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## When the cat sees a lion or a mouse in the mirror. The importance of building self-awareness for effective leadership growth.

As I am preparing myself to conduct briefing sessions with employees who are participating in a Leadership Assessment exercise as part of their organization's effort to build their leadership capabilities, I make it a point to remind myself that there is the possibility that I can encounter three very different reactions from the individuals receiving the results.

**The cat that sees a mouse in the mirror.** These are the individuals who believe they are not good enough. They generally experience self-doubt, or blame themselves for things that go wrong at work. Even when the feedback from others like supervisor, colleagues or direct reports indicates they are effective, they may find it difficult to believe / accept it. I hear comments like: "I am relieved! After all I am not that bad".

**The cat that sees a cat in the mirror.** These are the individuals who have a high level of self-awareness. They know themselves well, and understand what are their strengths and the areas for development. They listen to the feedback from others, positive and negative, with keen interest as it helps them validate and understand themselves further. I hear comments like: "I am not surprised. I have been working on this for a while, and I now realize there is still work to be done".

**The cat that sees a lion in the mirror.** These are the individuals who have very high regard for themselves and their abilities. They are less able to identify areas they need to work on to enhance their effectiveness, as they believe they are operating at optimum levels. Whenever discussing the feedback received, they tend to justify any negative feedback instead of reflecting on it to ascertain if there is any truth in it. I hear comments like: "These results don't accurately reflect who I am. Being nice is not going to get the job done. Results is what matters. I don't have time to change my behaviours and adapt my style".




Being aware of this, will help me ensure the debrief sessions are as effective as possible so that individuals receiving the results get the most out of our conversation.

If I have "**mouse looking cats**", I need to ensure I help them internalize and visualize their strengths and capabilities, as they already have them, but they are not capable of appreciating them, as much as others can. When these individuals are able to see themselves as other see them, they will be able to maximize their positive impact instead of doubting their every move. Only then, our conversation will smoothly transition towards building a plan of action they can drive towards strengthening their capabilities and closing identified gaps to enhance their effectiveness.

If I have a "**cat looking cat**" I will be able to have a balanced conversation around strengths and areas for development. The conversation will most likely focus around how to maximize strengths, and how to work around taking every available opportunity to reflect on the leadership aspects that need to be further strengthened in order to enable professional / leadership growth. They will take a very practical approach towards how they see themselves closing their gaps and working on their strengths.



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If I have a “**lion looking cat**” I have work cut out for myself! These are the most challenging conversations. Working with these individuals may require multiple steps instead of a single session. The objective is to enable them to appreciate, reflect and internalize the report. It is also essential to help them understand the importance and relevance of appreciating how others perceive or are impacted by their behaviours and actions. Only then will “lion looking cats” be able to move forward towards accepting the difference between their self-perception and the perception of others. Only then will we be able to move past the results towards crafting a plan of action that will see them focus on managing their behaviours and understanding any possible blind spot so they can build further their leadership effectiveness. At times, it will take abandoning a conversation without apparent success, and retaking it at a different time / occasion. What matters most, is to help these individuals understand that their success as leaders depends on their ability to listen, analyze, internalize and take corrective action. If they insist in downplaying the results or assigning blame to others, there is very little benefit that the “lion looking cat” will derive from this effort.

So, for those reading this article, I invite you to think about yourselves. Who will you be, or who have you been (mouse-looking-cat, cat-looking-cat, lion-looking-cat) when you receive feedback about yourself?

We may not be able to avoid reacting in certain ways to the feedback received. But we should allow ourselves the opportunity of reflecting about it, so that we are able to internalize it and take appropriate actions to strengthen our leadership effectiveness and capability. This much we owe to ourselves.

If you or your organization is looking to undertake any initiatives around Leadership Assessment and Development, please reach out to me via email at [claudia@thread-advisory.com](mailto:claudia@thread-advisory.com) so we can have a conversation on how I can support your efforts.