

## **Don't Sit on Your Assumptions, Examine Them!**

### *San Pasa's Checklist for* **EXAMINING ASSUMPTIONS**

***assumption:*** A statement accepted or supposed true without proof or demonstration. *Some similar or related words:* belief, hope, presumption, supposition; implication, premise, hypothesis, proposition, notion, suspicion, conjecture, theory; *a priori* principle. [Wishful thinking?]

#### **We all do it.**

We all embrace assumptions all the time—assumptions about ourselves, the people around us, the world and how it works, the cosmos. Some assumptions are useful. Some of them are more or less grounded in “reality” and tempered by our experience. Others are not so well founded but are generally serviceable. But some assumptions are suspect when it comes to their “trueness.” Some are downright dangerous.

#### **And get away with it.**

Most of the time, we get along pretty well without thinking about (much less examining) our favorite or other assumptions. There are times, however, when life can become miserably difficult and complicated because we *assumed* such and such.

#### **So . . .**

Although assumptions can be useful, *unexamined* assumptions can and do erode our effectiveness and sometimes lead to disaster. At the beginning of a project, relationship, conference, negotiation or mediation, trip or vacation, home repair job, competition, etc., list your assumptions about what you are going to undertake. Examine them. Re-examine them as you progress. Examine them afterwards.

#### **Then ask yourself. . .**

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What did I learn about others and my environment? What did I learn about my assumptions, thought processes, abilities and limitations? What does what I learned suggest about future undertakings, training and preparation?

*Ask yourself what are others assuming about you because of your. . .*

age  
gender  
body type  
manner of dress  
race or ethnicity  
manner of speech  
choice of conversation topics  
method of transportation  
education credentials  
occupation  
religion  
apparent (or real) rank or position  
friends, relatives and associates  
apparent wealth or lack of it  
present circumstances  
past circumstances  
marital status  
affiliations  
social or other activities  
allegiances  
alliances  
memberships  
level of participation  
home or neighborhood  
ability to do a particular thing  
*inability* to do a particular thing  
choice of food and drink  
hair style  
general appearance  
choice of wearing apparel

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What are *you* assuming about *others*? How often have you been “wrong”? What have unexamined assumptions cost you in money, time, relationships, discomfort, lost opportunities, lost sleep, etc.?

***Here are a few common assumptions from daily living:***

The lights will “turn on” when we flip the switch.

The other car will stop at the stop sign.

S/he really *likes* hamburger four times a week.

The staff won't mind working late again tonight.

The dry cleaners will return our clothes clean and undamaged.

We can still buy a candy bar for less than a buck (somewhere).

Our paychecks won't bounce.

The can of soup we bought from the supermarket is safe to eat.

Our doctor really *is* licensed to practice medicine.

The car brakes will work when we step on the brake pedal.

Water from our tap is safe to drink.

Our air is safe to breathe.

There really is an oil crisis.

Our elected representatives will diligently endeavor  
to attend to the people's business. [?]

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*Here are examples of assumptions that may prove useful:*

- Everyone (including yourself) does the best s/he *knows* how to do under the circumstances—but not necessarily the best s/he *can* do. This helps to shift attention and effort away from blaming and toward improving know-hows. Remember: “circumstances” are *internal* as well as *external*, so take care not to make unwarranted assumptions about another’s situation, problems or struggles.
- Most projects fail simply because we do not do the fundamentals well (for example, clear, complete and timely communication).
- Contractors do not necessarily share the host organization’s values, goals and business practices (even when the host organization is the government).
- Rewards are often not commensurate with productivity but instead with proximity to power.
- Your adversaries will use your virtues against you.
- Somewhere, someone is doing it better.
- Not everyone who disagrees with you is your “enemy” and not everyone who agrees with you is your “friend.”
- I am responsible for ***all*** my thoughts, feelings, words and deeds; I am ***not*** responsible for *anyone else’s* thoughts, feelings, words or deeds.

Examine some of your “everyday” assumptions—about work and work-related relationships, about personal relationships, about our society, about life on Earth. What are some reasonable ways to test and otherwise check out your assumptions? What are some of the implications and risks of holding your assumptions, especially when they are unexamined? With apologies to Socrates, *an unexamined assumption can make an undertaking not worth doing.*

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### *San Pasa's Version of* **The Famous Hapomos Shampoo Procedure**

Instructions (procedure) on containers of Hapomos brand hair shampoo for humans:

- 1. Wet hair.**
- 2. Lather.**
- 3. Rinse.**
- 4. Repeat.**

*What has been consciously or unconsciously assumed by the procedure writer? For example:*

The procedure will be/has been faithfully and legibly **reproduced** on product containers.

The procedure and its container bearing these instructions **have not been separated** from each other.

The product is **suitable** for its intended purpose (that is, for shampooing human hair).

The product has **not been altered** by any outside agents.

The product has **not "expired"** or otherwise become unusable.

The user can **see**.

The user can **see the procedure**.

The user can **read**.

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The user can read and **understand the language** of the procedure (in this case, English).

The user knows **the meanings of the words** in the procedure (that is, in this context).

The user knows **what the product is** (that is, Hapomos brand hair shampoo for humans).

The user knows **what the product is for** (that is, shampooing, or cleaning, human hair).

The user **understands in general** how to use hair shampoo (hence, the terse procedure).

The user is **able** to use the product.

The user is **authorized** to use the product.

The user will use the product (only?) for its **intended purpose**.

The user is in an **appropriate environment** for using the product (for example, a working shower bath) and **knows how to use the environment** (for example, how to operate and adjust water valves).

The user understands the procedure on the container **applies to the product** in the container.

The user **will read** the instructions.

The user **will follow** the instructions.

The user understands **numbers and sequence** (for example, Step 2 comes after Step 1 and before Step 3).

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The user will follow the instructions **in the order given** (that is, in order from Step 1 through Step 4).

The user will follow the instructions **without error**.

The user will wet hair with **water** and not some other substance.

The user will wet hair with the **appropriate amount** of water.

The user understands shampoo (the product) is **applied to hair**.

The user understands shampoo (the product) is **lathered while on hair**.

The user understand the rinsing step of the procedure (3) means **to rinse the shampoo from hair**.

The user understands **which steps of the procedure are to be repeated** (that is, Steps 2 and 3).

The user will not repeat Steps 2 and 3 **indefinitely**.

The user will repeat Steps 2 and 3 **one time**. [Or, as needed?]

Repeating Steps 2 and 3 is **necessary or desirable** (or both).

The user will rinse hair with **water** and not some other substance and will use an **appropriate amount** of water.

The user will **rinse all shampoo** (the product) from hair. [?]

The user understands the procedure is **complete after the final rinsing**.

The user or recipient **has hair**.

The user or recipient **is human**.





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*San Pasa's Examples of*  
**SOME POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS ASSUMPTIONS  
FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS**

Here are some assumptions about information technology (IT), about its specialists (such as, systems analysts, network administrators, application software programmers, “webmasters,” operations staff and project managers, consultants and contractors, et al.), and about computer software application projects which, if left unexamined, can ensure costly and/or unsatisfactory and/or disastrous results. (By the way, this list is not exhaustive!)

All computers or programming languages or other IT technologies are pretty much the same in functions, features and capacities.

A person knowledgeable about one computer or one computer programming language is knowledgeable about any/all other computers or computer programming languages.

A person skilled on your computer knows all there is to know about it; or, knows all aspects of it equally well.

IT equipment offered in the marketplace is compatible from vendor to vendor. *Or:* A single vendor's offerings are compatible with each other.

Vendors of computer hardware and software all provide about the same kind and quality of support services for their products.

Computer specialists and other IT “professionals” have standard or similar training. *Or:* Computer specialists and other IT “professionals” are licensed or otherwise sanctioned by some professional or government organization.

A degree in Computer Sciences or a diploma from some kind of technical school or other certificate ensures that a person will know how to develop and implement your software application.

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People engaged in computer software development employ a standard, professional model or methodology for developing a computer application, or, for managing an IT project.

Most IT consultants, contract programmers and analysts, and application software project managers are about equal in ability and will produce about the same results.

The less you pay per hour for systems consultants and/or contract programmers, the less it will cost to deliver the IT products you want.

System consultants, IT contractors and other computer specialists know *your* business better than you do; or, that they even know it *at all*.

Systems consultants, IT contractors or other computer specialists know *their* business.

Any of these people know how to manage a computer software development project. . . or anything else. . . especially, other people.

Consultants, contractors, and IT specialists somehow “automatically” know your problems or know which problems you hired them to solve.

You or your staff won't have to participate in the development and testing of computer applications you want to implement—technicians will just “plug in” the solutions.

Computer software systems with familiar names—such as, Accounts Receivable, General Ledger, Inventory Control, Order Entry—will all have the same features and functions and cost about the same to implement from organization to organization. *Or:* Because “it works that way” on your competitor's or associate's or brother-in-law's system, it will work the same on your system and in your computing environment.

Software systems can easily or cost effectively be transferred (“ported”) from one computer environment to another.

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The people developing your computer application will *document* the project as it progresses and document the software as it is developed, tested and declared “up and running” (operational).

IT specialists know how to train your staff in the use of the systems and software they have developed.

Any system or software documentation you do get will be clear, complete, logically organized, indexed and cross referenced, and easy for you and your staff to understand, use and maintain.

Developing solutions for exception processing can be done for the same cost as for normal transaction processing.

IT specialists will keep you informed in a timely, understandable manner.  
*Or:* That they will keep you informed *at all*.

You won't have to change your software, once it's “up and running.”

Your software will “pay for itself” overnight. . . someday. . . ever!

End.

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### *Who is San Pasa?*

**San Pasa** is the full-time Patron Saint of Systems and the part-time patron saint of people who don't have a patron saint and don't want one (which helps to explain his doleful expression).

