

THE FOUR-SQUARE FRAMEWORK

Separating Facts, Feelings, Fears, and Actions During Times of Uncertainty

When Emotions Start Driving Decisions

Most of us have experienced it.

A leader cancels a meeting without explanation. A project is reassigned. A promotion goes to someone else. A difficult conversation doesn't go as expected.

When something changes, our brains naturally try to fill in the gaps. Unfortunately, the stories we create are not always based on facts. Assumptions, fears, and emotions can quickly become intertwined with reality, making it difficult to determine what is actually happening and what requires action.

The Four-Square Framework is a simple tool designed to help individuals separate facts from assumptions, identify emotional responses, and focus on what can realistically be influenced or addressed.

Use this framework whenever you feel emotionally activated, overwhelmed, stuck, or uncertain about how to move forward.

Common Workplace Scenarios

This framework can be especially helpful when navigating:

- Receiving difficult feedback
- Organizational changes or restructuring
- Conflict with a coworker or manager
- Being passed over for a promotion
- Performance concerns
- Team communication breakdowns
- Career transitions
- Increased workload or shifting responsibilities

How to Use the Framework

1. What Changed? *(The Issue)*

Start by identifying what has objectively changed. Focus only on the event, circumstance, or situation that triggered your reaction.

Ask yourself:

- › *What happened?*
- › *What is different now?*
- › *What specific event am I responding to?*

2. What Do I Know? *(The Facts)*

List only information that can be verified. Avoid assumptions, interpretations, or opinions.

Ask yourself:

- › *What do I know to be true?*
- › *What evidence do I have?*
- › *What facts would another person agree occurred?*

3. What Do I Feel or Fear?

This section captures emotional reactions and internal narratives. Be honest — this is often where assumptions surface.

Ask yourself:

- › *What am I worried about?*
- › *What story am I telling myself?*
- › *What emotions am I experiencing?*

4. What Can I Ask or Influence? *(Actions)*

Shift attention toward what is within your control. Focus on clarification, communication, advocacy, and next steps.

Ask yourself:

- › *What questions can I ask?*
- › *What action can I take?*
- › *What can I influence, even if I cannot control the outcome?*

Example Scenario

What Changed? (Issue)	What I Know (Facts)	What I Feel or Fear (Feelings)	What I Can Ask or Influence (Actions)
My manager reassigned a project I had been leading to another team member.	The project was reassigned. My manager informed me during our weekly meeting. No explanation was provided. I remain on my other projects.	I feel disappointed and frustrated. I worry my performance is being questioned. I fear losing advancement opportunities.	Ask for feedback on the reassignment. Clarify expectations. Request development guidance. Deliver strong results on current work.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Facts inform decisions. Feelings provide information. Fears reveal assumptions. Actions create momentum.

The goal is not to eliminate emotions. The goal is to separate what is known from what is assumed so you can move forward with clarity and purpose.

[Download the worksheet](#)