



Self-Awareness Part 1

Tool: Conceptual Framework for Leadership Development

Self-Awareness (*n.*)

Conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives and desires. Alternatively, the capacity to recognize oneself as an individual and separate from the environment and other individuals.

Are you Self-Aware? If you are wondering if you are, take a quick look in the mirror. If you start hissing, barking, and/or feel frightened by what you see there, sorry, but you have failed the Self-Awareness test. However, if you look in the mirror and say "Wow, I look good today," congratulations, you have passed the Self-Awareness test. Although Self-Awareness is not unique to only humans, it is one of the main qualities that differentiates us from most of our animal friends.

As humans, we hold the highest level of Self-Awareness called **metacognition**. Metacognition, is our ability to recognize and interpret our own thoughts and feelings, sometimes referred to as "thinking about thinking." Metacognition dramatically improves our ability to learn and is as close to a superpower as it gets.

Now that you have started thinking about your thinking (imagine holding a mirror up to another mirror), let's explore how this relates to your time in the Actualize Development Program. At Actualize, we are here to help recognize how **your unique talents and abilities help solve a problem or meet a need in the world**. In other words, help you realize your full potential and find your purpose (so simple that all the best minds in the world have yet to figure out).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

As you can see to the right, Actualize found inspiration for its name from the highest level in Abraham Maslow's popular model for explaining the importance of various needs a human has over the course of their life. Maslow says that every human is capable of and has the desire to reach Self-Actualization, but can only do so once they have met the lower level needs. Self-Actualization is a person's achievement of their full potential.



At Actualize, our goal is to help you Self-Actualize, of course. However, what Self-Actualization looks like for you is likely different for your friends. Self-Actualization is a **unique process** based upon your personality, experiences, values, and vision for the world. But first, we have to help you know more about personality, experiences, values, and vision, through Self-Awareness.

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Developing Self-Awareness starts with understanding what makes you yourself, and that is your brain. Your brain is arguably the most important part of your body, but how much do you really know about your brain? The best place to start with questions about the brain is the field of **neuroscience**.

The Evolution-Designed Brain

Neuroscience tells us that we have three distinct parts of our brain:

1. **Brain Stem & Cerebellum (Reptilian Brain)** – Survival by reacting to threats, the fight or flight response, autopilot functions such as breathing.
2. **Limbic System (Mammalian Brain)** – Survival through Social bonds, creates emotions, memories, and habits.
3. **Neocortex (Human Brain)** – Survival by learning patterns & creating connections from experience, origin of language, imagination, and self-awareness.



Luckily for you, you don't have to consciously think about breathing every second of the day, your **brain stem** takes over and puts breathing on autopilot. Ever since you were born, you have been learning from other people around you, such as how to talk, act, and think, all as a result of your **limbic system** seeking survival by associating with other humans. Your ability to know that jumping off a building is bad idea without having to experience it yourself is thanks to your **neocortex** connecting the ideas of gravity + 100 feet of falling + your body = splat. In most situations, the right part of the brain takes control. But what happens when the reptilian brain takes over instead of the human brain?

In stressful, uncomfortable, and confusing environments your brain will often forgo any of the reasoning that happens in the neocortex and immediately use the fight or flight response instead. Have you ever given a presentation or speech in front of a large group of strangers and gotten so nervous that you forgot everything you were going to say? Public speaking is more feared than death, no wonder your fight or flight response kicks in!

At Actualize, it is our goal to help you use your neocortex as much as possible, maintaining self-awareness even in the most stressful of situations.

Remember, Self-Awareness is the ability to recognize yourself as an **individual** and **separate** from your environment and other individuals. Easier said than done. Like other animals, we as humans had to survive the harsh forces of nature, constantly looking for ways to increase our chances of survival. One of the best ways to increase our chances of survival came by working together, traveling in groups, and socializing. It was simple math: Lion vs. 1 person = Lion wins. Lion vs 10 people = Lion Losses. But there is a catch to living with a group of people: conforming to the rules of a group. In today's context, these 'rules' are anything from laws to **social expectations**. Although, these spoken and unspoken 'rules' are sometimes necessary to

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live with others, they can sometimes prevent you from pursuing your individual goals and reaching your full potential.

Recognizing where your unique values and beliefs differ from others is an integral part in your self-development process. As a child, you naturally adopt the beliefs and values of your parents. By the time you were a teenager you started to develop your own **internal voice** that allowed you to start disagreeing with your parents' ideas. Now, as a young adult, you may notice yourself questioning some of the ideas you had as a teenager as you continually gather more knowledge and experience.

Kegan's Stages of Social Maturity

Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan's theory on how we develop an adult mind

1. **Socialized Mind**— We are shaped by expectations from those around us, what we think and say is strongly influenced by what we think others want to hear.
2. **Self-Authoring Mind** — We develop our own ideology and moral compass. Our sense of self is aligned with our beliefs, values, and personal code. We take stands to defend our beliefs and set limits based on our own internal voice.
3. **Self-Transforming Mind** – Although we have our own ideology, we can see it from an objective third-person perspective, knowing that it is limited or partial. We can hold contradiction and oppositeness in our thinking and no longer need to gravitate towards polarized or extreme thinking.

Understanding the way your brain develops provides useful insights into which ideas and beliefs are truly your own or merely borrowed from your family, friends, community, society or culture. But what happens when you hold ideas or beliefs different from the groups you belong to? At times, you may repress some of our beliefs or desires due to **compliance** and social expectations. By using Self-Awareness, you can identify where your compliance to groups harms you, rather than helps you. You are the best expert on yourself.

So you're an expert now, feels pretty good eh? Experts above all share one thing in common: they understand the limits to their knowledge, in other words, they know what they don't know. Real Self-Awareness is inherently **revelatory**, revealing something about yourself previously unknown. As a self-expert, you must realize you only know yourself partially.

Starting with Self-Awareness, your time in the Actualize Development Program is less about changing yourself by learning new skills and more about discovering yourself by giving up what you previously thought you knew about yourself. The challenging corner-stone of self-development is **your ability to relinquish the notions of the person you think you are in exchange for the person you could become**. And that friends, is how you reach Self-Actualization (let us know when you start levitating).

Some final thoughts as you start your journey: Self-Development is a continuous process, there is no clear cut end goal, practice is your purpose for continuing the process, and your progress is measured by your sustained desire to learn about yourself.

Taking Action to Develop your Self-Awareness

Start Journaling

Journaling is an extremely effective way to see and process your emotions, providing you with the unique opportunity to “think about your thinking.” Journaling brings awareness to how your experiences, feelings, and emotions affect how you learn, perceive, and act. Because journaling is often difficult to start doing because you ask yourself “what do I even journal about?” we have provided an easy framework called the **ABCDE method**. Use each of the letters to frame your journal entry.

- A. Activating Event** – Give context to what the situation is, such as a meeting or conversation. Say you present an idea to your project team and they respond by questioning the ideas feasibility and generally show limited enthusiasm.
- B. Belief** – Record your in-the-moment thought, assumption, or impression you had based on the event. You interpret your project team’s behavior to mean they do not support you and think you’re stupid. What did you believe your teammate’s intentions at the time?
- C. Consequence** – Specify your emotional and physical response to your belief on the event. You respond to your team with anger and fear that you will fail the project. Your reptile brain takes over and you start raising your voice and calling people out. Did your heart rate jump, did you feel anxious, uncomfortable?
- D. Debate & Dispute** – Reflect on letters A, B, and C. Where is the proof of your initial belief? Was your emotional and physical reaction appropriate? Are there alternative, and more logical explanations as to why your project members doubted me? What would you have done if you were in the shoes of your project members? Where your project members doubting you or just your ideas?
- E. Emotional Effect** – Consider how debating and disputing your initial beliefs and responses change the way you think and feel about the situation and about yourself. What have you learned about yourself from this event? Have you noticed some of your emotional patterns that lead to anger or fear? Do you plan on changing how you handle similar situations in the future?

This model is a great way to break that “what do I even journal about?” barrier, but is merely a recommendation. Journaling is never a requirement, but is a surefire way to expedite your Self-Awareness development. Before you know it, you’ll be writing your personal biography.