



Self-Awareness: A Key Factor for Effective Leadership

Duyar Ibrahim*

Professor, Arkansas State University, USA

Submission: August 16, 2025; **Published:** September 02, 2025

***Corresponding author:** Duyar Ibrahim, Professor, Arkansas State University, Center for Excellence in Education-Doctoral Program, Jonesboro, AR, USA

Abstract

This conceptual reflection brings forth the importance of self-awareness in the success and effectiveness of today's organizational leaders. First, the theoretical foundations leading to the emergence of self-awareness are visited. The inner awareness and awareness of others are discussed as two dimensions of self-awareness, followed by the examination of some of the hindering factors of leaders' self-awareness. The perspective concludes with a discussion on the efforts to measure and develop leaders' self-awareness. A special emphasis was given to self-other-agreement and multi-rater evaluations for the measurement and evaluation of leaders' self-awareness and effectiveness. The paper concludes with a discussion of the fragmented nature of the measurement and development of self-awareness and provides suggestions for future directions.

Keywords: Effective Leadership; Self-awareness; Emotional Intelligence; Leadership Development

Theoretical Foundations

While some principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor's Scientific Management Theory remain applicable to organizations, contrary to the theory's assertions, the last century has shown that employees are far more valuable than organizational structures and procedures. The archenemesis, Human Relations Theory, which prioritizes employees above all else, has proved to be long-lasting and highly applicable in today's organizations. The human relations theory recognizes employees' social and psychological needs by prioritizing employee self-awareness and well-being. Seligman's [1] Positive Psychology Theory and its derivatives, such as Theory of Mindfulness [2] and Emotional Intelligence [3], center self-awareness as a critical attribute for effective leadership. Leadership applications of positive psychology offer new meanings to human relations in organizations through positive leadership [4], transformational leadership [5], authentic leadership [6], and servant leadership [7] approaches. Self-awareness of leaders is also the common denominator of these contemporary approaches to effective leadership.

Self-Awareness and Leadership

Leaders' role has shifted towards that of a coach and mentor, empowering subordinates and fostering their self-awareness. A

study by Sajgalikova et al. [8] showed that soft skills, such as self-awareness, feedback, developing others, and collective problem solving, are the sought-after skills of today's leaders. Today's organizations, with unprecedented complexities and challenges, require leaders who not only possess explicit knowledge about tasks but also inner and external self-awareness to navigate daily challenges in organizations [9].

Early approaches to self-awareness included only inner self-awareness. For instance, Church [10] described self-awareness as an attribute of evaluating strengths and weaknesses. The contemporary approaches to self-awareness define self-awareness as a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses both inner awareness and awareness of others [11]. While the first one is about understanding self-strengths and deficiencies, the latter is about understanding how others perceive oneself through objective feedback. The inner awareness of self is an individual's self-analysis of their identity and the resources and deficiencies they possess. A leader who is aware of the deficiency in an area helps followers to develop expertise in that area.

Inner awareness may be a double-edged sword! While awareness of self enables leaders to adjust depending on their strengths and weaknesses, the lack of it presents significant

obstacles for the effective functioning of leaders and their subordinates. Factors such as incompetence, bias, ego, and defense mechanisms lead leaders to disregard or distort subordinates' (i.e., others') feedback. Leaders tend to overestimate themselves compared to others' feedback on their performance. Inflated positive perceptions of self can lead to unhealthy pride, arrogance, or deception, ultimately harming the well-being of individuals and organizational effectiveness [9].

While knowing personal strengths and weaknesses is essential, it alone cannot be enough to become an effective leader. Instead, effective leaders also need feedback and support from their subordinates. Self-aware leaders are open to objective feedback that increases their integrity and effectiveness. As Showry and Manasa [9] note, "effective leadership often surfaces when individuals become aware of critical personal experiences in their lives, understand the driving forces, and respond by rethinking themselves, redirecting their moves, and reshaping their actions. Self-awareness propels leaders to develop a sense of self and directs them to convert weaknesses into strengths by working on themselves." (p. 1)

Measurement and Development of Leaders' Self-Awareness

The development of any skill requires the level of presence or the lack of the targeted skill. While there is a widespread agreement about the importance of self-awareness of leaders, the literature lacks inclusive self-awareness instruments that measure both inner awareness and awareness of others. This is perhaps because the developing inner awareness and awareness of others may have unique aspects of the mega concept, and they require different strategies and practices. In the absence of inclusive instruments that cover both dimensions, organizations usually use methods of self-reflection observations, such as "Self-Reflection and Insight Scale," self-report questionnaires, and multi-rater performance evaluations, such as self-other agreement. These instruments help organizations and individual leaders to assess their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their impact on subordinates.

Due to the fragmentation of instruments to measure self-awareness, the literature lacks inclusive development and intervention mechanisms for enhancing employees' and leaders' self-awareness. Other concepts, including psychological capital, social capital, emotional intelligence, learning communities, mindfulness, and insight, often overshadow the existing practices for developing employees' and leaders' self-awareness. Although these concepts center around self-awareness, the existing literature mainly attempts to legitimize these concepts without making any deliberate attempts to establish linkages to self-awareness as a uniting mega concept.

Evaluation Leaders' Self-Awareness: Self-Other Agreement

Recognizing the importance of leaders' self-awareness in

effective leadership practices, today's organizations employ multi-rater/source feedback instruments such as multi-source evaluations. Multirater performance evaluation instruments are centered around leaders' self-awareness and its two dimensions: inner self-awareness and external self-awareness. These instruments simultaneously include both self-ratings and ratings of others in the determination of leaders' overall performance.

The seminal work of Atwater and Yamamiro [12] on self-other agreement provided theoretical foundations for multi-source evaluations that analyzed both self and others' perspectives in leaders' performance evaluations simultaneously. This model values both self and others' ratings in the evaluation of leaders' performance. Atwater and Yamamiro's self-other agreement model included four different leader performances depending on the degree of self or others' ratings. The beauty of their model lies in the ranking of the four performance levels. The highest performing leaders are the ones who scored high in both self and others. This group of leaders perceives itself as high-performing, and others also rate their performance as high-performing. The lowest-performing leaders are those who are rated as low-performing by both themselves and others. By giving more credence to others' ratings over self-ratings, the second-highest-performing leaders do not perceive themselves as high-performing, while others rate them as high-performing. The third-highest-performing leaders are ranked high performing by themselves but lower performing by others.

Conclusions

Soft skills, particularly self-awareness, are a common measure of today's leaders' performance and effectiveness. Self-aware leaders understand their strengths and weaknesses and also value the feedback of others. Instead of being defensive, they utilize others' feedback to address their weaknesses and promote their strengths. Such a confident stance of leaders earns subordinates' as well as supervisors' trust and confidence in them in dealing with daily challenges in organizations. In return, the subordinates' self-awareness skills also improve.

Although there are fragmented efforts in the literature for its theoretical foundations, measurement, and development mechanisms, self-awareness has already proven to be a crucial soft skill in the effective functioning of today's leaders.

References

1. Seligman MEP, Ernst RM, Gillham J, Reivich K, & Linkins M (2009) Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education* 35(3): 293-311.
2. Siegel DJ (2009) Mindful awareness, mindsight, and neural integration. *Humanist Psychology* 37(2): 137-158.
3. Goleman D (2005) Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. Bantam Books. ISBN 978-0-553-3871-3.
4. Arakawa D, & Greenberg M (2007) Optimistic managers and their influence on productivity and employee engagement in a technology organisation: Implications for coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 2(1): 78-89.

5. Bass BM & BJ Avolio (1993) "Transformational Leadership: A Response to Critiques." In: Chemers MM and Ayman R edited by, Leadership Theory and Research: Perspectives and Directions, San Diego: Academic Press, p. 49-80.
6. Avolio BJ, & Gardner WL (2005) Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. The Leadership Quarterly 16(3): 315-338.
7. Barbuto JE, Jr & Wheeler DW (2006) Scale Development and Construct Clarification of Servant Leadership. Group & Organization Management 31(3): 300-326.
8. Sajgalikova H, Bajzikovab L, & Polakovac M (2012) Revisiting New Managerial Competences: Is There Enough Motivation to Apply Them? Social and Behavioral Sciences 58: 944-952.
9. Showry M, Manasa KVL (2014) Self-awareness: Key to effective leadership. IUP Journal of Soft Skills 8(1): 1-15.
10. Church AH (1997) Managerial Self-Awareness in High-Performing Individuals in Organizations. Journal of Applied Psychology 82(2): 281-292.
11. Hall DT (2004) Self-Awareness, Identity, and Leader Development. In: Day DV, Zaccaro SJ, & Halpin SM (Eds.), Leader Development for Transforming Organizations: Growing Leaders for Tomorrow, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 153-176.
12. Atwater LE, Yammarino FJ (1997) Self-other rating agreement: A review and model. In: Ferris GR (Ed.), Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management Elsevier Science/JAI Press, 15: 121-174.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/ASM.2025.12.555827](https://doi.org/10.19080/ASM.2025.12.555827)

**Your next submission with Juniper Publishers
will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission
<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>