



Tool

Incisive Questions

SOURCE: In her book *Time to Think* Nancy Kline outlines the technique of incisive questions. She defines as incisive questions as 'any question that will remove limiting assumptions from your thinking so that you can think again. An incisive question does this by replacing the limiting assumption with a freeing one.' (*Time to Think*, p.54).

These questions can be really powerful and challenging, helping us notice barriers to fresh thinking. A simple example would be if a colleague said to you:

'I never have time to update the website' - you could respond with a question like:

'If you had time what would be the first thing you'd change?'

Your colleague might just surprise themselves by discovering something they can update more easily than they thought...

Why not try and spot some of the assumptions in your own thinking or your team's conversations and use an incisive question to broaden your perspective? A few examples below based on common assumptions we might have...

If you were in my position, what would you do?

If you had a magic wand, what would you change?

If you knew it would definitely work, what would you try?

If you knew the answer, what would it be?

If you were not afraid of things going wrong, what would you try?

If you knew they would listen, what would you like to say?

If there were no limits, what would you do?

If you had all the confidence in the world, what would you do differently?

What are we assuming that is stopping us?

What do we already know that we are going to find out in a year?

If I knew I were good enough, what would I do?

What needs to change for things to be exactly right for you?

If you knew the opposite [of what you fear] to be true, what would you do or do differently?