

Date: 2 November 2021	Format: <i>(Delete those that don't apply)</i> Newsletter article	Approved by: Peter Berry
Author: Lynne Cruikshank		Approval date: 28/10/2021
Status: Approved		Published to: SIOPA newsletter

Cultivating strategic self-awareness

While many of us would like to believe that we have high levels of self-awareness, unfortunately, it is not unusual for blind spots to exist between how we perceive our own behaviours and attributes and how others perceive them. These blind spots have the potential to impact us in many ways including on our reputation, relationships and performance at work. Developing self-awareness and understanding our blind spots is important to foster growth and development and the good news is that it is possible to enhance our behaviour, relationships and performance at work.

Types of self-awareness

When seeking to improve self-awareness it is important to understand the different types of self-awareness. Organisational Psychologist Tasha Eurich provides a useful distinction between two types of self-awareness, specifically how we see ourselves (internal self-awareness) and our understanding of how other people view us (external self-awareness). We can also think of this as our understanding of our identity (how we see ourselves) and our reputation (how other people view us).

Our reputation has a significant impact on our experiences at work as it impacts how others treat and respond to us in the workplace. This includes others' willingness to hire, promote or fire us, assign us particular pieces of work or projects, how much they trust and confide in us, and how others approach their interactions with us. Having a high level of external self-awareness in relation to one's reputation and how others perceive us, as well as what we are doing to create those perceptions, is important in identifying meaningful development opportunities.

When seeking to improve our levels of self-awareness to enhance our growth and development, it is important to focus on strategic self-awareness. Strategic self-awareness involves understanding one's strengths and opportunities and how they compare to those of others. Strategic self-awareness provides insights to leverage one's strengths and adapt one's behaviour to improve performance and relationships at work and is the type of self-awareness that can be used to shape and direct one's career.

Personality and self-awareness

Understanding the personality tendencies that are typically associated with having greater levels of self-awareness may provide some insight into how to foster greater levels of self-awareness. Hogan conducted some research involving matched personality and 360 data for approximately 2,500 individuals, comparing the individual's self-ratings to how they were rated by others (manager, peers, and direct reports) across a range of leadership competencies. The results indicated that individuals who were more inclined to display the following day-to-day tendencies were more likely to have higher levels of self-awareness:

- being reflective
- introspective
- open to feedback
- frank
- critical
- practical and
- level-headed.

These findings suggest there is value in taking time to engage in self-reflection, as well as being willing to have frank conversations, adopt a pragmatic and critical lens of one's behaviour and performance, and be open to feedback to help foster self-awareness.

Using feedback to cultivate strategic self-awareness

It is important to note that strategic self-awareness cannot be achieved solely through self-reflection or introspection, particularly if the intention is to identify potential blind spots. It requires obtaining feedback from others in relation to one's behaviour and performance in order to develop a greater understanding of one's strengths and development areas in comparison to others. A highly effective and efficient way to obtain this feedback is through using tools such as 360 evaluations where the individual can compare their self-ratings to those provided by others such as their manager, peers and direct reports. This enables them to obtain insight into areas where their perception of their performance and behaviour may differ from others, highlighting potential blind spots. The anonymous nature of the ratings in 360s can also help to obtain feedback that may not otherwise be given if people were asked directly for feedback by the individual.

Additionally, 360s that include benchmarks can help foster strategic self-awareness by enabling the individual to understand how their performance and areas of strength and development compare to others. They can identify if they have unique strengths that they may leverage to further enhance their performance, as well as detecting areas that may be more of an opportunity for them to work on enhancing their relationships and effectiveness at work, relative to others.

Cultivating strategic self-awareness in teams

Cultivating strategic self-awareness doesn't just need to be at an individual level. Teams also benefit from building an understanding of their collective strengths and development opportunities, and how they compare to other teams. Similarly to individuals, teams can have blind spots that contribute to dysfunctional behaviours and affect the team in terms of performance or relationships. There are team assessments similar to 360s that enable the team to elicit feedback in relation to their performance from those within and external to the team, as well as comparing to other teams to understand relative strengths and areas for development

and enhance strategic self-awareness of the team.

Final thoughts

It is important to note that once strategic self-awareness has been acquired it doesn't stop there. It is an important first step in understanding what strengths and opportunities exist, and identifies areas to focus on to continue to grow and develop. Once strategic self-awareness has been obtained, it takes continued motivation to improve, a clear plan for development, and the investment of time and effort to achieve improvements in relation to the individual or team's reputation, relationships and performance at work.