

Developing Self-Awareness : Know Thyself

“There is no cure and no improving of the world that does not begin with the individual himself.”

– Carl Jung

This notion of self-development, as defined by Carl Jung, is based on the premise that an awareness of self is the basis for all positive human endeavour and interaction. It relates to the famous saying ‘*nosce teipsum*’ or ‘know thyself’ - but what does it actually mean to know oneself?

1. What is Self Awareness?

If “awareness” is about noticing things around us, “self-awareness” is all about focusing one’s awareness on oneself. It’s the ability to observe and accurately identify one’s feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, impulses, reactions, habits, and behaviors. Self-awareness is about being honest with oneself.

Self-awareness is the ability to focus on the self and how one’s actions, thoughts, or emotions do or don’t align with one’s internal standards. If one is highly self-aware, one can objectively evaluate oneself, manage emotions, align behavior with one’s values, and understand correctly how others perceive one (Duval and Wicklund, 1972).

Self-awareness is the extent to which people are consciously aware of their interactions or relationships with others and of their internal states. (Sutton, A. in “Measuring the Effects of Self-Awareness”, Europe’s Journal of Psychology, November 2016)

Baumeister (2005) who suggests that self-awareness is about **“Anticipating how others perceive you, evaluating yourself and your actions according to collective beliefs and values, and caring about how others evaluate you”** The anticipation of how others perceive one is often referred to as “other awareness”

(Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Mayer and colleagues (2004) contend that this understanding of how our behaviours impact others, and vice versa, how others behaviours impact one's 'self' can be used to inform our own self-awareness.

Fenigstein (1987) suggested that there are two forms of self-awareness: (i) **private;** and (ii) **public**. Private self-awareness refers to an understanding of our mental states which are invisible to others, such as thoughts, emotions, perceptions and goals, to name a few. In contrast, public self-awareness refers to an awareness of self when another's attention is directed towards us, and often involves an awareness of visible characteristics, for example, mannerisms, behaviours and physical appearance (Fenigstein, 1987; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). These visible aspects are merely an expression of our external identity to the world and we can often feel compelled to alter how we appear to others due to the desire to conform to perceived societal norms, or for fear of being judged harshly (Craig, George, & Snook, 2015). Alternatively, one may consciously or subconsciously alter their external representation of their 'self' in order to conceal the parts of themselves which they do not want to be seen; their vulnerabilities, shadows and blind spots.

To put things simply, it can be said that self-awareness is having a clear and realistic perception of who one is, why one does what one does, how one does it, and the impact one's behaviour has on others.

Further, it is worth remembering that "Self-awareness is not a destination point, but rather an emerging process where one continually comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires". (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

2. **Types of Self-awareness:**

Tasha Eurich (Harvard Business Review, January 2018) posits that there are two broad categories of self-awareness- **internal self-awareness, and external self-awareness**. 'Internal self-awareness' represents how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviours, strengths, and weaknesses), and impact on others. Internal self-awareness is associated with higher job and relationship satisfaction, personal and

social control, and happiness; it is negatively related to anxiety, stress, and depression.

The second category, ‘*external self-awareness*’, means understanding how other people view us, in terms of those same factors listed above. People who know how others see them are more skilled at showing empathy and taking others’ perspectives. For leaders who see themselves as their employees do, their employees tend to have a better relationship with them, feel more satisfied with them, and see them as more effective in general.

The Four Self-Awareness Archetypes

This 2x2 maps internal self-awareness (how well you know yourself) against external self-awareness (how well you understand how others see you).

	Low external self-awareness	High external self-awareness
High internal self-awareness	<p>INTROSPECTORS</p> <p>They’re clear on who they are but don’t challenge their own views or search for blind spots by getting feedback from others. This can harm their relationships and limit their success.</p>	<p>AWARE</p> <p>They know who they are, what they want to accomplish, and seek out and value others’ opinions. This is where leaders begin to fully realize the true benefits of self-awareness.</p>
Low internal self-awareness	<p>SEEKERS</p> <p>They don’t yet know who they are, what they stand for, or how their teams see them. As a result, they might feel stuck or frustrated with their performance and relationships.</p>	<p>PLEASERS</p> <p>They can be so focused on appearing a certain way to others that they could be overlooking what matters to them. Over time, they tend to make choices that aren’t in service of their own success and fulfillment.</p>

SOURCE DR. TASHA EURICH

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You may access one of the many free resources on the internet such as <https://www.insight-book.com/quiz> or <https://inlpcenter.org/self-awareness-test/> to find out how self aware you are.

3. Benefits of being more Self-aware

Self-awareness and emotional intelligence are increasingly recognized as major contributors to success, both at work and in day-to-day life. Daniel Goleman, psychologist and author of the best-selling book “Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ”, has written extensively about emotional intelligence, how it

affects professional success, and the crucial role self-awareness plays in that success. Self-awareness is one of the most important psychological traits one can develop for life. Its benefits extend to everything—whether it's managing your emotions in conflict or understanding your weaknesses at work or being realistic on what you can accomplish. As you might imagine, there are many benefits to practicing self-awareness:

- It can make us more proactive, boost our acceptance, and encourage positive self-development (Sutton, 2016).
- Self-awareness allows us to see things from the perspective of others, practice self-control, work creatively and productively, and experience pride in ourselves and our work as well as general self-esteem (Silvia & O'Brien, 2004).
- It leads to better decision making (Ridley, Schutz, Glanz, & Weinstein, 1992).
- It can make us better at our jobs, better communicators in the workplace, and enhance our self-confidence and job-related wellbeing (Sutton, Williams, & Allinson, 2015).
- In the words of Brian Koval - *"The most important part of being a leader is maintaining the desire to keep on learning. That means learning about yourself, about your peers, and about the people you serve."* This quote provides a useful narrative for understanding leader effectiveness, placing self-awareness as the basis for its development.
- It frees us from our assumptions and biases.
- It helps us build better relationships.
- It gives us a greater ability to regulate our emotions and adapt our behaviour.
- It helps in identifying and coping with stress

These benefits are reason enough to work on improving self-awareness, but this list is by no means exhaustive. Self-awareness has the potential to enhance virtually every experience one has, as it's a tool and a practice that can be used anywhere, anytime, to ground oneself in the moment, realistically evaluate oneself and the situation, and help one make good choices.

4. How to Increase Self-awareness?

“Knowledge is learning something every day. Wisdom is letting go of something every day.”

- Zen Proverb

1. Reflection and Introspection: Create space and time for yourself daily

Self-awareness is not learned through books but achieved through self-reflection and introspection. Some indicative questions to ask to take one on the journey of self-discovery are:

- a. What are one's top three strengths and top three weaknesses?
- b. What or whom does one value the most in life?
- c. What are the events, thoughts, and beliefs that make one happy and sad
- d. What are the feelings that one is more aware of experiencing, compared to others?
- e. What are one's triggers (people/situations that trigger negative /uncomfortable emotions)?
- f. What are one's values and beliefs?
- g. How does one respond under stress?
- h. How do the different roles played by one in life make one feel (spouse, parent , brother/ sister, child, boss, colleague, subordinate, friend, musician, sportsperson, etc..)?
- i. How does one relate to others?

2. Focus on choices:

- i. One's achievements, how one accomplished them, and what one learned from them.
- ii. One's failures, how they came about, and how to prevent them from recurring.
- iii. Why did one make a particular decision? How did this choice make one feel?

3. Be curious about self and let the guard down.

Saying one's intention out loud and proud, remembering that one is speaking to one's inner self, one's subconscious, perhaps one's higher consciousness, or

possibly even to some higher power (of one's choosing) to let them, and oneself know that one is focused on a certain direction or destination. Using these ideas to communicate with the inner self, letting the subconscious know that one wants to better understand the inner mind, so that one can live a more meaningful and satisfying life.

4. **Live with humility and courage:** Humility can enable one to see one's mistakes and correct them, to accept criticism. With honesty, one can be open about oneself. When one is alone with one's thoughts, there's no point in taking sides. What is required is: simply being willing to evaluate oneself as objectively as possible. It is important not to dismiss what one would rather not see. Rather, one must dig the subconscious for its opinions and correct the mindsets that are not compatible with one's values. One can do this by being completely honest with oneself, and when one finds something that is out-of-sync, examining that position, removing what isn't personally compatible, and inserting a better value or phrase to bring the idea in alignment with one's core values.

5. **Ask for feedback:** Feedback from others can help one be more self-aware. Asking for feedback on one's performance, behavior, interactions, can serve to improve one's future actions and responses. Feedback can also identify aspects of behavior that one is not seeing clearly ("blind spots"). The objectivity of others can be helpful in self-assessment. Asking a trusted friend or colleague or boss or subordinate or family member their opinion about one, or about how one managed a combined project or how one handled the self in some unusual situation – these can all be of immense use in one's quest for better self-awareness. However, one must strive to be resilient and willing to hear what others have to say. Communication in relationships is extremely important, but one must be open to listening to each other, even when what is said is said imperfectly or is hard to hear.

6. **Journaling is a good way to become more self-aware.**

By writing down one's thoughts or stream-of-consciousness, ideas, feelings, perceptions, choices, behaviours, and interactions with others, one begins opening up to those vulnerable places within. Writing sometimes reveals what

contemplation does not, so this method of self-reflection may be of assistance in expanding one's self-awareness. Telling one's story, releasing one's woes on paper, dreaming up one's fantasy situation—these are ways one's subconscious can speak to the self, revealing what's really “the matter.” Its important to let one's mind be free and be amazed at what it may reveal about one's self.

7. Practicing mindfulness can increase self-awareness.

Mindfulness is similar to self-awareness in that they both relate to consciously directing our thoughts inward in order to become more aware of our inner state of being, to observe our thoughts and beliefs, and to notice what triggers our emotions as they rise and fall. Mindfulness includes focused attention in the moment to whatever one is doing and involves practices such as meditation or a quieting of the mind. One can even try mindful walking, eating, listening.

8. Substitute some screen time with people time.

Nowadays, the average length of time one spends on the mobile phone, the laptop and the television screens is perhaps greater than the time spent in face-to-face contact. As one spends more time alone and on one's devices, one misses this essential human mirroring. (*Mirroring is the behavior in which one person unconsciously imitates the gesture, speech pattern, or attitude of another. Mirroring often occurs in social situations, particularly in the company of close friends or family.*) The symptoms of lack of mirroring are becoming more apparent in society: increase in anxiety, lack of empathy and intense self-objectification (as in the selfie craze). There's a need for greater self-awareness and reflection.

9. Becoming a good listener can increase self-awareness.

“Getting out of ourselves” by focusing on another person is a good antidote to stop downward spirals of self-destructive thinking. By being open to someone else, we can learn to listen objectively, even lovingly, to what that person wants or needs to share. This, in turn, helps teach us how to listen to our own inner dialogues and opinions objectively and lovingly as well.

9. Walking. Taking a walk, especially in the quiet of nature, can be useful in building self-awareness. The mind tends to wander along with our feet, so with a little conscious nudging (and walking), we can examine our part in something that is

happening in our lives now—at work, in social situations, in our relationships, or within the family.

10. Having regular discussions about the relationship. It's important to keep things in perspective and ensure that nothing is falling between the cracks. When we have regular conversations about our relationship with our loved ones, it's much harder to avoid or ignore things that can turn into problems. It also helps us reflect on our part and come prepared to discuss our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with our loved ones.

11. Labelling and tracking emotions

Practice labeling experiences in different situations throughout the day. Feelings provide an insight into the thoughts and actions. They also allow us to relate better with others. One may also recognize trends in how one feels, which can teach one something about oneself.

Inventory of emotions

Accepted	Concerned	Foolish	Miserable	Sensitive
Admired	Confident	Forgiving	Motivated	Shy
Afraid	Confused	Fortunate	Offended	Silly
Alone	Connected	Grateful	Open	Smart
Angry	Content	Guilty	Optimistic	Strong
Annoyed	Courageous	Happy	Overwhelmed	Stubborn
Anxious	Cranky	Heartbroken	Panicked	Stunned
Apathetic	Creative	Helpless	Paralyzed	Surprised
Appreciated	Critical	Hesitant	Paranoid	Suspicious
Appreciative	Curious	Hopeful	Pathetic	Thankful
Ashamed	Daring	Horrible	Peaceful	Threatened
Authentic	Defensive	Humiliated	Pessimistic	Timid
Awkward	Depressed	Hurt	Playful	Tired
Bored	Determined	Important	Pleased	Tolerant
Bothered	Disappointed	Indifferent	Powerless	Torn
Brave	Disconnected	Insecure	Proud	Trapped
Bummed	Disgusted	Inspired	Refreshed	Unappreciated
Calm	Disinterested	Interested	Regretful	Uncertain
Certain	Dissatisfied	Intrigued	Rejected	Uncomfortable
Challenged	Distracted	Irritated	Relaxed	Uneasy
Cheerful	Eager	Jealous	Relieved	Unforgiving
Clueless	Empty	Lazy	Resentful	Upset
Cold	Encouraged	Lonely	Reserved	Useless
Comfortable	Energetic	Lost	Sad	Vulnerable
Comforted	Envious	Loved	Satisfied	Weak
Compassionate	Excited	Lucky	Scared	Wise
Competitive	Fake	Manipulated	Selfish	Wonderful

12. Personality Tests and Johari Window.

Another way to increase self-awareness is through personality tests and tools like Johari Window. Personality 'types' are psychological classifications based on

clinical evaluations of how the functions and attitudes from Jung's framework tend to show up in individuals. A personality test is a method of assessing one's dominant cognitive functions and attitudes and how they combine to influence one's interests, desires, values and actions. The Johari Window is a model that helps us understand self-awareness and the human interaction that results from our personal self-awareness. Luft and Ingham, the creators of Johari Window believed that what happens in our life depends upon our own self-awareness, and the awareness others have of us.

Conclusion: One of the important pursuits in life is to become more self-aware and reap its benefits. But being "self-aware" is not an all-or-nothing trait. There are varying levels which we can achieve as self-awareness is a journey. The only person one can change is oneself. When one chooses to transform oneself, one can notice changes in the environment, including in the people who around oneself.

Compiled by Pankaj Setiya, General Manager and MoF, CAB, Pune

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