

Liberating Thinking: In Pursuit of Listening without Interruption



A Practical Introduction To Thinking Space and Thinking Environments

A series of Thinking Space ideas and plans to play with

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MAKING IT REAL

Creating Thinking Space is not difficult, it is a collection of questions and ideas that you can use to engage with people and really hear their stories. It is all about the questions and the pattern in which you use them. In most instances you would have agreed the membrane for the Thinking Space, so you would be thinking about a specific topic, situation, development opportunity etc.

At the heart of this are two of Nancy Kline's very specific questions:

What would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?

What more do you think or feel or want to say?

We already know that we carry assumptions with us and that these influence our thinking. These assumptions could be positive or negative. Either way it is helpful to get them out of our heads and into the light so that we can move forward in a more informed way.

What positive assumptions are you holding that are influencing your thinking?

What else are you assuming that is influencing your thinking?

What would you like to do with these assumptions now that you have brought them to the surface?

Equally we understand from the work that we have done on Transactional Analysis that as leaders we need to spend more time in our Adult and curious Natural Child states when we are looking to support and develop people in line with their strengths.

What do you already hold as a strength that could support you/us/the project?

What one thing could I help you to explore further?

What do you need from me moving forward?

What decisions and actions are you taking now?

These are the “master” questions, you can use them anytime, anywhere with anyone!

What follows are specific patterns of questions created around the 4D Appreciative Inquiry model.

Equally you can create your own patterns from the Powerful Questions Inventory also part of this series.

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INTRODUCTION

This page is designed to support you to conduct 1-1 Thinking Space sessions. This outline is for a 60- minute session with 2 people (30 minutes approximately each way) The times are a loose frame, you may need to watch the clock for the first few times, but like everything, the more you practice the more intuitive it will get. I have been working in this was as part of my practice for 10 years and the questions work perfectly. Don't over complicate it. You can half or quarter the time and adjust accordingly.

CHECK-IN: 2.5 MINUTES EACH WAY

00.00-00.05

Each person has up to 2.5 minutes to say how they feel about being part of the session. Depending on the existing relationship, this might be a general catch up, or more specific but the time remains the same. At the end of this decide who wants to go first.

STATE THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: 2 MINUTES

00.05-00.07/ 00.31-00.33

Irrespective of how often you do this and how well you know the Thinking Partner, you always begin with this.

- Welcome to your Thinking Space, my only purpose it to help you to think better for yourself
- I will not interrupt you, or fill silence, all that matters is you have space to go where your thinking takes you. Wherever that is, is right for you and I have no judgements or expectations.
- I will support your thinking by asking a series of questions
- When you are a minute from the end of your time, I will give you a signal
- Thereafter you can ask me a question if you want to
- Finally, you will reflect on what you want to do next with what you have discovered

THE THINKING SPACE:23 MINUTES

00.07-00.30/00.33-00.56

Below is a pattern of questions. Please do not be robotic about this. You may never need most of these. Remember that the main thing that will encourage thinking, is the quality of your attention; calm, listening with ease and not too much nodding. The thinker doesn't need to be distracted by our signals of agreement or otherwise. This sense of calm is also important in how you ask the questions, with intention and curiosity, slowly, hence the In-between the words. Trust the process. It will feel weird, of course it will. We are not used to being fully focused on the thinking of others, we are hardwired to get our thinking in, or to build on others thinking when they are not finished thinking for themselves. Stop knowing start wondering! Even at the end of the Thinking Space if the Thinker asks a question of you, think very carefully about what you say. At no point go back and disagree with thinking they have shared in the Thinking Space, at best it's a sharing of your personal experience nothing more and not if it's not requested. It's not about you!

Fundamental Questions

- So, Fiona.....What would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
- And what moredo you think.....or feel.....or want to say?
- You may repeat the question above several times or an abbreviated version...So, what more.....?
- Even when the thinker tells you they are done
- Just to check...are you sure there is nothing more you want to think?
- Do you need anything further from me? (always second last)
- What would you like to do next with what you have discovered? (always the last question)

Other questions you might need, if the thinker gets stuck or you feel they could help

- What assumptions are you holding that are influencing your thinking?
- What more are you assuming?
- How do you feel now that you have illuminated these assumptions?
- What feels true now?

APPRECIATION: 2 MINUTES EACH WAY

00.56-00.60

- Appreciate the other for their part in the Thinking Space

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PATTERN OF QUESTIONS FOR 1-1 DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATIONS GUIDANCE FOR THE THINKING PARTNER

The following are the key points that it is helpful to cover before you start any Appreciative Thinking Space. We include them for your information, once you “get fluent” you won’t need to have them written down.

1. Before we begin it can be helpful to confirm that my role is to help you to do your best thinking, I will not interrupt you or verbally respond to your thinking
2. It would be helpful for me if we can agree how you will let me know that one wave of thinking is complete
3. Only when I am sure that you are ready will I ask you another question. That may be the same question I have already asked, or it may not
4. Either way my only desire is to help you to discover your best thinking

DISCOVERY

1. What would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
2. What more do you think or feel or want to say? (Repeat until you are sure the thinking is complete. I would normally say, I am noticing that you seem to be finished and just to be sure I will ask you again...).
3. What positive assumptions if any, are you holding that can help you get to where you want to be?
4. What other assumptions if any, are you holding that may be unhelpful in getting where you want to be?
5. What do you need to take a note of (including the positive assumptions) at this stage in our thinking space?

DREAMING

1. If I was to invite you to be really ambitious about possibilities, what would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
2. What more do you think or feel or want to say? (Repeat until you are sure the thinking is complete. I would normally say, I am noticing that you seem to be finished thinking and just to be sure I will ask you again...).
3. What positive assumptions if any, are you holding and how are these assumptions influencing your thinking about possibilities for the future?
4. And what else are you assuming that is influencing your thinking about possibilities for the future? (Repeat until you are sure the thinking is complete for the moment)
5. What would you like to do with these assumptions? (It is fine to hold them at this point, and explore them further)
6. If you are choosing to hold onto and keep visible x as an assumption how does that influence your thinking about possibilities for the future?
7. If you are choosing to let that assumption go what usefully fills the space left behind? (How could you reframe these assumptions?)
8. What do you need to take a note of (including the assumptions) at this stage in your thinking space?

DESIGN

1. What specific detailed statement(s) of success do you want to agree on and record for today’s thinking session? (most helpfully, relationships and results should be considered)
2. How is what you have decided on influenced by any remaining assumptions (both helpful and limiting?)
3. What decisions do you want to make about those assumptions?
4. What would you like to think about now and what are your thoughts?
5. What more do you think or feel about the statements of success?

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DESTINY

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on your thinking space and on your notes so far
2. As you look at your collective thinking.....
3. What would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
4. And what more do you think or feel or want to say?
5. Knowing that your thinking and doing could make a real difference, what could you commit to now?
6. What more can you commit to now? (to deliver between now and when we speak again)
7. What do you need from me?

CLOSING AND APPRECIATION

1. My commitment to you based on what we agreed is.....
2. Our next conversation will be on.....
3. I would like to thank you for sharing your thinking with me and as a token I would like to say.....

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PATTERN OF QUESTIONS FOR MEETINGS

GUIDANCE FOR CHAIR OR FACILITATOR

The following are the key points that it is helpful to cover before you start any Thinking Space. We include them for your information, once you "get fluent" you won't need to have them written down.

Think about what the **Thinking Membrane** is for the meeting, what is the area/topic that you are inviting people to think about? Share this with the people in advance. It may also be useful to let people know that you are intending to conduct the meeting as a Thinking Space. The ethos behind this is that listening to people with appreciation, attention and ease makes a real difference to how people feel about sharing their thinking. This way of facilitating meetings also ensures that everyone's voice is heard and that there is a shared understanding that everyone is expected to contribute.

As the **Thinking Partner** it is your role to state the "rules of engagement" which include; how it will work, what will be expected of people, what you will do and how you will feedback the outcomes. The following is an example that you can use as a basis for your pre meeting briefing.

I am delighted to invite you to share your thinking about xxxx at our next meeting which will be facilitated in the form of a Thinking Space. There will be no formal agenda. Instead we will focus on behaving together in a way that allows our collective best thinking to surface.

The Thinking Space is typified by:

You going as far as you can with your own thinking

Everyone having a turn to think

Everyone else listening with attention and ease, no interrupting, no note taking and initially no questions

I will act as a "thinking partner" to the group, helping you to get to your best thinking

I will use questions to get to deeper thinking and to challenge assumptions and their impact

I will facilitate the agreement of themes and the next steps

This is a real opportunity for us to learn from each other and really hear each other's thinking and have conversations about possibilities and positive futures

OPENING THE THINKING SPACE MEETING

The following are some suggestions about how you can do this and a pattern of questions that in our experience works. Like anything new you will need to be patient!

Before we begin it can be helpful to confirm that my role is to help you to do your best thinking

Each person will have the opportunity to speak without being interrupted

We will pay attention to each contribution and value it as much as we value our own

It would be helpful for me if we can agree how you will let me know that one wave of thinking is complete, ensuring I do not speak when you are still thinking

Only when I am sure that you are ready will I ask you another question

That may be the same question I have already asked, or it may not

Either way my only desire is to help you to discover your best thinking

Once everyone has had an opportunity to share their thinking, we will open the space to an Appreciative conversation, reflecting on all of the thinking and what we would like to do next. We will maintain the rule of no interrupting

Everyone will have a chance to say or ask whatever they need/want to

Starting the Conversation

1. When you think about xxx, what would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
2. What more do you think or feel or want to say?
3. Hear from everyone
4. Even when the conversation opens up we maintain the Rules of Engagement

Continuing the conversation based on what you think would work in the specific situation

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The following is a series of questions that work. You do not need to use them all at the one meeting.

1. What themes are we noticing emerging? (Useful at the end of each thinking round)
2. What positive assumptions if any, are you holding that can help you/us to get to where you/we want to be?
3. What other assumptions if any, are you holding that are influencing your thinking?
4. If I was to invite you to be really ambitious about possibilities what would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
5. What more do you think or feel or want to say?
6. What assumptions if any, are you holding and how are these assumptions influencing your thinking about possibilities for the future?
7. What would you like to do with these assumptions? (It is fine to hold them at this point, and explore them further)
8. If you are choosing to hold onto and keep visible xxx as an assumption how does that influence your thinking about possibilities for the future?
9. If you are choosing to let that assumption go, what usefully fills the space left behind? (How could you reframe these assumptions?)
10. What do you need to take a note of (including the assumptions) at this stage in your thinking space?
11. What specific detailed statement(s) of success do you want to agree on and record for today's thinking session? (Most helpfully relationships and results should be considered)
12. How is what you have decided influenced by any remaining assumptions (Both helpful and limiting)?
13. What can you commit to now? (To deliver between now and when we speak again)

Closing and Appreciation

1. My commitment to you based on what we agreed is...
2. Our next conversation will be on...
3. I would like to thank you for sharing your thinking with me and as a token of my appreciation, I would like to say...