WORKSHEET + WORKED EXAMPLE

Look Beyond the First Explanation

A distinction between observation, interpretation, and conditions to investigate.

15 minutes | Observation and underlying conditions

Use it in three moves

1. Separate the headline from the observations supporting it.
2. Generate possible conditions without claiming to know someone's motive.
3. Go back to the people and the work to test your explanation.

What is the explanation being repeated?

Write it as a claim, not an established fact.

What has actually been observed?

Use specific events and sources.

What have we inferred from those observations?

Keep motives and generalizations here, not in the observation.

Look Beyond the First Explanation

YOUR WORKING NOTES / CONTINUED

What conditions could make the behavior understandable?

Consider access, history, incentives, relationships, and workload.

Who can help us understand what is happening?

Include people experiencing the condition.

What small inquiry will test the explanation?

Choose something that could contradict your first story.

A question for me

What part of the situation have I made easier to overlook?

See one way through

FICTIONAL WORKED EXAMPLE / NOT THE ANSWER TO YOUR SITUATION

What is the explanation being repeated?

People are resisting the new booking process.

What has actually been observed?

Six team members still ask the coordinator to make bookings; four said their login had not worked.

What have we inferred from those observations?

We assumed that asking the coordinator meant they did not want to learn the system.

What conditions could make the behavior understandable?

Login failures, lack of practice time, and the coordinator still being the fastest route.

Who can help us understand what is happening?

Ask people from different shifts to walk through a real booking.

What small inquiry will test the explanation?

Observe three bookings, repair access problems, and ask what still makes the process hard.

The thinking behind it

The conditions around people can explain something a label about them cannot. Include the conditions you help maintain.

The iceberg metaphor is used in writing and systems thinking to distinguish what is visible from what lies beneath it. This original tool uses that distinction as a prompt for inquiry, not a way to diagnose hidden motives.

Read You Have a Culture Problem by Nic Payne