

One Point Lesson: Advocacy and Inquiry

Getting Team Members' Rich and Diverse Perspectives

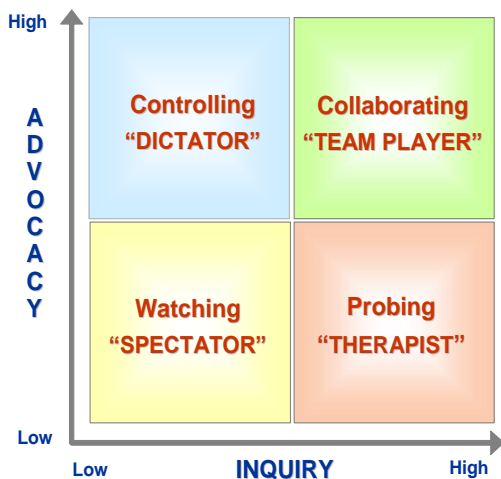
Chris Argyris and Donald Schön pioneered the conversation tools of inquiry and advocacy. These tools allow for the right *balance* of meaningful exchange among participants. While inquiry is a process for understanding a person's viewpoints and/or concerns by exploring his/her reasoning and conclusions, advocacy influences another's thinking and behavior by stating one's beliefs and thought patterns.

The value of gaining multiple perspectives is that it provides a rich source of thoughts and feelings that when tapped into lead to a much broader understanding of problems/opportunities for the company. Differing perspectives become critical when teams are forced to deal with complex and interdependent issues—where no one individual “knows the answer” and where the only viable option is for groups of informed and committed individuals to think together to arrive at new solutions. At times such as these, the skills for balancing inquiry and advocacy become essential.

Inquiry: *Exploring a topic by encouraging others to communicate their points of view, share concerns, and surface differences.*

Advocacy: *Speaking what you believe about a topic by openly sharing data, assumptions, and/or actions.*

Flexing Your Style



Ideally, we balance inquiry and advocacy appropriately. Sometimes, however, one person may dominate the conversation and it becomes stilted and ineffective. Others may just ask questions without sharing their point of view, and the team does not benefit from a potentially unique perspective and may never come to closure. The table to the left outlines how these roles can play out based on a continuum of “high” to “low” inquiry and advocacy.

- The **SPECTATOR** uses low advocacy and low inquiry—leading to passive participation in a conversation. For example, this person may attend a meeting and never say a word.
- When one uses high advocacy and low inquiry, others may feel there is only one option—the perspective of the **DICTATOR**. S/he can be verbally active to the point of controlling decision making and conversations without gaining the other participants' data and opinions.
- On the other hand, the **THERAPIST** is probing into people's points of view to such a degree that the team may not be able to draw conclusions—hindering the team's momentum. While this person may be very skillful in discovering or uncovering useful information that is necessary for making quality decisions, it becomes difficult to move to closure.
- Ideally, colleagues are engaging in conversations that balance high inquiry with high advocacy—creating collaboration and **TEAM PLAYERS**. When people are in this role, they lay out their reasoning or thinking behind a statement, and then encourage others to share their perspectives and discuss differences so that robust conversations and decisions can occur.

Balancing Inquiry and Advocacy with Conversational Moves

Balancing inquiry and advocacy is one way to ensure that we tap the diverse perspectives of everyone on the team. Listed below are *conversational moves* or phrases to use for improving your skills in balancing inquiry and advocacy. It's important to note that these phrases should only be used with genuine interest and regard for the viewpoints of others. Further, if you use these skills well, you may find that there is greater openness, which fosters candid conversations that allow for getting “the unspoken” on the table.

Improving Your Inquiry	Advancing Your Advocacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask others to make their thinking visible and/or draw out their conclusions. Use questions/statements such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Can you help me understand your thinking?</i> ○ <i>What leads you to that conclusion?</i> ○ <i>What are your thoughts around this topic?</i> • Then, check out your assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Let me make sure I understand your thinking...</i> ○ <i>Do I have this right? Your proposal impacts...</i> ○ <i>I'm wondering about your views because...</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires sharing your data, sharing your assumptions, and/or describing actions you believe need to be taken. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Here's what I think and how I got there.</i> ○ <i>I assumed that...</i> ○ <i>I believe we need to act because...</i> • Then test your conclusions with others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>What would keep you from accepting my proposal?</i> ○ <i>Do you see any disconnects in my thinking?</i> ○ <i>What did I miss?</i>
Surfacing Differences	Building Alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build shared understanding by raising concerns and listening to responses—while exploring options and offering one's own point of view. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Help me to understand your concerns...</i> ○ <i>Say more about...</i> ○ <i>Why aren't we on the same page...?</i> ○ <i>Let's explore why our thinking is different...</i> ○ <i>Let's take a moment to brainstorm ways that could address each of our concerns...</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move a team forward even if “you're stuck” or at an impasse. In these situations, you need to work through differences and find common ground. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>What do we know for sure? What do we need to understand more about?</i> ○ <i>What assumptions do we have in common?</i> ○ <i>What do we agree on and why? What do we disagree on and why?</i> ○ <i>What do you sense is true, but need more data to say for certain?</i> ○ <i>Let's go around and have everyone weigh in before we make a decision.</i>



Insight and Application

Each of us has a natural tendency toward inquiry or advocacy. Consider when, where, and/or what makes you fall on the continuum of “high” to “low” inquiry and advocacy.

When and where do you tend to be a “Spectator” and find yourself not sharing your opinions/thoughts? What do you gain by being quiet? What is the loss?

Alternatively, when and where do you find yourself wanting to “Dictate” and take charge of the conversation or decision making based on your data and views? What do you gain by the control? What is the loss to the team?

On the other hand, as the “Therapist,” when and where do you find yourself asking questions to such a degree that the team may be unable to move forward and draw conclusions? What is the gain? What is the loss?

Finally, when and where do you support people to lay out their views or reasoning behind a statement? Likewise, when and where do you encourage others to raise the stakes, challenge the status quo, or add a new twist so that a robust decision is made? This is the power of balancing high inquiry with high advocacy as a collaborating “Team Player” that gains much and loses little!