

The New Johari Window

#16. Quadrant One, External Locus of Control and the Movement Between an External and Internal Locus

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As in the case of the internal locus of control, I will sketch out some of the factors contributing to that sense of community and push toward conformity that does exist in contemporary Western societies. I will then relate these factors to an external locus of control and Joe Luft's Quad One. Paralleling my analysis of individualism, I can identify both proximal (recent) and distal (more dated) factors that contribute to Western community and conformity.

Life-Style Enclaves

In recent years, we observe a longing for community – and attendant willingness, at times, to conform in response to the distress associated with the “troubling ambiguity” and lingering alienation of our postmodern condition.ⁱ We yearn to return to a seemingly simpler world. In the grip of this nostalgia, we create or enter “life style enclaves” and embrace clothing, manners and values are embraced by a specific cluster of people. While distinguishing ourselves as Goths, Microsoft or Wal-Mart employees, or members of a Senior Citizen's Travel Club we are simultaneously presenting our individual identifies (differing in appearance and behavior from most other members of society) and our collective identity (as a conforming member of a distinctive, bounded group). Some social critics would declare that these enclaves have increased fragmentation of society and (through special interest lobbies) made governance more difficult (not just red and blue states, but also green, pink, yellow, orange, heliotrope, mauve, and brown enclaves).

Conformity and Authoritarianism

A little further back in time, we find the push toward conformity and collective identity as portrayed by many social critics. Many social critics during the 1950s and 1960s observed the

emerging corporate conformity in Western society (particularly the United States). Critics such as William Whyte,ⁱⁱ David Reismanⁱⁱⁱ and Erik Fromm^{iv} wrote about a retreat (or escape) from freedom and individual responsibility to a faceless diffusion of identity and purpose. Other social critics during the 1950s and 1960s such as Hannah Arendt,^v Theodore Adorno, Nevitt Sanford and their colleagues,^{vi} and social activists and psychotherapists, such as Eric Hoffer^{vii} and Rollo May^{viii} wrote about the dynamics of right-wing thought, stereotyping, and indiscriminate dependency.

Bringing these several analyses together (not hard, since some analysts such as Erich Fromm and Rollo May wrote about both organizational conformity and authoritarianism) and linking them to locus of control and Quad One, we find that there is a strong pull (what chaos theorists might describe as a “strange attractor”) toward the security of authoritative doctrine and simple beliefs. As I previously noted, Robert Kegan suggests that we are cognitively (and emotionally) “over our heads” in contemporary life, and seek out simpler forms.^{ix} Perhaps the nostalgic retreat in our postmodern society is not just a return to earlier life styles and values, but also an escape to simpler concepts and a world without dilemmas or paradox – a world of readily defined and solved puzzles, rather than multi-discipline problems and awe-filled mysteries.^x

One obvious form that promises less stress and complexity is a fundamental assumption that our life is under the control of some external agency – be it God, Fate, leaders of an organization or charismatic messiah. I might be “over my head” in cognitive and emotional complexity, but the omniscient external agency fully understands what is happening. I might feel powerless, but the external agency is omnipotent.^{xi} I shall be safe and secure!

Given this pull toward an external locus of control, it becomes clear that Quad One may be a very tenuous space in which to operate. I am vulnerable to external forces and my Quad One behavior (as well as the impact of this behavior) may be out of my hands. In Johari terms, my Quad Two (which is in the heads and heart of other people) and Quad Four (which is not

under the conscious control of anyone) seem to be very powerful – perhaps overwhelming. This assumption of power might be accurate. It is at least a self-fulfilling assumption, since I am likely to assign power to these two quadrants, even when the power isn't originally there. This is especially the case if I feel insecure regarding my presentation of self (Quad One) to the world.

From Hunting to Growing to Producing (Redux)

We can probe even deeper into the etiology of conformity and community. In doing so, we discover the strength of this external orientation – and move beyond mere nostalgia and pathological conformity. To find this strength, we return to Diamond's analysis of the Western world's origins in an Agrarian environment.^{xiii} As I noted above, agriculture (according to Diamond) enables (and often requires) the formation of community. Hunter-gatherer societies could not grow very large (given the limited natural resources available to any one location and the need to keep moving). By contrast, agriculturally-based societies could grow larger (greater food production being possible with domesticated plants and animals). Communities were formed and formal governance systems were established to manage these larger populations.

Today, we are even more in need of community and governance, as our capacity to produce food and feed members of our society becomes even greater. Furthermore, there is an even greater need for conformity to certain laws, values and procedures as we move in the 21st Century to what Thomas Friedman calls the "flat world" of global communication, exchange and interdependency.^{xiii} Thus, while we live in a society that values individuality, we also live in a global village that requires collaboration, some conformity (at the very least, a sense of collective responsibility), and, above all, a commitment to community.

What are the implications of this deeper need for community for the Johari Quad One and an external locus of control? Diamond's analysis suggests that an agrarian society must inevitably build a sense of community if it is to survive. He offers the history of several societies that

returned to a hunter-gatherer status precisely because its members couldn't figure out how to organize themselves. This could very well be the case with some modern and postmodern organizations – though it would be very difficult to return to a hunter-gatherer stage as a 21st Century society.

Quad One becomes very important in any society that requires collaboration and community. While the “traditions” of an Agrarian community – such as Tevia’s Anatevka – reinforce collaboration and community by providing a very powerful and pervasive external locus of control, there is still the need for internal discipline and “management” of an appropriate Quad One – especially (as in *Fiddler on the Roof*) when some modifications in the “traditions” are required. Tevia had to present a convincing (and not all-together-honest) Quad One argument to his wife, Golda, when trying to convince her that it would be acceptable for his oldest daughter to marry a poor tailor.

Tevia similarly (and painfully) had to manage his Quad One rejection (and final re-acknowledgement) of his youngest daughter (who chose to marry a Gentile). Tevia could not be driven by his Quad Four fears nor could he be wedded to the impressions that other people in his community might have of him (especially with regard to his decisions regarding his daughters’ marital choices). He had to hold and observe the traditions of his community in his own unique way, as all members of a community must do. This requires a balancing in Quad One between an internal and external locus of control. Each of us must similarly find this balance in our first quadrant. It is never easy to be perched precariously as a fiddler on the roof!

Movement Between External and Internal Locus of Control

Some West African societies suggest that we “earn our individuality” as members of a community. These societies and organizations embrace what might best be called a “communitarian” spirit. ^{xiv} Communitarianism represents a balance between individual rights and collective responsibility. The property and respect of each member of the community is

protected and respected; however, each member of the community is also expected to contribute to the overall welfare of the community even if this means the sacrifice of personal wealth or privilege. Identity in a communitarian society is vested in two places.

The identity and worth of individual are set initially within a group context. Members of a communitarian society are dropped into an existing group and community when they are born. They take on the identity of the community and the collective identity of the heritage and all the ancestors of this community. Newborns initially hold no life or identity independent of group. However, as members of the community mature and assume increasing responsibility for the overall welfare of the community, they assume distinctive roles, forge distinctive and complimentary identities, and create their own unique life path.

In addition, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the opposite type of societies in which there is a tendency to move from individual identity and individual rights to collective identity and collective responsibilities. Many of the Asian leaders with whom I work have taken this perspective in their life. While they have been oriented through most of their life to individualistic pursuit of success in business or government, they turn to a more collective perspective during the second half of their life. In Taiwan (which blends many of the Western traditions of individualistic entrepreneurship with traditional Chinese emphasis on collective responsibility), men or women who continue to pursue individual success after they have reached 50 or 60 are considered to be “unevolved.”

Rather, they should be moving away from the “mundane” details of their organization and become more concerned with and involved in community affairs – or at least with the way(s) in which their organization contributes to overall societal harmony. In Western societies we see this spirit captured in what Erik Erikson speaks of as the emergence of a spirit of generativity in mid-life.^{xv} One becomes interested in the enduring legacy one leaves for the next generation. Others describe this as a shift in emphasis from success (being the best *in* one’s world) to significance (being the best *for* one’s world).

In somewhat less positive fashion, we can view movement from internal to external as a defensive maneuver played out by those people who are trying (often desperately) to “fit in.” They decide to become like other people as a strategy for social acceptance – or even survival. This shift is often found among immigrants who try to hide their distinctive, ethnic identities to become like “everyone else.” This may be one of the reasons for the widespread depression among immigrants.

Many immigrants experience the loss of self and grieve this loss; furthermore, unless they have moved into an ethnic community, they often are isolated in their grieving for the loss of ethnic identity. They once were part of a collective identity in the community where they lived; they now possess an individual and distinctive identity as a “minority” in a new community. They wish to turn to a new collective identity, as a member of the “majority” community in their new community. Unfortunately, these immigrants often find that this shift back to an external locus is not possible, given the resistance of other people in their new community to abandon their image of the immigrant as someone who is “different.”

In some ways, we find an even more pervasive lure toward an external locus produced by the sense of isolation that often is associated with profound individualism. We want to “belong to something.” We long for a sense of community. Robert Bellah and his colleagues document this longing for community in *Habits of the Heart*.^{xvi} As workaholics with long commutes, we have lost our local neighborhood and must look instead to our workplace for community and neighborhood. As I noted previously, we look for this community and neighborhood at work precisely at time when it is not very safe to establish personal relationships in the workplace.

The movement between internal and external is always powerful, especially when this movement occurs not over a lifetime (as in West Africa), but over a period of several hours. I had the fortune many years ago of working with a colleague, Kate Regan, who had a strong background in the British school of facilitation – with its emphasis on the group itself as the

primary operating force in the group. I came out of the American school with its emphasis on the individual members of the group as the primary operating force. We decided to offer both forms of facilitation in a single group. We found that there were four “groups” operating in this weeklong workshop with 14 participants.

One of the groups was American in nature, with attention given (primarily by me) to the individual experiences, feelings and roles of group members. The second group was British in nature, with attention directed (primarily by Dr. Regan) to collective group dynamics. Both Kate and I were familiar with these two groups, having participated in both American-based and British-based programs. The third and fourth groups, however, were new to both of us and proved to be sources of quite powerful learning for everyone involved.

The third group was engaged when there was a transition between the American and British. Group members had to address their loss of individuality as the exploration shifted from the individual (American) to the group (British). Members reflected on their own experiences of being lost in “group think” and of their fears of “conformity” and loss of conscious intentions. The fourth group, by contrast, existed when the focus shifted from the British to the American school of analysis. Group members experienced the shift in attention from the group to the individual as a loss of “community” and a feeling of “isolation” or “disengagement.” There were powerful feelings when moving from one focus to the other focus. There was a source of rich learning for all of us (including the facilitators) in the accompanying shift between an internal and external locus of control.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1961.
- ^{iv} Fromm, Erik. *The Sane Society*. New York: Fawcett, 1955.
- ^v Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966 (originally published 1948).
- ^{vi} Adorno, Theodore and others. *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York: Harper, 1950.
- ^{vii} Hoffer, Eric. *The True Believer*. New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
- ^{viii} May, Rollo. *Freedom and Destiny*. New York: Norton, 1999.
- ^{ix} Kegan, Robert. *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- ^x Bergquist, William and Mura, Agnes. *Ten Themes and Variations for Postmodern Leaders and Their Coaches*. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Sounding Press, 2005, pp.212-221.
- ^{xi} Martin Seligman focuses in particular on learned helplessness and contrasts this perspective with learned optimism. [Seligman, Martin. *Learned Optimism*. New York: Knopf, 1991.]
- ^{xii} Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs and Steel*. New York: Norton, 1997.
- ^{xiii} Friedman, Thomas. *The World is Flat*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.
- ^{xiv} Gyekye, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Patrice Some. *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*. New York: Tarcher/Putnum, 1999; George Lodge. *Managing Globalization in the Age of Interdependence*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 1995, Chapter 5.
- ^{xv} Erikson, Erik. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton, 1968, pp. 138-139; Erikson, Erik. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: Norton, 1980, pp. 103-104.
- ^{xvi} Bellah, Robert and Others. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985