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The Johari Window

Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham developed the Johari (Joe and Harry) window model for a program in group process. It has become famous in the human resource development field as a communication and feedback model to depict how we give and receive information about ourselves and others.

The model depicts a four-paned window. Looking at the four panes in terms of columns and rows, the two columns represent the self; the first contains “things I know about myself,” and the second contains “things I do not know about myself.” The rows represent the group one is in or others, the first row being “things they know about me,” and the second being “things they do not know about me.”

The size of (i.e., the information contained in) each of these panes varies as the level of mutual trust and exchange of feedback varies in the group in which the person is interacting. The Arena contains information that I know about myself and about which the group knows. It is an area characterized by free and open exchange of information between myself and others. The Arena increases in size as the level of individual-individual or individual-group trust and communication increases.

The Blind Spot is the information known about me by others, but which I do not know about myself. This information may be in the form of body language, habits or mannerisms, tone of voice, style, etc. Our Blind Spots are the things we are not aware that we are communicating to others. It frequently is surprising to learn about these things and to learn how many of them there are. For persons with large Blind Spots, learning to solicit feedback can be quite useful and enlightening.

The Facade is the area of information that I know about myself but which, for some reason, I withhold from others. This information may include feelings, opinions, prejudices, and past history. People have various motives for keeping secrets: some may fear rejection or ridicule; others may withhold information in order to manipulate others.

The Unknown contains things that neither I nor others know about me. Some of this material may be so far below the surface that I may never become aware of it. Other material, however, may be below the surface of awareness to both me and others but can be made public through an exchange of feedback. This information may include childhood memories, unrealized potential, and so on. Because knowing oneself completely is extremely unlikely, the Unknown in the Johari Window model is extended so that part of it always will remain unknown. In Freudian terms, this is the “unconscious.”

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Training Implications of the Model

The boundaries of the panes are flexible, that is, one can enlarge or reduce a column or row by increasing or decreasing the amount of feedback one gives and receives. Much of the purpose of training with this model is to reduce the Blind Spot, to develop a receptive attitude, and to encourage others in the group to give me feedback. One needs to learn to solicit feedback from others in such a way that they will feel comfortable in giving it. The more this is accomplished, the more the vertical line will move to the right.

Another goal of training is to reduce the Facade (move the horizontal line down). One can do this by providing information to others about one's reactions to what is going on in the group and inside oneself.

Ratios of Panes

When one reduces one's Blind Spot and Facade through the process of giving and soliciting feedback, one increases the size of the Arena. In general, this is desirable. However, one may give more feedback than one asks for or ask for more than one gives. This imbalance can affect one's relationships with others. The size and shape of the Arena, therefore, also is a function of the ratio of giving versus soliciting feedback. The following illustrations depict ideal and extreme ratios in terms of giving and soliciting feedback.

Ideal Window. In any significant relationship, a window with a large Arena and small Blind Spot, Facade, and Unknown is best. A person of this description would be relatively easy for others to interact with and understand, making for better and more honest relationships. In general, the size of the Arena increases as the level of trust in the group increases and norms are developed that facilitate giving and receiving feedback.

Interviewer. This depicts a person who is comfortable asking questions of others (soliciting feedback) but does not like to reveal personal information or provide feedback—hence, the large Facade and small Arena. Such individuals are comfortable with a high group-participation level, but not when the group's attention is focused on themselves. Because such persons do not commit themselves in the group, it is hard to know where they stand on issues. Others eventually may react to this type of person with irritation, distrust, and withholding.

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Bull-in-a-China-Shop. A person who has a large Blind Spot is depicted in illustration three. The opposite of the interviewer, people with this profile give a great deal of feedback but solicit very little. Their participation style is to comment on what is going on in the group, including group issues and the behavior of other members. Unfortunately, such persons either tend to be poor listeners (thus, “insensitive” to the impact of their behavior on others or what others are trying to tell them) or they may respond to feedback in such a way (e.g., with anger, tears, by threatening to leave) that others are reluctant to continue to give it. This type may be perceived by others as insensitive, opinionated, and critical. Because they are unaware of the impact of their behavior on others, such individuals do not know what behaviors to change.

Turtle. This depicts an individual with a large Unknown. This type of person tends to be the silent member or “observer,” neither giving nor soliciting feedback. It is difficult for group members to know where this person stands in the group or where they stand with him or her. When confronted about such lack of participation, this person may respond with, “I learn more by listening.” Actually, however, such persons learn very little about themselves because they do not provide the group with any data to which it can react. It takes a considerable amount of energy to maintain an Arena this small in a group situation because of the pressure that group norms exert against this kind of behavior. The energy needed to maintain a closed system is not available for self-exploration and personal growth.

Conclusion

The goal of learning to give and solicit feedback is to move information from the Blind Spot and the Facade into the Arena. Through this process, new information also can move from the Unknown into the Arena. This frequently is called “insight” or “inspiration.” Using the Johari Window model helps people to provide a framework in which people can practice giving and receiving feedback. The overall goal is that they also learn to be more accepting of themselves and others.