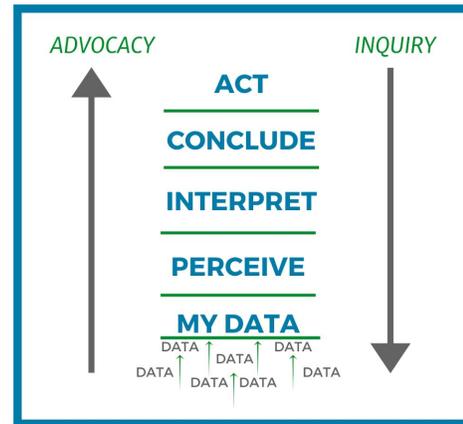




Balancing Inquiry and Advocacy

Balancing inquiry and advocacy is one way for individuals, by themselves, to begin changing a large organization from within. You don't need any mandate, budget, or approval to begin. Shifting your conversations in this way will enhance the quality of professional relationships you have as well as develop better decision making for the entire team.



1. Protocols for Improved Advocacy

Make your thinking process visible (walk up the Ladder of Inference slowly).	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
State your assumptions and describe the thinking that led to them.	<i>"Here's what I think and how I got there."</i>
Explain your assumptions.	<i>"I assumed that..."</i>
Make your reasoning explicit.	<i>"I came to this conclusion because..."</i>
<i>→ Explain the context of your point of view: who will be affected by what you propose and how they will be affected and why.</i>	
Give examples of what you propose, even if they are hypothetical or metaphorical.	<i>"To get a clear picture of what I'm talking about, imagine that you're the customer who will be affected..."</i>
<i>→ As you speak, try to picture the other people's perspectives on what you are saying.</i>	
Publicly test your conclusions and assumptions.	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
Encourage others to explore your model, assumptions, and data.	<i>"What do you think about what I just said?" "What can you add?"</i>
<i>→ Refrain from divisiveness when your ideas are questioned. If you're advocating something worthwhile, then it will only get stronger by being tested.</i>	



Reveal where you are least clear in your thinking, rather than making you vulnerable, it defuses the force of advocates who are opposed to you and invites improvement.	<i>“Here’s one aspect which you might help me think through...”</i>
Even when you feel strongly about an issue, hold space for difference by listening for understanding and keeping an open mind.	<i>“Does anyone see this the same, does anyone see this differently?” “Would anyone like to offer a different perspective for the group to consider?”</i>

2. Protocols For Improved Inquiry

Ask others to make their thinking process visible.	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
Walk others down the ladder of inference and find out what data they are operating from.	<i>“Help me understand how you came to that conclusion?” “What evidence do you have to support that statement?” “What causes you to say that?”</i>
Use unaggressive language, particularly with people who are not familiar with these protocols. Ask in a way which does not provoke defensiveness or lead them to your own conclusion.	<i>Instead of “What do you mean?” or “What’s your proof?” say, “Can you help me understand your thinking?” or “Have you considered...?”</i>
Draw out their reasoning by using language that expands the conversation. Surface their thinking about their statements.	<i>“Tell me more.” “Help me understand how this relates to your other concerns?” “Where does your reasoning go next?”</i>
Explain your reasons for inquiring and how your inquiry relates to your own concerns, hopes and needs.	<i>“I’m asking you about your assumptions here because...” “I am trying to understand how you came to this conclusion.”</i>



Publicly test other’s conclusions and assumptions.	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
Test what they say by asking for broader contexts or additional examples.	“How would your proposal affect...?” “Is this similar to...?” “Can you describe a typical example?”
<i>→ Check your understanding that may emerge by “closing the loop” frequently. Don’t concentrate on preparing to destroy the other person’s argument or promote your own agenda.</i>	

3. Protocols for Facing a Point of View With Which You Disagree.

Seek to understand.	
WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
Inquire what has led the person to that view.	<i>“How did you arrive at this conclusion?” “Are you taking into account data that I have not considered?”</i>
Make sure you truly understand their perspective.	<i>“If I understand you correctly, you’re saying that...”</i>
Explore, listen and offer your own views in an open way.	<i>“I invite you to consider...” “I suggest...” “Are you open to hearing a different perspective?”</i>
Opening lines.	
WHAT’S HAPPENING	WHAT TO SAY
Strong views are expressed without any reasoning or illustrations...	<i>“You may be right, but I’d like to understand more. What leads you to believe...?”</i>
The discussion goes off on an apparent tangent...	<i>“I’m unclear how that connects to the intention of this meeting. Can you help me understand how it is relevant?”</i>



You doubt the relevance of your own thoughts...	<i>"This may not be relevant now. If so, let me know and I will wait to discuss it another time."</i>
Two members pursue a topic at length while others observe...	<i>"I'd like to give my reaction to what you two have said so far, and then see what you and the others think."</i>
Several views are advocated at once...	<i>"We now have three ideas on the table (say what they are). I suggest we address them one at a time..."</i>
You perceive a negative reaction in others...	<i>"When you said (give illustration)... I had the impression you were feeling (fill in the emotion.) If so, I'd like to understand what upset you. Is there something we need to discuss before we can move on?"</i>
You perceive a negative reaction in yourself.	<i>"This may be more my problem than yours, when you said (give illustration)... I felt...am I misunderstanding what you said or intended?"</i>
Others appear non influenceable...the conversation is stuck.	<i>"I noticed the conversation appears to be stuck in one place, I am wondering what we can do so we can move forward?"</i>

(Adapted from the Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, Peter Senge, et al)