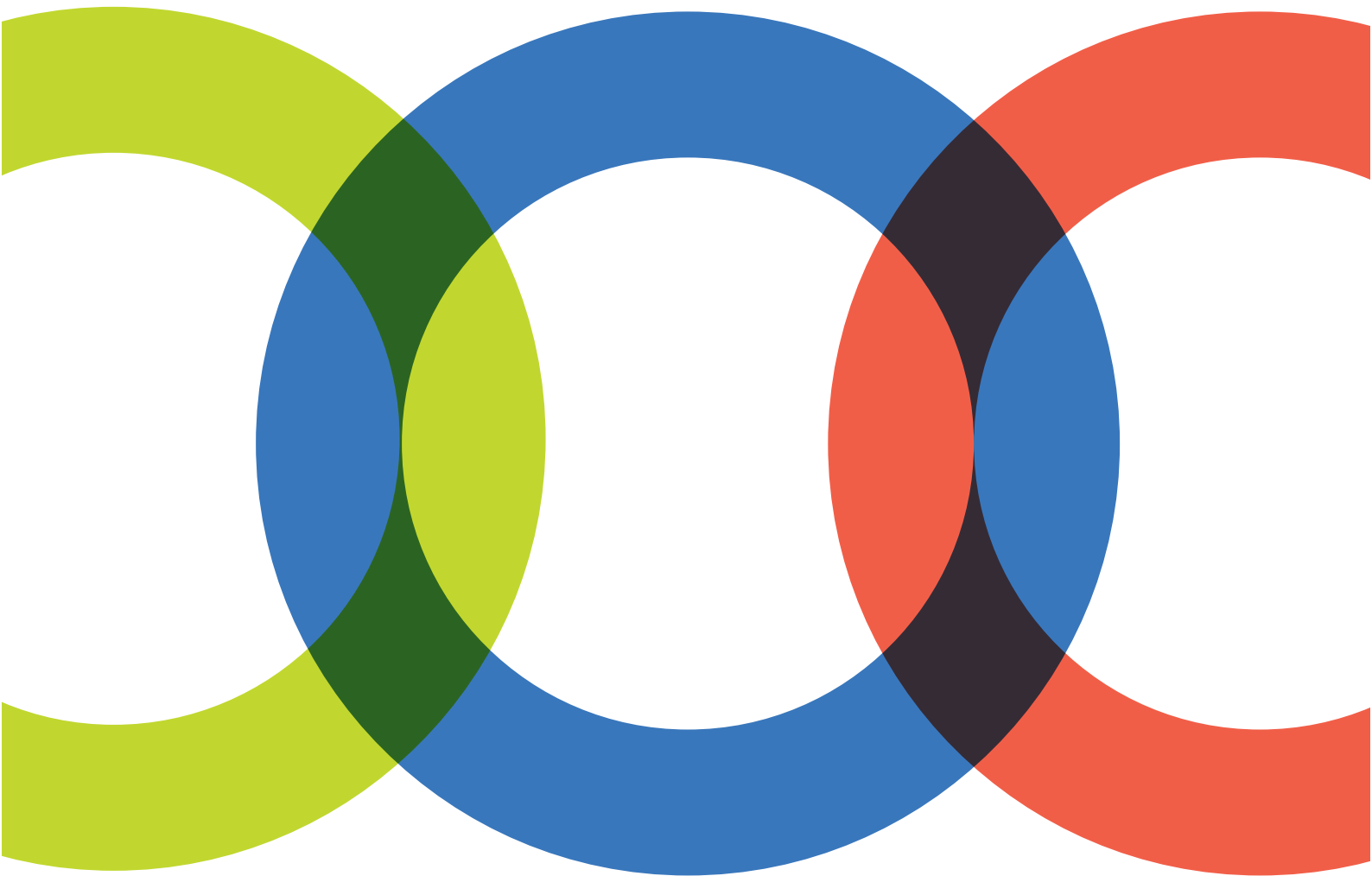


Developing Practice Series

---

# **Intervening in Human Relations: An Introduction to John Heron's Six Category Intervention Analysis**



**oasis**

School of Human Relations





## Contents

<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Intervening In Human Relations .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Section 1: Introduction and Background .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Background to the Six Categories Intervention Analysis System.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Section 2: Aspects of the Six Category Interventions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Overview of the Six Categories .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1. Prescriptive Interventions .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2. Informative Interventions .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3. Confrontative Interventions.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>4. Cathartic Interventions .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>5. Catalytic Interventions.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>6. Supportive Interventions .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Section 3: Working with the Interventions .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Valid and Degenerate Interventions.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Practitioner Development .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Diluting the Contribution.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Entering Feelings .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Facilitator Styles.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>A Final Reminder .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>56</b>



## Intervening In Human Relations

“People who help people move by the grace within the human spirit. This grace is the primary source of effective helping behaviour. Its presence and expression is entirely independent of professional training: it can inform and be enhanced by the latter, but can also be obscured, suppressed and distorted by it.

This helping grace seems to have five key attributes: warm concern for and acceptance of the other; openness and attunement to the other’s experiential reality; a grasp of what the other needs for his or her essential flourishing; an ability to facilitate the realisation of such needs in the right manner and at the right time, and an authentic presence. This combination of concern, empathy, presence, facilitation and genuineness is, I believe, the spiritual heritage of all humankind. It can manifest among the tutored and the untutored alike.

But it will manifest in terms of the norms, values and belief systems of the prevailing culture. Hence, the form a person gives to it is a function of having been educated with a culture, whether that education is in part formal, or entirely informal through the process of socialisation. Some people who are untutored may be very effective helpers, within the limits of their socialisation; just as the people who are formally tutored in professional roles may be so within the limits of their professionalisation. What makes an effective helper is, then, an interaction between inner grace, character, and cultural influence. Inner grace is a spiritual endowment and potential that everyone has. Character is what persons make of themselves in response to their culture. The way in which these three factors influence each other will determine wither or how the capacity for helping emerges.” John Heron: *Helping the Client: A Creative Practical Guide*, Sage, 2001.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> All the quotes in this manual are taken from this book, unless otherwise stated.



## Section 1: Introduction and Background

### Introduction

Relationships require us to be active – engaged, involved. We can't *not* behave, though we may not always give away what we truly feel in the way that we behave, just as we may not clearly know what we meant by what we did until later, when we reflect on it.

There are numerous frameworks for assessing the impact of interventions upon human relations activities, but the great advantages of John Heron's *Six Category Intervention Analysis*<sup>2</sup> (SCIA) are that it is comprehensive and exhaustive, whether applied to individuals, groups or organisations, and it has considerable educational value. It is a tool of personal inquiry into how the practitioner comes to choose to act as they do and a great help in learning how to reflect more precisely upon the consequences of actions – whatever the result.

The traffic that takes place in human interaction between intention and consequence is a productive interchange for assessing individual developmental steps and the framework is a major tool for enabling all kinds of human relations practitioners to deepen their grasp of their own practice. It is, therefore, more than a diagnostic tool; it is an invitation to inquire into the dynamics of practice with the purpose of improving it – i.e. *improving how one uses oneself*. For the fact is, most practitioners in whatever role rely upon *themselves* as the *instrument through which their help is offered*. Moreover, the more your work depends upon the development of an effective relationship, the more the idea of viewing practice through the '*self as instrument*' perspective can help give it form.

John Heron is not interested in taking an expert role and telling others how to intervene; he is much more interested in providing ways for individuals to explore how they intervene, what the consequences of their interventions are and how they might develop or change them. As a practitioner becomes increasingly familiar with the system and how to use it, links between types of intervention become more apparent, such as how a strongly prescriptive approach needs a balance with supportive and cathartic lightness, for example, or how catalytic interventions precede and support the more challenging confrontative ones.

The SCIA system fits well with the Seven Stage Model<sup>3</sup>. The Seven Stage Model takes a cyclical and progressive view of the helping relationship over time, and adopts a narrative view both of the relationship and the unfolding of the client's 'story' through time. The SCIA framework is a useful addition for any practitioner since it is atemporal (it doesn't take a time-bound view of what happens) and can be applied to any intervention at any stage. Working with the two systems together will help the practitioner discover more of what they want to focus on in their own development.

---

<sup>2</sup> For the reader who wants to explore Heron's ideas further and directly, the Six Category system forms the essence of his book, *Helping the Client: A Creative Practical Guide*, initially published by Sage in 1989 and reprinted in 2001.

<sup>3</sup> The Seven Stage Model of Human Relations is described in great detail in *Working with Others* by Bryce Taylor, Oasis Press, 2004.





## Background to the Six Category Intervention Analysis System

From its original beginning as an A4 monograph in the mid-1970s, the Six Category Intervention Analysis System took shape and increased in complexity to form the backbone of the book *Helping the Client* (Sage, 2001). These notes are not intended to stand in place of that book and all it contains, but to make some of what is developed there more approachable and accessible.

The original ideas were drawn from the work of Jane Mouton and Robert Blake<sup>4</sup>, organisational consultants who were looking at ways of understanding interventions in organisations and how they worked. There were other forms of research into ways of understanding the effects and the potential of interventions that began to develop throughout the 1970s, much of which was of a traditional kind – scientific observation leading to hypothesis. In such a traditional paradigm it was considered important to keep the knowledge of what was being noted from those being observed – you don't tell those you are observing because they might 'contaminate' the research, or they might attempt to collaborate in 'naïve' ways or, just as easily, refuse.

Other approaches to behaviour analysis have been developed to help identify and promote improvements in individual social skills and interpersonal skills performance. Rackham and Morgan's categories, for example, are descriptively derived from actual observation. The Six Category system on the other hand is prescriptively derived from taking a position that asks, 'What is it meaningful and worthwhile to do in relation to other persons?'

### Behaviour Analysis

Behaviour Analysis training is heavily reliant upon external observers to provide feedback to those under observation whereas the SCIA system uses peer group members as experiential researchers to check out the system for themselves. It is therefore strongly centred on the inquirer, whilst behaviour analysis is more intent upon improving on-the-job performance in an instrumental way. Just as with anything else, evolving a way of making the approach reliable, a good deal of effort had to be put in to working out answers to the following four key aspects of behaviour:

1. **Problems of observation:** do we all see the same thing?
2. **Behaviour happens too quickly to catch it all:** decisions had to be made about relevance.
3. **Agreeing standards/criteria:** descriptions of behaviour are difficult to standardise and shifts in things like tone of voice can make all the difference in terms of what is meant.

---

<sup>4</sup> Blake and Mouton's work on the 'organisational grid' had considerable influence upon organisational thinkers from the time it first came out. In essence, they summarised interventions as relating to people or task and then identified five major types of organisational intervention. A simple framework that was both understandable and comprehensive. The SCIA system refined and added a further category – the supportive – upon which all the others are said to rest.

4. **What to select in or not:** non-verbal cues, for example, were not included.

Further refinements were made and new systems devised. Rackham and Morgan wrote *Developing Interactive Skills* and, later, *Behaviour Analysis in Training*, which attempted to define the most important categories/dimensions for a given task, e.g. interviewing/supervising/receptionist skills. They went about this largely as a 'modelling' exercise i.e. they set about finding people who were recognised as good at the task by their contemporaries or colleagues. They:

1. Made extensive studies of good practitioners.
2. Refined out crucial behavioural dimensions that were important across a range of meetings.
3. Concentrated upon a limited number of the most important categories.
4. Extensively tested observers via videotape to find agreed criteria for *inter-observer reliability*.

Their work was essentially directed toward training managers, whereas the Six Category system is an educational tool inviting those involved to inquire into what makes a good performance. It also offers a continuing invitation to decide what constitutes a good performance and to improve upon it, in other words, past performance does not provide a limit – innovation is encouraged.

### Qualitative Research

A 'qualitative'<sup>5</sup> approach to research is now more common, but still unusual. New paradigm research, as it is also sometimes known (when it is more radical), involves more than simply consulting those about to be observed. It invites those upon whom the research is being conducted to become potential collaborators in the whole enterprise. The underlying assumption is that research *on people by people* should be *with* them, not done *to* them. The subjects are therefore encouraged to look upon themselves as *co-researchers* in a mutual inquiry. There are still different roles to perform and different tasks to undertake, but the emphasis is placed more upon, 'What we can find out *together*?'

Experiential research – another term for this work – and participative inquiry, still another, are all modifications of this essential idea of involving people in the research activity itself, and only really began to develop in the late 1970s. Now there is little significant research about people that doesn't involve them in some way. When SCIA was evolving this kind of research was rare.

### Applicability

The Six Category system has been widely used by many types of development agent because of its comprehensive nature. It covers all types of intervention, in all the many circumstances

---

<sup>5</sup> Qualitative research is the general term for those forms of research that involve more in-depth approaches and which allow those being surveyed or studied to play more than a compliant part. There are a range of forms of qualitative approaches, some more sophisticated than others.

in which helper and client meet; it also helps promote reflection and self-awareness on the part of the practitioner. It is best encountered through practice and no amount of reading about it can make up for the direct experience of working experientially with the system. That caution made from the outset, the framework nevertheless provides any active practitioner with many opportunities to consider issues of practice, styles of response and strategies of intervention. The system promotes an interest in the *intent* behind the interventions made and asks the practitioner to reflect upon their *purpose* not simply the result of the action.

### **An Educational Activity**

This can make exploring the Six Category system a profound educational enterprise; one of inquiry, inviting the practitioner to explore within themselves what they set out to do and how far they succeed. Heron is also interested in asking the practitioner to consider whether the purpose is consistent with promoting the wellbeing and wholesome development of the recipient – something no helper can afford to put aside.

Underlying the Six Category system is a series of presuppositions about the nature of relating, the nature of helping and the importance of clarity of understanding by the parties involved in the endeavour. One of its greatest appeals is that it challenges expertise-led professionalism – the view that helping needs to be managed, overlooked and patrolled as though it were some risky endeavour. Heron is not so naïve as to believe that help does not sometimes go astray, or that individuals never misuse their position or their power at the expense of the client, but he is very suspicious of the efforts of those who seek to regulate the human right in which all share – to be of aid to and act in support of the other. He says:

“I define ‘helping’ as supporting and enabling the well-being of another person. There is clearly something odd about turning human helping into a profession with training, accreditation, status, case conferences and institutional politics. Does the wise flow of love from person to person require all this apparatus of paternalism?”

### **The Purpose of Six Category Intervention Analysis**

SCIA does not entail any particular theoretical perspective coming from any particular school of psychology or psychotherapy. Indeed, the system could be used as an analytic tool to compare and contrast the therapeutic practice of different schools.

SCIA is much more about clarification at the level of *intentions* rather than crudely identifying *behavioural outcomes*. It sets out to establish a place of ‘witness’ within the awareness of the practitioner. It promotes the aim of the practitioner becoming more conscious of what they are doing as they are doing it and encourages them to pay attention to the fluctuations of motivation and effort that arise in the moment-by-moment interaction that takes place.

Initially, however, identifying and categorising the observable behaviours as belonging to one of the six categories is an important start since it begins to make those working together realise that they may all ‘see’ the same thing but they don’t all necessarily ascribe the same meaning to it. In this way the whole system is a means to engage in a personal and mutual inquiry into what is happening when people are busy working things out with one another.

## Motivation and Intention

SCIA highlights the questions of:

1. The **motivation** of the practitioner in making an intervention.
2. The **intention** of the practitioner in making an intervention.

Exploration of motivation and intention is, of course, a much more complex endeavour and one that is considerably more challenging for all concerned. However, the power of the Six Category system lies in this encouragement to explore, expose, or illuminate the enterprise of *giving assistance* rather than simply looking at the results. Much interest and concern is often placed upon the *consequences* of an intervention and, clearly, whether something works or not is a matter of great importance.

In addition, attention is often placed upon the *action* of the individual making the intervention – looking at the behaviour and describing it in some useful and mutually understood way. However, there is also a need to look at what the individual making the intervention is aiming to accomplish i.e. their *intention*. Many of us are all too aware of the gap between results and intentions, and Heron's system offers us a chance to become more aware and to give consideration to these crucial elements of any helping relationship. It raises such questions as:

- What is the intention on the part of the practitioner when they intervene?
- What does the practitioner think they are doing?
- Does the intention claimed match the action?
- Does the effect accomplish what they set out to do?

Much early work in gaining familiarity with the system lies in clarifying the *level* of intention rather than simply spotting behavioural outcomes. The role of the observer in practice work with the system is essentially that of coach, supporter, enabler. When observing practitioners at work, the observer can never *know* the intention of the practitioner, just as practitioners themselves can never know completely their own motivation when they are 'in it'. Time to reflect upon the nature of the interventions and the intention behind them is required. Such an approach recognises that we can never know the whole picture but that awareness will increase with and through reflection and inquiry.

The aim is to be able to identify the intervention offered before, during, or after it has been made and to do so with an accuracy and fluency that raises action to consciousness much more strongly than is usually the case in human behaviour.