

EXERCISE Hair over ears

Purpose Give students an appreciation for how selectively they observe things around them, and guidance on how to correct for it.

Recommended for Trail 10 Reality Phase Path

Time required 5 minutes

Key Points

You can't watch everything.

Even everything you can see, you don't really see.

Imagination is crucial to effective observation.

Instructions You want to have students observe a group of people, somewhere perhaps between 10 & 20 (such as the class they are in).

Model Script Would all of you please lower your gaze and just look down briefly. In a moment, I want you to look up and count the number of people seated at your table/in your row/section who have some hair covering their ears. It may be a little or a lot, and I want you to have an exact number in your head for how many people that describes. Alright, look up.

[Give them time to look and count.]

I'm sure that was easy for all of you, so I'm not going to check and just assume that you were all able to do that successfully. Now, lower your gaze again. This time—without looking up—I want you to recall how many of the people who you just looked at were wearing glasses.

Most of you have no idea. You just looked exactly where their glasses would be if they were wearing them, but that's not what you were paying attention to. You didn't know that was what I was going to ask you, that it had any importance. As you result, you don't know. You might as well have not looked at them at all.

This is not just some silly game. It's what we do every moment of our lives—and we miss a lot! Even things that are right in front of us. You could have easily checked to see who was wearing glasses, but to do that you needed to decide to pay attention to that in advance.

This is why scientists have hypotheses and detectives have hunches and journalists have stories. Because they need some way to determine what is relevant and important and what isn't. To observe effectively, you have to know what you are looking for.

When you are following the Status Quo cycle that's usually what you already want or expect to happen. But when you are following the Innovation Cycle what you need to see is less clear. You frequently don't know what you don't know. So you need to engage your imagination and form hypotheses and hunches that guide what you observe. You also need to be careful not to assume that just because you did not notice something, it wasn't there.



Reference Chabris, Christopher and Simons, Daniel, 2009. The Invisible Gorilla, New York: Crown Publishing