



Lecture Two: *The Art of Questioning*

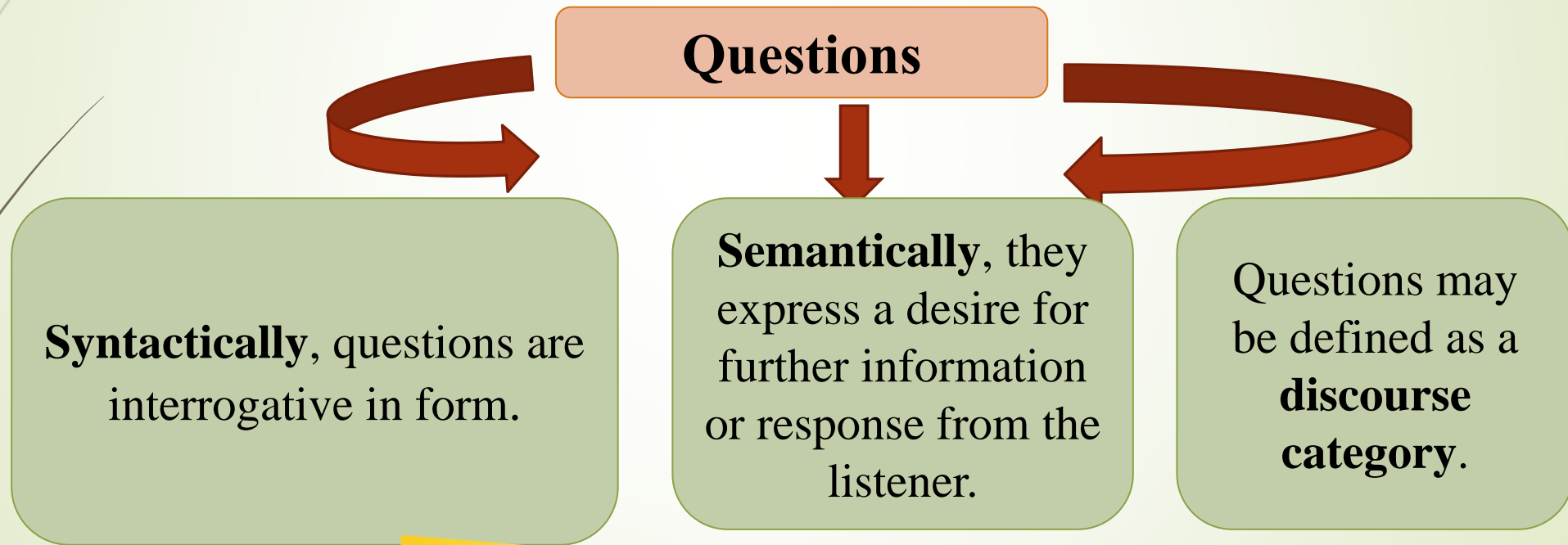




Question-and-answer (Q&A) sequences are, in effect, the building blocks of **interpersonal communication**(IPC). This point is highlighted by Hargie's (2017) analogy in which questions provide the fundamental DNA of interaction, and without which IPC cannot be sustained: 'in the absence of **questioning DNA**, the communication organism often becomes unstable and eventually dies'.

1- Defining Questions: Interrogatives, Knowledge and Interaction

Wang (2006) notes that **questions** have typically been defined from one of three main perspectives.



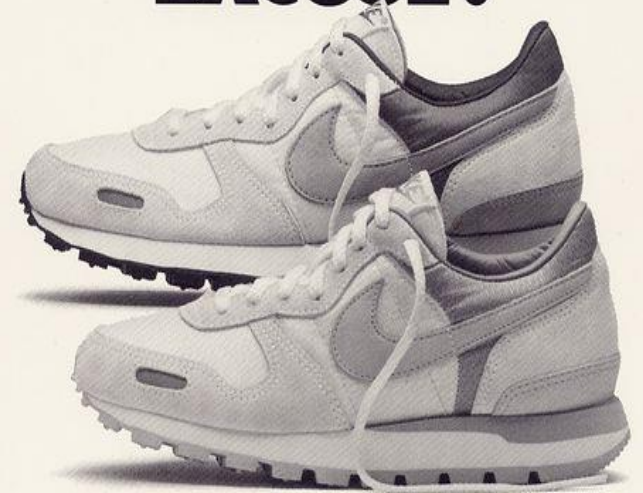
Do all interrogative structures seek **information**?



Don't you hate shopping
around the holidays?

- ❑ Not all **interrogative structures** seek information.
- ❑ **Rhetorical questions**, which are designed to emphasize a point or to persuade the listener of a particular perspective (Blankenship and Craig, 2006).
- ❑ **Tag questions** (e.g. 'He likes that film, doesn't he?') and **phatic communication**, or **small talk** ('How's life?'), while interrogative in format and usually inviting a response, do not typically seek information, but rather, perform social and interpersonal functions.

**SO NOW
WHAT'S YOUR
EXCUSE?**

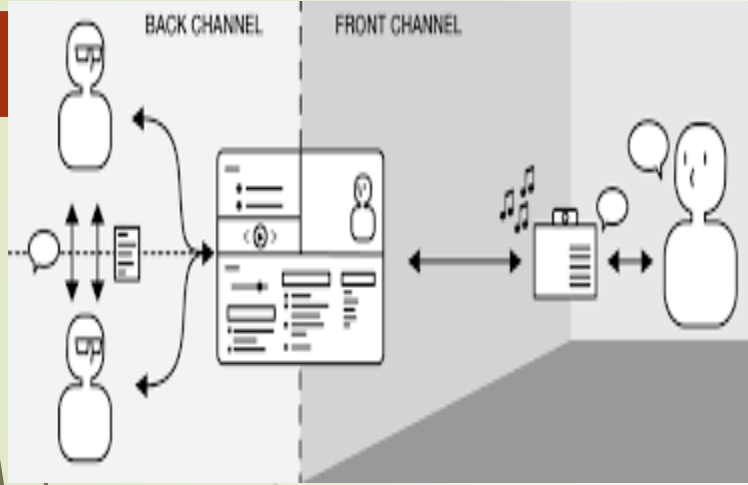


The Windrunner for men and women.

**NIKE
AIR**



- Interrogatives may be designed to **perform** other **social functions**, through **indirect speech acts**. Thus, '**Can you close the window?**' (interrogative) would routinely be understood not as a **request** for information about the listener's ability to close windows, but rather as a **request** or **directive** to perform that action.



- ❑ A question may be presented as a **declarative statement** that overtly seeks a response ('So you had a nice time, then?').
- ❑ Sarangi (2010) shows that in a counselling context, **back channels** ('**mm**', '**mhmm**'), may also function as questions insofar as they are understood as an invitation to provide further information.



A comprehensive definition is offered by Stewart and Cash (2011: 55), who state that a question is 'any **phrase**, **statement** or **nonverbal act** that invites an **answer** or **response**'.

EXAMPLE

- ❑ If the interviewee's account of previous work experience is followed by an interviewer statement relating to some aspect of that account (e.g. '**It sounds like you have used a range of management skills ...**').

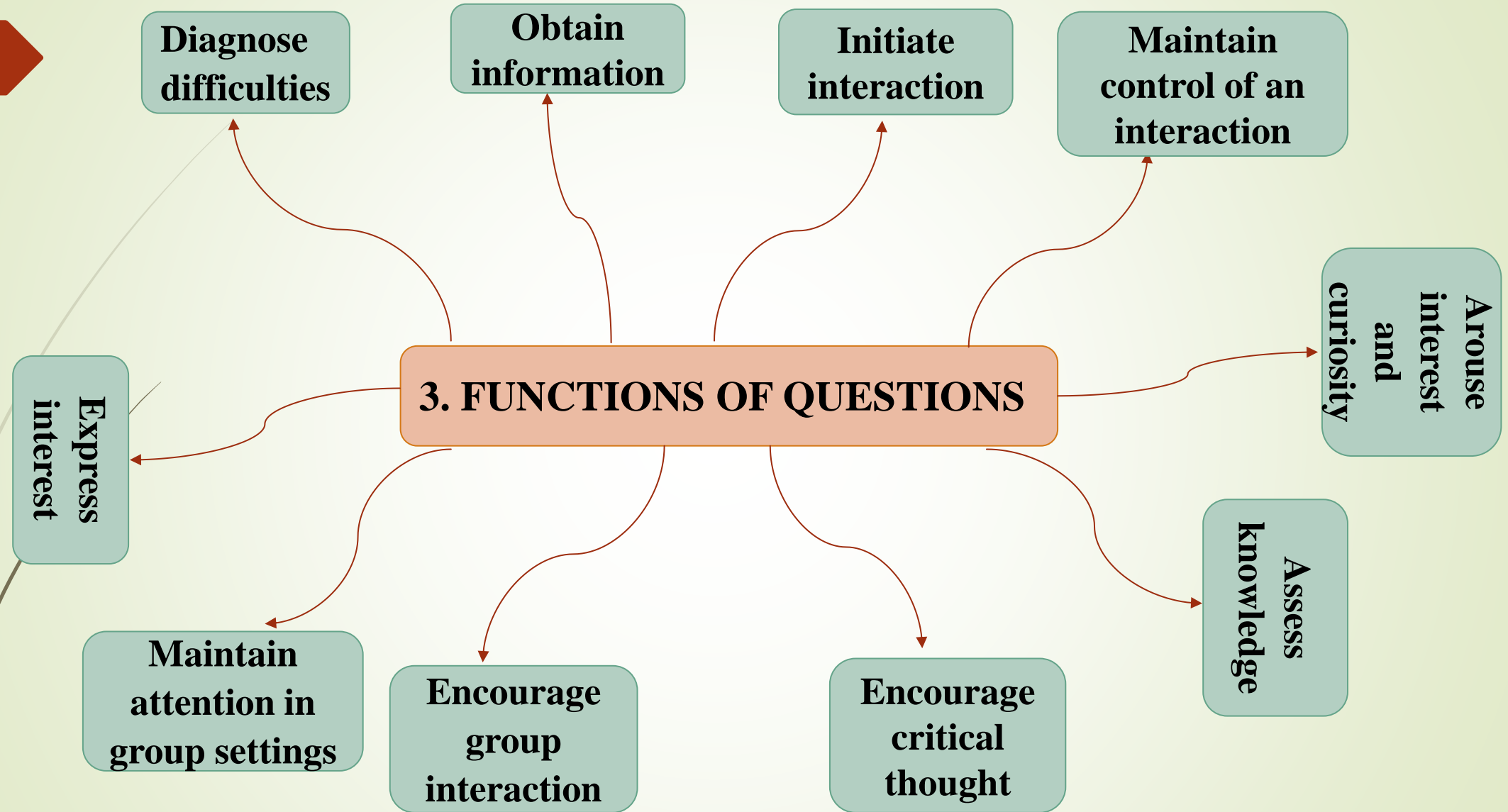
2- Questions and Epistemic Status

- ❑ At an informational level, questions may be seen as displaying or claiming **epistemic status**.
- ❑ **Epistemic status** relates to the way that speakers recognise one another as more or less knowledgeable about a given topic (Heritage, 2012).

The questioner is less **knowledgeable (K-)** than the addressee (**K+**).



Hargie (2017) lists the general **purposes** that may be fulfilled by questioning, as follows:





Asking the right question is at the heart of effective communication and coaching. So here are some common **questioning techniques**.

4. Questioning Techniques

Open and Closed Questions

Appreciative Questions

Probing questions

Funnel Questions



4-1 Open and Closed Questions

❑ **Closed questions** seek specific, and often pre-determined, types of information. Three main types have been identified (Dickson and Hargie, 2006):

1-Yes–no questions → **Polar Questions**

2-Selection questions → **Alternative Questions**

3-Identification questions → **A specific piece of information in response to a question-word.**

❑ **Open questions** elicit longer answers. They form the basis of a dialogical approach to conversations.



4-2 Appreciative Questions

These allow the recipient to focus on **strengths** and **positives**.



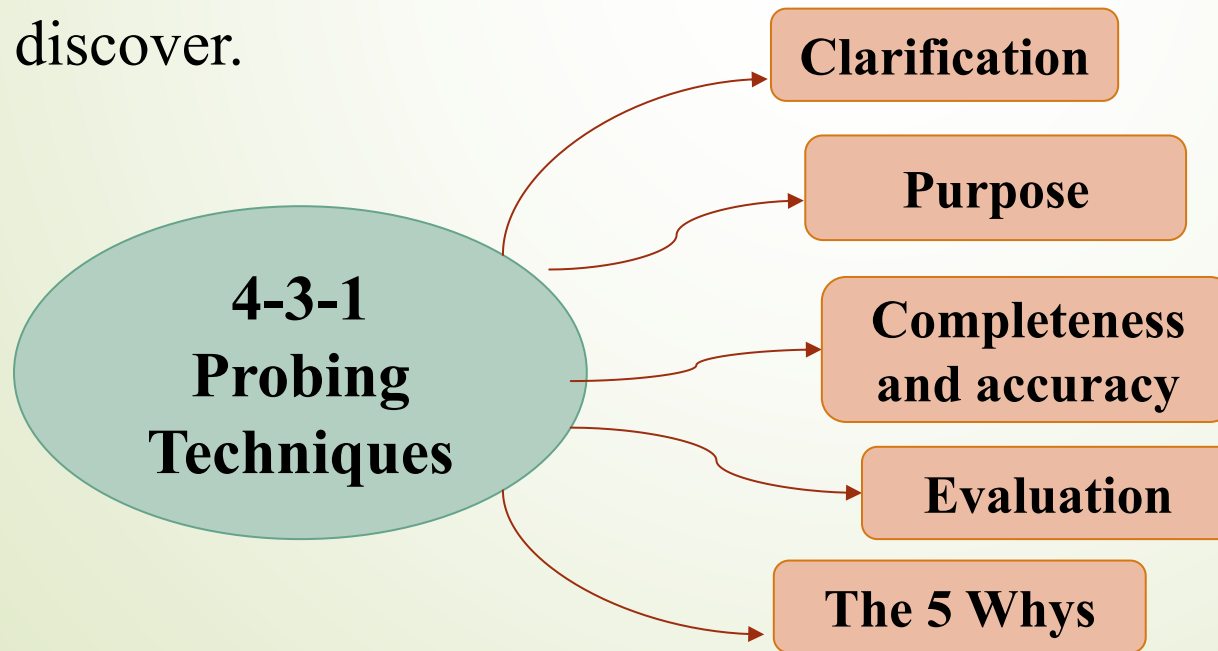
What would you like to achieve in this time?

When are you most energised?

Where do you feel you can make a difference?

4. 3 Probing questions

- ❑ Probing questions are crucial in order to **sustain interaction**, once begun, and also to **develop the depth** and **detail** of information received.
- ❑ When seeking more detail, there are a number of **probing approaches** you can use, depending on what the other person is saying and what you want to discover.



The 5 Whys

Define the Problem

Why is it happening?

Why is that?

Why is that?

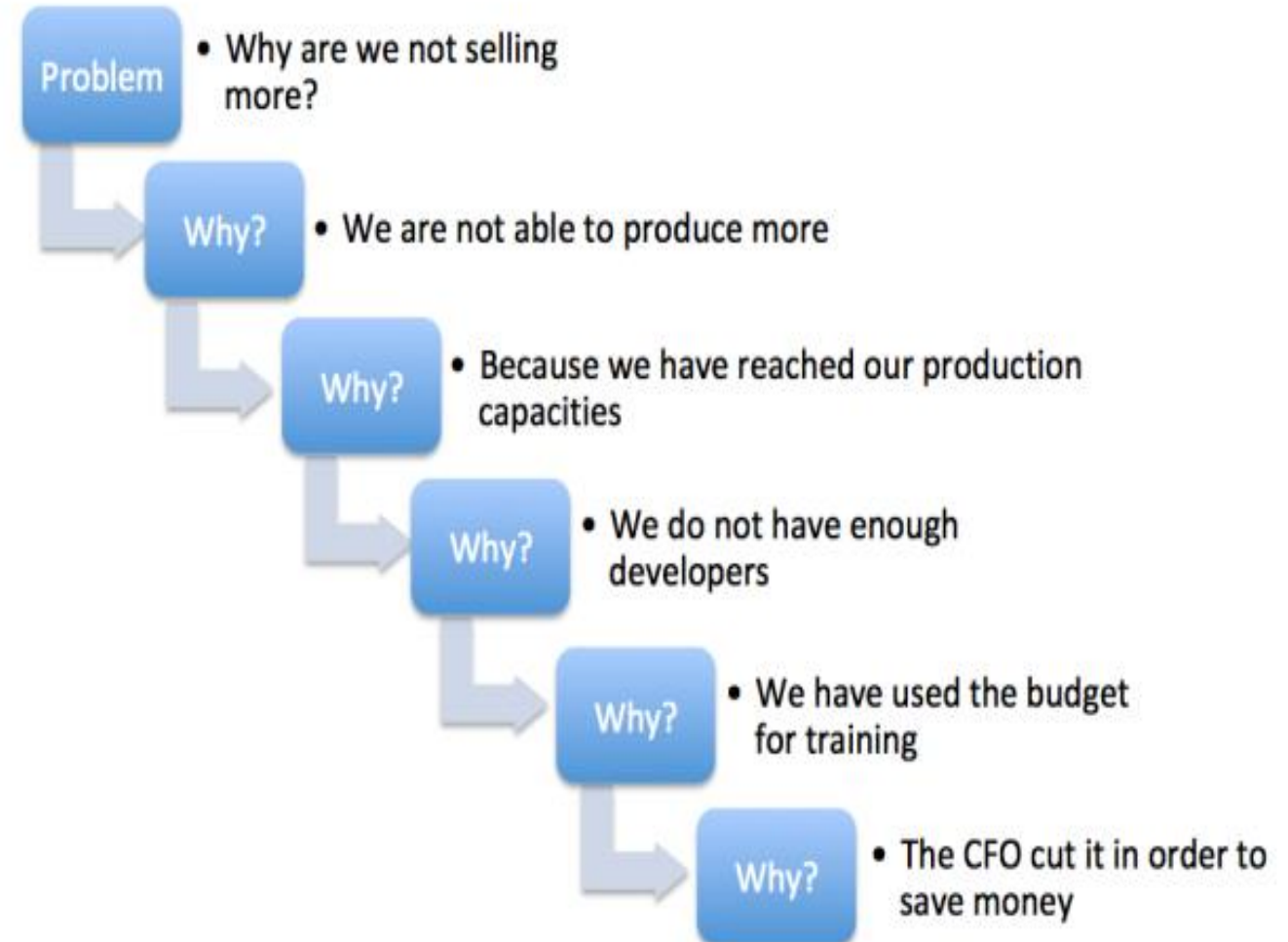
Why is that?

Why is that?

Root Cause

EXAMPLE

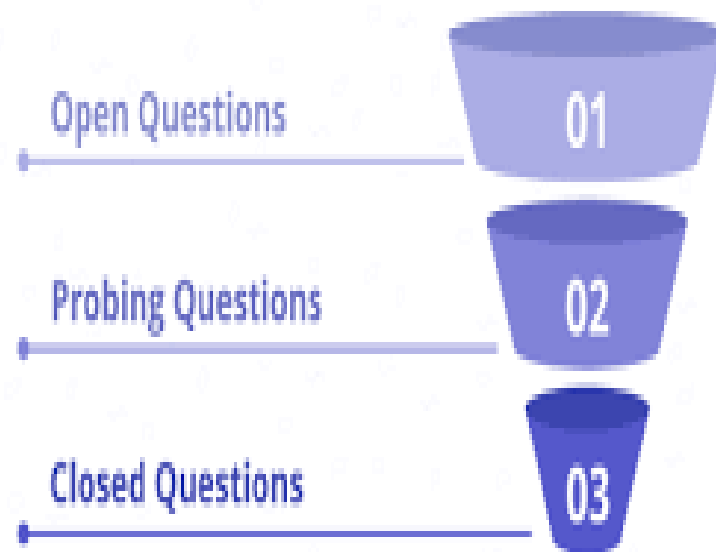
5 Whys for Root Cause Analysis (RCA)



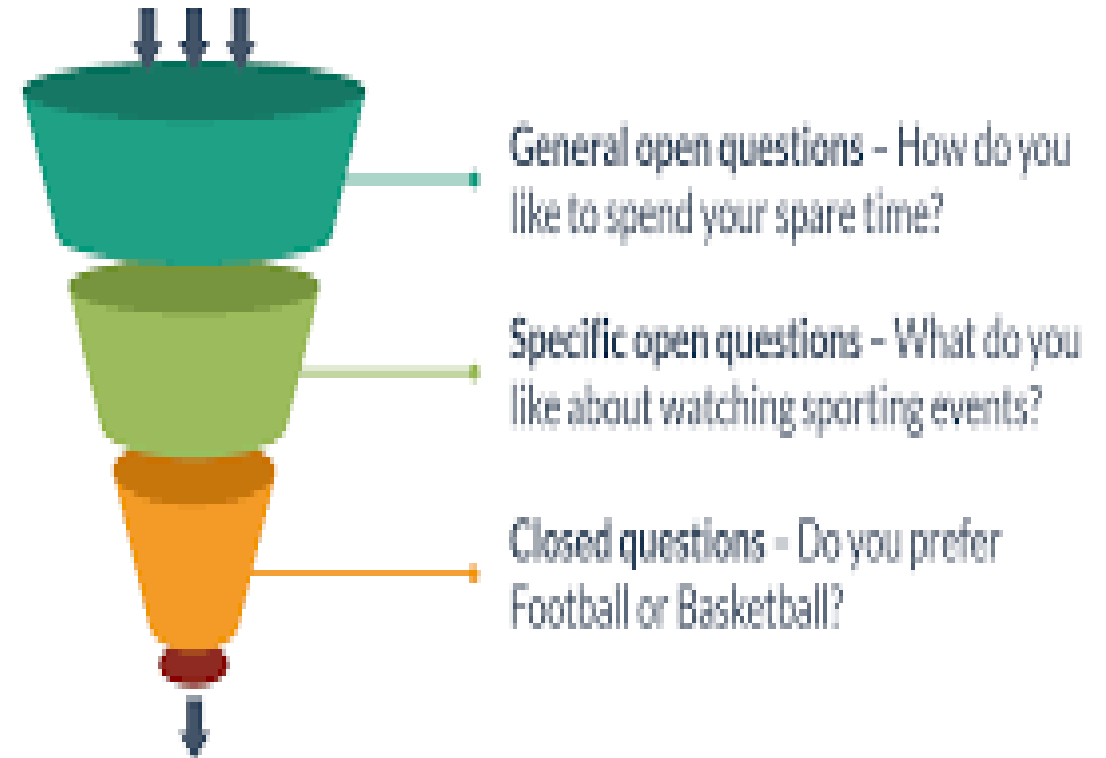
4.4 Funnel Questions

- ❑ This technique involves starting with **general questions**, and then homing in on a point in each answer, and asking more and **more detail** at each level. Funnel questions are good for gaining the interest or increasing the confidence of the person you're speaking with, and finding out **more detail** about a specific point, moving progressively from closed to open questioning.

The Funnel Effect



The Funnel Technique



**The wise man doesn't
give the right answers, he
poses the right questions.**

*Claude Levi-Strauss
French Anthropologist*



Communication Coach

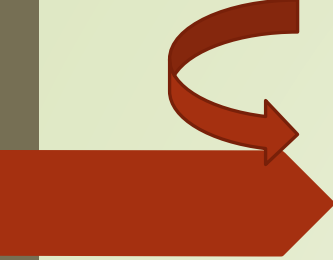


5- QUESTIONS AND POWER

❑ Questions have been widely associated with **power** and **control** in interpersonal interactions (Bolden, 2009).

❖ In a study of workplace interactions, Holmes and Chiles (2010) show that questions typically work as ‘**control devices**’: ‘Whether they are intended to facilitate interaction, elicit information, give directives, or provoke thought, they usually exercise some influence on the behaviour of others’ (p.187).

❖ Questions frequently constitute **FTAs** (Wang, 2006). They place requirements on the addressee to provide a response (thereby affecting **negative face**); while the provision of this information may damage the addressee’s image or self-esteem (thereby affecting **positive face**).



❖ In addition, all questions contain **presuppositions**, expressed through their wording, and these may position the addressee in a more or less favourable light. Compare ‘What do you think you could do to lose weight?’ to ‘Why are you not able to lose weight?’.



❖ The potential of questions to exert power and control is also evident in **formal allocations** of **questioning rights** and **obligations**. This feature is evident in many institutional contexts including: in classrooms, where teachers, rather than pupils, ask the majority of questions; in courtrooms where the majority of questions are asked by lawyers, rather than witnesses; and in medical interactions (Chen-Tan et al., 2005). These contexts are all examples of **asymmetrical communication**.



An ESL teacher working in Korea witnesses a bank robbery. The police question her as a witness.

Police: I understand you were the key witness for the robbery.

Woman: Yes, I was the only other person in the bank besides the tellers.

Police: Are you okay to answer some questions for me?

Woman: Sure. I don't know how much help I'll be. He made me get on the ground so I didn't get a very good look at him.

Police: Was he carrying a weapon?

Woman: Yes, he had a pistol in his back pocket. He threatened to use it, but I doubt it was loaded.

Police: What makes you say that?

Woman: He was just a kid. Probably fifteen or younger.

Police: Can you describe him for me?

Woman: He was Asian. Probably five foot six. He was wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses. I can't remember what else he was wearing.

Police: Did he talk directly to you? I mean, did he ask you for your money or anything?

Woman: No, he just told me to get on the ground. That's all I know. I'm running late for a class. Is it okay if I go now?

Police: I just want to get your name and phone number. If you think of anything else, please notify us.





1- Identify and explain the adopted questioning technique(s) in this formal conversation.

2- Did the questions exert power and control in this conversation? Justify your answer.