

The Johari Window: A Graphic Model of Awareness in Interpersonal Relations

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Like the unhappy centipede, many people get along fine working with others. Without thinking about which foot to put forward. But when there are difficulties, when the usual methods do not work, when we want to learn more—there is no alternative but to examine our own behaviour in relation to others. The trouble is that, among other things, it is so hard to find ways of thinking about such matters, particularly for people who have no extensive background in the social sciences. When Harry Ingham and I first presented The Johary Window to illustrate relationships in terms of awareness (at Western Training Laboratories, in 1995), we were surprised to find so many people, academicians and non professionals alike, using and tinkering with the model. It seems to lend itself as heuristic device to speculating about human relations. It is simple to visualize the four quadrants which represent The Johary Window.

Quadrant I, the area of free activity, refers to behaviour and motivation known to self and known to others.

Quadrant II, the blind area, which others can see things in ourselves of which we are unaware.

Quadrant III, the avoided or hidden area, presented things we know but do not reveal to others (e.g., a hidden agenda or matters about which we have sensitive feelings).

Quadrant IV, area of unknown activity. Neither the individual nor others are aware of certain behaviours or motives. Yet we can assume their existence because eventually some of these things become known, and it is then realized that these unknown behaviors and motives were influencing relationships all along.

The Quadrant and Changing Group Interaction

In new group, Quadrant I is very small; there is not much free and spontaneous interaction. As the group grows and matures, Quadrant I expands in size; and this usually means we are freer to be more like ourselves and to perceive others as they really are. Quadrant III shrinks in area as Quadrant I grows larger. We find it less necessary to hide or deny things we know or feel. In an atmosphere of growing mutual trust there is less need for hiding pertinent thoughts or feelings. It takes longer for Quadrant II to reduce in size, because usually there are "good" reasons of a psychological nature to blind ourselves to the things we feel or do. Quadrant IV perhaps changes somewhat during a learning laboratory, but we can assume that such changes occur even more slowly than do shifts in Quadrant II. At any rate, Quadrant IV is undoubtedly far larger and more influential in an individual's relationships than the hypothetical sketch illustrates.

The Johary Window may be applied to inter-group relations. Quadrant I means behavior and motivation known to the group and also known to other groups. Quadrant II signifies an area of behavior to which a group is blind; but other groups are aware of this behavior, e.g., cultist or prejudice. Quadrant III, the hidden area, refers to things a group knows about itself but which are kept

from other groups. Quadrant IV, the unknown area, means a group is unaware of some aspect of its own behavior, and other groups are also unaware of this behavior. Later, as the group learns new things about itself, there is a shift from Quadrant IV to one of the other quadrants.

Principles of Change

1. A change in any one quadrant will affect all other quadrants.
2. It takes energy to hide, deny, or be blind to behavior which is involved in interaction.
3. Threat tends to decrease awareness; mutual trust tends to increase awareness.
4. Forced awareness (exposure) is undesirable and usually ineffective.
5. Interpersonal learning means a change has taken place so that Quadrant I is larger and one or more of the other quadrants has grown smaller.
6. Working with others is facilitated by a larger enough area of free activity. It means more of the resources and skills in the memberships can be applied to the task at hand.
7. The smaller the first quadrant, the poorer the communication.
8. There is universal curiosity about unknown areas, but this held in check by custom, social training, and by diverse fears.
9. Sensitivity means appreciating the covert aspects of behavior in Quadrant II, III, and IV and respecting the desire of others to keep them so.
10. Learning about group processes as they are being experienced helps to increase awareness (larger Quadrant I) for the group as a whole, as well as for individual members.
11. The value system of a group and its membership may be noted in the way unknowns in the life of the group are confronted.

A centipede may be perfectly happy without awareness, but after all, he restricts himself to crawling under rocks.