

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 11, 1984

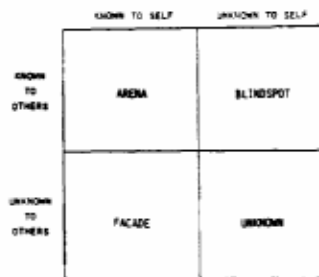
## THE ASSESSMENT OF FEEDBACK AND DISCLOSURE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS: AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

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Effective interpersonal relationships depend on a mutuality of attitudes and behaviors concerning both the basis for, and conduct of, the relationship. Implicit in this is that each party to the relationship possess a sufficient degree of self knowledge and a willingness to share information about emotions, concerns, values and attitudes with others in the relationship. These dimensions, "Known to Self" and "Known to Others," have been combined in a matrix known as the Johari Window (Luft and Ingham, 1955; Luft, 1969) to characterize the communication process through which individuals give and receive information about themselves (see Figure 1).

Newstrom and Rubenfeld (1983) provided an expansion of the basic Johari Window that explicitly recognized the interdependent roles played by both parties to a relationship in defining the quality and durability of that relationship. Their Feedback and Disclosure in Interpersonal Relationships Model provided for the evaluation of two sets of perceptions and their interactive effects. The first set explores the Individual's self perception and the Individual's perception of the other party to the relationship. A second set of perceptions explores the Other's self perception and the Other's perception of the Individual. These perceptual sets are represented in Figure 2.

FIGURE 1  
THE JOHARI WINDOW



### THE JOHARI WINDOW MODEL

The Johari Window is premised on an assumption that the potential for personal growth increases as the relative size of an Individual's Arena (the domain of information known to both the Individual and relevant Others) becomes greater. This occurs by disclosing useful data to others to reduce the size of the hidden (Facade) area. Additionally, this objective can be accomplished by receiving reactions and feedback from others, thereby diminishing the area unknown to self (Blindspot).

The Johari Window has been used extensively in a variety of training, self discovery, and communication situations (Newstrom, 1982; Bell and Keys, 1980; Lorey, 1979; Conyne, 1974; Johnson, 1972). Other authors have developed experiential exercises and tools to evaluate learning experiences (Crino and Rubenfeld, 1982; Esposito, 1978; Hanson, 1973; Holloman, 1973). In these applications, the Johari Window provided a framework to help Individuals assess their self knowledge and openness.

The primarily introspective focus of the Johari Window does not offer an opportunity to evaluate the impact that Others might have on the Individual's receptiveness to feedback or willingness to disclose personal information.

FIGURE 2

CROSS PERCEPTIONS IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS



Within each set of perceptions, Newstrom and Rubenfeld define four roles or processes which, when undertaken by each of the parties, would lead to greater openness and personal growth as well as a better quality relationship. The four processes involve the provision of feedback, solicitation of feedback, self disclosure, and the facilitation of self disclosure. This approach expands on the Johari Window by providing a set of behavioral processes to evaluate rather than asking for global assessments of "openness." The Feedback and Disclosure Model also provides an evaluative mechanism to explore why a relationship may or may not be sound. In this manner, this Model may contribute to both personal growth and improvement in the quality of interpersonal relationships.

### INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A WORK SETTING

The selection and training of new employees typically centers on technical competence, while interpersonal skills and relationships are left to fall into place "naturally." But as individuals begin jobs, they are thrust into situations where of necessity they are immediately involved in creating relationships with superiors and peers, and frequently with subordinates. Unfortunately, inadequately developed interpersonal skills may lead to strained relationships in the workplace. In turn, this may contribute to adjustment problems and interfere with the overall effectiveness of employees.

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It is preferable for individuals and organizations to be concerned with interpersonal skill development prior to the emergence of a crisis situation. Yet in the absence of such a catalyst, people are not likely to ponder the attributes of successful work relationships. This problem may be particularly acute for recent graduates and others with limited work experience. Both high school and college curricula typically are very limited in the areas of human behavior and interpersonal relations.

### THE CLASS EXERCISE

Experiential exercises have been shown to be useful in directing student interest toward topics in interpersonal relations. Capitalizing on this, the authors sought to create an exercise that would stimulate students to assess the relative importance of a number of mechanisms that may contribute to success in interpersonal relationships in a work setting. A questionnaire suitable for classroom administration was developed, in which students were asked to rate the importance of each of eight dimensions relevant to the formation and continuation of a future work relationship.

The dimensions specified were the four processes identified in the Feedback and Disclosure Model (provision of feedback, solicitation of feedback, self disclosure, and facilitation of self disclosure). Each dimension was described from the perspectives of both the Individual and the other party to the relationship. Students were requested to evaluate the importance of the eight dimensions three times, in the contexts of work relationships with superiors, subordinates, and peers. Seven point Likert-type rating scales were provided. The portion of the questionnaire dealing with the Individual's future relationships with a superior is shown in Figure 3. Appropriate instructions and definitions were provided for the other two contexts on subsequent pages of the questionnaire.

FIGURE 3

**DIMENSIONS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**  
**— YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SUPERIOR —**

Please rate each dimension according to its importance to the formation and continuation of a successful relationship in the work setting that you would have with your SUPERIOR (your boss, supervisor, or manager). Write the appropriate scale number on the line to the right of each dimension.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Unimportant      Very Important

MY SUPERIOR'S PROVISION OF FEEDBACK: My Superior provides me with his/her reactions to my behaviors, concerns, values, and attitudes. \_\_\_\_\_

MY SELF DISCLOSURE: I reveal to my superior how I feel about myself, and openly share my emotions, concerns, values, and attitudes with that person. \_\_\_\_\_

MY SUPERIOR'S SOLICITATION OF FEEDBACK FROM ME: My Superior actively encourages me to provide him/her with my reactions to his/her behaviors, concerns, values, and attitudes, and my Superior is receptive to my feedback. \_\_\_\_\_

MY SUPERIOR'S FACILITATION OF MY SELF DISCLOSURE: My Superior actively encourages me to reveal my feelings about myself, my emotions, concerns, values, and attitudes, and my Superior is receptive to these disclosures. \_\_\_\_\_

MY FACILITATION OF MY SUPERIOR'S SELF DISCLOSURE: I actively encourage my Superior to reveal his/her feelings, emotions, concerns, values, and attitudes, and I am receptive to these disclosures. \_\_\_\_\_

MY SOLICITATION OF FEEDBACK FROM MY SUPERIOR: I actively encourage my Superior to provide me with his/her reactions to my behaviors, concerns, values, and attitudes, and I am receptive to that feedback. \_\_\_\_\_

MY SUPERIOR'S SELF DISCLOSURE: My Superior reveals how he/she feels about him/herself, and openly shares his/her emotions, concerns, values and attitudes with me. \_\_\_\_\_

MY PROVISION OF FEEDBACK TO MY SUPERIOR: I provide my Superior with my reactions to his/her behaviors, concerns, values, and attitudes. \_\_\_\_\_

In one administration, thirty-six upper division business administration students were asked to complete the instrument during a regular class period. The resulting data are summarized in Table I. Findings included substantially

TABLE I  
 PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK AND  
 DISCLOSURE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

(A) Perceived Importance of Dimensions by Work Context<sup>a</sup>

DIMENSIONS	CONTEXT		
	Superior	Subordinates	Peers
1. My solicitation of feedback	5.00 <sup>b</sup>	5.25	5.17
2. My _____ provision of feedback	6.00	4.67	5.69
3. My _____ solicitation of feedback	5.22	4.72	5.25
4. My _____ provision of feedback to _____	4.11	5.64	5.25
5. My self disclosure	3.75	3.69	4.97
6. My _____ facilitation of my self disclosure	4.08	3.72	5.14
7. My _____ self disclosure	3.89	4.61	5.28
8. My _____ facilitation of my _____ self disclosure	3.92	5.33	5.02

<sup>a</sup>n=36  
<sup>b</sup>Average importance rating; scale ranged from 1(very unimportant) to 7(very important)

(B) Average Scores on "My" and "Your" Items

	Superior	Subordinates	Peers
My Behavior	4.19	5.00	5.10
Your Actions	4.79	4.43	5.34

(C) Average Scores on Feedback and Disclosure Items

	Superior	Subordinates	Peers
Feedback	5.08	5.07	5.34
Self Disclosure	3.91	4.34	5.10

different response patterns by individuals both within and across contexts. When aggregated, the data revealed that feedback was deemed more important than self disclosure in relationships with superiors and subordinates. Moreover, in relationships with superiors, respondents valued receiving feedback most highly, while in relationships with subordinates they valued giving feedback most highly. Respondents generally assigned lower importance to self disclosure, and in fact "My Self Disclosure" was the lowest rated item in each of the three contexts. Finally, respondents rated the four roles that actively perform to be most important in dealing with subordinates, while they evaluated the four roles of the other party to be most important in the respondents' relationships with superiors and peers.

Although not all of these observed differences are statistically significant, the fact that subjects perceive there to be relative differences in importance of these eight dimensions both within and between contexts, provides fertile ground for classroom explorations of the nature of interpersonal relationships.

### AREAS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Once the data from the exercise have been tabulated for the entire class, there are numerous areas for fruitful discussion. They include: observed differences across the eight dimensions; differences in scores between contexts (superior, peer, subordinate); differences between role-takers (me vs. other); differences between the four disclosure-oriented vs. the four feedback-

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oriented dimensions; a force-field analysis regarding potential behavior changes; exploration of how to operationalize each of the eight dimensions; and the development of personalized action strategies by each class member. Each of these will be briefly discussed, with references to the relevant data where appropriate.

1) ITEM DIFFERENCES. The class can be encouraged to examine the mean scores for each of the eight dimensions (within each context) to determine whether there appear to be substantial differences in the importance placed on them by the class. (If a computer or advanced calculator is available either in class or between two class periods, tests for statistical significance of the differences can be conducted.) For example, Table 1(A) shows that the means ranged from a low of 3.75 to a high of 6.00 for superiors, 3.69 to 5.64 for subordinates, and 4.97 to 5.69 for peers. Apparently, in this sample, some items in each case were viewed as more important than others. After identification of this fact, a useful question for exploration is "Why do you think some items (e.g., "My superior's provision of feedback") were rated so highly? The instructor may then integrate the answers with various course concepts, such as role modeling, cultural deference to authority, performance appraisal, followership/subordinancy, etc.

2) CONTEXT DIFFERENCES. A second issue for exploration is whether or not there are apparent differences in the class' assessment of the importance of the eight items across the three contexts studied. Visual examination of the differences in mean scores for similar items across the three columns (see Table 1(A)) reveals that there may be substantial variation in how students perceive the importance of most items (with the possible exception of "My solicitation of feedback from superior/subordinates/peers"). Students can be encouraged to speculate why "self disclosure" by a peer might be valued more than "self disclosure" by a superior, why they might value feedback from subordinates less than from a superior or peers, etc.

3) ROLE-TAKER CONTRASTS. The items can also be grouped (see Table 1(B)) according to whether they are actively performed by the respondent (items 1,4,5, and 8) or by the other party (items 2,3,6, and 7). This allows for examination of the question surrounding control -- whether my growth and awareness are best seen as a product of MY behavior or of YOUR actions. Although no strong trends are discerned in the present data set, individuals may find their own data telling a different story when they are directed to group the items IN this way. Relevant concepts here include power and control, assertiveness, and trust.

4) GROWTH STRATEGIES. A fourth direction in which to guide the discussion is toward the two major paths to interpersonal relations that are implicit factors dividing the eight dimensions. Table 1(C) presents a mean score for the four items (5,6,7 and 8) that comprise a disclosure-oriented factor, and another score for the other four (items 1,2,3, and 4) that comprise a feedback-oriented factor. Student attention should be directed toward the factor means to allow them to reach conclusions regarding the differential importance of each process. The data presented here indicate that feedback seems to be

a much-preferred path to the development of interpersonal relations, at least when the relationship involves superiors and subordinates. This raises a stimulating question for class discussion of the paradox involved: How can we expect substantial personal growth to take place when we tend to withhold disclosure, while placing high importance on feedback?

5) FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS. The four previous areas of discussion revolved around identifying which of the dimensions were believed to be most important to the formation and continuation of successful relationships in the work setting. Are these tactics commonly practiced? Student wisdom would probably cast doubt on the frequency of at least some of the eight behaviors studied. This creates an opportunity for breaking the class into small groups to examine some of the forces which constrain, and the forces which encourage, such behaviors. Different groups could be assigned the task of generating three probable forces in each direction for one of the (more important) behaviors within one of the three contexts, and then reporting their conclusions to the entire group. Sample rationales for lack of self disclosure might include perceptions of inferiority, fear of loss of face and ridicule, concern that the information (such as alcoholism) might damage one's career, etc.

6) TACTICS FOR OPERATIONALIZATION. The foregoing topics can be viewed as primarily intellectual or affective in their thrust, and therefore require a complementary emphasis on individual behaviors for a well-rounded experiential exercise. The final two ideas to be explained here attempt to set the stage for that balance. Specifically, students should be guided toward identifying concrete illustrations of how each of the eight dimensions would sound if practiced, so they would have the tools to use if they desired to make personal changes. They can be asked for sample statements and questions that would provide a "crutch," or vehicle to begin the implementation process. Sample stem items follow:

1. My solicitation of feedback - "How did I do on that task?" or "I would like your reaction to my attitudes on..."
2. My self-disclosure -- "I am highly concerned about " or, "One of the strongest values I hold dear is..."
3. My provision of feedback - "Your decision is inconsistent with the premise you stated earlier..." or, "Your attitudes toward the compensation system seem to be well thought out.
4. My facilitation of another's self-disclosure -- "Please tell me how you feel about.

If the instructor wishes, any of a variety of experiential exercises (e.g., see University Associates' annual series of "Structured Experiences" can be used to create face-to-face opportunities for practicing some of the growth- oriented skills discussed and illustrated previously.

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