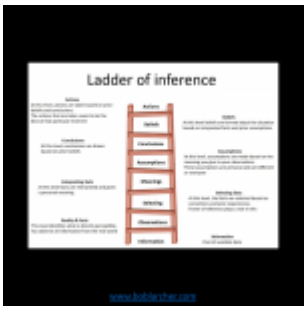
The ladder of inference



If you ask someone why they behaved in a particular way in a given situation, they would probably say that “it seemed obvious to them” or that it “was instinctive”

We all have a “data bank” of experience in our head, and maybe in our bodies, that we (unconsciously) refer to when anything happens to us and that triggers a number of steps in order to reach our conclusions

We:

- Observe information from the situation
- Select facts based on convictions and prior experiences
- Interpret facts and give them a personal meaning
- Make assumptions based on the meaning we give to our observations
- Draw conclusions based on the meaning we have given
- Adopt beliefs about the situation
- Act based on our beliefs about the situation

This step-by-step process is short circuited by the fact that, since the process happens so quickly, what may seem perfectly clear in our own mind is obvious only to us!

When considering your own thought processes, be aware of pieces of information that you take for granted. They are likely to be deeply rooted in your belief system, and it’s worth stopping to examine them to make sure that they really

are facts. Some of the time, at least, you will find that others do not see them as ‘right’ at all

Take the time to descend your ladder, help others to descend their ladder and then climb to the top together!