K T WARD CONSULTING

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CHANGE MANAGEMENT
ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

DIAGNOSTIC CONVERSATION GUIDE

Before You Fix It

An Organizational Diagnostic Conversation Guide

Five areas of inquiry to explore before implementing organizational change

Prepared by **Kesha T. Ward, PhD**

Organizational problems are not always what they first appear to be.

Communication breakdowns, employee turnover, declining performance, and resistance to change may signal deeper challenges involving organizational structure, leadership, workflows, or decision-making.

Before implementing a solution, leaders benefit from examining the conditions contributing to the problem. This guide introduces five areas of inquiry to support a more thoughtful approach to organizational diagnosis.

CORE PRINCIPLE

Diagnose the conditions before prescribing the intervention.

How to use this guide

1. Identify one organizational challenge.
2. Discuss each area of inquiry with relevant stakeholders.
3. Record what is known, what is assumed, and what requires further investigation.
4. Identify appropriate next steps before selecting an intervention.

Inside: **1** Define the Presenting Problem · **2** Examine the Evidence · **3** Consider Stakeholder Perspectives · **4** Examine Organizational Conditions · **5** Assess Readiness for Intervention

© 2026 KT Ward Consulting. All rights reserved.

THE GUIDE

Five Areas of Diagnostic Inquiry

Work through each area in order. The goal is not to answer every question perfectly, but to notice where understanding is solid and where it rests on assumption.

1 Define the Presenting Problem

PURPOSE

Establish a shared understanding of the challenge.

- What specifically is happening?
- When and where does the problem occur?
- How is the problem affecting organizational performance or employee experiences?
- Are we describing an observable condition or interpreting its cause?

2 Examine the Evidence

PURPOSE

Distinguish documented information from assumptions.

- What evidence supports our understanding of the problem?
- What data, observations, or experiences have informed our conclusions?
- What information contradicts our current explanation?
- What additional evidence would help us understand the issue?

3 Consider Stakeholder Perspectives

PURPOSE

Identify differences in how organizational challenges are experienced.

- Who is directly affected by the problem?
- Whose perspectives have informed our understanding?
- What might frontline employees, supervisors, and other stakeholders see differently?
- Whose perspectives are missing?

4 Examine Organizational Conditions

PURPOSE

Investigate potential systemic contributors.

- Are responsibilities and decision-making authority clearly defined?
- Do existing workflows, policies, or structures create barriers?
- Are resources, staffing, and expectations aligned?
- How might leadership practices or organizational culture influence the problem?

5 Assess Readiness for Intervention

PURPOSE

Determine whether the organization has sufficient understanding to select an appropriate response.

- What have we learned about possible contributing conditions?
- Which assumptions still require investigation?
- What changes are within our authority and capacity to implement?
- How will we determine whether an intervention addresses the underlying problem?

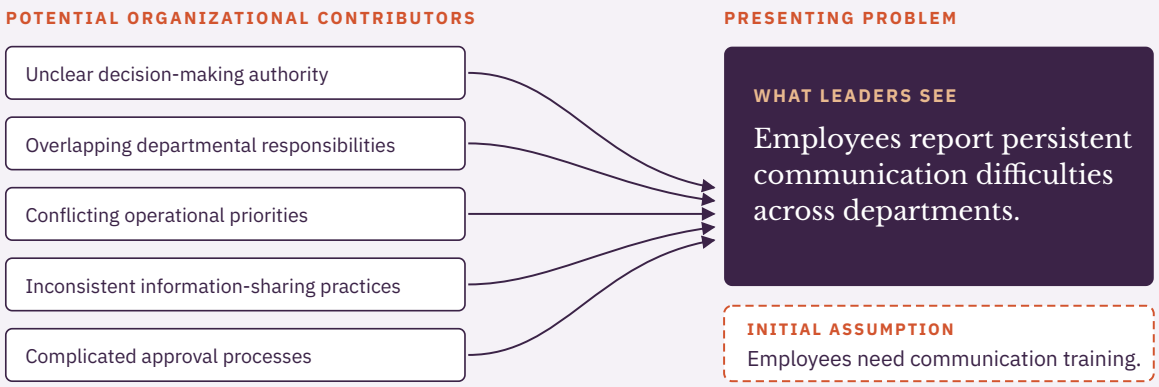
© 2026 KT Ward Consulting. All rights reserved.

APPLYING A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Look Beyond the Symptom

The problem leaders notice first is often the visible result of several underlying conditions. Systems thinking (Senge, 1990) cautions that responding only to symptoms can divert attention from more fundamental solutions.

EXAMPLE



DIAGNOSTIC INSIGHT

Communication difficulties may reflect organizational design or governance challenges rather than individual communication deficiencies.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Review decision-making processes, examine cross-functional workflows, and gather stakeholder perspectives before selecting an intervention.

A Brief Introduction to Organizational Diagnostic Frameworks

Weisbord's Six-Box Model

Weisbord (1976)

Purposes	**Structure**	**Relationships**
Rewards	**Leadership**	**Helpful Mechanisms**

A framework for examining six interconnected organizational dimensions. The model encourages leaders to examine how organizational conditions interact rather than treating challenges as isolated problems.

Burke–Litwin Model of Organizational Performance & Change

Burke & Litwin (1992)

External environment · leadership · mission & strategy · culture

Structure · management practices · systems · climate

Motivation → individual & organizational performance

A more comprehensive model examining relationships among external conditions, leadership, organizational culture, systems, management practices, motivation, and performance. It can help practitioners consider how changes in one organizational dimension may influence others.

> *These frameworks are introduced for conceptual orientation. This guide does not administer, score, or validate either model.*

© 2026 KT Ward Consulting. All rights reserved.

DIAGNOSTIC REFLECTION WORKSHEET

From Assumptions to Inquiry

1 Presenting organizational challenge

What issue are we attempting to understand?

2 Current explanation

What do we believe is causing the problem?

3 Evidence and assumptions

What do we know? What are we assuming? What remains uncertain?

4 Potential organizational contributors

Consider structure, leadership, governance, workflows, resources, policies, and employee experiences.

5 Stakeholders to engage

Whose perspectives would strengthen our understanding?

6 Next diagnostic step

What should we investigate before selecting an intervention?

CLOSING REFLECTION

What might change about our proposed solution if our understanding of the problem changed?

REFERENCES

Burke, W. W., & Litwin, G. H. (1992). A causal model of organizational performance and change. *Journal of Management, 18*(3), 523–545.

Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* Doubleday.

Weisbord, M. R. (1976). Organizational diagnosis: Six places to look for trouble with or without a theory. *Group & Organization Studies, 1*(4), 430–447.

ABOUT

KT Ward Consulting · Kesha T. Ward, PhD
Organizational Development | Change Management | Organizational Effectiveness
ktwardconsulting.com

This guide is intended for preliminary organizational reflection and discussion. It does not replace a comprehensive organizational assessment or professional evaluation.

© 2026 KT Ward Consulting. All rights reserved.