



WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Chapter 1

Understanding Self-Awareness in the Workplace

The Foundation of Personal and Professional Growth

In this chapter

Explore what self-awareness means, why it matters at work, how it connects with emotional intelligence, communication, stress and decision-making, and practical ways to develop greater insight over time.

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY



Understanding Self-Awareness in the Workplace: The Foundation of Personal and Professional Growth

Self-awareness is one of the most valuable skills an individual can develop, yet it is often overlooked in discussions about workplace success. Organisations frequently invest in technical training, leadership development and performance management, but the ability to understand ourselves—our thoughts, emotions, behaviours and their impact on others—is equally important.

Self-awareness influences how we communicate, solve problems, manage stress, make decisions and build relationships. It helps us recognise our strengths, understand our limitations and respond thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively under pressure.

In today's workplaces, where collaboration, adaptability and emotional intelligence are increasingly valued, self-awareness has become a fundamental professional skill. Employees who understand themselves are often better equipped to manage change, work effectively within teams and maintain their wellbeing during periods of pressure.

Self-awareness is not about striving for perfection or constantly analysing every action. Instead, it is about developing an honest, balanced understanding of who we are and using that knowledge to learn, grow and improve.

What Is Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness is the ability to recognise and understand your own:

- Thoughts
- Emotions
- Behaviours
- Beliefs
- Values
- Strengths
- Limitations
- Communication style
- Motivations

It also involves understanding how these influence the people around you.

A self-aware person is able to notice what they are thinking and feeling, understand why they are responding in a particular way and consider how their behaviour affects colleagues, clients and the wider workplace.

Rather than acting automatically, self-aware individuals pause, reflect and make conscious choices about how they respond.

Internal and External Self-Awareness

Internal Self-Awareness

Internal self-awareness refers to understanding yourself.

It involves recognising:

- Your emotions.



- Your thoughts.
- Your strengths.
- Your weaknesses.
- Your motivations.
- Your personal values.
- Your goals.
- Your stress triggers.

For example, you may notice that you become anxious before presentations or that you work best when given clear structure and sufficient preparation time. Understanding these patterns allows you to develop strategies that support your wellbeing and performance.

External Self-Awareness

External self-awareness is understanding how other people experience you.

This includes recognising:

- How you communicate.
- How your behaviour affects colleagues.
- How you respond during conflict.
- Whether people feel comfortable approaching you.
- The impression you create.

Sometimes the way we intend to come across differs from how others perceive us. Being open to feedback helps strengthen external self-awareness.

Why Self-Awareness Matters at Work

Self-awareness influences almost every aspect of working life. Employees who understand themselves are often better able to:

- Communicate effectively.
- Build trusting relationships.
- Adapt to change.
- Manage pressure.
- Resolve conflict.
- Accept feedback.
- Lead others.
- Maintain healthy boundaries.
- Protect their wellbeing.

Rather than reacting emotionally during challenging situations, self-aware individuals are more likely to pause, reflect and respond constructively.

Understanding Your Strengths

Knowing your strengths helps you contribute effectively to your team and increases confidence.

Strengths might include:

- Creativity.
- Organisation.



- Problem-solving.
- Empathy.
- Leadership.
- Analytical thinking.
- Communication.
- Adaptability.

Recognising strengths allows you to:

- Build confidence.
- Take on suitable responsibilities.
- Support colleagues.
- Continue developing existing skills.

Understanding strengths is not about believing you are better than others. It is about recognising where you naturally perform well and where you can add value.

Recognising Areas for Development

Self-awareness also involves acknowledging areas where further development may be helpful.

Examples include:

- Time management.
- Public speaking.
- Delegation.
- Organisation.
- Managing emotions.
- Confidence.
- Communication.
- Decision-making.

Recognising these areas demonstrates insight and a willingness to grow. Everyone has development needs. Professional growth begins with recognising them.

Self-Awareness and Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness is considered the foundation of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence includes the ability to:

- Recognise emotions.
- Understand emotional responses.
- Regulate emotions.
- Show empathy.
- Build relationships.

Without self-awareness, emotional regulation becomes much more difficult. For example, recognising that you are becoming frustrated during a meeting allows you to pause before responding impulsively.

Recognising Emotional Triggers



Everyone experiences situations that trigger emotional responses.

Common workplace triggers include:

- Receiving criticism.
- Feeling ignored.
- Tight deadlines.
- High workloads.
- Conflict.
- Unexpected change.
- Lack of clarity.
- Feeling overwhelmed.

Self-aware individuals learn to recognise these triggers early. Rather than reacting automatically, they can choose healthier responses.

Self-Awareness and Communication

Communication improves significantly when we understand our own communication style.

Ask yourself:

- Do I listen actively?
- Do I interrupt others?
- Am I clear when explaining ideas?
- How do I respond to disagreement?
- Do I communicate differently when stressed?
- Do people feel comfortable speaking with me?

Self-awareness allows us to adapt our communication to different situations and individuals.

Self-Awareness During Stress

Stress often changes the way we behave. Some people become quieter. Others become impatient. Some overwork. Others avoid tasks altogether.

Recognising your own stress responses allows you to take action before stress begins affecting performance or wellbeing. This might include:

- Taking a break.
- Asking for support.
- Prioritising tasks.
- Using relaxation techniques.
- Setting healthier boundaries.

Awareness is the first step towards effective self-management.

Self-Awareness and Decision-Making

Our decisions are influenced by emotions, experiences and beliefs. Without self-awareness we may:

- Make assumptions.
- React emotionally.

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- Avoid difficult conversations.
 - Repeat unhelpful patterns.
 - Allow bias to influence decisions.

Reflecting before making important decisions helps improve judgement and fairness.

Developing Greater Self-Awareness

Reflection

Take time to consider your experiences. Ask yourself:

- What went well?
- What could I improve?
- What have I learned?

Feedback

Invite constructive feedback from trusted colleagues or managers. Be curious rather than defensive.

Mindfulness

Pay attention to your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations without immediately reacting. Mindfulness increases awareness of emotional patterns.

Journalling

Writing about workplace experiences can help identify recurring themes, strengths and challenges.

Coaching or Supervision

Talking through experiences with a coach, mentor or supervisor can provide valuable perspectives and encourage deeper reflection.

Barriers to Self-Awareness

Developing self-awareness is not always easy.

Common barriers include:

- Fear of criticism.
- Defensiveness.
- Lack of reflection.
- Time pressures.
- Avoiding difficult emotions.
- Assuming we already know ourselves fully.

Self-awareness requires openness, curiosity and a willingness to continue learning.

The Benefits of Self-Awareness

Employees who develop strong self-awareness often experience:

- Better communication.
- Improved confidence.
- Greater resilience.
- Stronger relationships.

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- Better decision-making.
 - Increased adaptability.
 - Improved leadership skills.
 - Reduced workplace stress.
 - Higher job satisfaction.

Organisations also benefit through improved teamwork, stronger collaboration and healthier workplace cultures.

Practical Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to reflect on the following:

- What are my greatest strengths at work?
- What situations challenge me most?
- How do I usually respond to stress?
- What feedback do I receive most often?
- What values guide my decisions?
- What would I like to improve over the next six months?
- How do I want colleagues to experience me?

Reflection

There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is simply to become more aware of yourself.

Key Takeaways

- Self-awareness is understanding your thoughts, emotions, behaviours and their impact on others.
- It includes both understanding yourself and understanding how others experience you.
- Self-awareness improves communication, emotional regulation and decision-making.
- Recognising strengths and development areas supports continuous professional growth.
- Reflection, feedback and mindfulness all help develop greater self-awareness.
- Self-awareness protects wellbeing by helping us recognise stress and respond proactively.
- Developing self-awareness is an ongoing journey rather than a final destination.

Final Thoughts

Self-awareness is the foundation upon which many other professional skills are built. It shapes how we communicate, how we respond to challenges, how we build relationships and how we continue to grow throughout our careers. Rather than expecting perfection, self-awareness encourages curiosity, honesty and a willingness to learn from experience.

By understanding our strengths, recognising our limitations and becoming more aware of our emotional responses, we place ourselves in a stronger position to navigate workplace challenges with confidence and resilience. This not only benefits our own wellbeing but also improves the way we work with others.

Ultimately, self-awareness is not about changing who you are, it is about understanding yourself more deeply so that you can make conscious choices, develop your potential and



create a healthier, more fulfilling working life.