

Self-awareness as a workplace tool

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When we see ourselves more clearly, we are more confident, we make sounder decisions and communicate more effectively, which can result in more effective leaders with more satisfied employees in the workplace.



Self-awareness has become an important management buzzword.

Research suggests that when we see ourselves more clearly, we are more confident, we make sounder decisions and communicate more effectively, among other things. And in the world of work all that can result in more effective leaders with more satisfied employees and more profitable companies.

On a more philosophical side, self-knowledge is important because it offers us a route to greater happiness and fulfilment. A lack of self-knowledge can leave one open to accident and mistaken ambitions. Armed with the [right sort of self-knowledge](#), we have a greater chance of avoiding errors in our dealings with others and in the formulation of our life choices.

[Research done by The Eurich Group](#) found that even though most people believe they are self-aware, self-awareness is quite a rare quality: they estimate that only 10%–15% of the people they studied actually fit the criteria.

For starters, they identified two types of self-awareness. The first, internal self-awareness, represents how clearly we see our own values, aspirations, our fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviours, strengths, and weaknesses), and the impact on others. The research found that internal self-awareness is associated with higher job and relationship satisfaction, personal and social control, and negatively related to anxiety, stress, and depression.

The second category, external self-awareness, refers to understanding how other people view us, in terms of those same factors as above. The research showed that people who know how others see them are more skilled at showing empathy and taking others' perspectives. (Watch [Simon Sinek](#)'s excellent presentation on understanding empathy.)

To complement the two types, they identified four leadership archetypes that map varying levels of internal and external self-awareness. This emphasises the fact that self-awareness isn't a single truth but rather a delicate balance of two distinct, even competing, viewpoints.

It is widely assumed that introspection — examining the causes of our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours — improves our self-awareness. The Eurich Group's research found the opposite to be true: that people who introspect are less self-aware and report worse job satisfaction and well-being. The problem with introspection isn't that it is categorically ineffective — it's that most people are doing it incorrectly. The research showed that to increase productive self-insight and decrease unproductive rumination, we should ask what instead of why. What questions help us to stay objective, future-focused, and empowered to act on our new insights.

Leaders in the workplace who focus on building both internal and external self-awareness, who seek honest feedback, and who ask what instead of why can learn to see themselves more clearly — and reap the many rewards that increased self-knowledge delivers, for the greater good.

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