

Johari Window

	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known to Others	1 OPEN	2 BLIND
Not Known to Others	3 HIDDEN	4 UNKNOWN

The Johari Window, named after the first names of its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, is one of the most useful models describing the process of human interaction. A four paned "window," as illustrated above, divides personal awareness into four different types, as represented by its four quadrants: open, hidden, blind, and unknown. The lines dividing the four panes are like window shades, which can move as an interaction progresses.

In this model, each person is represented by their own window. Let's describe mine:

1. The "open" quadrant represents things that both I know about myself, and that you know about me. For example, I know my name, and so do you. You may know some of my interests. The knowledge that the window represents, can include not only factual information, but my feelings, motives, behaviors, wants, needs and desires... indeed, any information describing who I am. When I first meet a new person, the size of the opening of this first quadrant is not very large, since there has been little time to exchange information. As the process of getting to know one another continues, the window shades move down or to the right, placing more information into the open window, as described below.

2. The "blind" quadrant represents things that you know about me, but that I am unaware of. So, for example, we could be eating at a restaurant, and I may have unknowingly gotten some food on my face. This information is in my blind quadrant because you can see it, but I cannot. If you now tell me that I have something on my face, then the window shade moves to the right, enlarging the open quadrant's area. Now, I may also have blind spots with respect to many other much more complex things. For example, perhaps in our ongoing conversation, you may notice that eye contact seems to be lacking. You may not say anything, since you may not want to embarrass me, or you may draw your own inferences that perhaps I am being insincere. Then the problem is, how can I get this information out in the open, since it may be affecting the level of trust that is developing between us? How can I learn more about myself?

Unfortunately, there is no readily available answer. I may notice a slight hesitation on your part, and perhaps this may lead to a question. But who knows if I will pick this up, or if your answer will be on the mark.

3. The "hidden" quadrant represents things that I know about myself, that you do not know. So for example, I have not told you, nor mentioned what one of my favorite ice cream flavors is. This information is in my "hidden" quadrant. As soon as I tell you that I love "Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia" flavored ice cream, I am effectively pulling the window shade down, moving the information in my hidden quadrant and enlarging the open quadrant's area. Again, there are vast amounts of information, virtually my whole life's story, that has yet to be revealed to you. As we get to know and trust each other, I will then feel more comfortable disclosing more intimate details about myself. This process is called: "Self-disclosure."

4. The "unknown" quadrant represents things that neither I know about myself, nor you know about me. For example, I may disclose a dream that I had, and as we both attempt to understand its significance, a new awareness may emerge, known to neither of us before the conversation took place. Being placed in new situations often reveal new information not previously known to self or others. A situation can trigger new awareness and personal growth. The process of moving previously unknown information into the open quadrant, thus enlarging its area, has been likened to Maslow's concept of self-actualization.

Much, much more has been written on the Johari window model of human interaction. The process of enlarging the open quadrant is called self-disclosure, a give and take process between me and the people I interact with. Typically, as I share something about myself (moving information from my hidden quadrant into the open) and if the other party is interested in getting to know me, they will reciprocate, by similarly disclosing information in their hidden quadrant. Thus, an interaction between two parties can be modeled dynamically as two active Johari windows. For example, you may respond to my disclosure that I like "Cherry Garcia" by letting me know what your favorite ice cream is, or where a new ice cream shop is being built, kinds of information in your hidden quadrant.

We believe disclosure to be healthy, at least that's the impression one gets after reading Freud. However, self-disclosure of personal secrets has its dangers. We are often better off not telling secrets regarding our sexual behavior, mental health problems or large-scale failures. "If you give people information about yourself, you give them power over you," she says. Monica Lewinsky's disclosure to Linda Tripp and the ensuing scandal that enveloped President Clinton is a case in point. Be forewarned that most secrets get passed along to at least two more parties. People also misjudge how others respond to secrets. Sometimes you get negative feedback. Now, if you must tell your secret to someone, chose that person very carefully.

As one's level of confidence and self-esteem develops, one may actively invite others to comment on one's blind spots. A teacher may seek feedback from students on the quality of a particular lecture, with the desire of improving the presentation. Active listening skills are helpful in this endeavor. On the other hand, we all have defenses, protecting the parts of ourselves that we feel vulnerable. Remember, the blind quadrant contains behavior, feelings and motivations not accessible to the person, but which others can see. Feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, impotence, unworthiness, rejection, guilt, dependency, ambivalence for loved ones, needs to control and manipulate, are all difficult to face, and yet can be seen by others. To forcibly reveal what another wishes not to see, is "psychological rape," and can be traumatic. Fortunately, nature has provided us with a variety of defense mechanisms to cope with such events, such as denial, ignoring, rationalizing, etc.

The Johari window, essentially being a model for communication, can also reveal difficulties in this area. In Johari terms, two people attempt to communicate via the open quadrants. On the simplest level, difficulties may arise due to a lack of clarity in the interaction, such as poor grammar or choice of words, unorganized thoughts, faulty logic etc. This induces the receiver to criticize you, the sender, by revealing something that was in your blind quadrant. Then, if the feedback works, you correct it immediately, or perhaps on a more long term approach take a course in reading and writing. On a deeper level, you may be in a group meeting, and while you secretly sympathize with the minority viewpoint, you voted with the majority. However, blind to you, you actually may be communicating this information via body language, in conflict with your verbal message. On an even deeper level, you in an interaction with others, may always put on a smiling, happy face, hiding all negative feelings. By withholding negative feelings, you may be signaling to your friends to withhold also, and keep their distance. Thus, your communication style may seem bland or distant.

References:

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