

HEE Enhancing Human Factors

Improve Patient Safety: Self-Awareness

Please read the information below to understand more about self-awareness and its relevance to human factors and patient care.

What is self-awareness?

- Good knowledge and **judgement** about yourself (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*) o Understanding your strengths and weaknesses, and when to ask for help
- The extent to which an individual **sees themselves as others see them** (*Fletcher & Baldry 2000*) o Do you understand others' perceptions about your behaviour? Do you agree with them?
- Degree to which we are **sensitive** to how we are **perceived by others** (*Caldwell, 2009*) o Do you understand the impact you have on others? Are you able to anticipate others' feelings or reactions to your behaviour? Does this influence how you behave?
- A dispositional tendency to **reflect on private and public** aspects of the self (*Fenigstein, 1975*)
- **Awareness and understanding** of psychological processes, such as **thoughts, feelings, and behaviors** (*Beitel, 2005*)

Why is self-awareness important?

- High self-awareness is associated with:
 - Higher performance ratings in various medical and other occupational settings (e.g. Fletcher, 1997; Atwater et al., 1998)
 - Better working relationships (Wexley et al., 1990)
 - More attentiveness to feedback (Wholers & London, 1989)
 - Higher levels of organisational commitment because of consistency between work attitudes & behaviours (Tsui & Ashford, 1994)
 - Reduced levels of conflict with co-workers (Atwater & Yammarino, 2001)
 - Increased trust between supervisors & employees (Dennis, 1991)
- If self-awareness is low, individuals are more likely to ignore or discount feedback, suffer career derailment & have negative attitudes towards work (Ashford, 1989)

What does the Healthcare Leadership Model say regarding self-awareness?

These frameworks identify self-awareness as a core personal quality to support effective leadership behaviours: <http://www.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/resources/healthcare-leadership-model/>

Nine leadership dimensions have been identified as important in developing leaders:

Leading with Care	Sharing the Vision	Engaging the Team
Influencing for Results	Evaluating Information	Inspiring shared purpose
Holding to account	Connecting our service	Developing capability

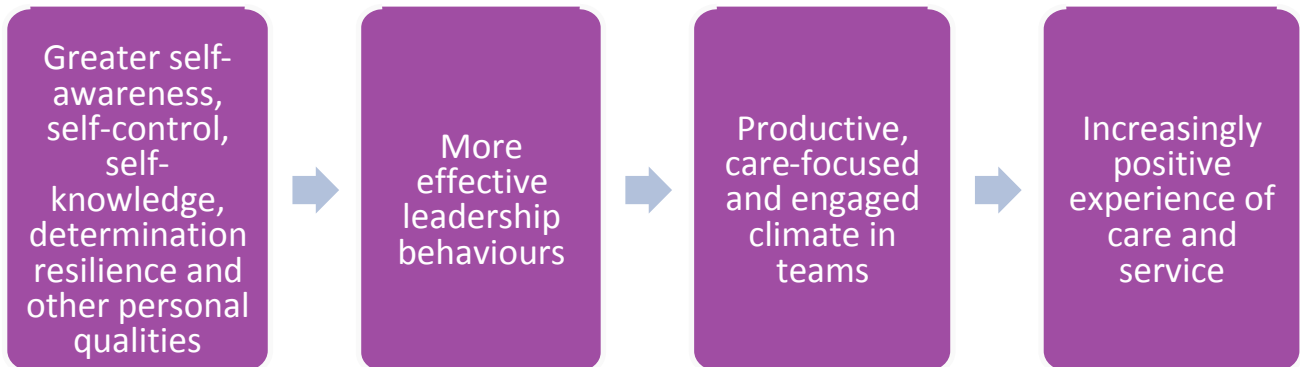
Improve Patient Safety: Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is viewed as a personal quality that is a critical enabler for these leadership behaviours: *“The way that we manage ourselves is a central part of being an effective leader. It is vital to recognise that personal qualities like **self-awareness**, self-confidence, self-control, **self-knowledge**, **personal reflection**, resilience and determination are the foundation of how we behave.”*

*“**Being aware of your strengths and limitations** in these areas will have a direct effect on how you behave and interact with others, and they with you. Without this **awareness**, it will be much more difficult to behave in the way research has shown that leaders should.”*

Self-awareness can not only help you develop within each of the nine dimensions, but can also help you consider how you manage your behaviour and relate to colleagues, patients and relatives.

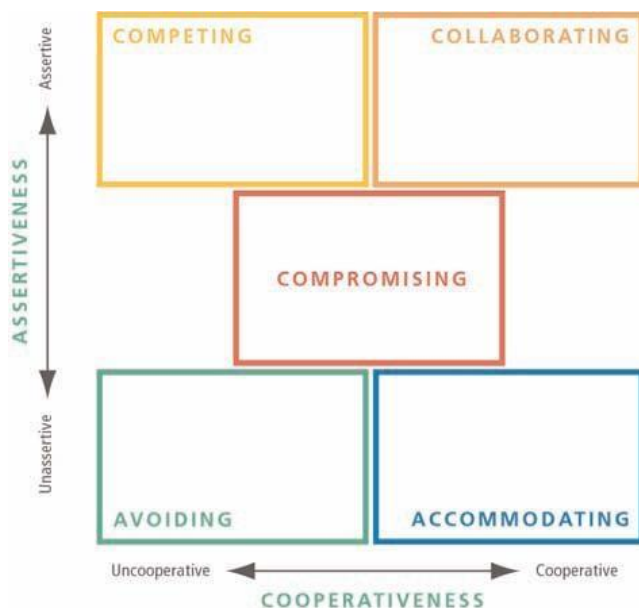
What is the impact of personal qualities, such as self-awareness, on experience of care?



In Focus: Self-awareness concerning your conflict management style

Conflict management is one specific example where understanding your own behavioural preferences may help you to adapt your behaviours as and when required.

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. Assertiveness and co-operativeness are two basic dimensions along which a person's behaviour can be described. They argued that people typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. However, they also noted that different styles were most useful in different situations and choice of strategy may depend on context, issue, goals trying to achieve, and the relationship between parties. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) helps you to identify which style you tend towards when conflict arises.



Ideally you can adopt an approach that meets the situation, resolves the problem, respects people's legitimate interests, and mends damaged working relationships.

All people have a preferred conflict style, however different styles are appropriate to use in different situations and choice of strategy may depend on the context, issue and people involved in the conflict for example, if this is someone that you have to work with every day and therefore need to maintain the relationship it may be unwise to be 'competing'.

Once you understand the different styles, you can use them to think about the most appropriate approach(es) for the situation you are in.

Improve Patient Safety: Self-Awareness

You can also think about your own preferred approach and learn how in certain situations you need to change this if necessary, as well as trying to understand the style that other people might work with and adapting accordingly.

Style	What Happens When Used:	Appropriate to Use When	Inappropriate to Use When:
Competitive	One's power, position or strength settles the conflict. I'm OK, you're not OK	When power comes with position of authority and this method has been agreed upon	Losers are powerless to express themselves and their concerns
Collaborative	Mutual respect and agreement to work together to resolve I'm OK, You're OK	Time is available; parties committed to working together as we versus the problem, not we- versus they	Time, commitment and ability are not present
Compromising	Each party gives up something to meet midway, often leaving both parties dissatisfied We're both sort of OK	Both parties are better off with a compromise than attempting a win-lose stance	Solution becomes so watered down that commitment by both parties is doubtful
Accommodating	Differences are played down and surface harmony is maintained. You're OK, I'm not OK	When preservation of the relationship is more important at the moment	If smoothing over leads to evading the issue when others are ready to deal with it
Avoiding	People just avoid a conflict by denying its existence I'm not OK; you're not OK	Conflict is relatively unimportant, timing is wrong, a cooling off period is needed	Conflict is important and will not disappear, but will continue to build

How can you develop your levels of self-awareness?

Identify your approach in typical situations where self-awareness skills are most important in your role (e.g. resolving conflict, working in teams or making tough decisions). How do you tend to **feel and behave** in these situations?

Review how you approached a challenging situation. How did you feel during this situation? How did this impact on your behaviour? Is there anything you could do differently?

Improve Patient Safety: Self-Awareness

Ask colleagues for feedback on your approach and compare this to your own evaluation of the situation.

Take time to **focus on your self-awareness** to understand your approach to situations and preferred ways of working.