



DRIVER REFERENCE GUIDE 4 OF 5

IDENTITY REFERENCE GUIDE

Whether employees believe their personal ambitions are aligned with the organization's direction. What to look for when diagnosing the driver, what to do when it needs attention, and what to avoid. Built for use in the field during the intervention period, not for reading once.

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4 THE DRIVER IDENTITY

Whether employees believe their personal ambitions are aligned with the organization's direction

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

- *If you were explaining why you work here to a talented friend who had other options, what would you say?*
- *When you look at where this organization is heading, do you see a future in it for yourself?*
- *Is there something this organization does that you find genuinely worth talking about outside of work?*
- *Where do you want to be in three years, and does what you're doing here move you toward that?*

WHEN THIS DRIVER IS STRONG

- Individuals describe the organization's work in purpose-led terms that go beyond compensation or role; they can articulate why the work matters
- "We" language is used naturally when describing organizational goals, decisions, and challenges; the individual experiences the organization's outcomes as their own
- People are willing to defend the organization's reputation externally, including when it is under criticism, because they experience the criticism as directed partly at them
- Employees connect their own development trajectory to the organization's direction; where the organization is going is broadly where they want to go
- High-potential employees who have outside options choose to stay and contribute at a high level

WHEN THIS DRIVER IS WEAKENING

- Answers to Why do you work here? become functional, compensation, location, role responsibilities, convenience
- "They" language replaces "we" when describing leadership decisions, organizational strategy, or challenges; the individual has separated their identity from that of the organization
- A spectator attitude develops toward organizational challenges, with people observing difficulties rather than engaging with them; the problems belong to leadership, not to everyone
- Individuals stop volunteering information that would help the organization improve because they do not experience its improvement as their concern
- High-potential employees who leave explain their departure in terms that reveal a gap between their ambitions and the organization's direction, a gap that was visible internally before it became visible externally

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The shift from “we” language to “they” language. The earliest signal of identity erosion is in how employees describe the organization. When employees who previously spoke about the organization’s goals as their own begin referring to leadership and the organization as external entities, the identity relationship is weakening. This shift often precedes any visible behavioral change in performance or engagement and frequently precedes awareness of the shift to the individuals themselves.

How individuals respond to organizational setbacks. In organizations with strong identity, setbacks produce collective problem-solving, with people asking what went wrong and how to fix it. In organizations where identity is weakening, the same setbacks produce a different response: observation rather than investment – a spectator attitude toward organizational difficulties that the individual no longer experiences as their own problem to solve.

Whether individuals defend the organization externally. In high-identity organizations, employees are frequently the organization’s most effective ambassadors, not because they have been instructed to be but because the organization’s success feels personally meaningful to them. When identity weakens, this changes. Employees become neutral about the organization’s external reputation rather than invested in it, and in some cases they become quietly critical.

How people respond to significant strategic change. Strategic change is the sharpest test of trust in identity. When the organization changes direction, employees who are strongly identified will ask whether they can see themselves in the new direction. Those who can will update their identity and remain. Those who cannot will begin disengaging even before they have consciously decided to leave. The quality of the explanation that accompanies strategic change, specifically whether it connects the new direction to the underlying purpose that people originally identified with, is what determines whether identity survives the transition.

WHAT TO DO

Actively connect individual work to organizational purpose. The connection between daily tasks and meaningful impact is not self-evident. It requires active translation by leaders who can show each team member specifically how their contribution shapes outcomes that extend beyond their immediate deliverable. This translation does not need to be elaborate; it needs to be honest and specific.

Demonstrate organizational values in difficult moments. The moments that build identity most powerfully are the moments when the organization upholds its stated values at visible cost. This could be the decision to protect a team member who made an honest mistake, or the strategic choice that was commercially inconvenient but aligned with what the organization had committed to stand for. These moments are remembered precisely because they were not required, and they become the evidence on which employees build their belief that the organization's values are real.

Invest in the belonging infrastructure. Identity at the team level is usually stronger than identity at the organizational level. Building identity at scale requires that team-level belonging be present as a foundation. This means paying attention to whether people in each team feel genuinely included, whether their contributions are acknowledged within the team, and whether the team functions as a social unit that people feel part of rather than a functional grouping they happen to belong to.

When direction changes, explain what stays constant. The most common identity failure during strategic change is the explanation of what is changing without an equally explicit explanation of what is not changing. When employees hear only what is different, they have no stable foundation on which to re-anchor their identity. The explanation that preserves identity names the continuity: the values that will still guide decisions, the commitments to people that remain in place, the underlying purpose that the new direction still serves.

WHAT TO AVOID

Culture initiatives that are not backed by behavioral consistency. Identity is built on the experience that the organization is what it says it is. When values statements, culture decks, and purpose narratives are not reflected in the actual experience of working within the organization, the gap between declared and actual culture is visible to everyone inside it. That gap is more damaging to identity than the absence of a stated culture would be, because it adds the experience of being misled to the absence of genuine alignment.

Mission drift without transparent renegotiation. When an organization's effective mission shifts significantly, whether through commercial pressure, strategic pivot, or change in leadership, people who joined on the basis of the original mission face an implicit renegotiation they have not been asked to participate in. Those who are not offered an honest explanation of what has changed and why frequently draw their own conclusions about the organization's integrity. The departure that follows is usually attributed to market opportunity or career development. The underlying cause is identity failure.

Conflating team identity with organizational identity. Strong team identity is valuable, but it is not the same as organizational identity, and the two are not always aligned. An organization in which people feel deeply loyal to their team but indifferent to the broader organization has identity at only one level, and it is the less durable one. When organizational circumstances change, team identity does not transfer automatically. Building both levels requires attention to the connection between team belonging and the larger mission.

WORKING PAGE

What sustains the driver. Identity depends on a genuine alignment between the individual's sense of purpose and the organization's direction. It cannot be manufactured through messaging alone. Identity erodes when the organization's stated values diverge from its actual decisions, when leadership behaves inconsistently with the mission, or when people can no longer see their own trajectory in the organization's future.

WHICH FAILURE IS IT?

From Step 2 of the intervention structure in Chapter 10. Identifying the specific failure determines which intervention will address it.

- ☐ Purpose-related (the work does not connect to meaning)
- ☐ Values-related (stated values are not demonstrated in practice)
- ☐ Mission-related (strategic change has created distance between what people signed up for and where the organization is now going)

The specific signals the diagnostic surfaced for this driver:

The one behavioral change people will be able to see:

How and when it will be communicated, before it is implemented:

Re-run the diagnostic question with the same people after sixty to ninety days. Date:

From Chapters 10 and 12 of *Compounding Trust* by Timen Baart (Rethink Press, 2026). The other driver guides and the first trust review worksheet are at compoundingtrust.com/resources.

COMPOUNDING TRUST

TRUST IS A DIRECTION, NOT A SCORE

Compounding Trust explains why trust inside organizations is not simply a cultural sentiment. It is a structural condition that determines whether people contribute fully, share information early, make decisions confidently, and invest their ambition in a shared direction.

The Compounding Trust Model identifies five structural drivers:

COMPETENCE · FAIRNESS · RECIPROCITY · IDENTITY · TRANSPARENCY

Together, they determine whether trust strengthens or erodes over time. The practical leadership question is not whether an organization has trust, but whether trust is moving in the right direction, and which structural driver is causing that movement.

CONTINUE THE WORK

Compounding Trust provides the model, diagnostic frameworks, and intervention principles. Additional practical resources are available at compoundingtrust.com/resources.

TrustXP is the measurement platform built on the Compounding Trust Model. It gives leadership teams continuous, driver-specific visibility into the direction of trust, helping them identify emerging gaps before those gaps appear in performance data.

Read and apply the framework

compoundingtrust.com

Make trust observable

trustxp.com

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