



The Four Kinds of Asking - Instructional Note

Introduction

This is an exercise that helps teach Asking by having the students explore an example Ask, transform it and use that transformation to derive the 4 quadrant CAVE matrix.

The purpose of this exercise is to help students think about how different ways of Asking for something change based on the approach taken and the circumstances involved. You will start with an initial example and progressively modify it, exploring different ways to frame a request.

The exercise can be executed in a number of ways. The first variant assumes the class stays together for the duration of the class. A variation is provided where the class can be split into 2, 3 or 4 breakouts, each of which will take an Ask and create variations of that Ask.

Instructor Background - Explaining the Prediction Control Space and the CAVE Matrix

The **Prediction-Control Space** is a framework created by Saras Sarasvathy and her collaborators which helps understand how different strategies can be used in situations involving uncertainty and control. This space is defined by two key dimensions:

1. **Prediction:** This refers to the degree to which outcomes can be anticipated or forecasted. High prediction means there is a clear sense of what the future holds, while low prediction suggests that the future is uncertain and difficult to predict.
2. **Control:** This refers to the level of influence an individual or organization has over the situation. High control means that actions can significantly shape outcomes, while low control indicates that outcomes are more dependent on external factors.

Within this prediction-control space, strategies for action can vary depending on the level of prediction and control involved.

The **CAVE Matrix** is a practical application of the prediction-control space that categorizes approaches to entrepreneurial actions into four distinct quadrants:



The Cave Matrix	
Quadrant 1: Causal	Quadrant 2: Visionary
Quadrant 3: Adaptive	Quadrant 4: Effectual

- **Causal:** This approach operates in a high-prediction, low-control environment. Actions are based on careful planning and forecasting, aiming to achieve specific outcomes based on known data.
- **Adaptive:** In this low-prediction, low-control quadrant, actions are exploratory. Entrepreneurs gather information, learn, and adapt as they go, responding flexibly to emerging circumstances.
- **Visionary:** This approach involves high control but low prediction. Entrepreneurs take decisive actions based on a strong vision, even if the future is uncertain. They aim to inspire others to follow their vision without relying on predictable outcomes.
- **Effectual:** In this high-control, low-prediction quadrant, actions are focused on co-creating the future with stakeholders. Entrepreneurs use their means (who they are, what they know, and whom they know) to shape outcomes collaboratively, rather than attempting to predict them in advance.

These quadrants reflect different ways in which entrepreneurs approach decisions and actions, depending on the levels of control they have and the predictability of their environment. By understanding the CAVE Matrix, students can learn how to identify, evaluate, and switch between different strategies when dealing with uncertainty.



Exercise Starting Point: Four Example Asks

Start with a short description of an Ask. You can lead a discussion or present the following to the class:

An **Ask** is a specific request made by an entrepreneur or entrepreneurial actor to engage potential stakeholders, partners, or supporters.

Next, choose an Example Ask of the four Asks below and write the Ask in quotations on the board. Do not explain the type of Ask you are writing or provide a label, just write down the Ask.

1. **Example A - Causal (Data-Driven Investment) Ask** - "Based on our initial research, we believe there is a 30% increase in efficiency for small retailers using our inventory management app. We're seeking investment to help us expand our reach to more businesses. Would you be interested in partnering with us to make this happen?" *Here, the Ask is driven by specific research findings. It aims to secure investment based on anticipated gains and benefits that are supported by data, with a clearer outcome in mind.*
2. **Example B - Adaptive (Exploratory) Ask** - "We're trying to better understand what this market needs. Could you share any insights or feedback on what challenges you face?" *This is a broad, flexible Ask where the entrepreneur is seeking general feedback. It's exploratory, aimed at gathering information without a specific plan or outcome in mind.*
3. **Example C - Visionary (Focused Partnership) Ask** - "We have an idea for an app that helps small businesses manage inventory more effectively. We'd love to connect with someone who's interested in supporting our idea. Would you be willing to collaborate or introduce us to others who might be?" *This Ask is more directed, with a specific idea in mind. It is focused on getting support from someone who resonates with the vision, without concrete predictions about the results.*
4. **Example D - Effectual (Co-Creative) Ask** - "We have a plan to develop an innovative platform for sustainable packaging. We're looking for collaborators who want to help us shape this product from the ground up. Are you interested in joining forces and bringing your expertise into this journey?" *This Ask is open-ended, focusing on collaboration and co-creating something new. The focus is on finding co-creative individuals who are excited to build something together, rather than pitching a fully defined outcome.*

Transforming the Ask

Go to the Example Ask section below which corresponds with the one of four Asks you chose above. For the Example Ask you chose, use the first transformation prompts in quotations for



your initial Ask to lead a discussion to create a new Ask from the initial Ask provided in the example. Do not label the type of Ask your initial Ask is.

For instance, if you started with **Example B - Adaptive** with its initial Ask: *“We’re trying to better understand what this market needs. Could you share any insights or feedback on what challenges you face?”*

1. First you would have written that Ask on the board per the instructions above.
2. Then you would state the first transformation prompt corresponding to the initial Ask, “How could you adjust this Ask if you had research or data that showed your solution would make a measurable impact?” To start a discussion to transform the Adaptive Ask into a Causal Ask.
3. Write the new Ask on the board under your initial Ask.
4. Depending on the time, you could Ask the class to comment on the implications of the transformation.

Repeat the same process above to transform your initial Ask into another type of Ask. For example, from Adaptive into Visionary. Write the new Ask under the first two Asks you have already written down. Repeat the same process one more time which will result in Four Asks on the board which represent your initial Ask and three successive transformations.

Example A: Starting with the Causal (Data-Driven) Ask

Initial Ask (Causal): *“Based on our initial research, we believe there is a 30% increase in efficiency for small retailers using our inventory management app. We’re seeking investment to help us expand our reach to more businesses. Would you be interested in partnering with us to make this happen?”*

Transformation Guide and Prompts

1. **Finding the Visionary Ask:** *“How could you reframe this Ask if your goal was not to provide data but to find people who share your passion for the idea itself?” Guide students to create a visionary Ask that focuses on sharing enthusiasm for the idea rather than relying on predictions.*
2. **Finding the Adaptive Ask:** *“What if you were still figuring out what approach might work and needed to gather more general insights or feedback?” Lead students to simplify the Ask to be more exploratory, looking for information and guidance rather than specific commitments.*
3. **Finding the Effectual Ask:** *“How could you transform this Ask to invite someone to help shape the solution rather than merely investing in it?” Encourage students to craft an Ask that is less about pitching outcomes and more about inviting collaboration in shaping the future product .*



Example B: Starting with the Adaptive (Exploratory) Ask

Initial Ask (Adaptive): "We're trying to better understand what this market needs. Could you share any insights or feedback on what challenges you face?"

Transformation Guide and Prompts

1. **Finding the Visionary Ask:** "What if you had a specific idea for how to solve one of these challenges and wanted to find someone who shares your passion?" *Encourage students to transform the Ask into one with a clearer vision and specific direction, inviting support for an idea.*
2. **Finding the Causal Ask:** "How could you adjust this Ask if you had research or data that showed your solution would make a measurable impact?" *Guide students to make the Ask more evidence-based, where data is used to show the effectiveness of a proposed solution.*
3. **Finding the Effectual Ask:** "If you wanted someone to join you in creating a new solution, where the future outcome is shaped together, how would you rephrase the Ask?" *Lead students to craft an open-ended, collaborative Ask that invites stakeholders to join in co-creating the solution.*

Example C: Starting with the Visionary (Focused Partnership) Ask

Initial Ask (Visionary): "We have an idea for an app that helps small businesses manage inventory more effectively. We'd love to connect with someone who's interested in supporting our idea. Would you be willing to collaborate or introduce us to others who might be?"

Transformation Guide and Prompts

1. **Finding the Adaptive Ask:** "What if you were unsure of what specific solution you wanted to pursue but were open to learning more about the market?" *Encourage students to make the Ask more exploratory, shifting from a clear vision to seeking general feedback or insights.*
2. **Finding the Causal Ask:** "How could you make this Ask more concrete if you had data to back up the impact of your solution?" *Lead students to transform the visionary Ask into one that is more evidence-driven, showing anticipated outcomes with specific data to secure investment or support.*
3. **Finding the Effectual Ask:** "What if instead of pitching a defined view, you were inviting someone to help shape this product together?" *This prompts students to make the Ask more collaborative, allowing stakeholders to contribute and help co-create the product.*



Example D: Starting with the Effectual (Co-creative) Ask

Initial Ask (Effectual): "We have a plan to develop an innovative platform for sustainable packaging. We're looking for collaborators who want to help us shape this product from the ground up. Are you interested in joining forces and bringing your expertise into this journey?"

Transformation Guide and Prompts

1. **Finding the Visionary Ask:** "How would you modify this Ask if you already had a clear view of what the platform should be and wanted to inspire others to join in supporting your idea?" *Guide students to create a more focused Ask that presents a defined idea and seeks others who are enthusiastic about contributing to that specific vision.*
2. **Finding the Adaptive Ask:** "What if you weren't sure what direction to take yet and were trying to gather general information about market needs?" *Encourage students to make the Ask more exploratory and flexible, seeking insights from potential stakeholders rather than Asking for direct collaboration.*
3. **Finding the Causal Ask:** "How could you reframe this Ask if you had data showing the potential impact of your platform and wanted to use that information to gain investment?" *Guide students to transform the Ask into an evidence-driven request that focuses on the anticipated impact and seeks investment or formal support.*

After you finish transforming your first Example Ask (eg. Adaptive), you can choose to proceed to a discussion or you can choose 1, 2 or 3 more Example Asks and transform their initial Asks into the three more Ask types.

Discussion

1. Facilitate a class discussion to help students recognize the key differences between each type of Ask and infer the principles at play behind each one.
2. Ask how the level of certainty about outcomes (prediction) changed the way they made their Asks. Ask how the level of influence they had over the situation (control) shaped the nature of their requests.
3. Guide them to understand that these two aspects (prediction and control) formed the core differences between the Asks, and that we can create a matrix where the approaches can be mapped based on these two dimensions, creating a two by two matrix. Label each quadrant - Causal, Adaptive, Visionary, Effectual.



4. Place all of the Asks (4-16 depending on how many initial Asks were used) on the two by two matrix.
5. Ask the students to reflect on when each type of Ask might be most appropriate for an entrepreneur and what makes an Ask effective in different situations.



Breakout Variation - The Four Types of Asking

Open the session by explaining that the class is going to participate in a breakout exercise to explore four types of Asking.

1. Start with a short description of an Ask. You can lead a discussion or present the following to the class:
2. An **Ask** is a specific request made by an entrepreneur or entrepreneurial actor to engage potential stakeholders, partners, or supporters.
3. Break the group into 4 groups. Tell the class that each group will be provided with an initial Asks and three prompts that they will use to transform that Ask into 3 additional variations for a total of four Asks.
4. Hand each group a worksheet that they will complete. Worksheets in Appendix below. Note, there are five different worksheets, a blank worksheet and 1 for each Ask Example. Give each group 15-20 minutes to transform their initial Ask into 3 variations which they will write down on their worksheet.
5. Reassemble the class and Ask each group to present their original Ask and then write it down on the board.
6. Facilitate a class discussion to help students recognize the key differences between each type of Ask and infer the principles at play behind each one.
7. Ask how the level of certainty about outcomes (prediction) changed the way they made their Asks. Ask how the level of influence they had over the situation (control) shaped the nature of their requests.
8. Guide them to understand that these two aspects (prediction and control) formed the core differences between the Asks, and that we can create a matrix where the approaches can be mapped based on these two dimensions, creating a two by two matrix. Label each quadrant - Causal, Adaptive, Visionary, Effectual.
9. Place all of the Asks (4-16 depending on how many initial Asks were used) on the two by two matrix.
10. Ask the students to reflect on when each type of Ask might be most appropriate for an entrepreneur and what makes an Ask effective in different situations



The Four Kinds of Asking Worksheet - Example A

Your Initial Ask: *Based on our initial research, we believe there is a 30% increase in efficiency for small retailers using our inventory management app. We're seeking investment to help us expand our reach to more businesses. Would you be interested in partnering with us to make this happen?*

Transformation Prompt 1: *How could you reframe this Ask if your goal was not to provide data but to find people who share your passion for the idea itself?*

Transformation Prompt 2: *What if you were still figuring out what approach might work and needed to gather more general insights or feedback?*

Transformation Prompt 3: *How could you transform this Ask to invite someone to help shape the solution rather than merely investing in it?*



The Four Kinds of Asking Worksheet - Example B

Your Initial Ask: *We're trying to better understand what this market needs. Could you share any insights or feedback on what challenges you face?*

Transformation Prompt 1: *What if you had a specific idea for how to solve one of these challenges and wanted to find someone who shares your passion?*

Transformation Prompt 2: *How could you adjust this Ask if you had research or data that showed your solution would make a measurable impact?*

Transformation Prompt 3: *If you wanted someone to join you in creating a new solution, where the future outcome is shaped together, how would you rephrase the Ask?*



The Four Kinds of Asking Worksheet - Example C

Your Initial Ask: *We have an idea for an app that helps small businesses manage inventory more effectively. We'd love to connect with someone who's interested in supporting our idea. Would you be willing to collaborate or introduce us to others who might be?*

Transformation Prompt 1: *What if you were unsure of what specific solution you wanted to pursue but were open to learning more about the market?*

Transformation Prompt 2: *How could you make this Ask more concrete if you had data to back up the impact of your solution?*

Transformation Prompt 3: *What if instead of pitching a defined view, you were inviting someone to help shape this product together?*



The Four Kinds of Asking Worksheet - Example D

Your Initial Ask: *We have a plan to develop an innovative platform for sustainable packaging. We're looking for collaborators who want to help us shape this product from the ground up. Are you interested in joining forces and bringing your expertise into this journey?*

Transformation Prompt 1: *How would you modify this Ask if you already had a clear view of what the platform should be and wanted to inspire others to join in supporting your idea?*

Transformation Prompt 2: *What if you weren't sure what direction to take yet and were trying to gather general information about market needs?*

Transformation Prompt 3: *How could you reframe this Ask if you had data showing the potential impact of your platform and wanted to use that information to gain investment?*