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Leadership – advanced

Self-awareness

What determines a leader's flexibility to switch styles is how self-aware they are. Self-aware leaders tune in to what kind of leadership style to adopt to suit the situation and the individuals involved (eg what style am I applying? What's the impact? Is there another style I could use?) They're also aware of their own predominant style (eg. I tend to be more – directive etc).

Many 'self' ideas are connected with the concept of self awareness, such as:

- **Self-concept:** How you see yourself - the image you've built, or allowed others to build, of your self-identity.
- **Self-esteem:** The way you feel about your self-concept, how much you value yourself, if you feel positive about your self-concept you'll have stronger self-esteem.
- **Self-talk:** The language you use to talk about yourself is a good barometer of how you see yourself and your level of self-esteem.
- **Self-efficacy:** What makes some people emotionally resilient and others fragile, it affects our ability to focus or concentrate.
- **Self-disclosure:** Is another key element of self-aware behaviour. It's about being open to myself about myself first and then being open with others about myself. This is the basis for our personal integrity and authenticity.

Learning to see yourself accurately and accepting yourself is an important foundation for your self-esteem and for your level of self-management.

Personal mastery

Personal mastery is a set of practices that can increase your level of self-awareness - how we perceive events and interact with others. Some ideas behind personal mastery are:

- **Personal purpose and vision:** Self-aware managers have a clear personal vision of their purpose - a focus on finding the answer to: How can I make a difference?
- **Personal values:** Self-aware managers are guided by and act out of a clear set of values, principles and business ethics.
- **Personal perception:** Self-aware managers perceive themselves accurately - which also extends to how you see other people, events and situations too.
- **Personal awareness:** Self-aware managers 'know' themselves. As Senge says, they have a 'commitment to truth - a relentless willingness to uncover the ways we limit and deceive ourselves.'



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Mental models

Self-awareness includes the ability to recognise how our own thoughts and actions create the reality we experience. This involves mastering our 'mental models' - deeply ingrained beliefs or mind-sets that influence how we make sense of the world, perceive events in it and determine the actions we take:

- Mental models provide our model of reality. We interpret everything against them. They help explain what we perceive, shape our values and assumptions, and the way we think, act and interact with others.
- While mental models are immensely influential and always present, we're often unaware of them or the impact they have on our perception and behaviour.
- Worse still, we rarely question how up-to-date our mental models are or assume the mental maps we use are the same as everyone else's.

Behaviour

Self-awareness is also about self-managing our behaviour. How self-managing we are matches closely with how much we subscribe personally to the principle of 'choice'. The 'choice' principle enables us to exercise self-control and make better choices. When we're more self-aware, we can be more empathetic and sensitive to the needs of others. With empathy we can positively influence others and be more effective as leaders. *Choice* says:

- We all choose how we behave and we need to accept the consequences of that.
- The only behaviour we can really control is our own. Many conflicts at work are caused by attempts to directly control others.
- We are in control – I may not control events, but I control the meaning I invest in them.
- We need to focus on our contribution to situations that arise around us (looking inwards first instead of blaming outwards).
- My capacity to change or control a situation lies first in changing my own behaviour.
- If you choose, then blaming others is irrelevant - better to first look at how your choices contributed to the situation.

One of the biggest obstacles to self-awareness is what Will Schutz (1994) calls 'blindspots' - things I'm not aware of about myself, my behaviour and why I behave, think or feel the way I do.

All of us have different ways of behaving. Inside normal limits, there are no right/wrong, good or bad ways. Some behaviours are more helpful or appropriate in some situations than others.

Schutz has a simple model to explain what goes on with behaviour. While there are numerous sorts of specific behaviours, he says three basic dimensions – inclusion, control and openness – describe where they all come from.



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Each dimension gives rise to certain patterns of behaviour - and anxieties or 'dramas':

1. The Inclusion Drama - whether I'm 'in' or 'out'. The major concern with inclusion/exclusion anxieties are prominence and significance. Self-aware people feel OK with their level of these.
2. The Control Drama - whether I'm 'on the top or bottom'. The main concern of control dramas is needing to have my competence confirmed. If I fear being out of control, I feel incompetent and re-act defensively - usually by asserting my control even harder.
3. The Openness Drama - whether I'm 'open or closed'. The major concern here is one of loveliness or likeability. My fear of feeling unworthy of love/liking leads to self-protective behaviours such as rejection, self-distancing, self-isolation or abandonment.

If we're self-aware, we know these patterns in ourselves. We can consciously choose to do something about them - or at least, have an idea of why we act the way we do. If we're *unaware*, we don't see these patterns and we're likely to feel defensive and react in ways we don't really understand. For example:

- Displaying strong emotions may signal our resistance when our long held beliefs are questioned.
- Rejecting feedback we get, rebuffing those who try to point things out to us about us.
- Name-calling, labelling and open criticism (eg That's stupid, unrealistic, impractical etc).
- Anger, withdrawal or embarrassment (as we are forced to reflect that we may not be what we think we are).
- Avoidance or sidestepping (as we try to distract others from truths about ourselves that we're protective about).
- Becoming excessively deflated, defeated or demoralised when we uncover things about our self we don't like.
- Over-inflating ourselves - thinking we're too much better or different than what we really are - especially in the face of criticism.
- Complacency - deluding ourselves that the way we are now is the best (or worst) we can be (eg That's just the way I am) which blocks any genuine personal change.

Being more self-aware of your own behaviour, how it comes across to others, and being able to cope with getting feedback about it - without falling into defensive routines - enables you to make a conscious choice about whether and how to behave differently.

Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Apply the principles of succession planning
- Leadership - introduction