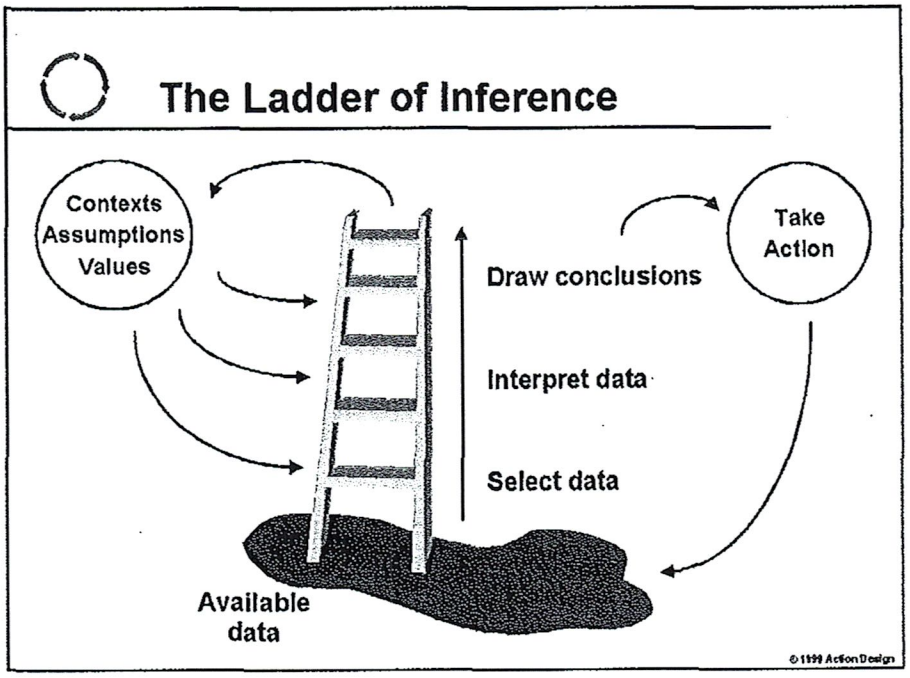
THE LADDER OF INFERENCE



We are so skilled at thinking that we jump up the ladder without knowing it:

- We tacitly register some data and ignore other data.
- We impose our own interpretations on these data and draw conclusions from them.
- We lose sight of how we do this because we do not think about our thinking.
- Hence, our conclusions feel so obvious to us that we see no need to retrace the steps we took from the data we selected to the conclusions we reached.

The contexts we are in, our assumptions, and our values channel how we jump up the ladder:

- Our models of how the world works and our repertoire of actions influence the data we select, the interpretations we make, and the conclusions we draw.
- Our conclusions lead us to act in ways that produce results that feed back to reinforce (usually) our contexts and assumptions.

Our skill at reasoning is both essential and gets us in trouble:

- If we thought about each inference we made, life would pass us by.
- But people can and do reach different conclusions. When they view their conclusions as obvious, no one sees a need to say how they reached them.
- When people disagree, they often hurl conclusions at each other from the tops of their respective ladders.
- This makes it hard to resolve differences and to learn from one another.

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