

# SUPER MODELS

In a series of articles examining learning models, **Dr Mike Clayton** looks at Luft and Ingham's Johari Window – seeing into ourselves

**C**ommunication can be a tough challenge – especially when the basis of communication, a set of shared reference points, is limited. Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham set out in 1955 to examine how to extend this area of shared understanding.

The model they produced is one of the most powerful in our toolkit: the *Johari Window*. Luft named it from a contraction of their first names, Joseph and Harry (Harrington): JoHari. The middle word capitalisation may have anticipated recent typographical fashion by 40 years, but it was soon dropped.

The window has four panes, derived from the knowledge, or lack of it, that we have about ourselves and that others have about us.

The *Open* area, sometimes called 'the Arena', is what we know about ourselves and the people around us also know about us. This is shared knowledge and is the basis of effective communication. Luft and Ingham worked from the assumption that the more of our life that is in this quadrant, the better our relationships will be.

The *Hidden* area is the information we keep from the world. In the context of my relationship with you, it is what I have not revealed to you about myself. This quadrant has also been called 'façade' or the 'avoided area'. It

may be a trivial fact, like my enjoyment of movies, or something deeply personal.

There is also an area, called the *Blind* area or 'Blind spot', in which the people around us are able to recognise traits, habits or characteristics to which we ourselves are oblivious. These can be both strengths and failings.

Finally, there is the *Unknown* zone. Here are the things that neither we nor other people are aware of. Perhaps these things are repressed; perhaps they are simply un-expressed. Examples of the latter are latent capabilities – often our focus as coaches and trainers. But beware: the repressed components should be addressed with great care, and only by qualified therapists.

We can enhance our knowledge of ourselves by seeking feedback, to make use of the insights others have. We can also increase our awareness by a process of self discovery, to learn about the contents of our unknown area. A group discovery process can open up the Unknown area to both ourselves and the group. Likewise, we can enlarge our *Open* area by disclosing information about ourselves to other people, removing it from the *Hidden* area.

These exercises can be done among peers or within teams, working with the knowledge they have about themselves and about each other. There is also a set of 55 adjectives that users can call upon to describe themselves, and for observers to describe them.

The range of uses of this model is immense. It is a starting point for a deep discussion about communication, relationships and self-awareness. Therefore, it is no surprise that this is a highly popular model among trainers, facilitators and coaches. ■

#### References:

1. Luft, J. and Ingham, H. (1955) "The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness", *Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development*, UCLA
2. Joseph Luft (1984) *Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics*, Mayfield

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