

# 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
- 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.:

Group	Item
Understanding / acceptance of others, diversity	I have compassion and acceptance for others
Understanding / acceptance of self	I have learnt about myself and how I see the world
Costs of self-awareness	I feel vulnerable

A stratified sampling approach recruited 215 participants (76% female, mean age 35.8 years) from four different populations, representing theoretically different levels of self-awareness:

Higher levels of self-awareness	Average levels of self-awareness
Therapists / counsellors	Employees in fields unrelated to psychotherapy
Post-graduate counselling students	Post-graduate business students

Participants completed an online questionnaire battery including:

- The SAOQ items
- Measures of different conceptualisations of self-awareness
  - Reflection-Rumination Questionnaire [5] (Reflection is a type of self-attentiveness associated with positive well-being, Rumination is associated with negative well-being)
  - Mindful Attention Awareness Scale [6]
  - Self-Reflection / Insight Scale [7]
- Engagement in mindfulness / self-awareness practices (e.g. meditation, writing a journal).



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 2.Lennie, C., The role of personal development groups in counsellor training: understanding factors contributing to self-awareness in the personal development group. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 2007, 35(1): p. 115-129.  
 3.Wilson, T.D. and E.W. Dunn, Self-Knowledge: Its Limits, Value and Potential for Improvement. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2004, 55: p. 493-518.  
 4.Walach, H., et al., Measuring mindfulness: the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory Personality and Individual Differences, 2006, 40: p. 1543-1555.  
 5.Troyen, P.D. and I.D. Campbell, Private Self-Consciousness and the Five Factor Model of Personality: Distinguishing Rumination from Reflection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1999, 76(2): p. 284-304.  
 6.Brown, K.W. and R.M. Ryan, The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2003, 84(4): p. 822-848.  
 7.Grant, A.M., J. Franklin, and P. Langford, The Self-Reflection and Insight Scale: A new measure of private self-consciousness. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 2002, 30(8): p. 823-835.

### Results

#### Questionnaire development

Factor analysis was conducted on the SAOQ items (alpha factoring with promax rotation to maximise alpha reliability of the resulting subscales). Items which did not load clearly (above .4) on a single factor were excluded and resulting factors with a reliability  $\alpha > .7$  were retained.

Factor analysis was rerun on the remaining 38 items, resulting in a 4 factor structure which explained 45% of the variance. The subscales represent 3 groups of benefits of self-awareness and one of costs.

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

#### Relationship between self-awareness measures and SAOQ

	Reflective Self-development	Acceptance of self and others	Proactive at Work	Costs
Insight	+	+	+	-
Self-reflection	+		+	+
Reflection	+			+
Rumination		-		+
Mindfulness		-		+

+ / - indicates positive / negative correlation ( $p < .05$ )

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 **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.