

Assessing Core Skills Of Clients



Introduction

It is important to IdeAL that we capture the individual outcomes of each EAL course we run so we can demonstrate the benefits of EAL to existing clients, potential clients and funding providers. We do this by assessing a number of core skills at referral, when the course is complete and one month after the course has been completed. By assessing the skills at referral, we can focus on the skills most in need of attention for each individual client. The core skills we assess are:

1. Awareness
2. Temperament
3. Emotion
4. Concentration
5. Confidence
6. Communication
7. Responsibility
8. Commitment
9. Integration
10. Empathy
11. Planning

Assessment Criteria

At IdeAL our assessment criteria are:

1. The assessment is simple to implement.
2. The assessment measures skills realistically and consistently.
3. The assessment is easy for everyone to understand.
4. The measurements are appropriate for everyone who attends EAL sessions, irrespective of why they are attending.
5. There is a desired state for each skill.
6. The assessment can measure whether a client needs to accentuate or moderate a particular skill.
7. Measurements can be displayed visually.
8. Subsequent assessments are easy to compare with the initial assessment.
9. The assessment is to measure how an individual client improves, not to compare clients with one another.



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Measurement

Measurement is important to determine whether EAL sessions do in fact result in improvements to the client's core skills, behaviour and wellbeing. Having a performance measurement system in place provides vital information about what activities work successfully for particular clients.

For EAL we needed to ask the following questions:

1. What does "improved" look like?
2. How will we recognise better when we see it?
3. How do we know if a change is an improvement?

To understand whether we have achieved our aims we need to define what our chosen "improved" state looks like and re-evaluate clients to determine if the lessons we provide result in the improvements we seek.

The act of measuring something signals that it is seen as a priority; however, our focus is improved client skills, behaviour and wellbeing rather than performing measurements. Time spent on measurement is time that is not available for delivering client-focused sessions.

Client stories are a very powerful way of discovering where opportunities for improvement lie and improvements have occurred. Using stories produces qualitative data; however it is possible to convert the qualitative data (e.g. Focused, Preoccupied, Obsessive) to quantitative data (a number) by asking people to express an opinion against a continuous interval scale that can include a fractional part.



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We use the following table to assign a score of between 1 and 5 for the 11 core skills of each client. The target score for each skill is 3. The scale is continuous, so, for example a score could be 2.5. Skills with a score less than 3 need to be accentuated whereas those over 3 need to be moderated.

Core Skill	Score				
	1 = Deficient	2	3 = Target	4	5 = Excessive
Awareness	None	Limited	Focused	Preoccupied	Obsessive
Temperament	Unresponsive	Timid	Calm	Agitated	Aggressive
Emotion	Concealed	Suppressed	Composed	Accentuated	Uncontrolled
Concentration	None	Distracted	Attentive	Preoccupied	Obsessive
Confidence	None	Nervous	Assured	Overoptimistic	Arrogant
Communication	Introverted	Anxious	Respectful	Preoccupied	Intolerant
Responsibility	Blames	Reluctant	Accepts	Delegates	Imposes
Commitment	None	Abandons	Focused	Preoccupied	Obsessive
Integration	Loner	Independent	Assured	Outgoing	Demanding
Empathy	Lacking	Ignores	Supports	Interferes	Controls
Planning	None	Disorganized	Focused	Engrossed	Obsessive

SMART Objectives

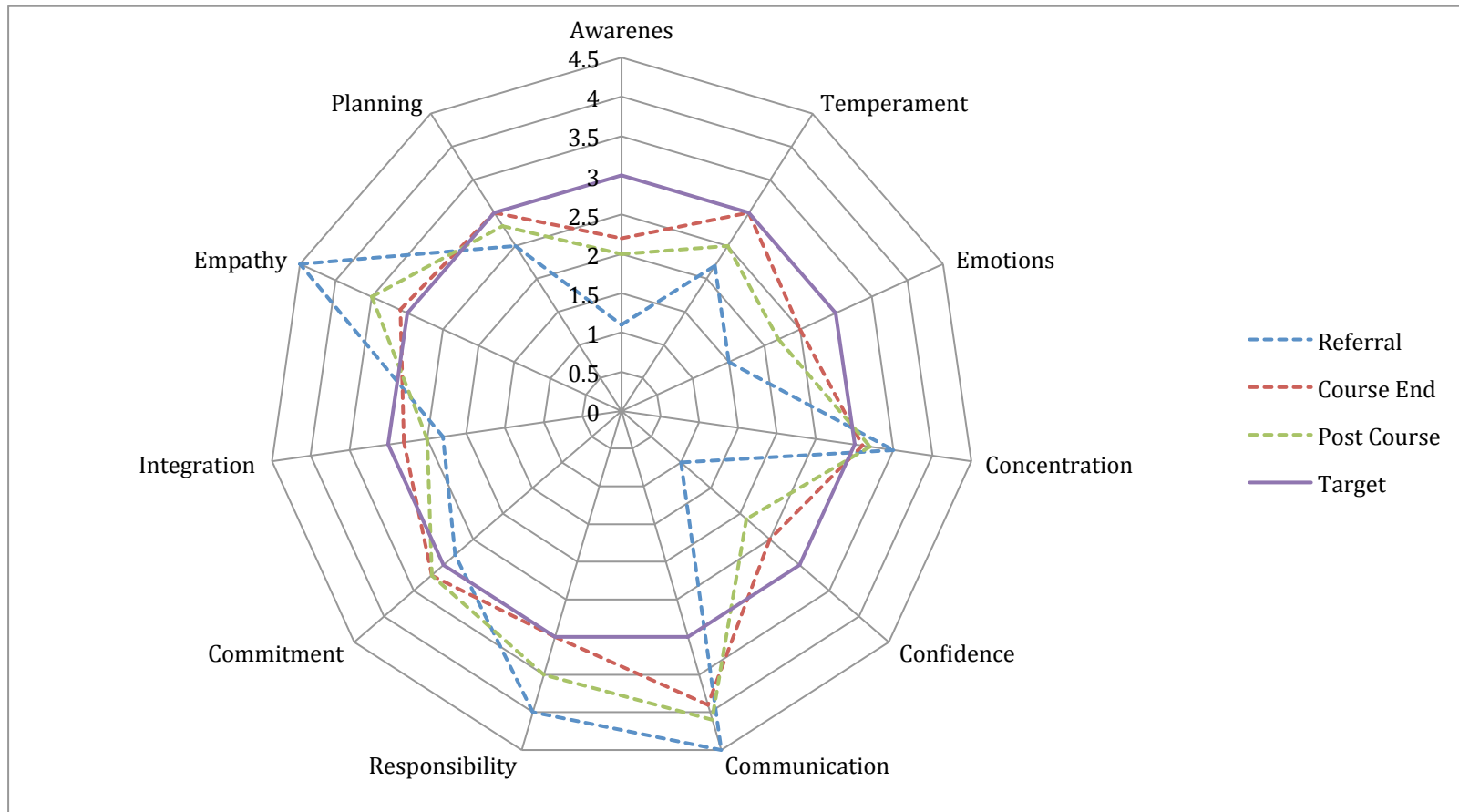
It's a familiar acronym, but a very useful one - our objectives are SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

In our case the assessment criteria specify that each skill be defined in a specific and measurable way. Although for some clients the desired state may be highly ambitious, our role as facilitators is to motivate and inspire, and help clients realise that improvement is achievable and realistic. Client progress will always be assessed after a predefined number of sessions.

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Displaying Results

The results are captured using an Excel spreadsheet, which allows the results to be displayed using a simple radar chart that shows the three sets of measurements as well as the desired state. The following is an example:



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Confidentiality

All the results of clients will be kept confidential. When used to demonstrate the benefits of EAL to potential clients and funding providers, information that could be used to identify the client will be excluded. Information stored on IdeAL computers will only use a numerical Client ID to identify the client; the mapping of Client ID to Client will be strictly managed and controlled by the directors of IdeAL.

Conclusions

At IdeAL we believe that being able to demonstrate the benefits of EAL is extremely important to all EAL providers, and that it is important that these benefits are measured in a systematic way and not simply supplied anecdotally based on personal observation.

No two clients will have the same needs. The referral assessment should be used to prioritise a client's needs and allow their EAL sessions to be customised to achieve the maximum benefit. The end of course assessments should be used to verify that the skills have been realistically assessed and are holding up over time.

Assessments should be easy to perform and visualise, and should not significantly impact on EAL sessions.