

The Mediator's Mirror: How the Johari Window Expands Understanding and Builds Agreement

Constantin-Adi GAVRILĂ, Christian-Radu CHEREJI

Abstract: This paper examines the Johari Window model as a framework for enhancing self-awareness, communication, and understanding in mediation. Developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (1955), the model divides awareness into four quadrants—Open, Blind, Hidden, and Unknown—each representing different dimensions of how people perceive themselves and others. The study applies this model across all phases of the mediation process: in preparation, it helps mediators map shared and concealed information; in exploration and problem-solving, it facilitates disclosure and feedback to shift from positional bargaining to interest-based negotiation; and in the agreement and evaluation phases, it guides the creation of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) agreements and supports reflection on outcomes and relationships.

The paper also considers the ethical, cultural, and power-related challenges of using the Johari Window, highlighting the importance of confidentiality and voluntary disclosure. At the same time, it underscores the model's value in strengthening mediator self-awareness, reducing bias, and promoting ongoing professional learning. Overall, the Johari Window demonstrates why mediation can work where conventional negotiation fails: it turns the process into one of guided awareness, allowing empathy, openness, and genuine understanding to emerge. By helping parties see what is hidden or misunderstood—both in themselves and in each other—mediation creates the conditions for deeper insight and more durable, integrative solutions when negotiation alone cannot achieve them.

Keywords: Johari Window, mediation, conflict resolution, self-awareness, communication, interest-based negotiation, ethical mediation practice.

Constantin-Adi GAVRILĂ

Mediator, CEO of ADR Center Romania

E-mail: cagavrla@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-2948-7927

Christian-Radu CHEREJI

Professor of Conflict Studies, FSPAC, BBU

E-mail: chereji@fspac.ro

ORCID: 0000-0002-3963-0646

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Introduction

This paper provides an in-depth exploration of the Johari Window model, a psychological tool designed to enhance self-awareness and mutual understanding, specifically within the context of mediation processes. Originally developed by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, the model has been widely applied across fields that rely on communication, trust, and interpersonal insight. In mediation, it serves as both a diagnostic and facilitative framework, helping mediators and parties alike to navigate the complex terrain of perceptions, emotions, and hidden motivations.

The Johari Window divides awareness into four quadrants - Open, Blind, Hidden, and Unknown - each representing different configurations of what is known or unknown to oneself and others (Newstrom & Rubenfeld, 1983). By systematically applying this model, mediators can gain profound insights into parties' perceptions, unspoken agendas, and emotional states, thereby fostering more effective communication and collaborative problem-solving (Ngcobo, 2023). Its utility extends across all stages of the mediation process: from the preparatory phase, where it aids in initial assessments, through exploration and problem-solving, where it helps uncover underlying interests and relational dynamics, and finally to the formulation of durable agreements that reflect a comprehensive and sustainable resolution (Moore & Kemp, 1988).

As a conceptual framework, the Johari Window enables mediators to manage the unpredictability of interpersonal dynamics and identify potential blockages that may arise during the resolution process (Seu, 2021). Self-awareness, cultivated through this model, becomes essential for both mediators and parties, allowing them to establish healthy boundaries, explore biases, and develop the reflective capacity necessary for critical thinking and balanced decision-making in conflict resolution (South, 2006). Recognizing that each individual brings distinct personalities, values, and belief systems shaped by personal and familial experiences is crucial for mediators aiming to facilitate authentic dialogue (Warren, 2002). Such awareness moves the discussion beyond surface-level disputes, allowing mediators to address the deeper cognitive roles and communication patterns that often underpin conflict (Guerra & Elliott, 1996).

By illuminating these intricate psychological and relational layers, the Johari Window provides a structured approach for mediators to encourage introspection and foster inter-party understanding, leading to more robust and mutually satisfactory resolutions (Blair & Desplaces, 2018). Its relevance in mediation extends beyond improving communication; it serves as a framework for identifying latent issues, unpacking the emotional context of disputes, and promoting genuine reconciliation. Specifically, the model assists mediators in distinguishing between information known to oneself and others, known to others but not to oneself, known to oneself but not to others, and unknown to both, thus offering a systematic approach to conflict analysis.

This process of categorization empowers mediators to guide parties strategically toward greater self-disclosure and empathetic listening, unearthing previously unacknowledged

aspects of the dispute (Kneip, 2010). Through this, a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors and interpersonal dynamics emerges, enabling all parties to reconstruct the conflict more accurately (Lau, 2022). The Johari Window thus helps mediators transcend superficial disagreements and address the psychological and emotional foundations that often sustain conflict (Alam, 2024).

In practical terms, the model supports mediators in managing the emotional landscape of mediation—where intense emotions can easily derail progress—by promoting positive engagement and mutual understanding (Ngcobo, 2023). It also helps mediators recognize how parties perceive both themselves and others, an awareness crucial for transforming defensive or hostile behavior into constructive interaction (Fiester & Stites, 2023). At the same time, it encourages mediators to cultivate awareness of their own emotional and cognitive states, fostering the clarity and presence indispensable for transformative mediation practice (Benítez-Schaefer, 2014).

This comprehensive insight allows mediators to identify perceptual distortions and communication barriers, laying the groundwork for interventions that promote genuine dialogue and collaboration. By mapping what is known and unknown within each party's perspective, mediators can deliberately expand the "Open" area, enhancing transparency, reducing misunderstandings, and building the trust necessary for navigating complex conflict dynamics. This analytical approach is equally valuable in identifying and addressing power imbalances, as the Johari Window reveals how parties perceive their own and others' influence in the dispute. Understanding these dynamics enables mediators to facilitate more equitable conversations and empower less dominant voices (Riera-Adrover, 2020).

Furthermore, the model assists in identifying and articulating the underlying interests of each party, beyond their stated positions, thereby enabling the discovery of mutually beneficial solutions that might otherwise remain obscured (Mujtaba & Garner, 2024). It also illuminates the emotional and psychological complexities shaping the conflict, allowing mediators to address these dimensions and achieve more sustainable outcomes (Kelly & Kaminskienė, 2016). This deeper awareness supports mediators in designing interventions that are not only effective in resolving disputes but also capable of strengthening relationships. Ultimately, the Johari Window offers a robust methodology for dissecting the multifaceted layers of human conflict, enabling mediators to facilitate understanding, rebuild trust, and guide parties toward meaningful and lasting resolution.

The Johari Window Model

Developed by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955, the Johari Window is a cognitive psychological tool designed to enhance self-awareness and mutual understanding among individuals within a group (Verkian, 2007). The model presents a four-quadrant matrix that captures different aspects of how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others (see Figure 1). Each quadrant, or "pane," offers a distinctive view

of one's personality traits, emotions, motivations, and intentions, categorized by whether they are known or unknown to the self and known or unknown to others. These four quadrants—the Open Area (or Arena), the Blind Spot, the Hidden Area (or Façade), and the Unknown Area—together form a framework that reveals the dynamics of self-perception and interpersonal awareness, providing valuable insights into communication challenges and relational development.

		Known to me	Unknown to me
Known to other(s)	Known to me	Our Open Area (or Arena)	My Blind Spot (or the other Party's Hidden Area, Power or Façade)
	Unknown to me	My Hidden Area (or My Power; or My Façade) (the Other Party's Blind Spot)	Our Unknown Area

Figure 1. The Johari Window Model

Origins and Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations of the Johari Window draw heavily from social psychology, particularly from theories of self-disclosure and feedback, which emphasize their central roles in promoting interpersonal growth and reducing relational ambiguity (Newstrom & Rubenfeld, 1983). It serves as both a conceptual and visual framework for understanding how individuals reveal themselves and how they are, in turn, perceived by others. By mapping these processes, the model helps improve communication and conflict resolution within groups. Moreover, by categorizing personal and interpersonal information into four interrelated regions, the Johari Window facilitates deeper insight into behavioral dynamics and offers a practical approach for analyzing interactions in a variety of contexts, including negotiation and mediation.

The Four Panes: Open, Blind, Hidden, and Unknown

Each of the four panes—Open, Blind, Hidden, and Unknown—represents a distinct intersection between what is known to the self and what is known to others, becoming a tool of self-awareness and communication within conflict resolution (Zucker, 2012).

The **Open Area**, often called the “Arena,” includes information that both the individual and others are aware of—behaviors, attitudes, intentions, and facts that are openly expressed and mutually recognized. In mediation, this pane represents shared understanding and common ground, forming the foundation upon which trust and cooperation are built (Golubeva, 2023; Nik et al., 2021). Expanding this area is therefore a central objective,

as greater openness and transparency promote collaboration and constructive dialogue (Stonehouse, 2015).

Further, in mediation practice, the Arena is frequently outlined during the initial joint meeting, where the mediator clarifies what information is shared and understood by all sides. When mediation briefs are exchanged, their “open” sections typically contain content from the Arena, often facts, arguments, or even pieces of evidence framed to justify each party’s standpoint. Occasionally, a party may authorize the mediator to share certain documents with all participants, explicitly widening the Open Area. In other cases, one party may request that the mediator obtain specific documents from the other side as a condition for engaging in mediation, demonstrating how control over what enters the Arena can shape both trust and willingness to proceed.

Throughout the process, mediators routinely test the boundaries of the Open Area by asking questions such as, “*Do you know if the other party is aware of this?*” or “*Has your partner been told about your intention to leave the partnership and use mediation to negotiate a peaceful separation?*” These inquiries guide parties in distinguishing what is already shared from what remains hidden, continually widening the Arena so that negotiations can proceed on a foundation of clarity and mutual understanding.

The **Blind Spot** contains information known to others but not to the individual, such as unrecognized habits, mannerisms, or perceptions that shape how others experience them (Ramani et al., 2017). Within a mediation process, these blind spots can contribute to misunderstandings or entrenched conflict positions without the individual’s awareness (London et al., 2022). Mediators play a crucial role here by using feedback techniques and reflective summarization to gently surface these blind spots, fostering insight and reframing entrenched narratives (Masaviru, 2016).

The most important lesson parties can draw from the Blind Spot quadrant is that we should never assume we possess all the information, even if we have been “living the conflict” for weeks, months, or years. Skilled negotiators understand this intuitively: information gathering is essential, and they employ a range of strategies—from relationship-building “carrots” to assertive or fear-based “sticks”—to elicit what they need. In mediation, however, the dynamic is different.

The mediator’s primary role is to build trust with each party, learning how they perceive risk, what uncertainties concern them, and what questions they hope to have answered, essentially, what information they are seeking to obtain from the other side. When mediators notice that parties are eager to explore certain topics or have specific questions for the other party, productive prompts include: “*Why would this be useful for you?*” or “*If, hypothetically, the other party shared this information, what might you be prepared to offer in return that aligns with their interests?*”

These inquiries help transform blind-spot-driven assumptions into clearer understanding and more strategic, constructive engagement, moving parties closer to shared insight and, ultimately, to agreement.

The **Hidden Area**, also known as the “Façade,” consists of information an individual is aware of but chooses to withhold from others—private feelings, fears, vulnerabilities, strengths, or strategic considerations that influence their stance but remain unspoken. In mediation, this hidden information often includes anything that, if revealed, might give the other party an advantage. For example, a party may avoid discussing legal uncertainties in a joint session because acknowledging risk could weaken their position in potential litigation or arbitration if mediation fails. Likewise, parties are rarely certain about how genuine the other side is in wanting to settle; perceived intentions can range from “not at all” (a mere fishing expedition) to deeply committed. And because information is power, parties are understandably reluctant to relinquish it, especially without receiving something of comparable value in return. Even seemingly simple disclosures, such as how flexible one’s demands truly are or one’s bottom line, are often guarded closely.

This is precisely why the Hidden Area is so critical in mediation. As trusted neutrals, mediators can facilitate a fair and balanced exchange of information between the parties’ Hidden Areas, helping transform secrecy into shared understanding. Through confidential caucuses, psychological safety, and strategic reframing, mediators can encourage voluntary self-disclosure that expands the Open Area (Lau, 2022). In doing so, they also help shrink the Blind Spots of both sides. This expansion of the Open Area is essential for value creation, improving the potential for integrative solutions and moving parties toward mutually beneficial agreements.

Finally, the **Unknown Area** encompasses aspects that are unknown to both the self and others—latent capacities, subconscious motivations, or undiscovered insights that may emerge under specific circumstances. In mediation, the Unknown Area also includes information that neither party possesses uncertainties about alternative courses of action if no agreement is reached, the behavior of third parties, or external developments beyond the disputants’ direct control. This quadrant highlights the dynamic, evolving nature of self-awareness and conflict, reminding mediators that new understandings or creative solutions can surface unexpectedly through dialogue, reflection, and trust-building.

Importantly, the Unknown Area is also where shared but unrecognized common ground often resides. Mediation can produce the best results when parties identify and build upon this common ground, even when it lies in domains that neither side initially sees clearly. Consider a public crisis in which both parties are facing reputational harm and cannot control how others discuss the situation. Each side may be inclined to “throw stones” at the other publicly in an attempt to protect itself. Here, the Unknown Area is significant because the public dimension introduces factors neither party can predict or influence alone.

In such cases, mediation can help uncover a mutual interest hidden in the unknown: the need to regain control over the narrative. A mediator can facilitate the creation of a co-ordinated “crisis management cell,” allowing parties to synchronize their public communication so they can, metaphorically, “get out alive.” By collaboratively shaping messaging,

the parties gain influence over what the other says publicly, transforming uncertainty into coordinated action.

Thus, the Unknown Area is not merely a space of ambiguity; it is also a potential reservoir of shared interests, waiting to be discovered through the guided structure of mediation.

Dynamics of the Johari Window in Interpersonal Communication

The Johari Window is inherently dynamic: the size and boundaries of each pane shift continuously as individuals engage in self-disclosure and receive feedback from others. Central to effective communication and conflict resolution is the expansion of the Open Area, which occurs when people share information about themselves and incorporate new perspectives offered by others (London et al., 2022). As this area grows, the Blind, Hidden, and Unknown Areas correspondingly shrink, signaling an increase in mutual understanding, psychological safety, and trust (London et al., 2022).

This process of expansion is particularly relevant in mediation, where creating and sustaining a larger Open Area between disputing parties facilitates transparency, reduces defensiveness, and enables collaborative problem-solving. By skillfully guiding disclosure and feedback exchanges, mediators help participants not only to clarify issues but also to see themselves (and each other) more accurately, laying the foundation for meaningful and enduring resolution.

Application of the Johari Window in Mediation

Johari Window in the Preparation Phase

During the preparation phase, mediators can employ the Johari Window as a diagnostic and anticipatory tool to gain early insights into the disputants' perspectives, communication patterns, and potential areas of conflict (Munduate et al., 2022). Through careful analysis of pre-mediation interviews, background documents, and party statements, the mediator can begin mapping the four quadrants of the Johari Window for each participant, identifying what information is openly shared, what others may know about a party that remains unacknowledged, what individuals deliberately withhold, and what issues or capacities remain unexplored. This preliminary assessment allows mediators to develop targeted questions and tailored strategies aimed at expanding the Open Area for all participants once the mediation begins.

A key benefit of this analytical approach lies in its ability to surface implicit biases, perceptual distortions, and risk factors *before* they shape the mediation process (Greenberg, 2011). In this sense, the Johari Window functions much like a pre-negotiation analysis used by skilled negotiators: it enhances awareness of uncertainty, clarifies potential vulnerabilities,

and supports the development of strategic readiness prior to engagement. Mediators can use the model to critically examine their own assumptions, expectations, and blind spots in relation to the parties, thereby reducing the likelihood that unconscious bias will influence facilitation. Likewise, recognizing the biases or preconceptions that parties may hold, either toward the mediator or toward each other, allows for proactive management of perceptions, ensuring that neutrality and fairness are both maintained and perceived throughout the process.

This meticulous pre-session analysis also assists mediators in anticipating communication barriers and preparing interventions that promote transparency, balanced information flow, and symmetrical participation, conditions that are fundamental to establishing a foundation of trust between the parties (Szejda & Hubbard, 2019; Fehrenbach & Hubbard, 2014). Such foresight ensures that the mediation environment is structured to encourage open dialogue while minimizing the risk of unforeseen interpersonal or procedural obstacles. When mediators use pre-determined headings for mediation briefs or position statements, reviewing those documents through the lens of the Johari Window becomes especially valuable. This approach helps ensure that the information received touches all relevant areas - Open, Hidden, Blind, and Unknown - allowing the mediator to assess where gaps or asymmetries may arise and to prepare strategies that support a more transparent and productive exchange during the session.

By understanding the contours of each participant's Johari Window before the session, the mediator can further tailor communication strategies to facilitate self-disclosure and feedback exchanges that gradually expand the Open Area. This not only supports a more candid and productive dialogue but also prepares the mediator to address the emotional costs of conflict, which, if left unmanaged, can adversely affect both organizational efficiency and individual well-being (Munduate et al., 2022). Through this early awareness, the mediator can design processes that create psychological safety, enabling parties to engage authentically and explore constructive avenues for resolution that might otherwise remain inaccessible (Druckman & Harinck, 2022).

Ultimately, the careful application of the Johari Window during the preparation phase allows mediators to anticipate relational dynamics and design interventions that maximize transparency, empathy, and understanding from the outset. At this stage, the model is particularly useful for assessing power distribution between the parties and for understanding their strategic orientation toward the mediation—whether they are approaching it competitively (the “stick”) or collaboratively (the “carrot”). These insights help mediators tailor their approach to the specific dynamics at play.

Preparation is also the moment when mediators explore each party's alternatives to settlement, guiding them through structured questions such as: “*If there is no agreement, what is your best-case scenario (BATNA)? How likely is that? What is your worst-case scenario (WATNA)? What risks come with it? What is your most-likely alternative (MLATNA)?*” This exploration naturally raises further questions: “*What information do you need to*

refine this analysis? Can any of it be obtained from the other party? What do you believe they are hiding from you? What do you know that they do not? And what remains unknown to both sides?"

By helping parties map these considerations onto the Johari Window, mediators gain deeper situational awareness and can better bridge divergent interests, offering a shared frame of reference and a common vocabulary that transforms differing institutional or personal perspectives into mutual comprehension (Holm, 2022). In this sense, the Johari Window becomes an operational guide for shaping an environment where dialogue, trust, and collaboration can emerge organically.

Jobari Window in the Exploration Phase

The exploration phase is where mediators effectively become information brokers, facilitating a carefully paced and ethically managed exchange between the parties' respective Blind and Hidden Areas. It is precisely because of the mediator's neutral and trusted role that parties in mediation are able to unlock a greater potential for value creation. Mediators can receive and handle confidential information, identify points of convergence or synergy between parties' interests, and do so without disclosing sensitive details. This enables parties to make deliberate and strategic choices about what they wish to reveal directly, what they prefer to share through the mediator, and what they choose to keep confidential.

In this way, the Johari Window's application becomes central to mediation, helping parties and their advisors make informed decisions about the process, its structure, and its strategic use. By managing the flow of information in a way that respects confidentiality while encouraging insight, mediators help transform the exploration phase into a space where hidden opportunities emerge and negotiations move toward constructive, integrative outcomes.

During the exploration phase, mediators employ the Johari Window as an active facilitation framework to expand the Open Area, the shared zone of mutual understanding and transparency between parties. This expansion occurs through deliberate questioning, empathetic listening, and observation. By posing open-ended questions, mediators encourage participants to articulate their experiences, perspectives, and concerns, thereby moving information from the Hidden Area into the shared space (Rashid, 2024). At the same time, mediators remain attentive to non-verbal cues and patterns of interaction that may reveal aspects from the Blind Area, helping parties recognize how their behavior or communication style is perceived by others. This process of revealing and reflecting promotes awareness and self-reflection, reducing misinterpretations and communication barriers that often perpetuate conflict.

This deliberate enlargement of the Open Area serves as a bridge from positional bargaining to interest-based negotiation, allowing mediators and parties to identify the deeper needs

and motivations underlying stated positions (Choi & Yang, 2024). Through guided dialogue, mediators can facilitate direct communication between parties, improving their interactional dynamics and enabling each side to better observe, interpret, and respond to the other's cues (Rashid, 2024). Such engagement not only enhances the flow of information but also allows mediators to detect and de-escalate emerging tensions before they evolve into destructive confrontation, transforming conflict into constructive dialogue (Druckman & Harinck, 2022).

Through this facilitative use of the Johari Window, previously unacknowledged areas of convergence—shared goals, common values, or mutual interests—can emerge, often reshaping parties' perceptions of both the dispute and one another. This discovery of common ground lays the foundation for cooperative problem-solving and the joint construction of viable, durable solutions (Buresh, 2022).

In most civil and commercial mediations—and equally in company–community mediation—private sessions are essential for this problem-exploration work. Parties are understandably reluctant to share sensitive information in joint meetings “in the name of settling,” knowing that if no agreement is reached, such disclosure could leave them vulnerable. Although the mediator typically gains insight during the preparation phase into what each party is intentionally keeping hidden and why, the exploration stage almost always brings newly revealed hidden information to the surface.

The mediator's task at this stage is to understand what additional information has emerged, why it remains concealed, and how it might be used—ethically and constructively—to facilitate strategic trade-offs between the parties. By navigating these hidden layers with care, the mediator helps transform guarded secrecy into opportunities for alignment, enabling the Johari Window to function as a catalyst for deeper insight and more integrative solutions.

Jobari Window in the Problem-Solving Phase

In the problem-solving phase, the insights generated through the expansion of the Open Area become instrumental in guiding the creation of innovative and mutually acceptable solutions. Mediators encourage parties to build upon their shared understanding to brainstorm options that address underlying needs and transform previously hidden or unknown potential solutions into tangible outcomes. This collaborative approach ensures that resolutions are not merely compromises but reflect integrated and creative responses grounded in a comprehensive appreciation of the conflict (Katz & Wahlgren, 2022; Anam & Satris, 2020).

By facilitating this process, mediators help parties cultivate cooperative competencies such as clear expression, empathic listening, and joint problem-definition, skills essential for reaching mutually beneficial outcomes (Tjosvold & Vliert, 1994). The process also

counteracts the corrosive effects of distrust, which can hinder collaboration and integrative bargaining (Druckman & Harinck, 2022). Moreover, as the Johari Window helps reveal previously concealed information, it builds confidence and enhances interpersonal trust, two critical ingredients for the durability and legitimacy of mediated agreements (Landau & Landau, 1997).

The mediator's role at this stage extends beyond simply generating solutions; it involves ensuring that proposed outcomes are robust, realistic, and sustainable, capable of withstanding future pressures or contextual changes. Research on transfer effects in problem-solving workshops supports this approach, showing that structured facilitation can generate learning and cooperative habits that endure beyond the immediate dispute (Fisher, 2020). By applying the Johari Window to ensure transparency and inclusiveness, mediators can guide parties toward developing SMART agreements—those that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—thus increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and long-term resolution (Druckman et al., 2020).

In cases where the mediation aims at a “peaceful separation,” with no future relationship between the parties, the Johari model is particularly valuable in helping the mediator act as a *reality agent*. At this point in the process, the negotiation zone will ideally have narrowed: perhaps still negative, but with a significantly smaller gap than at the outset. Because opportunities for value creation are limited in such separations, compromise often becomes the best achievable outcome. Here, the Johari Window helps the mediator guide parties through risk analysis and toward an acceptable compromise, one that may make them equally unhappy, but equally protected.

Conversely, when mediation supports the creation of a future joint relationship, the landscape changes entirely. Opportunities for mutual gain increase, and the mediator's task becomes helping the parties generate options that produce value for both sides. The Johari Window is especially useful in this context, as collaboration requires moving information out of the Blind Spots and Hidden Areas and into the Open Area, where shared understanding can fuel creative option-generation. It also provides a structured way to explore and manage the uncertainties that reside in the Unknown Area, enabling parties to design agreements that anticipate future risks and support long-term cooperation.

Johari Window in the Final Arrangements Phase: Ensuring SMART Agreements

In the final phase, the Johari Window provides a systematic framework for reviewing the completeness, clarity, and feasibility of the emerging agreement. The mediator draws on the expanded Open Area to verify that all relevant information has been disclosed and incorporated into the settlement, ensuring that each component of the agreement meets SMART criteria: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This

process requires careful evaluation of whether the proposed terms genuinely address the underlying interests identified earlier, leaving no critical issue unacknowledged or unresolved.

Through this final review, mediators help transform potential solutions, initially located in the Unknown Area, into explicit and actionable commitments by ensuring that every term is clearly articulated and mutually understood. In doing so, the mediator ensures that the commitments are both realistic and verifiable, translating general intentions into concrete actions and measurable deliverables (Tjosvold & Vliert, 1994). This attention to detail minimizes ambiguity and prevents the re-emergence of disputes based on differing interpretations, thereby enhancing the durability and enforceability of the outcome.

A SMART-oriented approach, grounded in the Johari Window, promotes integrative and sustainable agreements by aligning understanding, expectation, and accountability (Druckman et al., 2020). Moreover, mediators ensure that agreements are designed to foster ongoing cooperation, acknowledging that conflict resolution is not a static event but an evolving process of relationship management. As Hoffman and Bercovitch (2011) observe, peace is dynamic and requires continuous renegotiation and commitment from all parties. By systematically applying the Johari Window through to this final stage, mediators can ensure that agreements reflect not only consensus but also shared insight, trust, and an enduring capacity for collaboration.

Monitoring and Evaluation: The Johari Window as a Reflective Framework

The final phase of the mediation process—monitoring and evaluation (where applicable, as in company-community mediation)—serves not only to assess the durability and implementation of agreements but also to deepen learning and reflective practice for all participants. Within this stage, the Johari Window offers a valuable framework for analyzing both process outcomes and relational transformations, ensuring that the lessons of mediation extend beyond the immediate dispute. By revisiting the four quadrants, the mediator can help parties, as well as themselves, reflect on what knowledge has become shared, what insights remain obscured, and what new understandings have emerged through dialogue and collaboration.

From a practical standpoint, mediators can use the Johari Window during post-mediation reviews to examine how effectively the Open Area expanded throughout the process. This involves assessing whether parties have achieved greater transparency, empathy, and alignment of expectations since the agreement was reached. A significant increase in the Open Area suggests that mutual trust and communication have improved, whereas lingering Hidden or Blind Areas may indicate unresolved issues or potential risks to the sustainability of the outcome (Munduate et al., 2022). Monitoring in this way helps ensure

that the resolution is not only legally or procedurally sound but also relationally stable, anchored in genuine understanding rather than mere compliance.

The Johari Window also enables mediators to conduct self-evaluation, an essential yet often overlooked component of professional mediation practice. By critically reflecting on their own Blind and Unknown Areas, mediators can identify what aspects of their facilitation were effective and where potential biases or oversights may have influenced the process (Rahman, 2012). Feedback from parties, co-mediators, or supervisors can serve as an external mirror, revealing patterns or assumptions that might otherwise remain unacknowledged. This reflective exercise strengthens professional growth and helps mediators refine their techniques for future engagements (Shaw, 1997).

In addition to its use for individual reflection, the Johari Window supports systemic evaluation of mediation programs. Aggregated insights from multiple cases can reveal recurring Blind or Hidden Areas within an organization, community, or institutional framework, patterns that may point to structural issues in communication, trust, or policy. When systematically recorded and analyzed, these insights can inform capacity-building initiatives and institutional reforms that make mediation systems more inclusive, transparent, and adaptive (Holm, 2022).

Ethically applied, this reflective use of the Johari Window also reinforces accountability and continuous improvement. Mediators can track whether the SMART principles established during the agreement phase are being met, and whether implementation is generating the intended relational and practical outcomes (Tjosvold & Vliert, 1994). When gaps emerge, the framework helps identify whether they stem from insufficient disclosure, miscommunication, or external factors beyond the parties' control, guiding appropriate follow-up interventions.

This reflective capacity is also crucial for navigating questions of negotiation ethics, particularly when parties strategically withhold information. Not all nondisclosure amounts to bad faith, but mediators must remain alert to situations where concealment crosses ethical boundaries or undermines the integrity of the process. The Johari Window offers a structured way to assess our own standing as mediators when we suspect bad-faith negotiation strategies: it helps us examine what we know, what we are allowed to know, and how parties' tactics affect our neutrality and professional responsibilities. In principle, there are ethical lines mediators should not cross, and circumstances under which continuation of the role may no longer be appropriate. By illuminating the impact of parties' strategies on the mediator's own Blind and Hidden Areas, the Johari Window provides a valuable guide for determining when—and how—to intervene, address concerns, or, if necessary, step back to preserve the fairness and legitimacy of the mediation process.

Finally, the Johari Window underscores the transformative potential of mediation as an ongoing process of awareness and relationship-building. As parties reflect on what has shifted from their Hidden or Unknown Areas into shared understanding, they often

recognize personal and interpersonal growth that extends beyond the dispute itself. This recognition can foster long-term resilience and improved conflict management capacity, turning mediation into a catalyst for cultural change and collective learning.

In this sense, the Johari Window is not simply a diagnostic or facilitative model but a long-term reflective instrument, one that supports mediators, parties, and institutions in continually refining how they understand themselves, each other, and the evolving dynamics of cooperation. When integrated into monitoring and evaluation, it ensures that mediation outcomes are not only effective in resolving disputes but also developmental in strengthening the social fabric that sustains peace.

Table 1.

Quadrant	Meaning in Mediation	Practical Use
Open Area (Known to self & others)	Shared knowledge, facts, and feelings that both parties are aware of.	Building on these shared understandings can strengthen common ground.
Blind Spot (Unknown to self, known to others)	Behaviors, habits, or impacts that one party doesn't realize but the other perceives clearly.	Mediator can surface these gently via reframing, summarizing, or reality testing.
Hidden Area (Known to self, unknown to others)	Private feelings, unspoken concerns, strategic information.	Encouraging disclosure can expand the open area and reduce suspicion.
Unknown Area (Unknown to self & others)	Latent needs, unconscious biases, structural issues neither party has articulated.	Mediator may help discover these through deep questioning, caucus, or scenario exploration.

Benefits and Challenges of Using the Johari Window in Mediation

While the Johari Window offers substantial advantages in fostering openness, empathy, and mutual understanding, its application within mediation also introduces unique complexities. Chief among these are the challenges posed by power asymmetries and the natural resistance to self-disclosure that often characterizes disputes. Mediators must navigate situations where parties hesitate to reveal sensitive or strategic information out of fear that transparency might be exploited or perceived as weakness. Such reluctance can hinder the expansion of the Open Area, limiting the potential for genuine understanding and trust-building (Munduate et al., 2022). These obstacles highlight the importance of mediator sensitivity, adaptive communication, and the careful balancing of openness with psychological safety throughout the process.

Enhancing Mediator Self-Awareness

Beyond its application as a facilitative tool with disputing parties, the Johari Window serves a vital role in enhancing the self-awareness of mediators themselves. By reflecting

on their own Blind Spots and Unknown Areas, mediators can recognize how personal biases, assumptions, or interactional tendencies may inadvertently shape the dynamics of the session (Rahman, 2012). This reflective process strengthens impartiality and supports ethical practice, ensuring that mediators remain responsive rather than reactive in moments of tension.

Structured feedback, peer consultation, and continuous professional development all help mediators use the Johari framework as a mirror for refining their own practice (Shaw, 1997). In doing so, they become better equipped to detect and mitigate subtle forms of imbalance or miscommunication that may arise during facilitation. This self-insight not only prevents the mediator from contributing, unintentionally, to communication breakdowns but also enhances their ability to model transparency and emotional intelligence within the process. Furthermore, greater self-awareness enables mediators to leverage their strengths, such as empathetic listening, strategic reframing, or analytical clarity, to guide parties toward integrative, sustainable outcomes (Dreu, 2014).

Facilitating Party Understanding and Communication

For the parties themselves, the Johari Window provides a structured means of improving communication and mutual comprehension. By encouraging each side to explore both what they disclose and what they withhold, the model helps participants better understand their own perspectives as well as those of others, reducing misinterpretations and fostering empathy. This expansion of mutual understanding is central to transforming competitive or positional dynamics into cooperative problem-solving.

The model's capacity to make visible the interplay between self-perception and others' perceptions is especially valuable in settings marked by power imbalances. By enabling quieter or less dominant voices to be heard, the Johari Window helps prevent the marginalization of weaker parties and promotes a more balanced exchange of perspectives (Munduate et al., 2022). It also mitigates attribution biases—the tendency to misjudge others' motives—by prompting reflection on personal assumptions and by inviting a more nuanced interpretation of behaviors and intentions (Ng & Ang, 1999). Through this process, the mediator helps the parties shift from blame and defensiveness toward a more constructive, interest-oriented dialogue grounded in mutual recognition.

Potential Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Despite its evident strengths, the use of the Johari Window in mediation is not without risks. Its effectiveness depends on the mediator's ethical sensitivity and their ability to manage the delicate balance between openness and protection. One ethical challenge lies in handling sensitive information that may emerge through disclosure. Encouraging self-revelation can be beneficial, but if poorly managed, it risks creating emotional discomfort,

vulnerability, or even harm (Gutman & Grant, 2018). Mediators must therefore ensure that all disclosures are voluntary, purposeful, and aligned with the overarching goal of resolution rather than inadvertently exacerbating asymmetries of power or trust.

To safeguard participants, mediators must establish clear confidentiality protocols and explain how disclosed information will be used and protected, particularly when navigating deeply personal or culturally sensitive issues. Ethical discernment is also required when deciding how to address insights from a party's Hidden Area, as premature or insensitive exposure may deepen divisions rather than bridge them. This underscores the need for mediators to combine theoretical understanding of the Johari Window with advanced interpersonal competence and ethical fortitude.

Cultural variation further complicates disclosure dynamics. Norms regarding openness, hierarchy, and privacy differ across societies, influencing what parties perceive as appropriate to share (Holm, 2022). Mediators must therefore adapt the Johari Window to local cultural contexts, ensuring that the pursuit of transparency does not violate personal or collective boundaries. When applied with cultural and emotional intelligence, the model becomes a bridge to understanding rather than a source of discomfort or resistance.

Conclusion

In summary, the Johari Window provides mediators with a powerful conceptual and practical framework for enhancing self-awareness, communication, and empathy—the three pillars of effective conflict resolution. We see Johari as especially relevant because it helps us understand and address one of the core barriers to settlement: the human tendency, when in conflict, to lose perspective and hide information. By making these dynamics visible, the model teaches both mediators and parties to analyse alternatives to a negotiated agreement, define and manage risk, and allow for disclosure and vulnerability without increasing exposure in the event that no settlement is reached.

The Johari Window also strengthens our preparation for negotiation by helping us think strategically about the “three G’s” every professional negotiator must define in advance: what information we plan to Give, what we hope to Get, and what we must Guard. This clarity often leads parties to make a deliberate choice to use mediation rather than direct negotiation when sensitive issues or asymmetrical risks are involved. Once mediation begins, the same Johari principles help define an agreed information-sharing protocol: which information can be shared confidentially with the mediator, which disclosures may have their confidentiality waived (and why), and which information must remain known only to the mediator, whether provided before the mediation or revealed in private sessions.

When employed within a robust ethical framework, one that protects confidentiality while encouraging relevant and voluntary disclosure, the Johari Window transforms mediation into a space for authentic dialogue, personal growth, and collaborative problem-solving.

In this sense, it not only facilitates dispute resolution but also nurtures the relational and reflective capacities essential for lasting peace. Ultimately, the Johari model is not merely helpful; it is critical to the success of the mediation process for both parties and mediators alike.

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