

SAHILVERSE / INDEPENDENT FIELD GUIDE 001

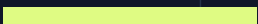


THE OPEN THINKING PLAYBOOK

Big ideas. No boardroom required.

How to inspect a framework, ask better questions
and keep intellectual humility intact.

SAHIL TAYAL / NEW DELHI / 2026
A PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE EXPERIMENT



Ideas should be usable.

Some concepts arrive in expensive-looking presentations. Many of the underlying research ideas are already public. The difficult work is making them fit a particular situation.

The question this guide asks

What changes when we separate an idea from its packaging? A person should be able to learn about motivation, decision-making or team behaviour without pretending that reading one framework confers professional expertise.

What this guide is

A short, usable introduction to six research-informed lenses; an explanation of what advisory work adds beyond knowledge; practical questions, fictional examples and spaces for your own notes.

What this guide is not

Not a proprietary consulting manual, a validated diagnostic instrument, an accreditation, or a guarantee of organisational results. Cases here are invented; no company, employee or customer data is represented.

A useful rule: separate what you observed, what you inferred, what you propose, and what evidence could change your mind.

HOW TO USE IT

1. — Choose one situation that matters.
2. — Select one or two lenses; more labels are not automatically more insight.
3. — Write down your uncertainty and the people affected.
4. — Try a small, reversible test when appropriate; inspect consequences.

What does a consultant sell?

A framework can be public while competent professional work remains valuable. The distinction is crucial for fair comparisons.

PUBLICLY LEARNABLE	CONTEXT-DEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL WORK
A theory about motivation	Diagnosing this organisation’s incentives, constraints and power dynamics
A decision matrix	Gathering valid evidence, identifying trade-offs and facilitating decisions
An implementation checklist	Building operational ownership, training, measurement and repair
A compelling slide deck	Stakeholder trust, communication and accountability

Knowledge has a marginal cost; judgment has a context

Once authored, a clear public explainer can be read by many people. But each real organisation has new people, histories, goals, information gaps and consequences. Applying the idea is not just repeating the definition.

Fees are not evidence of quality

An expensive engagement may be excellent or disappointing. A free resource may be enlightening or misleading. Ask whether there is a valid diagnosis, proportionate method, transparent reasoning and a defensible outcome.

The unbundling thesis: open access to useful concepts and respect for accountable expertise can coexist.

Say what you actually mean.

Corporate shorthand can be useful among specialists. It becomes costly when it hides disagreement or substitutes prestige for precision.

PHRASE	PLAIN QUESTION
Drive alignment	Who agrees to do what, and where do they disagree?
Unlock synergies	What improves when these groups work together?
Low-hanging fruit	Which easy improvement is important enough to matter?
Digital transformation	Which everyday process or behaviour will change?
Build a scalable model	What happens when demand doubles?
Create stakeholder buy-in	Who has agency, concerns, costs or veto power?

The jargon stress test

For any management phrase, ask: (1) What concrete behaviour or outcome does it name? (2) Who is responsible? (3) How could an outsider tell if it happened? (4) What could falsify the claim?

An important nuance

Simple language should clarify, not oversimplify. Sometimes a technical term compresses a real scientific distinction. Translate it, then preserve what matters about the original.

The goal is not to ban specialist language. It is to prevent specialist language from doing the thinking for us.

Before you blame motivation.

The COM-B model describes behaviour as involving capability, opportunity and motivation. Use it as a map of questions, not a personality verdict.

Capability

Can the person perform the task? Consider knowledge, physical and psychological skills, fatigue and accessible support. Training may help with missing skills, but it cannot repair an impossible workload.

Opportunity

Does the environment permit the behaviour? Look at tools, time, social norms, incentives, competing tasks and decision authority. Someone may know what to do and still lack the chance to do it.

Motivation

Does the person want or habitually initiate the behaviour? Attention, habit, confidence, goals and emotions may all matter. Avoid inferring inner states solely from an observed failure.

Example: A shop worker forgets reorder entries. Training is one hypothesis. A rushed closing shift, confusing sheet or missing ownership are others.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO TAKE TO THE FIELD

Observe — When, where and under which conditions does the behaviour occur?

Check skills — Is the task understood and feasible?

Check context — Which resources or rules help or block it?

Listen — How do affected people describe the obstacle?

Test — What small change could distinguish competing explanations?

SOURCE: Michie, van Stralen & West (2011), Implementation Science, DOI 10.1186/1748-5908-6-42.

Motivation is not a volume knob.

Self-determination theory and psychological safety raise two complementary questions: is engagement meaningful, and is speaking up socially possible?

Three psychological needs

Self-determination theory examines autonomy (experienced volition), competence (an ability to act effectively) and relatedness (connection and belonging). It does not say freedom from every constraint is possible or that supportive conditions eliminate material inequality.

Safety is observable in response

Team psychological safety concerns a shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is tolerable. When someone asks a naive question or reports a mistake, observe the response. A motivational poster cannot substitute for consistent behaviour.

LOOK FOR	ASK IN PRACTICE
Autonomy	Which parts of the process can people meaningfully influence?
Competence	Is feedback actionable and practice supported?
Relatedness	Who is excluded from the information loop?
Speaking up	What happened the last time someone disagreed?

Psychological safety is not universal agreement. You can maintain standards, disagree and still make it safer to report problems.

SOURCES: Deci & Ryan (2008); Edmondson (1999). Further reading and URLs on page 12.

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A plan is not a prophecy.

Two intellectual tools help bridge ideal goals and ordinary constraints: implementation intentions and bounded rationality.

If-then plans: link a cue to a response

Instead of “we will communicate better,” write “If a stockout is noticed, then the person on shift records the item before closing.” The cue and action are specific. Then inspect whether time, authority and resources make the plan viable.

Bounded rationality: design for limited minds

People decide with incomplete information, deadlines and finite attention. Better process can clarify the minimum evidence, the owner, and what will happen if an assumption fails. More analysis is not always a better decision.

Try this: “If [recognisable cue] happens, then [feasible action] will be done by [owner], with [required support].”

PUT IT TO THE TEST

Cue — Could a person recognise the moment clearly?

Action — Is the next step concrete and small enough?

Friction — What would stop it on a bad day?

Evidence — How will you tell if the plan was carried out?

Revision — What will you change if it fails repeatedly?

SOURCES: Gollwitzer (1999), implementation intentions; Herbert Simon, Nobel Prize lecture on decision processes and bounded rationality.

The work after the workshop.

A moving presentation is not the same as an intervention. Changing routines requires a theory of action, affected people, resources and evaluation.

STAGE	QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING
1. Define	What is happening now? Who experiences the cost?
2. Diagnose	Which explanations are plausible, and what data are missing?
3. Design	Which reversible change might reduce the identified constraint?
4. Implement	Who does what? What resources and consent are needed?
5. Learn	Which outcomes, unintended effects and alternative explanations matter?
6. Maintain	Who reviews, corrects, hands off or ends the change?

Do not confuse adoption with success

A tool may be used frequently without improving the outcome that justified it. A workshop may delight attendees without changing behaviour. A process change may reduce errors while imposing unfair costs on workers.

Ask who pays for your improvement

Speed for one department might create overload in another. A decision can be financially sensible yet ethically troubling. Identify whose time, autonomy or risk is being traded before declaring success.

Implementation is the encounter between a concept and a particular world. Keep the world in the frame.

Three cases. No hero answer.

These cases are invented teaching prompts. Their value is in the questions and counterfactuals, not in producing the “correct” consultant-style recommendation.

Case A — The family shop

Sales are flat. Someone recommends buying a loyalty platform. Before comparing software, inspect why people do or do not return. Talk with customers, examine stockouts and margins, and consider whether a cheap pilot can expose the key assumption.

Unanswered: Who is missing from the sample? Would a new system add operational burden?

Case B — The silent team

A manager says their door is open, but people do not raise risks. Observe what happens to dissenters; investigate how disagreement is handled. A speaking quota may increase exposure without building safety.

Unanswered: Is silence driven by fear, exhaustion, unclear authority, cultural norms, or something else?

Case C — The training trap

A workshop receives glowing feedback; six weeks later little has changed. Perhaps the material was weak. Perhaps people have no time or permission to practise. Measure the targeted behaviour rather than just satisfaction.

Unanswered: What observable behaviour was expected, and what credible comparison is available?

In any case, ask: “What would I recommend if I had to explain the trade-offs to the people who live with them?”

Confidence needs a ladder.

A polished chart or precise percentage is not automatically strong evidence. Look closely at what each kind of information can support.

OBSERVATION	WHAT IT DOES — AND DOES NOT — TELL YOU
Someone liked the workshop	Evidence of reaction; not necessarily behaviour change
The team reports more concerns	May mean more voice, more issues, or both
A pilot improved over one month	A promising observation; seasonality and confounders remain
A pre/post comparison	Shows change over time; not automatically causal
A suitable controlled evaluation	Can strengthen causal inference; still requires context and limits

Five ways to keep claims proportional

State the sample. Distinguish a measurement from the thing it represents. Disclose assumptions. Look for adverse effects. Mention rival explanations before claiming that your intervention caused the outcome.

Be precise about simulations

A fictional budget allocation is not evidence of actual fees. A branching case shows possible reasoning; it does not estimate probabilities about people. A self-created score is not validated merely because it is numerical.

Claim exactly what your evidence supports — neither more nor less.

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One question. A smaller experiment.

You can complete this privately or in a group. Keep names and identifying workplace details out of material you do not control.

1 / WHAT IS THE OBSERVABLE SITUATION?

2 / WHICH ASSUMPTIONS MIGHT BE WRONG?

3 / WHICH PEOPLE, RESOURCES AND RISKS MATTER?

4 / WHAT IS ONE SAFE, REVERSIBLE NEXT STEP?

5 / WHAT WOULD COUNT AS LEARNING?

Good research and practical judgment both leave room for surprise.

Read the original thinking.

A field guide should be a doorway, not a dead end. These links identify public research or author-maintained discussions. No cited scholar or organisation endorses this site.

Behaviour Change Wheel / COM-B

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