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An Investigation of the Managerial Competencies of Cultural Managers from the Perspective of Future Culture Scenarios

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to examine the managerial competencies of cultural managers. This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, employing field methods, semi-structured interviews, coding, questionnaires, and document analysis. The statistical population of the research included all experts in the field of futures studies related to the competencies of cultural managers. The research sample consisted of 13 experts selected through snowball sampling. Questionnaires related to the study variables were designed and distributed among the participants. After data collection, the information was analyzed through content analysis and the Delphi method by consulting experts, using MAXQDA2018 software. The results of the qualitative analysis indicated that futures studies in this domain require consideration of 152 subcategories. In the selective coding phase, the dimensions of the coding paradigm were identified, including six core categories: causal conditions, barriers, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences. One of the most important domains and causal conditions in the futures studies of cultural managers' competencies was the role of managerial skills. This is because cultural organizations, due to their unique characteristics, require managers who possess not only specialized knowledge in the field of culture but also managerial skills.

Keywords: Competency, Cultural Managers, Futures Studies, Scenario, Culture

Introduction

In today's volatile, complex, and rapidly changing organizational landscapes, the development and implementation of robust competency models for managers has emerged as an essential strategic requirement across sectors. Competencies represent the intersection of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable managers to perform their roles effectively in varied contexts. As managerial roles diversify in response to socio-economic, digital, and institutional transformations, competency models are no longer static checklists but dynamic frameworks guiding recruitment, development, evaluation, and succession planning [1, 2].

The concept of competency has evolved from traditional technical proficiencies toward a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional intelligence, digital adaptability, strategic foresight, ethical reasoning, and systems thinking [3, 4]. The breadth and depth of competencies demanded from contemporary managers are especially apparent in sectors such as education, healthcare, culture, and public administration—domains where human-centered leadership is central to long-term sustainability and resilience [5-7]. Yet, identifying, modeling, and validating such complex sets of competencies remain methodologically and contextually challenging tasks for researchers and practitioners alike [8, 9].

A key driver for this transformation has been the accelerated impact of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and knowledge economies on organizational governance and strategic decision-making. These forces necessitate not only technical and operational acumen but also advanced cognitive and behavioral competencies to lead within digitalized and uncertain environments [10, 11]. Within the context of public administration and policy, for example, the adoption of AI has introduced competency requirements related to ethical implementation, algorithmic literacy, and public accountability [10].

Similarly, the education sector—both primary and higher education—has witnessed a paradigm shift in managerial expectations. Educational leaders today are expected not only to manage administrative functions but to act as agents of change who lead learning organizations, foster inclusive pedagogical environments, and integrate socio-emotional intelligence into performance management [3, 12, 13]. The competencies required in these roles extend beyond structural management to include stakeholder communication, visionary planning, and institutional adaptability [14, 15].

In a similar vein, studies conducted within health and medical education institutions emphasize that managerial competency now involves a synthesis of professional ethics, communication intelligence, evidence-based decision-making, and resilience in crisis management [16, 17]. In a study conducted by Kingu et al. (2024), primary healthcare managers in Tanzania were found to require high levels of change management capability to successfully lead organizational transformations and service delivery innovation [18]. This highlights the cross-cultural and international relevance of managerial competencies across diverse institutional contexts.

The Iranian context further underscores the need for competency models that are adapted to local organizational cultures, institutional mandates, and developmental priorities. As emphasized by Dehghanpour Farashah et al. (2023), competency frameworks for government managers must be designed with reference to the specific bureaucratic structures, strategic visions, and sociopolitical dynamics of public organizations in Iran [19, 20]. Similar models developed for educational [1], medical [16], and cultural institutions [21] demonstrate the importance of contextual customization in competency modeling.

Furthermore, recent advancements in managerial theories, such as paradox theory, offer powerful lenses to interpret the dynamic tensions and dualities managers face in practice—such as control versus flexibility, centralization versus decentralization, and performance versus well-being. Nayeypour and Sehhat (2024) used paradox theory to propose a competency model for HR managers in the ICT sector, underscoring the necessity for cognitive complexity and integrative thinking in modern leadership [9].

Another emerging domain is succession planning and leadership continuity, where competency modeling supports talent identification and grooming. Studies by Montaghemi et al. (2023) and Montaghimi et al. (2023) introduced succession models in sports management based on competency standards, integrating both qualitative insights and institutional indicators [22, 23]. These studies confirm that leadership preparation cannot be decoupled from systematic competency evaluation.

It is also essential to understand how specific roles demand domain-related competencies. For instance, research by Jashni Arani et al. (2023) on the power plant industry identified coaching competencies as crucial for operational-level leadership, a finding that extends conventional managerial training beyond task delegation to human development [24]. Similarly, in the context of oil terminals in Iran, Kandarani et al. (2025) developed a validated model focused on specialized technical and managerial competencies tailored to the operational intricacies of that industry [25].

Beyond role-specific models, broader integrative frameworks aim to unify various dimensions of competency. Mikla (2025) emphasized a practical taxonomy integrating behavioral, cognitive, and emotional intelligence domains, supporting their

application in real-time decision-making scenarios [2]. Spieler (2024) further explored how middle managers balance autonomy, competence, and relatedness, aligning Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory with contemporary leadership models [4, 26].

In addition, competency development cannot be separated from organizational learning and cultural capital. Research by Dirgayasa (2024) highlighted the interaction between managerial competency and entrepreneurial ecosystems in shaping innovation performance and resilience in property companies [27]. Meanwhile, cultural intelligence and communication competencies have been examined as mediators of effective leadership in sectors like banking and education, as shown by Sadrayi and Najari (2022) and Sharifi et al. (2022) [15, 28].

This study builds upon these evolving insights by applying a grounded theory methodology integrated with the Delphi technique to identify and validate a comprehensive future-oriented competency model for cultural managers. Cultural organizations, due to their high dependence on human capital, symbolic interaction, and normative expectations, require managers who are not only strategic leaders but also empathetic communicators, cultural interpreters, and visionary change agents [21, 29]. The challenge lies in navigating the intersection of soft power and institutional accountability while fostering artistic innovation and stakeholder trust.

As emphasized by Zaharov and Kashtanova (2024), the modern manager's profile includes a complex combination of leadership, emotional adaptability, and process innovation [14]. These competencies must be rigorously modeled, tested, and embedded into training systems to ensure sustainable organizational excellence. This aligns with the findings of Zarei et al. (2022), who analyzed upstream policy documents to distill a foundational framework for school leadership competencies [13].

In sum, the literature reveals a consensus on the necessity of competency-based models tailored to institutional contexts, rapidly evolving external environments, and the psychological dimensions of leadership. However, despite the rich theoretical discourse and empirical contributions, gaps remain in translating these models into sector-specific tools that are future-oriented, adaptable, and empirically validated. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by constructing a grounded and scenario-informed model of managerial competency for cultural organizations, with implications for recruitment, training, evaluation, and succession planning.

Methods and Materials

The present research is qualitative, analytical, and exploratory in terms of its purpose, and its analytical approach is based on futures studies and the Delphi method. The statistical population in the qualitative part consists of academic experts in the field of culture (including five professors specializing in futures studies and five experienced cultural managers). The model design phase also employed futures studies and the Delphi method, involving individuals with sufficient knowledge and experience regarding the competencies of cultural managers, who could provide the researcher with valid insights and analyses on the various factors and components of cultural management competencies and their functional applications. The sampling method was purposive sampling.

The data collection instruments used in the study included, in the first stage, in-depth and semi-structured interviews aligned with the futures studies approach, and in the second stage, a Delphi questionnaire designed to determine the degree

of agreement among experts on the specified categories. The responses were captured using a Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree), and the questionnaires were distributed among the expert participants.

The data analysis in this study involved, for the qualitative section, identifying the core focus of the scenario (main question), analyzing past changes to identify trends and emerging driving forces, identifying future changes and known driving forces, determining key uncertainties, constructing a logical framework based on the identified uncertainties, enriching the key attributes, developing narratives for each scenario, and identifying themes within each scenario from a futures studies perspective. To identify the dimensions and components of cultural management competencies within cultural organizations, the Delphi method was used. For prioritizing these dimensions and components, the Friedman test was applied using SPSS software.

Findings and Results

In this study, the primary unit for analyzing qualitative data was open coding, yielding 152 codes. Subsequently, to determine the axial codes, the interviews were repeatedly reviewed, resulting in the identification of 14 open codes and 113 axial codes. Finally, during selective coding, seven core categories were identified: causal conditions, barriers, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences.

Table 1.

Causal Factors in the Futures Studies of Managerial Competency in Cultural Managers

Row	Item	Quotation
1	Managerial Skills	Cultural managers must be able to inspire and motivate their teams, establish strong relationships with stakeholders, and effectively communicate the organization's goals and values. This requires strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to make difficult decisions. Through effective leadership, cultural managers can present their organization's cultural values to society and actively contribute to the development of culture and the arts. Such leadership may lead to enhanced cultural services, audience engagement, and the promotion of cultural quality. The leadership role of cultural managers, as a key factor in cultural and artistic development, includes creating a conducive environment for cultural growth, fostering team spirit, formulating organizational strategies, developing employee skills, and responding to audience needs. (Interviewee 2, Pos. 5)
2	Personality Traits	Furthermore, cultural managers need strong emotional intelligence to navigate challenging situations and interact with stakeholders who have diverse perspectives and needs. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others. In the workplace, emotional intelligence is essential for cultural managers, as they must interact with a wide range of individuals and be capable of resolving issues and managing environmental tensions. (Interviewee 1, Pos. 23)
3	General Knowledge	Cultural managers who are capable of anticipating future cultural developments can also foresee changes in financial resources and revenue streams. This ability enables them to diversify funding sources and ensure their organization's financial sustainability in the long term. (Interviewee 6, Pos. 17)

Table 2

Consequences of Futures Studies on Managerial Competency of Cultural Managers

Row	Item	Quotation
1	Career Development	Cultural organizations are heavily dependent on the skills and expertise of their employees and artists. However, retaining talented staff and artists can be challenging, especially in the face of budget constraints and competition from other organizations. To overcome this challenge, cultural managers must create a positive and supportive work environment, offer competitive salaries and benefits, and provide opportunities for professional growth and development.
2	Contingency Perspective	By conducting case studies of organizations that will face similar future conditions, one can identify the required managerial competencies and design an appropriate managerial competency model. (Interviewee 5, Pos. 9).
3	Systemic Perspective	In a dynamic cultural environment, cultural managers must be flexible, adaptable, and open to new ideas. As workplace leaders, cultural managers must remain adaptable and responsive to environmental changes and fluctuations. Flexibility refers to the ability to adjust to changing environmental conditions, and adaptability refers to the capacity to align with people and circumstances in the workplace. (Interviewee 10, Pos. 23).

Table 3*Futures Strategies for Managerial Competency in Cultural Managers*

Row	Item	Quotation
1	Strategic Knowledge	From my personal experience, having worked in this field for many years, the ability to develop and implement long-term plans and strategies aligned with the organization's mission and vision is essential for cultural managers. This includes analyzing trends, anticipating challenges, and identifying growth opportunities. (Interviewee 1, Pos. 5).
2	Organizational Justice	Cultural managers must prioritize employee development and training to prepare them for the organization's cultural advancement. Employee training can lead to enhanced performance and efficiency. Updated employees familiar with new technologies can improve their work capabilities through the knowledge and experience they gain. (Interviewee 7, Pos. 13).
3	Transparency	Enhancing transparency – new technologies can increase transparency regarding organizational goals, metrics, challenges, and opportunities. This shared understanding fosters cultural alignment around common objectives. (Interviewee 11, Pos. 21).

Table 4*Contextual Factors in Futures Studies on Managerial Competency of Cultural Managers*

Row	Item	Quotation
1	Requirement Analysis Skills	By anticipating future cultural developments, cultural managers can better respond to the cultural needs of their clients and integrate those needs effectively into their managerial decisions. (Interviewee 9, Pos. 17).

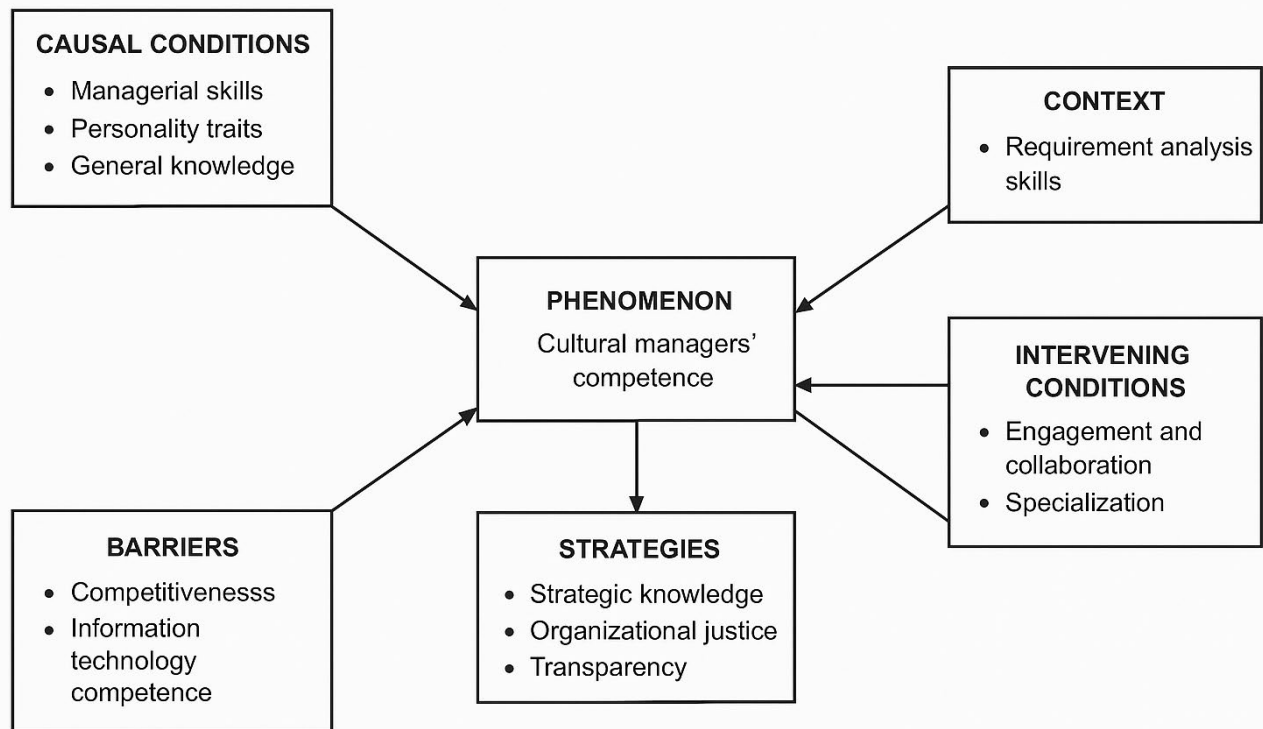
Table 5.*Barriers in Futures Studies on Managerial Competency of Cultural Managers*

Row	Item	Quotation
1	Competitiveness	From my personal experience, having worked in this field for many years, the ability to develop and implement long-term plans and strategies aligned with the organization's mission and vision is essential for cultural managers. This includes analyzing trends, anticipating challenges, and identifying growth opportunities. (Interviewee 1, Pos. 5).
2	Information Technology Competency	Cultural managers must prioritize employee development and training to prepare them for the organization's cultural advancement. Training can enhance employee performance and effectiveness. Updated staff familiar with new technologies can improve performance through enhanced capabilities, varied experiences, and broader knowledge. (Interviewee 7, Pos. 13).

Table 6.*Intervening Conditions in Futures Studies on Managerial Competency of Cultural Managers*

Row	Item	Quotation
1	Participation and Collaboration	One of the emerging challenges for cultural organizations is the need to engage with audiences in new and innovative ways. With the rise of social media and other digital platforms, audience expectations for interaction have increased, and cultural organizations must find new ways to connect with their audiences and build loyalty. (Interviewee 9, Pos. 19).
2	Specialization	Cultural managers must have a deep understanding of the cultural landscape in which they operate, including the history, traditions, and values of the communities they serve. This requires cultural sensitivity, empathy, and the ability to engage effectively with diverse audiences. (Interviewee 8, Pos. 5).

The final model of futures studies on managerial competency of cultural managers is a comprehensive and practical framework designed to evaluate and enhance the competencies of cultural managers. This model assesses managerial competencies from multiple dimensions and ultimately supports the development of effective and actionable strategies to improve these competencies in cultural organizations.

Figure 1*Final Model of Futures Studies on Managerial Competency of Cultural Managers (Qualitative Analysis)*

Grounded theory model Curultural managers' competence

Based on the results obtained from the third round of the Delphi method and the analysis of the mean scores of all existing indicators, the findings indicate that all 72 remaining indicators received scores higher than 4. Given the acceptable value of Kendall's coefficient of concordance, these indicators were identified as the final set of indicators to be examined in this study (Table 7):

Table 7*Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance*

Round	Number of Items	Number of Experts	Kendall's W	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
First Round	229	13	0.254	226	0.000
Second Round	115	13	0.347	112	0.000
Third Round	72	13	0.768	69	0.000

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to explore and model the future-oriented managerial competencies of cultural managers through a qualitative grounded theory approach and Delphi validation. The findings revealed that 72 core indicators—emerging from an initial 229—achieved a consensus among expert participants in the third round of Delphi, with all scoring above 4 on the Likert scale and Kendall's coefficient of concordance ($W = 0.768$, $p < 0.001$) indicating a strong agreement. Through iterative coding—open, axial, and selective—seven major categories were identified: causal conditions,

contextual conditions, intervening conditions, barriers, strategies, and consequences, culminating in a final grounded theory model for managerial competency in cultural institutions.

The causal conditions underscore the foundational role of managerial skills, emotional intelligence, and general knowledge. These findings align with the premise that leadership within cultural settings necessitates a deep integration of interpersonal, cognitive, and strategic competencies [3, 4]. The role of emotional intelligence, particularly, was emphasized by participants as a determining factor in dealing with stakeholder diversity and environmental ambiguity—an observation supported by the work of Sadrayi and Najari (2022), who stressed the critical link between communication competence and cultural intelligence in managerial roles [28].

Moreover, contextual conditions, such as requirement analysis and the ability to anticipate future cultural trends, revealed that managers must demonstrate proactive analytical capacity. This finding echoes the research of Rasouli et al. (2024), who argue that the success of educational institutions is contingent upon managers who can forecast cultural demands and integrate them into sustainable strategies [8]. Similarly, Zarei et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of alignment between managerial foresight and the goals articulated in upstream educational policies [13].

The intervening conditions highlight the importance of participatory leadership and specialization. Participants underscored the role of engaging audiences through digital and social platforms and having culturally rooted awareness of the traditions and values they serve. These dimensions were closely mirrored in the findings of Kingu et al. (2024), who examined how healthcare managers' competencies in Tanzania were shaped by their ability to adapt to local socio-cultural ecosystems [18]. The role of cultural sensitivity is also prominent in the work of Gunawan et al. (2023), who found that nurse managers' effectiveness was significantly tied to their ability to navigate the emotional and contextual realities of hospital staff [5].

Barriers identified in this study include a lack of competitiveness and insufficient information technology literacy among cultural managers. These barriers resonate with the work of Mahmoudi Khaledi et al. (2023), who pointed out a systemic weakness in digital competencies among public sector managers, particularly in education and evaluation systems [11]. Sandoval-Almazan et al. (2024) similarly highlighted that the integration of artificial intelligence in local governments demands new competency frameworks centered on digital ethics, system integration, and change management [10]. Therefore, bridging these technological gaps is imperative for equipping cultural managers to thrive in digitally mediated environments.

The strategies emerging from the data emphasize the criticality of strategic knowledge, organizational justice, and transparency. These strategies are not only future-oriented but also reflective of sustainable human resource management. Dehghanpour Farashah et al. (2023) offered comparable insights in their model for Iran's Planning and Budget Organization, where long-term planning, ethical leadership, and internal justice were prioritized as strategic competencies [20]. Similarly, Spieler (2024) noted that transparency in decision-making enhances trust, goal alignment, and cultural coherence within institutions [4].

The consequences identified in this research suggest that embedding competency models within cultural organizations can enhance career development, foster systemic thinking, and promote contingency-based leadership. These findings align with the conclusions of Mikla (2025), who emphasized the need for practical application of competency models that adapt to real-world dynamics and support professional advancement [2]. Furthermore, Montaghemi et al. (2023) and Montaghimi

et al. (2023) demonstrated that succession planning in sports organizations becomes effective only when tied to competency-based development paths [22, 23].

The Delphi results confirmed the high reliability of the final model. The growing consensus among experts regarding the 72 key indicators shows not only the robustness of the theoretical framework but also its empirical credibility. This iterative consensus approach resembles that adopted by Kandarani et al. (2025) in their model for oil terminal managers, emphasizing the integration of role-specific and context-sensitive indicators in model validation [25]. In this regard, the methodology adopted in the present study—grounded theory triangulated with Delphi rounds—offers a flexible yet rigorous structure for building sector-specific competency models.

The model also has pedagogical implications. As pointed out by Tovkanets (2022), effective educational leadership depends heavily on competency-driven training and mentoring processes [12]. Hence, cultural institutions can integrate the present model into their professional development curricula to cultivate more adaptive and context-aware managers. Sharifi et al. (2022) offered a similar implementation strategy for improving professional counseling in Tehran's educational institutions [15].

Likewise, Deci (2023) emphasized that managerial decision-making improves significantly when grounded in professional competence frameworks that account for behavioral diversity and situational complexity [26]. In our findings, managers who could synthesize emotional intelligence, stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning were identified as high-performers—a profile consistent with studies conducted in both public and private sectors [24, 27]. Moreover, the role of ethical decision-making and value-based leadership, which emerged strongly in this study, echoes the ethical competency dimensions proposed by Vakilzadeh Rahnema Zarandi et al. (2023) in the health sector [17].

Finally, by contextualizing managerial competencies within the cultural sector, this study advances the theoretical argument that competency frameworks must reflect sector-specific operational logic. This position is reinforced by the findings of Abbaspour et al. (2024), who designed a customized competency model for secondary education managers, emphasizing that generic models often fail to capture organizational realities [1]. Similarly, Madani et al. (2023) argued that contextualization is key when transferring competency models across sectors [16]. The grounded model presented here adds to this discourse by illustrating how cultural dynamics, stakeholder expectations, and institutional missions shape the required competencies of managers.

This study, despite its methodological rigor, has several limitations. First, the reliance on qualitative interviews and expert-based Delphi rounds limits generalizability. The cultural specificity of the study, focused primarily on Iranian institutions, may constrain its direct applicability in different national or organizational settings. Moreover, although the Delphi method enhances reliability through expert consensus, it remains susceptible to dominant voices influencing outcomes, even within anonymized structures.

Future studies should explore quantitative validation of the proposed competency model through large-scale surveys across different cultural institutions. Comparative studies between sectors—such as education, healthcare, and media—could uncover cross-domain transferable competencies. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess how the identified competencies evolve in response to environmental disruptions like digitalization, political change, or funding fluctuations. Integrating artificial intelligence or machine learning tools into competency assessment processes may also open new frontiers in model optimization.

Organizations should embed the proposed competency framework into HR systems, including recruitment, performance evaluation, and leadership development programs. Capacity-building workshops and digital upskilling sessions targeting the identified barriers should be institutionalized. Policy-makers should consider adopting this model as a guideline in cultural ministry planning and evaluation protocols. Finally, managers themselves should engage in self-assessment using this framework to guide their continuous professional growth and adaptive leadership evolution.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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