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KNOWHOW> CARING FOR YOUR MIND> SHARED ASSESSMENT



SHARED ASSESSMENT

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Caption

The way we are assessed at school, in higher education and in professional training commonly reflects the attitudes of the old paradigm. It is one of the ways in which authoritarian frames of mind are most securely kept in place. Experts set standards which we are not allowed to see—other anonymous experts judge whether the standards have been reached. We have no say in the matter. Such a one-sided evaluation encourages unbalanced development. Intellect is emphasized at the cost of interpersonal skills and emotional competence, distorting the quality and integrity of the minds of everyone involved. This form of assessment is not only unfair, however, it is also profoundly contradictory—managers, students, and employees are required to be responsible, intelligent, and capable of initiative—yet the systems of assessment in common use insist that they are incapable of assessing the depth and range of their own development.

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A new paradigm approach to assessment

Whether in formal learning, professional training, or self-development, a new paradigm approach to assessment sees the other people with whom we learn and work as responsible, with a capacity for self-direction and self-appraisal. Given a supportive climate, most people are capable of assessing their own level of attainment according to a set of learning or performance objectives. However, because none of us exists in isolation, we also need some input and feedback from other people who are going through the same training, development or employment process. It's not that others have the right to impose their views on us but rather that we, as self-directing, responsible people, wish to draw on their views in accurately refining our own opinions. The opinions of our peers ensure that the assessment is rigorous, and that we neither devalue nor overvalue ourselves.

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Self and peer assessment

The first stage in self and peer assessment is to decide what to assess—a skill, a level of experience or competence, a product, or a combination of these. The next step is for everyone involved to agree on the assessment criteria—the optimum levels of competence, awareness, skills, judgement or experience—and to agree what form the final assessment should take (pass/fail, credits, grades, qualifications, or accreditation). Different areas may, of course, be given more weight than others. The procedure from then on involves a self-assessment statement, preferably written, then clarification questions, followed by peer-assessment statements. If the peers cannot agree on the assessment they may reject it or invite revision and re-submission.

An important element of self and peer assessment is that the assessment process be seen and designed as a ceremony, with attention to sequence and timing. If several people are up for peer-assessment, the same ceremony should be followed for each person.

The following screens detail a self and peer assessment process in which, for around a decade and a half, I have participated both as a trainer and participant.

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1 Decide what to assess

The first stage in assessment is to decide what to assess—a skill, a level of experience or competence, a product, or a combination of these.

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2 Agree assessment criteria

The next step is for everyone involved to agree on the assessment criteria—the optimum levels of competence, awareness, skills, judgement or experience—and to agree what form the final assessment should take (pass/fail, credits, grades or qualifications). Different areas may, of course, be given more weight than others.

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3 Agree the assessment process

Agree how the assessment process will be carried out, timing, dates, written/oral, confidentiality publication, etc.

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4 Self-assessment statement

Make and present a full, preferably written, self-assessment, detailing your strengths, weaknesses, areas of uncertainty, any lack of resources or unforeseen difficulties plus areas that need more work, and what you plan to do about them.

Your assessment should include explicit references to the agreed assessment criteria and, if required, a suggested grade or credit.

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5 Questions

A short period of questions may follow, limited to points arising from your statement that need clarifying.

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6 Peer assessment

Other members of the group now have an opportunity to contribute to the assessment process. There is, essentially, only one issue for them to address—whether or not they agree with your self-assessment. If they accept your evaluation, they say so, adding any caveats they feel are pertinent. If they accept your self-assessment as a whole, but disagree with some of the details, they specify where and why they disagree.

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7 Revised assessment

By the time everyone has spoken, it is usually obvious whether or not everyone accepts your statement. If they do, then the group can move on. If there is some disagreement, then you may want to revise your assessment until everyone is satisfied. If there is still disagreement, you may want to repeat the process until an agreement is reached or you decide to re-think your assessment completely.

[more](#)

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Applying shared-assessment

Attempting to change the way you and others around you are assessed may well challenge entrenched attitudes toward power—fervent rejection might indicate an old paradigm devotion to top-down authority. It is true that shared assessment may initially feel a bit risky for ‘senior’ people if their own competence is open to consideration. But the self-disclosure it entails can dramatically enhance the trust and cohesion of a team or work group. Paradoxically, self and peer assessment is one of the best routes to achieve the free and open co-operation so sought after in management and other teams.

While this assessment process can be time-consuming, it demands only a minimum of resources, which means that it can be introduced independently and informally into non-controversial areas. It can also run alongside formal examinations where participants feel oppressed by the usual system, and can be used in any situation in which people realize that only those who know them well can realistically contribute to their assessment. It may make sense to start initially with a diluted version of the peer assessment process. Perhaps begin with sympathetic friends and colleagues, then invite the people who normally assess you to join in a shared assessment.

If we are to risk honest disclosure of our deepest insights into ourselves while confronting others with discrepancies between their claimed performance and our perception of it, then we need more than the usual intellectual competence. As with other new paradigm approaches to living and working together, self and peer assessment requires a certain amount of interpersonal and **emotional competence**.

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