



Performance Matters

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Newsletter

Challenge the Assumptions

How much time and money is your organization wasting because of faulty assumptions?

The world is rapidly changing. The pace of life is increasing and the pressure to respond intensifies. The world now requires people to learn and relearn, to regularly evaluate the way they work and the decisions that are made. Simply put, as the world continues to become more global the cost of making assumptions goes up.

Every time you accept a proposition as truth without proof or demonstration, you are making an assumption; most of those assumptions are unconscious, and they operate in your thinking without you knowing it. The lenses and filters that people are wearing influence those assumptions. You and I can look at something in two very different ways – with neither of them being right or wrong – just different.

Inside This Issue:

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Robin has facilitated presentations with groups of 150 or more, and has been a guest speaker for several well-known organizations, including the New York State Conference of Mayors, The Governor's Office of Employee Relations, and the New York State Society of Medical Assistants Annual Convention.

She co-authored the book *Maximize Your Mind; Peak Your Potential* available on her web site.

Her article "Ethics in Sales" was published in the HRDQ Press.

For a complete listing of products and services visit our web sites at: www.ReachandAchieve.com and www.PerformanceLeadershipTools.com

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Problems with Assumptions

The problem with assumptions is they stifle creativity, put people into ruts and promote conflicts in relationships. Simply stated, assumptions keep people where they are and hinder growth. If you want to increase your effectiveness you have to begin to look at some of the assumptions and beliefs that guide your actions.

People waste inordinate amounts of time and energy on projects and tasks, simply because they assume this is the way it has always been done, so it must be right. People are afraid to rock the boat, afraid of what others may think of them, or they doubt their own thinking and wisdom. Great ideas and famous inventions come when people begin to challenge the status quo, ask questions, and test assumptions.

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Related Quotes

The creative individual has the capacity to free himself from the web of social pressures in which the rest of us are caught. He is capable of questioning the assumptions that the rest of us accept."

- John Gardner

Telling the future by looking at the past assumes that conditions remain constant. This is like driving a car by looking in the rearview mirror."

- Herb Brody

Facing Your Assumptions

How does an individual gain awareness of their assumptions?

In order to bring assumptions to the surface you must begin the journey of becoming a critical thinker and objectively look at your thoughts. Learn to question and test thoughts and assumptions. Here are some questions to get you started:

Question goals, purposes and objectives.

The first step in uncovering assumptions is identifying your goals, purposes and objectives. What is the central purpose of your project? Your group? Your work with this person? Getting clear on the purpose and goals of a project, relationship, or group can help reveal or prevent many preliminary assumptions that are often made.

Question the way problems are shown, questions are formulated and issues are expressed.

What issues have to be addressed? What are the key questions that should be asked? If you don't correctly identify a problem, you take the road of making assumptions. If you don't ask the right questions to yourself, another individual, or a team, you are also taking that assumption road. Ask the questions to correctly identify problems, issues or concerns; then test to see if those questions have led you to the core problem.

Questioning Assumptions

Question information and sources of information.

What information do you need to better understand what is going on? Where can you get it? How can you test the information? Is it accurate? Is it relevant to this issue? If you are lacking information, assumptions will be made. If you have the wrong information, misleading assumptions will be automatic.

Question interpretations and conclusions.

What do you need to keep in mind with interpretations, judgments and conclusions? It's helpful to ask: What conclusions am I coming to? What facts do I have to support that conclusion? What conclusions are others coming to? Many assumptions are the result of jumping quickly to a conclusion without weighing the facts or knowing how you interpreted information. Take the time to access your interpretations and conclusions.

Question the point (s) of view being considered.



What points of view are important to consider in this issue? Have you looked at other points of view before drawing any conclusions? One of the best ways to test your assumptions is to consider alternate viewpoints. Anything can be looked at in a myriad of ways, and it is only through considering other beliefs and outlooks that people expand their horizons.

Become a Self-Directed Thinker

It is quite possible, and unfortunately quite "normal," to live an unexamined life, to live in an automated, unthinking way. It is possible to live, in other words, without really taking charge of the person you are becoming, without developing, or acting upon, the skills and insights you are capable of. However, if you fail to look at your assumptions and allow yourself to become unreflective, you miss many opportunities to make your own life, and the lives of others, fuller, happier, and more productive.

What is your choice?

Often Unasked Questions

- What are the known facts?
 - What facts are unknown at this point?
 - What are your feelings about this situation?
 - What are your options?
 - What is important?
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Appreciation – Extracting Maximum Information from facts

By: James Manktelow – www.mindtools.com

Appreciation is a very simple but powerful technique for extracting the maximum amount of information from a simple fact.

Starting with a fact, ask the question 'So what?' - i.e. what are the implications of that fact? Keep on asking that question until you have drawn all possible inferences.

Example:

Appreciation is a technique used by military planners, so we will take a military example:

Fact: It rained heavily last night

So What?

The ground will be wet

So What?

It will turn into mud quickly

So What?

If many troops and vehicles pass over the same ground, movement will be progressively slower and more difficult as the ground gets muddier and more difficult.

So What?

Where possible, stick to paved roads. Otherwise expect movement to be much slower than normal.

While it would be possible to reach this conclusion without the use of a formal technique, Appreciation provides a framework within which you can extract information quickly, effectively and reliably.

Key points:

Asking 'so what?' repeatedly helps you to extract all important information implied by a fact.

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