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Dear Reader,

Do you suffer from boring meetings? Or a disengaged audience when you are making a presentation? In this issue we explore what lies at the foundation of un-engaging conversations and failed training sessions.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"My ignorance is most troubling when I wish I knew a little, enough at least so I could have a question to ask."

Uncle Wilbur

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Optimizing Learning

by Isabel Rimanoczy

In the 1950's, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham developed the Johari Window Model to describe the different levels of awareness of our selves to help us to gain insight into our interpersonal communications and our relationships with others. They outlined a model with four quadrants, or Panes in the Window, representing:

What I know about myself and what others know about me Open Pane	What I don't know about myself, but what others do know about me Blind Pane
What I know about me but others do not know Hidden or Façade Pane	What neither I nor others know about me Unknown Pane

This model has long since been used in coaching and development programs aimed at increasing one's self-awareness.

Inspired by this model Russell, Abdul-Ali, Friend & Lipsky^[1] created a similar model to describe knowledge around sustainability. The model maintains the four quadrants, to indicate

- Quadrant 1: What you don't know that you don't know
- Quadrant 2: What you know you don't know
- Quadrant 3: What you don't know you know
- Quadrant 4: What you know

I was intrigued by this new perspective and began to reflect on how it could be applied to all types of knowledge, not just to understanding sustainability.

I found this model can serve as a very interesting guide to understand both successful training efforts and those with shortcomings. Let's explore the quadrants.

Quadrant 1: What you don't know that you don't know

This is the area that teaching has been traditionally focused on, and is still the most widespread approach. It is based on two clear polarities: the expert who possesses some kind of knowledge, and the student who does not know.

The expert will select what the student should know and will impart the content matter talking about it, and sometimes using demonstrations, as in the case of teaching specific skills.

This is an approach to teaching that can also be found in non-educational settings, for example a meeting where participants take turns to present information, share findings, ideas or reports. In any of these situations the underlying assumptions are that the expert has some information that the audience certainly needs (without knowing it even exists), and, secondly, that the audience has absolutely no clue about the topic being presented.

Based on these assumptions, success will be defined by a transfer of information, with the audience becoming aware of something that was totally off their radar screen. At the end of the session they will know it, or at least they will know something about it, but still not enough.

Quadrant 2: What you know you don't know

In this quadrant the audience has some basic understanding of the scope of a topic, a broad overview that gives them a hint of its complexity. They are aware of what may be there, but are also aware of their ignorance.

Unfortunately, all too often traditional teaching addresses this lack of knowledge, mostly at the end of a lecture or a presentation, with a quick "Any questions?"

This question doesn't provide a safe place for a person to risk exhibiting ignorance in public, and mostly appeals to extraverts who feel comfortable taking the opportunity to speak up. However the teacher can, very simply, convert the opportunity into a rich learning experience and maximize the relevance of the expert / audience exchange. An effective process would be to ask everyone to take a moment and come up with one or two questions they have on the topic. By doing so the expert will learn the areas of interest for the audience and focus on what will be of best use for them.

When we discussed Quadrant 1 we said it is based on the assumption that the audience is in total ignorance of the topic. This is a judgment that should yet be tested whenever possible, unless there is absolute certainty that no one knows anything (rare thing!). How many meetings have you attended where your questions were not addressed or where you couldn't find the relevance for you? How many training sessions did you endure in similar conditions?

Quadrant 3: What you don't know you know

The first quadrant was based on the assumption that the audience doesn't know anything of what we have to share with them, and that it will be a big, welcome surprise.

Quadrant 2 was based on the assumption that people are aware of the dimensions of a topic, and are thus filled with curiosity and questions.

The third Quadrant represents our tacit knowledge—information that we have, but we don't know that we actually have it. It includes what we intuitively know but cannot express, or have not yet expressed, in words. Unfortunately most meetings and training sessions are unmindful of this quadrant. We are so proud of the knowledge or data we hold that we cannot wait to pour it down the throats of the audience! Teachers, trainers, sports coaches, mentors, counselors, professors and instructors, keynote presenters but also professional experts, leaders, parents and friends—we just love to lecture others on what we know!

How many conversations, training sessions and meetings have we actually attended, where we already knew most of what was being presented? Or maybe we can better identify it the other way around: Which were the occasions when we didn't feel bored or disconnected, when we instead felt engaged, excited, interested and energized?

Conversely, when we, as presenters or trainers, deliberately glean the knowledge that is already in the room, we can make the subsequent interactions really useful, timely and relevant to the audience. This not only rapidly surfaces the knowledge, but also makes our contribution a more valuable service to the audience. We do it by asking questions of the participants and creating a safe space where they can comfortably reflect and answer without losing face or risking credibility.

Quadrant 4: What you know

The 4th Quadrant represents the expertise and conscious knowledge in the room. This knowledge is mostly distributed in an irregular way among the audience, but constitutes a rich asset on which we can all capitalize. Communities of practice thrive on this quadrant and know how to take advantage of it, creating knowledge-sharing opportunities.

As a team leader, a presenter or an instructor, it is possible to bring out this knowledge capital simply by providing opportunities to share and exchange, which multiplies the expertise.

Summing up

We have explored the four quadrants of relationship to knowledge that is at play in every situation when we are sharing information, whether through a presentation, a lecture or an informal conversation.

If we can keep in mind these different aspects and are clear in what outcomes we want in each of them, we may be able to select the most effective approaches and processes to make it happen. And the audience will be the judge of our success.

AUDIENCE	GOAL	STRATEGY	PROCESS
Quadrant 1: The audience doesn't know they don't know	Create awareness	Provide data, information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear display • Attractive display of the information • Audiovisual • Consider different learning styles • Check understanding periodically
Quadrant 2: The audience does know that they don't know	Expand their understanding; follow their interest to achieve maximum relevance	Collect and answer their questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe space • Time to collect thoughts • Use written questions
Quadrant 3: The audience doesn't know that they know	Help make it conscious so	Bring out the wisdom in the room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions of the audience • Create a safe space

	they can articulate it		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give sufficient time to reflect and ask to write down thoughts • Return their own questions when appropriate
<p>Quadrant 4:</p> <p>The audience knows</p>	Use existing knowledge to multiply and to build on it	Create knowledge sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify expertise and experts • Create opportunities for sharing and exchange • Connect offers and requests



[1] Sustainable enterprise metrics and measurement systems. In: The Sustainable Enterprise Fieldbook (2008). The authors cite the source of J.S. Atherton (2003). Tools for thought: Knowing and not knowing. Retrieved from <http://www.doceo.co.uk/tools/knowning.htm>

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If you want more triggers for reflection, visit <http://isabelrimanoczy.blogspot.com>



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