

Who's who in the corporate zoo...

 By [Auguste Coetzer](#)

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The 'corporate jungle' is hardly a flattering term for the management suite, but some similarities have to be acknowledged. Survival is a vital issue in both scenarios. Predatory instincts can be an asset along with the ability to mark and defend territory when necessary.

It's not surprising, then, that leadership consultants sometimes see parallels between the animal kingdom and successful executives.

After years of approaching (some might say 'ensnaring') senior managers, I confess that some prime specimens do possess certain beastly characteristics.

When hunting game like this at least seven targets stand out ...

Lion: some bosses may enjoy the association with 'the king of beasts', but probably for the wrong reasons. The lion has great presence and the roar can be intimidating, but a lion does little real work. His 'mates' generally do that. The power is there all right, but it stems from the lion's ability to delegate, only moving in to claim his due when the leg-work is over.

Hyena: this sounds insulting, but results can be spectacular. The hyena is nature's great opportunist. The corporate variety shows patience and lets others claim the kill, but then moves in to grab a big share of whatever's going. Being first to market costs time and money. You cut risks and costs by coming second, but following up effectively.

Zebra: apparently the perfect team player. He or she seems to blend in with the herd. This is an illusion. Zebras, organisational and otherwise, constantly seek to improve their position and corner the best grazing. When teamwork is prized and aggressive leadership can prove destructive, you bring in a zebra. The team stays intact and the organisation moves in the right direction.

Cheetah: the best leadership choice when speed is crucial. When running down a target is the prime requirement and you need to outpace competitors, this speedster is ideal. Decision-making is instant. But single-minded pursuit at breakneck pace may mean other opportunities are missed. A cheetah's acquisitions may impress, but slowing down and consolidating requires other skills.

Tortoise: a born survivor. Evolution seems to pass them by, but that solid shell keeps them from harm. They are slow, but get there. Sometimes the prime organisational requirement is a safe pair of hands. The organisational tortoise is safety personified, but may need to team up with other players if additional objectives are set.

Eagle: the ability to see the big picture is highly prized. The eagle soars high and spots opportunity and danger from afar. But a far-sighted visionary may seem aloof. Coming down to earth and getting the job done requires great versatility - or complementary skills from a senior colleague.

Dolphin: this gifted communicator exchanges information constantly and uses feedback to coordinate appropriate responses. But perpetual chatter may lead nowhere fast. You might optimise short-term opportunities and remain safe from immediate danger, but if more aggressive goals are set, the great communicator may need help from a great executor.

It's ironic, but in all cases these executive specimens usually improve their leadership performance by applying the human touch...

ABOUT AUGUSTE COETZER

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