



Discovery Questions & Cheat Sheet

The questions leaders ask are really important. Delivery questions force a decision and narrow choices. Discovery questions, on the other hand, encourage dialogue and open up possibilities. Next time you are in a meeting to discuss an in-process Innovation initiative, consider asking one of the following seven questions and/or using the cheat sheet on page 2 to encourage a more discovery-oriented mindset.



1. *How might we do this differently?* Being curious starts with the belief that there is always a better way to do things. Simple questions like “Why?,” “Why not?,” and “What if?” function in similar ways.



2. *What is the job to be done?* This question helps to reinforce the notion of being customer-obsessed and avoids the trap of developing a solution to a nonexistent problem.



3. *Who has solved this before?* This question leads you to the intersections, removes the shame of borrowing ideas, and reinforces the idea of smart collaboration.



4. *What would we need to believe?* Uncertain ideas can't be assessed purely analytically. Adeptness in ambiguity involves zeroing in on the key assumptions that would need to prove true for a desired outcome to occur.



5. *What don't we know?* Another key part of being adept in ambiguity is being humble about the limits of current knowledge. This question role-models humility and accepts that there will always be limits when doing new things.



6. *What did we learn?* This question further encourages being adept in ambiguity by moving away from a myopic focus on outcomes (which happens when you ask questions such as “Did it work?” or “Did we hit our targets?”). Beyond commercial success, there are three valuable things you can learn from an experiment: you can learn what won't work, you can develop a strategic option by learning that something will work only when other factors exist, and you can identify the opportunity to pivot to a different and better idea.



7. *What are our options?* This question helps to reinforce the notion of empowerment, with a leader shifting from asserting the answer to inquiring about possibilities.

When...	Instead of asking...	Consider asking...
An idea looks like one you have tried before...	Why are you proposing something that we know won't work?	What has changed from the last time we last tried that?
A team suggests exploring a new market space...	What does the business case look like?	What evidence suggests that this problem is worth solving?
A specific idea is presented...	What does the business case look like?	What can we learn from other industries or contexts?
A team presents the business case for a new idea...	Have you done enough analysis to be confident? Why is cell B4 so low? It needs to be higher.	What would need to be true for this to be interesting?
A team makes the case for a big investment...	Did McKinsey/Bain/Boston Consulting Group/Innosight validate this? Can you go and run some more numbers?	What experiment can we run to learn more?
Market research shows that customer like a concept...	How quickly can we launch?	How can we test what customers will actually do?
Something doesn't work as planned...	What did you do wrong?	What can we learn?
