WORKSHEET + WORKED EXAMPLE

Check Your Assumptions

A clearer distinction between what you observed, what you inferred, and what to ask.

10-15 minutes | Ladder of Inference

Use it in three moves

1. Start with a conclusion you are tempted to treat as fact. Reconstruct the observations and interpretations beneath it.

2. Look for what you selected, left out, or assumed. Offer another plausible explanation without pretending it must be true.

3. Choose a question that could change your view. Use the ladder on your own reasoning; do not announce which rung another person is stuck on.

What could someone else have observed?

Words, actions, timing. Keep motives out of this part.

What did I pay attention to?

What did I overlook or not have access to?

What meaning did I give it?

What did I assume without checking?

Check Your Assumptions

YOUR WORKING NOTES / CONTINUED

What conclusion did I reach?

What am I about to do because of that?

Another explanation that could fit

A possibility to test, not a replacement certainty.

What could I ask or check?

Ask without hiding an accusation in the question.

View the reasoning

Choose: From observation to action / From action back to observation

A question for me

Which part of this story am I most reluctant to have corrected?

See one way through

FICTIONAL WORKED EXAMPLE / NOT THE ANSWER TO YOUR SITUATION

What could someone else have observed?

Ravi said nothing in the final ten minutes of the proposal review.

What did I pay attention to?

I noticed the silence, but did not ask whether he had the latest proposal.

What meaning did I give it?

He does not support the proposal.

What did I assume without checking?

If he supported it, he would have spoken.

What conclusion did I reach?

He will resist the next step.

What am I about to do because of that?

Leave him out of the planning group.

Another explanation that could fit

He may not have had enough context, or may have wanted time to think.

What could I ask or check?

Ravi, what is your view of the proposal, and what have we missed?

View the reasoning

From observation to action

The thinking behind it

Nic's writing on certainty invites a more humble relationship with our own explanations. Leave enough room for the person to surprise you.

The Ladder of Inference is associated with Chris Argyris and action-science work on how people move from observations to conclusions and action. This adaptation makes the steps visible so you can inspect your own reasoning and compare it with another person's account. The labels are working prompts, not a psychological assessment.

The Systems Thinker: Ladder of Inference

Read The Search For Unapologetic Impracticality In Leadership: Part II - The Seduction of Certainty by Nic Payne