

# The New Johari Window I: Introduction to the Interpersonal Dance

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Why are some people interpersonally smart? Why do other people seem to be interpersonally challenged, if not downright stupid? Even more fundamentally, why are each of us sometimes geniuses and sometimes idiots in our interactions with people about whom we care deeply? Whom we want to influence? Whom we want to engage in a less contentious manner? With whom we want to be more productive manner?

Interpersonal effectiveness is not just a matter of social or interpersonal intelligence and not just a matter of interpersonal competence. It is also a matter of becoming more fully aware of the multiple dimensions in which human interactions operate. In seeking to address the WIIFM challenge (What's in it for me?), this set of essays provides a new model of interpersonal relationships that builds on the most widely used model of interpersonal relationships to be offered during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—namely the Johari Window. Acknowledged as among the most insightful and useful models of human interaction, the Johari Window continues to be respected and often cited during the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In the present set of essays, I offer a new edition of the Johari Window. The New Johari Window offers fresh insights and useful concepts regarding human interaction. Specifically, it addresses eight fundamental and elusive questions that face each of us in our daily interactions and that have much to say about the extent to which we are smart or not so smart in the way in which we conduct these interactions:

1. Why don't other people see me the way I see myself?
2. How do I find out what other people really think about me?
3. What do people know about me or feel about me that they don't share with me?
4. Why don't other people sometimes trust me?
5. Why do I find it hard to share important information about myself (thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears) with some of the important people in my life?

6. How do I tell other people that I don't like something that they do in a way that doesn't harm our relationship?
7. How do I let other people know who I really am?
8. Why don't I or can't I tell some people what I really admire about and how I benefit from who they are or what they do?

We must repeatedly answer these questions, for the answers will vary from one relationship to another and from one interpersonal setting to another. For us to successfully answer these questions, we must know something about the way in which we disclose information to other people and the way in which we receive feedback from these people. The first four of these questions primarily concern interpersonal feedback, whereas the final four questions are primarily about interpersonal disclosure. There are a couple of other perplexing questions that up the ante a bit regarding interpersonal intelligence:

9. To what extent in this relationship do either of us have much control over how we relate to one another or is it determined primarily by the roles we play?
10. What is preventing the two of us from forming a relationship that is more open with regard to both interpersonal disclosure and feedback?

Both questions concern the context within which interpersonal relationships take place and the ways in which we interpret our own behavior and the behavior of the other person within this context.

How do we go about answering these questions? What can we learn about interpersonal disclosure and feedback that will make us wiser in forming and sustaining relationships with other people? If we are in a helping role (as therapist, manager, minister, nurse, etc.), what should we know about the dynamics of interpersonal relationships that will enable us to be more insightful and hopefully more effective in being of assistance to other people? I propose that a model of interpersonal relationship has been available for many years that can help us address these questions and can help us be interpersonally smarter. This model is called the Johari Window.

No other model of interpersonal disclosure and feedback has been as often used as a teaching and coaching tool as this Johari Window (named after its two inventors, Joe Luft and Harrington Ingram). While many people know of this model of interpersonal relationships, it is sometimes dismissed as "old

fashion” or “too simplistic.” These essays are dedicated to showing how the Johari Window is still quite relevant. In addition, I offer an expanded and revised version of the Johari Window, introducing several late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century concepts that provide even more insightful perspectives regarding these fundamental interpersonal questions and, more generally, the complex and dynamic dance of human interaction.

## **The Window’s Dance**

This remarkable model of interpersonal relationships has been widely used by educators, trainers, consultants and coaches. This model is often praised—and even more often used (even by those who are skeptical about its ultimate validity). This model goes by an intriguing name: “The Johari Window.” Perhaps this is one of the reasons for its remarkable popularity. There are other reasons why this model is probably the most widely used representation of human interaction to be found in the world today. It is graphically very appealing. Symmetrical. Great to present on Power Point or on a flip chart with multi-colored markers. It holds an immediate appeal. Capturing something about the mysterious dance of human interaction.

In a nutshell by applying the Johari Window we know why old George over there irritates us or why we don’t get along with Susan. Like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Johari Window allows us to talk about difficult interpersonal relationships from a somewhat “objective” perspective. The least often mentioned (but perhaps most important) reason for the popularity of the Johari Window is that it seems to be an orphan. There is no author, so the model can be used without paying any royalties or purchasing anyone’s book.

Unfortunately, this last reason is not valid. There is an author and there is a book. Yet, this person and book are rarely cited by those who use the Johari Window. The person is Joe Luft. The book is *On Human Interaction*. Actually, Joe Luft isn’t the only author and *On Human Interaction* is not really the source of the Johari Window. The Johari Window was presented first at a human relations conference held in Ojai California during the 1950s. Sponsored by the University of California in Los Angeles, the Ojai conferences brought together some of the most accomplished human relations and organization development researchers and consultants in North America to provide education and training to high level executives in major organizations.

As is typical of this type of high-level and high-powered conferences, senior staff members were asked by the conference dean to prepare brief presentations that relate specifically to the dynamic events emerging from the intensive interpersonal experiences of the conference. At this particular Ojai conference, two of the senior staff members—Joe Luft and Harrington Ingram—were asked to prepare a presentation on interpersonal relationships that would be presented the following morning at a general session. Joe and Harrington sat down with a flip chart page and magic marker in hand to prepare this presentation. On a now-fabled tree stump they sketched out a four-cell model of interpersonal relationships that focused on the degree to which two people are open with one another in sharing their thoughts and feelings (especially about one another).

Luft and Ingram presented their model the following morning and then went their own separate ways without much fanfare. One year later, Luft was attending another human relations conference and was approached by a conference participant who wanted Joe to make a presentation on the “Joe-Harry Window”. Luft had no idea what this person was talking about and remained bewildered until the participant began describing the four-cell model that Joe had presented a year earlier with Ingram. Apparently, several of the Ojai participants apparently found the four-cell model to be insightful and began using this model in their own training. An informal authorship was assigned to the model (soon to be shortened to “Johari”). Since it had four cells and looked like a window, the model became known as the “Johari Window.”

Joe Luft went on to prepare a summary description of the Johari Window in a publication prepared by UCLA and wrote the first of several books on the Johari Window—a book with an unpretentious name (*On Human Interaction*). He began his book (Luft, 1969, p. 6/footnote) by noting that:

. . . it is fairly well known now that Johari does not refer to the southern end of the Malay Peninsula. That’s Johore. Johari is pronounced as if it were Joe and Harry, which is where the term comes from. However, Harry Ingram of the University of California, Los Angeles, should not be held responsible for releasing this neologism. Dr. Ingram and I developed the model during a summer laboratory session in 1955, and the model was published in the *Proceedings of the Western Training Laboratory in Group Development* for that year by the UCLA Extension Office.

Joe Luft wrote about the Johari Window in several additional books. The model, however, continues to be

used in its original manner—as a maverick or orphan model without any author and often without any consistent or coherent underlying conceptual base. The present set of essays has been written in an effort to establish and anchor the authorship of the original book—Joe Luft and Harrington Ingram—and to establish (and hopefully enrich) the conceptual base of the Johari Window.

## **Misconceptions**

Despite the popularity of the Johari Window, it is often dismissed by experts in interpersonal relationships, group dynamics and interpersonal communications. This dismissal is usually based on one of two misconceptions about the Johari Window. First, the Johari Window model is often considered out-of-date. After all, it was developed during the 1950s. Second (and even more often) the Johari Window is dismissed because it is too simple. I will briefly consider each of these misconceptions.

First, this model is not out of date. There are currently more than 2,000 Johari Window citations on the Internet—including the name of a rock group—so it is hard to conclude that this model is no longer in use or that the world of interpersonal relationships has somehow passed it by. There have been many new concepts and studies of interpersonal relationships that have been conducted since Joe Luft first formulated the Johari Window with Harrington Ingram; however, this doesn't make the Window a relic. It seems that human interactions have not changed in any fundamental way over the past fifty years. To the extent that the Johari Window is “dated” because it does not incorporate more recent findings, then the present set of essays should help to fill the gap. I am bringing to the Johari Window several recent models of interpersonal relationships, as well as integrating some of the research about human interactions and several of the interesting variations that have been offered with regarding the Johari Window since Luft and Ingram presented their original formulation.

With regard to the second misconceptions, there is a deceptive simplicity in Joe Luft's presentation of the Johari Window. It initially seems to be an over-simplified description of ways in which people chose to disclose themselves to other people and offer feedback to other people. Its seeming simplicity harkens back to a time when mature adults hoped for more trust and honesty in their relationships with other people through participating in sensitivity training programs and encounter groups. Yet, like any systemic model, the Johari Window becomes complex and subtle very fast as one begins to spin out many variations regarding ways in which two (or more) people can encounter one another.

Lest anyone still think that the Johari Window is too simple, the New Johari Window offers even more complexity than that offered originally by Luft and Ingram. The new window is “double paneled” with eight rather than four panes interacting with one another. It is hard to discount the New Johari Window as “simplistic.” It is much more likely to be criticized as “too elaborate” or even “unnecessarily convoluted.” If these criticisms are valid, then they should be laid at my feet rather than at the feet of Joe Luft, who always was a genius at making an idea seem simple and readily accessible when, in fact, it was quite subtle and complex.

All of this is to say that the Johari Window is neither out-of-date nor simplistic. The New Johari Window is intended to assure that the original model (and hopefully the new model) receives a fair hearing as a multi-tiered, multi-dimensional representation of human interactions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I hope that my colleague, friend and mentor, Joe Luft, would have liked what he reads here, for this set of essays is intended more than anything else to honor Joe Luft and his exceptional insights about the human condition.

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#### Reference

Luft, Joseph. *Of Human Interaction*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1969..