

Identifying the Dimensions of the Self-Awareness Model for Managers in Iranian Public Organizations

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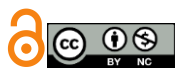
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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study was to explore and identify the variables and dimensions of the self-awareness model for managers in Iranian public organizations.

Methodology: This qualitative research utilized a content analysis approach, drawing upon interviews with experts in the field of public management. A total of 10 managers and specialists in Iranian public organizations participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were coded using open, axial, and selective coding methods. The analysis focused on identifying primary themes and categories related to the self-awareness model.

Findings: The content analysis revealed 43 initial codes from 151 interview excerpts, which were categorized into five key themes: (1) Consequences of Self-Awareness, (2) Functional Factors of Self-Awareness, (3) Individual Factors of Self-Awareness, (4) Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness, and (5) Self-Awareness Skills. Among these, Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness was the most frequently cited theme, followed by Functional Factors of Self-Awareness and Consequences of Self-Awareness. Additionally, 90% of the respondents mentioned the importance of Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness, highlighting its significance in the self-awareness model.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that self-awareness plays a critical role in enhancing managerial effectiveness and improving performance in public organizations. The study contributes to the development of a comprehensive model of self-awareness for managers, emphasizing both emotional and behavioral aspects. The results underscore the need for managers in Iranian public organizations to focus on self-awareness skills and behavioral criteria to achieve better decision-making, performance, and personal growth. Future research should explore the application of these findings in broader organizational contexts and examine the impact of self-awareness on organizational outcomes.

Keywords: self-awareness, self-awareness of managers, managerial behavior.

1 Introduction

For a long time, prominent political scientists and scholars of public administration have pointed to the importance of self-awareness for the performance of public organizations. Laswell describes self-awareness as "a process through which emotions are guided by perceptions of similarity" and noted that it may influence individuals to deeply dedicate themselves to a collective task. Simon (1947) considered organizational identification a major motivator that drives employees to exert effort on behalf of the organization. Kaufman (1960) stated that organizational identification "injects decision-making criteria that the organization wants to apply" into the organizational members' nervous system. Despite these classical contributions, recent literature on public management has rediscovered that organizational identification is crucial for understanding the motivational foundations of public employees. Improving the performance of public sector employees is extremely important (bidmeshk et al., 2022; Keshavarz Afshar et al., 2022), where civil service reforms attempt to create a merit-based system with a "performance culture" that departs from traditional practices and imposes increasing demands on public employees (Mubarakh et al., 2025; Odai, 2025). Current leaders are expected to have a better understanding of the practices and behaviors that can lead to greater efficiency in their operational environments. Supporting employees in organizations requires identifying and implementing leadership styles that include leadership traits and behaviors appropriate for the specific environments (Shekh-Abed, 2024; Weed-Schertzer, 2023).

In the present age, the role of management has become much more difficult due to the expansion of societal needs, the extent of communication, the scope and complexity of organizational goals and tasks, the growing complexity of employees' thoughts and expectations, and the skills required to use new technologies. Therefore, selecting managers, training, and preparing them for such important roles has become essential. Today, managers need a variety of skills, each of which can impact their lives and work in various ways. Among these, self-awareness is considered one of the most important skills for establishing communication and creating social relations (Weed-Schertzer, 2023). "Communication" is a very important managerial skill and a necessary foundation for effective management. Managers can establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, which are crucial for performing daily tasks, through communication. In fact, no manager can

perform their job effectively without good communication and communication skills. In this regard, managers must analyze the effects of their biases and habits on others. They should also be able to remove those who provoke negative reactions. Therefore, they must learn self-awareness and master themselves (Mirvis, 2008; Morin, 2011). In management literature, self-awareness is referred to as a prerequisite for mental health and the ability to understand others, meaning the understanding, insight, and awareness of a manager that leads to improved expertise and better human relations. Considering these points, managers should be helped to recognize their main personality traits, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. The key to managerial success lies in understanding the desires, expectations, and needs of an organization's human capital, and this will not be achievable unless managers are able to recognize themselves, control their actions and thoughts, and enhance collaboration within organizations. Given that the fundamental task of managers at all levels is to maintain an environment where individuals can work together and achieve predetermined goals, the continuous and ongoing effort to understand oneself becomes an essential need, where the identification of needs, values, goals, and most importantly self-esteem, holds particular significance. Furthermore, to reach self-actualization, which is the highest human motivation, fulfilling lower-level needs, such as self-esteem (a key component of self-awareness), is necessary (Sutton, 2016; Sutton et al., 2015).

Self-awareness is considered a "buzzword" in management (Eurich, 2018) and is often one of the features of MBA programs and leadership development (Lawrence et al., 2018b; Mirvis, 2008). It is claimed that higher levels of self-awareness lead to better decision-making, are associated with team performance, and correlate with authentic leadership. Furthermore, it is suggested that individuals with higher self-awareness are more likely to be promoted and become more effective leaders. Many researchers have argued that leaders' weaknesses in their capacity and character, along with poor and risky decision-making, contributed significantly to the recent global financial crisis (Lawrence et al., 2018b; Nasirpour & Sadeghikia, 2022; Rubens et al., 2018). This has led to attention to leadership development practices and, specifically, to the virtues of leadership (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016; Eriksen, 2009; Lawrence et al., 2018a, 2018b; Nasirpour & Sadeghikia, 2022; Rubens et al., 2018). Several researchers recognize patience as an important leader virtue, particularly in decision-making contexts (Manda et al., 2024; Masoumi et

al., 2024). Leaders who exhibit patience and perseverance in their followers are part of transformational leadership, leader-member exchange theory, servant leadership, and spiritual leadership (Alotaibi, 2025; Alshammari, 2025; Asbeetah et al., 2025; Haris & Nuraeni, 2025; Henderikx & Stoffers, 2025; Nasrun, 2025; Odai, 2025; Sacavém et al., 2025). Despite growing recognition of virtues in leadership, the virtue of patience in leadership decision-making remains in its early stages.

Despite considerable interest in public administration, there is no convincing consensus. Legal efforts (autonomy) to encourage businesses to act responsibly in their dealings with stakeholders have led to marginal successes, likely due to the challenges of a top-down approach. Therefore, existing knowledge about how to foster a lasting sense of ethical responsibility in the front-line sector of organizations should be expanded, as this often represents the first point of contact with stakeholders and also plays a critical role in maintaining relations with them (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2025; Nasrun, 2025). In this context, governments need effective measures to monitor organizations and balance control with trust. In literature, agency theory and servant leadership theory are often proposed as alternative and competing approaches to organizational control. However, in empirical studies of public administration, these approaches often produce contradictory and conflicting results (Haris & Nuraeni, 2025; Henderikx & Stoffers, 2025; Nasrun, 2025; Odai, 2025; Sacavém et al., 2025). Organizations form the foundation of society, and what will determine their growth, prosperity, or demise is management. A manager's task is to guide the organization from its current state to its desired state. One of the managerial capabilities that has gained increasing importance today is leadership skills, through which managers can tap into the latent capacities of their employees. This is only possible by understanding the complexities of human behavior and reactions, especially considering that self-awareness is a valuable asset for understanding others and enhancing managers' leadership skills. The necessity of focusing on public interests in public administration requires that public managers exhibit a public orientation in their daily processes and behaviors. The need to emphasize public trust and internal organizational trust, which are decreasing day by day, as well as the necessity for power distribution and empowerment in countries undergoing democratization, makes managers' self-awareness essential. The concept of new public services, as proposed by Denhart, has gained attention in recent years. In

light of the aforementioned literature, this study seeks to answer the question: What are the dimensions of the self-awareness model for managers in Iranian public organizations?

2 Methods and Materials

Given that the focus of this research is to identify the dimensions of the self-awareness model for managers in Iranian public organizations, and based on the advice of the thesis advisors and consultants, experts, managers, and specialists from Iranian public organizations were selected as the research committee members. From an objective perspective, this research is exploratory due to the reasons mentioned below. The results of this research contribute to presenting a model; moreover, the findings expand existing knowledge on self-awareness. This research is qualitative in terms of data collection process because the first part of the data is gathered from multiple sources, including interviews, library studies, and participation. In this research, data was collected through interviews. Additionally, in qualitative research, the second part involves analytical and interpretive methods used to reach findings or theories. These methods include conceptualizing data, known as "coding." In this study, open, axial, and selective coding methods were used. The third part of the qualitative research method involves written reports, charts, or oral presentations. In this research, charting methods were employed. Furthermore, from the perspective of execution logic (or type of reasoning), this research is inductive because, in this study, interviewees provide explanations based on their experiences regarding the outcomes of phenomena. The inductive nature of content analysis means that hypotheses are not tested; rather, the theory that is formulated emerges and grows from the simultaneous collection and analysis of data.

As mentioned, this is a qualitative research study. Therefore, given the importance of the topic, it was necessary to interview experts who, in addition to their multiple areas of expertise, have a thorough understanding of the theoretical foundations. Hence, in this research, individuals who have had or currently hold positions where they have practical experience and expertise across various fields were selected as part of the study population. This included experts from Iranian public organizations and university members. Some sample participants were key decision-makers in their respective fields, and interviews with them started first. Subsequently, as the research progressed and data were collected and analyzed, additional

interviews with other experts were conducted to better understand the concepts and categories. Thus, in 2023, interviews were conducted with 10 specialists.

In practice, after each interview, the transcript was carefully analyzed to infer and extract the concepts from each sentence expressed. Following this, the next interview was conducted. This process continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation means that the most recent interviews provided no new data and were entirely repetitive of earlier data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, after the sixth interview, no new data appeared, and the theoretical saturation was reasonably confirmed after the tenth interview. It is worth noting that most interviewees had more than ten years of professional experience in their respective fields and held doctoral degrees or were pursuing doctoral studies. The average duration of each interview with the specialists was approximately 70 minutes.

A qualitative research method is used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns in the meaningful data of qualitative research. Content analysis, along with thematic analysis, is widely applied in management and social science studies. This method is one of the simplest and earliest qualitative research methods and can be used with either a deductive or inductive approach. Content analysis is typically used to identify underlying categories from specialized interviews in qualitative research. It is also employed, particularly to extract categories from various interviews in qualitative research. Coding in content analysis is crucial. The main and subcategories resulting from content analysis are performed through coding. Content analysis is a method that can be applied to various types of messages found in literary works, articles, official documents, speeches, political statements, meeting reports, audiovisual programs, and reports of semi-structured interviews. The words used by the author, speaker, or respondent, their frequency, the arrangement of

those words in sentences, the structure of the speech, and how it unfolds are sources of information that the researcher uses to achieve understanding. In this study, the software Maxqda was used for qualitative data analysis and theory development.

3 Findings and Results

In open coding, the meaningful units of data are first labeled with a conceptual name, and then the concepts obtained are categorized using more abstract names. These categories are referred to as "themes." In the next step, through the analysis of the data, the characteristics and dimensions of the resulting themes are further developed. These stages are not linear and typically occur simultaneously with considerable overlap. In this phase, the researcher reviews the collected data and attempts to identify the underlying concepts within the interviews. This phase of coding is called open coding because the researcher assigns conceptual names to the data with an open mind, without imposing restrictions on the coding process. The purpose of open coding is to break down the collected qualitative data into the smallest possible conceptual units. The result of open coding is a set of conceptual themes generated from the data. It was observed that open coding identified 43 initial codes from 151 sections of the interviews.

The purpose of axial coding is to establish relationships between the categories produced in the open coding phase. Axial coding leads to the creation of groups and themes. All similar codes are grouped together in a specific category. In this process, all generated codes are reviewed again and compared with the texts to ensure no important information is missed. [Table 1](#) below shows the open, axial, selective coding, and the dimensions of security in the categories.

Table 1

Axial Coding

Theme	Initial Code	Frequency
Consequences of Self-Awareness	Creation of commitment	1
	Creativity and innovation	1
	Improvement of individual performance	1
	Creation of logical thinking	2
	Creation of desirable behavior	3
	Increased performance and productivity	4
	Achieving goals	4
	Creation of proper relationships	9
	Recording events	1
Functional Factors of Self-Awareness	Satisfaction with matters	1
	Recording events	1

	Valuing time	1
	Participatory management	3
	Valuing oneself	3
	Mastery of affairs	4
	Environmental awareness	5
	Improved decision-making	6
	Organizing affairs	10
Individual Factors of Self-Awareness	Spending time on self-awareness	1
	Personal discipline	2
	Recognition of strengths and weaknesses	3
	Identifying priorities	3
	Individual goal setting	4
	Personal characteristics	5
	Achieving personal success	6
Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness	Consultation	1
	Assertiveness	2
	Identifying talents	2
	Mental health	2
	Attitudinal impacts	2
	Creating awareness	3
	Emotional control	4
	Responsibility	4
	Ability to concentrate	4
	Self-confidence	4
	Recognizing personal values	4
	Risk-taking	4
	Having a defined behavioral pattern and attitude	5
	Mastery over own behavior	7
	Self-management	9
Self-Awareness Skills	Personal growth and development	1
	Showing respect	2
	Self-perception	3
	Self-awareness	5

The results of axial coding are shown in the table above. It can be observed that 43 initial codes have been categorized into 5 themes.

To measure reliability, Cohen's Kappa index was used. In this method, another individual (an expert in the field) categorized the data without knowledge of how the researcher had integrated the codes and themes. Then, the themes presented by the researcher were compared with those presented by this individual. Finally, the Kappa index was calculated based on the number of similar and different themes generated. For this purpose, the researcher created five themes, and the other individual created five themes. Out of these, four themes were common, resulting in a Kappa index of 0.660, which indicates a valid level of agreement.

Each of the themes is composed of one or more concepts, which in turn represent the "characteristics," "conditions," or "status" of the theme in the country, whether existing or desired. Another noteworthy point is the simultaneous occurrence of "description" and "prescription" in the sub-themes and main themes of the research. This means that the developed themes not only have a descriptive dimension, referring to the description of the current or expected future status, but they also carry a prescriptive aspect. In other words, each of these themes includes "dos and don'ts" in the pursuit of the desired state. The importance of these themes can be determined by examining the frequency of the codes assigned to them. The output from the software regarding the frequency of the codes assigned to the themes, broken down by each interviewee, is presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2*Frequency of Coding of Themes by Interview*

Themes	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Interview 5	Interview 6	Interview 7	Interview 8	Interview 9	Interview 10	Total
Consequences of Self-Awareness	0	5	7	1	0	3	1	2	5	1	25
Functional Factors of Self-Awareness	1	6	3	0	1	1	6	3	5	8	34
Individual Factors of Self-Awareness	2	5	2	7	2	1	2	0	0	3	24
Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness	3	0	9	4	6	8	9	5	3	10	57
Self-Awareness Skills	7	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Total	13	16	23	14	9	13	18	10	13	22	151

As shown in the chart and [Table 2](#), the theme Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness has the highest number of assigned codes (57), ranking first. The theme Functional Factors of Self-Awareness is ranked second with 34 codes, and the theme Consequences of Self-Awareness ranks third with 25 codes.

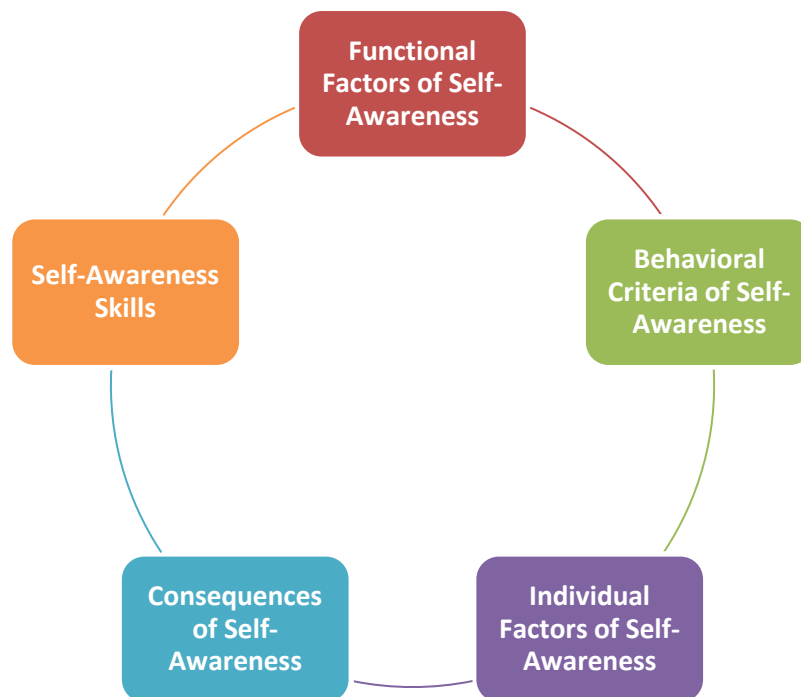
In addition to examining the number of codes assigned to the themes, the frequency percentage of interviewees who mentioned each theme can also be analyzed to understand the generality and scope of the mentioned theme among all participants. The results derived from the software output are provided in [Table 3](#).

Table 3*Distribution of Frequency of Interviewees by Identification of Themes*

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Functional Factors of Self-Awareness	9	90.00
Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness	9	90.00
Individual Factors of Self-Awareness	8	80.00
Consequences of Self-Awareness	8	80.00
Self-Awareness Skills	3	30.00
Total	10	100.00

It can be observed that out of the total 10 interviewees, 9 individuals (90%) mentioned the theme Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness. Therefore, in addition to the number of code repetitions, the Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness

theme holds a priority in terms of its generality and prevalence among the respondents, indicating its importance.

Figure 1*Model of Self-Awareness Themes for Managers*

4 Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, to examine the variables of the self-awareness model for managers in Iranian public organizations, a comprehensive analysis was conducted based on interviews with experts in the field. The related models and variables were identified. Ultimately, based on the final identified criteria, a model was proposed using the content analysis method. The results from the open coding of qualitative data collected through interviews revealed that 43 initial codes were identified from 151 sections of the interviews. These 43 initial codes were categorized into five themes: Consequences of Self-Awareness, Functional Factors of Self-Awareness, Individual Factors of Self-Awareness, Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness, and Self-Awareness Skills.

The results showed that the theme Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness had the highest number of assigned codes (57), ranking first, followed by the theme Functional Factors of Self-Awareness with 34 codes in second place, and the theme Consequences of Self-Awareness with 25 codes in third place. Out of the total 10 interviewees, 9 individuals (90%) referred to the theme Behavioral Criteria of Self-Awareness. Therefore, this theme, in addition to the

frequency of code repetitions, was also prioritized in terms of its generality and prevalence among the respondents, indicating its importance.

Dietzfeld and Schurz (2011, 2014) proposed a segmentation model that assumes the emotional reaction mechanism underlies self-segmented structures. Specifically, they suggested that the segmentation of self-beliefs arises from an individual's response (e.g., arousal) to the capacity of these beliefs. This implies that individuals with self-segmented structures generally show stronger emotional responses (e.g., in terms of physiology) to the emotional qualities of stimuli, such as stimulus intensity (i.e., high emotional reactivity) (Lawrence et al., 2018b). As a result, the stimulus capacity attracts special attention, which may provide a basis for categorization. Following this reasoning, it is assumed that individuals, due to increased emotional reactions and heightened attention to the capacity of their beliefs, categorize their beliefs.

In relation to self-awareness, there is evidence indicating that self-awareness reduces neural responses to emotional stimuli (Eriksen, 2009; Eurich, 2018; Morin, 2011). In other words, it seems that more self-aware individuals show fewer emotional reactions. Based on the results obtained from the variables, the following suggestions are made:

The study of self-awareness and the early stages of psychology overlap in terms of their historical development. Both have their roots in classical philosophy and have advanced through the development of new technologies and philosophies. William James was one of the first to theorize about this process in modern psychology, and his self-classification elements found parallel positions in several of his theories on self-awareness.

Newer formulas define self-awareness as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon. As such, they require the articulation of various levels of evidence. Physiological studies, especially neurophysiological studies, indicate the correlations of self-awareness and offer potential avenues for studying the material foundations and pre-reflective functioning of the conscious phenomenon. Performance criteria in experimental and environmental tasks present opportunities for testing self-awareness theories at the implicit level or, at least, in a way that is more related to the functioning of the organism. In this context, self-awareness scales play a role in defining the boundaries of self-awareness constructs and distinguishing between individual tendencies. Ultimately, as shown with more freely self-reported criteria, where respondents define categories to classify their conscious experience, first-person data can provide evidence that does not impose excessive limitations on expressing conscious experience.

Science, with strong predictive power, goes beyond classifying individuals into specific types of self-awareness. This requires comprehensive work to integrate evidence and methods to explain the complex relationships inherent in the phenomenon of self-awareness. Technological and methodological advancements today provide an abundance of opportunities and research data on self-awareness. The integration of these methods and evidence remains a significant challenge for researchers in this field.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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