

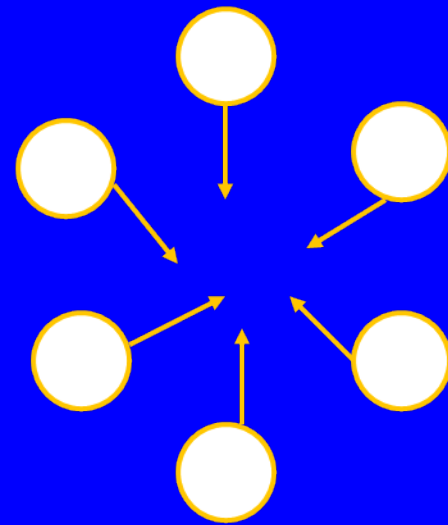
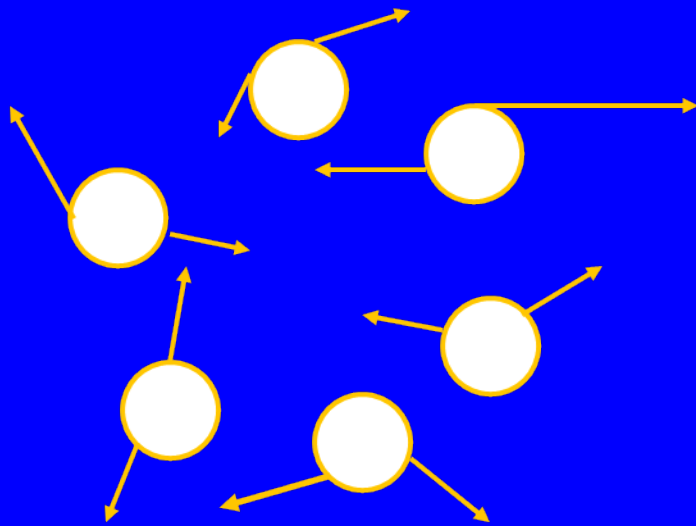
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# Discussing the Undiscussable Overcoming the Defensive Routines in the Workplace

Dr. Micah Fierstein

# Check In

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## *Creating the Container*

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### Essential Agreements – Draft

- Start and Stop on Time
- Listen With Respect
- Be Willing to Take Risks
- Be Honest About Not Understanding
- Agreement on Goals and Objectives
- Follow Through
- Have Fun

## ***50,000 Foot Level***

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Today we are going to experience and examine and five arenas:

- Creating the container for deep learning
- Defensive Routines
- Origins of deep learning
- Tools – inquire, advocacy, left-hand column
- Discussing the Undiscussable

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## Quick Write

Identify a challenging conversation that you would like to have with a individual and are avoiding.

(undiscussable)

What is making it so challenging?

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We are going to spend the six hours together today.

### Quick Write

What do you want to learn about challenging conversations, discussing the undiscussable, and or defensive routines, which would merit your investment in this workshop?

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## Quick Write

If you could have productive conversations about undiscussable issues what would be the impact on your organization?

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## Quick Write

What is a defensive routine?



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A defensive routine is what do you see, feel, think about when you get defensive?

## ***Threat and embarrassment***

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- “Conditions of threat and embarrassment seize our minds”
- Our response are protective strategies – defensive reasoning

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A defensive routine is what do you see, feel, think about when you get defensive?

## ***Unilateral Control Model***

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- Winning, Not Losing
- Being Rational and Avoiding Upset

## ***Defensive Routines***

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Because we don't like threat and embarrassment we engage in defensive routines.

- Bypass Tactics and Covering Up
- Making the “Way things work around here”

## ***Defensive Routines***

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### Bypass Tactics and Covering Up

- Easing In
- Requesting Help
- Delivering Bad News
- Sending Inconsistent Messages
- Interruptions
- Saving Face

## ***Bypass Tactics and Covering Up***

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Easing In

*“Don’t you think it would be a good idea”*

## ***Bypass Tactics and Covering Up***

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### Requesting Help

*“No one is available right now; would you mind leading on this project?”*

*The response “No, I am not comfortable doing that. You need to lead.”*



## *Bypass Tactics and Covering Up*

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### Delivering Bad News

“How do you think you did?”

“.... do you see it the same or differently?”

## ***Bypass Tactics and Covering Up***

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### Sending Inconsistent Messages

“That is interesting. Your idea is worth studying.”

## ***Bypass Tactics and Covering Up***

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### Interruptions

“I don’t mean to interrupt but ....”

“I need to interrupt you. You have made a number of points. Before you add another, I’d like to recap what you said to make sure I got them and then give myself and others a change to respond.”

## ***Bypass Tactics and Covering Up***

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### Saving Face

“I hear the project did not go well.”

“It bombed.”

“Well don’t feed bad. It happens to everyone.”

## ***Making the “Way things work around here”***

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- Inventing Motives
- Holding Others Accountable
- Inventing Causal Explanations
- Story Telling
- Claiming There’s a History
- Designing Helplessness

## *Making the “Way things work around here”*

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### Inventing Motives

“Our view seems immeasurably sensible and obvious, so we assume that others should see it as well and agree with us.”

So ..... I assign a “negative” motive of why they can see it my way.

## *Making the “Way things work around here”*

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### Holding Others Accountable

“I know I am part of the problem but the real reason is ....”

This shows up in the LHC “Okay, have it your way, but you can’t escape the truth.

## *Making the “Way things work around here”*

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### Inventing Causal Explanations

“Our theories of why someone did what he or she did.” This theory is sometimes shared with trusted colleagues.

“Do you know why John did that. I think it’s because he was unprepared and didn’t want to admit it.”



## *Making the “Way things work around here”*

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### Story Telling

“I can’t believe he told you that.”

“Let me tell you what I heard”

Stories are told as if they are the “absolute truth.”

## ***Making the “Way things work around here”***

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### Claiming There’s a History

“There is a history here.”

“Listing a backlog of past errors, failed interactions, and repeated offenses.”

## *Making the “Way things work around here”*

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### Designing Helplessness

“It’s office politics.”

“An excuse for not taking action. Inaction is an action that keeps defensive routine in place of permanence.”

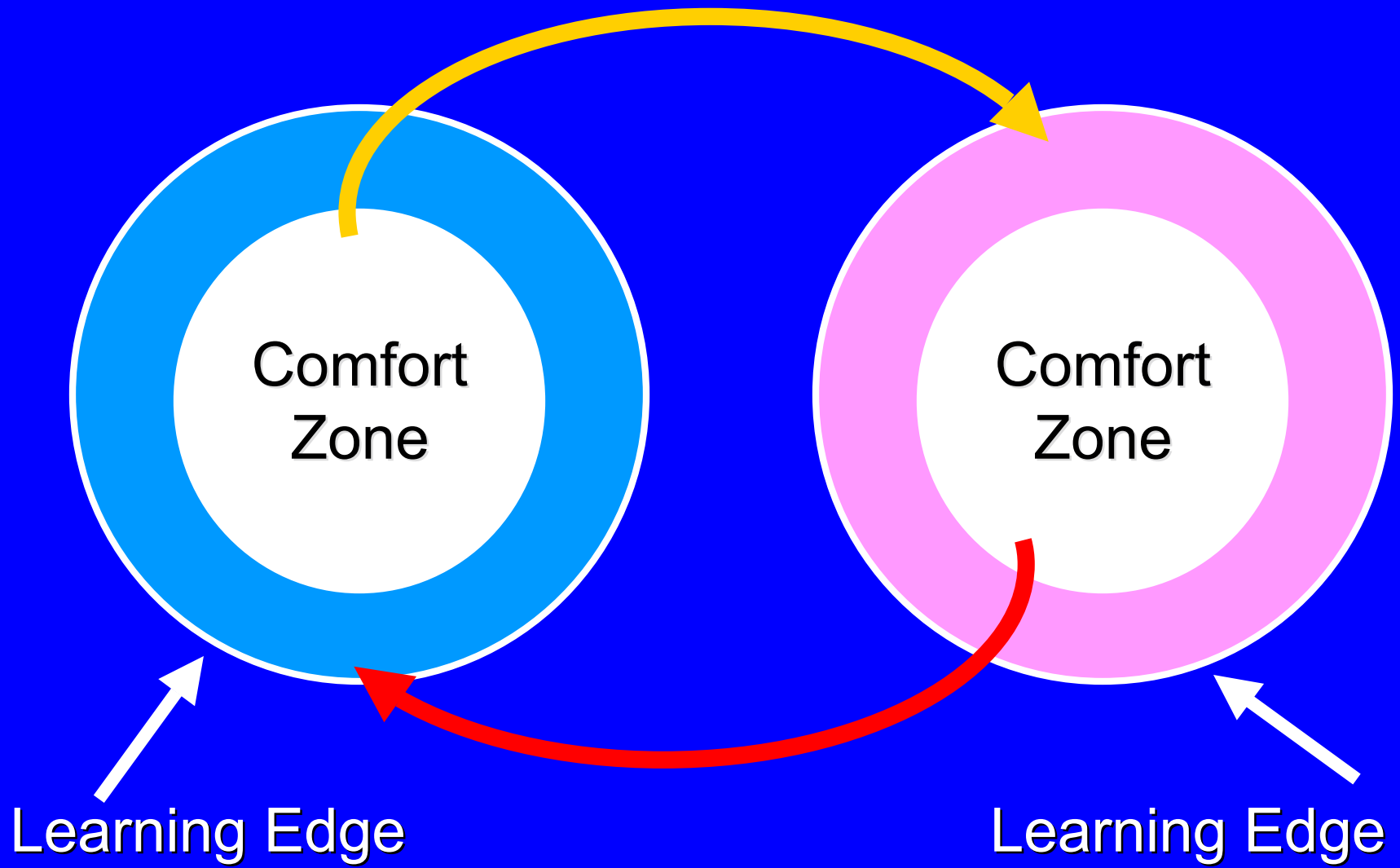
“We don’t readily admit to design our own helplessness .. based on our interpretation of reality

## *Origins of Deep Learning*

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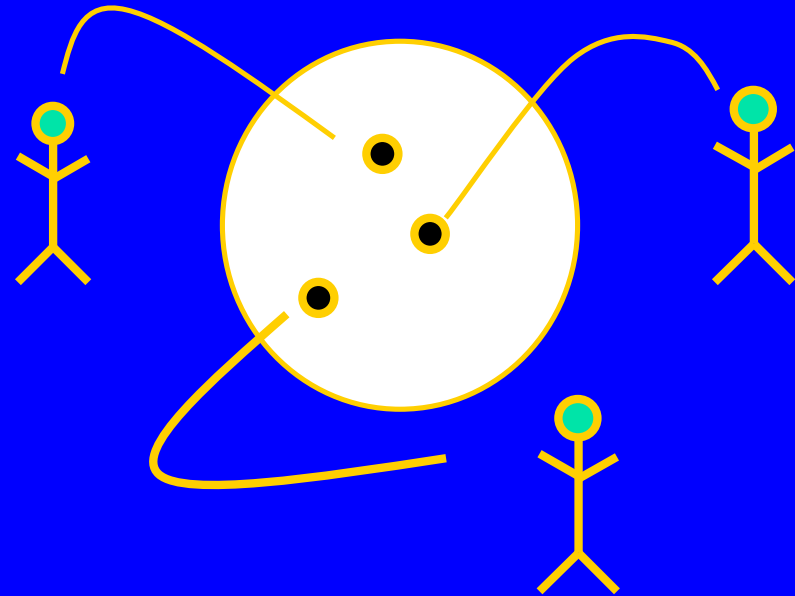
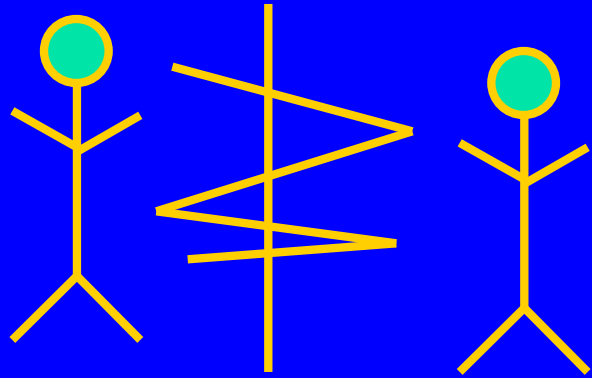
- Significant Learning Story

## Origins of Deep Learning



*Discussion*

*Dialogue*



**Knowledge**  
**Knowing**  
**Memorex**  
**Decision**  
**Fragmentation**



**Insight**  
**Wonder**  
**Live**  
**Choice**  
**Wholeness**

## *Three Tools*

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- Ladder of Inference
- Advocacy and Inquiry
- Left Hand Column

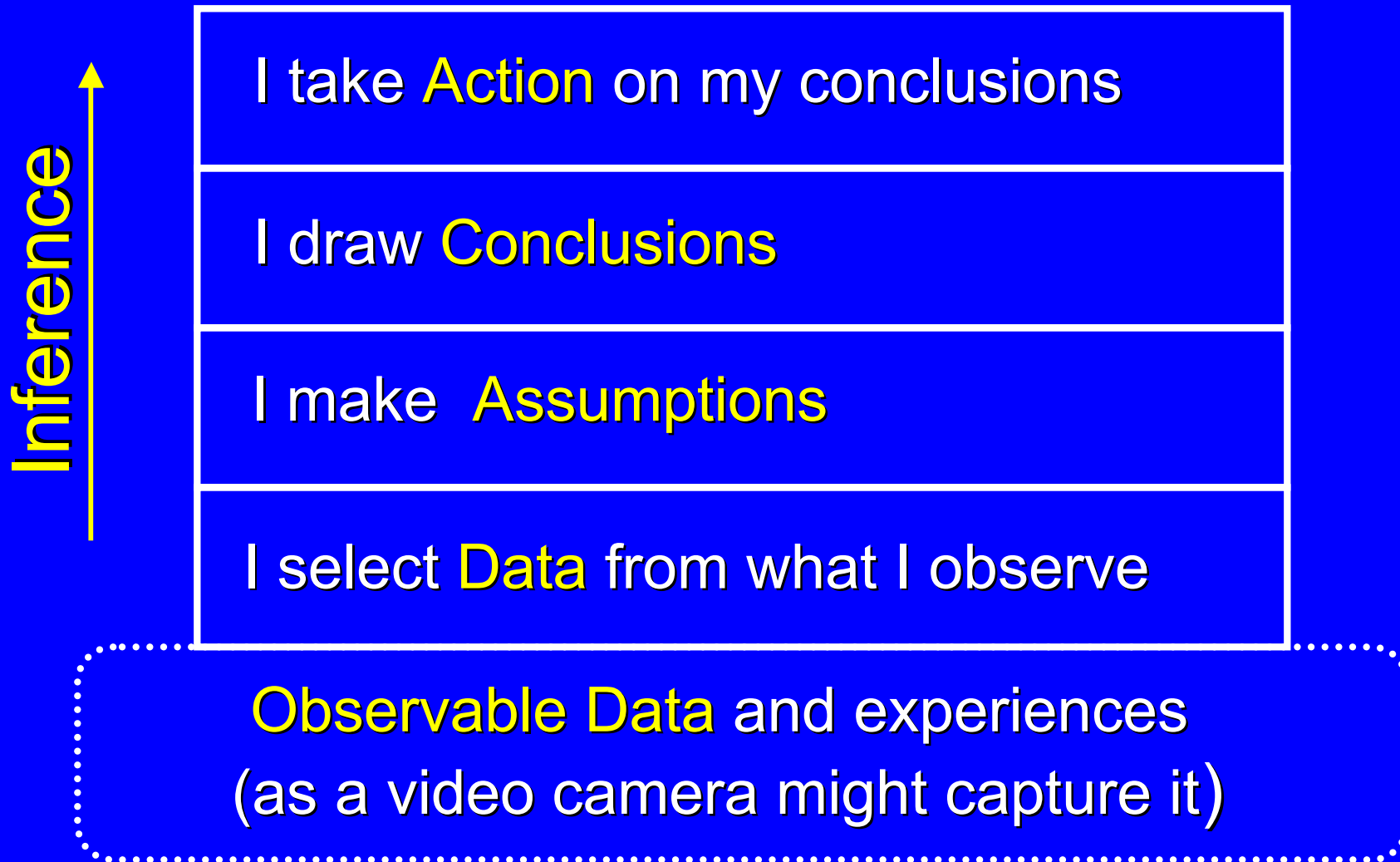
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- Ladder of Inference



## ***Ladder of Inference***

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## ***Key Ideas: Ladder of Inference***

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- Because ladder jumping is so rapid ...
  - I may not be aware of the data behind my decisions and actions. I also may not be aware of my assumptions and beliefs.
  - I may not see the link between the data I am selecting and how it is driving my assumptions and conclusions to arrive at an action .
  - I may not see how my assumptions, conclusions are shaping my actions.

## ***Key Ideas: Ladder of Inference***

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- Therefore many of my actions may be based on untested inferences, but which feel like facts.
- Preview...my actions often create conditions which yield data to confirm my assumptions; so I'm even less likely to see the need to test my thinking!

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- Inquiry

## ***Tool - Inquiry***

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**Inquiry**



I take **Action** on my conclusions

I draw **Conclusions**

I make **Assumptions**

I select **Data** from what I observe

**Observable Data** and experiences  
(as a video camera might capture it)

## ***Key Ideas: Inquiry***

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- Inquiry is the process of unpacking the thinking of others with questions, when they take actions or make statements we don't fully understand.
- Inquiry acknowledges that people are busy and issues are complicated. It requires a stance of curiosity.
- It provides you with a clear understanding of current reality.

## Ways to use Inquiry

I take **Action** on my conclusions

I draw **Conclusions**

I make **Assumptions**

I select **Data** from what I observe

**Observable Data**  
and experiences

### Gently walk others down the ladder

- *What leads you to conclude that?*
- *Can you help me understand your thinking?*

### Draw out reasoning

- *What is the significance of that?*
- *How does that relate to your other concerns?*
- *Where does your reasoning go next?*

### Explain your reasoning

- *I'm asking you about your assumptions because...*

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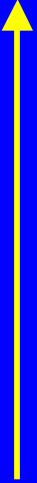
- Advocacy



## ***Tool - Advocacy***

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**Advocacy**



I take **Action** on my conclusions

I draw **Conclusions**

I make **Assumptions**

I select **Data** from what I observe

**Observable Data** and experiences  
(as a video camera might capture it)

## *Key Points: Advocacy*

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- How helpful it is to understand the map of somebody's thinking.
- Advocacy takes the conversation to the learning level not a guessing level.
- It is not always apparent to us what is under our ladder of inference.
- Using advocacy can be discovery process. It invites us to think about data, meaning, assumptions / conclusions.

## ***Key Points: Advocacy***

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- Advocacy coupled with the question “What do you think.” moves one into the living system paradigm because you are exposing thinking and inviting feedback.
- Advocacy is not to be evaluated on the result it achieves.
- Advocacy is making your thinking clear and visible to others and engaging in a dialogue about it. The ultimate goal is collective intelligence & collaboration.

## Ways to use Advocacy

I take **Action** on my conclusions

I draw **Conclusions**

I make **Assumptions**

I select **Data** from what I observe

**Observable Data**  
and experiences

### STATE YOUR ACTIONS

- *Here's what I 'm doing*

### EXPLAIN YOUR ASSUMPTIONS/ CONCLUSIONS

- *From that I assumed/concluded...*

### EXPLAIN YOUR MEANING

- *I interpreted those to mean....*

### DESCRIBE YOUR DATA

- *I focused on these items....*

## ***Difficult and Complex Issues***

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- Common Characteristics about difficult or complex issues:
  - Much of what people think or feel most strongly about does not get spoken.
  - Each assumes they are acting rationally while others are not.
  - Each person creates their own private explanations of the situation, none of which is discussed.

## ***Left-Hand Column (example)***

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### Unspoken Thoughts & Feelings

### What Was Actually Said

	<b>Principal: I would like you to come down to my office.</b>
<b><i>What does he want? What 's wrong now?</i></b>	<b>Teacher (Me): Is there a problem?</b>
	<b>Principal: We'll find out when you get here. When can you come?</b>
<b><i>Great! I don't have time right now. I have to prepare for my class.</i></b>	<b>Me: I'll be there as soon as I can...</b>
	<b>Principal: I got a call from Mrs. Jones about Jeff.</b>
<b><i>It has to be math - this new curriculum is so hard to teach. Half the class failed the test.</i></b>	<b>Me: Jeff is a hard worker but Mom doesn't understand that math is his weakest subject.</b>

## ***Instructions for Left-hand Column Exercise***

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- Partner A - reads left-hand column case
- Partner B - asks “6 questions - verbatim” and listens deeply. (No follow up inquires)
- Switch Roles Immediately (no dialogue at this time).
- Once you have both shared, open it for a dialogue and revisit the cases.
- If you were unable to answer questions 4 & 5 your partner might have some suggestions here, but refrain from any judgmental statements.

## *Difficult and Complex Issues*

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### Paradoxes

- If I don't say anything, the issue doesn't get resolved. If I do raise the issue, it may make things worse.
- If I bring up conflict, it may destroy the relationship. If I'm not honest, the relationship will eventually die.
- If I don't ask questions, I don't learn. If I do ask questions, I may look stupid.



## ***Difficult and Complex Issues***

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Unintended consequences of not engaging in difficult conversations:

- Opportunities for personal and team learning are reduced dramatically.
- Issues remain unresolved.
- Our beliefs and assumptions become institutionalized.
- A culture of non-learning is created.

## ***Key Ideas: Left Hand Column***

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- The left hand column is our unspoken thoughts and feelings in a conversation.
- These unspoken thoughts and feelings often are not examined or shared.
- Our inability to examine or test the assumptions in the left hand column limits learning and creates paradoxes.

## *Discussing the Undiscussable*

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- Limits of the Fixing Metaphor
- The Power of Reflection
- Engage Differences
- Key Thought Enablers

## *Discussing the Undiscussable*

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- Limits of the Fixing Metaphor

Fixing can be thought of a “methodical process of external manipulation.”

Alternative – influence verses control

Organization defensive routines can be influenced. The leverage is influencing my own behavior.

## *Discussing the Undiscussable*

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- The Power of Reflection

Making a connection to examine how we think and how it influences our actions.

“Examine the multitude of assumptions, values, and beliefs.”

## *Discussing the Undiscussable*

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- Engaging Differences

Begin Action with Curiosity

Testing assumptions in your left hand column

Balancing Inquiry with Advocacy

## ***Balance Inquiry with Advocacy***

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**B**alancing Inquiry with Advocacy will foster mutual learning

**A**sk for alternative views

**L**ook for examples that illustrate your view

**A**sk other's reasoning and data

**N**ot all advocacy and inquiry are equal. High quality advocacy and inquiry bring other's reasoning and data to the surface

**C**hallenge your own view with inquiry: "do you see it the same or differently?"

**E**xplain the steps of your reasoning by using the ladder of inference.

## *Discussing the Undiscussable*

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- Key Thought Enablers

Granting legitimacy to another's perspective

Assuming partiality

Attributing positive intentions

Acknowledging unintended impact and consequences



## ***Key Thought Enablers***

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Granting legitimacy to another's perspective

“They are hearing something different that I intend.”

## ***Key Thought Enablers***

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Assuming partiality

“I don’t see the whole picture.”

“When I do this ....I can ask an high quality inquiry. “What are you customers up against?”

## ***Key Thought Enablers***

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### Attributing Positive Intent

They have a logic that makes sense to them.

“They may have been aware of how their actions affected me and others.”

## ***Key Thought Enablers***

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Acknowledging Impact and Contribution

“Asking yourself how am part of the problem?”

## ***HAIPOP: How am I part of the problem***

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**ME**

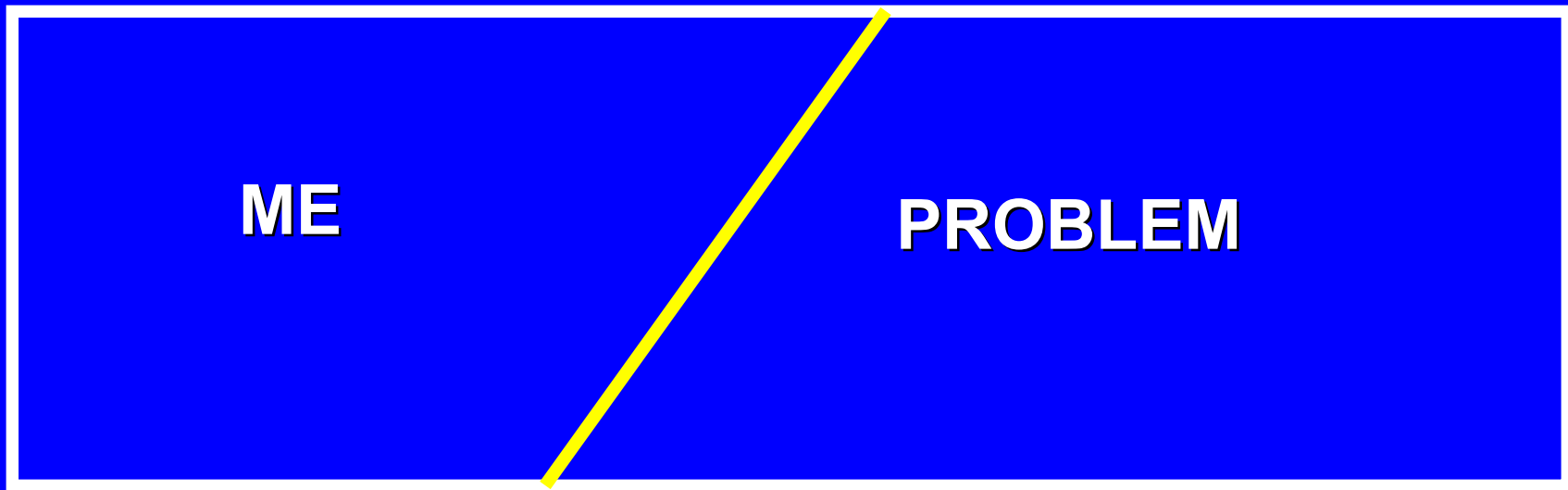
**PROBLEM**

If I can see the problem, then I am part of the system, thus I am part of the problem.

The question then becomes ... How can I be part of the solution.

## *HAIPOP: How am I part of the problem*

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I am not part of the problem.

The system is over there. It is their problem

# *Learning Journal*

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Ah-hah's (insights)

Puzzlements/ Questions (what remains unclear)

How can we increase learning in tomorrow's session?

## *Acknowledgements*

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- William Noonan\*
- Chris Argyris
- Donald Schon

Source: *Discussing the Undiscussable: Overcoming the Defensive Routines in the Workplace*: 2007 John Wiley & Sons



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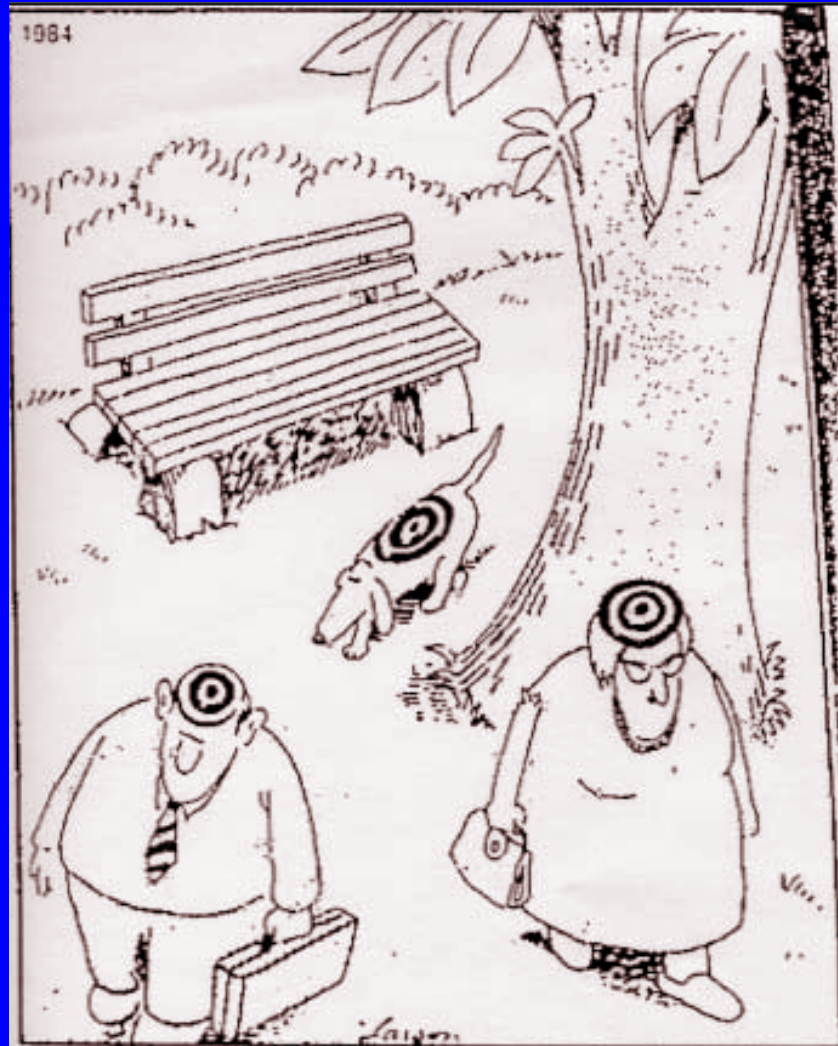
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## Mental Models

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How birds see the world