

Can Assessments Change Behavior?

BY TRACY REZNIK



Assessments are everywhere. In your quarterly strategic planning session.
In your annual performance review. Even in your monthly magazine subscriptions.

For the most part, assessments are used to raise self-awareness. This article discusses how assessments can be used, not only to learn more about yourself, but also how to act on the feedback to become more effective in work and life.

Albert Einstein once said, “Doing something over and over expecting a different result is a sign of insanity.” How many times have you wanted a different outcome from an interaction with a colleague, spouse, or family member? Until you are willing to change how you interact with that person, you cannot change the outcome. So, how do you know what to change? Use your assessment feedback!

Assessments serve three important purposes:

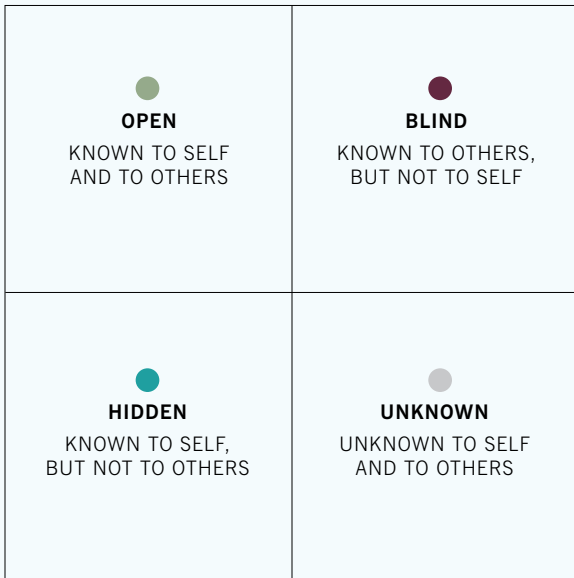
1. Open your eyes to behaviors you may be exhibiting of which you are not fully conscious
2. Give you the language to start conversations with others so you can improve your working or personal relationships
3. Serve as a baseline for your own growth and development

The original concept of the Johari Window, created by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955, was focused on helping people better understand their relationships with others. Participants of the Johari Window exercise were given 56 characteristics and asked to select the five or six that best described their personality. Others close to the participant were also asked to select descriptive characteristics. The results were plotted onto the Johari Window grid to illustrate similar and disparate character selections.

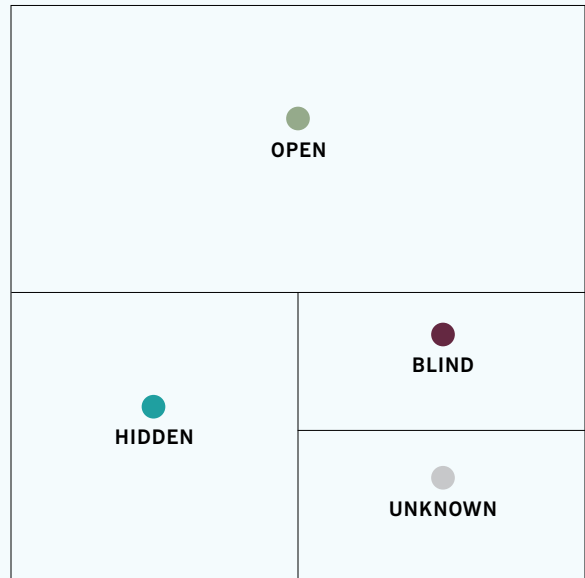
By going beyond just those 56 characteristics, and plotting your own self-assessment feedback into the Johari Window, you are suddenly able to see and understand those behaviors and traits about yourself that you perceive compared to how others see you. Assessments take all shapes and forms, but it is the understanding of the information in the assessment results that make them useful — the Johari Window is a framework that can help you do this. The most common format of assessments is self-report or 360-degree. Self-report instruments are exactly that: you are reporting the answers yourself. Then instruments can be either self-scored or administered, facilitated, and scored by someone who has been trained in a particular instrument. There are three self-report behavioral tools that are well-known and well-established for self-assessment and give insight into how one behaves: the DISC Profile, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the Birkman Method (see page 103 for descriptions). Taking these assessments multiple times usually yields the same results, making them very hard to ignore.

For a holistic picture, 360-degree assessments are the preferred method. You, your peers, direct reports, and managers all complete the same assessment about you. Once the scores are compiled, you can see how you rate yourself as compared to how the other groups rate you, based on the questions asked in the assessment. In this case, the Johari Window is a useful tool to continue conversations with the co-workers who gave you the direct feedback.

The Johari Window concept can help you understand how you perceive yourself compared to how you are perceived by others. Once the assessment is



JOHARI WINDOW - FIGURE 1



JOHARI WINDOW - FIGURE 2

completed, you can sort your feedback into the four categories of the Johari Window 2x2: Known to Self, Unknown to Self, Known to Others, Unknown to Others. This can be especially useful after 360-degree assessments to learn what aspects of your behavior are known to others, but could be unknown to you.

THE BLIND SPOT

The Blind Spot section of the Johari Window contains feedback from your peers, direct reports, and managers that is not consistent with your self-rating. In other words, these are perceptions others have of you, but you don't have of yourself. This acknowledgment can be a pleasant surprise in that it can be a confidence builder for you; e.g., "Wow, I didn't realize everyone saw me as an expert in Lean Six Sigma." Future actions can be to talk to your colleagues about how to get more involved in LSS activities and help others learn. On the other hand, if you thought you were an expert in LSS, but others do not, you can use this information to increase your functional knowledge in the area and further develop yourself, or spend a greater effort to share this knowledge with others.

THE OPEN AREA

The Open area in the Johari Window contains 360-degree assessment information that is consistent to all parties. Use this feedback to enhance your development plan, emphasizing your strengths and focusing on areas of growth. Because your colleagues

took time to complete your 360-degree assessment and give you valuable feedback, reviewing your development plan with them can be a good way to let them know you are serious about changing your behavior and improving your performance. Talk to them about how you plan to address the feedback you received via the assessment or suggest team building activities to help grow this area of the window with you and your colleagues. When there is little to no distrust or conflict, this area increases; effective communications and full cooperation are indicative of behaviors of those operating in this space. For highly performing teams, this is the area where you want to work and relate.

THE HIDDEN AREA

The Hidden area, or Facade, of the Johari Window can be a controversial area, in that it includes those behaviors and preferences you are hiding from others. Ask yourself, "Do I realize I am hiding this information? Why am I keeping these skills, competencies, characteristics, values, or motivations from others?" By being open and sharing this information, you can improve your working relationships with your colleagues.

THE UNKNOWN AREA

The Unknown area of the Johari Window highlights the areas that allow for continuous improvement. It contains information about your behaviors and

Statistically Valid and Reliable Self-Report Assessments

The DISC Profile is a self-assessment instrument most often used to improve teamwork, communication, and work productivity. The original theory was developed by Dr. William Marston in the 1920s. As a professor at Columbia University, he was curious how “normal” people behaved. Others took Dr. Marston’s theories and developed a statistically valid and reliable tool to measure human behavior. The letters of DISC relate to Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Compliance.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a self-assessment instrument used for much of the same purpose as the DISC Profile. It has been translated into more than 20 languages and is used by 89% of Fortune 100 companies to maximize individual and team effectiveness (source: www.cpp.com; MBTI publishing company). The MBTI is based on the work of Carl Jung, a Swiss psychologist in the 1920s. The statistically valid and reliable MBTI instrument measures 4 dimensions: how one gets his/her energy (extraversion-introversion), how one takes in information (sensing-intuition), how one makes decisions (thinking-feeling), and how one perceives the world (judging-perceiving).

The Birkman Method is a third type of self-assessment commonly used across Fortune 500 companies to increase individual self-awareness and improve interpersonal relationships. This tool provides a predictive summary of how individuals and groups (mostly co-workers and/or teams) approach communication, conflict, and decision-making. Its feedback includes a profile of your (or the team’s) motivational needs and reactions under stress.

preferences that are unknown to both yourself and others. By always reading, learning, and having the desire to further develop yourself, this quadrant can remain as small as possible.

In order to use the Johari Window for self-report assessment feedback, you **MUST** initiate conversations with your colleagues and peers; otherwise, there is no way to fill in the windows and understand how your self-perception matches others’ perception of you. Assess where the major feedback points in your profile fall to determine where to concentrate your behavior changes. Once you have the full understanding of how your behavior is perceived and affected by others, you can take strides to change your behavior to improve relations.

When you have a fuller understanding of yourself and you are open with your teammates, you will be far more effective both individually and as part of a team. After completing a series of assessments and talking about the feedback with your co-workers, your Johari Window may look more like Figure 2.

It’s the aha moments that make assessments so useful and the results hard to ignore. Whether it’s something you knew about yourself that you didn’t realize others perceived in the same way, or a new nugget about your own behavior, the feedback we learn from assessments is invaluable. These aha moments force us to take action, and we can start to act differently with this newfound knowledge. We become aware of how others respond to us in certain

situations, and we have the ability to make changes. Feedback from assessments also arms us with the information to have a constructive conversation about behavior and working relationships. This is especially useful if an entire team or department has taken the same assessment. The results provide a common language they can use to easily and openly discuss communication methods, leadership styles, and conflict approaches.

Once you learn something about yourself — or finally admit it — you are armed with the tools to make a behavioral difference. Assessment feedback opens your eyes to the “truth,” gives you a language to discuss behavior and perceptions of that behavior, and serves as a baseline for growth. In order to get the most out of your assessment results, consider using the Johari Window to analyze the feedback and start that valuable conversation with your coworkers to build a stronger team. Assessments are only as useful as the developmental action plans put in place to change your own behavior, which are only as useful as your understanding and interpretation of the assessment.

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