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The Career Traits Compass

The Theory and Design of a Leadership Dispositional-Fit Assessment

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Executive Summary

The move into leadership is one of the most consequential decisions a person makes about their career—and one of the least informed. People step toward management for prestige, pay, or the assumption that advancement requires it, rarely asking whether the day-to-day demands of leading fit the way they tend to operate. The Career Traits Compass is a research-informed assessment designed to bring evidence to that decision. It measures the dispositional tendencies most relevant to leadership and turns them into developmental guidance—showing where leadership is likely to feel like a natural fit, where it will take real effort, and where the smarter move is to build support around a limitation rather than grind against it.

This paper sets out the theory and design behind the instrument; a separate report documents its psychometric evaluation.

The core idea. Leadership is best understood not as a status or a personality type but as a *role environment*—a recurring set of demands (ambiguity, accountability for others, conflict, long time horizons, influence without full control) that bring some dispositional tendencies to the surface and leave others dormant. Leadership potential, on this view, is neither "born" nor "made"; it is the probabilistic fit between a person's stable tendencies and what the role asks of them. The Compass helps assess that fit. It does not forecast who will be an effective leader—it indicates where the demands of leadership are likely to feel sustainable and where they will strain.

What it measures. The Compass measures 23 behavioral tendencies, organized into 11 components and four domains:

- **Nerve** — acting decisively, candidly, and steadily under pressure.
- **Elasticity** — updating strategies, relationships, and behavior as conditions change.
- **Soundness** — emotional regulation, accountability, and interpersonal integrity.
- **Wonderment** — inquiry, evidence-seeking, and perspective.

These are not new personality constructs. They reorganize well-established trait science—the same territory mapped by the Five-Factor Model—around the specific demands of leadership, in language built for development rather than diagnosis.

How results are read. Scores describe current behavioral probabilities, not fixed ceilings. The Compass sorts a person's traits into three tiers: *Strengths to Leverage* (deploy what already comes naturally), *Areas of Potential* (mid-range tendencies, the natural place to focus development), and *Support Zones* (where the wiser move is to build structures and partnerships rather than force change). The aim is not to maximize every trait but to align a person's natural configuration with the demands they actually face.

What it is not. The Compass is a developmental tool, not a verdict. It is not a measure of intelligence, worth, or talent; not the sole basis for hiring or promotion decisions; and not a measure of values or motivation. Within the Becoming You Method it speaks to the Aptitudes pillar—how a person operates—while the Values Bridge, the Viewfinder, and the Opportunity Engine address what a person values, how others experience them, and where real opportunity lies.

1. Introduction

For many people, the path forward in a career eventually seems to point in one direction: up, into leadership. More scope, more pay, more standing—and, often, the sense that advancement simply requires it. But moving from doing the work to leading the people who do it is not more of the same work. It is a different kind of work, with different demands. Whether to make that move—or to keep building as an individual contributor—is among the most consequential decisions a person makes about their career.

It is also among the least informed. People step toward leadership for prestige, for compensation, or because the next rung is the only one in view, rarely pausing to ask whether the day-to-day demands of leading fit the way they are built. When the fit is poor, the costs are real—strain, depleted energy, and burnout—and capable individual contributors can become struggling managers (Benson et al., 2019). When the fit is good, the same demands can feel energizing and sustainable. Much of that difference comes down to disposition—the stable tendencies a person brings to pressure, change, other people, and uncertainty.

The Career Traits Compass is a research-informed assessment built to bring evidence to that decision. It measures the dispositional tendencies most relevant to leadership—organized into four domains: Nerve, Elasticity, Soundness, and Wonderment—and turns them into a clear picture of how naturally a person's tendencies meet the demands of leadership: where those demands are likely to feel natural, where they will take deliberate effort, and where the wiser move is to build support rather than force change.

What the Compass offers is deliberately bounded. It is not a verdict on whether someone "is" a leader, not a measure of intelligence, worth, or talent, and not a screen for hiring or promotion. It treats leadership potential as a probability shaped by disposition rather than a fixed destiny—a starting point for choosing and developing with intention, not a label to live under.

The sections that follow build the case in steps: what makes leadership a distinct environment of demands (Section 2); why the fit between a person's disposition and those demands matters (Section 3); the personality science behind measuring such tendencies (Section 4); the instrument itself, and how it was built (Section 5); how to read a profile and turn it into action (Section 6); and the boundaries of the tool, along with its place in the wider Becoming You Method (Section 7).

2. Leadership as a Role Environment

Leadership is easy to picture as a rung on a ladder—a title, a bigger team, a larger salary. That picture is misleading. Leadership and management are better understood as a distinct *role environment*: a set of recurring conditions that place characteristic demands on whoever steps into them. Moving from contributing individually to leading others does not simply add responsibility; it changes the kind of responsibility, and with it the demands a person must meet day to day.

A handful of demands recur across leadership roles—a pattern Henry Mintzberg documented in close observation of managerial work and revisited decades later (Mintzberg, 1973, 2009). Leaders act under ambiguity and time pressure, often with incomplete information. They are accountable not only for their own output but for the performance, development, and morale of others. They carry a heavier social and relational load—setting tone, absorbing stress, working through conflict, and delivering hard messages without rupturing trust. They operate on longer time horizons, where the consequences of a decision may not surface for months. And they exercise influence more than direct control, persuading and aligning people they cannot simply instruct.

These demands are not uniform; their mix and intensity shift with the role and the organizational level (Mumford et al., 2007). A startup founder, a first-time team lead, and a seasoned department head meet them in very different proportions, and any given role blends them in its own way. Leadership is not a single profile, and it is not separable from management: the same role almost always requires a person both to lead—setting direction and influencing—and to manage—organizing work and holding standards. The meaningful contrast, then, is not "leader versus manager," nor even a clean line between leadership and individual-contributor work. It is a shift in the *mix and intensity of demands* a role places on a person—a shift pronounced enough that tendencies which stayed quiet in individual work can become consequential once someone is leading.

That last point is the crux, and it has a name in personality science. Trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) holds that a disposition remains largely latent until a situation supplies cues that make it relevant; behavior emerges when a person's stable tendencies meet conditions that call those tendencies out. A capacity for steady composure is invisible on a calm day and decisive in a crisis. An appetite for new information matters little in a settled routine and a great deal when the ground is shifting. Situations, in other words, are not neutral backdrops—they activate some tendencies and leave others dormant.

Leadership environments are unusually dense with activating cues, and those cues cluster around a recognizable set of demands. Table 1 maps the recurring demands of leadership to the tendencies they call out. Read this way, the demands of the role and the dispositions that meet them are two sides of the same situation.

Table 1. Recurring leadership demands and the tendencies they activate

When a leadership role demands…	…it activates these tendencies
Acting under ambiguity and time pressure, with incomplete information	Decisiveness under ambiguity; composure under pressure *(Nerve)*
Sustaining effort and quality across long, demanding stretches	Performance drive; consistent drive *(Nerve)*
Delivering hard truths and working through conflict without losing trust	Candor balanced with care *(Nerve)*; emotional regulation *(Soundness)*
Adapting as conditions, tools, and strategies keep changing	Learning agility; situational flexibility *(Elasticity)*
Reaching beyond familiar circles for perspective, talent, and information	Weak-tie cultivation and maintenance *(Elasticity)*
Carrying responsibility for others—setting tone, owning outcomes, recovering from setbacks	Uplifting presence; accountability; resilience; realistic self-perception *(Soundness)*
Making sense of complex, fast-moving information and anticipating what comes next	Curiosity and research appetite; perspective formation; information foresight *(Wonderment)*

The four families of tendencies that leadership conditions most reliably activate—Nerve, Elasticity, Soundness, and Wonderment—are the domains the Career Traits Compass measures. The instrument is not an attempt to capture personality in the abstract; it focuses on the dispositions that leadership situations bring to the surface.

Framing leadership as an environment of activating demands does two things for what follows. First, it explains why these particular tendencies, rather than personality at large, are the ones worth measuring here. Second, it sets up the practical question the Compass exists to answer. The same conditions that activate a tendency also reveal whether it comes naturally or takes real effort—and that makes the fit between a person's dispositional profile and the demands of a leadership role something we can actually assess, and prepare for. That question, person-role fit, is the subject of the next section.

3. Why Disposition Matters: Fit, Not Destiny

If leadership is an environment of activating demands, the question that follows is whether a person's tendencies are equipped to meet them. This is the logic of *person-role fit*: outcomes depend not on the person alone or the role alone, but on the match between what a role requires and what a person reliably brings to it. It is also why leadership potential is best understood as neither "born" nor "made." Stable tendencies are real and consequential, but they do not operate in a vacuum; leadership capability emerges from the interaction between those tendencies and the specific demands of the role a person occupies (Zaccaro et al., 2004; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

Fit, though, is not one thing. Research distinguishes *demands-abilities fit*—whether a person can meet what a role requires—from *needs-supplies fit*—whether a role supplies what a person wants and values (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Edwards, 1991). The two are independent: a role can demand exactly the tendencies someone has in abundance while supplying little of what they find meaningful, or the reverse. The Career Traits Compass speaks to the first question. It assesses whether a person's dispositions are matched to the demands leadership places on them—not whether leadership will feel personally meaningful or worthwhile, which is a separate question of values and motivation. In the Becoming You Method, that second question belongs to the Values Bridge; the two instruments are built to answer different halves of fit, a point Section 7 returns to.

Why the demands-abilities side matters is straightforward: misfit is costly. When a person's tendencies are poorly matched to a role's demands, the role tends to drain rather than energize—producing strain, depleted reserves, and, over time, burnout and early exit. Good fit does the opposite, making the same demands feel more natural and more sustainable. Decades of person-environment fit research bear this out: across 172 studies and 836 effect sizes, better fit showed broadly generalizable links to favorable work attitudes, lower withdrawal and strain, longer tenure, and—to a lesser degree—performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It is worth being candid about what this evidence does and does not establish: the strongest and most consistent links are to attitudes and retention, and much of the fit literature measures *perceived* fit; the connection to objective performance is real but smaller. The Compass therefore treats dispositional fit as a guide to where leadership is likely to feel sustainable or straining, and where development will pay off—not as a forecast of performance.

That restraint carries into how strong a claim the instrument makes. The research linking personality to leadership is clearest for leadership *emergence*—who steps forward and is recognized as a leader—and more mixed for leadership *effectiveness* once someone is in the role (Judge et al., 2002). The Career Traits Compass takes the cautious reading—and a more useful one. A strong profile is not a guarantee that someone will be an effective leader. What it tells them is more practical than that: the demands of leadership are likely to feel more natural and sustainable, and easier to grow into, than they would for someone whose tendencies run against the grain of the role. The Compass shows where leadership is apt to feel like a tailwind and where

it will take deliberate effort. Dispositions shape likelihoods, not destinies—but knowing your own is what makes it possible to choose, and to prepare, with intention.

This is the case for measuring dispositional fit. It rests, however, on a premise a careful reader is right to question: that these “tendencies” are real, reasonably stable, and measurable in the first place—rather than intuitive labels dressed in the language of science. The next section takes up that premise directly.

4. The Science Underneath: Hierarchical Trait Measurement

The tendencies that the Career Traits Compass measures were not invented for it. They rest on more than a century of research in personality and leadership—a history worth recounting briefly, because it explains both why the dispositional approach fell out of favor and why it is now firmly back.

Early trait research was dismissed as too simplistic. Reviewing the evidence at midcentury, Stogdill (1948) concluded that no single trait reliably distinguished leaders across all situations, and over the following decades leadership theory moved through behavioral, situational, and other models that emphasized circumstance over disposition (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Dinh et al., 2014). That dismissal of traits proved premature. The early studies had organized traits poorly and largely ignored context; once researchers had better methods (especially meta-analysis), a shared vocabulary for personality (the Five-Factor Model, or "Big Five"; Goldberg, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999), and the habit of treating traits and situations together, the dispositional view returned on firmer ground (Lord et al., 1986; House & Aditya, 1997). Organized and assessed systematically, personality shows meaningful and replicable relationships with leadership (Hoffman et al., 2011; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Judge et al., 2002; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

The modern view does not pit traits against behavior; it integrates them. Traits shape the behaviors a person tends to enact, and leadership outcomes reflect both (DeRue et al., 2011). This is the same logic introduced in Section 2: a disposition becomes visible as behavior when a situation calls it out. The Compass measures dispositional tendencies precisely because they are the dispositional sources that shape the leadership behaviors that matter.

Personality is also organized—and at more than one level of breadth. Broad domains such as the Big Five sit above narrower facets, with a meaningful intermediate level in between: DeYoung et al. (2007) showed that each Big Five domain resolves into two distinct "aspects," and Judge et al. (2013) found that narrower trait measures add predictive precision over broad domains alone, especially for complex outcomes. Leadership attributes are themselves multi-level, with broad dispositions shaping more specific capabilities (Zaccaro et al., 2004). The practical lesson is that measuring personality at a single level of breadth leaves information on the table; a well-built instrument captures both the big picture and the detail.

This is the tradition the Career Traits Compass belongs to, and it clarifies what the instrument is—and is not. Its architecture is deliberately multi-level: four broad domains for an interpretable overview, 11 intermediate components, and 23 specific traits for precision and targeted development. And the tendencies it measures live in the same trait space personality science has long mapped. That overlap is worth stating plainly rather than obscuring: composure under pressure is kin to emotional stability, curiosity to openness, executional reliability to conscientiousness. Grit is a pointed example: the perseverance it captures has been shown to

overlap heavily with conscientiousness and to add only modest predictive power on its own (Credé et al., 2017), which is exactly why the Compass treats it as one leadership-relevant facet among many rather than a stand-alone engine of success. The Compass does not claim to have discovered new elements of personality, and it is not a "type" system that sorts people into boxes—its traits are continuous dimensions on which everyone falls somewhere. What it does is reorganize this well-charted dispositional territory around a single purpose: the activating demands of leadership identified in Section 2, rendered in language built for development rather than diagnosis. Put simply, the Compass does not replace the Big Five; it translates the logic of hierarchical personality measurement into leadership-relevant, applied terms. Whether that leadership-specific organization holds up as reliable and distinct is an empirical question—one a companion psychometric report will take up. The claim here is the more modest and prior one: that the Compass is built on validated ground and organized in a coherent, theory-driven way.

With that foundation in place, the next section presents the instrument itself—the full model, and how it was developed.

5. The Career Traits Compass Model

The preceding sections make the case for the kind of instrument the Compass is: a hierarchical, leadership-contextualized measure of dispositional tendencies, built to inform questions of fit rather than to issue verdicts. This section presents the instrument itself—its structure, the thinking behind each domain, and how it was built.

The model

The Career Traits Compass measures four domains, organized into 11 components and 23 traits. The domains are the broad families of tendency that leadership conditions most reliably activate:

- **Nerve** — the capacity to act decisively, candidly, and steadily under pressure or uncertainty.
- **Elasticity** — the ability to update strategies, relationships, and behavior as conditions change.
- **Soundness** — the reliability of emotional regulation, accountability, and interpersonal integrity.
- **Wonderment** — the orientation toward inquiry, evidence-seeking, and perspective integration.

These tendencies are not unique to leadership; stamina, adaptability, self-awareness, and curiosity matter across many kinds of work. The Compass organizes them specifically around the conditions under which leadership roles most reliably activate and stress them.

The three levels do distinct work, mirroring the multi-level logic described in Section 4. Domains give an interpretable high-level read; components group related tendencies into functional clusters; traits are the granular, behaviorally defined level where development actually happens. Figure 1 lays out the full structure, and Appendix A defines every trait and lists the influences behind each domain.

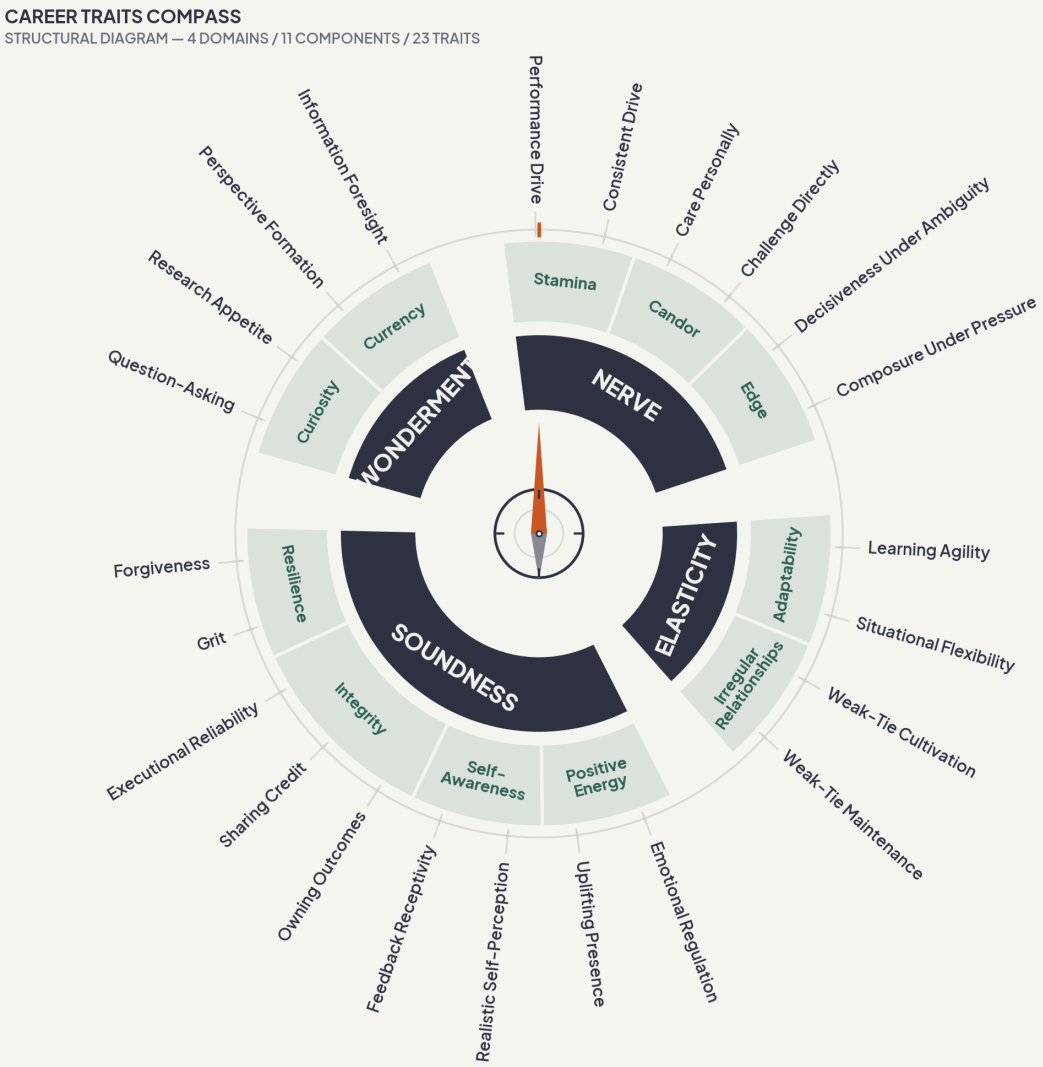

Figure 1. The Career Traits Compass model.

The full structure of the instrument, read from the center outward: four domains (inner ring), 11 components (middle ring), and 23 behaviorally defined traits (outer labels). Arc length is proportional to the number of traits each domain and component contains. Full construct definitions appear in Appendix A.

What informs each domain

Each domain was shaped by recognizable bodies of work on the tendencies it covers—from research on grit, candor, and judgment under uncertainty to work on mindset, psychological safety, emotional intelligence, and forecasting. These influences are listed by domain in Appendix A. They are offered as intellectual lineage, not as proof of validity, which rests on the measurement work described below and in the companion report.

How the Compass was built

The Career Traits Compass began in practice. Its four domains emerged from Professor Suzy Welch's four decades of coaching leaders, from her teaching at NYU Stern, and from observing what distinguished people who thrived in leadership from those who flourished as individual contributors or strained under management. As set out in her book *Becoming You: The Proven Method for Crafting Your Authentic Life and Career* (Welch, 2025), these were not abstract categories but recurring patterns drawn from thousands of interactions with students, executives, and entrepreneurs.

Practitioner insight set the starting point; research discipline turned it into an instrument. The observed patterns were mapped onto established theory in personality, leadership, and person-role fit, and organized into the multi-level structure described in Section 4—broad domains for overview, components for functional grouping, traits for behavioral precision.

Items were written following standard practices for scale construction (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021; Hinkin, 1998). Each item targets a specific trait and describes an observable behavioral tendency under real-world conditions—how a person tends to respond to uncertainty, conflict, change, or shared responsibility—rather than an attitude, an aspiration, or a hypothetical. Specific behavioral descriptions of this kind are easier to rate consistently than global self-impressions, and wording was kept concrete and balanced in tone to limit social-desirability and acquiescence effects (Paulhus, 1991).

Development proceeded across four iterations:

- **Construct specification** defined the hierarchy and tied each domain, component, and trait to the relevant literature.
- **Item generation** produced an initial pool guided by behavioral specificity and construct relevance.
- **Expert review** had specialists in leadership development, coaching, and organizational psychology evaluate each item for accuracy, clarity, and coverage, prompting revisions (Haynes et al., 1995).
- **Pilot testing and applied use** put preliminary versions to work in coaching settings, NYU Stern MBA courses, and client implementations. Across every version, the four domains and 11 components held steady; individual traits and items were edited, added, or dropped based on feedback and real-world interpretability (Clark & Watson, 1995).

The result is a 93-item assessment that takes about 20 minutes, uses a 7-point self-rating scale, and is designed for development rather than high-stakes selection. Its provenance is its logic in miniature: built from lived observation, disciplined by research, and refined through repeated real-world use. How its scores are read—and turned into guidance a person can act on—is the subject of the next section.

6. Reading a Profile: Interpretation and Development

A score is only as useful as the way it is read, and the Compass's interpretive philosophy is where much of its value lies. Every number it produces is a starting point for a conversation, not a verdict —a description of how a tendency shows up now, and a pointer toward what to do about it.

Scores as probabilities, not ceilings

This follows directly from the science in Section 4. Personality is stable enough to measure meaningfully: people do not become unrecognizably different from one season to the next, and relative standing on traits is fairly consistent across adulthood (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). But stable is not the same as fixed. Personality also changes systematically over the life course, particularly through adulthood as people take on new roles and responsibilities (Roberts et al., 2006). A Compass score therefore describes a current behavioral probability—how reliably a tendency is likely to appear across situations right now—not a ceiling on who someone can become.

Expression bands

To make scores legible, results at every level are placed on a common scale of expression and grouped into six bands. The bands translate a number into plain behavioral meaning: how consistently a tendency shows up, and what to do with it.

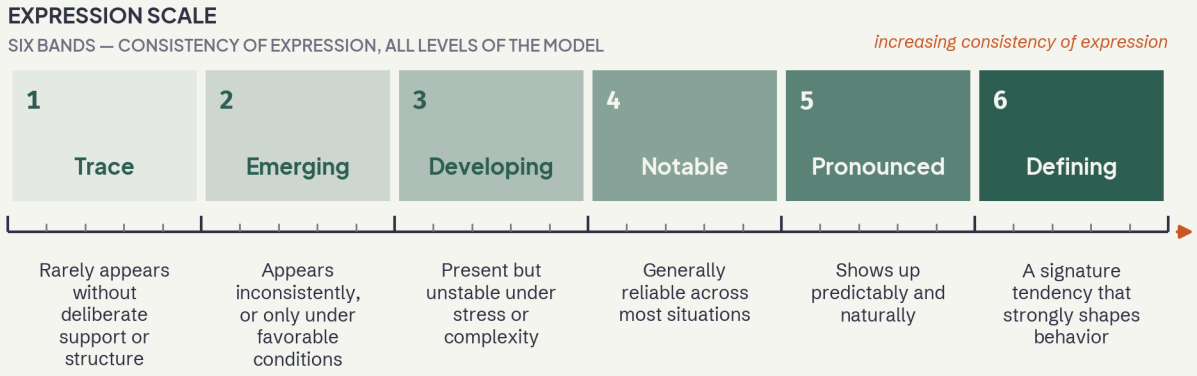

Figure 2. The expression scale.

Results at every level of the model are placed on a common six-band scale of expression, ordered by how consistently a tendency shows up across situations. Band definitions and developmental uses are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Expression bands

Band	Label	What it means	How to use it
1	**Trace**	Rarely appears without deliberate support or structure	Lean on systems and role design rather than willpower
2	**Emerging**	Appears inconsistently, or only under favorable conditions	Build routines, prompts, and external supports
3	**Developing**	Present but unstable under stress or complexity	Target specific behaviors for intentional practice
4	**Notable**	Generally reliable across most situations	Maintain it and apply it intentionally when it matters
5	**Pronounced**	Shows up predictably and naturally	Leverage as a stabilizing strength
6	**Defining**	A signature tendency that strongly shapes behavior	Use it strategically; watch for overuse or rigidity

From scores to strategy

Bands describe individual tendencies; the more useful move is to read the whole profile and decide where to spend effort. The Compass sorts a person's 23 traits into three action-oriented tiers.

- **Strengths to Leverage** are the high-expression tendencies that already come naturally. The highest-return move in development is usually here, not in one's weakest areas: it is far easier to go from good to great in something that already works than to drag a weak tendency up to par. These are what to build a role around.
- **Areas of Potential** are the mid-range tendencies—present but not yet consistent. On the Compass's developmental logic, they are the natural place to invest when someone wants to grow a specific capability—present enough to build on, not yet consistent enough to take for granted.
- **Support Zones** are the lower-expression tendencies that do not come easily. Here the most reliable strategy is usually not brute-force self-improvement but design: building structures,

routines, and partnerships so that a role does not depend on a tendency a person has to manufacture. A leader who is low on a given tendency can still lead well by organizing around it.

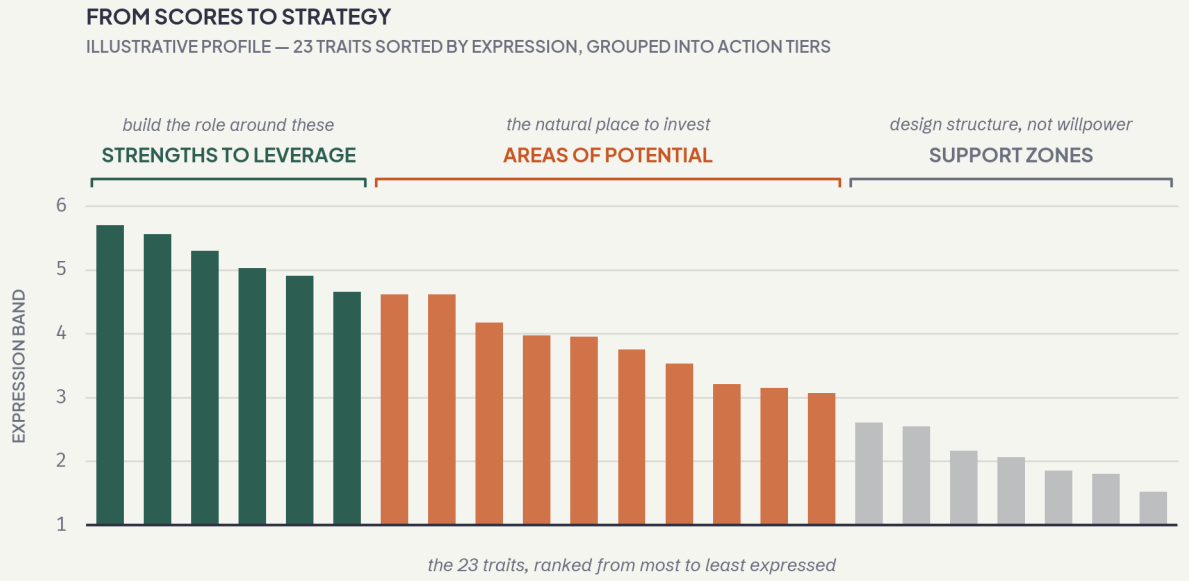

Figure 3. From scores to strategy: an illustrative profile.

A hypothetical profile shown for illustration only — the bars do not represent data from any respondent or sample. The 23 traits are ranked by expression and grouped into the three action tiers: Strengths to Leverage, Areas of Potential, and Support Zones. Tier boundaries reflect the shape of an individual profile rather than fixed cut scores.

This is a deliberately honest division of labor. Some tendencies are more malleable than others, and the tiers are a guide to where effort pays off versus where structure pays off—not a promise that every low score can be turned into a high one. Development, in this view, is less about rewriting personality than about growing in self-knowledge, skill, and the design of one's circumstances over time (Day et al., 2009). The goal is not to maximize every trait; it is to align a person's natural configuration with the demands they actually face.

Profiles, not single scores

Because outcomes rarely turn on a single trait, interpretation emphasizes the overall pattern—how a person's tendencies combine, and how that combination meets the demands of a given role—rather than any one number. It is worth being precise about what this means in practice. The Compass reports where a person stands on each of the 23 traits and sorts them into tiers; reading how those tendencies combine—and what the pattern means for a given role—is left to the person and their coach. The instrument does not reduce the profile to a single formula or sort people into fixed profile types. That keeps the results transparent and easy to act on, and richer ways of modeling how traits work together remain a natural avenue for future refinement.

Finally, the Compass is built for developmental insight—its results are meant to inform a person's own decisions and a coach's guidance. Detailed scoring and weighting procedures are documented in a companion report.

Where the Compass fits among the other things a person might want to know about themselves—and what it deliberately leaves to other tools—is the subject of the next section.

7. Boundaries, Responsible Use, and Place in the Becoming You Method

A tool is only trustworthy if it is honest about what it does not do. Three boundaries define the Compass as much as its content does.

What the Compass is not

It is not a measure of worth, intelligence, or talent. A profile says nothing about how smart, capable, or valuable a person is; it describes dispositional tendencies and how those tendencies meet the demands of leadership.

It is not a selection instrument. The Compass is designed for developmental insight—coaching, advising, and career-alignment conversations—and is not intended as the sole basis for hiring, promotion, termination, or other high-stakes personnel decisions. Anyone weighing the Compass as one input into such a decision should do so consistent with the professional standards for test validation and use set out in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA, APA & NCME, 2014) and the Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures (SIOP, 2018).

And it is not a measure of values or motivation. The Compass speaks to whether a person's tendencies fit the demands of leadership—not to whether leadership is something they should want. As Section 3 noted, those are independent questions: demands-abilities fit versus needs-supplies fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002). A person can be well-equipped for a role that would leave them cold, or drawn to one that would steadily drain them.

Using it well

Two practices follow. First, the Compass is most useful in dialogue—self-reflection, coaching, advising—where a profile becomes the start of a conversation rather than a label to be filed away. Second, like any self-report measure, it reflects how a person sees themselves, which is informative but partial; pairing it with the perspective of people who know someone well adds a dimension self-report cannot reach (Connelly & Ones, 2010). The Viewfinder instrument or some other 360 degree feedback tool can supply this complement.

Where it fits: the Becoming You Method

The Compass is one instrument within a larger framework. The Becoming You Method holds that a person's area of purpose sits at the intersection of three things: Values (what makes work feel authentic), Aptitudes (what a person is naturally equipped to do well), and Economically Viable Interests (where real opportunity lies).

The Career Traits Compass contributes to the Aptitudes pillar by characterizing how a person naturally operates—the stable, personality-related tendencies this paper has described. It is strongest in concert with the method's other instruments. The Values Bridge takes up the question the Compass deliberately sets aside, identifying a person's core motivations and the gaps between the values they hold and the life they are living. The Viewfinder adds the outside view, gathering input from people who know someone well on how their strengths actually show up to others—a counterweight to the limits of self-report. And the Opportunity Engine maps the third pillar, reading a person's interests and aims against where real opportunity lies.

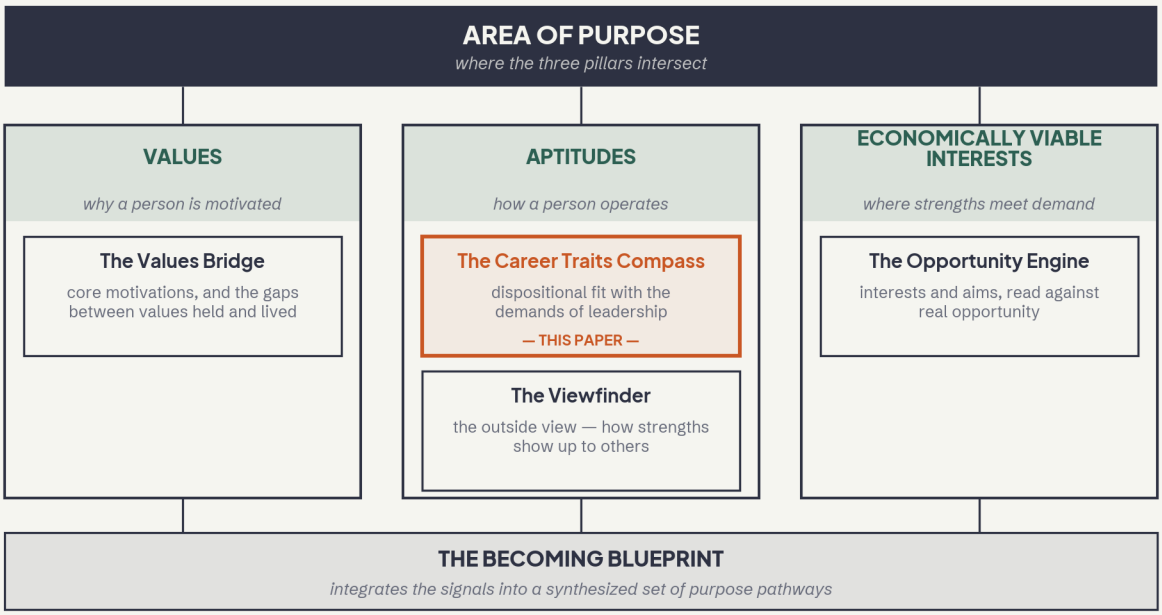

Figure 4. The Compass within the Becoming You Method.

The method's three pillars and the instruments that inform them. The Career Traits Compass (highlighted) contributes to the Aptitudes pillar; the Becoming Blueprint integrates the signals from all instruments into a synthesized set of purpose pathways.

Read together, the instruments answer different questions: how a person operates (the Compass and the Viewfinder), why they are motivated (the Values Bridge), and where their strengths meet genuine demand (the Opportunity Engine). The Becoming Blueprint then integrates these signals into a synthesized set of purpose pathways. The Compass answers its own question—how a person is equipped to meet the demands of leadership—well precisely because it does not try to answer the others.

In closing

The Career Traits Compass began from a simple observation: the move into leadership is among the most consequential career decisions a person makes, and among the least informed. People

take it for prestige, pay, or the assumption that advancement requires it, with little sense of whether the demands of the role will fit the way they tend to operate.

The Compass brings evidence to that decision. It does not tell a person whether they “are” a leader, and it does not promise that a strong profile guarantees success. What it offers is more honest and more useful: a clear, research-grounded picture of how a person’s dispositional tendencies meet the demands leadership will place on them—what will come naturally, what will cost real effort, and where they are better served building support around a gap than straining to erase it. Its value lies not in labeling people, but in helping them choose, prepare, and grow with intention.

A companion report documents the instrument’s psychometric development and the evidence for its measurement properties.

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Appendix A: Construct Definitions and Influences

The Career Traits Compass measures 23 traits, grouped into 11 components within four domains. Each trait below is defined by the behavioral tendency it describes. In each domain there are also lists of some of the recognizable bodies of work that shaped it. These are influences on the design, not evidence of the instrument's validity—which rests on measurement work described in a separate report. The inclusion of these works does not imply the authors' endorsement.

Nerve

The capacity to act decisively, candidly, and steadily under pressure or uncertainty.

Shaped by: Angela Duckworth (*Grit*), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (*Flow*), Kim Scott (*Radical Candor*), Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen (*Difficult Conversations*), Gary Klein (*Sources of Power*), and Daniel Kahneman (*Thinking, Fast and Slow*).

Stamina

- **Performance Drive.** Sustains focus and output during demanding periods, maintaining quality and energy under elevated workload.
- **Consistent Drive.** Delivers steady effort and attention in normal conditions, staying productive without external pressure.

Candor

- **Care Personally.** Balances honesty with empathy, showing respect and warmth that preserve trust even in tense conversations.
- **Challenge Directly.** Addresses difficult issues promptly and constructively, speaking with clarity and professionalism even when it is uncomfortable.

Edge

- **Decisiveness Under Ambiguity.** Makes timely calls with limited information, weighing risk and acting confidently despite uncertainty or incomplete data.
- **Composure Under Pressure.** Maintains clarity and calm focus in high-stakes or fast-changing moments, enabling sound judgment when intensity peaks.

Elasticity

The ability to update strategies, relationships, and behavior as conditions change.

Shaped by: Carol Dweck (*Mindset*), Adam Grant (*Think Again*), Anders Ericsson (*Peak*), Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey (*Immunity to Change*), Mark Granovetter ("the strength of weak ties"), and Ronald Burt's work on networks and structural holes.

Adaptability

- **Learning Agility.** Builds new skills ahead of changing demands, viewing continual learning as key to long-term effectiveness.
- **Situational Flexibility.** Adjusts tone, plans, and tactics smoothly as conditions change, staying effective and composed with others.

Irregular Relationships

- **Weak-Tie Cultivation.** Forms connections beyond familiar circles, engaging diverse people to broaden perspective and opportunity.
- **Weak-Tie Maintenance.** Keeps distant relationships alive through light, periodic contact that preserves rapport and future access.

Soundness

The reliability of emotional regulation, accountability, and interpersonal integrity.

Shaped by: Mayer and Salovey's work on emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence*), James Gross's work on emotional regulation, Susan David (*Emotional Agility*), Amy Edmondson (*The Fearless Organization*), Brené Brown (*Dare to Lead*), Kristin Neff (*Self-Compassion*), and Everett Worthington's work on forgiveness.

Positive Energy

- **Emotional Regulation.** Manages mood and reactions consistently across days and situations, sustaining steady tone and emotional balance over time.
- **Uplifting Presence.** Fosters optimism and steadiness in others, helping people feel encouraged and grounded under stress.

Self-Awareness

- **Realistic Self-Perception.** Keeps self-view anchored in feedback and evidence, recognizing strengths and limits without defensiveness.
- **Feedback Receptivity.** Invites and applies feedback constructively, staying open even when critique challenges comfort or self-image.

Integrity

- **Owning Outcomes.** Takes accountability for results with honesty and fairness, learning from both successes and setbacks.
- **Sharing Credit.** Acknowledges others' contributions accurately and promptly, ensuring credit is shared with fairness and clarity.
- **Executional Reliability.** Delivers on commitments dependably—meeting standards, timelines, and expectations without needing oversight.

Resilience

- **Grit.** Persists through obstacles and plateaus, sustaining focused effort and motivation toward long-term goals.
- **Forgiveness.** Releases resentment or blame to restore perspective, repair relationships, and move forward productively.

Wonderment

The orientation toward inquiry, evidence-seeking, and perspective integration.

Shaped by: Edgar Schein (*Humble Inquiry*), Warren Berger (*A More Beautiful Question*), Cacioppo and Petty's work on need for cognition, George Loewenstein's work on curiosity, Daniel Kahneman's work on cognitive bias, Karl Weick's work on sensemaking, Philip Tetlock (*Superforecasting*), and Paul Schoemaker's work on scenario planning and strategic foresight.

Curiosity

- **Question-Asking.** Shows curiosity by asking follow-up and clarifying questions that deepen understanding and uncover assumptions.
- **Research Appetite.** Pursues reliable information before forming conclusions, comparing sources to ground decisions in evidence and reason.

Currency

- **Perspective Formation.** Integrates diverse viewpoints into a clear, reasoned stance, revising opinions as stronger evidence emerges.
- **Information Foresight.** Monitors credible sources to anticipate shifts in trends, tools, and ideas before they surface widely.