



# Generative Questions for Organization Design

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STS Roundtable Webinar  
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*« A genuine question is  
a question that you  
don't already know the  
answer to »*


Marilee Adams





# Theme: Generative Questions for Organization Design

- Goal of the Workshop
  - Look at ways to increase the transformational potential of our questions for inquiry into four key components of organization design: the customer experience, the transformation process, management processes and finally, the employee experience at work



# Theme: Generative Questions for Organization Design

- Hypothesis
  - Generative questions (AI), contribute to creating humane, profitable and sustainable organizations
    - The person who sets the question sets the direction and has the power of a change agent.



# Agenda

- Introductions
- Context : Organization Design (Playground)
- Assumptions re: questions we ask
- Deficit-based & generative questions
- Formulating generative questions
- Conclusion and assessment of the webinar
- Next Webinar



# Introductions

- Who's on the call ?
  - Name
  - Where
  - Expectations
- Introduction of Jacinthe
- Roundtable webinars to come



# **WORKING MODEL FOR THIS WEBINAR**



# Organization Design (Playground)

- The formal modification of structure based on the optimal configuration of four processes:
  - Customer experience
  - Transformation
  - Decision-making for coordination and strategy
  - Employee experience
- These processes are interdependent and are assessed, ideally, in real time





# **THE QUESTIONS WE ASK IN OUR WORK**



# Task

- Please take 2 minutes to formulate a question you would typically ask if you were working with any one of the proposed 4 components of organization design
  - The customer experience
  - The transformation process
  - Decision-making for coordination and strategy
  - The employee experience

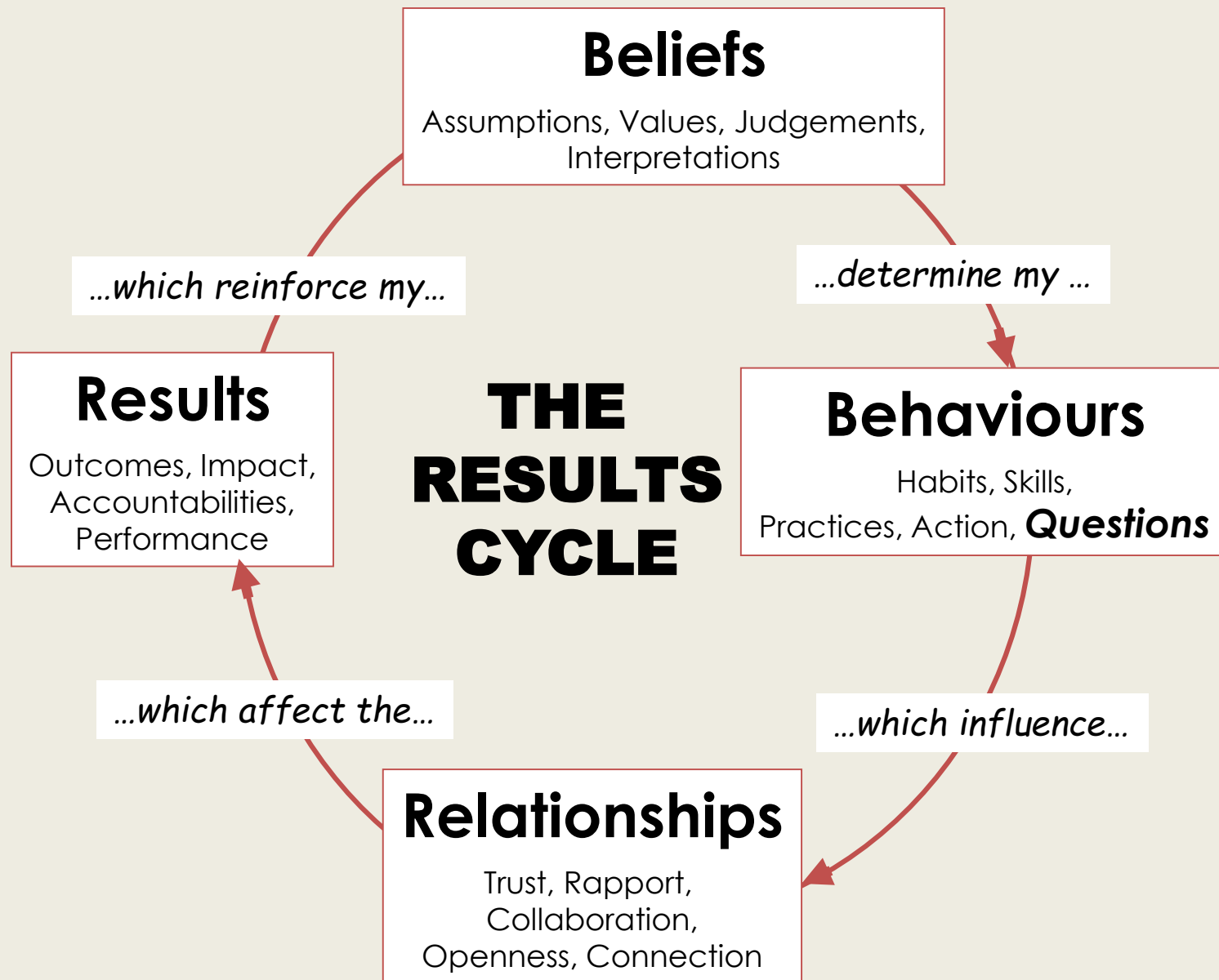


# What are our assumptions?


Every question has a direction; where it leads often depends on its hidden assumptions

Few questions are neutral; most carry a bias and energy

*Source: What is Appreciative Inquiry, Bliss Brown, Imagine Chicago*



From : Thomas G.Crane, The Heart of Coaching, p. 121



# Some of Our Assumptions as STS Practitioners

For example

- To redesign an organization we need to ask questions to understand
- The existing gaps / deficits in the technical and the social systems
- What's “broken” and needs to be fixed / redesigned



**... OTHER ASSUMPTIONS?**



# Some Assumptions Behind Generative / Appreciative Questions

(Source: David Cooperrider, Bliss Browne, *Gervase Bushe*)

1. What we focus on becomes our reality
  2. Change is happening as we are asking the question, hence the importance of the questions we choose to ask
  3. It is important to name and claim what's working as well as what needs work (foundation upon which to build)
  4. Images of the future are powerful
    - We can only move in the direction of what we can imagine
    - *With our questions we shape the world*
  5. Creation of positive emotions is a vital step in the change process
    - People experiencing positive feelings are more flexible, creative, integrative, open to information and efficient in their thinking
- (Isen (2001) and Fredrickson (2001, 2006))



# Task

- Revisit the question you wrote as an answer to our opening question...
  - On what assumptions is your question based?





What's the Rationale?

# **GENERATIVE QUESTIONS**



# Transformational Change

- How can we use questions to engage employees in meaningful/generative conversations that would already embody the organizational design we want?



# Generative Questions Give Way to Conversations that ...

1. Help people look at their work and organization differently.
2. Influence both how people think and how they take decisions
3. Are conducive to creativity and exploration / identification of new possibilities
4. Generate compelling images that people want to act on
5. Generate curiosity in the listener

Bushe, G.R. (2013) Generative process, generative outcome : The transformational potential of appreciative inquiry, in D.L. Cooperrider, D.P. Zandee, L.N. Godwin, M. Avital & B. Boland (eds) *Organizational Generativity : The Appreciative Inquiry Summit and a Scholarship of Trnasformation* (Advances in Appreciative Inquiry, Volume 4), Emeral Group Publishing Limited, pp. 89-113\_

# Examples

## Transformation process

Deficit based Questions	Generative Question
What are the recurring problems you encounter in preparing your customers' products or services (variances)?	Imagine a world where variances are experienced as an opportunity to demonstrate our expertise. Explain how we, as a team, share the tasks to leverage these variances.



# **BREAK OUT GROUP WORK**



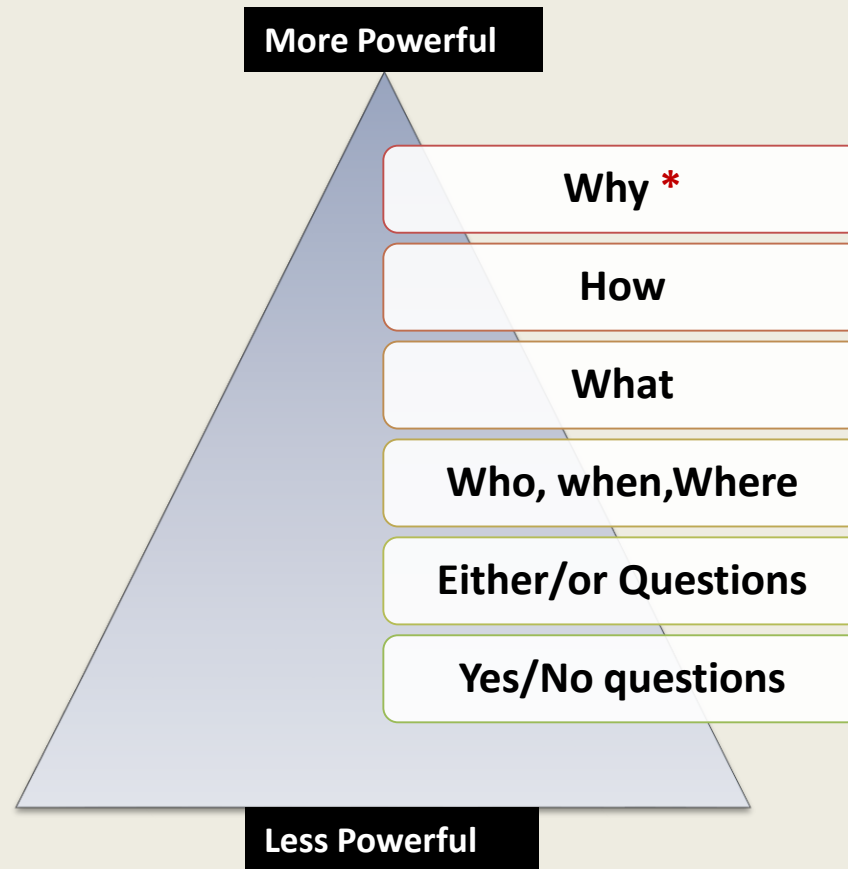
# Task

- Using the question you developed at the beginning of the webinar, how can you make it more generative?
- If time permits, develop generative questions pertaining to one of the four processes
  - The customer experience
  - The transformation process
  - Decision-making for coordination and strategy
  - The Employee Experience

Be ready to share one generative question

Time : 15 minutes

# Construction of a Powerful Question



*\* Use the question “why” to better understand the purpose, the meaning, the beliefs, etc. but not to bring someone to justify, defend or prove themselves right*



# Qualities of Generative Questions

- ☐ They generate energy and forward movement
- ☐ They are surprising: questions that people haven't discussed or thought about before.
- ☐ They take people back to memories that are personally meaningful and have deep emotions attached to them – what matters most to them
- ☐ They allow people to build relationships when they share these stories.
- ☐ These questions force us to look at reality a little differently either because of who we are listening to or because of how they ask us to think.
- ☐ They change how people think so that new options for decisions and/or actions become available to them
- ☐ They are thought provoking
- ☐ They stay with participants

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# Customer experience

Deficit based Questions	Generative Question
What are the needs we meet and those we don't meet?	Tell me about a recent satisfactory experience you had as a customer where your needs were fully met or even surpassed. What made it possible?
What is the customer turnover rate? Who are the customers that leave and why?	Tell me about a recent satisfactory experience you had as a customer with one of our competitor where your needs were fully met or even surpassed. What made it possible?
What do customers appreciate more in our competitors' service / product offering?	Who are the "unconditional" customers and why?
	How do our customers <b>best</b> use the product or service we provide?

# Transformation Process

Deficit based Questions	Generative Question
What are the recurring problems you encounter in preparing your customers' products or services (variances)?	What are the recurring, yet unpredictable, events (variances) that occur in the preparation of our products ?
How would you like things to be carried out? What are the gaps that need to be filled?	Imagine a world where variances are experienced as an opportunity to demonstrate our expertise. Explain how we, as a team, share the tasks to leverage these variances
What do you know about the work being accomplished in other departments about your products or services?	What variances are the best opportunities to improve ourselves? How would you transform the way things are carried out?
	Describe the ideal transformation process ? What do you value most in the way your team accomplishes the tasks required to deliver?
	For the future success of your company, if you had a magic wand and were able to change one thing in the way things are done, what would it be?

# Management and Coordination

## Day-to-Day and Strategic Decision-Making

Deficit based Questions	Generative Question
<p>What are the recurring problems you would prefer not having to look after on a daily basis? (Questions for managers)</p> <p>Name one or two important decisions that were recently made by management, where you should have been involved. What was missing in the decisions that were made ?</p>	<p>What, in your opinion, are the value adding contributions only you can have as a manager and that could make a big difference?</p> <p>Name one or two important decisions that were recently made by management. How could you have contributed to a better decision?</p> <p>What are the contributions you have that consolidate your organization's strategic position?</p> <p>What are the contributions you make that are very important for you?</p>

# Employee Experience

Deficit based Questions	Generative Question
<p>What are the variances you see on a day-to-day basis and how are you involved in managing them?</p> <p>What are the competencies missing in order to better perform your job?</p> <p>In what ways are you disappointed in the way you work with your team?</p>	<p>How important is it for you to work collaboratively as a team? What would it look like if you were to do more of it? How would it help you in your day-to-day work?</p> <p>Describe a situation in which you truly experienced collaborative work? What were the conditions that made this success possible?</p> <p>What are the competencies you wish to grow? In what situations are you able to use or develop them?</p>



# Closure

- What is one take-away you wish to share?



# **STS ROUNDTABLE NEXT WEBINARS**

# Bibliography

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