

School-wide well-being through Compassionate Systems Leadership

A FISA-sponsored webinar series

Webinar 3



Shape of the day (learning intentions)

Generative Social Fields

- How might we recognize when our work is helping to create and sustain the school cultures and climates to which we aspire?

The Ladder of Inference.

- How might we use the Ladder (as a self-reflection tool) to build awareness of our thinking habits?
- How can the Ladder help us check in with ourselves in the moment to help grow the gap between stimulus and response?

Review of the last sessions...

What are some overarching themes in the resilience & wellbeing literature?

- Connection is key
- Interactions between personal & environmental factors = resilience

What is it about CSL that supports these themes?

- Simultaneous consideration of the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal (3-legged stool)

How might we integrate CSL to better support resilience & wellbeing in schools?

- Systems awareness
- Check ins
- Creative tension as potential energy for working towards vision

Why CSL is key to the BC MHIS strategy...

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/mental-health-wellness/mhis-strategy.pdf>

SUPPORTING THE EMOTIONAL/CARING LABOUR OF WORK IN SCHOOLS



Teachers, counsellors, and other helping professionals (i.e. professional carers) regularly experience emotion in the course of their very relational work.



Emotion can be exhausting and is a contributory factor to burnout, yet we rarely talk about these experiences in our professional settings.



Talking about emotional experiences is one way that we can validate each others' experiences while also being validated ourselves.



As we encounter each other, we also encounter ourselves in new and deeper ways (if we are open to the possibility).



The experience of being seen for our whole (i.e. rather than our "professional") selves and validated as thus helps us to shift our ways of interacting with others - including students.

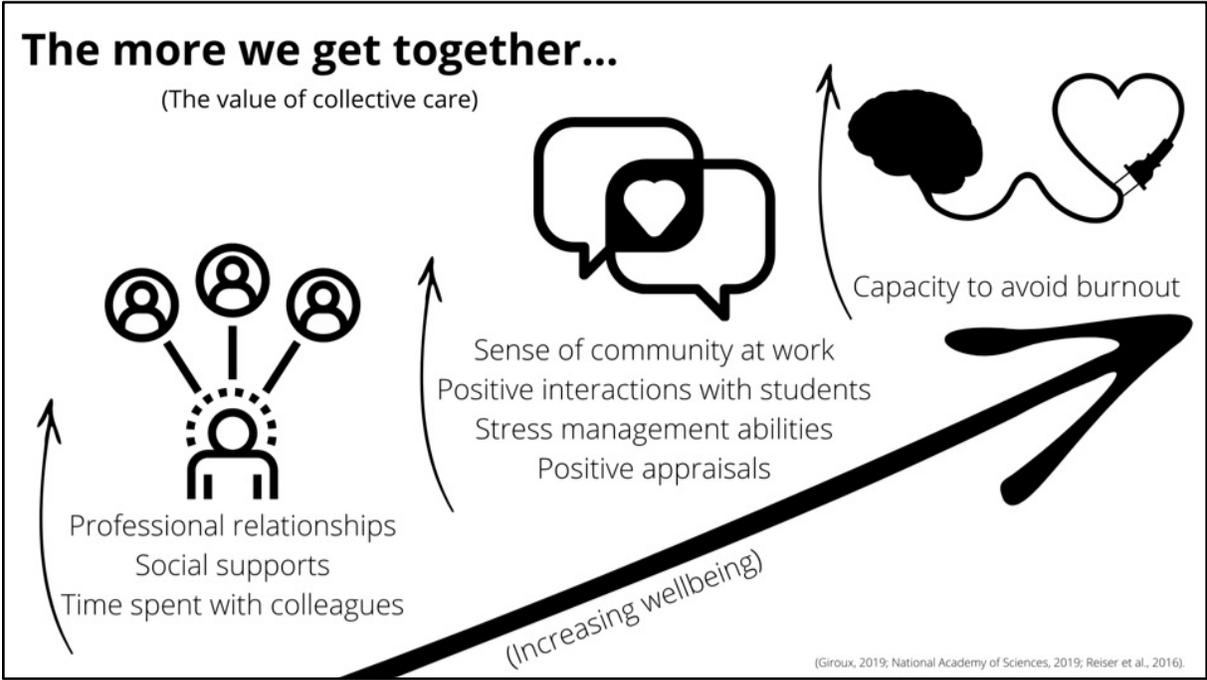


Caveat: asking people to add one more thing to their plates without support for that "one more thing" perpetuates issues in our existing systems of support for staff well-being as it reinforces a message that it is the sole responsibility of individuals to be able to continue in one's work long-term, even given widely acknowledged challenges in our systems. Material resources (e.g. dedicated paid time) are vital signals that this work and the people doing it are valuable: they are important & worth investment.



Deliberate care + compassion for school staff-> modelling of care + compassion for students-> increased care + compassion in communities-> paradigm shift!

My advocacy mission: reconceptualizing the work we do as educators to emphasize the relational aspects and the potential repercussions of those features. This is what brought me to Compassionate Systems Leadership – the potential to engage in work as a system to bring this vision to fruition.



A network of responsive, supportive relationships (especially when supported at work with time and resources) can be protective against burnout.

Recognizing the limits to our awareness



<https://www.adventisthealthcare.com/living-well/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant/>

Remembering the Sufi parable of the blind men and the elephant... When we are only aware of part of a system (as we generally are), we may misunderstand the larger nature of the system. This is why it is important to work together in compassionate and collaborative ways if we hope to see things happen differently and make shifts in a system. CSL provides tools to help honour our interconnectedness and plurality of voices, which are huge steps towards building and sustaining the trust → agency → collective care → wellbeing.



Checking in

Getting here to being here

Grounding
Journaling
Sharing



Mindful breathing: Gentle focus of attention on the breath. Coming in and going out. Not trying to change your breathing in any way. No expectations. Simply awareness of the breath moment to moment.

THIS IS ALL (and always) BY INVITATION ONLY

Preparation: Find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, with your head, neck and spine aligned. Uncross your legs and let your hands rest quietly in your lap or by your sides. Loosen any tight clothing and gently close your eyes or let your gaze become unfocused and relaxed.

Sharon Salzberg meditation from 2016 Wisdom 2.0 conference
<https://youtu.be/ZAAAUuNXzOU>



Journaling

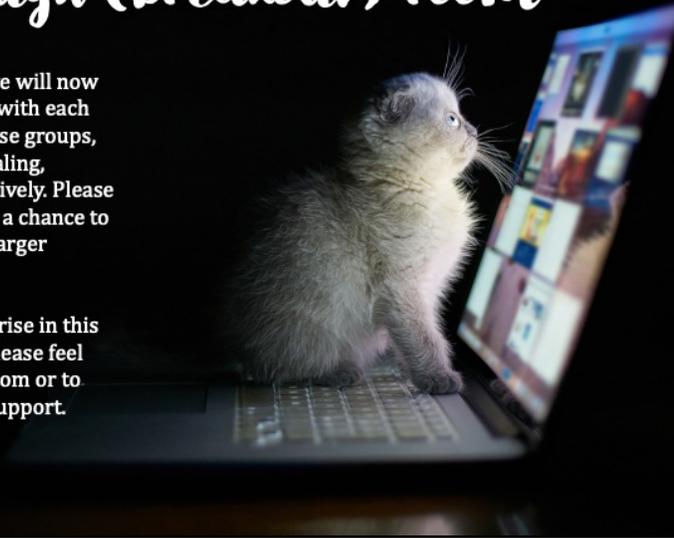
How are you today? What is moving in you that might need a bit of extra awareness?

Think about a time when your work felt real, necessary and satisfying to you, whether the work was paid or unpaid, professional or domestic, physical or mental. Describe this time and what was present to bring that satisfaction in as much detail as possible (in the always-too-short time provided).

Break through (breakout) room

Based on your reflections, we will now take 12 minutes to check in with each other in small groups. In these groups, please reflect on your journaling, individually and then collectively. Please ensure that each person has a chance to share before moving into a larger conversation.

It is normal for emotion to arise in this kind of sharing. If needed, please feel free to leave the breakout room or to send a message to request support.





We have talked about the why of this work: connectedness & safety → bravery to show up as our whole selves. Now let's take a detour into the "where" in which this work of compassionate systems often happens and leads, regardless of people, place, or position(s) within a system.



Journaling

Think of a time where you stepped into a space and you just **knew** that you had stepped into something tense or uncomfortable or just plain “bad” (whether just for you or for everyone)... not because of anything anyone said or even necessarily because of anything you could specifically put a finger on... just “because.”



Journaling

Think of a time where you stepped into a space and you felt like it was a **good** place to be... again, not because of anything anyone said or even necessarily because of anything you could specifically put a finger on, but just “because.”

Thinking again of our first journal prompt for today, when we reflected on a time that work was real, necessary, and satisfying. What was your “sense” of the space at that time?

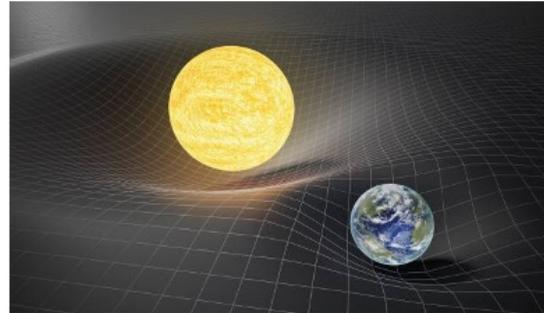
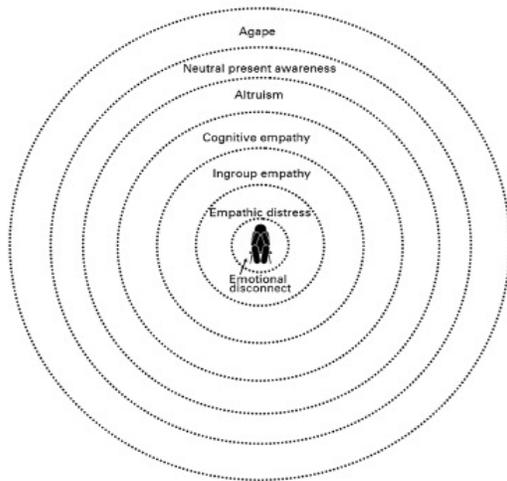
It is likely that this experience was of a generative social field.

We can have all sorts of social fields (whether or not we are aware of them). Not all are social (as we likely well know).

Break through (breakout) rooms

What is your experience of a generative social field? Where and when is (or has this been) a reality for you?





Theory of Relative Responsibility for the Social Field

Generative social field = a space where people can feel psychologically safe to produce new ideas & outcomes, new capabilities in working together, and help for ourselves and others to see opportunity in our actions.

The Circle of Connectedness (to be revisited on May 27)

Comfort in, dump out (ring theory: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/promoting-hope-preventing-suicide/201705/ring-theory-helps-us-bring-comfort-in>)

The greater the responsibility, the greater the space you hold (i.e. the more you bend attentional gravity towards you). I visualize this as: in holding agape, we are unbounded in the extent to which we can grow care and compassion in our space so that we also encompass all those who may not currently have the awareness to tap into the agape, but who can nevertheless benefit from being in that space and called forth from themselves to take part in the community in a more full way. When we practice checking in with ourselves and each other (grounding, reflecting, sharing), we increase the collective capacity for care and compassion in our larger spaces. The more responsibility/authority/leadership we

hold, the more influence we have on the shared social field (and on whether it is generative or not). We will talk about this again in the May 27 session.



As we explore our responses in a setting (i.e. the ways we show up), we might benefit from awareness of the ladder of inference.

Getting groups to make good decisions is no trivial matter. Mostly because it's hard to agree on what we're agreeing on: What's the "real problem" we're solving? For whom (for what stakeholder?) are we optimizing our solution? What does the data say? (Since data doesn't say anything without us interpreting it...) Establishing a baseline reality and a following a simple process to get to good agreement is non-trivial, but a simple framework can help: The ladder of inference.



See Ladder of Inference video at
https://vimeo.com/612110800?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=129031697

Image: the higher we go on the ladder, the harder it is to make different choices (i.e. the less flexibility we have).

First Peoples Principles of Learning

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.

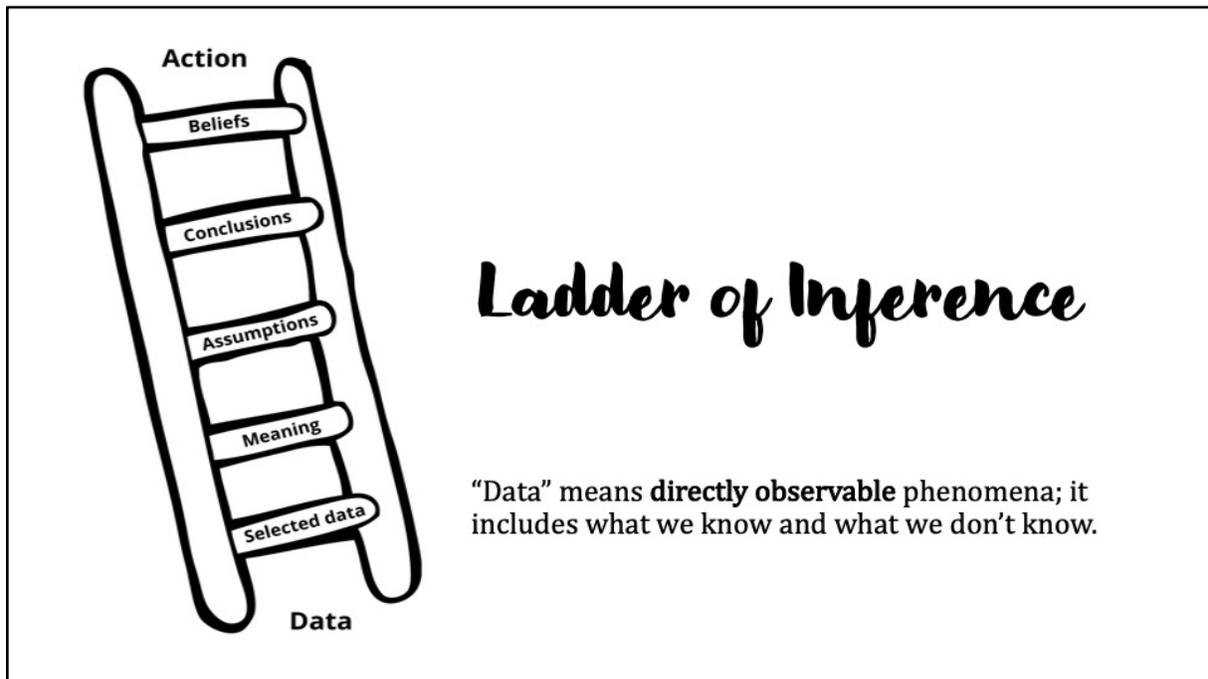
Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

The Ladder of Inference especially helps us embody and model the FPPL in four particular ways.



We live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested. We adopt these **beliefs** because they’re based on conclusions, which are inferred from what we observe, plus our past experience. The word “Data” means directly observable phenomena. Our ability to achieve the results we truly desire is eroded by our feelings that (a) our beliefs are The truth, (b) the truth is obvious, (c) our beliefs are based on real data, and (d) the data we select are the “real” data.

The Ladder of Inference is a useful tool to help us all understand how quickly we jump to conclusions and interpret the world around us based on our biases and history of experience.

Thinking Traps

(a few examples)

Personalizing

(blaming yourself)

Externalizing

(blaming others)

Overgeneralizing

(always/everything thinking)

Magnifying/minimizing

(making some aspects more and others less significant)

Mind reading

(assuming we know someone's thoughts/feelings or vice versa)

Emotional reasoning

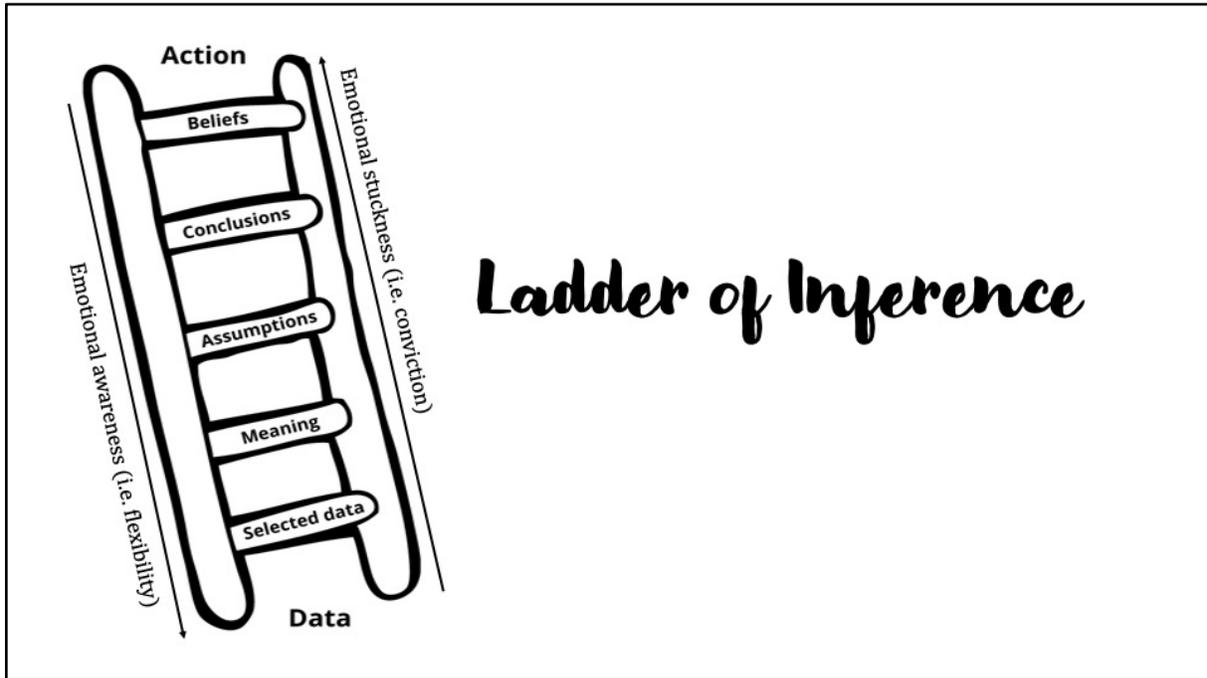
(making assumptions based on feelings rather than facts)

Shoulding

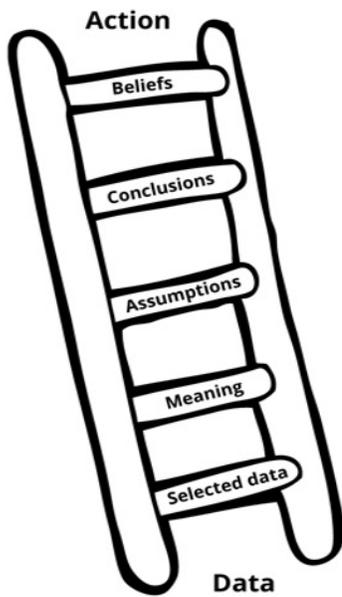
(expectations about how the world "should" be)

The Ladder of Inference is a tool to help us imagine climbing up a ladder in our minds, helping us to recognize how rapidly we leap to knee-jerk conclusions with no intermediate thought process (often through the "help" of thinking traps). It can also help us recognize our patterns of behaviour.

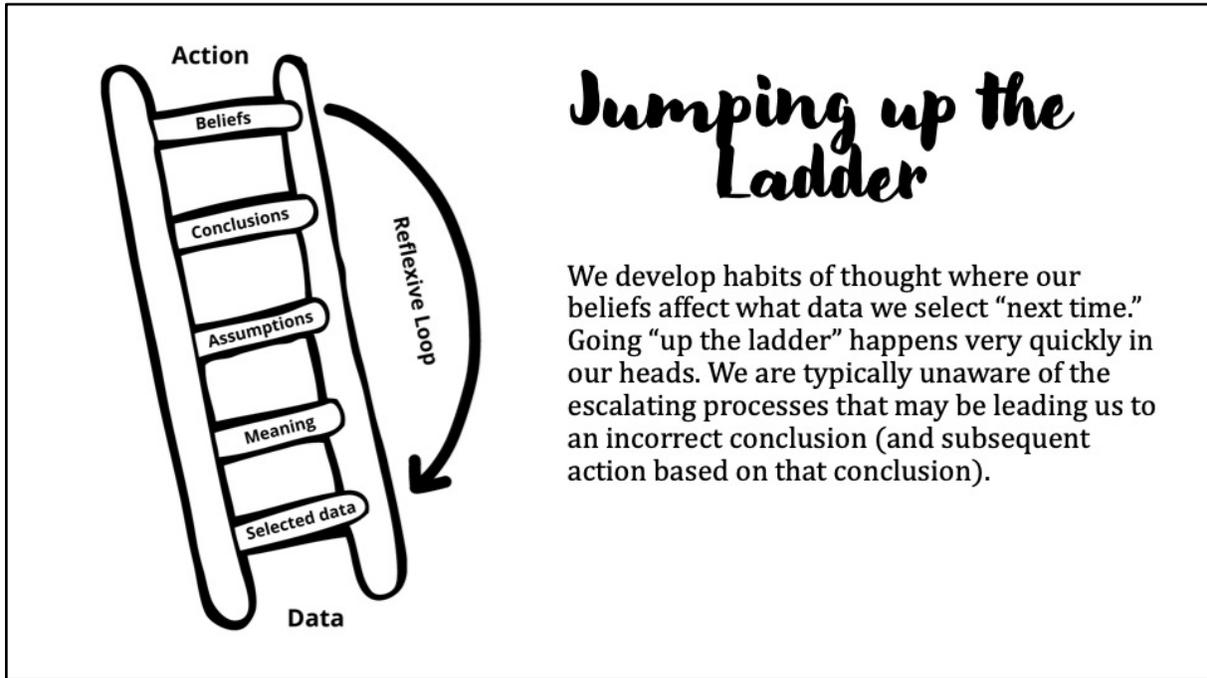
For more examples: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/ThinkingTraps.pdf>



When we “climb the ladder,” we tend to become a fierce advocate and have a tendency toward greater “emotional stuckness”. Emotional intensity is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can become a problem if you become stuck there. When we bring ourselves down the ladder, usually by using inquiry to discover the truth, there usually comes a stronger sense of emotional awareness.



- ↑ Take action based on our beliefs.
- Adapt beliefs based on our conclusions.
- Draw conclusions from our assumptions.
- Make assumptions based on our meanings.
- Add meanings to selected observations.
- Select data from observations.
- Engage with directly observable phenomena.



In a reflexive loop, what we see in the available data is filtered by our beliefs, in a cycle of self-reinforcement. So, we often see what we’re looking for, scanning with *intention*, not just attention. We are “caught” in a loop of confirmation bias (i.e. we see what we expect to see and hear what we expect to hear) where it can be difficult to even allow for the possibility of “new” data.

Clean Advocacy

The process of using “I messages” to help you have a discussion with another person to move from difference to dialogue. We can adopt a practice of inquiry to test our assumptions by using the frame:

- When you . . .
- I feel
- And I think . . .
- So I conclude . . .
- Am I correct? Incorrect?

Shortcut: “The story I’m telling myself is...”

Clean advocacy is a helpful process to integrate into the Ladder of Inference. Being aware of and owning our emotions can free us up; a high form of emotional intelligence. Consider how being direct and authentic can help you feel less agonized over things you’re assuming and help you use inquiry to check your assumptions.



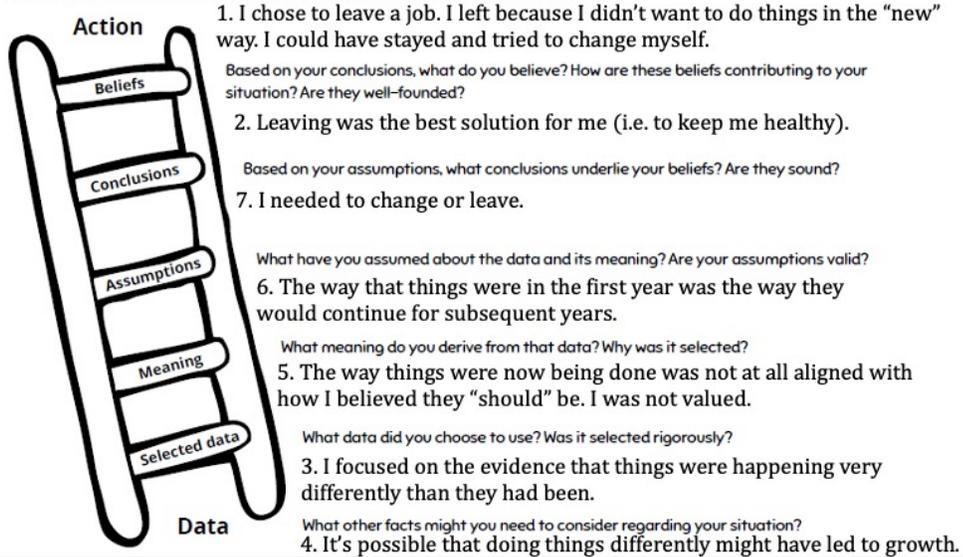
Journaling

Let's use the Ladder of Inference to take some time to reflect on something that happened recently where you may have jumped to a conclusion...

We will use a series of questions mapped on to the Ladder of Inference to guide our reflection.

Ladder of Inference: A tool for Reflection

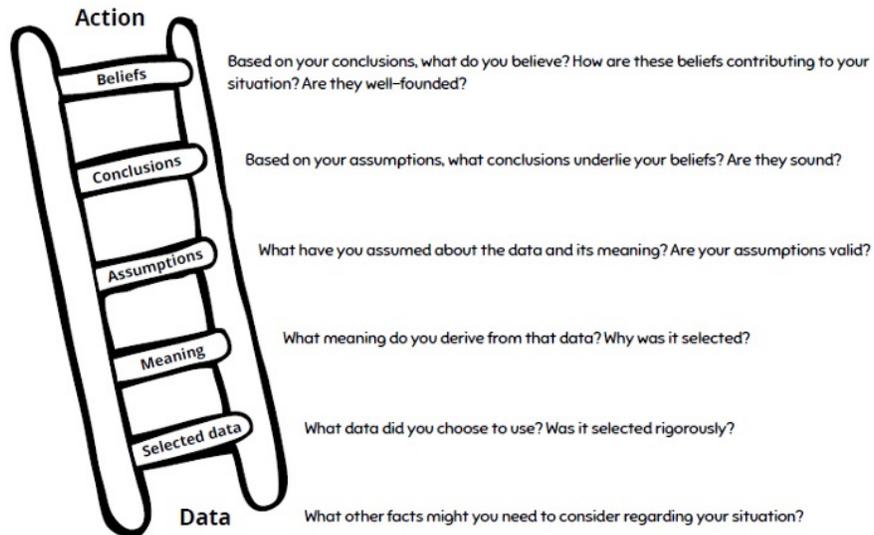
Reflect upon an action you have taken or are considering taking. What is the action upon which you are reflecting? Why choose this course of action? Are there other possible actions to choose instead?



There is not one "right" way to use this tool. I like to start at the top, then go the bottom and work my way up. On this slide, I have numbered the steps in the way I tend to work through them.

Ladder of Inference: A tool for Reflection

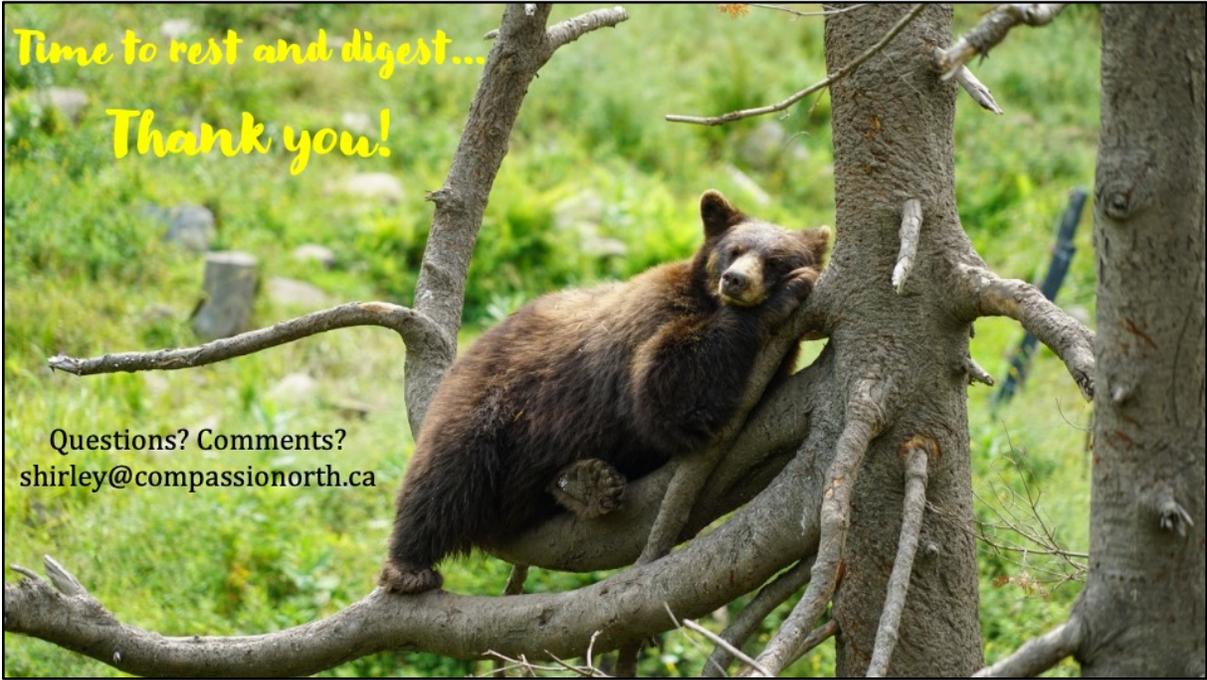
Reflect upon an action you have taken or are considering taking. What is the action upon which you are reflecting? Why choose this course of action? Are there other possible actions to choose instead?



Break through (breakout) room

Reflecting on the Ladder of Inference. What comes up for you? Where might you most easily/readily (predictably?) find yourself jumping up the ladder?





Time to rest and digest...

Thank you!

Questions? Comments?
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