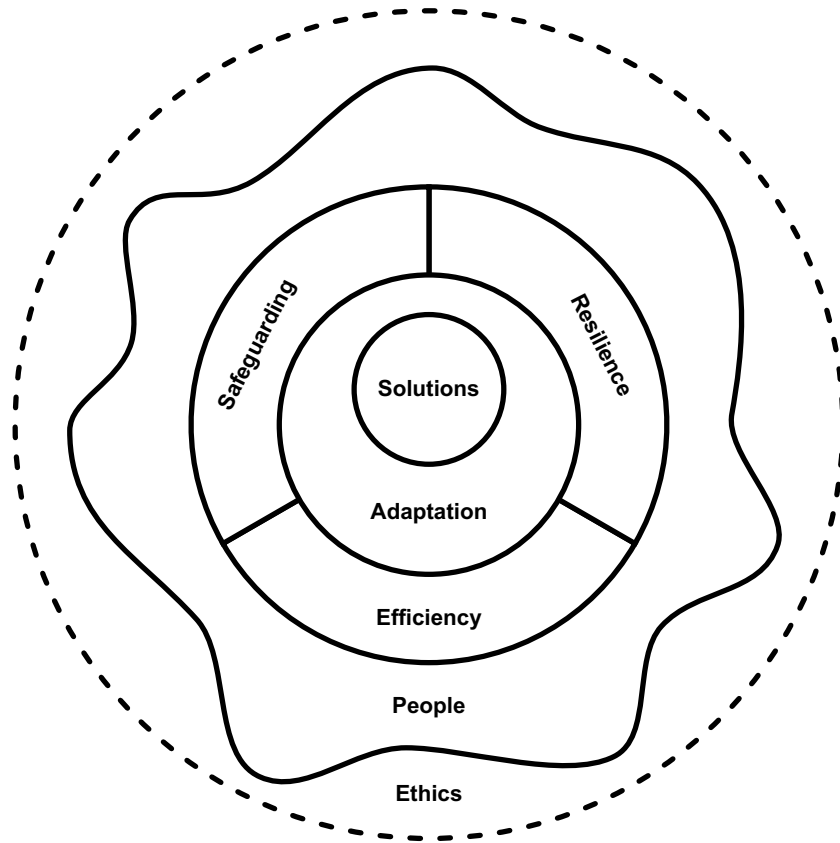


Compass

Leader's Behavior Compass



This is a downloadable version of the online manual (<https://omimo.org/en/modules/compass/>), generated on 2025-09-12. Check the website for newer versions.

Leader's Behavior Compass comes from OMIMO (<https://omimo.org/>), which is a family of open, minimalist modules.

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NOTE: This is a draft of the Compass to be reviewed by contributors.

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Categories

The following are the categories of behaviors in the Compass:

- [Solutions](#)
- [Adaptation](#)
- [Safeguarding](#)
- [Resilience](#)
- [Efficiency](#)
- [People](#)
- [Ethics](#)

Introduction

This **Leader's Behavior Compass**, or **Compass** for short, is a structured model of observable behaviors that are desirable for most leaders to have most of the time.

The Compass may be useful to many people, but it's primarily designed for **leaders** in the **project ecosystem**. These two key terms are defined as follows in OMIMO.

The project ecosystem

In OMIMO, the phrase “project ecosystem” refers to the 5 levels of management that directly relate to projects and help make sense of them:

- Level 5: Portfolio management
- Level 4: Program management
- Level 3: Project management
- Level 2: Team management
- Level 1: Task management

Depending on the organization, other types of management outside the project ecosystem, such as operations management, can also have significant impacts on the results of projects.

Leaders

A leader is someone who motivates, guides, and sometimes pushes a group of people toward creating desirable results.

The following are examples of leaders in the project ecosystem:

- Level 5:
 - Portfolio manager
 - Portfolio management team member
- Level 4:
 - Program sponsor
 - Program manager
 - Program management team member
- Level 3:
 - Project sponsor
 - Project manager
 - Project management team member
- Level 2:
 - Team manager

Leader vs. manager

A manager is a leader who's officially in charge.

All managers are leaders, but not all leaders are managers. A secretary who's not in charge as a manager but actively guides people toward the right path is a leader. Healthy environments usually uncover leaders who are not managers and gradually convert them to managers.

The practical difference between a leader who's a manager and one who's not a manager is that the former can use organizational power in addition to other sources of power to get results, which makes them potentially more impactful.

Minimalism

The Compass doesn't provide you with a list of all potentially desirable behaviors: it's a minimalist model that avoids clutter by focusing on the most essential behaviors. These are behaviors that have the biggest impact and are necessary for most leaders most of the time.

Listing all potentially desirable behaviors would result in a list more than ten times the size of this Compass.

Scope of impact

The behaviors described in the Compass have impacts in four areas:

- The leader themselves
- The people who are led by the leader
- The organization(s) the leader works for or contributes to
- The larger society and the environment

Leaders should be careful not to underestimate any of these four domains.

Skills

Most behaviors in the Compass are only possible or effective when the leader has certain **skills**. However, it's the behaviors that create results, and skills are among the enablers for those behaviors. Besides skills, behaviors require other elements such as habits. That's why the Compass is focused on behaviors rather than skills.

Moreover, behaviors are actionable and observable, which makes them more practical than abstract skills, especially because many skills often come mixed with distracting, misleading buzzwords.

Behavioral model

The Compass is more than the sum of its behaviors. What's extra is the "behavioral model" that categorizes the behaviors, as shown in the diagram.

The model starts with the [solutions](#) category in the center because the main reason for having leaders is to get results, and solutions are how we achieve that.

Each solution works in a context, and that context constantly changes. Some of these changes make the solution less effective or even irrelevant. As a result, it doesn't matter how well the solution is designed, we need to constantly adapt it to its environment. That's why the [adaptation](#) category is the second ring in the diagram, surrounding solutions.

The next ring in the diagram is divided into three categories: [safeguarding](#), [resilience](#), and [efficiency](#). These categories help us to be more successful with our adapted solutions. Think of the adaptive solution as the direction, and "efficiency" as our speed in that direction. There may be various difficulties in our path, and we try to avoid them via the safeguarding behaviors. Finally, it doesn't matter how we move, we'll always run into some problems; and when that happens, we should be able to get over them and move on, because of our resilience.

The next ring is the [people](#) category, because we need more power for designing and adapting solutions, to safeguard them, to make ourselves more resilient, and to move faster.

Having people makes it possible or easier to get results but also makes it necessary to act ethically. That's why the outer ring that surrounds everything is the [ethics](#) category.

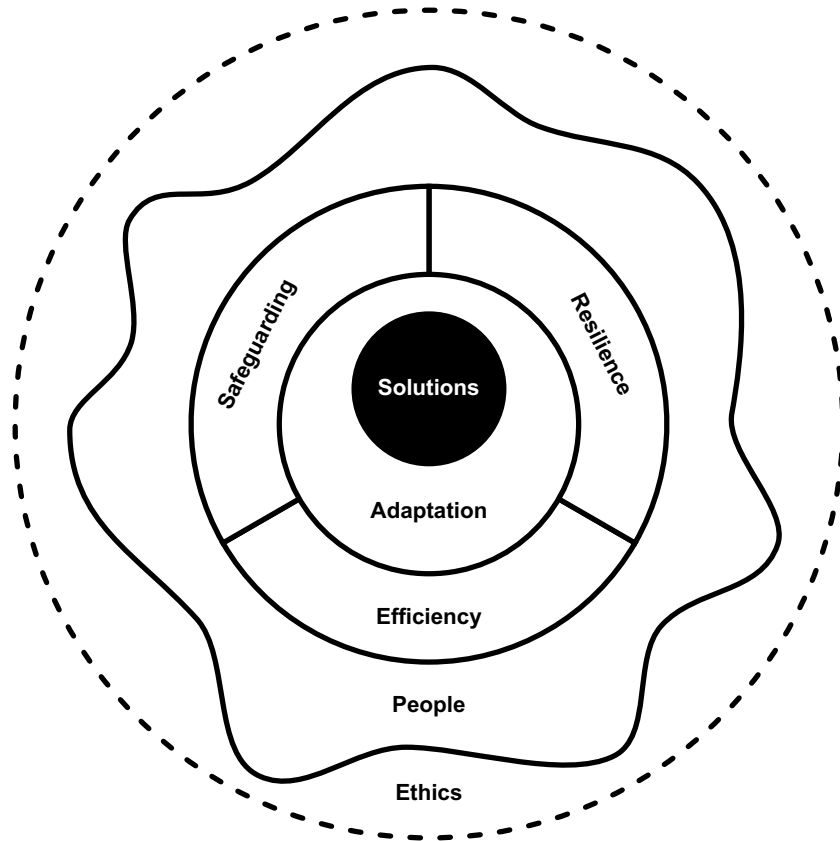
How to use the Compass

This Compass can help aspiring leaders as well as experienced ones. One way of using it is to go through the model, discover the gaps, prioritize them, and then start improving those behaviors in yourself by developing new skills and habits.

An alternative way is to use the self-assessment system, which suggests a plan that will potentially bring you the maximum improvement.

(Note: The self-assessment system is under development.)

Finally, in addition to individuals, trainers can also use this model in their courses and workshops. You can ask your attendees to take the self-assessment and give you their report codes, and then you can import all the codes into the self-assessment system to create a list of topics that's most useful to your audience as a whole.



Leaders are needed to create results, and they do that through **solutions**. That's why the solutions category is in the center of the behavioral model in the Compass.

What's a solution?

This Compass uses the word “solution” in a broad sense with several meanings, including the following:

- The resolution of a conflict
- The design of a small element
- The improvement of a process
- A whole project or program

There's a hierarchy of solutions: There are massive ones, such as projects and programs, which contain smaller ones, such as tiny innovations.

Who designs solutions?

Sometimes, the leader is the person who designs a solution (e.g., how to resolve a conflict), but usually, the leader motivates other people to design such solutions.

Regardless of who designs solutions, the leader needs to employ certain behaviors to support the proper design of solutions. These are the behaviors described in this category.

Decisions

Each solution or action represents a set of **decisions**. That's why the solutions category has many decision-making behaviors. However, the category is called "solutions" and not "decisions" because decisions are enablers whereas solutions are what we need.

When it comes to decisions, remember that failing to make an explicit decision when one is required is also a decision – an implicit one.

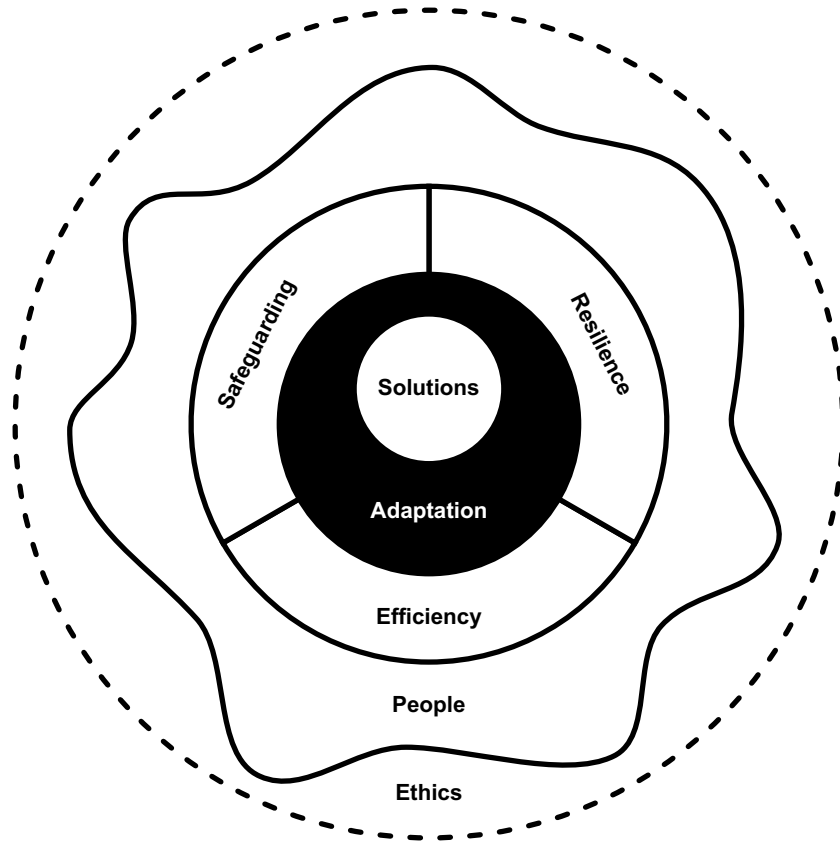
Adaptation

Having great solutions is not enough; we also have to adapt to changes in our environment and improve those solutions to get better results. That's why [adaptation](#) is the outer category around solutions.

Behaviors

The following are the desirable behaviors for leaders related to solutions:

1. You direct all decisions based on their alignment with a vision for a desirable future.
2. You ensure that the benefits of doing anything justify its investment.
3. You break down big or complex subjects into smaller, more manageable ones.
4. You understand the cognitive biases of yourself and people around you and limit the impact of those biases on decisions.
5. You improve decisions by considering relevant, diverse perspectives.
6. You increase buy-in of impactful people by involving them in decisions.
7. You ensure that all relevant factors and their interconnections are considered when making a decision.
8. You ensure enough time is spent understanding and exploring the subject before a decision is made.
9. You ensure solutions are not limited to popular, predictable options but also consider designing original solutions.
10. You select the more sustainable, high-quality solutions from among those that are similarly justifiable.
11. You ensure that the implementation of the solution is not rushed, but that an appropriate amount of time is spent planning it upfront.
12. You ensure that solutions in your area are compatible with those others create in related areas.
13. You ensure that relevant people have a reliable understanding of what it takes to implement the solution (time, cost, etc.).
14. You don't act too conservatively out of fear of failure but rather take measured, reasonable risks.



The core category of the Compass is [solutions](#). The main reason we have leaders is to get desirable results, and that's done by designing and then implementing solutions. However, both our environment and our understanding of the environment change, which requires us to adapt to those changes by adjusting our solutions. That's why we need to surround the solutions category with the adaptation category.

Sources of change

There are various sources of change that should be monitored. Those sources belong to two major categories:

- **Changes in our understanding:** It's not possible or even justifiable to learn everything about the subject before designing a solution for it. Therefore, as we learn more about it, we may realize that the solution must change to adapt to our new, improved understanding.
- **Changes in the environment:** There may be various types of change in our environment, both internal and external to the organization, which can change the suitability of the solution or even change our goals and visions.

Feedback

User feedback is a common way of discovering how to adapt, but not the only way. Moreover, user feedback itself can be understood in two ways:

- What people tell you
- What you observe about people

The second source of feedback is more reliable because people usually mistake what they want with how they want to be judged based on their desires.

In a more general sense, you have to pay attention to two different things:

- What people need
- What people want

The first one helps your long-term success, whereas the second helps with your short-term success. Like most other things, you must balance the two.

Practicality

Remember that if you try to make everyone happy, you won't make anyone happy. That's key in adjusting solutions: Except for [ethical](#) aspects that are not negotiable, we should be brave enough to draw the line somewhere and exclude some expectations so that we can adapt in order to satisfy a desirable subset of the audience.

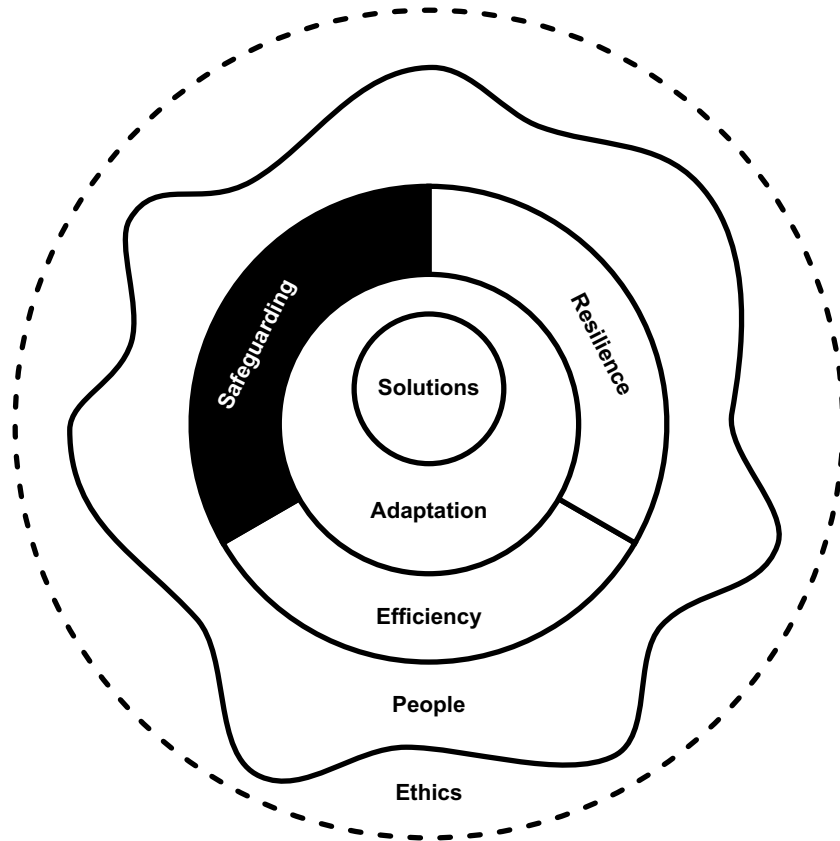
Becoming reactive

There's a common form of over-adaptation that gradually turns into reactive tweaking of the solution without paying attention to high-level goals and visions on the one hand and opportunity cost on the other. When leaders and people around them fall into this trap, their work no longer generates the desirable results.

Behaviors

The following are the desirable leader's behaviors in the adaptation category:

1. You regularly evaluate visions and goals to ensure they remain desirable and achievable.
2. You regularly adjust in-progress solutions to ensure they remain justifiable.
3. You remain open to replacing your selected solution with another that's justifiably better.
4. You ensure that proposed changes to solutions are justifiable based on all relevant factors before implementing them.
5. You ensure that competing factors that impact a solution are continuously identified and balanced.
6. You ensure that work items are continuously re-prioritized, allowing the more important ones to gain more attention.
7. You continually seek ways to justifiably increase the satisfaction of relevant stakeholders.
8. You ensure that relevant expectations are continually evaluated and justifiably met via solutions.
9. You are always proactive and encourage others to be proactive as well.
10. You constantly review the past to see how you can make better decisions in the future.



A leader must safeguard themselves, their teams, and their organizations against various potential sources of problems. Otherwise, investments, reputations, and other valuable things will be in danger.

Risk-taking

Risk-taking is natural and necessary for any leader. However, such risk-taking, which is part of solution design in this Compass, must be measured and balanced and doesn't mean that we don't need safeguarding. Don't mistake sloppiness for risk-taking.

Amount of safeguarding

There must be a reasonable level of safeguarding: not too much and not too little. Don't allow the need to safeguard to become an obsession for you.

The right amount of safeguarding is not fixed but depends on the type of solutions you're working on. Some are sensitive and require more safeguarding, while some require less.

Timeline

Some leaders limit their safeguarding to the beginning of designing or implementing a solution. However, effective safeguarding starts before the implementation of a solution, while it's still being designed, because our safeguarding may require a certain type of solution; and it continues at least

until the implementation is finished, to create better coverage.

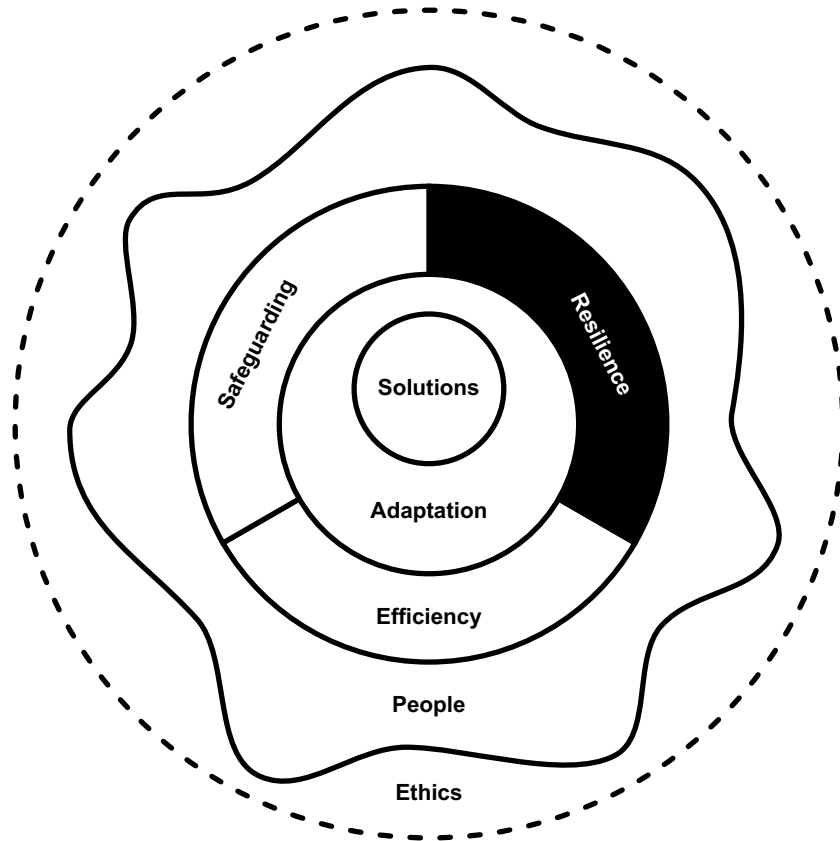
Cost of safeguarding

Safeguarding, like many other things, requires some effort and delays implementation at certain intervals. A good leader should be able to convince people that this investment is justifiable by the bigger savings that will be made in the future.

Behaviors

The following are the desirable leader's behaviors related to safeguarding:

1. You ensure that relevant uncertainties and unintended consequences are considered when making decisions.
2. You ensure that decisions are lawful and that unlawful claims are identified and addressed.
3. You ensure that regulations specific to your work are identified and fully complied with.
4. You ensure that standards and best practices relevant to your work are identified and considered.
5. You ensure that relevant people are informed of decisions and formally approve them if necessary.
6. You ensure that decisions and approvals, especially those from external sources, are recorded and traceable.
7. You ensure that confidential information stays safe.
8. You protect your team from distractions, annoyances, and problems to a reasonable degree.
9. You actively look for problems and justifiably solve them before they pile up and grow.



Good leaders must safeguard themselves and the people around them. However, any reasonable level of safeguarding leaves some amount of potential threat. In other words, bad things happen, and when they do, you, your team, and your organization must be strong enough to get over them.

Personal resilience

This category of the Compass has more behaviors related to the leader themselves than any other category. The reason is that it's much easier for a resilient leader to be ethical and positive toward people around them.

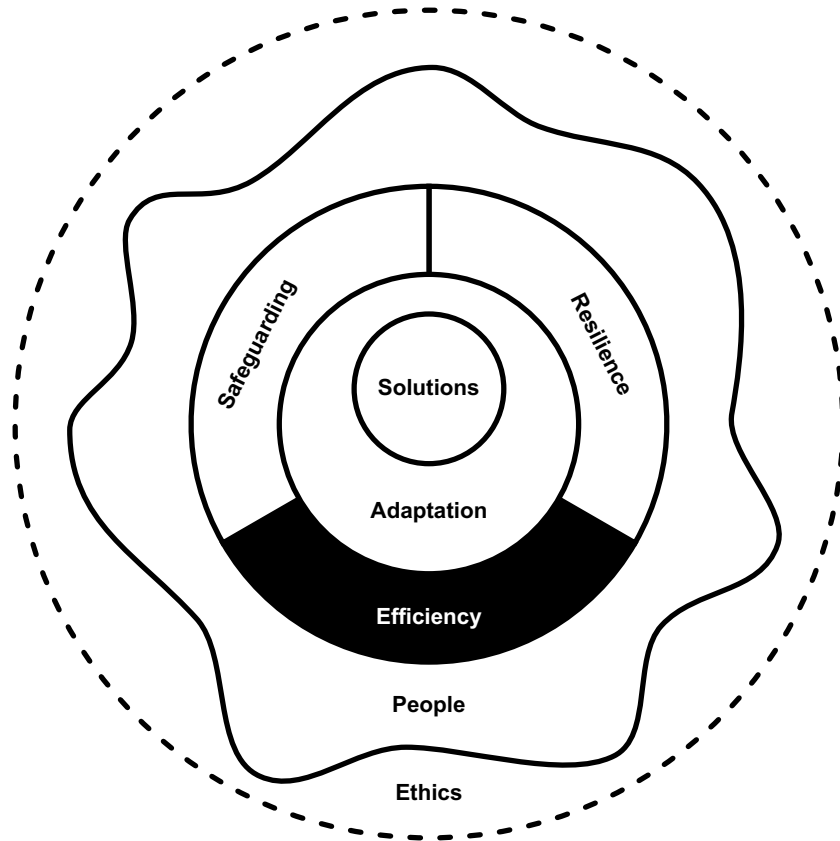
Firefighting

Some leaders don't spend enough effort improving their resilience because they're too busy reacting to day-to-day problems. The key here is that when you don't invest in improving resilience and safeguarding, you'll have more immediate issues to deal with. Don't let yourself get trapped in such a vicious cycle.

Behaviors

The following are the key behaviors a leader should have in the resilience category:

1. You build and maintain a strong, positive professional reputation.
2. You build effective relationships with people who work in your field and industry.
3. You don't limit yourself to your official responsibilities but also volunteer to do things that make sense to you.
4. You develop your mental strength to overcome emotional challenges.
5. You invest primarily in gaining capabilities that remain relevant despite changes in technology, market, and preferences.
6. You manage your work and life in such a way that you can overcome financial issues without any serious difficulty.
7. You take care of your physical health to ensure you'll work and enjoy life for a long time.
8. You ensure the knowledge and skills of team members are such that work can continue if one or a few team members become unavailable.
9. You ensure that there's enough reserve (time, money, etc.) in the implementation of any solution to cover its unknown unknowns.
10. You always have an alternative plan for when the primary plan doesn't work.
11. You ensure that there's an effective versioning and backup system for the information you and your teams create.
12. You ensure there's enough redundancy for the critical technologies the team uses.
13. You know who to go to when you need niche services.
14. You ensure that solutions are diversified so that they are not subject to the same risks.
15. You reduce the complexity of solutions when possible and justifiable.



[Safeguarding](#), [resilience](#), and efficiency are needed because you want to get certain results via [adapting solutions](#). With efficiency, you want to make the implementation of the solution faster.

Speed vs. direction

Remember that speed is only positive when you're heading in the right direction. Your direction is set in the [solutions](#) category and adjusted in the [adaptation](#) category. This is important to remember because some leaders focus so much on speed that they forget about direction.

Governance

One of the contributing factors to efficiency is how some decisions should be escalated, because escalations usually add delays. While you should try to optimize the process, the goal is not always to remove escalations because they're one of your [safeguards](#) and a way to ensure that you're moving in the right direction. Don't sacrifice direction for speed.

Shorter path vs. higher speed

You can achieve desired outcomes faster in two ways:

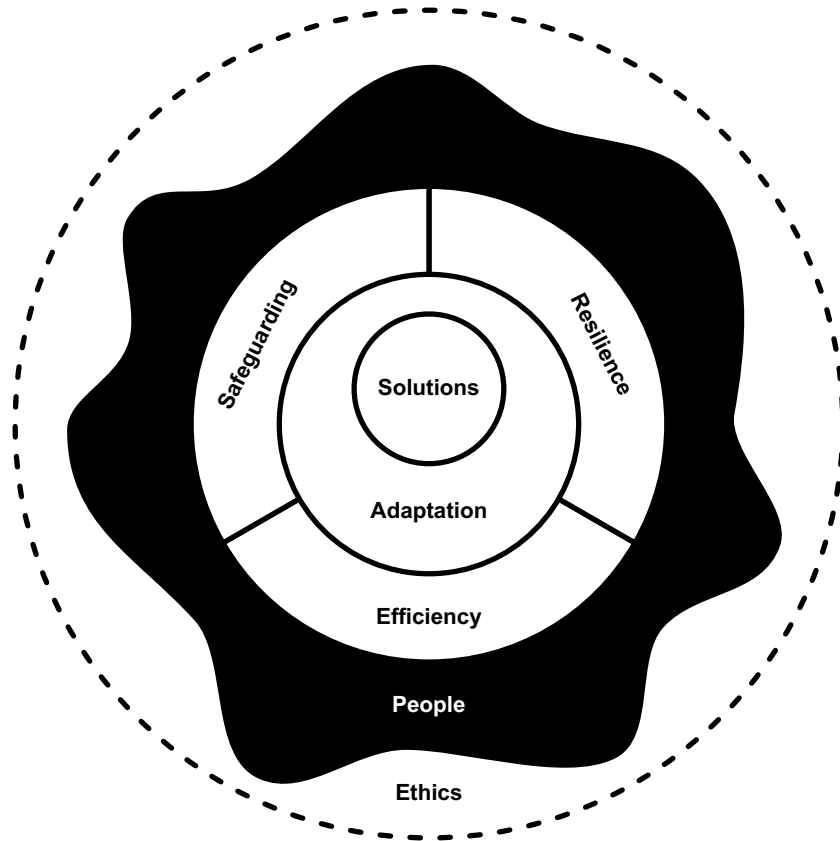
- **Shortening the path:** You increase business value when you achieve the same outcome with a different output that requires a smaller investment.
- **Increasing speed:** With a certain output, it's usually possible to move faster without sacrificing quality and endangering the outcomes.

You should benefit from both of the above methods. The first one is the subject of the [solutions](#) and [adaptation](#) categories, and the second one is what we aim for in the efficiency category.

Behaviors

The following are the leader's desirable behaviors related to efficiency:

1. You don't mistake efficiency with overwork, pressure, and busyness.
2. You avoid clutter and waste by focusing on the essential aspects of the subject.
3. You use publicly available methods and make them your own instead of reinventing the wheel.
4. You ensure that when a type of work is repeated, it's done a little better than the previous times.
5. You consider automating repetitive work or structuring its workflow when justifiable.
6. You learn about various types of software packages that can be helpful in your role and use them effectively.
7. You control your emotions under stress and other strong stimuli and limit their impact on your decisions and behaviors.
8. You delegate work to the right people and get results without micromanaging them.
9. You ensure that everything important is documented and stored in a way that makes it easy to retrieve in the future.
10. You structure and present information in a way that makes it easy for relevant people to understand.
11. You speak and write clearly, completely, and yet concisely, to avoid misunderstandings, friction, and time-wasting.
12. You spread your attention and energy among things based on their importance.
13. You improve efficiency by limiting the amount of work done in parallel.
14. You make sure deliverables are fully completed before closing them.
15. You always prepare yourself for what's coming, from a simple meeting to a big project to a crisis.
16. You are punctual, to avoid wasting time and mental energy and to respect yourself and others.



The main challenge in a leader's job is to work with people! It's difficult because people behave in unpredictable ways, not everyone is the same, and many people have conflicting interests.

Main challenge vs. primary goal

Don't mistake the primary challenge of leaders, which is working with people, with their primary goal, which is getting results through [solutions](#). Without solutions, there's no reason to work with people. Having this property of the Compass in mind is important because some leaders sacrifice everything for this category, which defeats the purpose.

Who are the "people"?

The people that a leader should be thinking about in this category are

- those who are led by the leader, and
- those who expect results from the leader:
 - people internal to the organization (e.g., managers)
 - external customers (if any)
 - external regulators
 - etc.

We should also think about organizations as groups of people and hence a subject of this category.

There's a wider range of people in society who will be impacted by your solutions, and they need to be considered as well, but that's an [ethical](#) consideration separate from what we have in this category.

Balance

Some people believe in very harsh styles of leadership where everyone contributes to results out of fear. Some people believe in very soft styles of leadership, wherein people contribute to results only if they are convinced to do so. As usual, both extremes are problematic, and effective leaders stay around the middle of the spectrum, swinging a little to one side or the other depending on the situation.

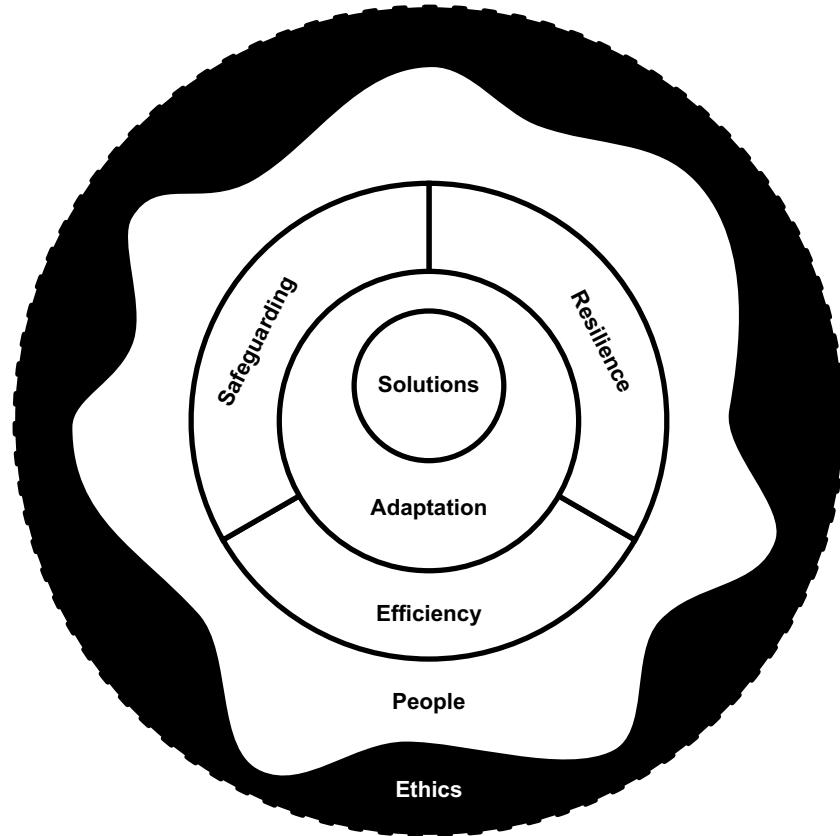
Nature

There are different styles of leadership, and each one is more natural for a certain type of leader. If you try to adopt a style of leadership that's not suitable to you, you'll be perceived as fake, and you won't be able to motivate people sufficiently.

Behaviors

The following are the desirable leader's behaviors in the people category:

1. You identify all the individuals and organizations who can impact the move toward the vision and the achievement of goals.
2. You ensure that people around you understand and, if possible, believe in the visions and goals that they work toward.
3. You understand the motivations of relevant people and organizations and attempt to satisfy them when justifiable.
4. You bring people together to brainstorm and provide you with useful information, ideas, and solutions.
5. You create a safe space for people to give opinions, and you listen in order to understand, not to respond.
6. You facilitate people to work together smoothly toward visions and goals.
7. You balance kindness and support with clear expectations and charisma.
8. You make it clear what's expected from each person without making it too detailed.
9. You speak in ways that inspire people to take action.
10. You recognize and appreciate people's achievements appropriately.
11. You resolve conflicts among people in an effective, fair, and sustainable way.
12. You negotiate effectively toward win-win solutions.
13. You alert your managers to their mistakes but support their decisions if they don't change them.



The outer ring in the behavioral model of the Compass is the ethics category. Being the last category, it completes the set of behaviors and surrounds everything we do.

Scope

Your ethical responsibilities, as a leader, are toward the following:

- People you lead
- Organizations you work for or contribute to
- The wider society and the environment

Power vs. responsibility

The more power you have, the more responsibility you should have, and that includes ethical responsibilities as well. Therefore, leaders who are also managers have a higher ethical responsibility than those who are not.

Justification

Some people believe that being ethical pays you back in the long term and that being ethical can be justifiable from the business perspective; for example, by building reputation and trust. This is

dangerous because once business reasons become the justification for ethics, they can also be the reason for violating ethics when they don't align.

We act ethically because it's our way of life, and we don't need a business justification for it.

Ethics vs. law

Some ethical topics are covered by law in various countries, but that doesn't make law and ethics equivalent, as there are many more ethical concerns that go beyond the law. Also, ethical principles may not align with the current laws in your country, which is how many social reform movements start. You need to understand and comply with legal necessities as a [safeguard](#), and on top of that, you act ethically as a norm.

If you work long enough, you will probably face difficult decisions in which the law and ethics contradict each other. You must be prepared and know which one you want to give priority to when this happens.

Absolutism

You're not alone if you think you can't act ethically 100% of the time. That's natural, but you shouldn't let that discourage you from being ethical altogether. Just try to be as ethical as you practically can, and gradually improve on it.

Supporting the people category

We should act ethically because there are other [people](#) in the world. That's why we need to have the ethics category in this context. In other words, being ethical is not the ultimate goal (otherwise it would have been in the center of the behavioral model), but it's a necessity.

The practical consequence of this point is for decision makers: Selecting an ethical leader is not enough; you must select a leader who can support the creation of solutions and who also acts ethically.

Behaviors

The following are the desirable leader's behaviors related to ethics:

1. You act ethically, even when it's challenging to do so or when no one else is acting ethically.
2. You consider yourself as responsible for the decisions you could have made but didn't as for those you did make.
3. You encourage, respect, and support ethical behavior in people around you.
4. You don't tell lies to yourself or others.
5. You keep your word.
6. You respect people's privacy.
7. You treat people fairly, without discriminating based on gender, race, religion, etc.
8. You carefully consider the impact of actions on people, organizations, the environment, cultural heritage, etc.
9. You pursue opportunities that benefit both you and others and avoid zero-sum situations when possible.
10. You actively strive to improve the well-being of people who work for you.
11. You guide, help, and encourage people around you to develop their capabilities.
12. You learn about the culture of the people you work with and respect it to a reasonable degree.
13. You don't blame others for your mistakes and don't take credit for what others have done.
14. You match people's responsibilities with their capabilities and preferences whenever possible.
15. You disclose your conflicts of interest.