

Integrative Communication: Combining Advocacy with Inquiry

Communication matters. Communication is one way that we access reliable information so that we can make good decisions. Yet, communication often fails or breaks down among groups and thus undermines group effectiveness. Why is that? One reason is that people often lack the tools or techniques for communicating effectively. Fortunately, we can develop specific strategies for improving our ability to communicate. One skill we can develop is what Chris Argyris (2010) refers to as integrative communication. Integrative communication combines advocacy and inquiry. When we advocate, we communicate what we actually think, know, want or feel. When we inquire, we seek to learn what others think, know, want, or feel. The absence of either advocacy or inquiry results in passivity. The presence of only inquiry results in accommodation. If we only advocate, we are assertive. Combining both advocacy and inquiry is integrative and most likely results in improved relationships, better decision-making, and improved group learning and problem solving.

Advocacy and Inquiry

Advocacy	High	Assertive	Integrative
	Low	Passive	Accommodating
		Low	High
	Inquiry		

David Peter Stroh (2015) in his book on systems change has this to say about integrative communication: “Most people are more accustomed to advocating than inquiring, so it often helps to begin with inquiry—the art of asking others how they see the world and then listening to them deeply. As my colleague Bryan Smith told me many years ago, people need to know that you care before they care what you know” (p. 87).

References

- Argyris, C. (2010). *Organizational traps: Leadership, culture, organizational design*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Stroh, D. P. (2015). *Systems thinking for social change: A practical guide to solving complex problems, avoiding unintended consequences, and achieving lasting results*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.