SELF AWARENESS

AND

SELF CONTROL

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SELF AWARENESS AND SELF CONTROL

1.   Both the terms contain the word "Self" and hence it would be best to start by understanding the concept of 'Self' or 'I'. The quest for finding the meaning of Self or I is as old as mankind or at least since the time records about man are available. For more than three millennia, "knowledge of the self has been considered to be at the very core of human behavior" (Whetten and Cameron, 2007, p. 58). Over time, almost all texts, religious or philosophical, record such a quest and provide some possible answers of "what is the meaning of Self or I".

2.   Personal identity and awareness of oneself are critical elements of effectiveness in creating relationships with others. There is a story about a young person who approached a religious leader asking, ''who am I?'' The guru replied simply, ''And who is asking the question?'' In modern times this quest has been documented by noted philosophers.

Self

3.   Self is the "I" as experienced by an individual. In modern psychology this notion of self has replaced the earlier conceptions of the soul. The concept of 'self' has been a central feature of personality theories propounded by philosophers including Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and Abraham H. Maslow, among others.

4.   According to Carl Jung, the 'self' is a totality, and consists of conscious and unconscious contents which dwarf the ego in scope as well as intensity. The maturation of the self is the individuation process, which is the goal of a healthy personality. Rogers, on his part theorized that a person's self-concept determines his behaviour and his relation to the world, and that true therapeutic improvement occurs only when the individual changes his own self-concept. May's approach was similarly existential; he conceived the self as a dynamic entity, alive with potentiality. Maslow's theory of self-actualization was based on a hierarchy of needs and emphasized the highest capacities or gratifications of a person and he propounded that man's behaviour is shaped by his needs in a particular order of importance.

5.   **Identity and Self.**   One's identity defines how an individual presents oneself to others as well as how others perceive that person. Ashforth and Johnson in their article " Which Hat to Wear" say that an individual's identity affirms his/ her worth to others and to self, in a corporate or organisational setting. Josselson in his 1994 article 'Identity and Relatedness in life cycle' says that identity is at its core psychosocial, as an "expression of self, for, with, against, or despite; but certainly in response to others".

6.   The concept of 'self' for an individual is incomplete without one being aware of it. The aim of all religions is to become aware of oneself. As Swami Yagananda Paramahansa said "Self-

realization is, in fact, the only religion. For it is the true purpose of religion, no matter how people define their beliefs".

7. There are three forms of awareness

(a) Simple Conscious Awareness, which is awareness of whatever is being experienced. In this, self is understood as the perceiving subject. It is the center of sensations, perceptions, and impressions. One notices one's surroundings, and is able to name one's perceptions, feelings, and nuances of behavior.

(b) Reflective Awareness which is awareness of oneself i.e. the person himself / herself who is experiencing something. As opposed to Simple conscious awareness where the focuses is on on direct experience, reflective self-awareness is the other way round and focuses on the person who is experiencing. One steps back to observe and considers its own performance.

(c) Reflexive Awareness which is awareness one that how his/her awareness is constituted in direct experience. We cannot observe and make judgments about ourselves in the same way we can about another person. This is because our knowledge is self-referential. Ludwig Wittgenstein gave a famous example concerning differences between the two statements i.e. ''she is in pain'' and ''I am in pain.'' The first is a statement which can be substantiated with data as it is one made about another person. The second statement, however, is different. This is because the statement is not simply describing the pain; it is itself, an articulation of the pain.

Identity and Self

8. Flanagan in 1991, while describing varieties of moral personalities, wrote "Identity is who we believe we are", self-awareness includes the degree to which we are sensitive to how we are perceived by others as per Fletcher and Bailey while assessing self awareness in 2003. In fact, Self awareness theory suggests that people who are more aware of how they are perceived by others perform better in self-appraisals and improve more. Own identity is heavily dependent on an ongoing comparison with an ideal standard of behavior, Burke in 1991 provided the model of Identity Control Theory. As per this, when an identity is established, a feedback loop with four components is created. The identity cycle begins with the
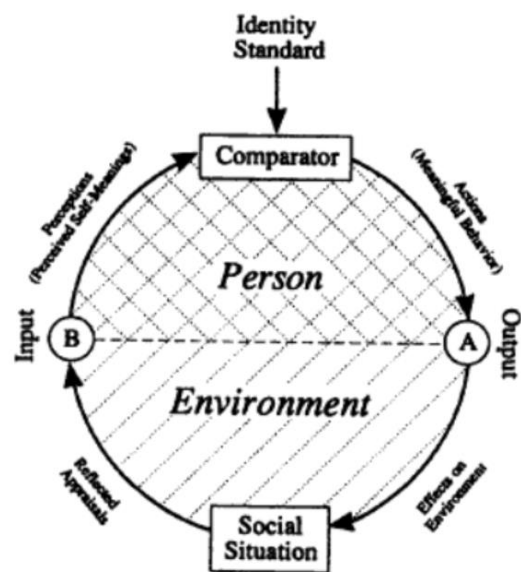
actions and meaningful behaviors, which make up the output of an identity. This output is an attempt to adjust individual behaviors to match the ideal internal standard which makes up how we view ourselves. Our behavior occurs within the context of a social situation. Typically, we use self- categorization and social comparisons from the feedback we receive from others to anticipate how to act. From the reflected appraisals of others, we perceive evaluated input, or our interpretation of how our actions and behaviors fit within the situation in which we have been engaged. Our interpretation of these appraisals is heavily influenced by the roles we play in groups. The identity standard is the ideal or comparator which makes up our expectations that are associated with self- defined roles which incorporate how we have defined ourselves and who we believe we ultimately are.

9.   "The core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance" as per Burke. We compare ourselves to others who are both like us and different from us in determining our self-image and identities. Our social and personal identities integrate both our self-perceptions and the attributes of these identities.

Self Awareness

 "The deeper the Self-realization of a man, the more he influences the whole universe by his subtle spiritual vibrations, and the less he himself is affected by the phenomenal flux" : Paramahansa Yogananda.

10.   Self-awareness involves having a "deep under- standing of one's emotions, as well as one's strengths and limitations and one's values and motives" It incorporates the self-reflection capacity and thoughtfulness which are necessary to discover one's voice as well as the ability to understand one's true nature and the freedom to choose how one responds to situations in life. A high value is ascribed to the ability "to think things over rather than react impulsively".

11.   Stress among other factors, reduces self awareness and miss signs which enable them to be effective in managing themselves and their relationships. Even skilled leaders who usually recognize the importance of tuning into the nuances of interpersonal relationships fall prey to the compelling problems, uncertainty, and often uncontrollable situations that hijack our physiological responses. This in turn, exponentially increases stress, and cause inevitable self-awareness dysfunction in a vicious circle. Sankar in 2003 suggested that self-awareness and effective leadership require character in carefully examining the consistency of one's personal attributes and behaviors in relationships with others.

12.   This tendency to believe in faulty preconceptions is consistent with several types of self-deception identified by Siegler in 1962. He identified eight rationalizations that frequently occur as part of self-deception. Those eight perceptions and their respective meanings are briefly summarized below:

(a)   <u>Pretense</u>. Claiming prior knowledge about results as an attempt to appear better.

(b)   <u>Discounting failure</u>. Post facto claim about likely failure without actual articulation earlier.

(c)   <u>Articulation of past fears</u>. Unwillingness to deal with uncertainty.

(d)   <u>Inability to understand</u>. Failure to acknowledge a situation or result which one cannot emotionally deal with or understand.

(e)   <u>Wanting reality to be different</u>.   Biases affect how we see the world so powerfully that one gets swayed by wishful thinking.

(f)   <u>Intentional averting of attention</u>.   Avoiding a painful issue so that we do not have to deal with it.

(g)   <u>Resolving to change</u>.   At times, we acknowledge that we have not dealt with issues that we ought to have addressed in the past and claim to change.

(h)   <u>Acknowledged regret</u>. We may express the fact that we should have been attuned to key information in the past, but overlooked key indicators ourselves.

13.   **<u>Benefits of Self Awareness</u>**

(a)   Aids self-control, creativity, pride, and self-esteem.

(b)   Predicts self-development, acceptance, and proactivity.

(c)   Facilitates decision-making.

(d)   Leads to more accurate self-reports.

(e)   Required to develop self-control.

It would be correct, therefore to summarise that "**Self-awareness is wasted if it does not result in self-acceptance".**

14.   The greatest pursuits in life should be to become more self-aware and realize these benefits. "**The Goal of Self-Awareness Is Self-Acceptance".** Being "self-aware" is not an all-or-nothing trait and has degrees. Some actions that help boost self awareness are as follows:

(a)   **Hold weaker opinions.** Unless one is an expert in afield, one's intuitions or assumptions may be wrong. The simple acknowledgement that "I could be wrong about this," puts mind in a place of openness, curiosity with an ability to learn.

(b) **Recognising patterns.** When angry, one gets argumentative and arrogant. When sad, I shut down and play a lot of video games. Recognising these coping patterns forewarns oneself before committing errors. I

(c) **Recognising Self created problems.** Not being able to talk about anger or sadness and finding an escape through drinking or arguing with people around are self created issues. These don't help at all and recognizing these early mitigates their effect.

(d) **Being realistic.** It's not abou*t removing* faulty reactions but about understanding them to adjust to them. Like we have skills and activities we're better at than others, we all have emotions we're better at than others. Some people are bad with happiness but good at managing their anger. Others are terrible with their anger but relish their happiness.

(e) **Not being Over Concerned**. Some people fall in the trap of always looking one level deeper. Beyond a certain level, it is a spiral of doom. The act of looking deeper itself, at times, generates more feelings of anxiety, despair, and self-judgment than it relieves.

SELF CONTROL

15. Chocolate smells delicious and makes mouth water. Yet we may resist the urge to eat because of a goal of cutting back on calories. We all face moments in life where self-control comes into focus. This is self control and allows us to inhibit ourselves from impulsive responses in behavior, favoring more appropriate, context-specific behavior. Self-control is the capacity to override an impulse in order to respond appropriately.

16. Self-control is not a stable trait and tends to wax and wane over the course of a day, suggesting that self-control is less like a mental capacity such as intelligence and more a fluctuating resource along the lines of physical energy.

17. Self-control has three main parts:

(a) **Monitoring.** This involves keeping track of thoughts, feelings and actions. People who weigh themselves every day, compared with those who did not, are less likely to gain weight and keeping track of spending results in saving money.

(b) **Standards.** These originate from society and culture. Following the rules is OK while breaking rules will have consequences. These self or societal standards assist self control.

(c) **Moral or Inner Strength.** This is the energy needed to control impulses. Mental exhaustion and stress may reduce self control.

IMPROVING SELF CONTROL

18.   Improving self-control is easier said than done. Effective self-control hinges on all three working together. Without monitoring, you may know what you need to do and have the energy to do it, but may struggle to accomplish. Like a three-legged stool, without any one or more ingredients chances to loose self-control increase.

19.   **Deferring Gratification**. Self-regulation in preferring long term benefits instead of immediate ones improves self control. Self-control is not about self-deprivation but about redefining what is pleasurable to check self destructive behaviours.

20.   **Removing Temptation.**   Deferring or avoiding temptations consistently is not easy. Another way is to remove the temptation. It creates effortless self-control. Managing oneself and surroundings by removing temptations makes decisions automatic and self-reinforcing.

21.   **Caution**.   The *ability to be cautious or* prudent improves self-control. How to think, analyse and then act rather than merely reacting to an impulse improves decision making. Taking time to explore and evaluate options is a strong example of self-control. Less violent outbursts occur when someone can slow their response to react to a perceived threat appropriately.

22.   **Alternative Perspectives**. The ability to identify and evaluate alternative perspectives can be strengthened to improve self-control. Rather than reacting impulsively to another person, someone with enhanced social intelligence may respond with compassion and empathy. Controlling own actions and learning to ignore immediate impulses, no matter how powerful, improves self control.

23.   **Managing Energy**.   Most people plan spending their time and only few plan how they spend their limited self-control energy. Planning what to do along with how much self-control energy is needed to do it helps. When to spend and when to conserve energy will help self control.

24.   **Building Mental Strength**.   Self-control relies on an all-purpose energy resource. Self-control can be improved by doing unrelated self-control tasks. Using non dominant hand to complete everyday tasks like brushing their teeth increases self-control in other domains, such as reducing aggression.

25.   **Controlling Environment**. In their book "Willpower," Roy Baumeister and John Tierney (2011) propound that self-controlled people control their environment. If motivated to lose weight, they do not bring junk food into the house. If driven to write 2,000 words a day, they block their email to prevent distractions. Identifying ways to change environment to achieve a specific goal helps. It affects both the ability and the motivation to achieve goals.

26.   **Implementing Automation**. Self control is difficult because we have to fight ourselves and our own mind. A solution is to take the mind out of the middle by setting up a mental

contract. To achieve an academic goal, deciding that, "When I get home from class, I will read Chapter 5." It is simple and it works.

27. **Measuring Progress.** What gets measured gets managed. Monitoring progress keeps the focus on goals. Monitoring helps us become experts on our own behavior, and it makes habits less difficult to govern and change.

28. **Managing Stress.** Stopping and taking a few deep breaths reduces heart rate and relaxes. Exercising regularly, eating well at regular times and getting enough sleep improves focus and health. When sleep deprived or at low energy levels, decision making suffers.

29. **Prioritising.** Making a to do list for every day, week and month and knowing progress made helps feeling more in control. Feeling overwhelmed leads to disorganization, stress and wasted time.

30. **Forgive Yourself.** Failing is a part of life. Feeling bad and worrying achieves nothing. Forgive yourself and move on. Winston Churchill once wrote, "Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm". Eighty percent of achieving a goal is attitude and good attitude results in a happy worker.

Benefits of Better Self Control

31. Self-control improves life in three ways:

   (a) **Individual well-being**. Physically, self-controlled people sleep better, experience fewer physical sickness symptoms and live longer lives while enjoying better mental health. It lowers anxiety and depression.

   (b) **Relationships**. People want to spend lives with people we can be trusted, who follow through on their promises and are not impulsive. Self-controlled people are forgiving and react to conflict calmly resulting in better relationship.

   (c) **Societies** . Self-control helps societies flourish. They override their selfish impulses and go out of their way to help others. Societies that have clear-cut standards for appropriate behavior tend to function better than ones where people do as they please.

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