

# The Making of a Sailor

## *A navigation logs of our traits, terrains, and timing*

In a small coastal town in Indonesia, a young boy once dreamed of becoming the world's greatest software engineer—a vivid ambition born in a place where the internet came and went like the tides. He was an organic thinker and a dedicated student. With only secondhand books and an outdated computer, where software tutorials loaded pixel by pixel and schoolbooks arrived years behind the syllabus in Jakarta, but he carved his way from that modest town to one of the best universities in the capital.

He was my senior in school, my mentor, and the person I looked up to. Years later, I found myself finally catching up to him. He had once been my symbol of a breakthrough. But when I reconnected with him, something had changed. The fire was gone. He was unambitious, bored not just with life, but with the very thing he once loved: software engineering. He had graduated from his dream major, reached what looked like his peak—until suddenly, he hadn't. And now, it seemed as though the world had stopped moving in his favor.

When I look into the pattern my senior went through, it makes me shudder because it felt uncomfortably familiar. My dearest sister went through a season of emotional challenges when she entered college; she went from being the top performer in high school, getting into university through invitation, to watching her grades fall like never before. My uncle once led the audit for one of Indonesia's most prestigious presidential campaigns, only to find himself without a single client in recent years. I believe we all can recall one or two moments in life that share these peaks and valleys, stories of people close to us, or even our own.

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We may never fully decode how life works, but many have walked the path before us, and we've lived long enough to notice that it follows patterns. As the old saying goes, "*this too shall pass*," and indeed, it will. Charles Handy (2015) describes life as moving in the shape of an S-curve, where it begins slowly, gains momentum, reaches a peak where progress feels effortless, and eventually plateaus before it declines. Living in 2025, we can see this pattern unfold more quickly than ever. With today's rapid pace of technological change, what seemed impossible a year ago is now within reach. As Ray Kurzweil (2005) also once said, "*we won't experience 100 years of progress in the 21st century, it will be more like 20,000 years of progress at today's rate.*"

The answer to this rapidly changing world is the Second Curve (Handy, 2015), which refers to a deliberate leap into a new path before the current one begins to decline. It is a strategy of reinvention that helps individuals and institutions stay relevant and resilient amid constant change. Now, the rising question we must ask ourselves is this: **what makes such a leap possible** in the

first place? If the Second Curve is the answer, it assumes something critical—that we are ready to leap. And not everyone is.

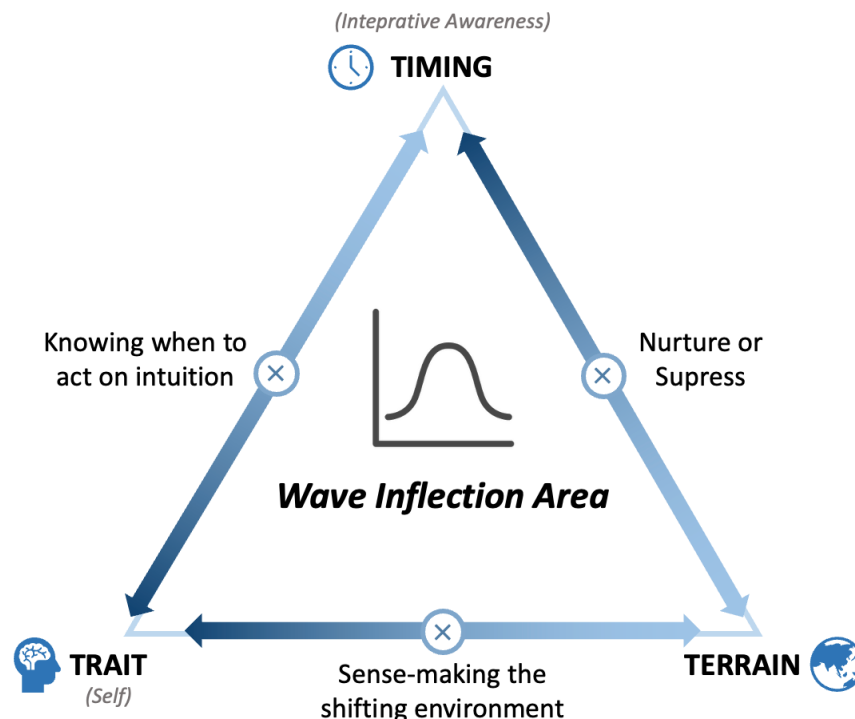
I still think of my senior, the boy who once outpaced everyone with raw brilliance and determination. He was paving his own way to rise. But he didn't leap. He kept learning the way he always had—slowly, thoroughly, organically. It was the method that once made him great. But he held onto it even when the world no longer rewarded it. In the labor market, software engineers are expected to adapt fast, learn efficiently, and deliver quickly. He remained committed to the learning style that once made him great—even as the world shifted beneath him. The curve plateaued, and he didn't see it coming. Or maybe, the glass in front of him was just too thick.

Handy himself acknowledged this tension when he wrote that “*there are natural limitations to everything, including growth.*” That limitation isn't always external. Sometimes it's timing. Sometimes, it's us.

And we need to have respect to that. This leads to a deeper question: **what determines whether someone is able to make the Second Curve leap?**

## | The Leap Wave Triangle

Through reflection and observation, I've come to see that navigating the Second Curve requires readiness. I call this framework *The Leap Wave Triangle*—a navigation tool designed to help individuals map their readiness for change. It brings together three interacting forces: **Trait**, **Timing**, and **Terrain**.

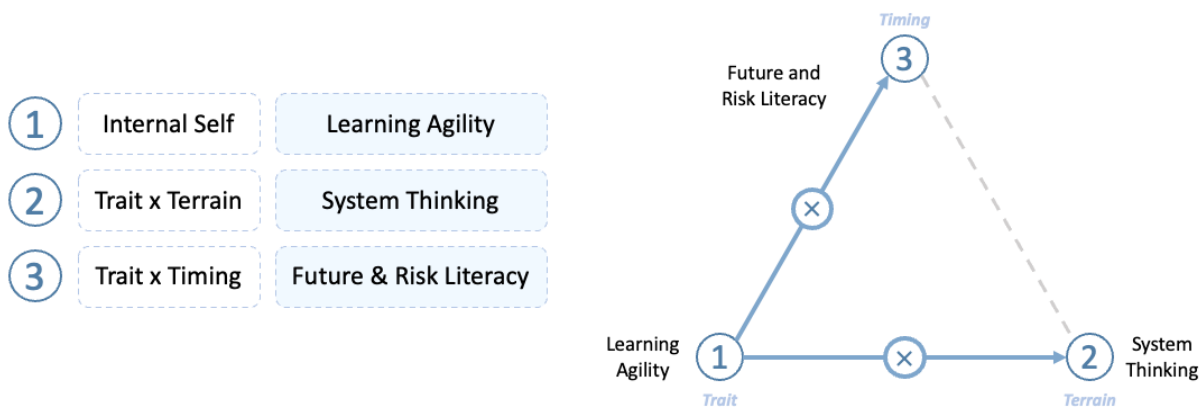


## Trait: The Inner Compass

A friend of mine, Nindyan, has always been a free spirit. She was never the loudest in class or the most certain about her future, but she possessed a quiet willingness to explore. She began posting on TikTok as a casual hobby, initially following viral trends to build traction. Yet what set her apart was her decision to pivot—moving away from formulaic content to create videos that reflected her personal style. She started posting “fit-check” videos—still following trendy things, but uniquely hers. Over time, she became a go-to source for fashion inspiration among youths and her peers. This wasn’t the result of a calculated branding strategy, but an internal shift. She wasn’t afraid to stop, restart, or reimagine her path.

Her approach stands in stark contrast to that of my senior. While equally intelligent, he was deeply anchored to the methods that once brought him success. He struggled to detach from those familiar patterns—even as the world around him evolved. What once elevated him eventually confined him. As Drucker (1999) observed, people often stay attached to practices that no longer serve them simply because they once did. These two examples reveal something important: **people respond differently to change not because of talent, but because of differences in traits.**

According to psychology, a trait is a comparatively constant and long-lasting quality that influences a person's behavior across various contexts (Haslam, 2007). In biology, a trait refers to a characteristic shaped by both environmental and hereditary factors (OpenStax, 2013). In both cases, trait suggests stability and not rigidity.



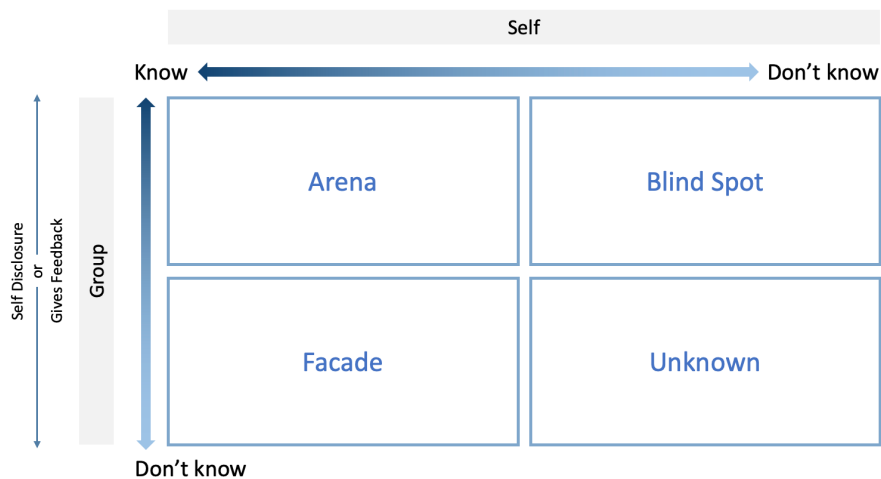
In the Leap Wave Triangle, Trait refers to our **internal disposition**—how we perceive change, how we process uncertainty, and how willing we are to let go of what once worked. It is the part of the system that we have the most control over, but also often, the least clarity about.

- **Learning Agility** refers to the ability to adapt quickly, unlearn outdated approaches, and grow through unfamiliar challenges.

- **System Thinking** refers to the capacity to connect one’s role and choices to broader contexts, recognizing patterns and interdependencies.
- **Future and Risk Literacy** refers to a person’s curiosity and willingness to explore what lies ahead and willingness to act without full certainty with calculated risk before comfort.

These traits do not belong to the lucky few. Research in neuroscience and psychology increasingly supports the idea that traits like resilience, discipline, and adaptability can be cultivated. As Cherry (2023) explains, the brain’s neuroplasticity allows us to form new neural pathways in response to learning and experience. Longitudinal studies also affirm that personality can evolve: traits like conscientiousness and emotional stability tend to increase with age (Roberts et al., 2017). These findings underscore a critical point: **Trait is not a talent—it is a practice.**

Yet building these traits begins with awareness. Without it, we risk relying on outdated strengths or overlooking the blind spots that quietly limit us. The Johari Window, a psychological framework introduced by Luft and Ingham (1955), reminds us that self-awareness is often incomplete. The “blind spot” which refers to the qualities known to others but hidden from ourselves—can quietly inhibit growth. Many people never leap to their Second Curve not because they lack capacity, but because they lack the visibility to recognize which traits they need to develop, unlearn, or replace. Hence, this framework also offers a way to reflect on how we can build those traits—by aligning ourselves with the three winning factors through intentional self-disclosure, structured reflection, or feedback from others.



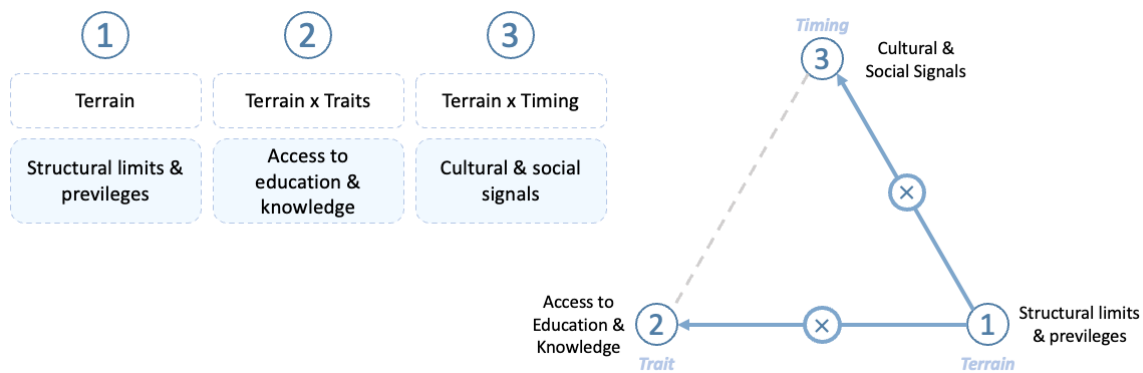
Trait in the Leap Wave Triangle is our inner disposition, how we face change, handle uncertainty, and release what no longer works. It’s the part we most control, yet often misunderstand. Readiness begins when we reflect, seek feedback, and read our inner compass—because even the best-built vessel drifts if the sailor can’t catch the wind.

## | Terrain: The Water Beneath You

In thinking about the Second Curve, I often return to one of my role models—Maudy Ayunda. She is one of Indonesia’s most influential public figures: a singer, actress, writer, Oxford and Stanford graduate, government spokesperson, and most recently, an entrepreneur. On the surface, her path seems effortless—each chapter unfolding smoothly into the next. But what fascinates me is not just her range, but her ability to **redefine herself** repeatedly in **different domains**. She doesn’t just follow waves—she seems to know when to paddle toward the next one. Her story is inspiring. But it also raises an uncomfortable question.

What if the reason some people leap is **not just who they are**—but **where they are**? What if our surroundings—our family, school, culture, community—play a more powerful role in shaping readiness than we usually admit?

In the Leap Wave Triangle, Terrain represents the external environment that surrounds an individual—the systems, signals, and structures that either accelerate or constrain their readiness for change. Unlike Trait, which is internal and buildable, Terrain is often given: shaped by where we’re born, the opportunities we inherit, and the limitations we cannot always control. While no terrain guarantees success, some conditions make the leap more possible than others. From observation and reflection, I see three external factors that most influence Terrain readiness:



- **Access to education and knowledge**, which provides the tools to grow;
- **Social and cultural signals**, which shape whether change feels acceptable or dangerous, including the reward system that promote conformity or celebrate reinvention; and
- **Structural limits and privileges**, the hard boundaries—economic, geographic, political—that determine how far one can realistically sail.

Unlike Trait, which can be cultivated from within, Terrain must be read, respected, and worked with. We do not choose the environments we’re born into, but we can choose how we respond to them—what to push, what to pivot from, and when to adapt.

Navigating Terrain requires two kinds of clarity: the courage to act where we can and the wisdom to acknowledge limits where we must. As Charles Handy (2015) writes, “*There are natural limits to everything, including growth.*” The Second Curve is not about endless expansion—it’s about timely reinvention within the constraints of reality. He cautions us that “*growth for growth’s sake is a dangerous doctrine,*” and reminds us that we must “*let go of the illusion that we can do everything.*”

Understanding one's Terrain means accepting that some waves will never be yours to catch. My senior, for instance, may have had the right traits, but without access to new networks, mentors, or support, his attempts to leap were left unsupported. In contrast, Maudy Ayunda’s environment didn’t just enable her—it amplified her. Global education gave her the language to shape ideas; a society that celebrates multihyphenates gave her space to pivot.

Drucker, too, warned against overextending in the wrong directions. In *Managing Oneself*, he wrote: “*The only way to discover your strengths is through feedback analysis*” (Drucker, 1999, p. 4). And feedback, whether from others or from the reality around us, includes learning what your Terrain supports—and what it doesn't.

This echoes a Stoic principle articulated by Epictetus: “*We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them*” (Epictetus, as cited in *Of Mind and Body*, 2023). Understanding one’s environment, and one’s limits within it, is not resignation but rather a strategy. It allows us to stop chasing unreachable waves and start sailing with purpose on the waters we’re given

My friend Nindyan may not have had Maudy’s resources, but she read her Terrain well. She sensed that her digital platform could be both a playground and a runway—and she acted within it. She didn't try to be someone else; she maximized the waters she was already in.

This comparison shows how the three external Terrain factors play out in real life. Access to knowledge and education gave Maudy tools to move fluidly across disciplines. My senior, by contrast, may have lacked the exposure and mentorship to translate his learning into new settings. Cultural signals matter too—Maudy thrived in a context that celebrates reinvention, while others operate in systems that discourage experimentation or deviation.

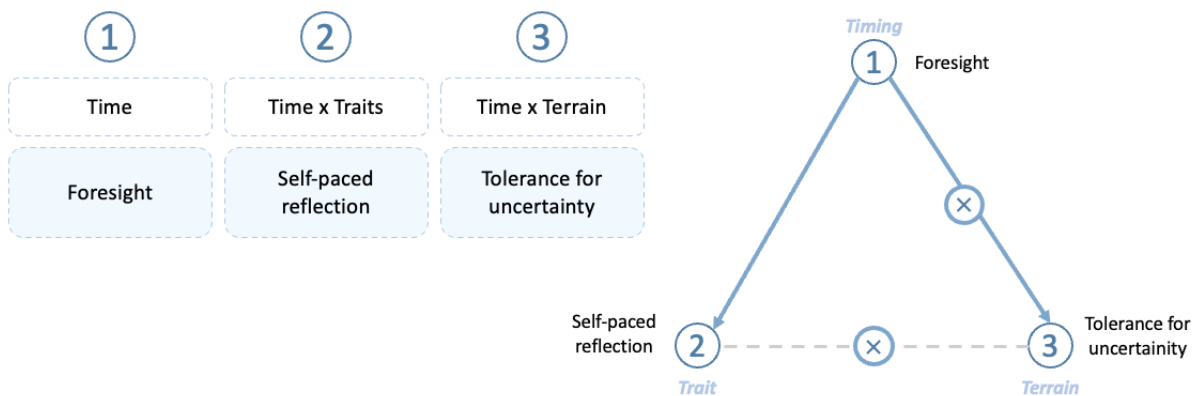
Finally, structural limits—the hard edges of economy, geography, or systemic inequality—can shape what feels possible. While Maudy could leap into global platforms, and Nindyan carved a niche in an open-access digital space, my senior may have encountered invisible ceilings that made the leap harder than it appeared from the outside.

These factors don't guarantee success or failure. But they change the weather around the sailor, and sometimes, that's all it takes to alter the course of the journey.

## | Time: The Shift in the Wind

If Trait is our compass and Terrain the water beneath us, then **Time is the wind**—unpredictable, invisible, and yet utterly decisive. It is not something we control, but something we must learn to read. And in the context of the Second Curve, it matters not just **what** we do, or **where** we are—but **when** we act.

The Second Curve, as Handy (2015) explains, must begin *before* the first curve peaks. But how does one know when that moment is? Most people do not fall because they are incapable or unprepared—but because they **mistime the leap**. They act too late, clinging to what once worked. Or too early, abandoning something before it matures. Timing is subtle, and its signals are rarely clear. But from observation, I’ve found that Second Curve timing depends on three interrelated enablers: **foresight**, **self-paced reflection**, and **tolerance for uncertainty**.



**Foresight** is the ability to sense when things are about to shift—*before* that shift becomes obvious. It’s the difference between reacting to change and anticipating it. Maudy Ayunda, for example, transitioned from entertainment to public policy and entrepreneurship long before her relevance waned. She didn’t wait for the applause to fade—she sensed when to pivot. By contrast, my senior kept climbing the same curve long after the incline flattened. His loyalty to a past method became his trap, not his strength.

The second factor is **self-paced reflection**—a trait-timing intersection. People often think timing is about speed, but more often, it’s about **pause**. Drucker (1999) wrote, “*Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.*” In my friend Nindyan’s case, it was this pause that enabled her to shift from viral content to purpose-driven creation. She didn’t panic. She reflected. And in doing so, she found a better wind.

Lastly, timing depends on **tolerance for uncertainty**. Those who leap onto their Second Curve must do so **without full clarity**. The path forward is rarely guaranteed; it’s often an educated bet. In this way, timing becomes an act of courage. As Handy (2015) reminds us, “*The future is not inevitable. We can shape it, if we believe we can and if we are prepared to start.*” This is where

many falter—not because they lack information, but because they demand too much of it before moving.

In the Leap Wave Triangle, **Time is not a countdown—it’s a rhythm.** Readiness comes from learning to sail with the wind, not against it. Acting too early or too late can cost momentum. But those who sense the shift, reflect clearly, and embrace uncertainty often move ahead—not by waiting for the future, but by creating it. As Drucker (2004) wrote, *“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”*

## | Conclusion: Sailing Forward

The three forces and their nine interconnected elements compose the Leap Wave Triangle, a navigational model that I have presented in this essay. It is a means of mapping one's readiness to jump before the curve decreases, not a technique for making predictions.

At its heart, this model is a reflection of my desire to help people—friends, mentors, strangers—find their way through change with both realism and hope. Growth, as Handy reminds us, is not limitless.

In the end, the making of a sailor is not about mastering the sea, but about learning to navigate it. It’s about developing the right **traits to steer with confidence**, reading the **terrain** to know **which waters are yours to sail**, and sensing the right **timing to raise the anchor**—or **open the ship’s curtain** to a new horizon. No sailor controls the wind, but with clarity, adaptability, and awareness, they can choose when and how to move forward. That, above all, is what readiness truly means.

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