

# A study into secretive human behavior



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Secretive is human behavior that has generally negative connotation which should not be confused with “ Privacy” which generally represents the human trait in which one individual is not ready to share his/her personal information to others.

In contrast the secretive behavior is not limited to personal information only. If we look at the relevance of the particular behavior we may find that not only it is associated to individual level behavior but also to the organizational level. Therefore we can say that it has considerable effect in behavior modeling of individual as well as at organizational level. We can also distinguish the effect of this behavior on individual and organizational level.

Secretive behavior can be associated to particular personality traits that an individual possesses which can be looked into by different conceptual framework as given in this study. Though the “ secretive” behavior of an individual is always taken in negative sense but when we compare the inherent traits that build up this kind of behavior we may find that “ secretive” behavior arise some positive traits in an individual which is more explained by Johari Window in following precedence.

### Conceptual Framework

According to the study of scholarly articles studied by me I have come upon the definition of “ secretive ” behavior as the personality trait of an individual which comprises of hiding some information (that can be relevant or irrelevant) from others either consciously or unconsciously by the virtue of the individual traits that a person possesses. The hiding of the information

can be act of introvert nature of a person or a kind of defence mechanism as suggested by Freud Theory.

Therefore to analyze the personality traits that mould the “ secretive” behavior I have taken help of Johari Window Framework. Johari Window was developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (Jo + Hari, Johari) in 1950’s which is taken as 2 X 2 window having 4 quadrants or regions.

Each quadrant or region depicts the information of an individual as perceived by themselves and by others as well. And hence by knowing the findings one can get a good understanding of themselves and their personalities in a more refined way. Figure 1 depicts the four quadrant of Johari Window from perceiver’s perspective and from others perspective.

Perceived Person

Known

Unknown

Perceiver

Known

OPEN

BLIND

Unknown

SECRETS

## UNKNOWN

## Figure 1: Johari Window

Following are the details of all four regions of Johari's Window described in detail:

**Open Region:** When the personality traits or behavior of a person matches with the perspective of others as well, it is called as open region. It is generally that part that you show and share with others. It includes your appearance, team behavior, skills etc. It is generally recommended that people should belong to this region to increase their productivity in an organization.

**Blind Region:** This is the region which includes characteristics that are known to other members in the group but individuals are not aware of that. These are generally the blind spot which should be as low as possible. These include individual behavior like making faces, showing emotions, aggressive nature etc which an individual does not know when they indulge in this type of traits. The aim is to reduce this area as much as possible which can be done by taking feedback from other members in the group to know things that an individual is not aware of.

**Secret Region:** In this region the individual is aware of certain things but the others not. These things or behaviors are generally kept as secrets by the individual. This can be related to the introvert, shy nature of an individual. Another aspect is the avoided area by the individual which can be result from certain behavior that is socially not acceptable or considered as wrong.

It can include certain private information that an individual does not want to share or the information that individual did not want to share. This kind of “secretive” behavior can adversely affect the dynamics of group therefore, it is recommended to reduce this area as much as possible and make the system more transparent.

Unknown Region: When the behavior or traits are unknowns to the individual as well as the other team it is classified under this region. This can include talent and other behavior that can be revealed by either the person himself in future or by any other team member.

By taking the Johari’s window as a framework to analyze the personal traits of an individual one can distinguish that in which region out of the four does it belong and a person if it belongs in 3rd region that is “ Secret” Region the attributes of that person can be best suited to know more about the “ secretive” behavior of an individual at individual level as well as group level.

### Review of Literature

The dictionary definition of “ secretive” is defined as “ inclined to secrecy or reticence about divulging information; “ although they knew her whereabouts her friends kept close about it” “. If we look into literature review of this behavior there is lot of research papers that are presented.

Few author presentation and perspective has been presented below:

The well known concept of Johari Window<sup>1</sup>, which is a model of self awareness, personal development, group development and understanding

relationship. This concept can be related to MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)<sup>2</sup> Indicator

According to Julie D. Lane and Daniel M. Wegner<sup>3</sup>, “ secrecy is a form of intentional deception that is peculiar for two reasons. First, whereas deception involves inducing a belief in another person that one knows to be false, secrecy involves preventing the other from knowing something one believes to be true. The second distinction is that secrecy is something one can do alone in a room”.

In another perspective Aldert Vrij, Karl Nunkoosing, Beth Paterson, Annerieke Oosterwegel and Stavroula Soukara<sup>4</sup>, defines the impact on individual behavior which is stated as “ Secret-holders confided information to those with whom they felt emotionally close; were more reluctant to confide when they kept the secret to avoid disapproval, and more likely to confide when they believed that others would find out about their secrets by paying attention to their (secret-holders) behaviors”.

Another context in the literature in Sullivan’s Interpersonal Theory<sup>5</sup>, which looks into interpersonal relations that modify the individual behavior. Sullivan stated that the personality of human being is shaped by the interpersonal relations that an individual have.

More depth on individual aspect of why do people indulge in this kind of behavior is given by Defence Mechanism Theory by Sigmund Freud<sup>6</sup>. It involves the involvement of an individual in any behavior either unconsciously or by projecting wrong deception to indulge into defence mechanism.

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## **Empirical Study & Generalization**

To study the effect of “ secretive” behavior of an individual, I conducted a case study of four people studying in XLRI PM&IR programme who knew well each other before coming here. This case study takes the help of Johari window from which I can deduce the understanding of personalities of these individual according to them as well as from the perspective of others.

The main aim of doing this case study is to actually study the personality traits of an individual as perceived by him/her and as perceived by others. With the help of this I can categorize people into each of the four windows as described above in Johari Window and with the help of this segregation I can correlate which kind of people generally depict “ secretive” behavior at individual level.

## **Description of Case Study:**

**In the case study I deliberately choose four people who knew each other very well so that the perception of an individual as perceived by others does not depend on just spontaneous interaction. I gave them 55 adjectives that a person can associates with himself/herself or with others. Then I make them to choose 6 adjectives that they think are best to describe about themselves and then I gave same set of adjectives to other three individual and noted down their responses about the same individual from their perspective on the same 6 adjective parameters.**

**The adjectives that I have used are given in Appendices at the end of this report. While filling the corresponding personality traits choices one constraint that I follow is I gave only 120 seconds to fill out their responses for themselves and for others also.**

Since, there can be a possibility that during 120 seconds the individual does not get enough time to think upon the actual important personality traits.

To eliminate out this discrepancy, I conducted same set of case study 4 times among the same set of individual but each time the response sheet which contains the set of 55 adjectives was in random order.

To further reduce any unwanted deviations I conducted this at different times over a span of 3 days. By doing this an individual does not actually remember the choices that he/she had filled for others in previous trials.



## **Findings of the Study & Generalization**

Based on the case study as described above following are the results obtained for each of the four individual. Figure 2 represents the Adjectives picked by individual for themselves out of the given 55 adjectives.

Adjectives associated with personality

1

2

3

4

5

6

Values perceived by Person A

friendly

caring

cheerful

energetic

brave

sensible

Values perceived by Person B

independent

logical

organized

helpful

caring

modest

Values perceived by Person C

sentimental

quiet

sensible

observant

dignify

wise

Values perceived by Person D

giving

happy

helpful

sensible

caring

proud

Figure 2: Adjectives picked by individual for themselves out of the given 55 adjectives

Figure 3 represents the adjectives associated with each person as perceived by other three persons. In this the frequency of each adjective is shown in ( ) after taking the questionnaire at different point of time.

Person A

Person B

Person C

Person D

Person A

X

friendly(3),

bold(2),

extrovert(2)

bold(3),

energetic(2),

organized(2)

extrovert(3),

powerful(2),

responsive(2)

Person B

Caring (4), helpful (3), extrovert(3)

X

helpful (4), logical (2),

modest (2)

logical (2), proud (2), helpful (2)

Person C

extrovert(2), cheerful (2) ,

happy (2)

nervous(3),

tense(2),

complex(2)

X

relaxed(2),

ingenious(1),

giving(1)

Person D

helpful(3),

calm(2),

modest(2)

giving(2),

happy(2),

caring(2)

modest(2),

organized(2),

giving(1)

X

Figure 3: Adjectives picked by others for specific person. ( ) represents the frequency of that adjective

As we can see from the data collected by taking down the personality traits of an individual from perceiver as well as perceived perspective that the individual behavior of Person A , Person B and Person C matches to a certain extent with the behavior as noted by other members in the group. Moreover, the frequency with which the kind of adjectives appears for both the persons indicates that all of them belong to Region 1 of Johari Window which is Open region. And the adjectives associated with both persons like friendly, organized, brave, responsive, helpful, extrovert etc are in perfect correlation with the qualities that are associated with Region 1 as given by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham.

If we consider the case of Person 3, where the behavior described by himself does not matches with the behaviors as perceived by others, we can say that the Person C belongs to Region 3 or Secret Region of the Johari Window where the behavior are known to the person but are unknown to others. The basic traits that the person think of him is sentimental, quiet, sensible, observant, dignify and wise which is in negative correlation with the behavior given by other like extrovert, happy, relaxed etc.

Moreover, the attributes associate with Person 3 which he think of him perfectly correlates with the behavior associated with Region 3 of Johari Window as given by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham.

Therefore, we can say that the individual having personality traits like introvert, quiet, shy, powerful, observant are much more associated to the persons having “ secretive” behavior as compared to the person with the behavior like extrovert, happy, openness etc.

## **Implications of Group Work**

We can distinguish the effect of this behavior on individual and organizational level which is given as follows:

### **At Individual Level:**

**Impact on Psychological Aspect:** When we look into the effect of this kind of behavior on mental functions of human we can see that this type of behavior is generally associated with the people who are reserved, introvert, who does not want to share information. Also we can say that that the type of people who show this kind of behavior have very strong will which make them to hide information from others.

**Impact on Behavioral Modernity:** With the advent of more information channels and competition the secretive nature has been considerably changed from our ancestors. And by comparing with the previous we can say that it has considerably increased.

### **At Organizational level:**

**Impact on Sociological Aspect:** Sometimes secretive nature of the organization is more concerned with hiding of some information due to protection of ideas, future plans, information which can affect them severely.

**Impact on Anthropological Aspect:** When an organization does not share proper information with employees, they are actually creating a traditional relations with them which will affect the motivation and performance of there work.

Impact on Job Satisfaction Level: Job Satisfaction relates to the content level of an individual with his/her performance. And when an individual thinks that an organization is hiding some relevant information that arise a suspicion which decreases the job satisfaction or this behavior shows the negative correlation with job satisfaction.

## **Contributions to Organizational Behavior**

I feel that as a part of organizational behavior it is very important to understand the individual behaviors and personality traits. In addition to this it is very much essential to understand and focus on the actual causes behind these behaviors which actually force an individual to indulge in “secretive” behavior.

Therefore I think my study about “secretive” behavior is very much relevant to organizational behavior. But since my research involves the study the effect of internal personality traits on “secretive” nature and therefore it will be interesting to see how external effects like situation and society plays an important role in contributing the modification of “secretive” behavior in an individual. Hence, there is further scope to extend this study in the light of “external factors” and correlation of these “external” factors with the internal behavioral trait of an individual.

## **Conclusion**

According to the study of scholarly articles studied by me I have come upon the definition of “secretive” behavior as the personality trait of an individual which comprises of hiding some information (that can be relevant or



irrelevant) from others either consciously or unconsciously by the virtue of the individual traits that a person possesses.

As showed in the case study results given above the personality traits to a greater extent affects the “ secretive” behavior of an individual. For example the individual who are more introvert, shy and reserve tend to show more “ secretive” behavior as compared to the people who are extrovert or outspoken. Even the people who have strong determination are more capable in holding any secret as compared to one who did not have strong will power.

Therefore, by studying the Johari’s window on different set of people I can say that individual personality traits or internal factors affect the “ secretive” nature very much.