

THE COUL & GOLD GROUP · PRACTITIONER TOOLKIT NO. 01

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# The Leader Signature Field Guide

*A nine-dimension practitioner's guide for reading a leader's operating pattern, with observable signals, field prompts, and applied examples.*

(TRADEMARK PENDING)

THE COUL · GOLD GROUP

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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# A Structured Way of Noticing

This is not a psychometric instrument. It is a structured way of noticing what is already in front of you: the language a leader uses, the people around them, the absences in a biography, the shape of the silences.

Work through the clusters in order on first use. After that, return to the dimensions that matter for the specific question in front of you.

The most diagnostic information is often in what is conspicuously absent, not what is present. Read the dimensions as a system, not as a checklist.

## CLUSTER ONE

# Authority & Identity

How a leader constructs and holds their authority, and whether it is built on substance or on scaffolding borrowed from the institutions they passed through.

## D1 · PRESTIGE VS. CAPABILITY BALANCE

### Does their authority hold when the institutional scaffolding is removed?

*Would this leader still be credible in a context where their CV carried no weight?*

#### OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Credentials lead every introduction; delivery language thin or absent.
- Authority dissolves in new environments where the CV carries no weight.
- Capability gaps surface under pressure that prestige previously concealed.

#### FIELD PROMPT

*Ask them to describe a decision they are proud of without naming the institution it happened in. Notice how much language remains.*

## D2 · MISSION VS. HUMANITY BALANCE

### Can they hold purpose and people in the same sentence?

*When pressure rises, does the leader reach first for the mission, the metric, or the person?*

#### OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Language reaches for the system or metric when things go wrong, not the person.
- People perform out of obligation rather than contribution.
- Mission integration present; human presence absent or inconsistent.

#### FIELD PROMPT

*Recall the last time someone under this leader had a hard week. How did the leader name it, if they did?*

## D3 · COHERENCE & ADAPTABILITY UNDER CHANGE

### Does their identity hold under pressure, or does it shift with the environment?

*Is there a through-line across very different contexts, or a different person showing up in each chapter?*

#### OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Long-arc coherence: values constant across very different contexts.
- Short-tenure volatility, or roles that ended without a clear next chapter.
- The pattern between the chapters tells you what the biography will not.

#### FIELD PROMPT

*Line up the titles and tenures in their CV without reading the company names. What does the rhythm alone tell you?*

## CLUSTER TWO

# Relational & Systemic Intelligence

How a leader operates within human systems: the trust they generate, the dynamics they can read, and what endorsement (or its absence) reveals.

## D4 · RELATIONAL PRESENCE & INTERPERSONAL IMPACT

Do people move toward this leader, or away from them, especially when things are difficult?

*Does the room around this leader feel safe to contribute in, or quiet in the wrong way?*

### OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Creates conditions for contribution, disagreement, and early problem-surfacing.
- Low relational presence often presents as professional distance, not coldness.
- Endorsement language: specific and warm, or generic and carefully worded?

### FIELD PROMPT

*When someone on their team makes a mistake, who finds out first: the leader, or the leader's peer?*

## D5 · PEER & COMMUNITY ENDORSEMENT

Who speaks for this leader when they are not in the room, and with what specificity?

*What does the absence of endorsement tell you?*

### OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Multiple senior roles over many years; little visible substantive peer validation.
- Endorsement formulaic, thin, or structurally absent at senior level.
- Former colleagues speak with specificity and warmth, or do not speak at all.

### FIELD PROMPT

*Find three people who worked closely with this leader five-plus years ago. Read what they say without prompting.*

## D6 · POWER LITERACY & SYSTEMIC NAVIGATION

Can they read informal power, and do they navigate it with integrity intact?

*Are they structurally naive, or politically sophisticated; and if sophisticated, in service of what?*

### OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Structurally naive: repeatedly blindsided by political reality.
- Politically sophisticated but uses it for control rather than coherence.
- How they talk about past environments and the people in them is the tell.

### FIELD PROMPT

*Ask them to describe a situation where they had responsibility without authority. Listen for how they located the actual power in the room.*

## CLUSTER THREE

# Self-Knowledge & Expression

How a leader understands their own impact, and how effectively they translate that self-knowledge into how they communicate, decide, and lead under pressure.

## D7 · SHADOW LITERACY &amp; SELF-AWARENESS

## Do they know how they land, and does that knowledge change how they operate?

*What is the gap between how they see themselves and how they are experienced, and who is managing that gap?*

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Names their own patterns with honesty and specificity, not performance.
- Accountability consistently locates itself outside them: team, timing, market.
- Evidence of incorporating feedback over time, or of deflecting it.

## FIELD PROMPT

*Ask them about a time they got it wrong. Listen for the shape of the mistake, and whose it turns out to have been.*

## D8 · DECISION QUALITY &amp; JUDGMENT UNDER PRESSURE

## Is there a visible process, and does it hold when the stakes are high?

*Can they articulate how they decide, and does the reasoning hold under scrutiny?*

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Can articulate how they decide; reasoning holds under scrutiny.
- Process is values-anchored and transparent, not outcome-dependent.
- Others trust the direction in uncertainty, or second-guess in silence.

## FIELD PROMPT

*Ask them to walk you through a recent difficult decision, including the decisions they chose not to make.*

## D9 · COMMUNICATION RANGE &amp; STRATEGIC EXPRESSION

## Can they modulate, or is the register narrow regardless of what the moment requires?

*Does the leader speak differently to a board, a team, a customer, a crisis, and is the difference deliberate?*

## OBSERVABLE SIGNALS

- Moves between precision and warmth, strategic altitude and human presence.
- Same tone, same distance, same version of leadership regardless of context.
- Watch how they communicate when things are hard: range holds or collapses.

## FIELD PROMPT

*Collect three artefacts of their communication: an email to a peer, a message to a team, a public statement. Read them back to back.*

## READING ACROSS CLUSTERS

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# The Dimensions Work as a System

Cluster One tells you how their authority is constructed. Cluster Two tells you what the human environment around them feels like. Cluster Three tells you whether they know it, and whether knowing it changes anything.

Most strong leaders have genuine gaps. Knowing which gaps they carry is often more useful than the overall shape of the profile.

Read the dimensions as a system, not as a checklist.

*“A leader without self-awareness creates unpredictable environments even when every other dimension is strong, because the gap between how they see themselves and how they land is invisible to them, and therefore unmanaged by anyone.”*

D7 · SHADOW LITERACY

## APPLIED EXAMPLES

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# Three Ways to Use This Guide

## Evaluating a Potential Boss

Before accepting a role, give yourself ninety minutes with the nine dimensions and the person you have met twice. You are not trying to score them. You are trying to notice what you have and have not yet observed.

The three most useful dimensions for this read are:

- D2: do they name the human first, or the metric?
- D4: who tells them hard news, and how early?
- D7: the dimension that governs whether everything else compounds or erodes.

## Prepping a Reference Call

References are usually self-selected and carefully coached. You are not listening for the answers. You are listening for the texture of them.

The three most useful dimensions for this read are:

- D5: whether endorsement is specific and warm, or careful and thin.
- D3: the same person described across different chapters, or different ones?
- D6: how the reference talks about the environments the leader has been in.

## Reading a Current Leader

You are already inside the system. You have more data than anyone running an external assessment. What you may not have is a frame.

The three most useful dimensions for this read are:

- D7: are they actually absorbing feedback, or performing absorption?
- D8: does their process hold under pressure, or dissolve into instinct?
- D9: does their range hold when things are hard, or does it collapse?

## A NOTE ON CALIBRATION

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# A Structured Read Trains the Eye

The first time you use this framework on someone you already know well, some of your reads will land sharply and others will feel forced. Trust that signal. The dimensions you cannot easily score are the ones you have not observed closely enough, not the ones that do not apply.

The second time you use it (on a different leader, in a different context) the framework will feel lighter. Patterns you missed the first time will start to show. This is the point.

## FOR DEEPER WORK

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The Leader Signature is the diagnostic layer underneath our Executive Advisory and Established CoS engagements. To request a structured read applied to yourself or to a specific leader, get in touch at [coulandgold.com/#contactus](https://coulandgold.com/#contactus).