Laying a Foundation for Success

by Sophia Tutorial

WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will identify the traits of people who exhibit self- and social awareness and how this skill increases their human capital.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Defining Human Capital
2. Self- and Social Awareness: A Strong Foundation
   a. Questions to Guide Self-Reflection
   b. Social Awareness: Building Collaboration
3. Being Socially Aware at Work
4. Humanity at Work

1. Defining Human Capital

Human capital is a measure of your ability to translate your personal attributes, education, and habits into economic value in the labor market. It encompasses your ability and willingness to work, learn, earn, and make wise decisions about how to invest in your future. Human capital includes your health, education, training, and skills development. Just like financial capital contributes to the economic success of a business, human capital is what contributes to your personal and professional success and well-being.

BIG IDEA

Human capital is arguably the most valuable asset that you can develop!

One of the best ways to understand your capacity for learning and your earning potential is to exercise your self- and social awareness skill. This skill is foundational to many of the other 10 Skills and will help you get to know your strengths and opportunities for growth.

TERM TO KNOW

Human Capital
A measure of your ability to translate your personal attributes, education, skills, and habits into economic value in the labor market.

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2. Self- and Social Awareness: A Strong Foundation

Every house needs an unshakable foundation—the same is true when it comes to your life and career. You need to understand where your foundation is strong and where it could use some support in order to make smart decisions. All this starts with developing your self- and social awareness skill.

THINK ABOUT IT

What traits and behaviors do you think a person has if they're skilled in self- and social awareness? What kinds of things do they do and say?

People who are self- and socially aware exhibit a number of positive characteristics. Here are several:

- They know their strengths and limitations.
- They understand the impact their behavior has on others.
- They value self-knowledge and continually work to improve themselves.
- They ask for **feedback** and use it for self-improvement.

Having a heightened sense of yourself and the world around you is a foundational skill that will enhance all areas of your life and career.

TERM TO KNOW

Feedback
Information about performance used to make improvements.

2a. Questions to Guide Self-Reflection

Have you ever arrived home after a job interview and wished you had answered some of the interview questions differently? Did you ever achieve a high exam grade and stop to reflect how your good studying habits got you there?

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The process of looking back at your own behavior, actions, and motives is called**self-reflection**. It is a critical part of growing your self- and social awareness skill. Awareness is thinking about what's working well in your life or career and laying out plans for improvement. When you get to know yourself better, you make an investment in your human capital.

To start the process of self-reflection, you can ask yourself a few simple questions. Answering them honestly is the best way to get at the core of who you are. These questions are a good start, but there are many others:

1. What are my values?
2. What are my most important career goals?
3. How wisely am I using my time to achieve my goals?
4. What are my greatest strengths?
5. In which areas of my life or career do I need to improve to achieve my goals?
6. Am I working daily toward achieving my goals?
7. Am I thinking positive thoughts?
8. Am I working on building and maintaining healthy relationships?
9. How do I tend to react when I receive constructive criticism?
10. How well am I taking care of myself mentally and physically?
11. What worries me the most about the future?
12. What matters the most to me right now?
13. Who has the greatest impact on my life?

REFLECT

What other questions can you think of that help to raise your self-awareness? Think about your life experiences, or do some research on the Internet if you'd like.

Improving your self- and social awareness skill requires you to reflect on these sorts of tough questions. You

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must also show a willingness to learn from the questions in order to truly grow. Consider this example:

> EXAMPLE Several years ago, Amelia was on a path to graduate from college. All that changed when she quit school and took on a part-time job to care for her aging mother. But now that her mom is self-sufficient and getting the best professional care, Amelia is reflecting on what's important in her life. And one answer becomes clear—she wants to go back to school to earn her degree. After some research, Amelia learns that her credits will transfer to a state college nearby that offers night classes. The flexibility of the program is just what she needs. It allows her to continue earning income and gives her plenty of opportunities to check on her mother's well-being. Amelia's self-awareness has given her the confidence and agility she needs to revitalize her professional career.

Self-reflection is a process that doesn't usually happen overnight. It takes time to work through the complex questions and answers that help guide us through situations. In the example, Amelia might have asked and answered reflective questions in the following way:

What's going well for me right now?	*"Mom is safe, her health is improving, and I'm earning steady part-time income."*
How am I doing emotionally?	*"So-so. I feel isolated from my friends, but mostly I regret not finishing what I started at the university."*
What worries me about the future?	*"I'm naturally concerned about Mom's health, but I'm also worried about my future earning potential."*
What matters the most to me right now?	*"Going back to college matters most."*
How can I achieve my goals and still support the people around me?	*"The flexibility of taking night classes while I work is key. Mom is in good hands, and I'm only a phone call away if she needs me."*

TERM TO KNOW

Self-Reflection
The process of thinking about your behavior and beliefs.

2b. Social Awareness: Building Collaboration

Self-reflection is only part of developing your self and social awareness skill. You also need to exercise **social awareness** by spending time with other people in personal and professional settings. By observing and engaging with people who have different perspectives, you'll gain a better understanding of their strengths, limitations, and needs. You'll then be more equipped to interpret your environment, recognize the viewpoints of others, and act appropriately in a variety of contexts. Diverse experiences and cultural competency are things you can bring to any workplace.
Being socially aware also leads to better collaboration among teams. **Collaboration** is working constructively with one or more people to create something useful. When we know the values and skills of our peers and colleagues, we're able to find common ground with them and work toward innovative solutions together. Check out this example:

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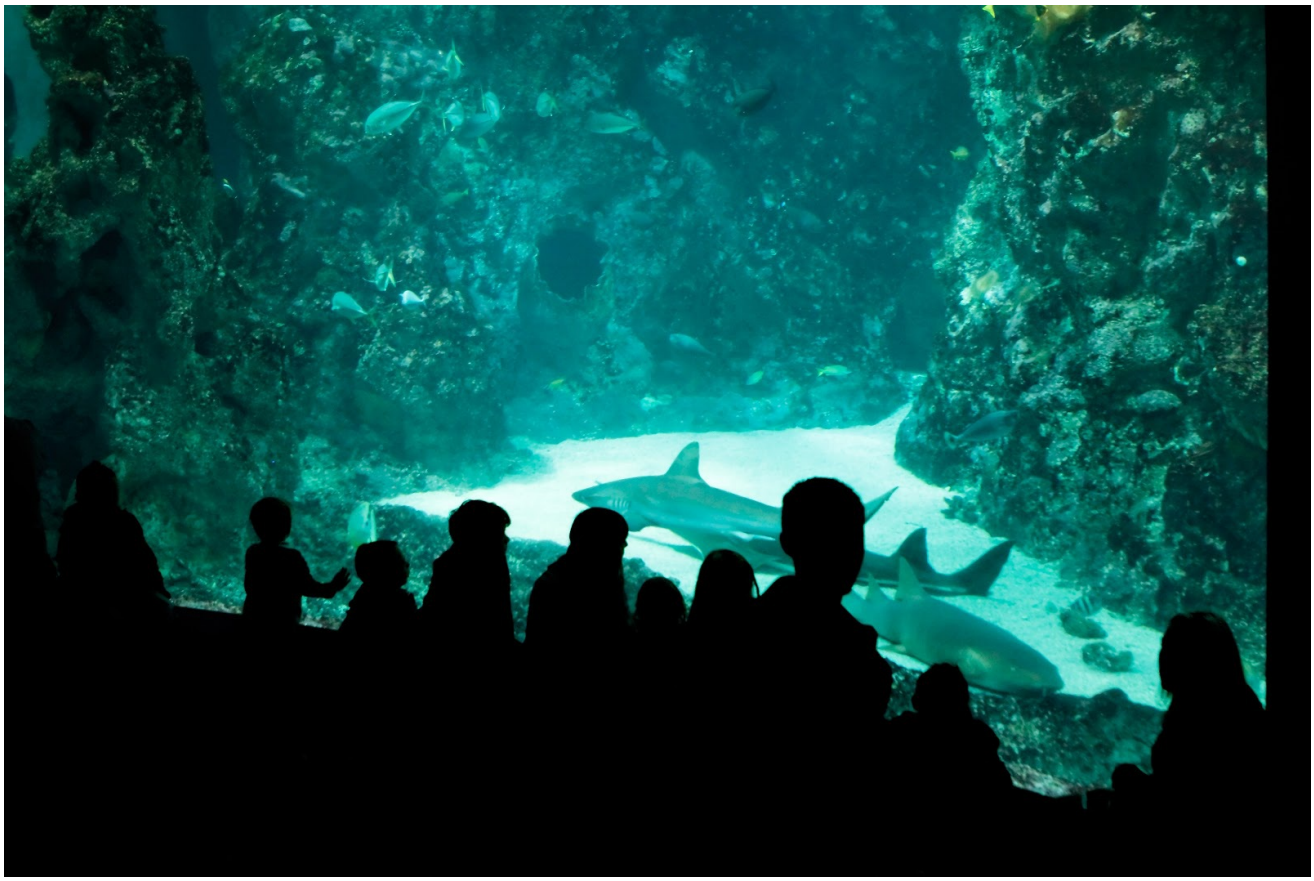

EXAMPLE Imagine you work at a museum of natural history. You and several coworkers are brainstorming the design elements for an exhibit about ocean life. One of your strengths is generating ideas on the spot, and you rarely shy away from voicing your opinion. However, you notice that your coworker, Dina, isn't saying much. After seeing her behavior and reflecting on your own, you decide that you won't jump to conclusions about her participation. After all, she was taking notes and engaged in the meeting but just didn't seem as comfortable speaking to the group. You conclude that Dina probably needs time to process the information before she's able to effectively offer her ideas. When the meeting has ended, you speak with her one-on-one in her office to see if there are any design features she'd like to add.

In this example, when you reflect on your own behavior and observe that of others, you're practicing self- and social awareness. This skill will improve your collaboration with Dina and the rest of the team and help you successfully complete the exhibit design together. Self- and social awareness is commonly the first step toward building strong relationships.

TERMS TO KNOW

Social Awareness
The ability to interpret your environment, recognize the perspective of others, and act appropriately in a variety of contexts.

Collaboration
Working constructively with others to create something of value.

3. Being Socially Aware at Work

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It pays to ask and answer questions about who you are. This helps you identify and reinforce your strengths, fill gaps in your development, and increase your human capital. Being self- and socially aware is an attractive skill that employers look for starting with your very first job interview. Whether your career is in aviation, zoology, or anything in between, you'll stay competitive in a changing world by growing your self- and social awareness skill.

Unfortunately, not everyone chooses to exercise self- and social awareness. When employees don't understand or use this important skill, it can cause challenges. They usually don't work too well with others, especially when faced with adversity. At times, they might even allow their emotions and shortcomings to cloud their judgment which prevents them from getting things done. Instead of working to improve their weaknesses, some employees choose to remain stagnant and may be passed over for promotions and future career opportunities.

4. Humanity at Work

In the modern workplace, computers and artificial intelligence can perform many of the same tasks that humans can. Some people are concerned that humans could lose their jobs to computers. While there are many tasks that computers can do, humans have a skill that computers don't have—we have the ability to be self- and socially aware!

Imagine a machine trying to solve a customer dispute. Or picture a computer trying to form an emotional connection to an audience of potential investors. Neither of these scenarios would go over very well. Unlike machines, humans have the emotions and empathy needed to suitably interact with people. Thanks to self and social awareness, you and I will always be an asset in the developing workforce.

TRY IT

What other types of interactions and workplace scenarios require a human element in order to be successful?

SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how **human capital** is arguably the most important asset you can develop. By investing in your skills, you increase your capacity to learn and your earning potential. This type of investment starts with your **self and social awareness** skill which is **a strong foundation** for your academic work and future career. By asking a host of **self-reflection questions**, you can learn more about yourself to guide your skills development.

Unlike self-awareness, social awareness is the ability to interpret the perspectives of others and to know your environment. When we **become more socially aware at work**, we **build collaboration** and strong relationships with our coworkers and managers. Taken together, **self and social awareness** is a unique human skill that won't soon be replaced by any machine or mechanism. **Humanity** will always be an important element in the workplace.

TERMS TO KNOW

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