How can we measure the impact of self-awareness at work?

Construction of the Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire

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Introduction

Attempts to improve an individual's self-awareness are made in fields as diverse as employee development [1], counsellor training [2] and continuing professional development. There is good evidence for the beneficial consequences of self-awareness in everyday life [3], but the practical impact of self-awareness at work remains difficult to measure.

Current research into self-awareness tends to focus on related concepts such as mindfulness [4] or to operationalise self-awareness as a personality trait [5]. Given the substantial investment of time and money by organisations and individuals in activities promoting self-awareness, a reliable and valid measure of actual workplace outcomes is an essential step in assessing the return on these investments. We address this need by developing the Self-awareness Outcomes Questionnaire (SAOQ).

Research Aims:

- To create an initial self-report measure of self-awareness correlates and factors affecting self-awareness.
- To further explore and identify the outcomes associated with self-awareness.

Method

We developed a comprehensive list of SAOQ items from three sources:

- a thorough literature search
- analysis of reported outcomes of employee development workshops
- focus group discussions with counsellors experienced in developing client self-awareness.

This resulted in a final list of 83 items representing 14 different groups of outcomes. E.g.:

- **Proactive at work**
  - I take control of my work

- **Acceptance (of self and others)**
  - I feel on the whole very comfortable with the way I am

Subscale | Item | No. items | alpha
--- | --- | --- | ---
Proactive at work | I take control of my work | 9 | .81
Acceptance (of self and others) | I feel on the whole very comfortable with the way I am | 11 | .83
Reflective self-development | I focus on ways of amending my behaviour that would be useful | 11 | .87
Costs | I feel vulnerable | 7 | .77

Relationship between self-awareness measures and SAOQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Self-development</th>
<th>Acceptance of self and others</th>
<th>Proactive at Work</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumination</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>–</td>
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</tbody>
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In addition, increased engagement in mindfulness or self-awareness practices is associated with increased Reflective Self-Development and Acceptance but also increased Costs.

Self-Awareness Outcomes

T-test comparisons of the subsample groups confirmed the theoretically expected differences in self-awareness between the groups. Comparison of the groups on the SAOQ scales also showed significant differences:

- Therapists reported higher Reflective Self-Development and Proactive at Work outcomes than non-therapists.
- Students on therapy-related courses reported higher Costs than business students.

Applications

- The SAOQ enables practitioners and researchers to measure the practical impact of self-awareness interventions on employees’ work lives.
- Because items were originally developed from a longitudinal study, the SAOQ can be used to demonstrate both the short- and long-term utility of improved self-awareness in a range of developmental contexts at work.
- We also contribute to the improved theoretical understanding of the self-awareness and mindfulness concepts, particularly the intriguing finding that mindfulness shows a similar (negative) pattern of outcomes to rumination.
- Finally, our results indicate that students on counselling or therapy-related courses report more costs of self-awareness than equivalent business students. It is important that any interventions designed to improve self-awareness include appropriate support to help participants to deal with these costs.

Limitations: Further work is needed to confirm the factor structure in different populations.