



Working with Daniel Ofman's core quadrants in psychodrama

Introduction

Putting energy into getting to know yourself better is often a good thing. This is particularly important in cases one has been confronted severely with oneself; something did not work out the way you wanted it to, and you were disappointed by that; your life still has not become what it promised to be; people praise you highly and you do not understand why; you fall ill unexpectedly. Then you have to face things that usually go by unnoticed, Discovering what may lie behind all this could make you a happier and wiser person.

Getting to know yourself is not only important for you personally, but is also a requirement if you want to be of meaning to someone else; showing empathy at your work, partnership within relations, guidance, psychotherapy. For this reason professional training dedicates a lot time to personal education and learning through therapy.

There are many ways and methods to get to know oneself. One of which is working with the so-called 'core-quadrants' as devised by Daniel Ofman (1997). He applies an older idea (Helwig; Schultz von Thun), that each quality in a person's life has a counter quality. Both of which are necessary to live harmoniously. E.g. the quality Caution has the counter quality Daring. Overdoing these qualities results in devaluation. They turn into Fear and Recklessness.

Ofman turns this theoretical concept into a practical one, using the term "core-quadrant" in which each quarter represents, successively *core quality, pitfall, challenge and allergy*.

In this article I explain Ofman's method and what he means by all the terms used above. (1)

I describe two methods of procedure as applied in psychodrama, one of which abridged (2) and the other extensively and reflectively. (3)

The final part will be a reflection on the didactical concept, the director's part and an encouragement to make such a quadrant yourself.(4)

1.

What are Core Qualities?

Ofman (1997, p32) defines the concept core quadrant as follows:

“Core qualities are attributes that form part of a person’s essence (core); people are steeped in these qualities, which place all their – more or less striking – competences in a certain light. A person is “colored” by his or her core qualities. It is their strong point, the characteristic that immediately comes to mind when we think of this person. Examples of core qualities are determination, consideration (for others), precision, courage, receptivity, orderliness, empathy, flexibility, etc.”

They are the possibilities a person carries within himself and that make him the person he is. They radiate through him, sometimes forcefully, sometimes faded sometimes distorted. Unlike skills, they cannot be learned.

Every core quality has its complementary one that can prevent the core quality from becoming one-sided or overdone. A person has to develop this complementary quality intentionally as a challenge toward the core quality thus stabilising harmony in his life.

If you know your own core qualities you can apply them adequately. More often than not, if you do not, you over-apply them, thus creating exaggeration or distortion, a too much of a good thing, with a negative result.

E.g.

An exaggeration of the *core quality* ‘justice’ results in legalistic behaviour. Real justice is bent and distorted. This is a *pitfall*.

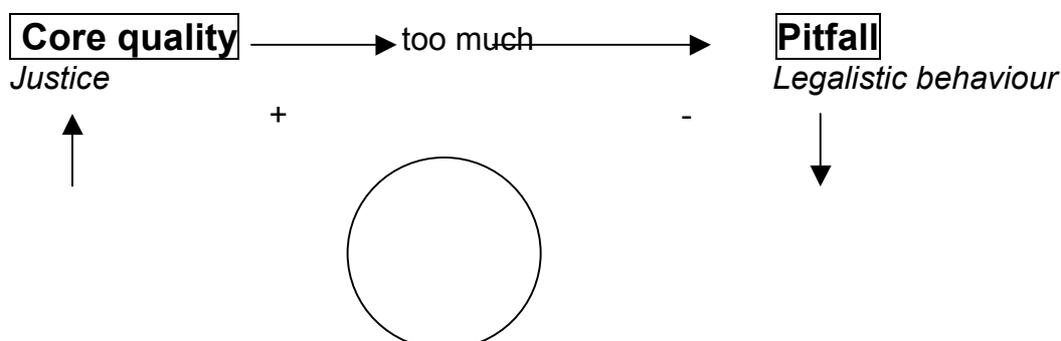
To prevent you from falling into this pit, you have to unfold a complementary quality within yourself. This is your *challenge*. In this case ‘mercy’ complements justice.

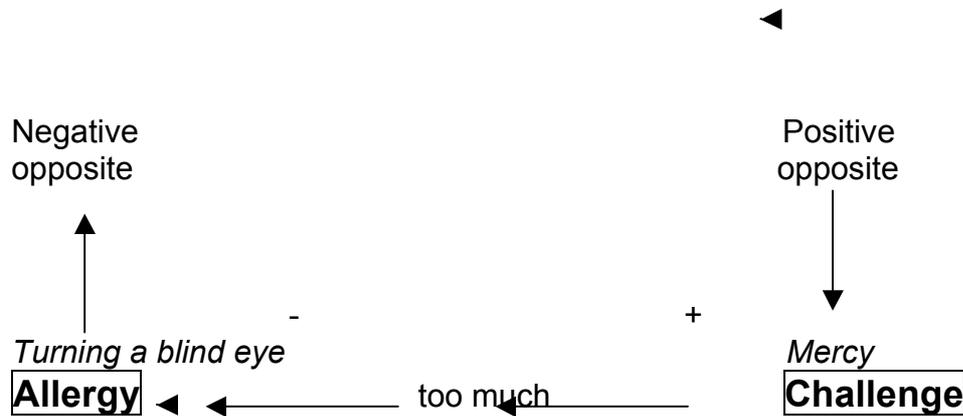
Even mercy knows its distortion. Over-applying it brings ‘turning a blind eye’. As a rule this distortion is the direct opposite of the original core quality. Here: justice.

A ‘just’ person is allergic to people who turn a blind eye. This *allergy* drives him towards his pitfall; in our example he will rigorously never allow himself nor anyone else to bend the rules. If you are acquainted with the psychological categories ‘Shadow, Dark Side’, you may explore how and why you avoid some questions about yourself. Ofman (1997, p41) says; ‘Something you are allergic to in someone else is probably an excess of a quality you yourself need most’. This way you can learn a lot from the people you have trouble with, communicating.

Below a schematical representation of a Core quadrant.

Core quadrant





Drawing up a core quadrant of yourself, you can start in any of the four angles. You hope to create a sharp picture of yourself and come to a harmony within yourself by working on your challenges. Dealing with your pitfalls and allergies can help.

2, Core quadrants and psychodrama.

Psychodrama allows several applications of the core quadrant method, two of which will be described below.

In their recently published book 'Drama in bedrijf' the authors Lex Mulder and Judith Budde describe how they apply drama techniques in training and coaching people in business. Often the techniques they describe are applicable in or derived from different contexts. Two of these involve the use of core quadrants. The one we report about is dealing with individual questions in training groups (2006, p 89) the other one (2006, p 164) mainly concerns group themes and team training. They call both applications *Living core quadrant*.

Procedure

Before the action part or *living* part begins, a core quadrant is drawn up by means of an interview or conversation. Sometimes the trainer has the group split up in smaller groups, working amongst themselves at a core quadrant for each person. Back in the whole group they are asked who would work out his core quadrant in action. Another time the trainer explains to the group and the protagonist how a core quadrant works. He puts a stool in the centre of the room, saying: this is the intersection of the diagonals of this quadrant. He then points out in which angle is the area of the core quality, to its right is the area of pitfall, diagonally across: the allergy and to the right thereof the challenge. The protagonist starts at the centre of this designed core quadrant, which is the central Ego-position.

Below a concise description of a case:

The trainer (T) asks: What would you like to start with?

The protagonist (P): I'd like to focus on one of my qualities: 'I am good at caring'.

T: Go to the area core quality and get into caring as much as you can.

P. (enthusiastically) I love cooking for visitors, having a good time with friends, pay attention to birthdays (laughing) I am the perfect son-in-law.

Finally this protagonist calls this core quality: considerate/thoughtful.

The trainer asks him to choose a group member to stand in for this quality. He chooses Joy, and she gets into this part.

The trainer then asks the protagonist to choose either his pitfall or his allergy.

P: I know exactly what I hate enormously. He walks to the allergy area and lashes out at any kind of person who is selfish, only thinking of themselves, allowing the door to slam into other people's faces, playing music loudly from their car stereo systems for everybody to 'enjoy' etc .

T: (interrupting) Try to identify with this position and don't turn against it. Get into your allergy, for it opens up the way to your challenge. Get into it.

P:(hesitating and trying to activate the selfish person within himself.) Mmm, this feels kind of good. Just taking myself into account, having my own interest in mind, I like it, I 'm good at it. Who cares what others think? I don't.!

Peter is invited to take the part of selfishness.

T: Now try to take the energy you had there, with you towards challenge. Gradually reduce it to 50 %.

This protagonist needs to concentrate really hard. He walks up and down between allergy an challenge three times before he has found it. He asks for a chair and a glass of water. Sits down. For a while there is an impressive silence. Then he starts talking.

P. This is something I do very little. Stop and think about myself. Realising what my needs are. You know,... I sometimes forget I'm thirsty, I even sometimes forget to go to the bathroom.

T: In this area you don't forget about that kind of thing. Can you tell us what is important to you, from this position?

P: Take time for myself.... Ask for help if I need it have somebody look after me for a change. ... realising what I need, I could sit here for hours.

The protagonist takes his time, The trainer allows him to do so and then stimulates him to finish the quadrant. Mary gets the part of challenge: realising your own needs.

The protagonist slowly walks towards the area pitfall.

P: This is the complete opposite. I am not concerned about what I need, I only see what other people need. I could easily fill my day with this. I always notice things that have to be done; I spot the coffeepot is empty, and I only drink tea myself.

Paul gets the part of always taking care of other people.

To finish the action, the trainer has the protagonist sit down on the stool at the centre. The four auxiliaries in turn show and speak out what the protagonist has just acted out.. He allows it to sink in.

Here the enacting stops.

The protagonist has clearly and sufficiently experienced the four different aspects of his quadrant. And, more importantly has energetically met his challenge.

3. Psychodrama and core quadrants

A completely different way of working: the director uses the elements and dynamics of the core quadrant methods, without explaining this method to the protagonist beforehand. He chooses this method based on a number of criteria. I list a number of criteria below.

- Psychodrama usually starts by searching for a topic to explore, looking for something that can make life a little easier. Some directors call this 'problem-directed approach'. Once the problem has been found (e.g. by means of the interview) one soon gets a picture of other people's behaviour that bothers the protagonist or it is his own behaviour he would like to change. You soon get to the question 'Show us what happens'.
- You should avoid using this method if it is very clear during the interview that you are dealing with strong emotional expression (e.g. in case of sexual abuse, suicide, violence) The method aims at mobilising positive qualities and challenges. Therefore is applicable as a continuation of therapy after the negative feelings have been dealt with.
- The director, knowledgeable with the method, has a number of directive question concerning each quadrant angle at his disposition, such as:
 - Core quality: What do others appreciate in me? What do I expect of demand in others? What do I play down in myself?
 - Pitfall: What am I willing to forgive in others? What do others blame me for? What do I try to justify for myself?
 - Challenge: What do I admire in others? What do I miss in myself? What do others wish for me?
 - Allergy: What would I hate in myself? What do I despise in others? What do others expect me to put in perspective?
- The director must have a large working place at his disposition, big enough to take ten paces in any direction. It is practical if you can leave four scenes, each in every angle.

Below a description of a psychodrama in which the director guides the protagonist to all different angles, without explaining the core quadrant method.

In this example it is a group of trainees, who want to learn directing psychodrama. During the warming up process a group theme emerged: We often keep our mouths shut, when we should speak our minds. It was not about being a hero, but about every day kind of things, such as: Saying, 'stop' when your children are asking too much of you, walking over to the neighbour when he is ruining you garden fence, asking for help when your work is getting too much for you for a while.

Continuing on the theme of having or lacking courage, a group member comes up with the question: “Why, don’t I have the courage to ask my doctor for an eye-lid correction”?

For a while the group is surprised; does this question apply to the theme?

The director immediately puts two and two together, and realises, that asking this questions in itself is sign of courage. She is speaking up for herself. He asks the rest of the group if they have ever had the same kind of experience. Four of them recognise the problem. Two men and two women. All four of them say that they would benefit from exploring this problem. The group members encourage the woman to be the protagonist this time. Without exploring the reasons behind their encouragement, the director says to the woman: ‘Ann, we are going to find out why you can’t ask the doctor this question. Maybe we are going to touch upon all kinds of different things, we’ll see. Do you mind being today’s protagonist?’

Ann: Not at all.

Then follows the interview. The woman describes herself through doubles and questions asked by the director, creating the following image:

Ann, (now 39 years of age) was the younger of two children. Her brother, Peet, was their mother’s favourite. Ann was the apple of her father’s eye. She tried to be what her father wanted her to be in every way: fresh, natural, beautiful long blond hair, sporty, no make-up, few but stylish jewellery. To him she was nature personified and he wanted her to stay that way. Ann, gratefully used all facilities offered to her by her father: mountain bike, sports-school, hairdresser, swimming-classes, designer clothes and lots of fruits and vegetables. She adored her father and finished the Sports Academy *for his sake* and moved on to kinesiology. Ann’s father died of a heart attack a year ago. Leaving her very upset for three months.

She was now the manager of a Health and Wellness – chain, with 22 national branches. She had always considered herself beautiful and liked this. It was just her eyes; wrinkles and bags appeared around them, giving her a tired expression, even though she felt top fit. At work she had many co-workers, all of whom were body centred and wanting to look beautiful, Ann stimulated this as they were to become the firm’s ‘faces’, She couldn’t stand people who were always complaining about their looks, when they were quite attractive. Any time a colleague would tell her something like that she felt like killing them.

At this point the director realises they could work with a core quadrant: the start could be Ann’s allergy.

Director (D): Ann, I am going to work with you from a number of positions, forces and counter-forces. What we need is a central point at which you incorporate each and every one of them. From there you can direct you own interplay of forces. Get a chair and put it in the centre.

Co-director (doubles): I’m getting a chair, but I don’t know where this is going.

D: Possible?

A.: Very much so, but I have every confidence, besides I am always in control myself.

D: Okay, if that is the case, I would like to ask you to come to this angle and tell us explicitly, what it is that you are allergic to.

A:I hate moaners.

D: Now become a moaner in this position. Talk in the first person and tell us, what there is to moan about.

A: I'm trying to be a moaner, who comes to me with his story: *Oh Ann, those massages are still too expensive for us, the employees. On our salary a 20 % discount still means quite a lot of money. And I do need it, as my skin is turning flappy.* These people make my hair stand out at the back of my neck.

D: What would you call this kind of behaviour?

A: Spoiled brat behaviour.

D: What causes this behaviour? What is behind it?

A: errr.

Double: I can't accept the fact that I'm getting older.

D: Possible?

A.: Quite possible. It's more or less the same for me. I can't stand myself either, when I am worried like that standing in front of the mirror. I say to myself: Girl, you are a dissatisfied chicken.

Double: Sometimes I hear myself when I hear moaning like that.

A: Maybe so, I don't tolerate this moaning in me, so I don't tolerate it from anybody else either.

D: You were supposed to identify with this position. Complete this sentence: In this position I am

A: a beggar, without self-respect.

D. Please choose a group member to represent this position for you.

A: John, would you mind?

Auxiliary John: I lack self-respect. I am a beggar.

A: Oh, I hate that!

As a director you now have the choice of moving on to either the core quality or the challenge. However the first move should be back to the central position. From there you decide, depending on the information the protagonist gives about her feelings in the allergy angle.

The director asks the protagonist to soliloquize on the things that do belong to her. This may be a self description but also a wish.

A: (soliloquizing) I am really quite a different person . I am a forceful, independent woman, standing up for herself in a world full of machos. My job is: showing men what their place is, and I'm good at that. In fact that is any woman's task: stand beside the man, look him straight in the eyes and show him who you are.

Co-director (doubles): I am a free woman.

A: I am a free person. Isn't that great! Internally rich!

D: Go to the angle opposite the beggar. You are his perfect opposite. You call it internally rich.

Ann goes to that angle and says loudly, again, towards the beggar: I am a forceful person, independent, resilient.

D: Do other people see you like that?

A: Yes I am regarded as the right person at the right place.

Double: I am in control.

D: Possible?

A: Yes, I am the director and others feel safe with me.

D: Please choose somebody to be the director.

Ann asks Paula (who doubled her before: I'm in control). Paula gets into it and says: I am a forceful person, I'm in control, I'm the director.

A: Yes that's it. Sometimes I take things too far. Then I want to protect and direct everybody, but that is stupid of course. Then the whole thing backfires. I tend to think that my way is the quickest, safest and most advantageous.

D: Hold on, you're going too fast. Stick to that quality of yours: I am the director, I am resilient, I am a forceful person.

Paula ("director"): Nobody has to guide me. I don't have to ask anybody's permission, I'm the boss.

D: Possible?

A: Yes, exactly, I'm the boss.

D: You are happy, your co-workers are happy. Enjoy it together with your auxiliary director.

After that Ann is guided back to the central position. The director points towards pitfall and says: If you look in that direction you see a position in which your quality of 'being in control' degenerate, because you apply too much of it. Does that ever happen to you? What do people around you say then?

Walk over there and think out loudly.

A: I hear: spoiled arrogant madam. You're so arrogant! Yes, that's what I hear. I send out the message that other people really can't do it very well. I can't delegate. I always drive myself, only then I feel safe.

Co-director: In this position I have to do it all. I don't do myself justice.

A: in this position I hear my father grumbling: Ann, stay the boss, nobody can do better than you. You are the top and you must stay so. In this position I won't be told what to do. I keep them at arm's length.

Co-director: I am unapproachable. I don't allow anyone to come close.

D: Possible?

A: (emotionally) I can't allow anybody into my life. That's why I am alone. (pauses for a minute) O, dear, Am I still trying to be daddy's little girl?

D: Are you still trying to be daddy's little girl?

A: I miss him so much. He is still so present. He made me become successful.

Double: I'm afraid I will lose him if I do the thing I would like to do.

D: Possible, Ann?

A: That's it! I don't want to lose him, and yet, I want to do my own things. But I get angry with myself if I allow myself to think like that.

Double: I would like to have an eye-lid correction.

A: Yes and no.

Co-director: I want to, but my father's daughter doesn't.

A: Yes.

D: Say that in your own words.

A: It feels like I've taken my dad as a hostage. It isn't the case that I am not allowed to do anything, I don't allow him to. He is not holding on to me, but I keep him imprisoned. I have to let him go, then I can love myself again. I have mummified him. (tears in her eyes) I do want to have my eye-lid correction.

The director walks around with Ann. She calms down and says: Now we need someone to represent arrogance. Well, Doris, why don't you?

Doris: (smiling) I'm in control of everything, even my father.

Ann to the director: She has still a lot to learn (pointing with her thumb)

Co-director: I have still a lot to learn there? What's that again?

A: What if I started by joining a women's network. That's killing two birds with one stone. I don't have to control anything and I don't have to measure up with any man. (silence) I want to learn to see the other for what he is and treat him as such. (silence)

I want to listen to what others say about me, learn to see the other me, besides the director. I want to find what my father made of his own life and not what he made of mine.

Double: There is a hell of a lot I have to learn. But first I'm going to take a break.

D: Possible?

A: Possible, but it won't be easy.

D: Ann this is the challenge angle. What is your biggest challenge?

A: Taking care of myself. Loving myself, learning to laugh.

D: Please choose someone to represent this challenge.

A: Here I want two persons, can I?

The director allows it, and Ann chooses two cheerful young women.

They say: This is nice. Go out and have fun.

A: (correcting them) Enjoying doing nothing and looking at myself.

The director takes Ann to the central chair. Has her sit down and has every angle speak its subsequent slogans, and then once again, but all together. Ann is surprised and concludes: The Boss is allowed to do nothing and take care of herself. That is new.

After this, during the sharing, several group members spoke about their own hidden ordering and forbidding inner voices, about parents and children and about being afraid of putting a burden upon the next generation.

4. Reflection

Let us conclude the description of the use of this instrument with three short thoughts. The first one places psychodrama in the framework of experiential learning. The second one encourages the director to focus on the positive elements the same

way that Ofman does. The third one is an invitation to draw up a core quadrant of yourself, for a change.

(1) Working with core quadrants in psychodrama in any form is characterized by experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). It aims at getting the hang of experiences and a better understanding of them, and then to carry them to the next higher or deeper level. This way you get a purification, sometimes reinforcement and perhaps a leaving behind of old concepts (with their behavioural codes).

Actually you pass through the four phases that can be distinguished within the process of experiential learning, these are:

- Describing and reliving concrete experiences.
- A reflection thereof.
- A recognition and revision of the under-lying concepts about oneself, the others and one's own actions.
- And finally choosing a different behaviour, aiming at more positive experiences.

(2) It is the director's job to test whether the experiences, spontaneously arisen or handed to the protagonist (by doubles), do indeed reflect reality. He makes it easier to link intuition and reason. Especially, as far as the angles of core quality and challenge are concerned, thought and feeling should go hand in hand. The positive elements in the core quadrant should be the final destination in psychodrama as well.

During the sharing, the director and co-director must see to it that the other group members are asked about positive qualities even if they start sharing from the pitfall and allergy positions.

(3) Directors of psychodrama themselves may benefit from drawing up their own core quadrants. It is our experience that core quadrants change with the development of the person involved. E.g. for a young psychologically trained psychodrama director a common core quadrant was 'being able to listen to others' (e.g. the protagonist). His challenge becomes: 'developing courage to be directive'. By practising this a lot, this may eventually become one of his core qualities. In our experience many a director gets so good at leading and bringing structure, that he often gets ahead of the protagonist. In supervised sessions his colleagues will correct him. They tell him: 'Work with the protagonist, follow him!' In his core quadrant the challenge would be: 'Listen to the other person'.

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