

Facilitation Difficulty: 

 50 min.

 4-10 people

 Preconference
in advance

Purpose – When you’re faced with a dilemma (a particular, concrete problem that seems to require a choice between equally unfavorable or mutually exclusive options), the Consultancy Protocol provides a structured process to help see new possibilities. The presenter of the dilemma must have the power to effect some kind of change in relationship to the dilemma for this protocol to be effective.

Time – Approximately 50 min.

Group size – Protocol should be used in groups of 4-10 to create a zone of safety for the presenter as well as to help maintain confidentiality. That said, outside perspective is critical to this protocol working effectively, so some of the participants should be individuals who do not share this particular dilemma at this time. Take care to invite others with differing perspectives.

Preconference – Ensure that the presenter has some power to effect change with the dilemma. Consider whether this protocol or the [Dilemma Analysis Protocol](#) best meets the presenter’s needs. Determine the presenter’s focusing question. The presenter may want to bring recording equipment to the meeting to collect ideas rather than attempting to write notes and listen simultaneously. If the presenter decides to record the process, the coach must get the group’s consent before beginning the protocol.

Prerequisites – Group must have completed the [Probing Questions Practice Activity](#) and [Giving and Receiving Feedback](#), and, ideally, [Zones of Comfort, Risk & Danger](#).

Preparation – In addition to preconferecing, bring chart paper and a marker to post the focusing question, and Post-it® notes and pens. If presenter chooses to bring artifacts to support the presentation, ensure adequate copies are available for all participants. If the presenter brings recording equipment, ensure that is set up and ready to go when needed. You may want to bring copies of the [Quick Guide to Probing Questions](#) or [Probing Question Approaches](#) for participants, or direct them to bring their own.

Steps:

1. **Setup** – (2 min.) Explain the purpose and review the steps below so participants know what to expect.
2. **Present** – (Up to 7 min. presentation, and then up to 5 min. to examine artifacts if available.) The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma and charts a focusing question for the group to consider. It is vital that the presenter has spent time reflecting deeply on the dilemma and has carefully framed the question with the coach’s help in the preconference. If the presenter has brought documents relevant to the dilemma, there is a pause after the verbal presentation to pass them out and silently examine them.
3. **Clarify** – (5 min.) The group asks clarifying questions of the presenter, which are answered. It’s okay if not all clarifying questions are asked or answered: it’s impossible for participants to fully understand all the details, so trying to do so will not significantly alter the final outcome of this protocol.
4. **Create probing questions** – (2 min.) Instruct the group to consult their [Quick Guide to Probing Questions](#) or [Probing Question Approaches](#) and take two minutes to silently write probing questions for the presenter on Post-it® notes. These questions are designed to help the presenter clarify and expand their thinking about the dilemma, to gain insights rather than find an immediate solution.

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5. **Ask** – (3 min.) Ask for group members to read one of their probing questions aloud, and continue around the room. After time is up or after all the probing questions have been asked, pass all sticky notes to the presenter.
6. **Review and refine** – (2 min.) The presenter shares which one or two probing questions were the most provocative, the ones that pushed their thinking the most. The presenter does **not** answer the probing questions nor explain why some were less valuable.
7. **Refocus** – (1 min.) Ask the presenter to re-state the focusing question, adapting it if necessary.
8. **Separate** – (1 min.) Direct the presenter to physically move away from the group but stay close enough to hear, and ideally, turn so they aren't making eye contact with anyone. The presenter should bring materials for taking notes. For the next step, instruct everyone to imagine the presenter has left the room, to avoid eye contact with the presenter, and to speak of the presenter in the third person. ("They said" rather than "You said.")
9. **Discuss** – (12 min.) The group now discusses the dilemma in the context of the focusing question, keeping in mind the most provocative probing questions as stated by the presenter in step 5. As needed, remind participants not to speak directly to the presenter but to speak of them in the third person. Possible questions to frame the discussion.
 - *Thinking objectively, as though we were all digital recorders, what did we hear?*
 - *Thinking analytically, what did we not hear that might be helpful to the discussion?*
 - *What might the presenter be assuming unconsciously?*
 - *What issues does this dilemma surface for us?*
 - *What is our gut reaction to or thoughts around the dilemma?*
10. **Recommend** – (3 min.) The group now offers recommendations based on these questions:
 - *What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma?*
 - *What suggestions do we have (couched in "I wonders")?*
11. **Reflect** – (5 min.) Instruct the presenter to return to the group so they can interact with everyone again. Presenter should share any parts of the Consultancy that were particularly meaningful or helpful to them. If the presenter can identify their next steps around the dilemma, it's also helpful for the group to hear those.
12. **Debrief** – (5 min.) Begin with the presenter:
 - *How did the experience of presenting and listening feel?*
 - *Was the outcome of this protocol different than other attempts to solve the dilemma?*
 - *Do you have a different appreciation of the protocol rules now that you have presented?*

Then open to debrief with the rest of the group.

 - *How did the experience feel from your point of view?*
 - *Did anything the presenter said surprise you?*
 - *Have you learned anything you may take into your work, or when facing your own dilemmas?*

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