# Reflections on a quadrant (John Wheeler)

In the Podcast with Elfie and Dominik I refer to a quadrant based on four possibilities for a conversation – centred on the client, centred on the practitioner, influential and non-influential. The description of the quadrant I had in mind was partially formed at the time of the interview. Following the interview I have moved on to a revised wording which better reflects what I had in mind at the time.

The terminology, "centred" and "influential", was first encountered by me at a workshop by Michael White hosted by BRIEF. Michael White's quadrant was as follows.

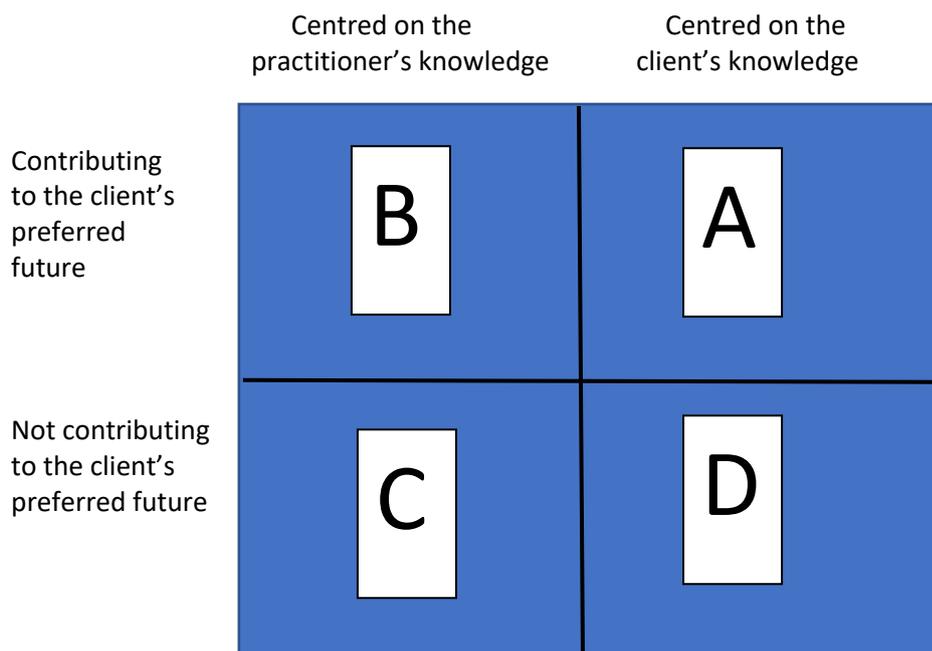|	Centred	De-centred
Influential		
Non-influential		
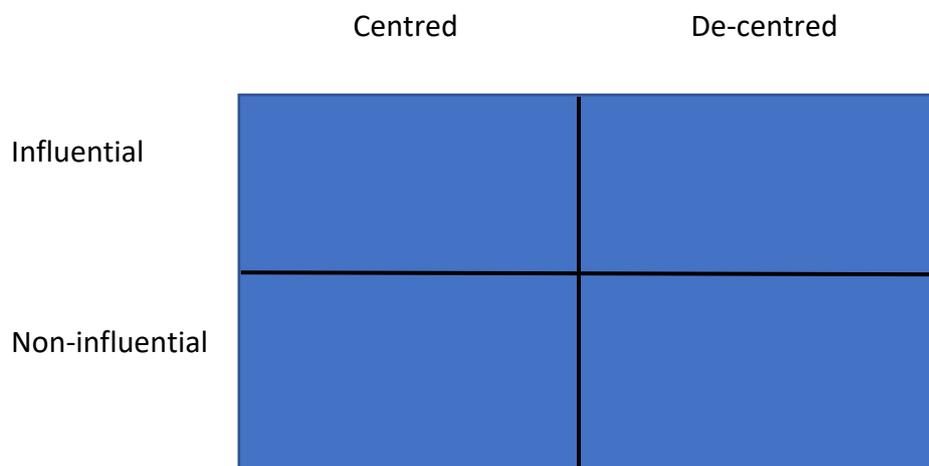
For Michael White "Centred" meant a conversation based on the practitioner's expert knowledge. He may well have been drawing on the philosophies that were inspiring him at the time, such as Foucault with regards to Dividing Practices and the Global Knowledge professionals might draw on to separate out those who are considered to be not normal and a threat to society. "De-centred" thus meant a conversation based on what mattered to the client, in Foucault's terms the local knowledge they had with regards to the living of their lives.

Through further training in Family Therapy I noticed that the terminology of centred and de-centred had become a popular way of determining whether a therapeutic practice was, or was not, collaborative and an act of co-construction.

For me the terminology was confusing. I had also been trained in Carl Roger's Person-centred Counselling and was noticing that as services in the UK were moving to a collaborative value base, they were often referring to their approach as being person-centred.

After the conversation with Dominik and Elfie I noticed that I was also uncomfortable with the word "influential". As a Solution-focused practitioner I do intend to bring an influence to

the conversation. I do hope that this is a conversation that will make a difference. In particular I hope that the person will be more aware of their preferred future, more aware of what already contributes to this and have more clues about what better would look like. The word influence can, however, have associations that are incompatible with Solution-focused assumptions and ways of engaging with clients. The Chambers English Dictionary, for example, includes the following to define influence – "the effect of power exerted", "domination", "often hidden". On further reflection I came to a conclusion that the quadrant I had in mind is better represented as follows.

	Centred on the practitioner's knowledge	Centred on the client's knowledge
Contributing to the client's preferred future	B	A
Not contributing to the client's preferred future	C	D

As a trainer I sometimes come across practitioners who have been mainly positioned in quadrant C. Typically they face the challenge of keeping their ideas to themselves, asking questions that invite the client to come up with their own ideas and then being prepared to sit with a pause to give the client a chance to answer.

In my practice I sometime meet clients who start off focusing on what they don't want. My decision to ask questions designed to move the conversation to solution building has several implications. Does this person need to be sure I appreciate the degree to which they are struggling with difficult challenges before trusting me to ask unusual questions? Has the client plucked up the courage to tell a story of victimisation they have never shared before and are now ready to expose? The timing of an invitation to solution building can be critical. However, if I don't ask then we are likely to stay in quadrant D.

Solution-focused Practice, as currently presented through Elfie and Dominik's podcasts, could be said to be in either quadrants A or B, with much debate and discussion about the differences. A, for me, represents the position of only selecting from what the client brings. B, in contrast, is based on the possibility of SF being a meta-model, allowing for times when the practitioner might add something they know to have been useful to others, and possibly

relevant to client's preferred future, and then inviting the client to decide whether or not it is.

The quadrant I had in mind when speaking with Elfie and Dominik might be of some help when mapping out what could be Solution-focused Practice and what is unlikely to be. The quadrant has also been useful to me at times when a conversation has drifted to a quadrant I know to be unlikely to be helpful and helped me navigate a way back to quadrant A.

John Wheeler

23 July 2019