond "What did you achieve?"—success may reflect a stable system. Ask: "Tell me about a time when things were genuinely uncertain and no one gave you direction. What did you intentionally decide to shape? And tell me about a time it went wrong; what did you take ownership of?" Listen for intentionality and accountability, not just results. Develop beliefs alongside skills. Build self-efficacy through mastery, modelling, and encouragement; strengthen psychological capital; and let leaders practise intentionality. Each Friday, writing "I feel ownership for..." can shift focus from tasks to their impact on people. Organisations cannot demand agentic leadership while disempowering people. Give leaders autonomy, information, and psychological safety. If initiative leads to approval forms or criticism for acting without permission, the organisation punishes rather than enables agency. The agency needs room to grow.

This conceptual paper is a starting point. First, proposed measures of intentionality, responsibility assumption, and proactive outcome shaping need psychometric validation, including content validity, factor analyses, and discriminant validity from related constructs (proactive personality, psychological empowerment, and responsible leadership). Second, longitudinal studies should test whether the sequence from intentionality to responsibility assumption to proactive shaping is linear or recursive. Third, cross-cultural research should examine responsibility-taking across power-distance cultures. In Nigeria and much of West Africa, ownership may be more collective; does the model still hold? Finally, research should investigate agency's dark side: when does it become hubris or overconfidence, or proactive shaping become reckless or unethical pro-organisational behaviour? Every virtue has a shadow.

Future research should: test the intentionality–responsibility–shaping sequence across three waves to establish temporal order and reduce common method bias; assess cross-cultural validity in high power-distance contexts, including Nigeria and India, where hierarchy may limit agency; examine agency's dark side, including its potential to become hubris and whether narcissism moderates curvilinear effects; and use multilevel modelling to study how leader agency fosters collective team agency and organisational adaptability.

This paper reframes managers as intentional shapers of their organisations' future, not reactive problem-solvers waiting for crises, instructions, or stability. In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, leadership's greatest capacity may be acting intentionally, owning consequences, and shaping what follows.

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