

Module-14

Recognizing Self and Others

Understanding and defining the ‘self’ is central to many adjustment issues. For any given individual self has several representations— self as son or daughter, self as father or mother, self as brother or sister, self as a spouse, self as a colleague, and so forth. More importantly, the past self and the self of the future are vital.

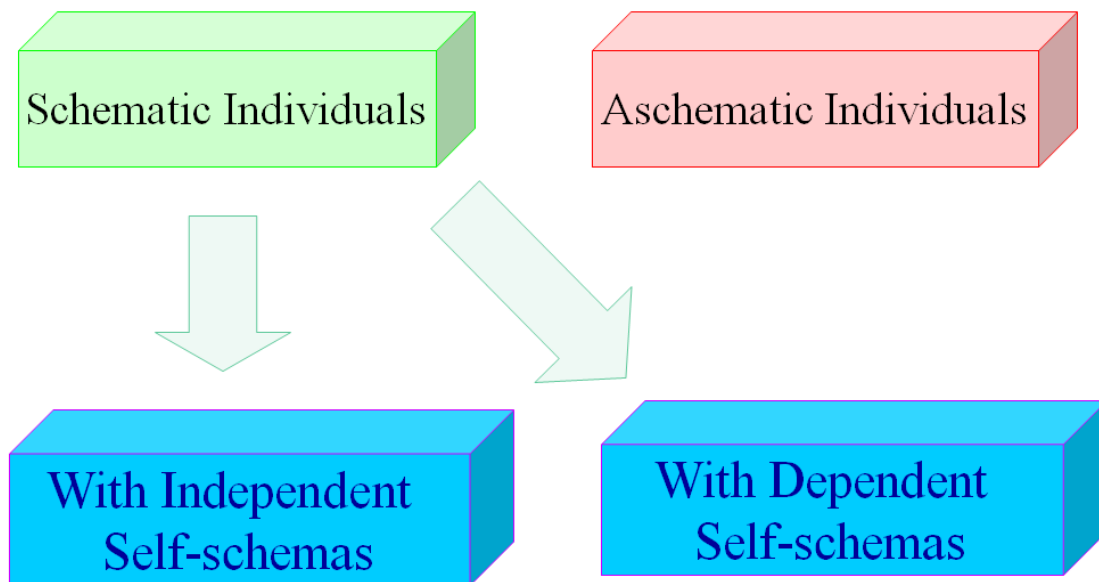
Self-schema

Self-schema embodies qualities that an individual consider central to himself or herself and self-defining. According to Kunda (1999), “A self-schema is an integrated set of memories, beliefs, and generalizations about one’s behavior in a given domain.” Hence, it entails a stable self. This comprehension about the self is carried even if the situation changes and that is the reason why one can predict the behaviour of schematic people. For instance, the collegial self-schema may comprise of specific events of friendliness and mutual respect. This facilitates the general conviction about one’s typical behaviour in different situations, thus helping self-categorization of who is collegial and who is hostile.

Self-schema and information processing about self and others

Self-schema plays an important role in information processing. Those who rate themselves exceptionally independent or very dependent and also deem this central for their self-description are classified as schematic individuals. On the other hand, those rating themselves low on being independent and also not considering it central to self-

description are considered aschematic individuals. Individuals with independent self-schema who can articulate well are likely to process self-independence related information differently than those who do consider themselves the same way but lack comparable detailed self-knowledge. Thus, self-schema is instrumental in processing information about the self. The illustration given below shows the Markus (1977) classification of self-schema.



The self-schema in a given aspect implies that the individual concerned would have detailed information about the aspect. Such details are important for processing information about others. As discussed above with respect to the self-schema of 'collegial', other significant components are also processed the same way. The self-schema of polite, humble, honest, etc. would not only ensure sound acquaintance about one's own politeness, humbleness and honesty but also about the very nature of these

characteristics. This knowledge, in turn, provides yard stick for assessing these characteristics in others.

Self-concept

Certain circumstances in life influence the aschematic aspects of the self. However, the self might comprise of conflicting beliefs and characteristics. Self-concept is influenced by the current environment and the people around us. All of you who have traveled and stayed abroad would agree that you realized yourself of being an Indian more when you were surrounded only by foreigners. Similar defining moments might come in one's life making them dominantly realize their gender, religion, caste, ethnicity, and so forth.

We do have a working self-concept. It represents a subset of dissimilar self-concepts reflecting self at a specific moment. We all show varied behaviour depending on the occasion. The same person might be very social at one occasion and very unfriendly at some other occasion. The stable characteristics of the self are reflection of one's enduring self-knowledge. This lasting self-knowledge gives birth to the working self-concepts. We do see inconsistency in the behaviour of people. Our self-concept, beliefs, and emotional appraisal are differently activated in different situations and this could lead to inconsistency in the behaviour.

Our self-esteem gets influenced by the reactions of our surroundings. Referring to self-esteem Kunda (1999) explains it as, "a stable construct that has broad implications for the representation of self-knowledge for the cognitive strategies that people engage in when processing self-relevant information, and for their reactions to such information."

Self-schema, self-concept and self-esteem, all the three play significant role in organizing self-knowledge. Self-schema provides defining characteristics to the individuals whereas high self-esteem provides clarity to the sense of being what one is. We all vary in terms of self-complexity. It decides whether a negative incidence that challenged one characteristic of the self would spread out to other characteristics or not. Self-complexity acts as a buffer, thus safeguarding people from the negativities of stressful life events. Someone with high self-complexity and discrete self-characteristic is likely not to allow the failure and disappointment in one area to spill over to other areas. The reverse is true for those with low self-complexity and highly interrelated self-characteristic.

Hence, we organize self in three realms— the actual self, the ideal self and the ought self. The actions and accomplishments as well as the self attributes comprise the actual self. The ideal self represents the type of person one aspires to be whereas the ought self represents what one definitely feels that he/ she should be. The actual self always fall short of the ideal and ought selves. This difference motivates us to polish our skills and competencies. One might cherish promotional goals, thus encouraging well-being and achieving desired rewards or craft preventive goals, thus avoiding feared outcomes. However, it might be a concern if one realizes that the difference cannot be filled. Realizations of these self-discrepancies are crucial for one's adjustment.

Evaluating one's self-discrepancies, when one focuses on the ideal self he/ she looks at his/ her achievements. Hence, the focus is on the positive outcomes. However, knowledge about how much one falls short of the ideal self is likely to induce negative outcomes. In order to plan better strategies, we tend to evaluate the presence and absence

of positive outcomes while evaluating life of others. By evaluating the achievement and failure of others one chooses strategies that are likely to yield maximum positive outcomes. On the other hand, focus on the ought self helps one identify guilt he/ she would like to avoid. When one falls short of the ought self negative outcomes, such as anxiety and agitation, are generated. The presence and absence of negative outcomes might be evaluated while assessing others. Whether others also experienced misfortunes or they were successful avoiding it helps the individual choose strategies that might balance negative and positive outcomes.

Self as a guide

While evaluating the deeds of others one may use the yardstick of own performance. The superior is the performance of an individual the poorer is the assessment of the other person. After experiencing failure this tendency to assess others based on own performance increases. This tendency serves another secondary purpose. It bolsters the self. From the adjustment point of view it is important to understand the self in relation to others. While one uses self to judge others, other's can be reciprocally used to judge the self. At times an exceptional performance by someone closer can boost one's ego. At some other occasion it can make one question his/ her ability and worthiness. Such feelings are likely to make the individual feel disheartened. How close one feels to the other person is important in such comparative self-evaluation. Closeness is a function of shared psychological unit inasmuch as sharing family ties, village/ town, shared life experiences increases the feeling of closeness. If one considers the domain of performance of the other person irrelevant to defining himself/ herself, he/ she feels

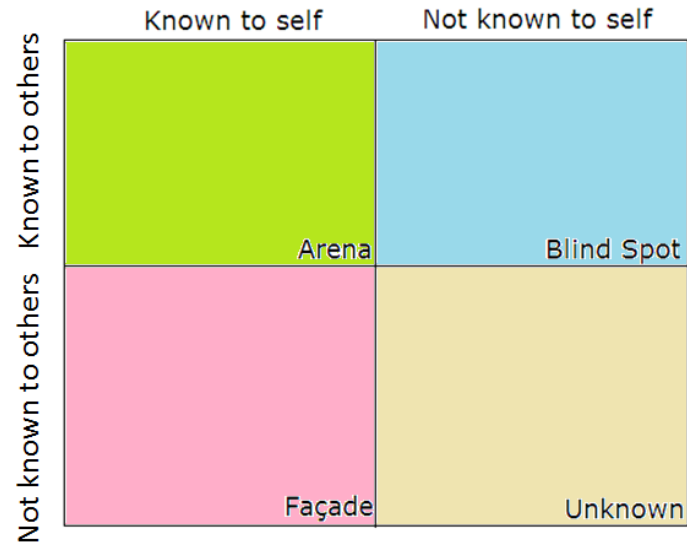
positive about the superior the other person's performance. For instance, the excellence of someone close to you in the area of theatre does not make you feel personally threatened because your achievements in the domain of academics seem incomparable. But if the other person is also in the same domain then his/ her outstanding performances might make you question your worth. This reflects a natural tendency to dismiss threat and maintain a positive self-image.

Some techniques for understanding relationships

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Johari Window are some of the popular techniques used to understand the relationship with oneself and others. A succinct description of the two is provided here. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) identifies 16 personality types that indicate the preferred thinking and acting styles of the person concerned. They are plotted on the basis of type preferences, temperament and interaction styles. The figure below shows this classificatory scheme for type preferences.

Type Preferences and the 16 Personality Types		SENSING (S)		INTUITING (N)	
		THINKING (T)	FEELING (F)	FEELING (F)	THINKING (T)
INTROVERSION (I)	JUDGING (J)	ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
	PERCEIVING (P)	ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
EXTRAVERSION (E)	PERCEIVING (P)	ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
	JUDGING (J)	ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ

Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) requires the participants to choose 5-6 adjectives from a given set of 56 adjectives that describes him/ her. The same exercise is repeated by the participant's peers. The selected adjectives are mapped onto a grid as shown below.



The first room of the grid reflects what the person knows of him/herself and that is known to others also. This is an open arena. The second room has traits that others see but the person concerned is not aware of. This is defined as blind spot. The third room has traits that neither the individual nor the peers are able to see. The fourth room carries traits that is known to the self but is not known to others. Hence, this is the private space of the individual.