Appropriate Use of Advocacy and Inquiry (Senge, 1994)

**Advocacy** - stating point of view, expressing opinion, urging action

**Inquiry** – asking questions, clarifying information, sensing process

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1. **High Advocacy/ Low Inquiry** *(EXPLAINING/TELLING)* = one-way communication – good for: sharing your perspective with others based on how you think the world works and why (your culture, your mental model, your experience), giving directions, explaining and asserting. Appropriate when bringing already conceived ideas to a group of people (i.e. an organizational strategic plan used as the basis for a departmental strategic plan). *It cannot be used alone if your ultimate goal is to enhance understanding of diverse perspectives or to build common ground. If used incorrectly (i.e. dictating and imposing which does not offer an explanation as to “why” and the underlying common values) you are likely to create resistance.*

2. **High Inquiry/ Low Advocacy** *(INTERVIEWING/ASKING)* = one-way communication – useful for gathering information, for discovery, for exploring others points of view and the reasons behind them. The speaker can also ask for clarification as in “what is the question/problem we are trying to address?” *If used exclusively (i.e. not providing any input or feedback) the leader can appear as if they are interrogating and you can be thought of as having a hidden agenda.*
3. Low Inquiry/ Low Advocacy (OBSERVING) = very little conversation occurs when you are mostly observing. You will be in a watchful mode; highly sensitive to process and watching the conversation flow without saying much. However, in this stance, you are keenly aware of all that transpires. In this case you are paying attention to and observing mostly process and not focused as much on content. This is useful when you need to observe what is happening (getting on the balcony for diagnosis). It can create difficulty however when you withhold your views for too long and therefore appear to have “checked out” or are not paying attention (withdrawn).

4. High Advocacy/ High Inquiry (MUTUAL LEARNING/GENERATING) = two-way communication and high level of learning; both parties stating their views and asking the others’ view. This is skillful dialogue where there is a strong balance of inquiry and advocacy. You suspend all assumptions and create a holding environment in which collective thinking can occur. You are genuinely curious and you also make your own reasoning explicit. You ask thoughtful questions that uncover assumptions without being critical or accusing. You must be mindful to be authentic in this space as at times one has the skills to balance inquiry and advocacy yet remains close-minded and perhaps manipulative.