



HIDDEN ASSUMPTIONS

We have all been warned at one time or another that making assumptions can have bad results in our lives. The question is do hidden facility assumptions have potentially detrimental results to our efforts to improve and make changes? To answer the question, it is important to understand the various assumptions that exist and how they affect our processes and systems.

There are essentially three kinds of assumptions:

Paradigm assumptions are those that are based in fact. These are hard assumptions to challenge. For example, a facility's paradigm assumption might include a service standard for excellence, such as how to answer the phone to improve customer satisfaction.

Causal assumptions are those where there is a cause and effect. These assumptions are generally easy to test because the cause either has an effect or not. For example, we might assume that if all residents, staff and families get a flu shot, the facility will only have 5% of residents actually develop the flu.

Prescriptive assumptions are those where facility folklore and employee misperceptions create a standard of assumptions of how we do business. These are the hidden assumptions where sabotage of new ideas or tests of change can happen. Addressing the prescriptive assumptions is a key and critical tool toward facility improvement. For example, a hidden or prescriptive assumption might include current frontline staff training new staff that following body mechanics is only important when managers are watching, because there is not enough time to follow the guidelines all of the time, and "no one ever gets hurt anyway."

Before implementing a facility change, it is necessary to understand the counterintuitive hidden assumptions that are barriers to making progress. One way to determine those hidden assumptions is to interview new employees within 90 days of the first day of work and asking questions around the hidden assumptions to determine what is prevalent within the culture. Once you have that information, you can begin "assumption correction" to clarify why the hidden assumptions are faulty. In doing so, you will increase your chances of effectively implementing the proposed changes