



## A Clearer Window Into Performance

Apply the trait-reputation-identity lens to the Johari window to get a more comprehensive view of a leader's performance.

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**P** sychologist and author Daniel Goleman identifies *self-awareness* as a core component of emotional and social intelligence—the ability to accurately assess and know oneself. However, our research, in collaboration with the University of Barcelona, found that nearly 50 percent of leaders either overestimate or underestimate how others evaluate them, highlighting a significant gap between self-perception and external perception. That gap can undermine effective leadership because leaders who lack accurate self-insight may struggle to make informed

decisions, build trust, and navigate tricky interpersonal situations with their teams.

One common manifestation of the issue is overconfidence bias, which is prevalent among leaders (overestimators). Alternatively, our research on 360-degree feedback also identifies leaders who are extremely self-critical and perfectionistic who often compensate for a lack of confidence by systematically rating their skills and abilities below those of others (underestimators).

To better understand how feedback from others can illuminate a leader's areas of weakness, many L&D practitioners often use

the well-known Johari window, a psychological tool designed to help individuals gain self-awareness by examining the differences between how someone sees themselves and how others perceive and experience that individual. While the Johari window provides a useful framework for feedback, leaders can deepen their understanding of self-awareness by combining it with the newer trait-reputation-identity (TRI) lens.

### Mapping the Johari window and the TRI lens

The Johari window divides a leader’s self-knowledge into four quadrants:

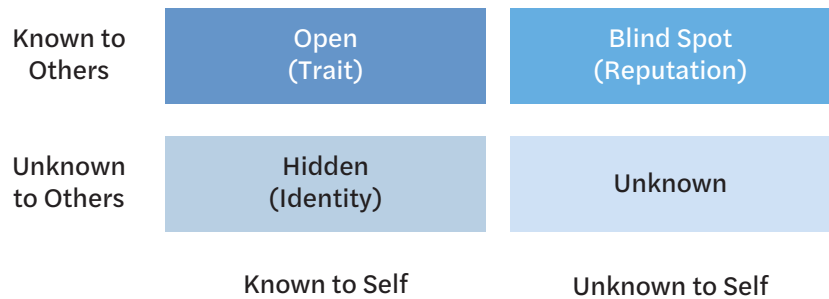
- **Open.** Known to both the leader and others, including public and widely recognized behaviors and attributes
- **Blind spot.** Known to others but not to the leader, including unconscious behaviors or traits that others notice but the leader is unaware of
- **Hidden.** Known to the leader but not to others; it involves private thoughts, feelings, or personal challenges that the leader keeps to themselves
- **Unknown.** Unknown to both the leader and others; represents untapped potential or undiscovered traits

The model is valuable in both coaching and leadership development because it helps leaders expand their open area by reducing the size of their blind and hidden areas, ultimately fostering greater self-awareness. Leaders with high emotional intelligence demonstrate smaller blind spots and can more accurately gauge the impact of their behavior on their team and how others perceive them.

The TRI lens emphasizes three important aspects of self-awareness:

- **Trait.** The inherent qualities and characteristics a leader attributes to themselves that are congruent and overlap with how others experience and evaluate them
- **Reputation.** How others perceive the leader, based on observed behaviors, performance, personality, and the leader’s impact on individuals and the team (such as

### Johari Window With the Trait-Reputation-Identity Lens



engagement, motivation, job, and team satisfaction), which may differ from their self-perception

- **Identity.** The leader’s self-reported personality, skills, abilities, and performance, reflecting their own perspective on those characteristics

The TRI lens is helpful because it aligns self-perception (identity) with external perception (reputation), giving leaders a more comprehensive understanding of their overall effectiveness. By exploring the lens’s three dimensions, leaders can gain insight into how their behavior aligns or diverges from how they perceive themselves and how others see them.

Combining the Johari window model with the TRI lens results in more nuanced insights (see Figure 1).

- **Trait (open area).** Both the leader and others agree on certain strengths and competencies.
- **Reputation (blind spot).** Others perceive certain traits or behaviors that the leader may not know.
- **Identity (hidden area).** The leader’s internal values, attitudes, and private aspects remain unknown to others, either purposely or due to a lack of opportunity to observe specific behaviors.

### Enhancing talent management

Talent development functions can leverage the Johari window and the TRI lens in many ways to foster leadership self-insight and improve performance management.

**Performance reviews.** Organizations are increasingly using feedback

from direct reports and peers along with managerial evaluation as part of overall performance ratings.

**Succession and progression planning.** Peer and direct report evaluations as well as manager ratings contribute to identifying high-potential employees and planning for company progression and succession.

**Coaching and mentoring.** Internal or external coaches and mentors can guide leaders in reconciling discrepancies between self-perception and external feedback, helping them leverage their strengths while addressing weaknesses to enhance career and professional planning and ongoing development.

**Performance coaching feedback.** Regular feedback sessions by the leader’s manager can ensure the leader is continuously aligning their behaviors and attitudes with organizational expectations, goals, and key performance indicators.

Several organizations have successfully integrated the Johari window and the TRI lens into specific HR systems. Doing so enables companies to address employees’ and leaders’ long-time frustrations around performance reviews and rating systems.

According to a 2024 Gallup study, only 2 percent of Fortune 500 chief HR officers report satisfaction with their overall performance management system. The TRI lens could be one way to improve accuracy and fairness in the unpopular HR practice by incorporating perspectives beyond one’s manager to accurately evaluate

reputation through the lens of other stakeholders working with the leader.

Contrary to the belief that managers, peers, and direct reports are inherently unreliable raters of others, substantial research, including in the September 2024 edition of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, indicates that the perceptions others have of someone are valuable and often more accurate than the individual may realize. Feedback from colleagues, direct reports, and peers offers unique and meaningful insights into a leader's skills, personality, and influence on others.

Such source-specific perceptions are particularly evident in 360-degree feedback assessments, where different feedback rater groups tend to emphasize specific aspects of a leader's behaviors. For example, managers often focus on bottom-line results; direct reports may place more importance on interpersonal and social skills, sometimes even prioritizing those over technical expertise or experience; and peers may emphasize future leadership potential. Such a difference in perspective illustrates that feedback from others provides a fuller, more balanced picture of a leader's strengths and development areas.

Findings from Talent Strategy's *Group Global Performance Management Report 2023* reveal that managers assess employees in 95 percent of companies, and 50 percent of employees must assign themselves an overall rating. Yet only 15 percent to 20 percent of companies include direct reports and peers in performance evaluations.

Several companies have used feedback and input from peers, direct reports, and supervisors for components of their key HR systems.

- PepsiCo incorporates direct report feedback in its annual performance review system of leaders across the organization.
- Amazon uses an "anytime feedback" platform that enables staff to provide anonymous feedback.
- Netflix leverages "radical candor," where employees give feedback on what colleagues should stop, start,

## Why People Don't See Themselves Accurately

Several streams of research shed light on why leaders often fail to accurately evaluate their personality, skills, or abilities.

**Positive illusions.** Research by psychologist Shelley Taylor suggests that leaders often maintain a set of positive illusions—including inflated self-assessments, unrealistic optimism, and an exaggerated sense of control—to protect their self-esteem.

**Better-than-average effect.** This relative comparison bias contributes to leaders perceiving themselves as better than others, even when statistical improbability suggests otherwise.

**Dunning–Kruger effect.** Leaders with less competence and developed skills may fail to recognize their own limitations, which distorts their view of their impact on others and inflates their own competence and performance.

Those cognitive mindsets, among others, underscore the importance of helping leaders develop greater self-awareness of both their strengths to leverage further, as well as potential development opportunities. Narrowing the gap between how leaders perceive their skills and abilities relative to others in the workplace is typically a goal of both executive coaching and leadership development programs.

or continue doing regarding specific projects and behaviors.

- IBM has offered an app that enables employees to ask for feedback from anyone—such as a manager, a direct report, or a teammate—at any time related to specific tasks and projects.
- Google uses anonymous peer reviews that only managers can see.

Note that employers that do not carefully implement the use of feedback from others can contribute to a culture of mistrust and disengagement. In such cultures, employees can exploit the anonymity of their feedback to target specific colleagues as well as find other ways to manipulate the system rather than contribute to genuine performance measurement and improvement.

Those same potential concerns, however, also exist for traditional performance review systems where manager ratings drive performance scores and nominations for elite leadership development programs. Companies that understand the science behind the TRI lens can ensure that they consider all valid perceptions of personality,

skills, and performance in any performance or talent management evaluation or succession planning systems.

The Johari window model and the TRI lens can help coaches, TD professionals, and organizations use employees' perspectives and evaluations for development programs and personnel-related systems. The "self-other" perception gap of skills and personality can drive not only individual growth and self-awareness but also contribute to more accurate measures of current performance and predictions of future potential and performance. Through accurate self-reflection and feedback, leaders can unlock their full potential, ultimately driving both personal and organizational success.

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