Introduction
The search for innovative ideas involves breaking up old patterns of thinking. We are trapped in routine ways of mind, sometimes called mental models, that limit our creative abilities. We must reexamine our belief structures and assumptions, thereby enriching our ability to think outside the box.

Learning Objectives:
By the end of this module, the participant will be able to:
- Identify assumptions related to a problem or process.
- Reverse assumptions and thereby produce new ideas and innovations.

Group Size:
Although this exercise may be done individually, it is suitable for teams of 4-10. Multiple teams may work simultaneously.

Time Required:
Twenty-thirty minutes.

Resources:
- A problem statement or brainstorming objective, created by the group.
- Overhead Projector.

Physical Setting:
- Round tables with 4-10 seats.
- Flipchart easel in plain view of participants.

Procedure:

1. Welcome Participants.

Greetings! This is a module designed to teach a new creativity tool called challenging assumptions. It involves surfacing and testing beliefs and assumptions that limit how we solve problems and see the world.

2. Introduce the Tool.

Mental models are the beliefs we hold about how the world works. Ask for
examples. Stereotypes are an example. The European idea that we can own land, which is totally foreign to the Native American. It is not that mental models are wrong? it is just that they are never surfaced, tested and challenged. Doing so, especially reversing assumptions, provokes new and innovative thinking.

3. Set the Objective.

We will first choose a problem or issue that requires a creative answer. (The facilitator may choose a problem for the class or ask them to select one. In the course proper, we used processes that were broken, cumbersome, needlessly complex, difficult to navigate and known to displease customers.)

4. (FC) Write the Problem or Process on the Flipchart.

5. Give brief lecturette.

How did we get where we are today? Certain environmental factors drive assumptions that go into the design of a business, producing a set of behaviors. Healthcare processes were constructed in this fashion. The problem is that assumptions harden into rules, which become unquestionable, unconditional and unchangeable. Until these are challenged and overturned, innovation will not be possible.


Let’s work through a few of these together. What assumption was overturned that allowed the following innovations?

1. Only hospital personnel can collect information to admit patients.

2. Diagnostic tests and procedures must be separate and distinct, to address unique needs and functions. This can only occur in different facilities with professional equipment and special design.

Run the Exercise.

WRITE DOWN ALL OF THE ASSUMPTIONS RELATED TO YOUR PROBLEM. NOW CHALLENGE EACH ASSUMPTION BY STATING ITS OPPOSITE OR ASSUMING ITS NEGATIVE.

USE THE REVERSED ASSUMPTION AS A STIMULUS TO GENERATE IDEAS. WHAT THINKING
COMES FROM YOUR REVERSED ASSUMPTIONS?


**Recommended Evaluation Procedure:**

Major assumptions to listen for are:

- Generalist vs. Specialist
- Technical Knowledge to Fit a Job
- Layers of Management
- Empowerment of People
- Time-critical Tasks
- Similarities of Tasks

The steps above could constitute a written exercise, which could also be assigned as homework.

**Optional Variation:**

Use deBono’s “Why?” Technique, asking why several times in succession. (See citation)

**References:**

- Creativity and Innovation, Quorum Health Resources course, pp. 57-70.