

Creating an Assumption Log: Making Hidden Premises Visible and Continuously Re-Checked

- ▶ Gain a repeatable practice to capture, validate, and review project assumptions
- ▶ Assumption log: a living artifact, distinct from risk register and issue log
- ▶ Explicit tracking reduces hidden risks, late surprises, and costly rework
- ▶ Roadmap: from cost of untracked assumptions to daily habit building



Why Untracked Assumptions Fail Projects



- OpenAI telemetry outage: monitoring tool crashed Kubernetes control plane due to untested scale assumptions



- Microservices migration failure: 47 services built without operational platform, spending 60% of sprints on infra



- Queensland Health payroll: \$1.2B disaster from unchecked vendor and requirements assumptions



- Cognitive traps: optimism bias, overconfidence, groupthink normalize risky beliefs as facts

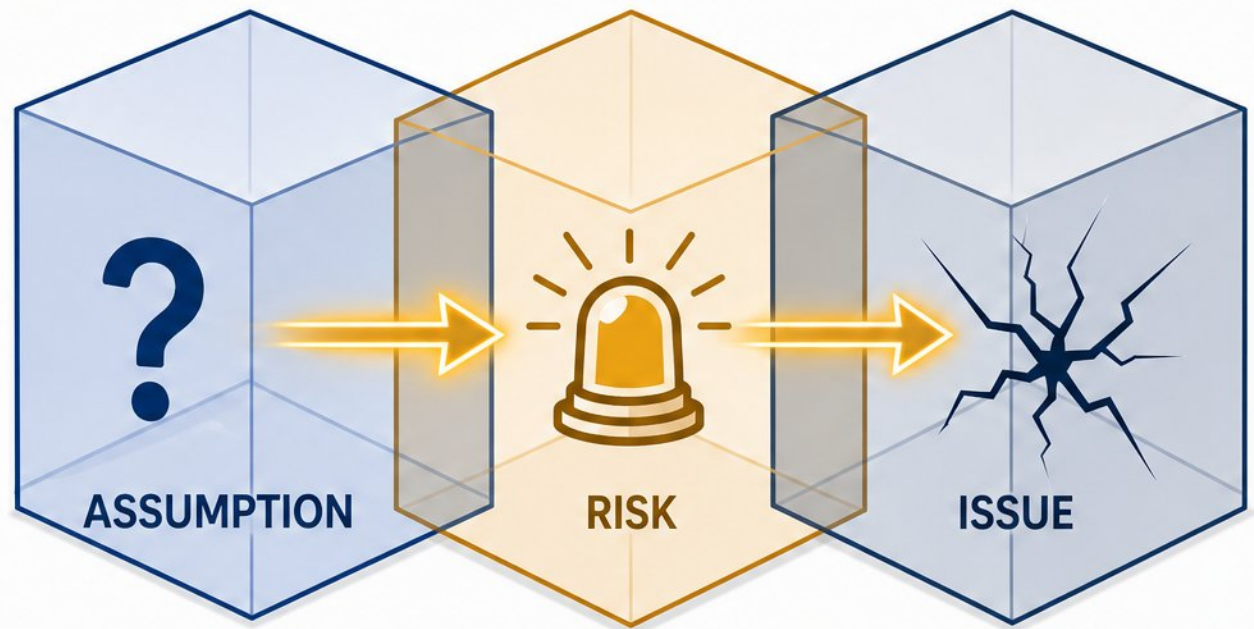


- Detect assumptions by asking: are we acting on verified fact or unproven belief?



Assumption Log, Risk Register, and Issue Log: Understanding the Differences

- **Assumption log:** records unproven beliefs treated as true for planning
- **Risk register:** tracks future uncertain events that may impact objectives
- **Issue log:** captures current problems requiring immediate action
- An **invalidated assumption** converts into a risk, then into an issue



Core Fields That Make an Assumption Log Actionable

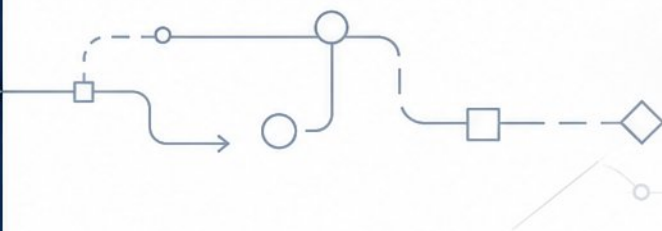


- **Minimum:** ID, testable description, owner, status, impact, review date
- **Mature fields:** category, validation method, confidence level, contingency plan
- Each column must answer 'how to prove,' 'what if wrong,' 'who checks'
- Example: 'BrightFrame delivers assets by Apr 15' → owner, method, quantified impact

FROM FLAT ROW

ID	Testable Description	Owner	Status	Impact	Review Date

TO ACTIONABLE DIAGNOSTIC PANEL



Surfacing Hidden Assumptions:

Elicitation Techniques That Work



- Document scanning for 'wills & musts' and rationalizing unconnected planned actions



- Facilitated pre-mortems: 'What must be true for this plan to succeed?'



- Write testable, falsifiable statements: 'QA lead confirms 2 testers by March 1'



- Separate unverified beliefs from requirements, constraints, and dependencies



骨架与血肉



Validating Assumptions: Turning Guesses into Facts



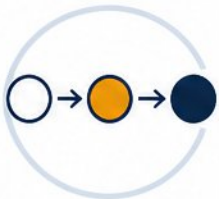
- Match validation method to each assumption: interviews, audits, POCs, surveys, or Delphi panels



- Score confidence (High/Med/Low) and plot impact vs. certainty on an Assumption Matrix



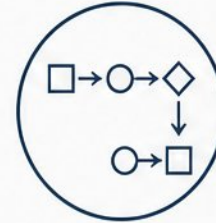
- Kill Zone assumptions (high impact, low confidence) demand immediate testing; Noise Zone risks are accepted



- Transition states: Open → Validated (fact), Invalidated (triggers risk/issue entry), or At Risk



Confidence Scoring and the Validation Workflow in Practice



- **Validation workflow:** identify → score → design experiment → execute → record outcome → update status → invalidated? convert to risk



- **IF-THEN test:** "IF this assumption proves false, THEN the effect on the project would be..." to create measurable risk statements



- **High impact, low stability = Kill Zone** (immediate validation required); high impact, high stability = **Watch Zone** (monitor monthly)



- **Example:** exchange rate assumption in **Kill Zone** → currency hedge converts low stability to high stability

The Regular Review Loop: Preventing a Stale Log



- An outdated log creates false control—decisions rest on silently invalid premises



- Weekly team reviews for status; monthly steering summaries for leadership signal



- Dedicating a standing 5-minute agenda item in weekly calls keeps it current



- Event-driven reviews: phase gates, milestone slips, vendor changes, risk escalations



- Trigger events: regulatory updates, new risks emerging, any significant change request

Ownership, Accountability, and Governance



- Assign a single named owner per assumption, not 'the team'



- Make the log a standing steering committee agenda item



- Flag invalidated assumption → PM assesses impact → sponsor decides



- Cross-reference owners with RACI accountable roles for decision clarity



- Document contingency activation decisions for audit and learning

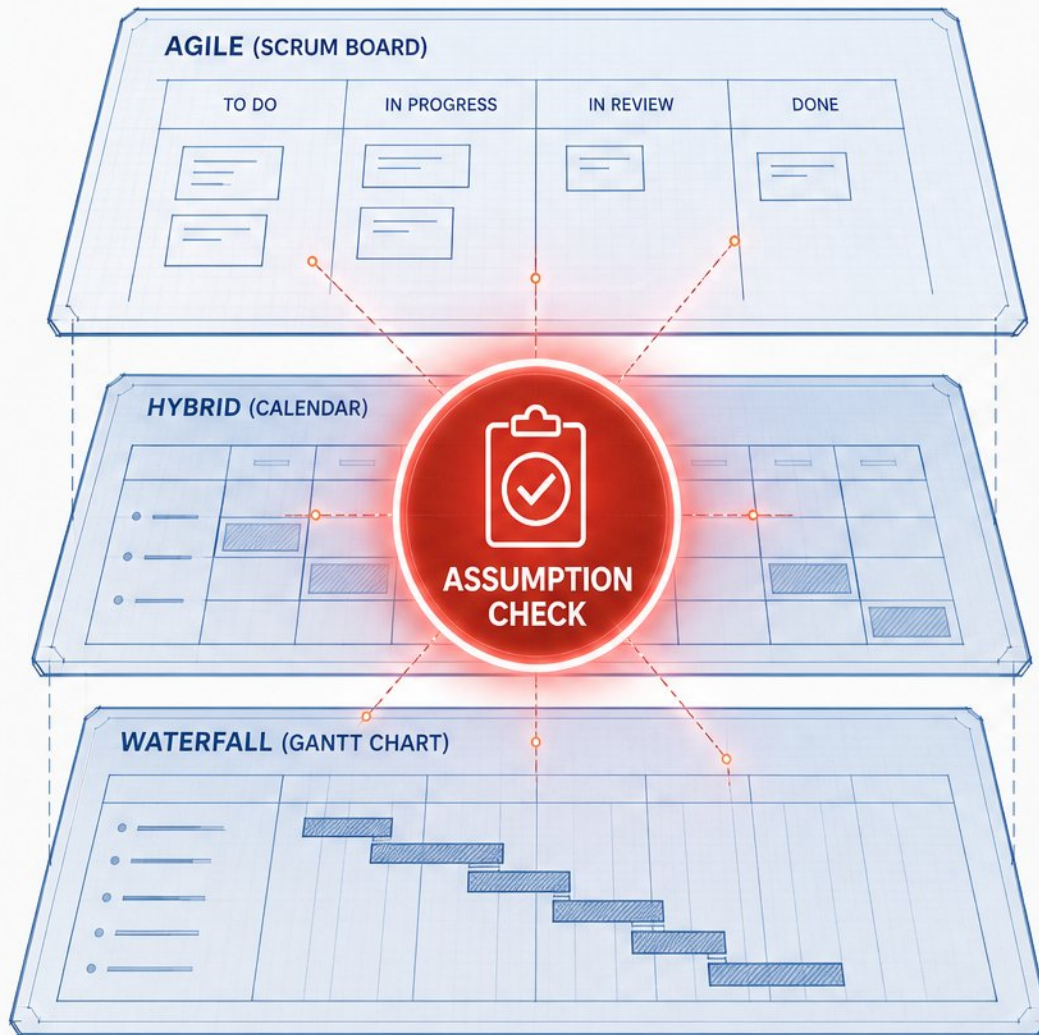


Tools and Collaboration for Shared Assumption Visibility

- Spreadsheets work for small teams; integrated platforms (Jira, ClickUp, Rocketlane) enable governance-ready tracking.
- Essential features: shared real-time access, notifications, version history, and links to affected tasks.
- Start with a shared sheet and defined columns—don't wait for a perfect tool.
- Workflow example: 'At Risk' flag in stand-up → owner updates log with evidence → PM notified → tasks flagged for replanning.



Adapting the Log to Agile, Hybrid, and Waterfall Contexts



- **Agile:** review in retrospectives; test assumptions with spikes or experiments within a sprint.



- **Hybrid:** synchronize predictive planning with iterative discovery; verify assumptions for fixed regulatory dates.



- **Waterfall:** capture at initiation; revisit at every stage gate to prevent costly late changes.



- **Core discipline:** keep assumptions visible, review on a defined cadence, and link to decisions and risks.

Common Mistakes That Undermine Assumption Management



Static Log



- Treating the kickoff log as final: a static log is fiction by week four



Vague Wording



- Writing vague, untestable assumptions instead of specific, falsifiable statements



No Owner



- Failing to assign named owners, turning the log into passive observation



Link Lost



- Keeping the log disconnected from the project plan so replanning arrives late



Reviews Skipped



- Skipping scheduled reviews, destroying the log's credibility and team trust

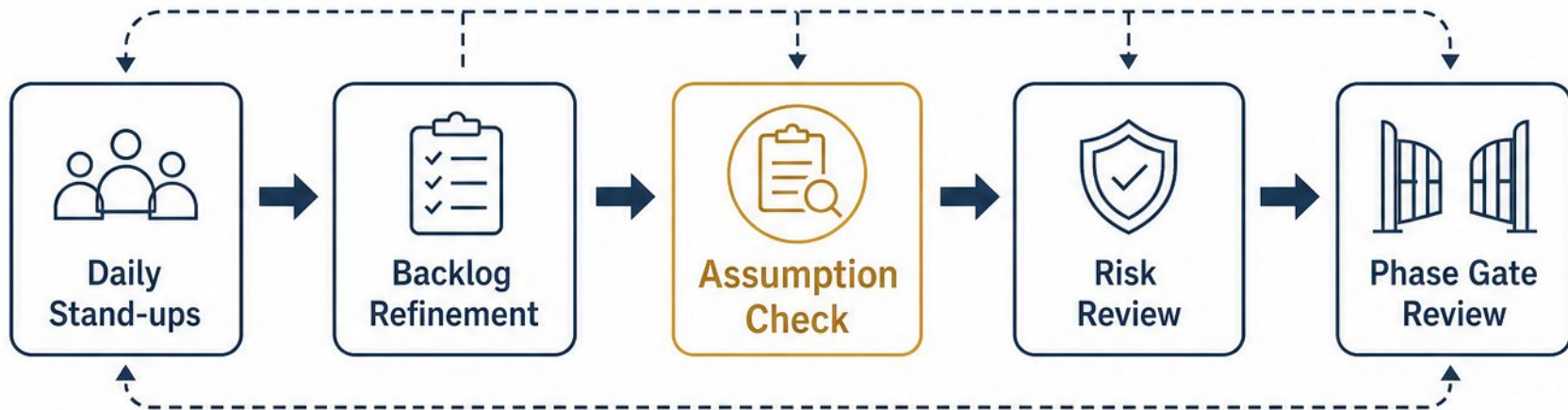


Building an Assumption-Aware Team Culture

- 📦 - Reward early identification; never punish a belief later proven wrong
- 📦 - Add "any new assumptions?" as a non-negotiable stand-up prompt
- 📦 - Celebrate invalidated assumptions as learning wins, not failures
- 📦 - Watch for fewer late surprises and open discussion in stakeholder meetings
- 📦 - Leaders who reference the log in governance make the practice valued



Integrating the Assumption Log into Daily Practice and Existing Workflows



- Add a 30-second 'any new assumptions?' check to daily stand-ups



- Validate assumptions during backlog refinement and phase gate reviews



- Start with a minimal log: ID, description, owner, status, weekly review



- Counteract failures: anchor reviews first, tie status to performance, show prevented crises



Your 30-60-90 Day Action Plan and Key Takeaways



- **Days 1-30:** Create template, run a 2-hour workshop, assign all owners, schedule weekly reviews



- **Days 31-60:** Integrate reviews, start confidence scoring, connect to risk register, report to steering group



- **Days 61-90:** Expand fields, run an assumption retrospective, capture lessons learned for future projects

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