

# LISTENING FOR THE ASK



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## Who are we?

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## Agenda

- What is Listening for the Ask?
  - Paradigms & Practices
- What prevents us from Listening for the Ask?
  - Bias
- What tools are we using to help us Listen for the Ask?

Have you ever noticed team members  
make comments or observations,  
rather than questions?

...or you ask a question to your team  
only to hear a pin drop?



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# WHAT IS LISTENING FOR THE ASK?



# Reframing

- Looking for further meaning in what people say by:
  - asking questions
  - thinking about bias
  - encouraging safe spaces
- Developing situational awareness
- Thinking in context



# Shift your paradigms

- Assign purpose to comments or observations
- Shift from common paradigms to Listening for the Ask paradigms
- Challenge your thinking



# Listening for the Ask Paradigms

Every time a person speaks they are either providing information or making a request.

“This came up in the last project”



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# In the moment

Information	How I get there
There's a better way	"Since the last project, what new insights have been made?"
The team is familiar with the work	"Could we benefit from quality control, like a checklist to verify steps?"

Request	How I get there
What did we do last time?	"Yes, it did. Let's see what we can learn from the lessons learned"
Is there a different way?	"Would it benefit us to brainstorm some alternatives?"

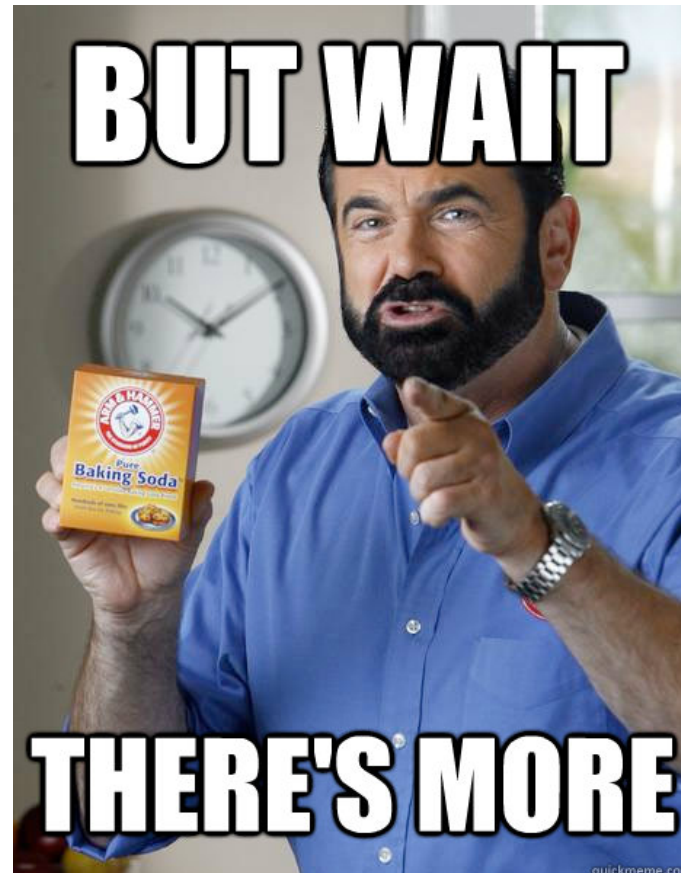


# Follow up actions

- Information shared
  - Note in project documentation and verify
  - Develop tools or resources
  - Parking lot/Future meeting item
- Request made
  - Note decision for leadership/sponsor
  - Explore and regroup
    - Brainstorm
    - Research



Meetings are one way to engage teams...



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# Get Creative!

- Online brainstorming
  - Email
  - Project site discussion boards
  - Wikis and SharePoint
- Digital meeting spaces
  - Video conferencing
  - Instant messaging/group chat



# Preparing to Listen for the Ask

Common Practices	Listening for the Ask Practices
Only structure “big meetings”	<b>Structure all meetings</b>
Assume everyone knows one another	<b>Get to know you activities</b>



# Listening for the Ask

Common Practices	Listening for the Ask Practices
Rush through discussion	<b>Press pause</b>
Rush through decision-making	<b>Stay creative and curious</b>
Assume effective group dynamics	<b>Develop group norms</b>



# Listening for the Ask

Common Practices	Listening for the Ask Practices
<p>Ignore mixed signals and expect questions to sound like questions</p> <p>Expect people speak up if they have a concern or notice a problem</p>	<p><b>Squint with your ears</b></p> <p><b>Develop situational awareness</b></p>



# WHAT PREVENTS US FROM LISTENING FOR THE ASK?





# Bias

- Oxford Dictionary definition: Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.
- What does bias mean to you?



**anchoring**

The first thing you judge influences your judgment of all that follows.

Human minds are associative in nature, so the order in which we receive information helps determine the course of our judgments and perceptions. Be especially mindful of this bias during negotiations.

**confirmation bias**

You favor things that confirm your existing beliefs.

We are primed to see and agree with ideas that fit our preconceptions, and to ignore and dismiss information that conflicts with them.

"The first principle is that you must not fool yourself – and you are the easiest person to fool."  
– Richard Feynman

**backfire effect**

When your core beliefs are challenged, it can cause you to believe even more strongly.

We can experience being wrong about some ideas as an attack upon our very selves, or our tribal identity. This can lead to motivated reasoning which causes us to double-down, despite disconfirming evidence.

**declinism**

You remember the past as better than it was, and expect the future to be worse than it will likely be.

Despite living in the most peaceful and prosperous time in history, many people believe things are getting worse. Use metrics such as life expectancy, levels of crime and violence, and prosperity statistics.

**just world hypothesis**

Your preference for a just world makes you presume that it exists.

A world in which people don't always get what they deserve is an uncomfortable one that threatens our preferred narrative. Try to remember that we're all fallible, and bad things happen to good people.

**sunk cost fallacy**

You irrationally cling to things that have already cost you something.

When we've invested our time, money, or emotion into something, it hurts to let it go. Ask yourself: had I not already invested something, would I still do so now?

**dunning-kruger effect**

The more you know, the less confident you're likely to be.

Because experts know just how much they don't know, they tend to underestimate their ability, but it's easy to be over-confident when you have only a simple idea of how things are.

**barnum effect**

You see personal specifics in vague statements by filling in the gaps.

Psychics, astrologers and others use this bias to make it seem like they're telling you something relevant. Consider how things might be interpreted to apply to anyone, not just you.

**framing effect**

You allow yourself to be unduly influenced by context and delivery.

Only when we have the intellectual humility to accept the fact that we can be manipulated, can we hope to limit how much we are. Try to be mindful of how things are being put to you.

**in-group bias**

You unfairly favor those who belong to your group.

We presume that we're fair and impartial, but the truth is that we automatically favor those who are most like us, or belong to our groups. Try to compensate by imagining strangers to be family.



**availability heuristic**

Your judgments are influenced by what springs most easily to mind.

How recent, emotionally powerful, or unusual your memories are can make them seem more relevant. This, in turn, can cause you to apply them too readily. Try to gain different perspectives and source statistical information.

**belief bias**

If a conclusion supports your existing beliefs, you'll rationalize anything that supports it.

It's difficult for us to set aside our existing beliefs to consider the true merits of an argument. In practice this means that our ideas become impervious to criticism, and are perpetually reinforced.

**groupthink**

You let the social dynamics of a group situation override the best outcomes.

Dissent can be uncomfortable and dangerous to one's social standing, and so often the most confident or first voice will determine group decisions.

**optimism bias**

You overestimate the likelihood of positive outcomes.

There are benefits to a positive attitude, but it's unwise to allow this to affect our ability to be realistic. If you make rational judgments you'll have a lot more to feel positive about.

**reactance**

You'd rather do the opposite of what someone is trying to make you do.

When we feel our liberty is being constrained, our inclination is to resist, however in doing so we can over-compensate. Wisdom springs from reflection, folly from reaction.

**curse of knowledge**

Once you understand something you presume it to be obvious to everyone.

When teaching someone something new, go slow and explain like they're ten years old (without being patronizing). Repeat key points and facilitate active practice to help embed knowledge.

**self-serving bias**

You believe your failures are due to external factors, yet you're personally responsible for your successes.

Many of us enjoy unearned privileges, luck and advantages that others do not. It's easy to tell ourselves that we deserve these things, whilst blaming circumstance when things don't go our way.

**negativity bias**

You allow negative things to disproportionately influence your thinking.

The pain of loss and hurt are felt more keenly and persistently than the fleeting gratification of pleasant things. We are primed for survival, and our aversion to pain can distort our judgment for a modern world.

**pessimism bias**

You overestimate the likelihood of negative outcomes.

Pessimism is often a defense mechanism against disappointment. Perhaps the worst aspect of pessimism is that even if something good happens, you'll probably feel pessimistic about it anyway.

**halo effect**

How much you like someone, or how attractive they are, influences your other judgments of them.

If you notice that you're giving consistently high or low marks across the board, it's worth considering that your judgment may be suffering from the halo effect.

**bystander effect**

You presume someone else is going to do something in an emergency situation.

When something terrible is happening in a public setting we can experience a kind of shock and mental paralysis. Presume to be the one who will help.

**fundamental attribution error**

You judge others on their character, but yourself on the situation.

It's not only kind to view others' situations with charity, it's more objective too. Be mindful to also err on the side of taking personal responsibility rather than justifying and blaming.

**placebo effect**

If you believe you're taking medicine it can sometimes 'work' even if it's fake.

The placebo effect can work for stuff that our mind influences (such as pain) but not so much for things like viruses or broken bones. Keep a healthy body and bank balance by using evidence-based medicine from a qualified doctor.

# 24 cognitive biases stuffing up your thinking

Cognitive biases make our judgments irrational. We have evolved to use shortcuts in our thinking, which are often useful, but a cognitive bias means there's a kind of misfiring going on causing us to lose objectivity. This poster has been designed to help you identify some of the most common biases and how to avoid falling victim to them. Help people become aware of their biases generally by sharing the website [yourbias.is](http://www.yourbias.is) or more specifically e.g. [yourbias.is/confirmation-bias](http://www.yourbias.is/confirmation-bias)

This poster is published under a Creative Commons Attribution and Non-commercial license 2018 by The School of Thought, a 501c3 non profit organization. To learn more about biases you should definitely read the books *Thinking, Fast and Slow* and *You Are Not So Smart*. The illustration above is a reference to Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* which many believe depicted the human brain in God's surrounding decoration. The godfathers of research into cognitive biases, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, are pictured alongside the Christian God above.

Download this poster at [www.yourbias.is](http://www.yourbias.is)

# Bias

- Resources:
  - School of Thought.org
    - <https://www.schoolofthought.org/>
    - <https://yourbias.is>
    - <https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com>
  - Project Management Institute
    - <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/systematic-biases-culture-project-failures-5578>



# Halo Effect and Framing Effect

- How much you like someone, or how attractive they are, influences your other judgments of them.
  - Yourbias.is
- You allow yourself to be unduly influenced by context and delivery.
  - Yourbias.is



# Halo Effect and Framing Effect

- Interviews
- Presentations
- Documentation formatting



# Anchoring

- The first thing you judge influences your judgment of all that follows.
  - [Yourbias.is](http://Yourbias.is)



# Anchoring

- First impressions
- Procurement and vendor products
- Focused on replacing an existing product rather than actual business requirements for a solution



# Confirmation Bias

- You favor things that confirm your existing beliefs.
  - [Yourbias.is](http://Yourbias.is)





# Agile Manifesto

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

Working software over comprehensive documentation

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

([agilemanifesto.org](http://agilemanifesto.org))



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# Dunning Kruger

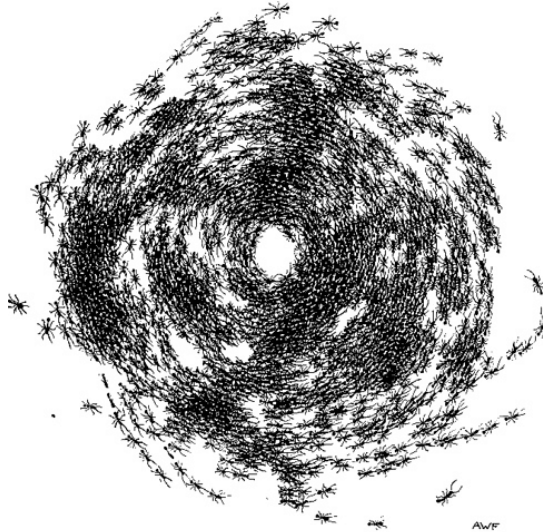
- The more you know, the less confident you're likely to be.
  - [Yourbias.is](http://Yourbias.is)



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# Groupthink

- You let the social dynamics of a group situation override the best outcome
- Dissent can be uncomfortable, often the most confident or first voice can determine group decisions



# Space Shuttle Challenger and Columbia Disasters

- Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart shortly after takeoff in 1986
- Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated upon re-entry in 2003
- Investigations into both disasters revealed that Groupthink played a part
  - Power distance
  - Culture unaccepting of criticism
  - Presentation and interpretation of facts



# WHAT TOOLS ARE WE USING TO HELP US LISTEN FOR THE ASK?



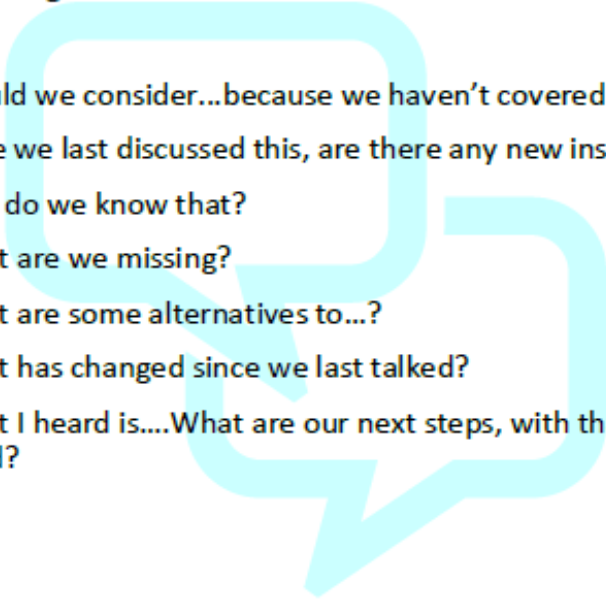
# Strategies + Tools

- Get to know your team:
  - Introductions
  - Quick team building games (consider feelings of introverts and extroverts)
- Provide agendas
- Clarify role with participants and asking if that makes sense to them
  - I want you to be part of this committee for XYZ reason/observation, does this make sense? Are there other contributions you feel you can make?



# The of Questions

## Encourage contribution:



Should we consider...because we haven't covered it yet?  
Since we last discussed this, are there any new insights?  
How do we know that?  
What are we missing?  
What are some alternatives to...?  
What has changed since we last talked?  
What I heard is....What are our next steps, with that in mind?

## Start a discussion:

Can you tell me more about this?

How can your expertise help us achieve our goals?

What are your expectations/requirements for this?

What is it you'd like to see accomplished?

What stands out for you?

## Refocus conversation:

You mentioned...can you help me understand how that relates to...?

How do you see this connect to your role/expertise?

# Project Meeting Feedback Survey

25%

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In a meeting, what settings, circumstances, techniques, or behaviours make you feel...

Comfortable

Type here

Tense

Type here

Apprehensive

Type here

Engaged

Type here

Anxious

Type here

Relaxed

Type here

Uninterested

Type here

Invigorated

Type here





# THANK YOU!

Please connect with us during the conference  
or send questions or comments to

[systemspmo@uvic.ca](mailto:systemspmo@uvic.ca)



# Resources

- How to ask great questions <https://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/3-kinds-of-questions-smart-people-never-ask-and-5-they-do.html>
- Squint with your ears <https://www.fastcompany.com/3001537/how-ask-and-listen-you-mean-it>
- Communication isn't just talking:  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joefolkman/2015/09/08/tell-ask-listen-the-3-steps-to-great-communication-as-a-leader/#166f8ae43a0e>
- Engage Introverts: <https://www.fastcompany.com/3052599/the-top-3-reasons-introverts-dont-speak-up-in-meetings>
- 4 Ways Introverts Can Get Heard In Meetings  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2014/06/19/four-ways-introverts-can-get-heard-in-meetings/2/#380ecf2e8a92>

