Tea and The Law of Raspberry of Jam

By Esther Derby & Viktor Cessan

Asking Better Questions - Assumptions

All questions come with embedded questions. We all make assumptions, based on our view of the world, our background, and other factors. Becoming aware of our own assumptions can help us ask better questions. Becoming aware of others' assumptions can help us understand how others see the world. When we can identify assumptions, we can examine them, test them, and arrive at a shared understanding.

Example questions and the embedded assumptions

How can we make people more accountable?
Assumes:
- People aren't accountable now
- Accountability is the key component of performance
- Individual will and character are stronger than the system

Why aren't people more motivated?
Assumes:
- People aren't sufficiently motivated now
- Motivation can be increased through external actions
- The behavior observed is a result of low motivation

Who is resisting this change?
Assumes:
- This change is good and universally desirable
- Resistance is undesirable
- The behavior observed is not appropriate and is aimed at stymying some change
- That you and your change is right
- That the resistors are the problem

How can we get our teams to collaborate more?
Assumes:
- Collaboration is desirable
- that teams need to collaborate when maybe they actually need to cooperate
- (May indicate) that the speaker doesn't differentiate between collaboration and cooperation and telegraphs that the person has an image of what collaboration looks like

What would make our teams more agile?
Assumes:
- Agility is a universally desirable state
- Some-- but probably not shared--definitions of what agile is and is not
- That teams are separate from the system
- That teams are the point of control for agility

How do we recruit the best people?
Assumes:
- That there are best people
- That it's a good idea to recruit the best people
- It is possible to determine who the best people are
- People either are or aren't best, "bestness" is a binary state
- It is possible to recruit the best people
- If you have the best individuals you get the best results
- Performance of the people is independent of the system they operate within

Homework

1. Write down 3 questions you've recently asked or are curious about.
2. What assumptions are embedded in those questions?
3. How are those assumptions limiting your and other people's thinking?
4. What are your thoughts on those assumptions? Which are they accurate or inaccurate?
5. Given all the above, what are some other ways to express your questions?

Our third and final episode (for now) about asking better questions is finally out! In it we talk about the assumptions embedded in questions. We all make assumptions, based on our view of the world, our background, and other factors. Becoming aware of our own assumptions can help us ask better questions. Becoming aware of others' assumptions can help us understand how others see the world. When we can identify assumptions, we can examine them, test them, and arrive at a shared understanding.

<Listen to our episode here>

What value can you get from becoming more aware of the assumptions you and other people make?

- Improved ability to ask better and more relevant questions
- Increased awareness of your own biases
- A better understanding of how others see the world--cognitive empathy--and may tell me more about things look from where they stand. Over time this gives a better understanding of their world view and your own world view.
- When assumptions are explicit, you can test and challenge your and others assumptions.