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The Johari Window

By the
MT
Team

Using Self-Discovery and Communication to Build Trust

(87) ★★★★★

Have you ever been part of a team where everyone was completely open with one another?

If so, then the chances are that you worked extremely effectively together. You knew your co-workers very well, and there was a solid foundation of trust between you. As a result of this positive working environment, you probably accomplished a great deal with this group.

Most of us realize that teams rely on trust in order to function productively, but how do you go about building that trust?

The Johari Window is a model that helps you do this, and it helps you learn important things about yourself, and so develop as a human being.

In this article we'll look at how the Johari Window works, and we'll see how you can use it with your team to improve communication and trust.

About the Model

The Johari Window is a communication model that is used to improve understanding between individuals. The word "Johari" is taken from the names of Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, who developed the model in 1955.

There are two key ideas behind the tool:

1. That you can build trust with others by disclosing information about yourself.

2. That, with the help of feedback from others, you can learn about yourself and come to terms with personal issues.

By explaining the idea of the Johari Window, you can help team members to understand the value of self-disclosure, and you can encourage them to give, and accept, constructive feedback.

Done sensitively, this can help people build better, more trusting relationships with one another, solve issues, and work more effectively as a team.

Explaining the Johari Window

The Johari Window is shown as a four-quadrant grid, which you can see in the diagram below.
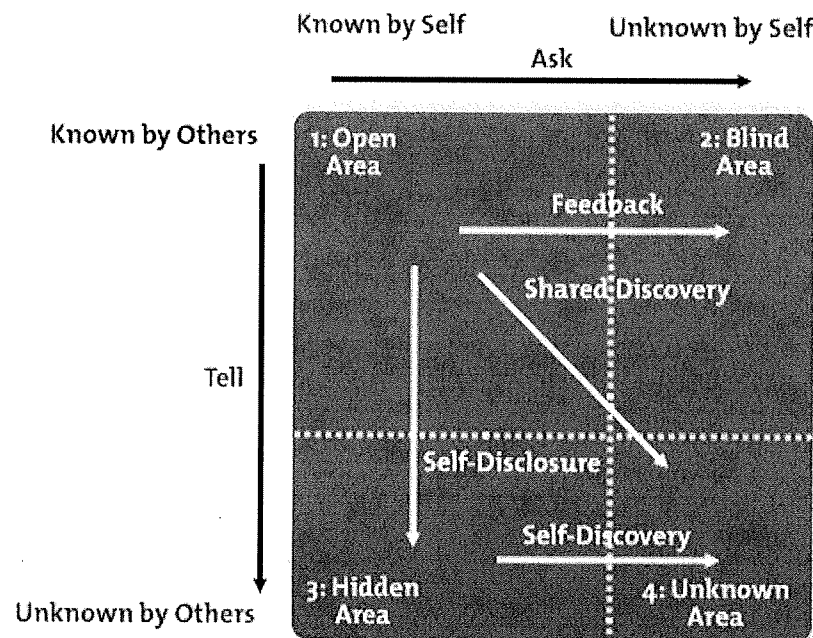
From "Of Human Interaction," by Joseph Luft. © 1969. Reproduced with permission from McGraw-Hill Education.

The four quadrants are:

1. Open Area (Quadrant 1)

This quadrant represents the things that you know about yourself, and the things that others know about you. This includes your behavior, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and "public" history.

2. Blind Area (Quadrant 2)

This quadrant represents things about you that you aren't aware of, but that are known by others.

This can include simple information that you do not know, or it can involve deep issues (for example, feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, unworthiness, or rejection), which are often difficult for individuals to face directly, and yet can be seen by others.

3. Hidden Area (Quadrant 3)

This quadrant represents things that you know about yourself, but that others don't know.

4. Unknown Area (Quadrant 4)

This last quadrant represents things that are unknown by you, and are unknown by others.

The End Goal

The ultimate goal of the Johari Window is to enlarge the Open Area, without disclosing information that is too personal. The Open Area is the most important quadrant, as, generally, the more your people know about each other, the more productive, cooperative, and effective they'll be when working together.

The process of enlarging the Open Area quadrant is called "self-disclosure," and it's a give-and-take process that takes place between yourself and the people that you're interacting with.

As you share information, your Open Area expands vertically and your Hidden Area gets smaller. As people on your team **provide feedback** ◉ to you about what they know or see about you, your Open Area expands horizontally, and your Blind Area gets smaller.

Done well, the process of give and take, sharing, and open communication builds trust within the group.

At first glance, the Johari Window may look like a complex tool, but it's actually very easy to understand with just a little effort. As such, it provides a visual reference that people can use to look at their own character, and it illustrates the importance of sharing, being open, and accepting feedback from others.

People who have a large Open Area are usually very easy to talk to, they communicate honestly and openly with others, and they get along well with a group. People who have a very small Open Area are difficult to talk to, they seem closed off and uncommunicative, and they often don't work well with others, because they're not trusted.

Other people might have a large Blind Area, with many issues that they haven't identified or dealt with yet. However, others can see these issues clearly. These people might have low self-esteem, or they may even have anger issues when working with others.

Using the Tool

The process of enlarging your Open Area involves self-disclosure. Put simply, the more you (sensibly) open up and disclose your thoughts, feelings, dreams, and goals, the more you're going to **build trust** ⊛ with your team.

Tip:

Try to avoid "over-sharing" in your self-disclosure. Disclosing small, harmless items builds trust, however, avoid disclosing personal information which could damage people's respect for you.

Another important aspect of enlarging your Open Area is accepting feedback from others on your team. This feedback helps you learn things about yourself that others can see, but that you can't. This is important for personal growth.

Tip:

Be careful in the way you **give feedback** ⊛. Some cultures have a very open and accepting approach to feedback, but others don't.

You can cause incredible offense if you offer personal feedback to someone who's not used to it, so be sensitive, and start gradually.

If someone is interested in learning more about you, they can reciprocate by disclosing information in their hidden quadrant.

For example, imagine that you tell someone on your team that you're interested in going to business school to get your MBA. She responds by telling you that she enrolled just a few months ago, and then she tells you all about the MBA program that she's involved with. You reciprocate by opening up about your career goals, and you discuss how an MBA will help you achieve them.

As a person's level of confidence and self-esteem rises, it becomes easier to invite others to comment on their blind spots. Obviously, **active** ◎ and **empathic listening** ◎ skills are useful in this exercise.

The Johari Window in a Team Context

Keep in mind that established team members will have larger open areas than new team members. New team members start with smaller open areas, because they haven't yet had the opportunity to share much information about themselves.

Feedback

The importance of feedback in this process can't be overstated. It's only by receiving feedback from others that your Blind Area will be reduced, and your Open Area will be expanded.

Group members should strive to help other team members to expand their Open Area by offering constructive feedback. The size of the Open Area can also be expanded vertically downwards into the Hidden Area, as people disclose information and feelings to the group.

Also, group members can help a person expand their Open Area into the Hidden Area by asking personal questions. Managers and team leaders play a key role here, by teaching team members how to give **constructive feedback** ◎ to individuals about their own Blind Areas.

Tip:

The Johari Window is often used with a list of 56 adjectives such as "kind," "clever," or "idealistic." These adjectives can be used with the group to describe the person that everyone is focused on. You can see a list of adjectives to use **here**.

Key Points

Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham developed the Johari Window in 1955. The tool is a useful visual representation of a person's character, and is represented with a four-quadrant grid.

The goal of the Johari Window is to demonstrate the importance of open communication, and to explain its effect on group trust. The model also teaches you the importance of self-disclosure, and shows how group feedback can help you grow, both personally and professionally.

Your Open Area is expanded vertically with self-disclosure, and horizontally with feedback from others on your team. By encouraging healthy self-disclosure and sensitive feedback, you can build a stronger and more effective team.

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Johari Window model

known by self   ask ➡   **unknown by self**

known by others

1 open/free area	feedback solicitation ➡ **blind area** **2**

tell ⬇

self-disclosure/exposure ⬇

shared discov-ery ↘

others' observation ⬇

self-discovery ➡

unknown by others

3 hidden area   **unknown area** **4**