Reference: Windows of Self-Concept

INTRODUCTION

The term *self-concept* is used to refer to an accumulation of thoughts and feelings. It is a general idea about oneself from specific events and situations; a thought or notion formed in the mind. One's self-concept is a collection of attitudes and beliefs about oneself and if the individual has low self-awareness skills, these mental impressions can become a distraction and hindrance to personal best.

The notion of self and human performance requires self-knowledge and a healthy balance of regulating oneself in private individual moments and regulating self in social interactions. For some individuals, the opinion of self is too high and reveals itself in one's attitudes, actions, and conversations. For others, the opinion of self can be too low or even toxic, self-critical, or self-condemning.

SELF-CONCEPT

Every individual has a self-concept; it plays a critical part in personal performance improvement. An individual with a poor self-concept creates destructive patterns of thought; the inner voice works against the individual. In addition, a person with poor self-concept becomes subject to the views and opinions of others and allows these views to override the individual's self-valuing process.

For example, an individual may fail after several attempts at a task and the failures become a dominant force in the mind. If these thoughts are left unregulated, they will work against the individual's abilities to overcome the failure or task and personal best is no longer the motive. Likewise, the negative remarks from others may become the dominant thought and ultimately lower an individual's self-concept.

Time and Perception

Self-concept can be understood using the measures of time: past, present, and future. The perception an individual has about their past and the perception an individual has about their future are both directly related to the individual's current perception of self. These ideas are constantly created in the mind and impact one's skills and ability to perform consistently over time. The idea of getting better or improving at a task begins with developing one's own self-concept or perception of self from each measure of time.

Personal perception is also known as a mental impression, which is automatically created from the process of becoming aware, potentially as early as birth. Using the five senses, people learn to develop skills and abilities to become aware; in this case, the brain function becomes aware of self and its surroundings.

Today, as we learn more about the many brain functions, we better understand how an individual is constantly creating these mental impressions throughout life experiences. If an individual has a past event with poor performance, the individual's perception or mental impressions may create feelings that can be a distraction to the individual in the moment. These past mental impressions can impact the individual's current perception of oneself and directly impact technical competencies and critical decision making.

SELF-CONCEPT WINDOWS

Self-concept can be learned by associating the measures of time with windows. To better understand self-concept, we can use the three viewpoints of the past window, future window, and present window.

These three different viewpoints each create their own pattern of thought. For example, an individual may have a dominant pattern of thought from the past window that frequently comes to mind. In the same way, an individual may be called a day-dreamer for referencing a dominant pattern of thought from the future window. At the most critical point of human decision making, an individual's pattern of thought from the past window and future window directly influence attention span, learning, and creativity in the present window. In other words, thoughts from the past and future can distract performance in the present, leading to errors and poor decision making, regardless of technical skills.

The Windows of Self-Concept is another critical decision-making model to help better understand how thoughts from the past, present, and future can become a distraction.

© *electrical training ALLIANCE* 2019

Optimal performance is learning to keep the mindset or focused on the current task or in the present window. As random thoughts appear throughout the task, mental and emotional skills enable the individual to prioritize or discriminate thoughts by filtering each window or viewpoint. It is important to recognize that prioritizing or discriminating thought patterns first requires self-awareness and self-regulation skill sets.

The goal in achieving optimal performance or optimal states is for an individual to regulate thought-patterns to stay on task in the present-window. As often as the mind drifts to the past window or future window, self-awareness and self-regulation skills improve the individual's ability to stay focused in the moment.

Past Window: Self-Image

Self-image is the first viewpoint or window and references past mental impressions—anything from past experiences create an individual's self-image. Recent brain research documents a 42-year-old woman who, while having brain surgery, describes in detail her fifth birthday party and how good the cake tasted on that day 37 years ago. This research further validates the notion the brain stores mental impressions that internally stimulate thoughts, feelings, and sensory perception.

Self-image is generally resistant to change and views an individual's physical details like height, weight, and hair color, but also attitudes and beliefs that have been learned by the individual. From early stages of childhood personal experiences are internalized. Internalizing involves a natural process the brain goes through to integrate the individual's attitudes, values, standards, and the opinions of others into one's own identity or sense of self.

The development goal in human performance is first to become aware of one's own self-image and how past experiences can distract from future and current tasks or abilities. As self-awareness and self-regulation skills improve, an individual learns to engage in healthy reflection exercises. By intentionally reviewing past events an individual can improve their self-image and even change their own perception of past events. Over time this creates a new perception of self.

Future Window: Self-Ideal

Self-ideal is the second window concerning future events and the ideal version of one's self. *Ideal* is defined as most suitable and is regarded as perfect. Self-ideal is based on the individual's perception of what is most suitable and what is the perfect-self. Top performers often internalize a vision for self and coming events.

In contrast, there is a natural gap between an individual's self-image (past) and their self-ideal (future). These mental impressions, thoughts, and feelings about the future are shaped by the individual's past impressions. Internal opinions about self and external messages received from other people all impact an individual's self-ideal and future performance. Cultural values in the workplace and social values from family and friendships all help or hinder one's own self-ideal. Role models also play a big influence in defining an individual's self-ideal based on actions and behaviors to be imitated.

Reaching the self-ideal requires the mental skill of innovation: the ability to create new words and mental pictures of self. People by nature have a destructive mindset and a negative bias, so in order to personally develop one's self-concept, the individual must practice courage and imagination.

The Gap

When an individual's self-image and self-ideal are consistent or very similar, a state of congruence exists. Congruence refers to a sense of internal harmony and directly impacts a person's value of self and increases self-esteem. High performing individuals develop self-awareness and self-regulation skills to consistently bridge the gap between past performance and future performance.

If there is a mismatch between an individual's self-image and self-ideal, this is likely to affect how much the individual values oneself and potentially lowers self-esteem. An individual's self-image may not be consistent with their actual experience, or what they think and feel is possible. This is called *incongruence* and directly impacts personal performance. Incongruence suggests that unpleasant thoughts and mixed feelings result from a gap or discrepancy between an individual's self-image (past) and self-ideal (future). These unpleasant thoughts and feelings can create a variety of mental impressions that can become a distraction.

Top performing individuals recognize this unique relationship between the past, future, and present. A simple and yet effective thought-process to bring all three viewpoints into congruence is a chatter-check. Frequently throughout the day, a top performing individual will first isolate a distracting thought using one of the three viewpoints by asking, "which window is this dominant thought coming from" and engage positive self-talk strategies to promote a process of internal harmony.

The individual simply engages in positive self-talk by asking and answering the following question, "knowing the person that I want to be, how do I see myself handling this future task?" The answer, when sought-out, is based on the individual looking at one's self as an object in the future-window. Visualizing and defining specific thoughts, feelings and the actions or specific behaviors the individual desires for the upcoming task. This thought-process of visualizing future events re-enforces the individual's self-ideal.

© *electrical training ALLIANCE* 2019

By intentionally visualizing specific thoughts, feelings and actions or behaviors in advance the individual improves clarity of thought and decision making in the actual moment of executing the task in the future.

Present Window: Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the third viewpoint or window of self-concept and refers to feelings and emotions in the moment. Self-esteem is a complex study of how an individual feels or values oneself in the present window. Also known as self-worth, self-esteem refers to the extent to which an individual likes, accepts, or approves of oneself. It always involves a degree of positive or negative evaluation.

Self-esteem is different than self-concept, which is a natural occurrence with human beings that develops in the background most every day of the individual's life. Self-esteem is a part of learning to understand self-concept. While self-concept is a descriptive thought of one's self for a role or task, for example, "I am a worker," self-esteem is an emotional opinion of one's self, "I feel good about being a worker." As it pertains to human beings, thinking and feeling are two uniquely separate capabilities best learned by isolating and separating the two.

Self-esteem reflects an individual's overall emotional evaluation of their own worth. Self-esteem shows up in every task a human performs, in all roles both personal and professional. An individual with high self-awareness and self-regulation skills learns to develop a healthy attitude or pattern of thought towards self. A process of reflective exercises from past events combined with new mental impression of future events and opportunities.

Self-esteem is considered to be an influential predictor of certain outcomes, such as achievement of a task, personal happiness, and social relationships. If an individual does not feel good about oneself, personal performance and social interactions are hindered. Positive self-esteem is critical to an individual's mental health and ability to relate well to others. By strengthening one's self-esteem, one will increase contentment in relationships.

Self-esteem can apply to a task, or general attitude or pattern, or habit of thought. Specifically, to a particular task for example, "I believe I am a good technician, and I feel happy about that." Or, self-esteem can be applied to a general attitude; for example, "I believe I am a bad person, and I feel bad about myself in general."

High self-esteem is when an individual has a positive, healthy view of self. This tends to lead to an increase in confidence in the individual's own abilities, more self-acceptance, and ability to find peace and avoid worrying about what others think and even develops the emotional intelligence skill of optimism. High self-esteem helps personal performance.

Low self-esteem is when an individual has a negative view of self. This tends to lead to lack of confidence, a desire or need to be like or look like someone else and can lead to worrying what others might think and pessimism. Low self-esteem hinders personal performance.

Self-Confidence

Self-esteem refers to how an individual feels about oneself overall; how much esteem, positive regard, or self-love an individual has. Self-confidence is how an individual feels about their own abilities and can vary from situation to situation. Self-confidence is a feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities, and judgment.

Self-confidence is an emotional intelligence skill and can be developed with self-awareness and self-regulation exercises. An individual may have healthy self-esteem, but low self-confidence about certain tasks. For example, an individual may feel good about oneself and have high self-esteem and at the same time low self-confidence if tasked with flying an airplane.

Self-confidence is considered one of the most influential motivators and regulators of behavior in people's everyday lives. A growing body of evidence suggests that one's self-perception of ability or self-confidence is the foundational building block for achievements and striving to improve performance. One must have confidence things can change for the better.

Self: The Object

When applying self-concept to the process of improving personal best, healthy high-performing individuals learn to look at oneself as an object with a past, a future, and an object in the moment or present. All independent. All critical. All working together in a healthy manner to build one's self-concept.

Self-knowledge is one Emotional Intelligence skill. The study of self, people, and industry is the key to personal performance.

© *electrical training ALLIANCE* 2019

Every past event the individual has experienced has created these mental impressions that can result in positive or negative thoughts and feelings that can become distractions. As independent thoughts and feelings begin to drift from the present to the past or future, high performing individuals engage in specific thought-processes for corrective actions and recovery techniques to stay focused, keeping the mind in the present event or on the current task.

CONCLUSION

Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to "Who am I?" As it pertains to reducing errors and improving human performance, top performers develop healthy responses to this question. It includes the past, present, and future selves, where future selves (or possible selves) represent the individual's ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, or what they are afraid of becoming.

The windows of self-concept model support a healthy self-assessment process. The process is broken down into three specific viewpoints, the past-self, the future-self, and the present-self. The past perceptions represent, "who I used to be." The future perceptions and mental impressions represent, "who I desire to be." A combination of past and future perceptions and mental impressions indefinitely define the answer to "who I am today, right here, right now?"

© *electrical training ALLIANCE* 2019