

A BETTER QUESTION

Not: "What is wrong with me?" Instead: "What condition makes this step hard?"

INTENTION $\neq$ ACTION

A sincere goal can coexist with a missed action. The missing step is an observation, not a verdict about character. Capability, opportunity and motivation can all matter. The practical task is to investigate without pretending a single story explains everything.

A SIX-STEP INVESTIGATION, NOT A SIX-STEP OBLIGATION

01 Describe only what happened

"I did not open the document this morning" is observable; "I am a fraud" is an interpretation.

02 Ask whether the goal is still yours

Change, pause and withdrawal are legitimate options. Consider promises made to others.

03 List more than one explanation

An unclear first move, inaccessible conditions or high emotional costs may coexist.

04 Pick one reversible change

Choose a small, feasible alteration; do not assume all obstacles are yours to remove.

05 Name disconfirming evidence

Decide what result would weaken your favourite explanation, not just support it.

06 Observe and keep options open

Keep, revise, seek support, rest or release. One trial rarely settles a causal question.

Scope: These exercises are educational reflection tools. The Identity-Action Gap and Friction Lab are an exploratory author synthesis, not an established psychological scale, clinical assessment or prediction engine.

FIVE GATES, NOT LABELS

Suspect a condition. Try to distinguish hypotheses. Leave room for structural reality.

01 / UNCLEAR FIRST STEP

Possible clue: A project is named, but no specific starting action.

One possible trial: Try naming an observable two-minute move and ordinary cue.

Limit: Clear instructions alone may not repair missing access or competing commitments.

02 / PHYSICAL OR SOCIAL CONTEXT

Possible clue: Tools, time, privacy, transport, permission or help are missing.

One possible trial: Try changing access or asking for help if it is safe and realistic.

Limit: A structural obstacle is not personal weakness.

03 / COMPETING DEFAULT

Possible clue: An easier immediate activity wins at the decision moment.

One possible trial: Make the intended action easier to reach for one trial.

Limit: Preferences may be legitimate; change the goal if appropriate.

04 / EMOTIONAL COST

Possible clue: An action carries uncertainty, grief, rejection or pressure.

One possible trial: Lower stakes or ask for appropriate support; do not force distress.

Limit: This does not diagnose an emotion or mental-health condition.

05 / RECONSIDER THE GOAL

Possible clue: The destination no longer fits obligations or values.

One possible trial: Pause, negotiate, redesign or release it deliberately.

Limit: Not pursuing something can be an intelligent decision.

REMEMBER: MULTIPLE GATES CAN BE PRESENT. NONE IS A PERSON TYPE.

SIX DIFFERENT STORIES

All cases are fictional. Compare an easy verdict with alternative hypotheses.

CASE 01 / THE UNWRITTEN LETTER

Easy verdict: I must not care about my friend.

Other explanations: The first sentence feels heavy; the relationship is changing; a call may be kinder.

One cautious trial: Draft a rough sentence or ask if a short call is welcome.

What it cannot prove: A sent sentence does not prove reciprocity; silence does not prove indifference.

CASE 02 / THE UNGIVEN FEEDBACK

Easy verdict: My colleague is a coward.

Other explanations: Power, uncertainty, role boundaries, retaliation risk or missing evidence may matter.

One cautious trial: Write the observation and question, then check whether it is safe to raise.

What it cannot prove: One conversation cannot make an unsafe workplace safe.

CASE 03 / THE ABANDONED EXERCISE PLAN

Easy verdict: I should just make the time.

Other explanations: Caregiving, access, recovery, cost and exhaustion are real constraints.

One cautious trial: Investigate a feasible enjoyable option—or choose rest.

What it cannot prove: A smaller plan cannot solve every structural or health constraint.

MORE THAN WILLPOWER

The same observable delay can admit several explanations.

CASE 04 / THE STALLED RESEARCH IDEA

Easy verdict: I am not a real researcher.

Other explanations: An unbounded question, missing skills, lack of collaborators or weak methods can stall action.

One cautious trial: Name a falsifiable question and request informed criticism.

What it cannot prove: A clear hypothesis is not validation; failed pilots may teach.

CASE 05 / THE NEVER-SENT APPLICATION

Easy verdict: I must lack ambition.

Other explanations: Eligibility, unpaid assessments, rejection costs, access and role fit all matter.

One cautious trial: Check actual criteria and time costs; choose whether applying is worthwhile.

What it cannot prove: One acceptance or rejection says little about someone's worth.

CASE 06 / THE CANCELLED COMMUNITY EVENT

Easy verdict: Nobody really cares about community.

Other explanations: Transport, uneven labour, poor access, unclear purpose and competing priorities intervene.

One cautious trial: Co-design a smaller event around participants' stated needs.

What it cannot prove: Low turnout cannot establish apathy; the idea may need changing.

CHALLENGE THE FIRST STORY

A good hypothesis can be revised. A plan does not need to be performed.

EXPERIMENT A / FIRST STEP MAY BE UNCLEAR

Observation: "I haven't started my essay."

Hypothesis: Perhaps "work on essay" is not an observable first move.

Change: Open the document and write one provisional question after breakfast.

Counter-evidence: If this is specific and feasible but the start still stalls, vagueness is not the whole account.

Next choices: Investigate opportunity, rest, get help, or revisit whether the essay matters.

EXPERIMENT B / MAYBE THE GOAL ITSELF CHANGED

Observation: "I have delayed enrolling in a course repeatedly."

Rival ideas: The signup is confusing; funds are short; the course no longer fits.

Change: Compare one credible syllabus with time and cost, then discuss alternatives.

Counter-evidence: If the course remains appealing and genuinely accessible, reconsidering the goal may not explain the delay.

Next choices: Enroll, request support, choose a different course, or decline without self-accusation.

THREE INTERPRETIVE TRAPS

Mind-reading: inferring why someone else acted from a single behaviour. Trait leap: converting a delayed action into a permanent identity. Confounding: changing three conditions at once and claiming one caused the result.

Evidence is not a courtroom verdict. Results can be ambiguous. Repeat observations only where safe, ethical and genuinely useful.

ONE GATE. ONE TRIAL.

Use a pen. Nothing you enter on the website is embedded in this PDF.

01 / OBSERVABLE ACTION

What, specifically, would someone see happen?

02 / SUSPECTED CONDITION

What is one possible obstacle? What else might explain it?

03 / ONE REVERSIBLE CHANGE

What could I change, ask for, or decide not to do?

04 / OPPORTUNITY / CUE

If I choose to test it, when and where?

05 / DISCONFIRMATION

What result would challenge my first explanation?

06 / OPEN ENDING

Keep, revise, ask for support, rest or release?

Evidence desk: Michie et al. (2011) COM-B · Fogg Behavior Model (Stanford Behavior Design Lab) · Gollwitzer & Sheeran (2006) on implementation intentions · Wood & Neal (2007) on habit. The original framework and exercises are illustrative, not validated instruments.

Full references: thegap.sahiltayal.online/#sources · sahil@sahiltayal.com