

THE JOHARI WINDOW



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Johan has been in the IT, marketing and corporate game for 20 years. He has featured in CEO Magazine, SA Millionaire, Brainstorm and ITWeb, has been a speaker for companies such as Capestorm, Vox Telecoms and BDO, and he has contributed to a range of business publications. He currently consults on business development and marketing to a range of corporate and SME clients.

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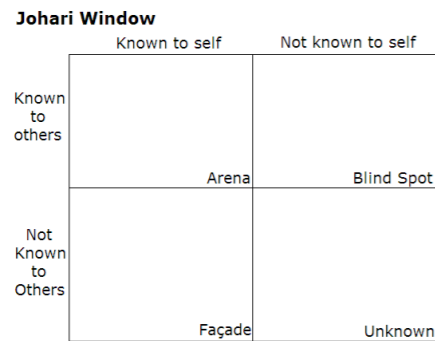
During business development and executive coaching workshops, I am frequently asked what tools could be used to help managers better understand interpersonal communications and relationships, in order to raise self-awareness and personal development in their sales and marketing teams.

Good leadership nowadays is more about an emphasis on behavioural soft skills such as co-operation, inter-group development and empathy, which in turn leads to greater productivity, better group dynamics and indirectly increased sales.

A very useful cognitive psychological tool to achieve this is something called the Johari Window which was developed in 1955 by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in the United States. It can also be used to improve a group's relationship with another group or individuals in a group.

The model may also be viewed as a disclosure or feedback model and represents information

such as skills, views, attitudes, motivation, feelings and experience within or about a person – in relation to their group. The Johari Window is effectively a quadrant or window with four regions as shown by the following diagram:



The four areas of the Johari Window are:

1) Arena (open space)

This area is what the person knows about themselves (behaviour, knowledge, attitude,

views) and likewise what others know about them as well.

The primary objective is always to develop this area to the mutual benefit of both the individual and the group. This shared information leads to better trust and productivity within teams and greatly increases communication, as the group is free from conflict, mistrust and confusion.

By actively soliciting feedback from the group, the individual can expand this area to the right of the quadrant and, in the process, gain a better self-awareness. Within an established team, this area would be larger with individual team members than for instance a new team, where each member knows little about each other.

The individual can grow the open area downwards, into the existing hidden quadrant, by disclosing more information about themselves to the rest of the group or by the group actively asking questions of the individual.

Leaders have a duty and responsibility to foster a culture of honesty, information sharing and openness within their organisations and teams to assist with this process.

It is well known in the business community that top companies generally have a culture of open positive communication, thereby encouraging the positive development of the open area or open self for everyone.

2) Blind spot/area

This area represents what others know about the person, but what is unknown to the individual. This area is not a productive quadrant within any group and the aim is always to reduce this as a priority. Some view this area as self-ignorance or self-delusion. Individuals who are so called 'thick-skinned' generally have a large blind area.

As mentioned earlier, by soliciting feedback from the group, the individual can reduce this area and expand his open area at the same time. (Thereby increasing self-awareness).

Managers should promote a culture of self-disclosure and non-judgemental feedback in order to assist self- and group awareness in this regard.

3) Hidden area (façade)

This area represents what the individual knows about him/herself, but keeps hidden from the others.

In a number of cases, this area would represent very private information about an individual that they would obviously not want to share within a group or team. This could be hidden agendas, fears, insecurities or secrets and may have no bearing on the work environment. Typically though, if this kind of information is work related, it has direct bearing on the productivity within the team and is therefore better off being moved to the open area or quadrant of the Johari Window. This can be achieved only by the individual voluntarily disclosing information by telling others in their group how they feel. In turn, this would enable better team effectiveness, higher levels of trust and greater all-round productivity. Remember, by reducing

the hidden quadrant, poor communication, mistrust and the potential for confusion is reduced within a department or group.

As I have mentioned before, the company's culture will have a major influence on people's preparedness to disclose more information about themselves. People tend to feel vulnerable and do not want to be judged by disclosing sensitive information about themselves.

A word of caution though: people should be always disclose information at a depth and speed with which they personally feel comfortable with and always at their own discretion. As with the solicited feedback from the blind quadrant, some individuals are more hardy or resilient than others and managers or leaders should take care to avoid emotional upset. Remember, some people are more able or willing to disclose information to the group than others are.

4) Unknown area

This is by far the most interesting quadrant of the Johari Window. The space represents information, behaviour, attitudes, aptitudes and feelings that neither the individual nor the group knows about him/herself.

One would normally find a large unknown area with less-experienced or younger people in general, or with people with a lack of self-belief. Some relevant examples of unknown areas could include:

- A fear or aversion that the individual is not aware of.
- An ability within the person that is untried, untested or under-estimated.
- A potential natural ability within the individual that is unknown.
- Subconscious feelings or conditioned behaviour from childhood.
- An unknown illness.

When this knowledge is uncovered, the question begs to which quadrant it is shifted: the open, hidden or blind area? This would depend largely on who discovered the information and what their intent is. They would either share it with the group through disclosure and move it to the

open area, or keep it in the hidden quadrant. If it was a group discovery about the person, then the group could either choose to keep it in the blind area or, through the process of feedback, decide to move it for the benefit of the entire team into the open area.

There are various processes that can assist to reveal information in the unknown quadrant. Group observation or self-discovery would obviously be two of them, but counselling or mutual discovery may also be beneficial. In the case of counselling, the individual would of course have the discretion of sharing this new information with the rest of the group (and making it open or keeping it hidden).

One of the biggest advantages of exploring this quadrant, which is of benefit to the organisation or team, is the ability to uncover hidden aptitudes or skills. This is not as sensitive an issue as uncovering unknown feelings.

Once again, leaders should encourage self-discovery and constructive observation and feedback among team members. Most people work well short of their true potential and a company with a culture of self-discovery can benefit only by allowing people to fulfil their true potential within the organisation.

This process of soliciting feedback or providing disclosure relates very closely to self-actualisation as Maslow described in his Hierarchy of Needs.

In conclusion:

A management, sales or marketing team, which has a good mutual understanding of itself, will always prove to be far more effective in a corporate environment. Although the Johari Window is a potent tool for the modern business leader, it is vital that the theory is explained properly to people in the organisation in order to empower them through this process of self-awareness and self-actualisation to the benefit of the entire company.

Only then will this ensure that the principles of Johari are incorporated into their thinking process and behaviour going forward.