



Challenge Assumptions

Why

It's not stupid at all to ask so-called stupid questions which help us challenge status quo. There are many ways we get stuck into patterns of thinking and doing, making innovation difficult. Not so long ago, most people assumed that humans would never be able to fly. Today, we fly in air balloons, planes, and spaceships. It's easy to keep doing things the way they've always been done, and to be comfortable with keeping things that way. Change can be scary and challenging to grapple with, though it is something we need to become increasingly comfortable with, considering the rapidly changing environments we find ourselves in.

Some of the most established characteristics of products, services, business models, environments and just about any other designable thing are subject to change at any given time. Not too long ago, the following questions were quite thought-provoking, and some would call the questions downright stupid: Do doors *always* have to have handles? Should taps *always* be hand-operated? Do phones *really* need to have a cable? Do cars *have to have* a driver and a steering wheel?

The new frontier of innovation is smashing assumptions we have about how things should be and coming up with disruptive ways of arriving at the same goals in ways we never considered possible.

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When

- Take a step back from the challenge you're tackling and ask some important questions about the assumptions you have about the product, service, or situation where you're trying to innovate.
- Challenging assumptions when you are stuck in current thinking paradigms or when you have run out of ideas is particularly effective. Therefore, it is good for rebooting a flagging session.

How

1 | List assumptions

Remember that everything is a perspective. The one and only "truth" does not exist. Even this statement is a perspective – or a belief. Typical assumptions include:

- That it is impossible to do something – particularly within constraints such as time and cost.
- That something works because of certain rules or conditions.
- That people believe, think, or need certain things.

2 | Challenge assumptions

Assume that you can overcome and challenge all assumptions.

- Ask questions like: 'How could this be not true?'
- 'What if we could do this twice as well in half the time?'
- 'Are the characteristics we take for granted about these things really crucial aspects, or are they just so because we've all become accustomed to them?' 'Do people really always have to wear identical socks on both feet?—or even identical shoes, for that matter? Are socks even necessary?'

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- These kinds of questions may sound silly, and many of the assumption busters you may come up with may indeed be silly, until you come up with something that really makes the entire team sit up straight and say, "Hey, why call it 'ABC'? What if it's really 'XYZ'?"
- You have to ask a few dumb questions before you reach the insightful ones, as Don Norman likes to put it. It's not that any of the questions are *really* dumb, though; it's just that it takes some experimentation before a different yet viable way of looking at things rears its head.

3 Find ways of making the challenge a reality

The real challenge is to make it happen in reality. Use this very same principle again.

