

The Leadership Compass

INTRODUCTION

Different leaders teach us different things about strategy. Some show how fighting for what you believe in is the best way, while others teach strength from harmony. Some focus on the values and importance of a community, while others show that individual freedom is the route to success.

But successful leaders share one thing in common: they have built their strategies for leadership on the foundations of their individual characters. One reason for this is that each of them, in their own way, developed and stuck to an approach to leadership that was thoroughly consistent with their characters. If there is one thing on which most writers on leadership now agree it is that effective leadership grows out of what works for the individual leader.

Research shows that successful organizations are well-led, not just by one powerful leader, but by a culture of leadership. Organisations need strategy, structure, systems, creativity, innovation, control and effective empowerment. Sometimes these elements conflict with each other: strict policies can repress innovation; clear targets can mean people lose sight of what is important; and hierarchies can disempower.

The Leadership Compass maps what organizations need, and identifies the kind of leadership that is most likely to deliver these often-conflicting needs. It shows how, working together in effective leadership teams, people with different characters can create effective and comprehensive leadership.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is not management. People can learn how to be good managers by adopting a number of managerial techniques. Management is predicated on authority, and even poor managers can get things done simply because they have that authority over the people they manage. Being a good manager means being good at what you do.

However, leadership depends upon others' willingness to follow, and is not about being good at what you do, but being good at who you are.

In leadership, it is not what you do or say that is important, but whether those who would follow believe in you. If leader X, a person I trust, value and fundamentally believe in, asks me to do something, the chances are that I will do it willingly. But if leader Y, a person whom I believe to be untrustworthy, self-centred and lacking in integrity asks me to do exactly the same thing, I'll find every way I can to avoid doing it.

Leaders need to be adaptable and well rounded. But they also need to have a core strategy, a firm and consistent framework upon which to build their unique leadership styles.

Of course, for all leaders, there will be times when it feels right to fight for what they believe in; they have people around them they can involve in decision-making; a sense of organizational community needs to be created and maintained; while everyone should have a degree of freedom to express their individuality to some degree.

Each of these is an issue of judgement. At what point is it appropriate to fight for what you believe in? How far should people be allowed to go in influencing a leader's decisions? How involved in the community should people be? How much freedom should individuals be given?

There are no right answers to these questions. Leadership is demonstrated in the exercise of discretion – making consistent, coherent and credible judgements on issues of significance to others, but issues which have to be resolved according to what you, as a leader, believe to be right. As a leader, you are expected to make decisions and stick to your beliefs on matters like these.

Not everyone will agree with your decisions and judgements, but trying to satisfy everybody, and to be all things to all people can end up with adopting a leadership style that has no substance, no consistency, and therefore, no credibility. Effective leaders know that you don't have always to be right to succeed. But you do have to be believed in.

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY THROUGH INTEGRITY

Many people in leadership roles have collected a toolkit of leadership techniques, most of which have their merits, but many of which are hard to apply effectively. Warriors who try to suppress their innate tendency to lead from the front may become frustrated with trying to take the back seat, and feel they are failing to add value. But if they have been taught to “empower” people, and not to get too involved, they try valiantly to put into practice something that they cannot truly believe in, and consequently help no-one, not even themselves.

Similarly, Adventurers who try to ‘grow up’ and become serious, responsible father-figures can become excessively authoritarian as they over-compensate for the fact that they are operating outside of their Home Base. Knowing that people often look for more guidance than they want themselves, they can end up smothering people.

Sages, responding to feedback that they fail to fight for what is right, can become quixotic, taking on battles that they ought to avoid. The ‘fighting’ Sage, unaccustomed to the implicit ‘Queensbury Rules’ of the organisation can astonish and dismay people with their flailing around. They can be very bad tacticians, having had little experience of how to win in open conflict.

Guardians who feel they ought to give people more rope can become untrustworthy and rash. Many of their subordinates begin to feel betrayed and abandoned by the very person who, hitherto, had been their rock.

Much of what is taught and has been written about leadership, especially in recent years are 'proven' leadership methods, promoted as 'the answer', without recognition that any approach to leadership, for it to be an effective tool, has to be harmonious with a leader's character.

What makes you a good leader is learning how to lead in the way you were born to lead. In this sense, leaders are born, not made. Character comes first, leadership strategy second. Before you take on any leadership technique, ask yourself how well it fits with your character.

One of the most dangerous mistakes a leader can make is to try to be all things to all people. This may be based on the good intention to be a rounded individual. But in a leadership position, this can so easily come across as inconsistency. Successful leaders know themselves and develop strategies that are both consistent and in tune with their core characters, and appropriate to their context.

THE LEADERSHIP COMPASS AND MBTI

If your organisation currently uses MBTI or another personality profiling instrument as a developmental tool, you will already recognise how psychometrics can help:

- Increase self-awareness
- Promote mutual understanding
- Enhance teamworking
- Improve communications
- Develop effective leadership styles

Like any instrument, however, MBTI™ has its limitations. It can explain how leaders lead. But it cannot anticipate the values or strategies that a leader will espouse or follow. A great deal of what made Margaret Thatcher the leader she was grew from what she believed in, as well as from her ESTJ style. Mahatma Gandhi, however, succeeded by following a strategy diametrically opposed to Thatcher's beliefs, but totally in line with his own.

MBTI™ is good at portraying **personality**, but it does not explore the **character** of leadership - what drives good leaders. That's what the Leadership Compass instrument does best.

Built from over fifteen years' practical work with hundreds of leaders, the Leadership Compass provides a breakthrough in leadership development. It has been used successfully in Investment Banks, European Development Institutions, wholesale and retail organisations, local government, and many other organisations. It works excellently in conjunction with MBTI™ and other

leadership development tools, and provides a level of understanding that those who have used it have found extremely valuable.

The Leadership Compass focuses not on the 'how' of leadership, but the 'why' - strategy rather than style. It gets to the roots of clashes of values and helps sort out organisational politics

Above all, it enables leaders to develop strategies that will work for them. Acting with integrity means leading in accordance with personal beliefs and values rather than trying to follow rules and role models that conflict with what you believe in. The Leadership Compass provides each person who takes it with a written report showing how his or her character aligns with current lifestyle, the role he or she is fulfilling, and the model of leadership he or she is working with. The report provides, in addition, observations on strategic choices that are consistent, and compatible with the individual's character and values.

CASE STUDIES OF THE LEADERSHIP COMPASS IN USE

People who have completed the the Leadership Compass Personal Assessment have the chance to look at the degree of 'fit' between their Home Base and their 'model' of leadership. The questionnaire looks at leadership through their eyes in two ways: what they see as 'ideal' leadership, that they may be aspiring to; and how they describe their own leadership style.

In many cases, there is a significant degree of similarity between these three (Home Base, Ideal Leader, and Leadership Style). Ideally, one leads by living what one believes in.

But in some cases, there has been a significant difference in how people identify their Home Base, and how they either see leadership, or how they live it. In each of these cases, the individual has been faced with significant problems. The following are real cases of leaders who have drifted in their approaches to leadership away from their Home Bases.

Wes, the Warrior who tried to be a Sage

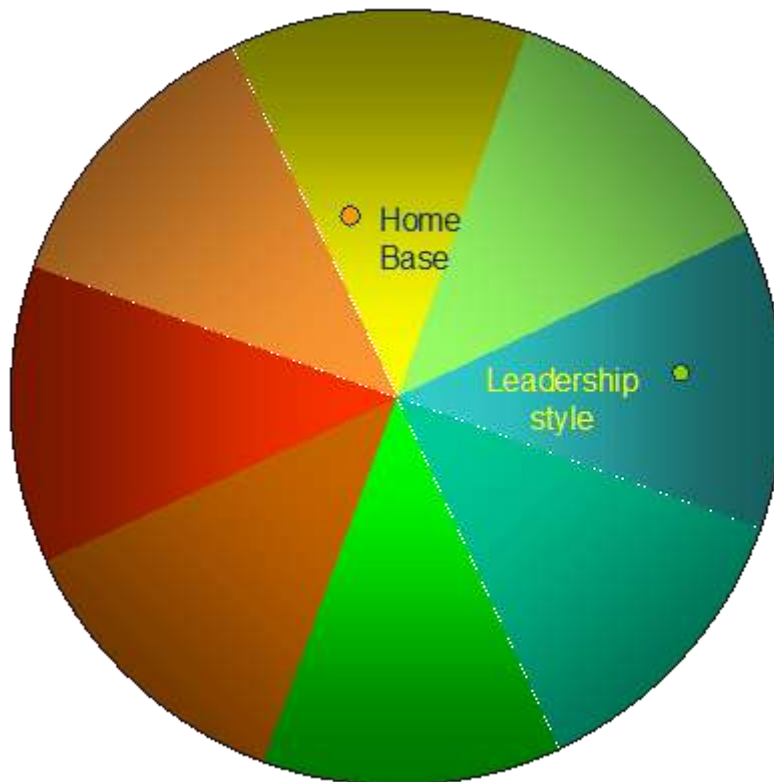
Wes was a mature, senior manager in a large European organisation. He had recently been appointed to head up a new venture for the organisation, setting up a new line of business and a new team from scratch. Within the first few months, he was experiencing some serious problems with his team, some of whom were openly hostile to him.

As part of the process of exploring what was going wrong, Wes went through the the Leadership Compass Personal Assessment.

In general there was a fairly high degree of consistency in his responses, most being clustered within the Guardian/Warrior quadrant. But his overall Leadership Model was in Sage/Guardian territory.

His '**ideal**' model of a leader was more Guardian than Adventurer, but was equally Warrior and Sage, a difficult balance for any leader to achieve. But on this dimension his **own** leadership style he described as completely Sage, with no Warrior at all. As a Warrior by character, this means that his leadership style, as he saw it, was not the one that is most natural to him.

He saw himself as neither challenging nor stretching others, nor as strong and decisive. Instead, his approach was to be a coach or mentor, and to teach others rather than to lead from the front or to role-model strength and determination.



There are many reasons why people develop leadership styles that are 'out of character'. In Wes' case, he had developed a style of managing that had worked well in the past, and he had assumed that his leadership style could simply be more of the same.

But managing and leading are fundamentally different, and Wes did not realise that, in leadership, what is being assessed is not the one-to-one

relationships between manager and managed, but his entire approach to the new venture.

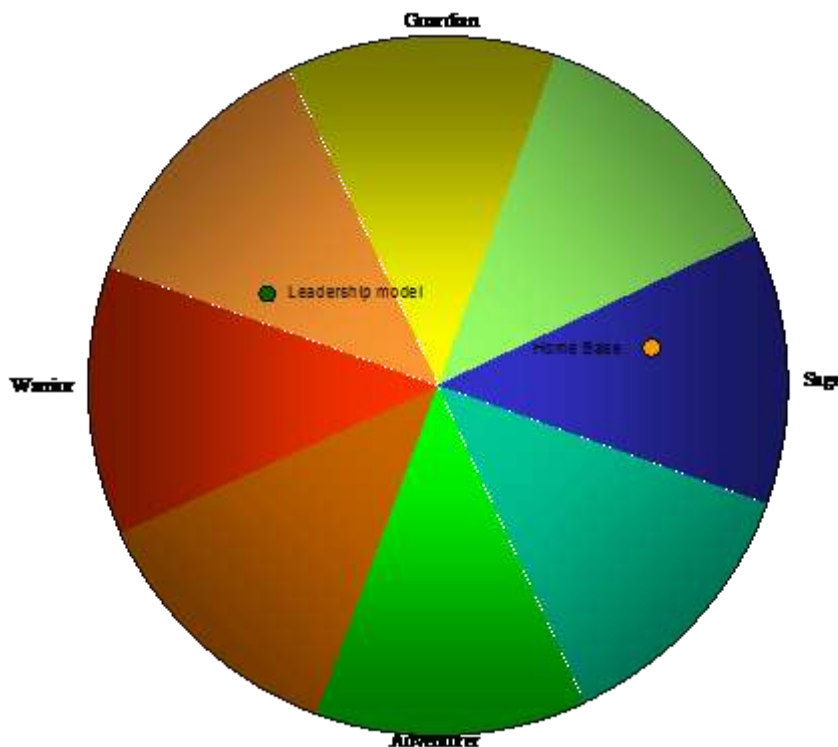
Wes' motivation to win and achieve, his drive for advancement and promotion, and his competitive spirit were all spurs to encourage him to lead from the front. But, in trying to engage others in dialogue and decision-making, he quickly gained the reputation for indecisiveness and lacking in the courage of his convictions. Disastrously, this came to a head in a client meeting in which two of his own people turned on Wes and gave vent to their frustrations.

Wes needed to rethink and to re-establish leadership, but this time, as a Guardian/Warrior, not as a would-be Sage.

Ivan, the reluctant Warrior

Ivan was a highly intelligent young man whose personal history had been troublesome. Having escaped persecution in his homeland, he had joined a global financial services company to make use of his natural talent with numbers.

He had risen rapidly to a position of seniority, being good both with the figures, but also with clients, with whom he established rapport based on his quickness of thinking, and his apparently easy charm.



Ivan's Home Base was Sage/Guardian, with Sage his Primary Driver. He was fully aware that his career with the organisation was never going to be an end in itself, but he was unable to find a way of meeting his Sage needs in the foreseeable future, as he could not go back home to find the inner harmony he valued so highly. Until he was able to find a way forward, he put his energies into doing his job as well as he could.

He was a quick learner, and one thing he learnt was how his boss, a genuine Warrior/Guardian, got results. The boss was respected and believed in, and became a strong role model within the business. Ivan based his leadership on what he saw his boss doing, both in terms of his 'ideal' leadership model, but also in terms of how he dealt with the people around him.

Ivan was feared and mistrusted. What came across from his boss as strong, clear, decisive and challenging leadership was interpreted when Ivan followed the 'same' behaviour patterns, as stubbornness and insensitivity. He quickly gained a reputation of being unwilling or unable to listen to anyone else's views, and of pushing people too hard, including himself. No-one wanted to work with Ivan – at least not for more than a few weeks.

It upset Ivan when he saw people's reactions to him, especially as he believed in people so much. Yet he had never had the chance to learn from other Sages in leadership positions, and genuinely believed that 'Sage leadership' could not work in the real world.

Ivan's chances of evolving a genuine Sage leadership strategy were slim while he remained within the organisation. His reputation was too visible, and any sudden shifts in how he behaved would have simply added to people's belief in his insincerity. He had to move on.

Steve tries to break the mould

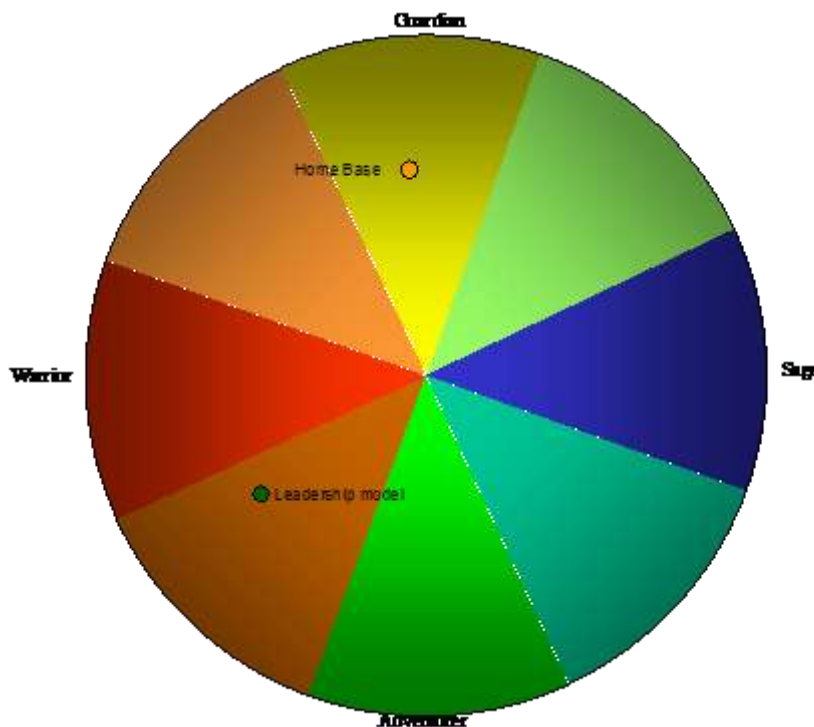
Two years after being taken over by a major multi-national, a 'sleepy' IT company acquired from its parent a new CEO. Steve had become a fan of a particular writer on organisations who challenged many preconceptions about how to get the best out of people. Steve appointed the writer to be his personal coach, and set about trying to transform the company along new lines.

Although he had pursued a successful career in the parent company by following the rules and guidelines, being CEO gave him much more freedom to experiment. Although some of the ideas his coach advocated had been tried, piecemeal, in other organisations, no-one had taken the coach's ideas as far as Steve was determined to do.

At the core of his new approach was 'empowerment'. Whether they liked it or not, employees (now to be called 'associates') were empowered to delight customers. And managers (now called 'coaches') were not allowed to stand in their way. For example, Steve told everyone that if any meeting went on for

more than 15 minutes without customers being talked about, associates should leave the meeting in protest.

The previously tight controls on costs were scrapped as they prevented associates from doing everything in their power to do the customer's bidding. Budgets were delegated down to the coal-face, and associates given free rein to spend as they thought fit.



Steve was in unfamiliar territory. He had such faith in what his coach had told him that he happily replied to questions about how people were supposed to make this new approach work with, "I haven't the foggiest idea." This was his interpretation of the idea of empowerment.

Rather than feel empowered, people in the company felt betrayed and abandoned. The 'safe pair of hands' they thought they had inherited from the parent company was playing with their company and their livelihoods. Because he was not an Adventurer by character, Steve's behaviour was seen as patronising and irresponsible, but neither liberating nor empowering.

He had made too radical a shift from his Home Base to be successful, and after 15 months, he was removed from office. Shortly after his departure the

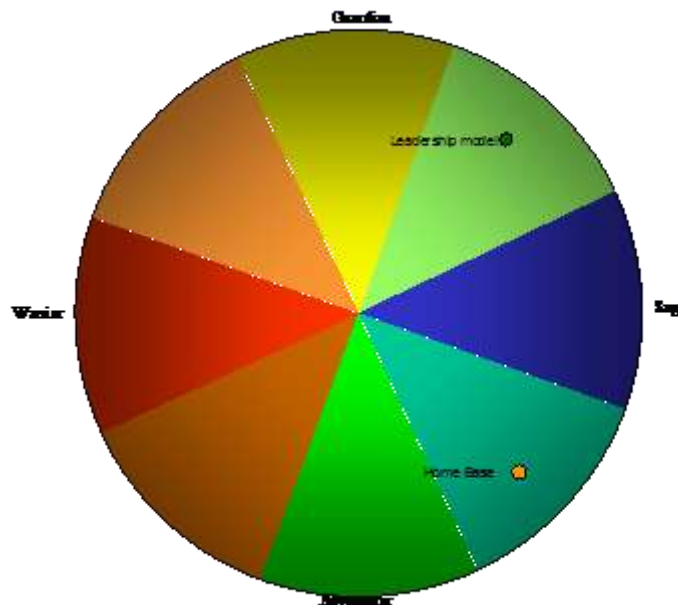
company was sold on the stock exchange for \$8 billion. It had been bought, just a few years before, for \$17 billion.

Nigel, the Adventurer who tried to grow up

Nigel had seniority thrust upon him, and made the mistake of assuming that he had to change. Leadership is about developing not changing.

As an Adventurer, Nigel had spent many years moving from job to job, getting bored and frustrated with each after a short while. As he advanced in years, he realised that he needed to find somewhere he could feel more at home for longer. Eventually his complex and chequered c.v. would be his downfall. So when he joined a consulting firm that gave individuals enormous amounts of freedom to do things their own way, he felt that he had found what he was looking for.

He was not particularly perturbed when, over the years, new ownership of the firm introduced systems and procedures aimed at increasing the professionalism of the organisation, since he was working in an area that retained a great deal of autonomy. And when he was offered the role of running this unit, he weighed up the pros and cons and decided that he would take it on rather than risk having someone he could not get on with appointed over him.



Suddenly, Nigel was part of the senior team, expected to play a full part in the development and strategy of more than just his own unit. Moreover, as a senior member, he was now a visible role model, and would have to take a more responsible approach than he had done so far.

So he started to behave very differently. He found the deference accorded to him by people he had previously laughed and joked with unsettling, but played along as best he could, thinking, as he was increasingly surrounded by people hanging onto his every word, “So this is what is meant by ‘rank has its privileges’.”

He introduced procedures into the unit that were based on what he saw as ‘best practice’, and started taking a very close interest in each team member’s career progression, and helping them by sharing with them the fruits of his own experience and wisdom. He held regular review meetings and chaired strategy sessions to create a sense of shared direction. He was, he thought, being very grown up.

His team turned against him very quickly. Morale plummeted, and the more he tried to do the right thing (according to the implicit model of leadership he was working to), the worse things got.

From a variety of sources he started to find out that he was seen as aloof and patronising. He was frequently accused by some of his team of ‘pulling rank’, and by others of selling out.

Until he was promoted, Nigel had been highly regarded throughout the firm as an innovative and competent consultant. His apparently poor leadership had a knock-on effect on this reputation, and fewer and fewer people felt inclined to call on his skills and experience. Not only was he seen as a poor leader, his technical competence was now being called into question. There was no way back, and he had to admit defeat.

ACTING WITH INTEGRITY

Leaders do best when their leadership style is in line with their character. Developing a strategy for leadership that is in line with character tends to benefit both the leader and the led. It minimises the risk of sending out mixed messages, especially when under pressure.

It is during times of stress that many leaders ‘revert’ to their natural style, but because it is a reaction rather than a plan, it can often come across to others as negative, inconsistent or a signal of incompetence.

But even when situations do not seem to be stressful, leaders who do not build their strategies on what they believe in are likely to come up against real problems, like those faced by Wes, Ivan, Bill, and Nigel.

In each case, their downfall was a lack of integrity. None of them was leading by living the values they truly believe in. And when someone is going against their values, they are going to be ‘found out’ sooner or later.

None of the leadership strategies – Warrior, Sage, Guardian or Adventurer – is better than the others. Each has its strengths and potential weaknesses. But if you adopt a leadership strategy that you do not believe in, you will not be acting with integrity.

Acting with integrity means being true to yourself and your values. If you can do this, you can be a good leader. Not everyone will follow you; people with different value-sets may not see the good in what you do.

However, the honesty of your approach, the consistency of your message, the coherence of your strategy, and the alignment with what you believe in will do far more to help you succeed in leadership than any trendy new ‘leadership technique’.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that there is a great deal of value in the use of personality profiling to help leaders identify and work on their leadership style. When administered in conjunction with the Leadership Compass, leaders can recognise more than just style, but also the foundations (character and values) that underpin that style and enable them to lead in ways that reflect who they truly are, and thereby to lead with integrity.

MBTI and other personality profiling instruments, despite the benefits they can provide, do not explore the character of a leader. The Leadership Compass does.