

Recent Developments in Therapeutic Conversation

Part 1: Interventive Interviewing

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Interventive Interviewing

“An inclusive orientation in which everything a psychotherapist or consultant says and does, and does not say and does not do, is regarded as an intervention which could be helpful or harmful.”

Interventive interviewing invites greater participatory responsibility for the change process and assumes that:

- 1) it is impossible to interact and not intervene and,
- 2) the actual effect of any intervention is ultimately determined by the client, not by the therapist or consultant

Interventive interviewing shifts the focus from whether a specific intervention should be used or not, to examine the effects of interventions that are always taking place in the ongoing interaction between a therapist/consultant and the client.

This approach to therapy/consultation demands:

- 1) continual initiative on the part of the professional that is planful
- 2) ongoing sensitivity to the actual effects of the professional's behavior.

The complexities of this approach to therapy/consultation could promote excessive consciousness regarding the change process and, hence, could inadvertently undermine intuitive skills.

However, practice in adopting and maintaining certain guidelines or “conceptual postures” during therapy or consultation (so that they become automatic and/or non-conscious), enables a professional to limit his/her conscious attention to salient issues, and yet respond spontaneously with interventions that are more liable to be helpful, than non-helpful, or counterproductive.

Interviewing as a Method

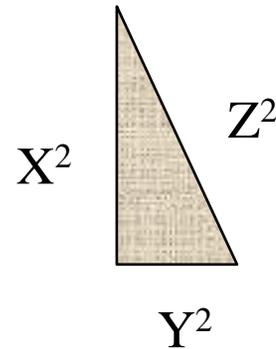
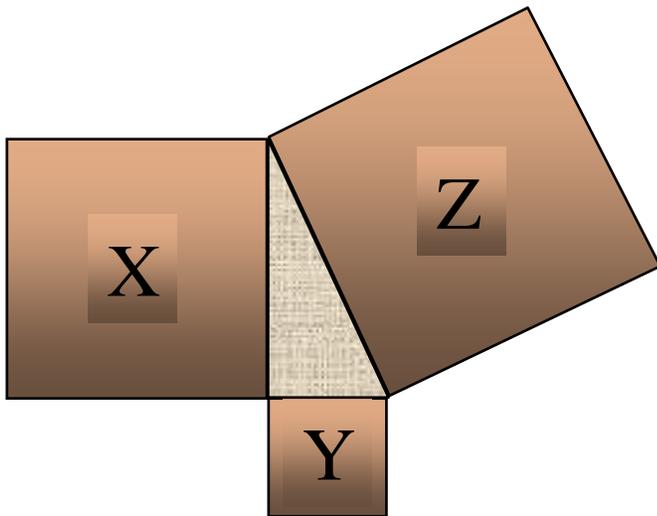
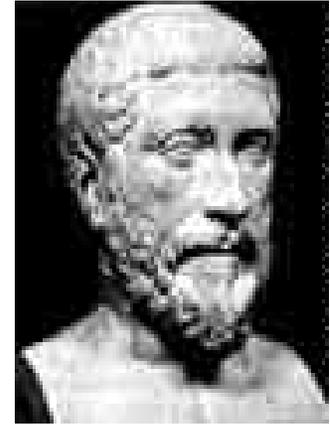
- Medical approach vs Systemic approach
 - Converging onto a cause vs expanding into context
 - Assessment and intervention as sequential vs simultaneous
 - Ends justify means vs means consistent with ends
- Questions vs Statements
 - Statements set forth the interviewer's views
 - Questions bring forth the client's views
- Overlap in linguistic communication
 - Questions can embed statements
 - Statements can embed questions

Gregory Bateson tells a story about Socrates claiming that “knowledge is innate” and only needs to be expressed.

Socrates proceeds to demonstrate this by showing that an uneducated boy from the streets of Athens already ‘knew’ the theorem of Pythagoras.

Theorem of Pythagoras

"The area of the square built upon the hypotenuse of a right angle triangle is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares upon the remaining sides."



$$X^2 + Y^2 = Z^2$$

Aspects of Clinical Questions

- Open vs closed questions
- Who, what, where & how questions vs “why” questions
- Effects of questions & their answers
 - Enabling the release of information
 - Altering meaning and experience
 - Constructing new knowledge

Aspects of Clinical Questions (cont'd)

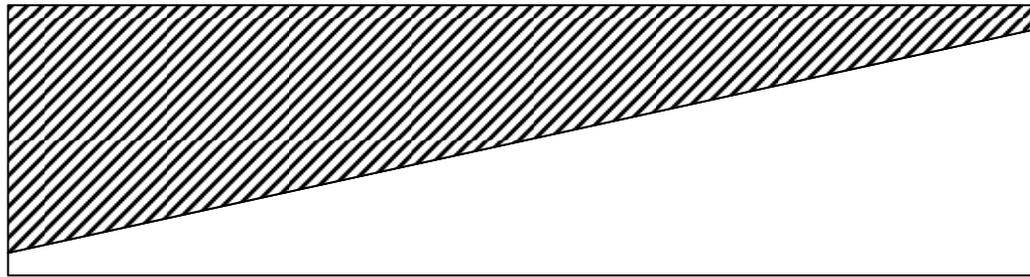
- Questions can be oppressive and intimidating
 - by generating a pattern of dominance and submission between the interviewer and interviewee
- An interviewer wields considerable ‘power’ when asking questions
 - by formulating the question itself
 - The question defines the domain of a ‘legitimate’ answer
 - by drawing on cultural expectations for an interviewee to respond with an answer
 - by altering tone, cadence, non-verbal expressions, etc, questions can convey demands (vs invitations)

Developing a classification of types of questions

- Purpose
 - To enhance awareness of differential effects
 - To increase choices and skills for interviewers
- Means
 - Review of videotapes
 - Discussions with colleagues and clients
- 2 heuristic dimensions:
 - Intentionality of the interviewer in asking
 - Assumptions about the interaction process

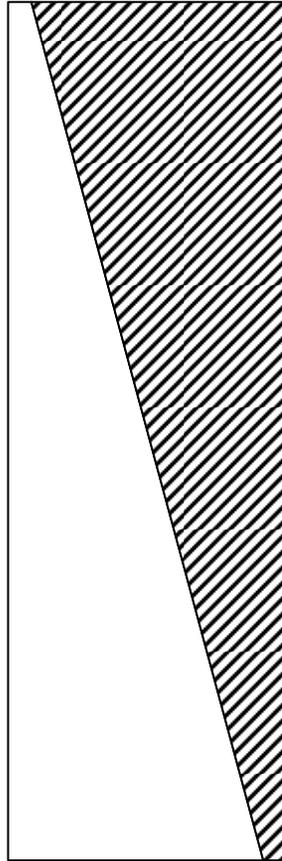
A continuum in an interviewer's intentionality

Orienting
intent



Influencing
intent

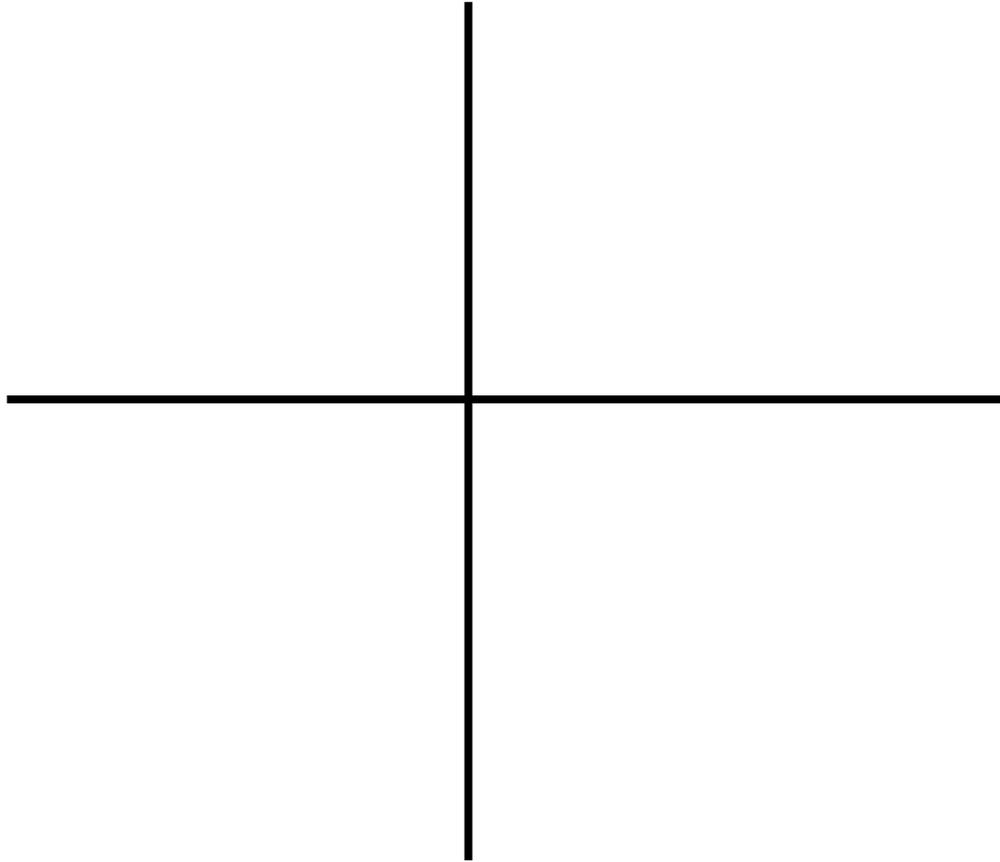
Lineal Assumptions
with a directive process



Circular assumptions
with an invitational process

Lineal Assumptions
with a directive process

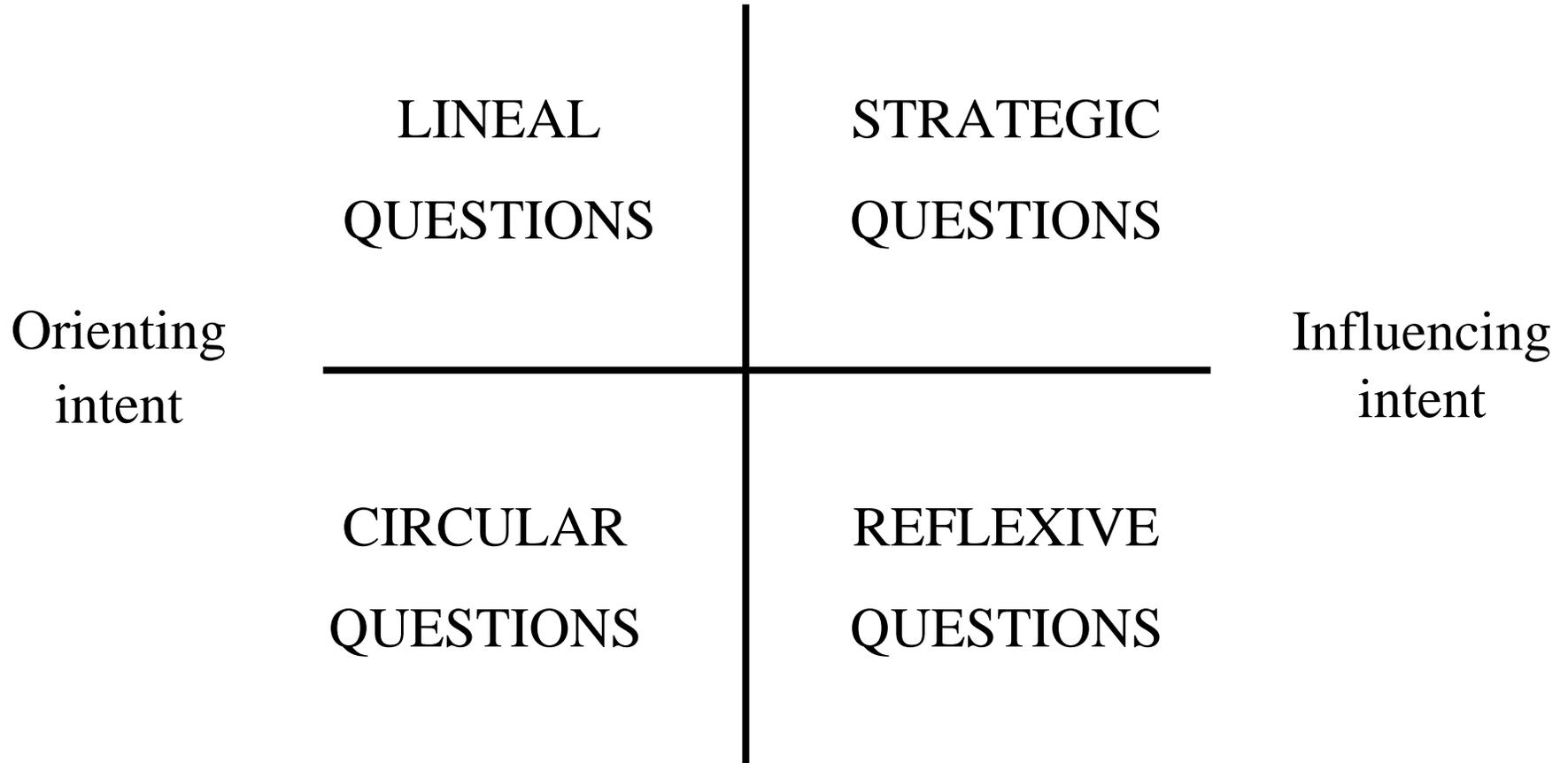
Orienting
intent



Influencing
intent

Circular assumptions
with an invitational process

Lineal Assumptions
with a directive process



Circular assumptions
with an invitational process

LINEAL
QUESTIONS

STRATEGIC
QUESTIONS

problem
explanation
questions

leading
questions

problem
definition
questions

confrontation
questions

behavioral effect
questions

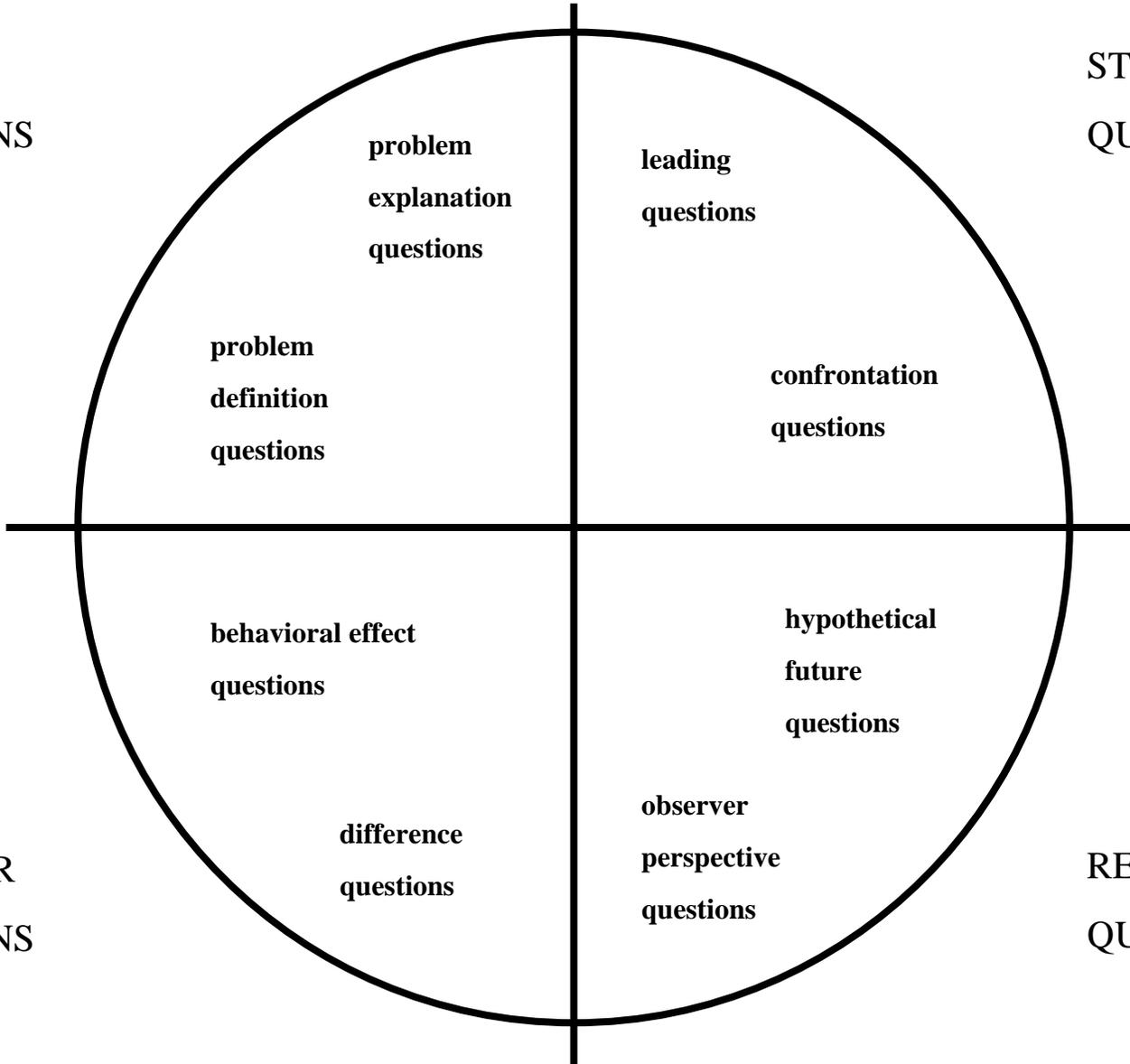
hypothetical
future
questions

difference
questions

observer
perspective
questions

CIRCULAR
QUESTIONS

REFLEXIVE
QUESTIONS



4 Major Types of Questions

- 1. Lineal questions
 - Intent is to generate a cause and effect understanding for the interviewer
 - Clarify the sequence of events over time
- 2 Circular questions
 - Intent is to generate a contextual understanding for the interviewer
 - Clarify the here and now situation and patterns of interaction in relationships

- **3. Reflexive questions**

- Intent is to influence clients respectfully
- Open space for alternative meanings that are healing or enhance an understanding that supports wellness
- Selectively mobilize clients' own knowledge and competencies
- Manner is invitational and enabling (not imposing)

- **4. Strategic Questions**

- Intent is to influence clients correctively
- Close space for clients to continue with their own problematic ideas
- Pressure clients to accept the interviewer's ideas as better than the interviewee's
- Manner is directive and impositional (less inviting)

LINEAL
QUESTIONS

STRATEGIC
QUESTIONS

INVESTIGATIVE
INTENT

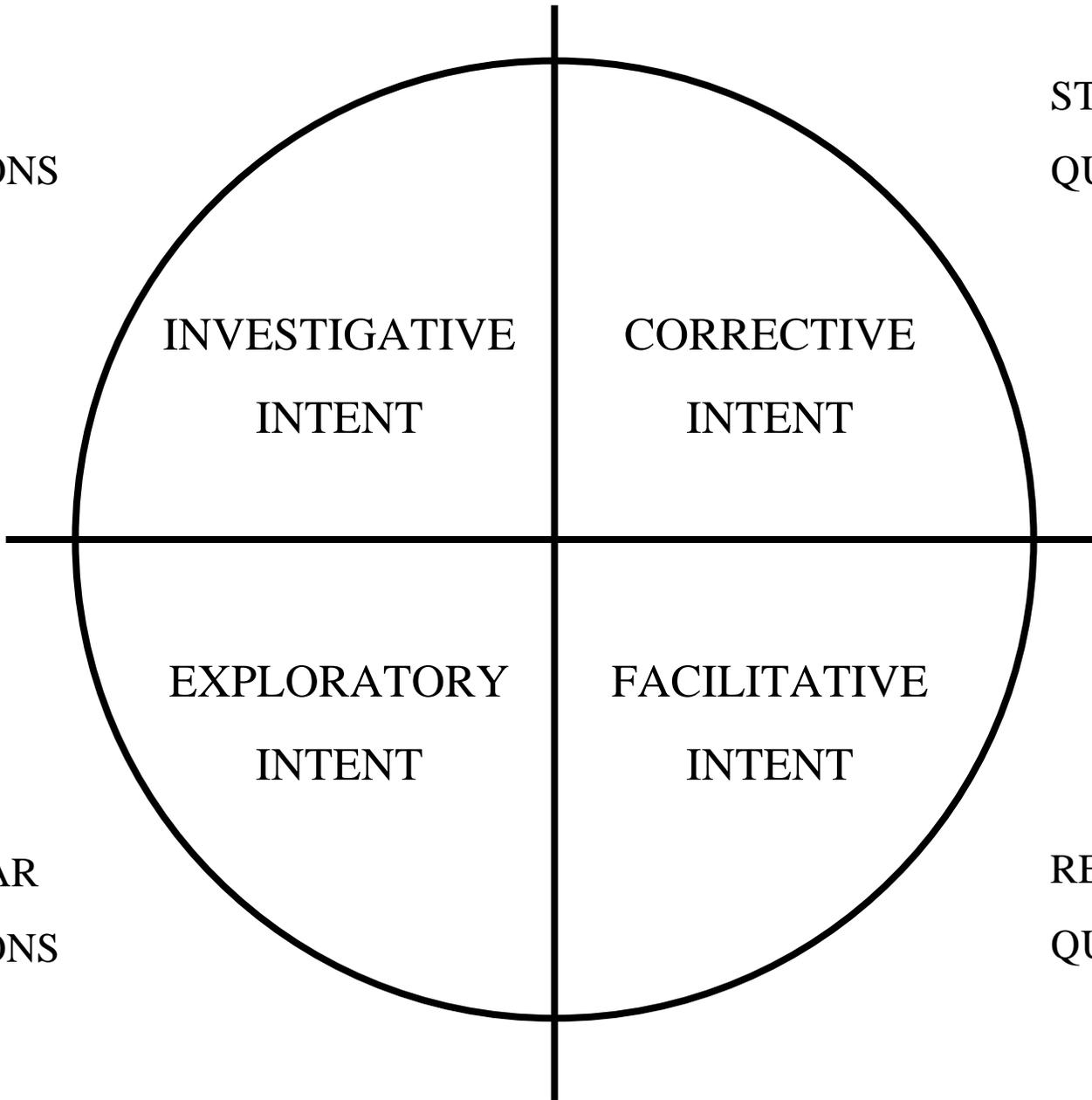
CORRECTIVE
INTENT

EXPLORATORY
INTENT

FACILITATIVE
INTENT

CIRCULAR
QUESTIONS

REFLEXIVE
QUESTIONS



A brief demonstration interview to illustrate the four different types of questions

(The person who volunteers has the advantage of experiencing the actual effects of the questions.)

Typical Effects of Different Types of Questions

- Lineal questions with investigative intent
 - Conservative effect on client
 - Judgmental effect on both interviewer and client
- Circular questions with exploratory intent
 - Accepting effect on both interviewer and client
 - Possible liberating effect on client

Effects of Different Types of Questions (cont'd)

- Reflexive questions with facilitative intent
 - Generative effect for client
 - Creative effect on the interviewer
- Strategic questions with corrective intent
 - Constraining effect on client
 - Oppositional effect on both client and interviewer

LINEAL
QUESTIONS

STRATEGIC
QUESTIONS

INVESTIGATIVE
INTENT

CORRECTIVE
INTENT

(Conservative effect on client)
(Judgmental effect on therapist)

(Constraining effect on client)
(Oppositional effect on therapist)

(Accepting effect on therapist)
(Liberating effect on client)

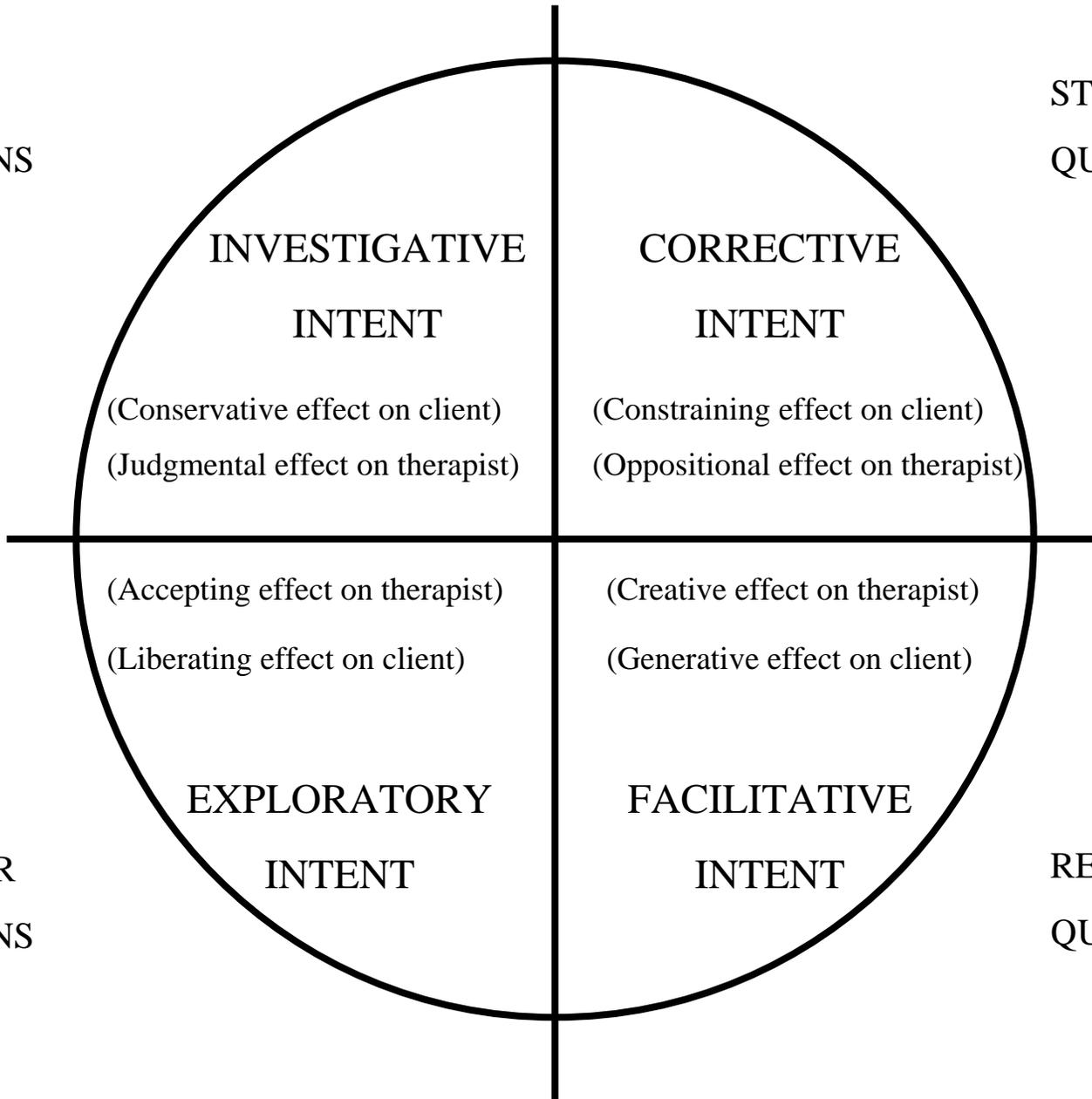
(Creative effect on therapist)
(Generative effect on client)

EXPLORATORY
INTENT

FACILITATIVE
INTENT

CIRCULAR
QUESTIONS

REFLEXIVE
QUESTIONS



A Suggested Exercise:

Form three person groups of interviewer, interviewee, and observer

Take turns to practice intentional interviewing by formulating different kinds of questions

Provides an opportunity to internalize the classification by consciously asking various types of questions and getting feedback from colleagues

References

- Tomm, K., "Interventive Interviewing: Part III. Intending to Ask Lineal, Circular, Reflexive or Strategic Questions?" Family Process, 27: 1-15, 1988.
- Tomm, K., "Interventive Interviewing: Part I. Strategizing as a Fourth Guideline for the Therapist," Family Process, 26: 3-13, 1987.

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