

The New Johari Window II: Two Models of Interpersonal Awareness

Joe Luft's original model contained four quadrants that represented the total person in relation to other persons. These four quadrants also define the essential features of the New Johari Window. The following definitions and principles are substantially the same as those presented in both *On Human Interaction* (1969) and his second major book, *Group Processes* (1984, pp. 10-11):

Quadrant 1 (Q1): the open quadrant, refers to behavior, feelings, and motivation known to self and to others. [often called "public self"]

Quadrant 2 (Q2): the blind quadrant, refers to behavior, feelings, and motivation known to others but not to self. [often called "unaware self"]

Quadrant 3 (Q3): the hidden quadrant, refers to behavior, feelings, and motivation known to self but not to others. [often called the "private self"]

Quadrant 4 (Q4): the unknown quadrant, refers to behavior, feelings, and motivation known neither to self nor to others. [often called the "potential self"]

Following are the primary principles of change offered by Luft with regard to the Original Johari Model. They also informed the New Johari Window:

1. A change in any one quadrant will affect all other quadrants.
2. It takes energy to hide, deny, or be blind to behavior that 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 1 is larger, and one or more of the other quadrants has grown smaller.

6. Working with others is facilitated by a large enough area of free activity. It means more of the resources and skills of the persons involved can be applied to the task at hand.
7. The smaller the first quadrant, the poorer the communication.
8. There is universal curiosity about the unknown area, but this is held in check by custom, social training, and diverse fears.
9. Sensitivity means appreciating the covert aspects of behavior, in quadrants 2, 3, and 4, and respecting the desire of others to keep them so.
10. Learning about group processes, as they are being experienced, helps to increase awareness (enlarging quadrant 1) 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 life of the group are confronted.

The Original Johari Window

The original Johari awareness model was applied to questions of human interaction. These questions were brought into focus with the aid of the four quadrants. The model was then used by Joe Luft to engage in speculation. For example, what happens in a group when someone gives an unsolicited interpretation of another's blind area? What happens to Quad 1 or Quad 3? The original model helped to clarify changes in awareness and openness as well as changes in tension, defensiveness, and hostility. Certain universal questions were addressed through the model – questions about the effect of unknowns on human interaction, trust, levels of miscommunication, ancient and primitive leadership patterns, and appropriate disclosure of self.

**Figure One:
The Original Johari Window**

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| | KNOWN TO SELF | UNKNOWN TO SELF |
| KNOWN TO OTHERS | QUADRANT ONE OPEN SELF PUBLIC SELF | QUADRANT TWO BLIND SELF UNAWARE SELF |
| UNKNOWN TO OTHERS | QUADRANT THREE HIDDEN SELF PRIVATE SELF | QUADRANT FOUR UNKNOWN SELF POTENTIAL SELF |

The original book was written with two purposes in mind. These same two purposes hold true for the new version of the Johari model of human interaction. The first purpose is to develop basic issues about human interaction with the aid of this model. The second purpose is to illuminate interpersonal learning and the process of learning-to-learn through use of the model.

The meaning of observation and of feedback, for example, is considered in order to show how learning about behavior can be conceptualized. Attention is also given to some of the special qualities and problems in interpersonal and group dynamics training programs – often called T-groups, human relations laboratory groups, sensitivity groups, or encounter groups. The

two purposes often overlap since questions of learning and important issues such as trust and leadership closely interrelate.

The schemes used in both the original and the new Johari models lack neatness and strict compartmentalization. In the original book, Luft cautioned that: “the reader will not find a clear-cut beginning, middle, and end, but will discover portions of the text that stimulate personal observations, speculations, and discoveries about the many ways in which people interact.” I would suggest that this same caution applies to the present series of essays and the New Johari Window. As Luft suggested:

If nothing else, we hope that our readers will never again be bored in listening in on conversations or attending a reception or other social affair. Human interactions are inherently fascinating – provided an insightful and provocative frame of reference is brought to the observation of and participation in these interactions.

To this modest hope I can only add a “ditto” and an expression of great appreciation for the fascination that Joe Luft brought to human interactions through his initial Johari Window.

The New Johari Window

While the original Johari Window offers wisdom regarding human relationships that still holds true, I have modified and expanded on this Window in several ways, suggesting that wisdom contained in the original model can be expanded through additional analysis. First, I have sought to create an expanded model that is responsive to the profound shifts that are now occurring in 21st Century societies. Along with many other social analysts, I suggested in a book I wrote more than two decades ago that we are moving into what might best be called a postmodern society (Bergquist, 1993). This shift from a modern to postmodern social system holds many implications for interpersonal relationships. In the new Johari Window model, I spin out some of these implications.

Second, there are important analyses and studies regarding interpersonal relationships that were offered or conducted after Luft presented his initial model. I believe it is important to incorporate these findings in the Johari model, if this model is to be truly integrative.

Third, I believe that the Johari Window will be more fully integrative if it also incorporates other major interpersonal models that fully compliment the ideas presented by Joe Luft. Some of these alternative interpersonal models can be traced back to sources from early in the 20th Century, while other models have been offered since the initial introduction of the Johari Window. I will first provide a summary description of the new model and then offer a brief exposition regarding the rationale for these expansions of the model. A more extended exposition will be presented throughout the remaining essays.

A Dynamic Model

The Johari Window has always been a highly dynamic model – though it has often been portrayed and used as a static model by those with only a superficial understanding of Luft’s analysis. As a static model, the Johari Window defines the relatively openness of individual people in their interpersonal relationships, irrespective of the specific relationship being taken into account.

The Window was always meant to be highly contextual. The processes of disclosure and feedback that determine degree of openness are highly dependent on the nature of the relationship being established and the interplaying and reciprocating behavior that commences in this relationship. Even within a specific relationship, processes of disclosure and feedback will vary from moment to moment, depending on the setting and the specific issues being addressed.

The New Johari Window is even more dynamic and contextual, for it offers even more finely differentiated panes in Quadrant 2 and 3. Each of these panes can, in turn, portray subtly nuanced interplay amongst actors in an interpersonal drama. The key element in this subtle

interplay, however, remains the same and consistent – this key element is trust. I begin, therefore, with a visit to the domain of trust and suggest that even this seemingly straightforward dimension of interpersonal relationships is, in fact, rather complex.

Three Forms of Trust

Some linguists (notably Benjamin Whorf, 1973) believe that you can tell quite a bit about a culture by noting areas in which there is very elaborate and detailed labeling and areas in which labeling is sparse. The many names for snow among the Inuit (Eskimos) and the many words for love among the Greeks are often offered as evidence of this so-called Whorfian hypothesis. Inuit seem to be very interested in snow, hence have many different names to describe different kinds of snow (much as avid snow skiers have multiple labels, such as “corn snow” and “powder snow”). The Greeks similarly seem to be very interested in love and its many different forms (ranging from “eros” to “agape”).

I would like to contribute yet another example. This concerns the word “trust.” For some reason, there is only one word in English for the many different forms that “trust” takes in our society. Does this suggest that “trust” isn’t really valued in our society? At the very least, it means that the concept of “trust” can be very confusing to us. I believe that trust is a critical component in any dynamic model of human interaction; hence, I take the distinctions between different forms of trust quite seriously. Trust is the engine of interpersonal relationships. It provides both direction and energy for sustained human interaction. It provides direction by setting the goals for virtually any relationship. It provides energy by providing each member of the relationship with motivation to continue engaging in the relationship.

Most of us hope that our interactions with other people will increase levels of trust – even when we are trying to manipulate another person or are at war with this other person. If nothing else, we want them to be clear about our intentions – even if this means that we intend to do them harm. We rarely want other people to leave us with less clarity regarding our relationship or with less interest in engaging us in future relationships.

When trust is considered in relationship to the Johari Window, its direction and energy become even more important and apparent. We will see throughout this series of essays that the dynamics of both disclosure and feedback are profoundly influenced by levels of individual and reciprocal trust. It is important, therefore, that we be clear about what the term “trust” means to us. In doing so, I will propose that this term actually has three different (though related) meanings and that “trust” has a distinctive impact on interpersonal relationships depending on which of these meanings is being engaged.

Specifically, I propose that the first meaning associated with the English word, “trust,” concerns *competence*. The second meaning concerns *intentions*. The third meaning concerns *perspective*. I will illustrate each of these three meanings by turning to an exercise – called the “trust fall” – that was very popular in the human growth workshops of the 1960s and was revived during the 1990s as a component of “Ropes” (Survival) courses.

One participant is asked to stand in front of the group or (in a “Ropes” program) to step up on a platform, walk to the edge, and turn her back (as if preparing for a back dive into a pool of water). In the old 60s program, someone was asked to stand behind the trust-faller. In the case of the Ropes program, several people are asked to stand in front of the platform. The trust-faller then, as the name implies, falls back into the arms of the person or persons assigned to catch her. This exercise obviously involves the willingness of a person to trust that they will be caught by another person or group of people.

This is a wonderful exercise that often generates rich personal insights; however, the insights it generates can be a bit confusing because of the three different meanings of the word “trust.” On the one hand, the trust-faller can be falling off the platform into the arms of three people who love her and have every good intention to look after her welfare. Unfortunately, they are the trust-fallers’ three young daughters who are not big enough or strong enough to catch her. The trust-faller would probably injury all three of them and herself if she fell backwards off the platform into their arms. The trust-faller trusts the intentions of her daughters, but not their competence.

Conversely, the trust-faller could be falling into the arms of three very strong and competent men. Unfortunately, these three catchers are all men who she rudely dropped during the courtship phase of her life. All three were emotionally wounded by her rejection and have vowed to take vengeance. They would love to see her fall backwards onto the ground, breaking her back (“that heartless #&%@*#&@!!!!”). She trusts their competence but not their intentions.

There is a third alternative. The three gentlemen standing in front of the platform all come from a foreign country and are interested in studying the unusual behaviors of those who participate in “Ropes” programs. They look with great interest as the trust-faller plunges backwards onto the ground, with no one catching her. They help her up and wonder if she will attempt to perform this unusual, self-injuring ritual again. These foreign gentlemen are certainly capable of catching her and they wish her great success in her endeavor. They simply have a different perspective and do not understand that they are supposed to catch her.

Our trust-faller will appropriately refuse to fall backwards until these foreign gentlemen have been fully informed about the nature and purpose of the “trust fall.” Before she falls backwards, our trust-faller must trust the intentions, competencies and perspectives of anyone who is supposed to catch her. If she misses any of these three definitions or criteria of trust, she

will end up with physical (and psychological) injury to herself and perhaps other participants in the trust-fall process.

I will repeatedly return to these three definitions of trust while describing the New Johari Window. One needs to know about the interpersonal intentions, competencies and perspectives of the person with which one is interacting when deciding whether or not, and how to, expand or contract any of the panes of the Johari Window.

Opaque Rather Than Blind

I will be using the word “opaque” rather than “blind” to label the second quadrant (Q2). While Joe Luft occasionally used the word “opaque” to describe Quad Two, I would like to use this word instead of the word “blind” in most instances. The Q2 dynamics of opaque knowledge of self is an important theme that appears throughout this series of essays and is a key concept in the new Johari Window. I suggest that we are usually not “blind” to how other people see us; rather, this knowledge about other people’s perceptions of us is opaque – we can see the faint outline or shadow but not the clear detail.

At some level we are very much aware of the potential – if not real – image that other people hold about us. That is why we get “defensive” when we are about to receive feedback. That’s why we brace ourselves. At some level, we believe that other people really do know us and know our secrets, our mistakes and our weaknesses (they also know our strengths, but this is rarely acknowledged). There is an old saying that goes something like this: “Which one of us if told that ‘everything has been revealed; you have been found out’ wouldn’t pack his/her bag and catch the first train out of town!”

At some level, all is known by us. Furthermore, every salient feature about us is repeated again and again in our psyche. There is no way we can hide it, not can we be totally oblivious to the fact that other people see these features in us every day – in our behavior, in our expressed feelings, and in the decisions that we make about interpersonal relationships. All of

this relates, fundamentally, to a concept offered many years ago by Sigmund Freud – signal anxiety. While this concept was replaced years later by Freud in his own evolving concepts of anxiety, the original notion about signal anxiety remains relevant today – especially as we analyze the dynamics of Q2.

Signal Anxiety

In his own analysis, Freud (1929/1959) begins by noting that anxiety is not the only unpleasant feeling that we experience – there is “tension, pain or mourning, grief.” The unique characteristic of anxiety is that it “is the reproduction of some experience which contained the necessary conditions for an increase of excitation and a discharge along particular paths, and that from this circumstance the unpleasure of anxiety received its specific character.” Thus, according to Freud, “anxiety arose originally as a reaction to a state of danger and it is reproduced whenever a state of that kind recurs.” Freud concludes that: “we cannot find that anxiety has any function other than that of being a signal for the avoidance of a danger-situation.”

Freud’s signal anxiety seemed strange and mysterious at the time. After all, how can we know what we can’t know? Today it is less strange. Chaos theory and, in particular, the phenomenon called “fractals” offer an explanation. Patterns keep repeating themselves at all levels of a system. We have a hint of what is opaque (and frightening) because we see this same pattern repeated at a more conscious – and benign – level. We get a little fear from dropping when we ride a roller coaster. This ride gives us a sense of the big fright that would come from falling to our death. We get a taste of terror when we attend a scary movie. This movie briefly samples the profound feelings that would accompany real life fear associated with the experience of being attacked by a murderous villain or alien monster.

All of this is offered to serve notice that I will be retrieving the old Freudian concept of signal anxiety in this series of essays. Clearly, we often become anxious in our relationships with other people – especially if the processes of disclosure and feedback are involved. This anxiety

in turn serves as a signal that something threatening lies below the surface of this relationship—or something unpredictable or threatening is associated with the context in which this relationship is taking place. In essence, our “psyche” splashes our face (or guts) with painful anxiety to inform us that this relationship or context is to be avoided.

We also might use the metaphor of “inoculation” to describe the signaling properties of anxiety. Ernest Becker (1971, p. 43) uses this metaphor when discussing Freud’s notions about anxiety:

Freud understood this process of the ego taking over anxiety as a sort of “vaccination” of the total organism. As the central perceptual sphere learns what the organism gets anxious about, it uses an awareness of this anxiousness in small doses, to regulate behavior. The growing identity “I” must feel comfortable in its world and the only way it can do this is experimentally to make the anxieties of its world its own.

Signal anxiety doesn’t really hurt us (unless it is long-lasting), but it does wake us up. It lets us know that we need to be vigilant and careful not to proceed further toward the threatening interpersonal relationship or context—or any thoughts, feelings or memories associated with this relationship or context. The paradox is that at some level we are fully aware of the thing that threatens us—otherwise we wouldn’t splash ourselves with the noxious anxiety.

We must know or even experience what is threatening to us in order to decide that we don’t want to know it or experience it. In this series of essays, I will discuss our opaque knowledge of other’s people’s perceptions of us, suggesting that we often know (opaquely) more than we want to know and that this knowledge powerfully influences the ways in which we avoid disclosing to other people and avoid or misinterpret feedback from other people.

Becker (1971, p. 55) goes even further by suggesting that this vaccinating signal anxiety becomes the basis for creation of distinctive defensive structures that each of us creates as we mature in a world that is often threatening or at least unpredictable:

[T]he ego grows by putting anxiety under its control, as it finds out what anxiety is for the organism, and then choose to avoid it by building defenses that handle it. . . . [T]he ego “vaccinates itself” with small doses of anxiety; and the “antibodies” that the organism builds up by means of this “vaccination” become its defenses.”

There is a more positive side. The “inoculation” from signal anxiety is preventative in nature, like the inoculations we receive for various physical diseases. We gain insights about ourselves even when there is not a major “meltdown” in our relationship with another person. We learn about ourselves and other people even when we are impacting another person in a manner that evokes only small nonverbal reactions rather than a wholesale blurting out of angry (or effusively positive) feedback.

We are “primed” to learn more about ourselves as a result of this opaque knowledge. Initially, we “see through a glass darkly,” but with “faith” (interpersonal trust), we will soon see clearly. Our opaque knowledge of other people’s perceptions of us prepares us for, helps us to interpret and enables us to make use of feedback from other people. We learn about ourselves – our strengths as well as our weaknesses – from this opaque knowledge and gain interpersonal wisdom even without direct and open feedback from other people.

Attribution Error

There is another aspect operating in the acquisition and use of opaque knowledge about self. This third aspect has to do with attribution. We are often only opaquely aware of our consistent patterns of behavior, choosing instead to attribute our behavior to the specific setting(s) in which we find ourselves. We believe that our behavior is primarily a function of

context and external forces – while we tend to walk around with a different theory of attribution regarding other people.

This alternative theory is based on an assumption that other people operate as they do because of their ingrained personality or “character.” As the attribution researchers, Jones and Nisbett (1972, p. 80) suggest:

. . . the actor’s perceptions of the causes of his behavior are at variance with those held by outside observers. The actor’s view of his behavior emphasizes the role of environmental conditions at the moment of action. The observer’s view emphasizes the causal role of stable dispositional properties of the actor. We wish to argue that there is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions.

We are rarely completely “blind.” At some level we “know” what we don’t “know.” Our knowledge is opaque, in part, because we view ourselves from a state or contextual point of view, whereas others tend to view us from a trait or personality perspective. We think we can change (it’s a matter of situation), whereas others don’t think we can change (it’s a matter of personality). This attribution error is not entirely off-based. There is just enough error to enable us to discount how other people see us – but just enough truth in the attribution to force us (at least sometimes) to listen to what other people say about our consistent behavior patterns (our “personality”).

Protected Rather than Hidden Self

I also tinker a bit with Luft’s labeling and description of the third quadrant. We are never really “hidden” in Q3. We are “leaking” all over the place – nonverbal communication, what we do and don’t say. We make assumptions and try to “hide” these assumptions; however, through our actions we tend to provoke thoughts and actions in other people that confirm these assumptions. These assumptions become “self-fulfilling prophecies.”

We can't talk about any of this with other people and are even unlikely to reflect on these dynamics in our own minds. We are left, as a result, with what Chris Argyris and Don Schön identify as "self-sealed assumptions". Given this leakage and these dynamics regarding self-fulfilling prophecies and self-sealed assumptions, I am inclined to call this quadrant the "protected self" rather than the "hidden self."

Given these modifications, allow me to present a first version of the New Johari Window – this model being two-dimensional like Luft and Ingram's original Window.

**Figure Two:
The New Johari Window [Two-Dimensional]**

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | KNOWN TO SELF | UNKNOWN TO SELF |
| KNOWN TO OTHERS | QUADRANT ONE OPEN SELF | QUADRANT TWO OPAQUE SELF |
| UNKNOWN TO OTHERS | QUADRANT THREE PROTECTED SELF | QUADRANT FOUR UNKNOWN SELF |

Multi-Dimensional Model

Hopefully, this two-dimensional model adds something to the Original Window; however, I wish to move beyond these two dimensions in the New Johari Window by introducing the dimension of internal world and external world. This enables us to move to a new metaphor regarding the New Johari Window: a *storm window* that comes complete with double panes. A

storm window helps to separate the outside world from the inside. It offers a layer of air – a cushion or buffer – between the variable conditions of the external world (extreme temperatures, rain and snow, daylight and dark) and the less variable conditions of the internal world (thermostatically controlled temperature, no precipitation, controlled lighting).

The New Johari Window suggests that we similarly set up conditions in our interpersonal relationships so that we are buffered from the external realities of this interpersonal life. People with whom we interact profoundly influence us, yet, we are not simply tossed like a leaf by the exigencies of these relationships. We have the capacity to interpret, distort, and even ignore the messages being delivered intentionally and unintentionally by another person. We also deliver messages to other people that come from both the window we present to the outside world and the window we create inside ourselves. Thus, the New Johari Window has double panes representing both the internal and external worlds in which we live.

To the extent that the gap between these two panes is small, there is substantial congruence between our internal and external worlds. To the extent that the gap is large, there is an incongruent state and the dynamics involved in coping with this gap can be profound. In many instances, as we shall see throughout these essays, the gap is large because trust has been violated in earlier relationships – there have been violent external, interpersonal storms. We have therefore built a strong storm window to keep out the turbulent, unpredictable and potentially harmful relational storms. We protect ourselves with the gap in the two panes of all four quadrants, just as we install storm windows with large thermal gaps when choosing to live in climates that are turbulent, unpredictable and potentially harmful.

**Figure Three:
The New Johari Window: Three-Dimensional**

External Panes

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| | Known to Self | Unknown to Self |
| Known to Others | Q1:E Inadvertent Self | Q2:E Ignorant Self |
| Unknown to Others | Q3: E Obtuse Self | Q4:E Discounted Self |

Internal Panes

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| | Known to Self | Unknown to Self |
| Known to Others | Q1:I Presentational Self | Q2:I Blocked Self |
| Unknown to Others | Q3:I Withheld Self | Q4:I Unexplored Self |

The double-paned Johari model suggests several powerful implications regarding personal assumptions about internal and external sources of control--particularly with regard to interpersonal perceptions and relationships. This interpersonal model also suggests that there are many ways to view interpersonal relationships. We can focus on the external panes or look deeply into the dynamics of the interior life of each participant in an interpersonal relationship. The double-paned window also points to the importance of interpersonal needs and to ways in which we express and fulfill these needs. Interpersonal needs are not simply shown to the external world. We don't simply ask or demand that these needs be met. Rather, these needs may remain "at home" (the internal panes) and may rarely or very subtly be made known outside our home (the external panes) to specific people in specific settings.

I will briefly address, in turn, each of these themes in the following essays, looking first at the matter of internal and external locus of control. I will turn subsequently to three different perspectives on interpersonal relationships, and, finally, to the matter of interpersonal needs and how and when they are expressed. Each of these themes will receive much more extensive attention throughout this series of essays, as we begin to systematically address each of the four quadrants of the New Johari Window.

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