

## **The New Johari Window**

### **#18. Quadrant One: Continental School of Thought Regarding Interpersonal Needs and Quad One General Implications**

**William Bergquist, Ph.D.**

I turn now to a third perspective on Luft's Quad One and then trace out general implications regarding Quad One and the diverse analyses I have provided regarding this quadrant of Joe Luft's window.

#### **The Continental School**

When advocates for the Continental school approach Quadrant One, they observe neither the openness and the somewhat naïve authenticity of the American school nor the unawareness and depth of the British school. Rather the Continental perspective on Quad One concerns deception, fear and the exercise of power. In Continental Quad One we all wear masks ("persona") and dance to the tunes that other, more powerful people play or request. We wear the mask and dance the tune because we are afraid.

The Continental school advocate asks only that we quit deceiving ourselves and acknowledge that we are wearing the mask and dancing to someone else's tune. Courage comes from acknowledging these external determinants and not letting them dominate all aspects of our life and our sense of self: "you can make me wear the mask, but you can't dictate what lies behind the mask or what I do when I remove the mask 'behind closed doors.'" "You can make me dance, but you can't make me enjoy the dance or identify myself as a dancer." These Continental themes of power, control and courage play out in three sub-themes: (1) the social construction of reality, (2) the management of emotions and (3) the social construction of self.

#### **Social Construction of Reality**

Several social scientists have written about the social construction of reality – notably Berger

and Luckmann.<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that an “objective” sense of reality can never be attained, given that this reality is always viewed and evaluated within a specific social context and through the lens of specific societal values, cultural perspectives, untested assumptions and political agendas. In their embracing of a constructivist notion of reality, these social scientists have taken a significant step in positing that language (or more generally the use of symbols and signs) is central to the definition and description of reality.

Language is not simply a handmaiden for reality, as the objectivists would suggest. Language is not a secondary vehicle that we must employ when commenting on the reality that underlies and is the reference point for this language. While *objectivism* is based on the assumption that there is a constant reality to which one can refer (through the use of language and other symbol/sign systems), *constructivism* is based on the assumption that the mode and content of discourse is the closest thing we have to a reality. If reality is a social construction, then the language being used to describe this elusive and changing reality is itself a major source of this social construction.

One of the major implications of this constructivist analysis is that our language creates our reality and that reality is therefore ephemeral. Once we have spoken, the reality is not present that was created when we were speaking. Even if we say the same words, they are spoken in a different context, hence have somewhat different meaning. Thus, even when our “speaking” comes in the form of written words or in the form of other images (visual, tactile, etc.), these words or images will have different meaning. Meaning will shift depending on the audience, what the setting is in which the communication takes place, and which words or images have preceded and will follow these efforts at communication.

What part does interpersonal relations (and, in particular, the Johari Window) play in the social construction of reality? First, most interpersonal theories (and the Johari Window in particular) suggest that social construction is truly social. Reality is created simultaneously by both parties or (in the case of a group) by all parties participating in the relationship. Second,

given the co-determination of social constructions by the parties involved in an interpersonal relationship, one can't help but wonder if this interpersonal system is self-contained. Participants in the relationship would not readily recognize the arbitrary constructions in this relationship.

Furthermore, these constructions are likely to be self-fulfilling. All parties in the relationship are likely to act in a manner that fulfills their expectations regarding the way(s) in which the relationship will operate and the way(s) in which each party will operate in the relationship. The self-contained relationship is also likely to be "self-sealed." None of the constructions can be discussed by any party in the relationship – unless the relationship is about to collapse under the weight of one or more outmoded or dysfunctional constructions.

Third, it is primarily in Quad One where social realities are defined. Quad One thus becomes the interpersonal "construction zone" – filled with activity and purpose. Fourth, Quad Two and Quad Three often hold the alternative constructions or versions of reality for both (all) parties. These alternative constructions are held out of Quad One because they challenge Quad One assumptions and constructions. They challenge assumptions regarding what is and is not appropriate for Quad One disclosure, feedback and discussion.

Fifth, in high-context, deeply and richly textured (enmeshed) societies, most of the constructions are dictated by external sources (external locus of control), whereas in low-context, lightly-textured (disengaged) societies, fewer of the constructions are dictated by external sources (internal locus of control). The more enmeshed a society, the fewer external critics are available to call attention to the assumptions and constructions in interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the more enmeshed a society, the less will distinctive Quad Two and Quad Three material be available to any party to the relationship – and the greater will be the amount of material remaining in Quad Four.

## Management of Emotions

The Continental school suggests that it is not only our thoughts that are arbitrary and easily influenced, but also our emotions. We choose – or someone else chooses – not only our constructions of reality, but also the nature of and way in which we experience and interpret our feelings. To use Arlie Hochschild's term, we "manage our heart" and this, in turn, profoundly impacts our sense of self and the way in which we present ourselves to other people.<sup>ii</sup>

Hochschild specifically focuses on this dynamic in her study of Delta flight attendants and bill collectors. She describes ways in which contemporary men and women can become quite confused about their own feelings because they have been trained or soon learn to control their own feelings about other people and events that impact them every day.<sup>iii</sup>

According to Hochschild, Delta Airline flight attendants and bill collectors learn how to manage their own emotions so that they can more effectively perform their jobs. Flight attendants learn how to become enthusiastic about their passengers, so that they can be more friendly and hospitable-- even when a passenger is rude. Conversely, Delta Airline bill collectors learn how to develop a feeling of disgust for their next client, so that they are immune to the hard luck stories that this client is likely to tell.

Hochschild compares the training that these Delta Airline employees receive to the "deep acting" that is taught to would-be actors and actresses, using the Stanislavsky ("method acting") approach. The flight attendant and bill collector – like the method actor – learn how to "manage" their own emotions and thereby more effectively control their own behavior. Unfortunately, when these employees (and actors) become skillful with their *managed hearts* they no longer can rely on their emotions to provide them with an accurate sense of their real attitudes, values and feelings about other people or events. They have learned how to "con" themselves, hence no longer know who they really are.

Experts in human relations similarly argue that we should learn how to better control our emotions, yet do not speak about the impact of this control on our tenuous sense of self in this turbulent and complex postmodern world. To what extent, for instance, do managers in contemporary organizations learn how to control their own emotions as they move through complex and often contradictory workdays?

At the end of the day, how do they recognize their “real” feelings, having effectively controlled and modified their feelings all day long to cope with the turbulent postmodern world that exists inside and around their organization? Similarly, to what extent will a postmodern therapist, physician, minister, nurse or social worker manage her heart when working with a variety of needy clients or patients? To what extent is a human service professional likely to be confused about her emotions at the end of a long, hard day of work? These are important questions to ponder as we prepare our children – and ourselves – for the postmodern world.

The Hochschild study strongly suggests that our emotions are defined in large part not by our internal physiological cues, but by our interpersonal context and the social cues that emanate from this context. Our public self (Quad One) is, in turn, strongly influenced by our emotions, as is our opaque self (Quad Three), from which leaks nonverbal behavior that is, itself, strongly influenced by our emotions.

We are in control of our public self (Quad One-Internal) to the extent that we can actually control our emotions – turning them on and off, as in the “deep acting” that Hochschild suggest occurs among flight attendants and bill-collectors. The Continental school proposes that this internal control is rarely the case. Even when we are “in charge” of our emotions, the nature and “use” of these emotions are dictated by assigned roles (for example, that of a sympathetic therapist) or purposes (for example, the anger/violence of the football player or the sociability of the flight attendant).

Even more often, the Continental school would suggest that our emotions are dictated by external forces without our explicit awareness. This, in turn, leads to a certain banality and even boredom (or sense of alienation). As Christopher Lasch suggests:<sup>iv</sup>

Today, Americans are overcome not by the sense of endless possibility but by the banality of the social order they have erected against it. Having internalized the social restraints by means of which they formerly sought to keep possibility within civilized limits, they feel themselves overwhelmed by an annihilating boredom, like animals whose instincts have withered in captivity.

### **Social Construction of Self**

As we will see with regard to the other three quadrants, the Continental school is strongly biased toward the external locus of control, and focuses on the four external panes, leaving detailed (and “superficial”) analysis of the four internal panes to the American school. Whereas the British school challenges us to turn internally and identify what truly is “openness,” the Continental school moves to an external perspective and wants to know who is defining “open” and why they are given the privilege or authority to provide (and reinforce) this definition. Whereas the British school challenges us to identify what is “true” about ourselves, the Continental school wants to know who determines what is “true” and what is “untrue” – given that these are rather arbitrarily assigned terms (as is the term “open”).

The Continental school moves the British school notion of collusion to a broader level, focusing on societal collusion when considering about what it means to be “open” or “closed” – and even more basically, what it means to construct a coherent sense of self. Ultimately, the Continental School calls into question this most fundamental construction of Western societies – namely, the social construction called “self.” Clearly, “self” does not hold up as a biologically-based construct, given that parts of our physical body are constantly being replaced. “Self” also does not hold up as a social psychological concept, given that our behavior is profoundly influenced by the context in which we find ourselves, the roles we are playing, and the rules and norms by which we are operating.

If “self” holds any meaning as a social construction, this meaning is based in our sustained (and sustaining) narrative about “self.” This, in turn, brings us directly to Quad One of the Johari Window – for it is in Quad One that we hold our personal narrative. We may not always share this narrative with other people (meaning that we assign it to Quad Three – our private self – in the case of some relationships). However, it is only a narrative (with a story line, a beginning and temporary end, a lesson to be learned) because it *might* be told. And only in rare cases will none of it ever be shared with another person.

Furthermore, this is the part of our social construction that is unique to each person. Ironically, one’s personal narrative is also quite vulnerable to the general social constructions of one’s society – such constructions as the values assigned to certain aspects of self (the “good” parts of me, the “weak” parts of me, the “small” parts of me, the “active” parts of me, and so forth), the lessons to be learned from my life experiences (“that’s what happens when you tell a lie,” “that’s what happens when you stand up for your principles”), and the parts of one’s personal narrative that have been borrowed (often uncritically) from other people (especially one’s parents).

## **Implications and Applications:**

### **What to Do About Quad One**

In tracing out the implications regarding what we have said about Quadrant One in the last few essays, I return to the issue of trust – all three kinds. We establish a successful and enriching relationship with another person – and an engaged and nurtured Quad One – when we agree about the norms and values of our relationship (third stage in the relationship development model). We share a perspective about our relationship – this represents one type of mutual trust. We agree upon those aspects of our selves that are relevant to our relationship (the selective self) – they are manifest in our ongoing relationship and neither of us attempts to hide these aspects of self. We agree what things mean in our relationship. We also clear away the debris in our relationship through the movement of appropriate information from our

second and third quadrants into Quad One. This establishes a second type of mutual trust: trust in intentions.

The third type of trust (competency) is established in a relationship when we each exhibit the skill of interpersonal discernment. While the mystics of the Middle Ages used the process of discernment to determine which messages were coming from God and which were coming from the Devil, we can today, in our interpersonal relationships, also engage in discernment. We can mutually determine which messages (models of interpersonal relationship) are a good fit (godly) and which are a bad fit (ungodly). We can be mutually thoughtful in our selection of appropriate domains of Quad One we should bring to this specific relationship.

We can collaborate in discerning which type of relationship we should establish, given all of the various models of relationship in our postmodern world. We live not only with a saturated self but also with saturated images of the successful interpersonal relationship. We must discern which is best for us in this setting and at this particular time. Unless we are hiding away in an enclave, we are faced with the diversity of many other relationships that exist in our life. We must mutually craft a relationship that may be similar to but is never quite the same as these other unique relationships.

### **The Three A's: Finding Continuity in a World of Flux and Diversity**

We benefit by viewing Quadrant One as a process rather than as a thing or an outcome. This is the "working space". It is a matter of "becoming" – not being. We are not conveying who we are, but rather *what we are becoming in this unique, dynamic relationship*. As I have said repeatedly (in defense of Joe Luft), the Johari Window is not static. People out in the real world keep opening and closing their interpersonal windows – so they had better be strong, flexible and well-lubricated! Given this fluid, dynamic process, how does one gain any sense of continuity in one's own sense of self or, more specifically, in one's sense of another person's "self." I would suggest that there are three "A's" that provide some guidance in our complex, unpredictable and turbulent world of interpersonal relationships: authenticity, alignment and



appreciation.

A person is authentic if she is consistent over time and if there is a match between words and actions. The four quadrants are in sync. A person is aligned if her values and aspirations are compatible with and attuned to decisions that this person makes and actions that she takes. Q1 becomes more transparent and reliable if there is not only authenticity, but also alignment. A person's behavior is congruent with her personal values and life purposes when there is alignment. One's personal energy is more available, a course of action is easier to set and sustain, and there is less likely to be discontent, alienation or burnout. Just as an automobile with aligned tires uses less gas, rides more smoothly, and creates less wear-and-tear on the tires and suspension, so alignment of one's own values with one's actions results in the expenditure of less psychic energy, smoother functioning, and less wear-and-tear on oneself as well as everyone around us.

In our engagement with Quad One in ourselves and in other people we must come to an appreciative understanding of self. This appreciation is, in turn, based on the recognition and use of our own distinctive competencies and the distinctive competencies in other people. What is special about us (appreciative perspective)? When we know what is special about us, why don't we focus on this – use it as a platform for facing what we don't know about ourselves (that may threaten us: Q2)? For example, if I am articulate (a good speaker), how do I use this strength to address feedback regarding my lack of technical expertise. I can talk a lot – which further reveals my lack of technical expertise – or I can pair up with someone who does have expertise (but perhaps is a bit shy or introverted) to become a spokesperson, teacher or salesperson for this person's technical idea.

Our public strengths (known competencies) are usually what get us in trouble – not our public weaknesses (or even unknown or non-revealed weaknesses). We need feedback from other people (Quad 2 to Quad 1) if we are to know when our strengths are inappropriate or over-used. We don't need feedback that this is a strength – this we already know – but we do need

feedback about when best to use this strength. I am articulate – but I talk too much in some settings. What are those settings in which my strength of articulation is over-used or inappropriate, and what is the impact of this misuse? About this I need feedback.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we turn to the dynamics of the other three quadrants, we will keep returning to this theme of appreciation and to the processes of disclosure and feedback that enable us to enlarge our Quadrant One in an appropriate and selective manner. We begin this fuller exploration by turning to Quadrant Two.

---

<sup>i</sup>Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. *Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday, 1967.

<sup>ii</sup>Hochschild, Arlie. *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983..

<sup>iii</sup>Hochschild, Arlie. *The Managed Hear*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983..*t*

<sup>iv</sup>Lasch, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York: Norton, 1979, p. 39.