

Questioning in the Field: Notice the Mismatch

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Why this matters

The plan can be accurate when work starts and become incomplete as the job changes. A different response, missing item or unfamiliar condition deserves attention. Describe what you expected and what you actually observed. That comparison gives the crew a useful question to resolve before the next affected step.

Objective: Recognize a field discrepancy, separate the observation from an explanation and identify the evidence needed to resolve it.

Key hazards or failure points

Explaining away an unexpected result; treating familiar work as unchanged; accepting the first explanation; relying on stale information; missing another crew's changes; investigating beyond your safe access or role.

Practical controls

- At the planned checks and when conditions change, compare the expected condition with what is actually present. Use the current instruction or requirement, not an expectation based only on yesterday's job.
- State the difference plainly: the step, expected condition and observed condition. Invite another perspective. Keep possible explanations separate from facts; confidence or seniority does not settle a conflicting observation.
- Protect the affected work through its established pause process. Get the appropriate person to review reliable information and required checks. Continue only after the discrepancy is resolved and required authorization is established.

Verify It in the Field

Use a paper scenario or safe observation of today's setup. Ask a worker to identify one expected condition and its source, then describe the actual evidence. Record both statements separately so the explanation cannot replace the observation.

Have the responsible checker compare the discrepancy with the applicable current record and authorized field-check result. Check that the evidence concerns this item, location and time. Do not approach a suspected hazard or operate equipment to investigate a hunch.

Ask what evidence would contradict the preferred explanation. If the information still conflicts, keep the question open. Record the observation, source, actual finding, checker, time and decision owner; communicate any approved correction to the affected crew.

Stop and reassess

Pause the affected step when the expected response does not occur, conditions differ from the approved method or reliable information is missing. Maintain the defined protection and seek help. A plausible explanation without the required evidence is not a release to proceed.

Ask the crew

1. What should we expect at the next important step?
2. What change would challenge that expectation?
3. What evidence would show that our first explanation is wrong?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 2, pp. 10–12; OSHA Hazard Identification and Worker Participation. Full references: webpage..

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/questioning-attitude-field-mismatch

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