Version 2 · Revised 11 November 2026 · 7/12

Diagnose the Problem Before Choosing a Solution

By the end of this guide, you can

Build a diagnostic record that compares explanations and selects a proportionate next investigation.

Bring to the task

A defined performance gap, recent cases and people who know how the work is performed.

“We need another course” can be a reasonable request and an untested diagnosis. Before designing the course, ask what people need to do differently, what happens now and what prevents the desired performance. A skill gap is one possibility. Missing information, workload, incentives, access and unclear responsibility are others.

Define the gap in observable terms. “The team lacks ownership” is an interpretation. “A proposal reached its deadline without anyone confirming the technical assumptions” describes a case you can investigate. Specify the expected action and compare it with the actual sequence.

EXPLAIN · APPLY

Compare explanations before choosing a response

Observed gap: proposal missed its deadline

Capability

Can the employee check completeness with the right inputs?

Information

When was the required technical estimate available?

Responsibility

Who owned the unresolved input?

Competing explanations, not established causes. Seek evidence that distinguishes them.

Original Tibyan teaching aid. Illustrative example; not observed field results.

Generate competing explanations for the same case. Ask what each predicts and what evidence would distinguish them; several conditions may interact.

Text explanation of the graphic
Compare explanations before choosing a response
Observed gap: proposal missed its deadline
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Can the employee check completeness with the right inputs?
Information

When was the required technical estimate available?
Responsibility
Who owned the unresolved input?
Competing explanations, not established causes. Seek evidence that distinguishes them.
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Case, demonstration and correction

Work the diagnosis with supplied records

Fictional teaching packet — all dates, records and results below are invented for practice. Namaa requires a proposal's scope and technical assumptions to be confirmed before issue. The operations manager must choose the next response by 11 November 2026. All times are on the same fictional business clock.

Record	What the packet says
E1 · Proposal P41	Due 4 November, 15:00. Estimate requested 3 November, 11:00; received 4 November, 17:00. Proposal issued late.
E2 · Proposal P42	Due 5 November, 15:00. Estimate requested 3 November, 09:00; received at 12:00 that day. Proposal issued on time.
E3 · Proposal P43	Due 6 November, 15:00. Estimate received 5 November, 11:00; proposal still late. It involved an additional service not present in P41/P42. The approval log is missing.
E4 · Demonstration	With complete reference information and the agreed checklist, the coordinator identified all four required assumptions omitted from a fictional practice draft. This is one supported attempt, not proof of routine proficiency.

A completed competing-explanations matrix

Explanation and prediction	Support	Challenge or uncertainty	Discriminating check
Missing capability: checks fail even with clear inputs and time.	No direct skill-failure evidence is supplied; P43’s lateness makes the specific task worth examining.	E4 weakens a general inability claim; P43 may involve extra complexity.	Observe the additional-service check with current instructions; inspect the reasoning, not just completion.
Information timing: a required input arrives after the commitment.	E1's estimate arrived two hours after the deadline.	E3 had an earlier estimate, so timing alone does not explain every case.	Trace request, receipt and change timestamps; check whether the received estimate was complete.

Explanation and prediction	Support	Challenge or uncertainty	Discriminating check
Unclear responsibility: unresolved items wait because no role owns escalation.	The P43 approval log cannot identify an owner.	A missing log is not proof that no one acted.	Ask the coordinator and approver separately, then inspect the message assigning the unresolved item.

Reasoned next decision: operations manager Salma will retrieve the P43 messages and observe one additional-service completeness check before commissioning training. If the coordinator can perform the check but the item had no acknowledged owner, Salma will test an explicit escalation handoff on the next three suitable proposals. If the check fails despite adequate inputs and instructions, she will add targeted practice with feedback. She will review at the third eligible proposal, or earlier if an unconfirmed commitment is about to be issued. Information and capability problems may coexist.

Weak response: “Two late proposals prove poor time management.” It converts a small, selected packet into a causal conclusion. **Improved response:** “This packet makes information timing plausible for P41 and leaves P43 unresolved; obtain the missing approval trail before choosing the intervention.”

COMPARE · APPLY

An evidence matrix that can challenge a diagnosis

Capability

Prediction: checking errors persist when the necessary inputs are available.	Seek: a demonstration with complete inputs. Correct checking would weaken a simple skill-gap explanation.

Information timing

Prediction: work pauses while a required input is missing.	Seek: request/receipt timestamps. An input already available before the pause would challenge this explanation.

Responsibility

Prediction: unresolved requests have no clear owner or escalation route.	Seek: agreed versus actual handoffs. A named owner who acted on time would challenge this explanation.

Illustrative predictions and evidence to seek—not observations. More than one explanation may be important; compare other differences between cases.

Original Tibyan teaching aid. Illustrative content, not observed field results or a validated instrument.

Use the predictions to plan evidence collection, not to label causes already proven. Seek a finding that could weaken each explanation and record other differences between cases.

Text explanation of the graphic
An evidence matrix that can challenge a diagnosis
Capability
Prediction: checking errors persist when the necessary inputs are available.
Seek: a demonstration with complete inputs. Correct checking would weaken a simple skill-gap explanation.
Information timing

Prediction: work pauses while a required input is missing.
Seek: request/receipt timestamps. An input already available before the pause would challenge this explanation.
Responsibility
Prediction: unresolved requests have no clear owner or escalation route.
Seek: agreed versus actual handoffs. A named owner who acted on time would challenge this explanation.
Illustrative predictions and evidence to seek—not observations. More than one explanation may be important; compare other differences between cases.
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Your reusable working record

1. Expected and observed performance

Name the standard, case and period; do not turn an interpretation into the gap.

2. Explanation 1: prediction, support and challenge

Use a separate row or paragraph for each component.

3. Explanation 2: prediction, support and challenge

Identify evidence that could make this explanation insufficient.

4. Explanation 3: prediction, support and challenge

A missing record is an uncertainty, not a confirmed absence of action.

5. Source/date and confounding conditions

Record where the observation comes from and what differs between cases.

6. Next evidence check and owner

Choose evidence that could alter the intervention.

7. Conditional response and review trigger

Write what you will do under at least two plausible findings.

Annotated completed record

Expected and observed performance

Scope and assumptions must be confirmed before issue. P41 and P43 missed their stated deadlines; P42 did not. Packet: 3–6 November 2026, fictional.

The gap uses named cases and an explicit standard; it does not estimate the company-wide delay rate.

Explanation 1: prediction, support and challenge

Capability: predict a failed completeness check with adequate inputs. Support: no direct evidence of a failed check; lateness alone is nondiagnostic. Challenge: E4 succeeded; P43 is more complex. Next: observe the extra-service check.

The late outcome is not treated as direct evidence of a skill deficit.

Explanation 2: prediction, support and challenge

Information timing: predict the estimate arrives after commitment. E1 supports this; E3 challenges timing as the sole explanation. Check completeness and change timestamps.

A supported explanation for one case need not explain every case.

Explanation 3: prediction, support and challenge

Ownership: predict unresolved items lack acknowledged escalation. P43 owner unknown because log missing. Obtain messages and compare two accounts.

The entry keeps the absence of a log distinct from the absence of responsibility.

Source/date and confounding conditions

E1–E4, fictional packet checked 11 November 2026. P43 includes an additional service; workload and approval messages remain unknown.

Named exhibits make the inference auditable; the extra service is an alternative explanation.

Next evidence check and owner

Salma retrieves P43 messages and observes the additional-service completeness check before choosing training or a process repair.

The check distinguishes support conditions from task capability.

Conditional response and review trigger

Successful check + no acknowledged escalation: test explicit ownership on three eligible proposals. Failed supported check: add targeted practice. Review at proposal 3, or before an unconfirmed issue.

Both findings lead to different, bounded actions; neither establishes a revenue effect.

Practice and retry

Complete the matrix from E1–E4 before reading the worked decision. Then add this new fictional fact: P43's message assigned escalation to sales, but the coordinator did not receive it. Revise one explanation and the next check; do not merely add the fact to your original conclusion.

Common error and corrective feedback

Watch for diagnosing a trait from an outcome, treating missing documentation as proof of inaction, and assuming contrasting cases differ in only one condition. A defensible alternative may retain several interacting explanations.

Independent-study alternative

Cover the worked matrix, complete your own, then compare the predictions and uncertainties rather than matching its wording. Write one reason your first diagnosis might fail.

Check your work

- The gap concerns observable work.
- Competing explanations have different predictions.
- Contradictory evidence is considered.
- The next check could change the response.

Apply and review

Collect the agreed evidence and revise the diagnosis before committing to a larger intervention.

Sources and further reading

- CIPD. Evidence-based practice for effective decision-making
- HM Treasury. The Magenta Book: Test and Learn

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Original evidence-informed teaching aid. Cases and example records are hypothetical; the assessment is not a validated certification.