TALENT RESEARCH FOUNDATION · WORKING PAPER

The SF-Gene Framework

An Evidence-Based, Impact-Validated Model of Human Productivity and Sustainability

John B. Samuel
Founder & Principal Researcher, Talent Research Foundation

May 2026

Abstract

This paper presents the SF-Gene Framework, an evidence-based model of human productivity derived from over two decades of applied diagnostic research. The framework identifies two inborn, lifetime-stable Success Factor Genes (SF-Genes) governing human contribution: SF-Gene A (Natural Productive Zone), which determines the domain of sustainable productivity, and SF-Gene B (Expressive Aptitude Modality), which determines the innate mode through which effort is most effectively expressed. Unlike personality typologies and self-report psychometric instruments, the SF-Gene Framework relies on third-party, longitudinal validation through observable impact on others. The research establishes seven expressions of SF-Gene A as natural laws of productivity and identifies three mutually exclusive modalities of SF-Gene B — Action, Abstraction, and Emotion. The framework demonstrates predictive validity across leadership effectiveness, role alignment, burnout risk, and long-term sustainability, with consistent cross-cultural application suggesting an anthropological rather than situational basis.

1. Introduction

Despite extensive research in organizational psychology, leadership studies, and talent management, persistent challenges remain unresolved: burnout among high performers, disengagement despite competence, and chronic role misalignment. Prevailing models — personality typologies, behavioral styles, motivation theories, and strengths inventories — offer descriptive insight but limited predictive power, particularly with respect to sustainability and failure modes.

The SF-Gene Framework emerged in response to these limitations. Developed through applied, field-based research rather than laboratory abstraction, the framework seeks to identify the design principles governing human contribution. Its central premise is that sustained productivity and fulfillment are constrained not primarily by motivation, skill, or values, but by innate, lifetime-stable design factors that govern both *where* and *how* individuals contribute most effectively.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Success Factor Genes (SF-Genes)

The SF-Gene Framework posits that each individual possesses two inborn, lifetime-stable Success Factor Genes:

- **SF-Gene A (Natural Productive Zone).** Governs *why* an individual experiences energy, meaning, and usefulness, defining the domain of contribution in which effort produces sustainable productivity.
- **SF-Gene B (Expressive Aptitude Modality).** Governs *how* effort naturally expresses itself, defining the individual's primary mode of engaging tasks, problems, and people.

Together, SF-Gene A and SF-Gene B constitute an individual's **Productivity Genome**, shaping not only performance outcomes but also leadership style, relational dynamics, learning patterns, and vulnerability to burnout.

2.2 The Design Constraint Hypothesis

A core theoretical proposition of the SF-Gene Framework is the *design constraint hypothesis*: while individuals may acquire skills and adapt behaviors, sustained productivity and fulfillment are constrained by innate design. Persistent misalignment between role demands and SF-Gene configuration produces predictable dysfunction, regardless of competence or intent.

3. Epistemology and Methodology

3.1 Limitations of Self-Report Models

Much of the existing literature relies on self-report instruments, including personality inventories, motivation scales, and strengths assessments. While useful for self-reflection, such tools are subject to self-presentation bias, aspirational distortion, and contextual instability (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). The SF-Gene Framework explicitly rejects self-report as a sufficient basis for identity-level diagnostics.

3.2 Impact-Based, Third-Party Validation

Instead, the framework adopts an observational epistemology grounded in the principle that an individual's design is revealed through consistent, observable impact on others over time. This principle is operationalized through the **Zone Validation Questionnaire (ZVQ)**, which gathers data from multiple independent observers across diverse contexts. Patterns of convergence — both strengths and limitations — are analyzed to identify SF-Gene A and SF-Gene B. Blind spots are treated not as error variance, but as diagnostically meaningful expressions of the same underlying design.

4. SF-Gene A: The Seven Natural Laws of Productivity

4.1 Conceptualization of Natural Laws

Within the SF-Gene Framework, a *natural law* is defined as a principle that produces predictable outcomes when honored and predictable dysfunction when violated. SF-Gene A expresses itself through seven such laws, referred to as **Zones**.

4.2 The Seven SF-Gene A Zones

Empirical analysis identifies seven — and only seven — dominant expressions of SF-Gene A:

1. **Search Zone** — Discovery, exploration, and opportunity identification.
2. **Execute Zone** — Action, momentum, and completion.
3. **Teach Zone** — Explanation, understanding, and transfer of meaning.
4. **Enable Zone** — Empowerment and capacity building in others.
5. **Regulate Zone** — Standards, accuracy, and stewardship.
6. **Build Zone** — Systems, structures, and enduring frameworks.
7. **Aid Zone** — Care, restoration, and alleviation of suffering.

Each individual exhibits one dominant Zone. The Zones are mutually exclusive in dominance, cross-culturally observable, and stable across the lifespan.

5. SF-Gene B: Expressive Aptitude Modalities

5.1 Definition and Scope

SF-Gene B refers to the innate modality through which an individual most naturally expresses effort, competence, and contribution. While SF-Gene A defines *where* productivity is sustainable, SF-Gene B defines *how* productivity is enacted. SF-Gene B is not a skill set, personality trait, or learned style. It is an inborn, lifetime-stable expressive driver that governs the form effort must take in order to produce energy rather than depletion.

5.2 The Tripartite Structure of SF-Gene B

The research identifies three mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive expressive modalities — Action-Based, Abstraction-Based, and Emotion-Based. Each individual exhibits one dominant SF-Gene B modality, regardless of role, education, or professional development.

5.3 Action-Based SF-Gene B

Individuals with an Action-based SF-Gene B naturally express competence through doing, executing, and direct intervention in tasks, processes, or environments. Typical aptitudes include creating, executing, producing, organizing, communicating, monitoring, and designing. Action-dominant individuals experience increased energy when progress is tangible and visible; prolonged abstraction or emotionally intensive work without execution leads to disengagement and fatigue.

5.4 Abstraction-Based SF-Gene B

Individuals with an Abstraction-based SF-Gene B express competence through conceptual processing, mental modeling, and anticipatory thinking. Typical aptitudes include planning, analyzing, conceptualizing, strategizing, imagining, evaluating, and forecasting. Abstraction-dominant individuals require cognitive coherence before action; environments demanding constant reactive execution produce rapid depletion.

5.5 Emotion-Based SF-Gene B

Individuals with an Emotion-based SF-Gene B express competence through relational attunement, emotional sensing, and interpersonal influence. Typical aptitudes include empathizing, persuading, engaging, influencing, evoking, and impacting. Emotion-dominant individuals draw energy from meaningful human engagement; mechanistic or emotionally sterile environments reliably produce burnout.

5.6 Interaction Between SF-Gene A and SF-Gene B

SF-Gene A and SF-Gene B operate orthogonally but synergistically: SF-Gene A defines the *domain* of contribution, while SF-Gene B defines the *mode* of contribution. Sustained productivity occurs only when both genes are actively engaged. Alignment with SF-Gene A without engagement of SF-Gene B produces partial fulfillment, while engagement of SF-Gene B outside SF-Gene A produces effort without sustainability.

6. Predictive Validity and Failure Modes

Once SF-Gene A and SF-Gene B are identified, the framework reliably predicts:

- Leadership and supervisory style.
- Preferred learning and working conditions.
- Relational friction patterns.
- Burnout vectors.
- Conditions under which performance will degrade despite competence.

This predictive capacity distinguishes the SF-Gene Framework from descriptive typologies and positions it as a diagnostic model.

7. Application: The Success Factor Compass

The Success Factor Compass extends SF-Gene diagnostics into applied leadership and sustainability contexts. Its purpose is not identity discovery alone, but ongoing stewardship of design alignment, enabling early detection of misalignment-induced risk.

8. Cross-Cultural and Cross-Contextual Validation

Applications across corporate, educational, familial, and faith-based contexts demonstrate consistent recognition of SF-Gene patterns, suggesting the framework describes anthropological design rather than culturally contingent behavior.

9. Distinction from Existing Models

The SF-Gene Framework differs from prevailing models in that it is:

- **Design-diagnostic** rather than trait-descriptive.
- **Impact-validated** rather than self-reported.
- **Predictive of failure modes** rather than descriptive of strengths.
- **Applicable across life domains**, not limited to organizations.

10. Implications and Future Research

Future research directions include longitudinal outcome studies, comparative analyses with psychometric models, and institutional-scale deployment evaluations. The framework has implications for leadership development, education, burnout prevention, and role design.

11. Conclusion

The SF-Gene Framework reframes productivity and fulfillment as consequences of alignment with innate design rather than products of motivation or effort alone. By identifying both the domain and the mode of contribution, the framework offers a robust, evidence-based foundation for sustainable human productivity.

References

Paulhus, D. L., & Vazire, S. (2007). The self-report method. In R. W. Robins, R. C. Fraley, & R. F. Krueger (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality Psychology* (pp. 224–239). Guilford Press.