Decision Making Assumptions Audit Checklist

The Core Principle

Every decision rests on assumptions—beliefs we hold as true without complete evidence. The best decision-makers systematically surface and test their assumptions before committing resources. Most decision failures happen not because the analysis was wrong, but because a critical assumption proved false.

This checklist helps you identify hidden assumptions, test them rigorously, and adjust your decision if the evidence contradicts your assumptions.

Part 1: Identify Your Assumptions

What decision are we making?

What are we assuming about the market?

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____
- [ ] Assumption 4: _____

What are we assuming about customers?

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____
- [ ] Assumption 4: _____

What are we assuming about competitors?

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____

What are we assuming about our capabilities?

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____

What are we assuming about timing?

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____

What are we assuming about resources?

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____

Part 2: Rank Assumptions by Risk

Which assumptions, if wrong, would most damage our decision?

Critical Assumptions (would kill the deal):

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____

Important Assumptions (would significantly impact success):

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____

- [ ] Assumption 2: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3: _____

Nice-to-Have Assumptions (would be nice if true, but not critical):

- [ ] Assumption 1: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2: _____

Part 3: Test Your Assumptions

For each critical assumption:

Assumption 1: _____

How confident are we?

- [ ] Very confident (90%+)
- [ ] Confident (70-90%)
- [ ] Somewhat confident (50-70%)
- [ ] Low confidence (<50%)

What evidence supports this assumption?

- [ ] Evidence 1: _____
- [ ] Evidence 2: _____
- [ ] Evidence 3: _____

What evidence contradicts this assumption?

- [ ] Contradiction 1: _____
- [ ] Contradiction 2: _____
- [ ] Contradiction 3: _____

How could we test this assumption?

- [ ] Test 1: _____

- [ ] Test 2: _____
- [ ] Test 3: _____

What would change our mind?

- [ ] Evidence that would prove us wrong: _____
- [ ] How would we know if this happened?

Revised confidence level after testing:

- [ ] Very confident (90%+)
- [ ] Confident (70-90%)
- [ ] Somewhat confident (50-70%)
- [ ] Low confidence (<50%)

Assumption 2: _____

(Repeat the same process)

Assumption 3: _____

(Repeat the same process)

Part 4: Decision Impact Analysis

If our critical assumptions are wrong, what happens?

Scenario 1: Assumption 1 is wrong

- [ ] Impact on timeline: _____
- [ ] Impact on budget: _____
- [ ] Impact on success probability: _____
- [ ] Can we recover? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Maybe

Scenario 2: Assumption 2 is wrong

- [ ] Impact on timeline: _____

- [ ] Impact on budget: _____
- [ ] Impact on success probability: _____
- [ ] Can we recover? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Maybe

Scenario 3: Assumption 3 is wrong

- [ ] Impact on timeline: _____
- [ ] Impact on budget: _____
- [ ] Impact on success probability: _____
- [ ] Can we recover? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Maybe

Part 5: Contingency Planning

For each critical assumption, develop a contingency plan:

If Assumption 1 proves wrong:

- [ ] Early warning sign: _____
- [ ] Contingency action: _____
- [ ] Timeline to implement: _____
- [ ] Owner: _____

If Assumption 2 proves wrong:

- [ ] Early warning sign: _____
- [ ] Contingency action: _____
- [ ] Timeline to implement: _____
- [ ] Owner: _____

If Assumption 3 proves wrong:

- [ ] Early warning sign: _____
- [ ] Contingency action: _____
- [ ] Timeline to implement: _____
- [ ] Owner: _____

Part 6: Decision Checkpoint

After testing your assumptions, should we proceed?

- [ ] Yes, proceed with confidence
- [ ] Yes, proceed with contingencies in place
- [ ] Pause and gather more information
- [ ] No, walk away

If pausing or walking away, why?

If proceeding, what's our monitoring plan?

- [ ] Assumption 1 monitoring: _____
- [ ] Assumption 2 monitoring: _____
- [ ] Assumption 3 monitoring: _____
- [ ] Review frequency: _____
