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The Mindsets in Your Way

The patterns that pull leaders into performing, and the practices that quiet them

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The Mindsets in Your Way is an instrument of the Choose Becoming program, Infinitum Leadership's five-instrument development sequence for executive leaders.

Who this paper is for. Executives deciding whether the patterns named here are theirs to work on will find their route in Sections 1, 2, and 8. Practising coaches evaluating the instrument's provenance and method: Sections 3 to 6. HR sponsors deciding whether the instrument is safe to put in front of a leader: Section 7 and the governance statement that follows it.

Executive summary

Leaders rarely stall for lack of skill. They stall because an inner pattern — vigilance that cannot stand down, perfectionism that cannot ship, control that cannot delegate, approval-seeking that cannot tell the truth — hijacks the very capacities their role requires. *The Mindsets in Your Way* is the Choose Becoming instrument built for that stall: forty statements, self-rated, resolving into ten named mindsets whose "volume" a leader can see, choose among, and practise against, with a named micro-practice for each and a quarterly volume check inside the program's weekly rhythm.

This paper does three things a skeptical reader is entitled to ask for. First, it publishes the instrument as written — the ten mindsets, their voices, the movements of The Becoming Method each one blocks, and their paired practices. Second, it works backwards: it sets the ten against the neighbouring clinical tradition that independently named much of the same territory — Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems parts — and against the academic literature that studies these patterns one at a time, grading every mapping honestly, including the mindset that fits no single placement and the two mindsets that are the instrument's own constructions. The ten were also developed in dialogue with the practitioner coaching literature that works this territory, Chamine's *Positive Intelligence* (2012) among it; that literature is acknowledged here as part of the instrument's conversation, and none of the paper's claims rest on it. Third, it separates the paper's load-bearing claims from its witnesses: the claims that practices quiet these patterns rest on peer-reviewed evidence (cognitive defusion, self-compassion training, perfectionism and procrastination research, implementation intentions), the coaching setting itself carries meta-analytic support stated at its corrected weight — restricted to randomized controlled trials, coaching's overall effect is g = 0.59, with publication bias detected in that record (de Haan and Nilsson, 2023) — and Internal Family Systems is cited as a clinical tradition with a developing evidence base whose posture toward inner patterns — protective, never pathological — the instrument adopts. The paper closes with the instrument's standing stated plainly: a coaching instrument with face validity and a transparent scoring rule, whose psychometric validation program lies ahead.

1. The problem: performing as a leadership failure mode

Every coaching practice meets the same paradox. A leader can be promoted for a pattern and then limited by it. The vigilance that made a young manager reliable becomes the senior leader's inability to let a room breathe. The perfectionism that built a reputation becomes the bottleneck an entire team waits behind. The drive that produced results becomes a self-worth wired to the last quarter's numbers, and with it a leadership performed for an audience rather than exercised for a purpose.

Choose Becoming names that axis performing versus becoming. Performing organizes a leader's energy around how they appear — to boards, to teams, to themselves. Becoming organizes it around who they are growing into. The Mindsets instrument works the seam between the two. Its premise, drawn from the traditions examined in Section 3, is that the patterns pulling a leader into performing are recognizable, nameable, and workable — and that a leader who can name the pattern operating in a meeting has already loosened its grip on that meeting.

The opening observation — promoted for a pattern, then limited by it — also has a scholarly form. Grant and Schwartz (2011) document the inverted-U as a general property of apparently positive constructs: virtues and strengths follow inverted-U relationships with outcomes, and "more is better" is the error to design against. The instrument's core move, that a strength overextended becomes the obstacle, is therefore a citable scholarly principle, and this paper cites it as one wherever the move does load-bearing work.

2. Ten patterns, named

The instrument asks clients to rate forty behavioural statements — four per mindset, sampling the pattern's promise, its behaviour, and its cost — and reports each mindset's volume in plain bands: Quiet, Present, Loud, Very loud. Results foreground the loudest patterns and route the client to work with one focus mindset. Each mindset is a named persona with a voice line, the words the pattern actually says, because recognition is the instrument's first mechanism.

- **The Adversary** — the core pattern, underneath all four movements of The Becoming Method. Voice: *"Someone here is to blame. And there is nothing you can do that would fix it."* Practice: **The accusation and the action** — write the accuser's charge in one line; beneath it, one thing inside your control in the next hour, and do it.
- **The Sentinel** (blocks Clarity): *"Something could go wrong here. Stay ready."* Practice: **Fact, then fear** — two columns, what is known and what is imagined, acting only on the first for the next hour.
- **The Analyst** (blocks Clarity): *"Feelings are unreliable. Show me the reasoning."* Practice: **Name it before you solve it** — one sentence a day, "Right now I feel ___," with no fixing and no explaining.
- **The Drifter** (blocks Courage): *"Not today. It will keep until things are calmer."* Practice: **The ten-minute approach** — exactly ten timed minutes moving toward the avoided thing.
- **The Host** (blocks Courage): *"Keep everyone comfortable. That is your job here."* Practice: **One true sentence** — once a day, in a low-stakes moment, the true thing said kindly.
- **The Sprinter** (blocks Commitment): *"This has gone flat. The next thing will feel alive."* Practice: **Finish one small thing** — close one small open loop completely, and keep a written "Finished" list.
- **The Editor** (blocks Commitment): *"Almost. It is not ready yet. One more pass."* Practice: **Ship at good** — a visible deadline, and at the deadline the work goes out.
- **The Director** (blocks Character): *"If I do not run this, it falls apart. Move, everyone."* Practice: **Hands off one scene** — once a day, someone else runs one small arena their way, uncorrected, while the anxiety gets named instead of obeyed.

- **The Performer** (blocks Character): *"Your worth is your last result. Keep producing."* Practice: **Off the record** — one weekly block that produces nothing and is reported to no one.
- **The Martyr** (blocks Character): *"After everything I have carried, this is the thanks I get."* Practice: **Ask plainly** — once a week, one need that would have travelled as a complaint, stated as a direct and kind request.

Every mindset card also carries the pattern's *promise* before its *cost* — what the pattern offers and what it has been protecting — and two reflection prompts, the first of which asks where the client first remembers this mindset showing up in their life. The first prompt is an invitation, and its depth is always the client's choice: a client may answer from last quarter rather than from childhood, may pass on it entirely, and nothing written in response is reported to anyone outside the coaching relationship. The instrument is administered by a coach, inside that relationship, for exactly this reason; the governance statement following Section 7 sets out the full fencing. The Adversary is always presented in full and first: the instrument's model holds that blame fused with helplessness, when loud, distorts the reading of every other pattern.

3. Where the ten came from: a backwards provenance

The ten were built from coaching observation and then checked against the neighbouring frameworks, rather than adapted from any one of them. The account below is published so a reader can verify the overlaps instead of taking novelty on faith.

Practitioner coaching literatures work this territory too, and the ten were developed in dialogue with them — Chamine's *Positive Intelligence* (2012) among them. The checks this paper leans on are the clinical and academic anchors that follow.

Two mindsets are the instrument's own constructions, and the paper claims them as constructions rather than borrowings. The Adversary is the core one: blame fused with helplessness — a voice that faults self, others, and circumstances in one breath and surrenders agency in the next. It plays the structural role of a core pattern the others serve, and Section 4 gives it its scholarly home in the self-criticism literature. The Sprinter names a shape familiar to every coach of founders and executives — high initiation, abandoned middles, beginnings that feel alive and continuations that feel flat — drawn from coaching observation and stated as such.

Against Internal Family Systems, most mindsets read as managers — Schwartz's proactive protectors: vigilance, intellectualizing, people-pleasing, perfectionism, control, and achievement are canonical manager strategies. The Martyr resists a single placement, and the paper leaves it unplaced on purpose: its suffering belongs to what IFS calls an exile, while its display is a protector's work, and compressing that into one label would misdescribe it. The Drifter's placement as a manager is likewise flagged as a judgement call, since avoidance can serve reactive, firefighter ends in other presentations.

4. The evidence beneath the ten, graded

Internal Family Systems — clinical tradition, developing evidence. Schwartz's model (Schwartz and Sweezy, 2020; Schwartz, 2021) contributes the posture the instrument adopts: parts are

protectors, every pattern learned its job somewhere and usually for a good reason, and change begins with curiosity toward the pattern rather than war against it. The evidence base is graded as developing, and the grade now rests on a fuller record than it did a year ago. A scoping review counts 27 peer-reviewed IFS studies (Buys, 2025). The earlier record stands: a randomized controlled trial of an IFS-based intervention in rheumatoid arthritis (Shadick et al., 2013; n = 79) found improvements in pain and depressive symptoms, and a pilot study with survivors of multiple childhood trauma (Hodgdon et al., 2022; n = 17, uncontrolled) reported large within-group changes in PTSD symptoms, a design that cannot support strong causal claims. The PARTS program has since added a feasibility study (Comeau et al., 2024) and a pilot in comorbid PTSD and substance use (Ally et al., 2025), and then the field's first randomized controlled trial of a group IFS-derived treatment (Joss et al., 2026; n = 60): participants in the PARTS arm and in a well-matched active control arm both improved substantially on clinician-rated PTSD symptoms, with no significant difference between the groups, although the PARTS arm attended more sessions and reported higher satisfaction. That null between-group result is carried here at full weight. It is what a developing evidence base looks like when it is reported honestly, and it is one reason the grade stays at developing. The model's 2015 listing on a United States evidence registry is a historical fact about a registry discontinued in 2018, and this paper cites it only as that. IFS-style deep work with traumatic material belongs with trained clinicians; Section 7 draws the instrument's scope boundary accordingly.

The academic record — established constructs. Beneath the taxonomies sits a mature literature studying the same patterns one at a time: perfectionism in its multidimensional forms (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt and Flett, 1991); procrastination understood as short-term mood regulation, meta-analytically reviewed (Steel, 2007; Sirois and Pychyl, 2013); self-worth made contingent on performance (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001); the impostor phenomenon, the Performer's closest named neighbour in the literature — high achievers unable to internalize their own success (Clance and Imes, 1978); the tendency for interpersonal victimhood as a measurable construct whose mechanics — recognition-seeking, rumination, grievance — match the Martyr precisely (Gabay et al., 2020); and intolerance of uncertainty beneath the Sentinel's scanning (Carleton, 2016).

Two of those anchors deserve a paragraph of their own, because they shape how the instrument itself is written. The perfectionism literature distinguishes perfectionistic *strivings* — high personal standards, often adaptive — from perfectionistic *concerns* — fear of mistakes, doubts about actions, and perceived external demand (Stoeber and Otto, 2006). The Editor targets the concern; the striving is part of what built the client's career, and the instrument's copy is written to quiet the first while leaving the second intact. The territory is also growing: across birth cohorts from 1989 to 2016, perfectionism rose on all three of its dimensions, with socially prescribed perfectionism — the belief that others demand flawlessness — rising fastest, by roughly a third (Curran and Hill, 2019). That is the Performer's and the Host's ground as much as the Editor's. The Adversary's home is the self-criticism literature. Gilbert's compassion-focused therapy treats shame and self-criticism as transdiagnostic problems, and distinguishes a self-correcting form of self-criticism, aimed at improvement, from a self-attacking form whose voice is contemptuous and whose function is punishment (Gilbert, 2009). The Adversary's voice line is the second form stated plainly. The placement also loads Section 6: where a pattern is self-attack in Gilbert's sense, self-compassion is a mechanism-matched counter, and the practices are aimed accordingly.

The instrument's claim on this literature is translation: the same territory, rendered in a form a coaching client can recognize in themselves, name in a session, and practise against.

A developmental frame: patterns held as subject, not yet as object. The instrument's deepest framing — a mindset is something a leader is currently subject to, and can learn to hold as object and examine — comes from constructive-developmental theory, cited here from its scholarly sources rather than from its popularizations: Kegan's *The Evolving Self* (1982) and *In Over Our Heads* (1994), where adult development is precisely the progressive taking-as-object of what was previously subject. In that frame the Adversary reads as a meaning-making structure, not a mood, and each mindset names a pattern the leader can move from being run by to looking at. The leadership evidence for the theory is graded by the field's own account: McCauley et al. (2006), reviewing constructive-developmental applications to leadership and management in *The Leadership Quarterly*, found mixed support for the proposition that developmental stage predicts leadership effectiveness, alongside methodological limitations, and concluded the theory needs more robust research to earn greater impact. A representative positive study found developmental stage significantly predicting performance ratings among 67 managers (Strang and Kuhnert, 2009). This paper accordingly uses developmental language as rationale for the instrument's framing — the reason a pattern can be worked with at all — and never as validation of the instrument or of stage-based prediction.

A naming collision deserves one explicit sentence. Dweck's (2006) "mindset" names a belief about the malleability of ability; this instrument's "mindsets" name recurring inner patterns. The kinship is thematic, and the distinction matters for Section 6: meta-analysis puts mindset-intervention effects on achievement as small (Sisk et al., 2018, r = .10), with a large national experiment finding benefits concentrated in specific conditions (Yeager et al., 2019). This instrument takes the lesson — belief instruction alone moves little — and pursues change through practice and competing commitments instead.

5. Methodology justification

A statement bank, self-rated. The mindsets are patterns of inner speech; the only rater with access to them is the client. Forty statements sample each pattern across promise, behaviour, and cost, reducing single-item noise, and voice lines are written for recognition. The instrument reports volume — a coaching measure in plain bands — and Section 7 states what that does and does not claim.

Personification as method. Naming a pattern as a character separates the person from the pattern: "my Editor is loud this quarter" supports a different conversation than "I am a perfectionist." Narrative practice calls this externalizing (White and Epston, 1990); acceptance and commitment therapy's defusion research supports the underlying move, in which a thought noticed as a thought loses its literal grip (Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson, 2012; A-Tjak et al., 2015). Clinical and narrative traditions personify inner patterns for the same reason, and clients describe their inner lives in parts unprompted — Schwartz built IFS on exactly those reports.

Promise before cost. A pattern a client experiences as purely pathological gets defended. Kegan and Lahey's (2009) competing-commitment account — a theoretical interpretation drawn from constructive-developmental theory, offered here as theory rather than as an empirical finding —

holds that a behaviour persists partly because of what it protects: a commitment operating beneath the stated one. IFS's posture toward protectors makes negotiation possible where war fails. Each card therefore honours the pattern's job before pricing it. This is the instrument's core design inheritance from both sources.

Loudest first. Development is sequenced by triage: the loudest pattern carries the strongest competing commitment, and ten simultaneous change targets produce none. Results foreground one focus mindset, and the Adversary is always shown in full because blame fused with helplessness colours the client's reading of everything else.

Practices matched to mechanism, closed with if–then commitments. Each practice trains the specific counter-move its mindset blocks: timed behavioural approach against avoidance, affect labelling against over-analysis (putting feelings into words reduces their reactivity: Lieberman et al., 2007; Torre and Lieberman, 2018), a direct request against indirect grievance, shipping against perfectionism. Doses are minutes, daily or weekly, on the logic that nervous systems update from experience — good and sent teaches what insight about sending cannot. Each card closes with an if–then commitment, the implementation-intention format with its own evidence base (Gollwitzer, 1999).

A longitudinal volume check. The construct is state-sensitive by design — volume "at this season of your life" — so the meaningful signal is self-comparison over time. The full instrument can be retaken at any time, and a one-question volume check on the focus mindset rides inside the program's quarterly rhythm ("Since your last take, your focus mindset feels: Quieter / About the same / Louder"), with results showing movement against previous takes. A single-item check is a conversation instrument, and the paper describes it as exactly that.

Placement in the program. The instrument sits fourth in the Choose Becoming order — after the Snapshot, the Plan, and the Weekly Check-In have established goals and rhythms, and before Write Your Story. Mindset work interprets why a plan stalls; it earns its place once stalls can be observed, and the story work that follows can then revisit where the loudest patterns were learned.

6. Why practices, and the evidence that they help

The instrument's wager is that patterns quiet through practised counter-moves carried by self-compassion, rather than through insight or self-attack. The meta-analytic record supports the components. Acceptance and commitment therapy, whose defusion and acceptance moves underlie several practices, shows a medium effect across clinically relevant problems (A-Tjak et al., 2015, $g = 0.57$). Self-compassion interventions improve psychosocial outcomes across 27 randomized trials (Ferrari et al., 2019), and the construct itself is reliably measurable and trainable (Neff, 2003; Neff and Germer, 2013). Immunity to Change supplies the diagnostic discipline: surface the competing commitment a pattern protects, and the practice can be aimed at the real obstacle (Kegan and Lahey, 2009). The method is cited at its graded weight: theoretically grounded in Kegan's constructive-developmental scholarship (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and supported by case material from its authors' practice, with no controlled outcome study of the protocol itself located in the literature — "theoretically grounded, case-supported coaching method" is the strongest honest description, and it is the one this paper uses. Implementation intentions supply the follow-through format, cited in the Snapshot and Plan paper with their corrected effect sizes

and cited here on the same terms. None of this validates the ten-mindset taxonomy as such — Section 7 is explicit about that — and all of it supports the instrument's working parts.

Two further anchors complete the section. The certainty-loosening practices — the Sentinel's *Fact, then fear*, the Analyst's *Name it before you solve it* — train a move that now has its own empirical literature. Intellectual humility, defined as recognizing that one's beliefs may be fallible, with attentiveness to the limits of their evidence and of one's own evaluation (Leary et al., 2017), is measurable as a multi-factor construct (Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse, 2016), has been mapped across 18 definitions and 20 measures in an integrative framework (Porter et al., 2022a), and is associated with learning, decision-making, and openness in the field's *Nature Reviews Psychology* synthesis (Porter et al., 2022b). The construct and its consequences are supported; the specific practices in this instrument are applications of that construct, presented as applications. And the setting in which all of this is worked — a coaching conversation — carries its own meta-analytic warrant, stated in Section 6's register: coaching's effects are significant across outcome classes and largest on goal-directed self-regulation (g = 0.74; Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen, 2014), and restricted to randomized controlled trials the overall effect is g = 0.59, with publication bias detected (de Haan and Nilsson, 2023). Within the conversation, one micro-finding is cited with its qualification attached: people who ask more questions, especially follow-up questions, are perceived as more responsive and are better liked, with modest experimental effects (Huang et al., 2017) — although question-asking is substantially a dyadic behaviour, and the original speed-dating results do not survive social-relations reanalysis intact (Kluger and Malloy, 2019). The instrument's question-led session design is consistent with that evidence pattern. No study isolates question-asking as outperforming advice-giving, and this paper claims the pattern, not the proof.

7. What this instrument is, and what it is not

The Mindsets instrument has face validity, a transparent scoring rule (four items summed per mindset, banded for conversation), and a defined developmental purpose. It has no published reliability coefficients, no normative sample, and no criterion validation; its bands are interpretive heuristics, and its permitted use is coaching conversation and self-knowledge. Any reader who suspects the ten overlap with established trait territory — neuroticism, perfectionism, avoidance — is right, and Sections 3 and 4 publish the instrument's provenance and its academic anchors precisely so the overlap can be checked rather than asserted away; the instrument's contribution is translation into a workable form, and rebranding familiar territory as discovery would be the one claim this paper refuses to make.

A further limit concerns the ten among themselves. The paper has been careful about overlap with outside literatures; overlap inside the instrument deserves the same candour. The Sentinel, the Analyst, and the Adversary plausibly co-vary — vigilance, intellectualizing, and blame are travelling companions in many leaders — and the Editor and the Performer share an evaluative core. The design expects this: co-loud patterns are normal, they carry information about which pattern is driving, and they are exactly why the instrument routes the client to work with one focus mindset rather than with ten scores at once. Whether the ten separate empirically as cleanly as they

separate on the page is a question the validation program must answer with data, and intercorrelation and discriminant analysis of the statement bank is named in that program below.

Two further limits belong on the record. Self-report of self-deception carries a paradox the paper acknowledges: the instrument measures recognized volume, a pattern the client cannot yet see will under-report, and results are therefore worked through with a coach while the quarterly check lets recognition itself develop. And personified language carries a reification risk — patterns are metaphors with work to do, and the instrument's copy routes every practice back to the client's own action. The scope boundary is plain: a coaching instrument for functioning adults, and a companion to clinical care in no sense. Trauma, dissociation, and any clinical condition belong with trained clinicians, and the program refers accordingly.

The names themselves carry a risk the paper names before a sponsor has to. Mindset names are memorable because they travel, and a name that travels into the wrong room does harm. The names are session language, coined for recognition inside a coaching conversation; they are never file language. Results are not entered into employment records, not shared with a sponsoring employer, and not used in any decision about the client. The governance statement following this section sets these boundaries out in full.

Fairness and access, briefly. The instrument is written in plain English at a general reading level and is currently offered in English. Volume is a self-report measure, and cultures differ in directness and in how readily difficulty is presented to another person; volume is therefore interpreted inside the client's own frame, tracked against the client's own previous takes, and never normed across clients or cohorts. The persona names and voice lines are coaching vernacular, introduced in session, and a client who finds that a name does not travel well in their own culture or language renames the pattern in their own words: the recognition is the mechanism, and the label is only its handle.

The validation program is stated as future work in the same register as the LEADS assessment paper: expert review of the statement bank, pilot data collection across coaching cohorts, internal-consistency analysis by mindset, intercorrelation and discriminant analysis among the ten scales, and test–retest across the quarterly cycle the design already creates. Until that record exists, the instrument claims coaching standing only — which, for the leaders performing their way through rooms they were promoted to lead, is the standing it needs.

Use, scope, and governance — The Mindsets in Your Way

For: functioning adults in a coaching engagement, working on the performance patterns this paper describes.

Not for: clinical screening, diagnosis, or treatment; anyone whose presenting need is care rather than development. Where that line is in doubt, the clinical route is taken first.

Prohibited uses: selection, promotion, succession, performance management, or any other employment decision; entry of results or mindset names into employment records of any kind.

Administration: coach-administered only, inside a coaching relationship. Never employer-administered, and never distributed for unsupervised completion in a sponsored cohort. Reflection prompts invite depth at the client's choice; a client may decline any prompt, and no response is reported outside the relationship.

Data ownership: results belong to the client and are held in the client's coaching record for the duration of the engagement. A sponsoring employer receives no results, no pattern names, and no session content; the only information that crosses to a sponsor is what the client personally chooses to carry there.

Referral triggers: instrument work pauses, and referral to a trained clinician is made, when a client discloses traumatic material they wish to process, when dissociation or persistent and deepening distress appears, or when anything presents that belongs to clinical care rather than coaching.

8. Working with the instrument

In practice the instrument is small. Forty statements, completed in one sitting of minutes. The debrief session walks the volume bands, takes the loudest pattern's promise before its cost, and settles on one focus mindset and one if–then practice. From there the work rides the program's rhythm: the practice runs daily or weekly inside the client's actual week, and the quarterly volume check asks whether the pattern's hold on that week has changed. Movement is read against the client's own previous takes — quieter, about the same, louder — because the client is the only norm the instrument claims.

One composite, drawn from several engagements with details changed, shows the shape. A vice-president of operations at a health authority scored the Editor Very loud and the Director Loud. Her team had learned to wait: nothing left her desk on its first pass, and her deputies had stopped deciding anything in her absence. The work took the Editor first — *Ship at good*, a visible deadline, work released at the deadline whether or not it felt finished — with the Director's practice held for the following quarter. Two quarterly readings later the Editor read Loud; her own summary was that she had "stopped being the quality department," and her directors' meeting had begun clearing routine items with her out of the room. The volume had not vanished. It had become negotiable, which is the outcome the instrument is built to produce.

The instrument is taken inside a coaching engagement, and the engagement begins with a single conversation. Readers who recognize their own patterns in Section 2 are invited to book a discovery call through the Infinitum Leadership website; coaches and sponsors with questions about the instrument's governance can use the same door.

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