

Understanding Interviewer Probing

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Behavior Coding Study

- Starting point for research
 - ▶ A way to see what is happening across interviews
- Observation only, no debriefings
 - ▶ Can't investigate how interviewers are thinking during the interaction
 - ▶ Can observe behaviors and patterns

What are all the things you have done to find work during the last 4 weeks?

■ Open-ended field coded question

Current Population Survey - Ver 1.30

Forms Answer Navigate Options Help

CPS ADDR FAQ Chg Resp ROS F9 Exit/F10

What are all of the things you have done to find work during the last 4 weeks?

◆ Do not read answer categories

Active Passive

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> 1. Contacted employer directly/interview | <input type="radio"/> 10. Looked at ads |
| <input type="radio"/> 2. Contacted public employment agency | <input type="radio"/> 11. Attended job training programs/courses |
| <input type="radio"/> 3. Contacted private employment agency | <input type="radio"/> 12. Other passive |
| <input type="radio"/> 4. Contacted friends or relatives | <input type="radio"/> 13. Nothing |
| <input type="radio"/> 5. Contacted school/university employment center | |
| <input type="radio"/> 6. Sent out resumes/filled out applications | |
| <input type="radio"/> 7. Checked union/professional registers | |
| <input type="radio"/> 8. Placed or answered ads | |
| <input type="radio"/> 9. Other active | |

Question-Answer Sequence Illustration

Question

What are all the things you have done to find work during the last four weeks?

I went online.

Response

Probe

You went online?

Yes, that's right.

Response

Probe

Anything else?

Nope.

Response

Probe

Did you go on any interviews?

I wish I had!

Response

Question-Answer Sequence Illustration

What are all the things you

POSSIBLE CODES

- Adequate
- Vague
- Don't know
- Refuse
- Help Request
- Other Inadequate

Probe

Anything else?

SUGGESTIVE

Probe

Did you go on any interviews?

POSSIBLE CODES

- Neutral
- Rephrase Q
- Repeat Q
- Verify
- Suggestive
- Ignore

ADEQUATE

Nope.

~~BEFORE~~
~~AFTER~~
Response

OTHER
INADEQUATE

I wish I had!

AFTER
Response

Behavior Coding Methods

- Coded recorded calls
 - ▶ CATI call center cases
 - ▶ Pre-selected cases for our target question
 - ▶ More than 1 person per HH may be asked
- Final dataset of 40 Question-Answer Sequences
- Coded every turn
 - ▶ Number of unique turns, total = 270
 - ▶ Mean turns per Q-A sequence = 6.75, SD = 3.05
 - min = 2, max = 14
- Two independent coders
 - ▶ Substantial agreement, $k_{Q-A} = 0.76$ and $k_{case} = 0.65$

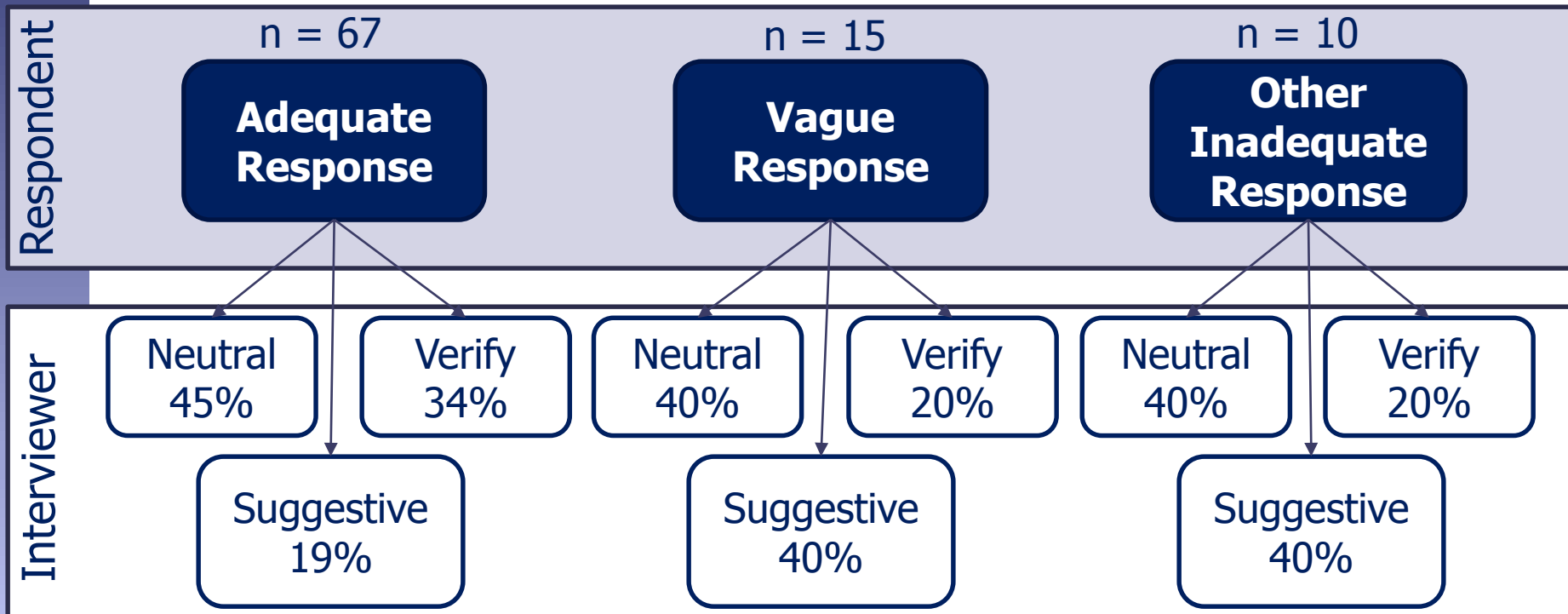
Probes Used

| Probe Type | Frequency across turns | Frequency across Q-AS |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Neutral | | |
| Verify | | |
| Suggestive | | |
| Repeat Question | | |
| | n = 106 | n = 40 |

Responses Given

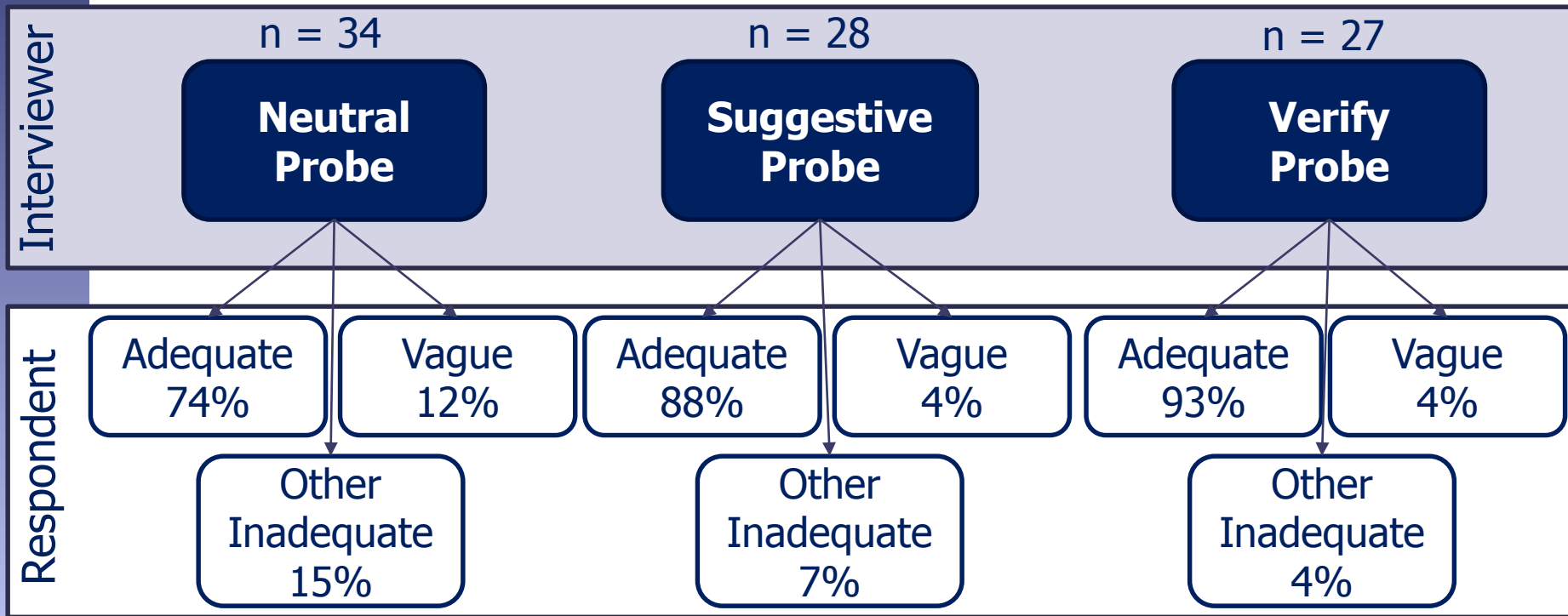
- Before a probe
- After a probe

Probe Selection



Interviewers are reacting to their circumstances when choosing probes

Probe Efficacy



Interviewer Behaviors

| Interviewer Behavior | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Miss a clarification probe opportunity | 32.5% |
| Miss "Anything Else" probe | 25% |
| Skip question or deviate from script | 20% |

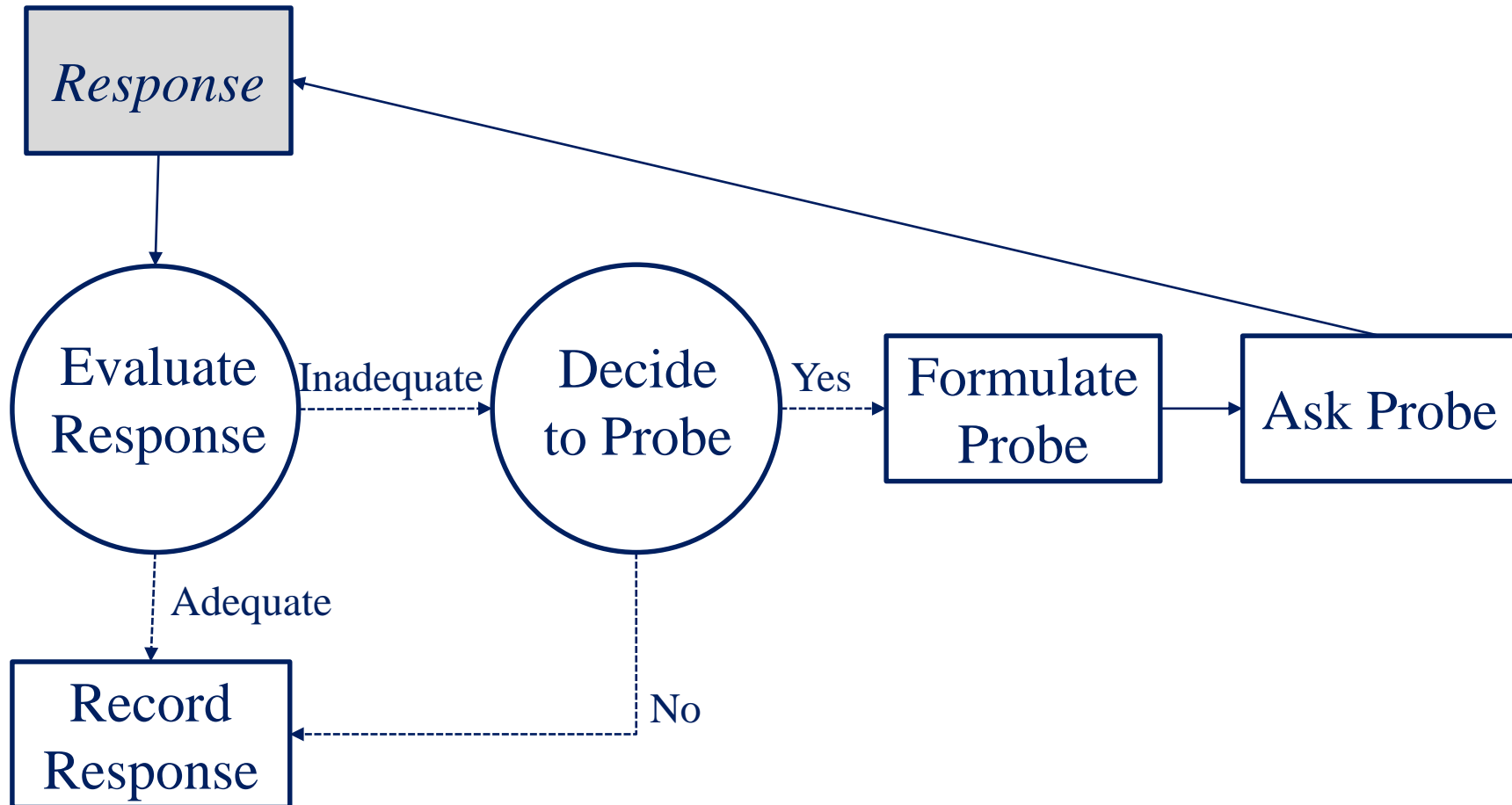
n = 40

- About half of interviewers did not engage in any of these behaviors
 - ▶ 42.5% of Q-As showed none of these behaviors
 - ▶ 37.5 % of Q-As showed one behavior
 - ▶ 20% of Q-As showed two behaviors

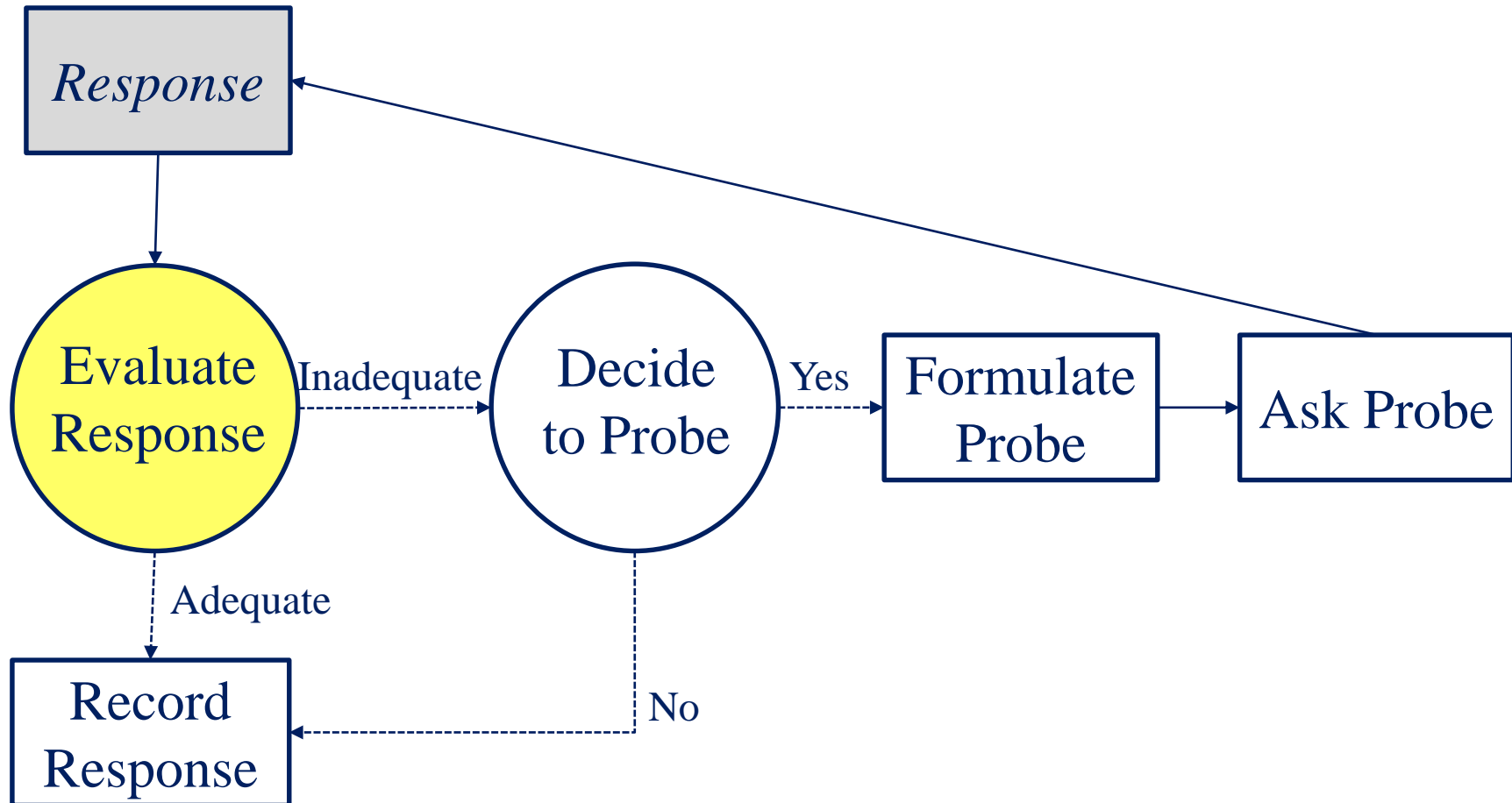
Takeaways from Behavior Coding Study

- When choosing a probe, interviewers are considering the preceding response
 - ▶ Choosing suggestive probes after vague or otherwise inadequate responses
- Some interviewers may be relying on a few types of probes without considering others
 - ▶ Half of the interviewers were responsible for all of the use of suggestive probes

Model of Interviewer Probing



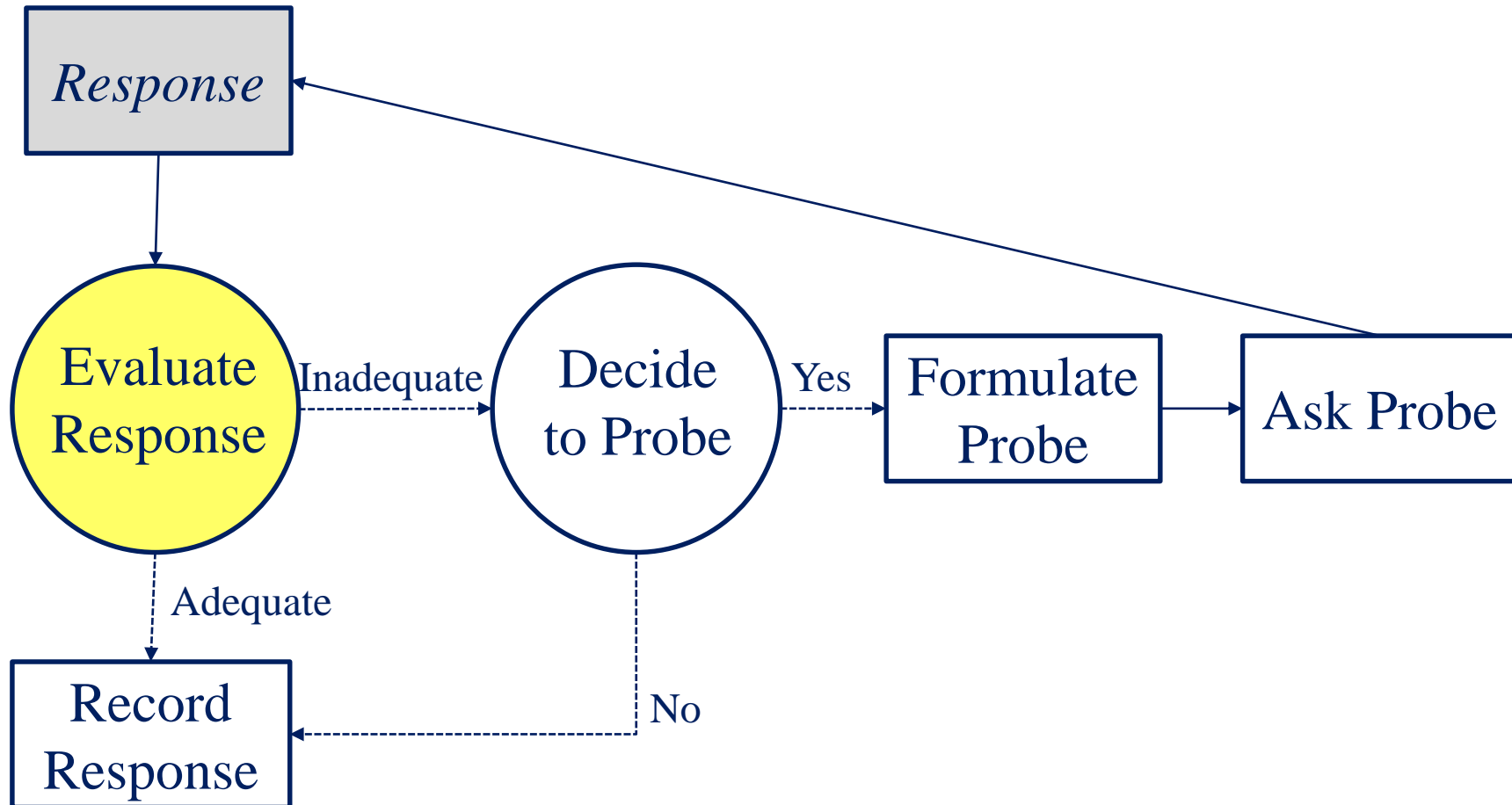
Model of Interviewer Probing



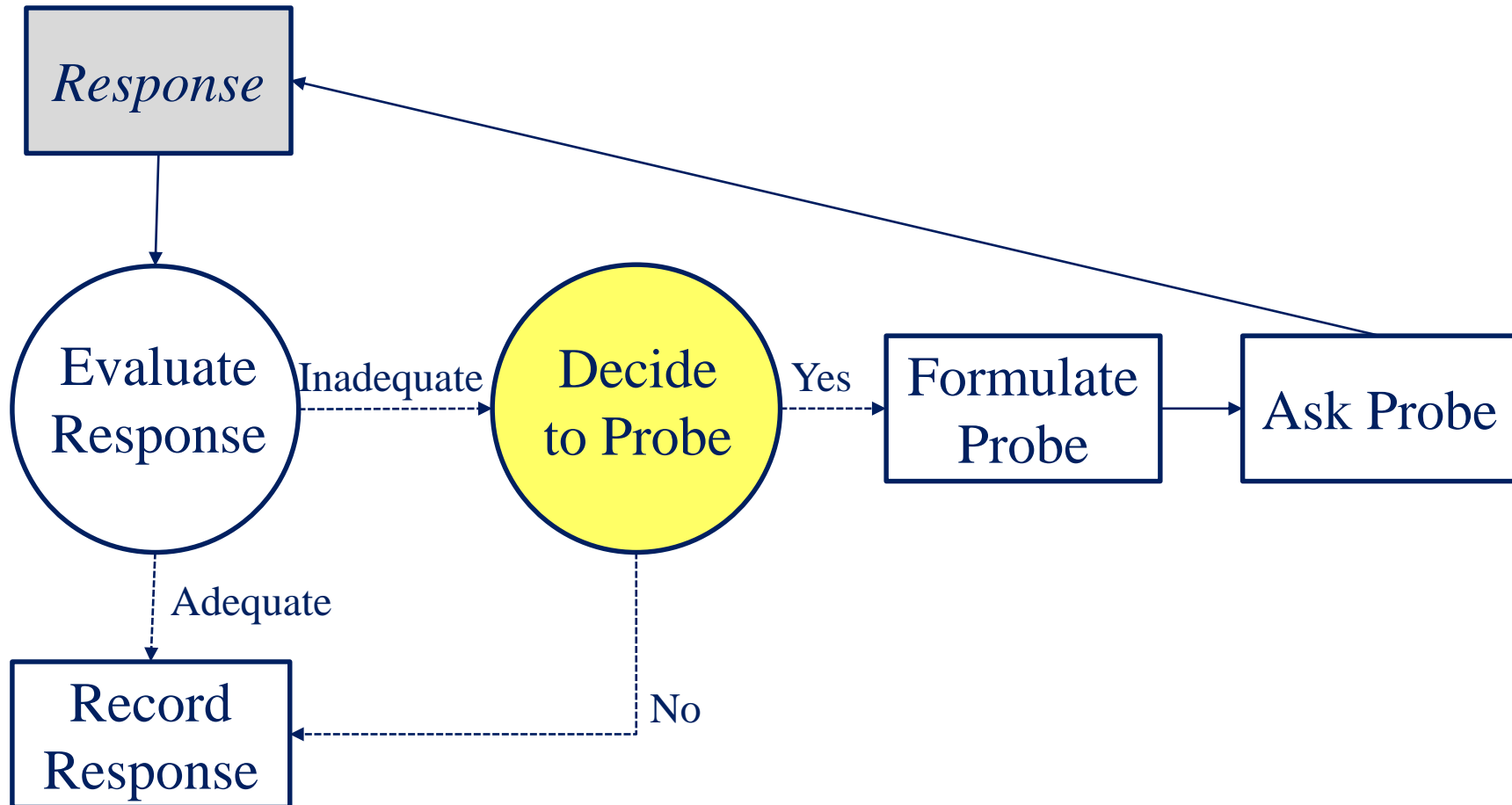
Evaluate Response

1. Compare the observed response to the available response options
2. Judge whether the response maps to one available response option adequately
 - ▶ Exact match?
 - ▶ Closest match?
 - ▶ Common sense similarity?

Model of Interviewer Probing



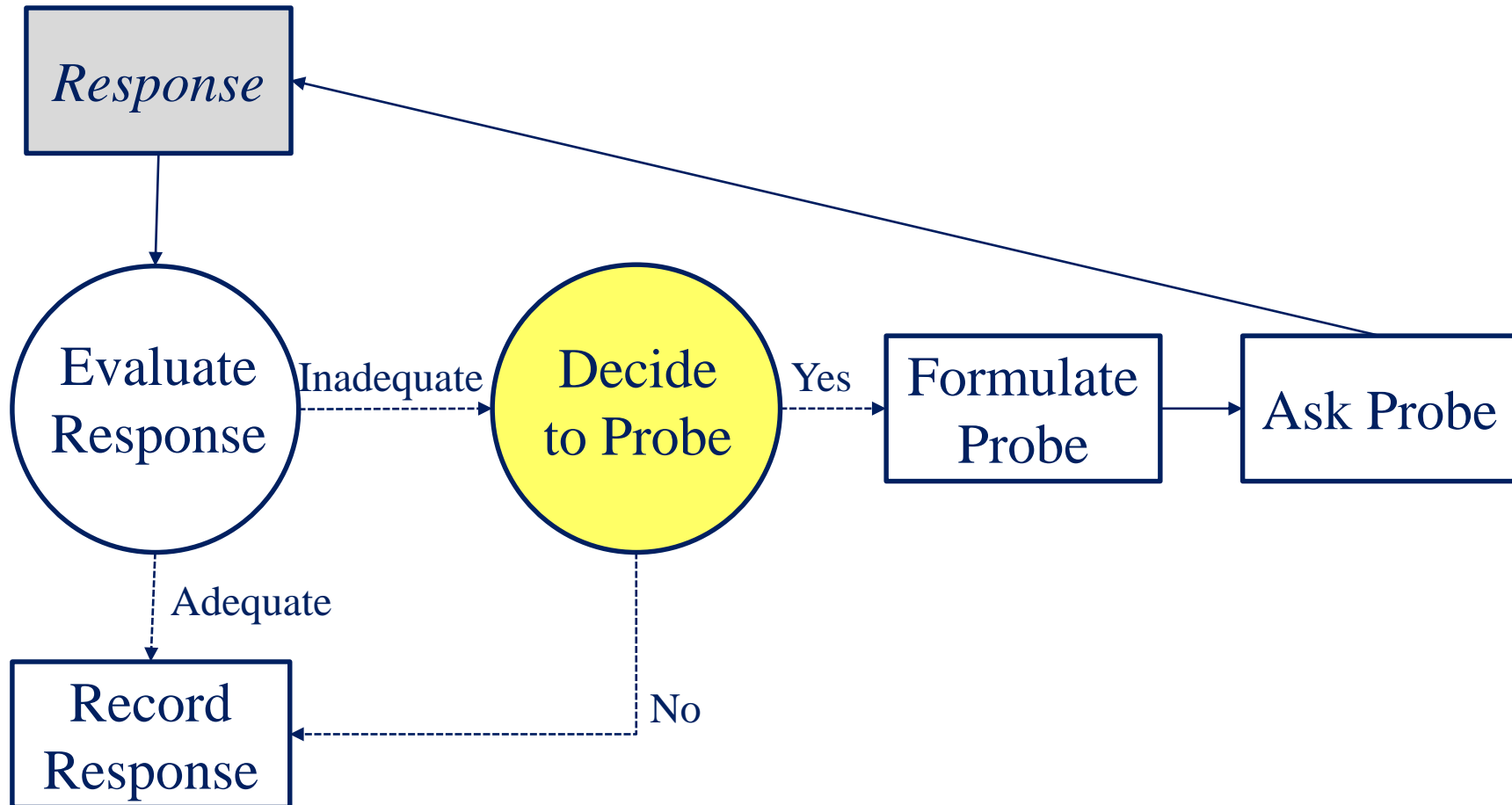
Model of Interviewer Probing



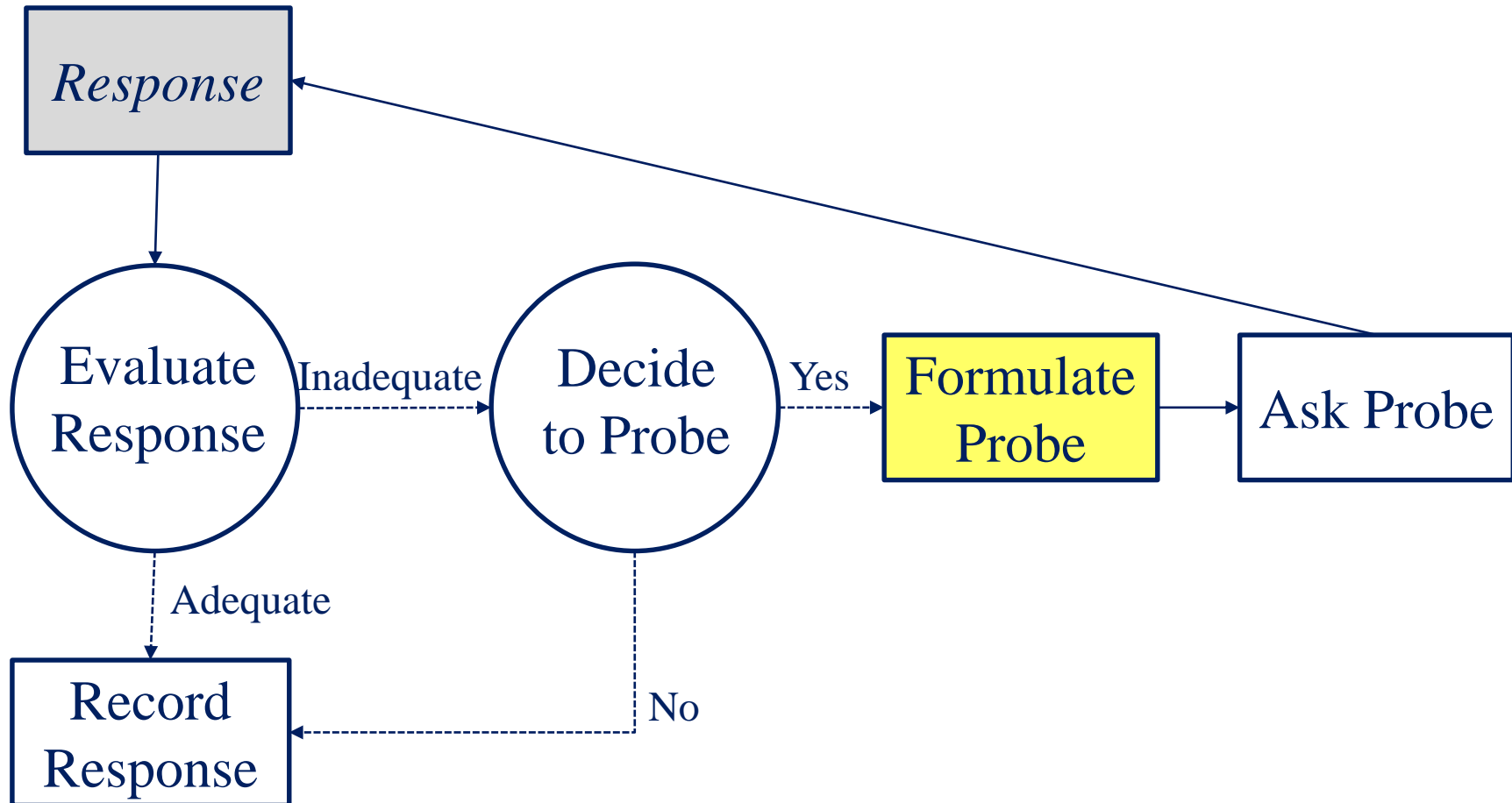
Decide to Probe

1. Evaluate the 'costs' and 'benefits' of probing
 - ▶ How severe is the response inadequacy?
 - ▶ Will this raise data quality?
 - ▶ Will this harm rapport?

Model of Interviewer Probing



Model of Interviewer Probing

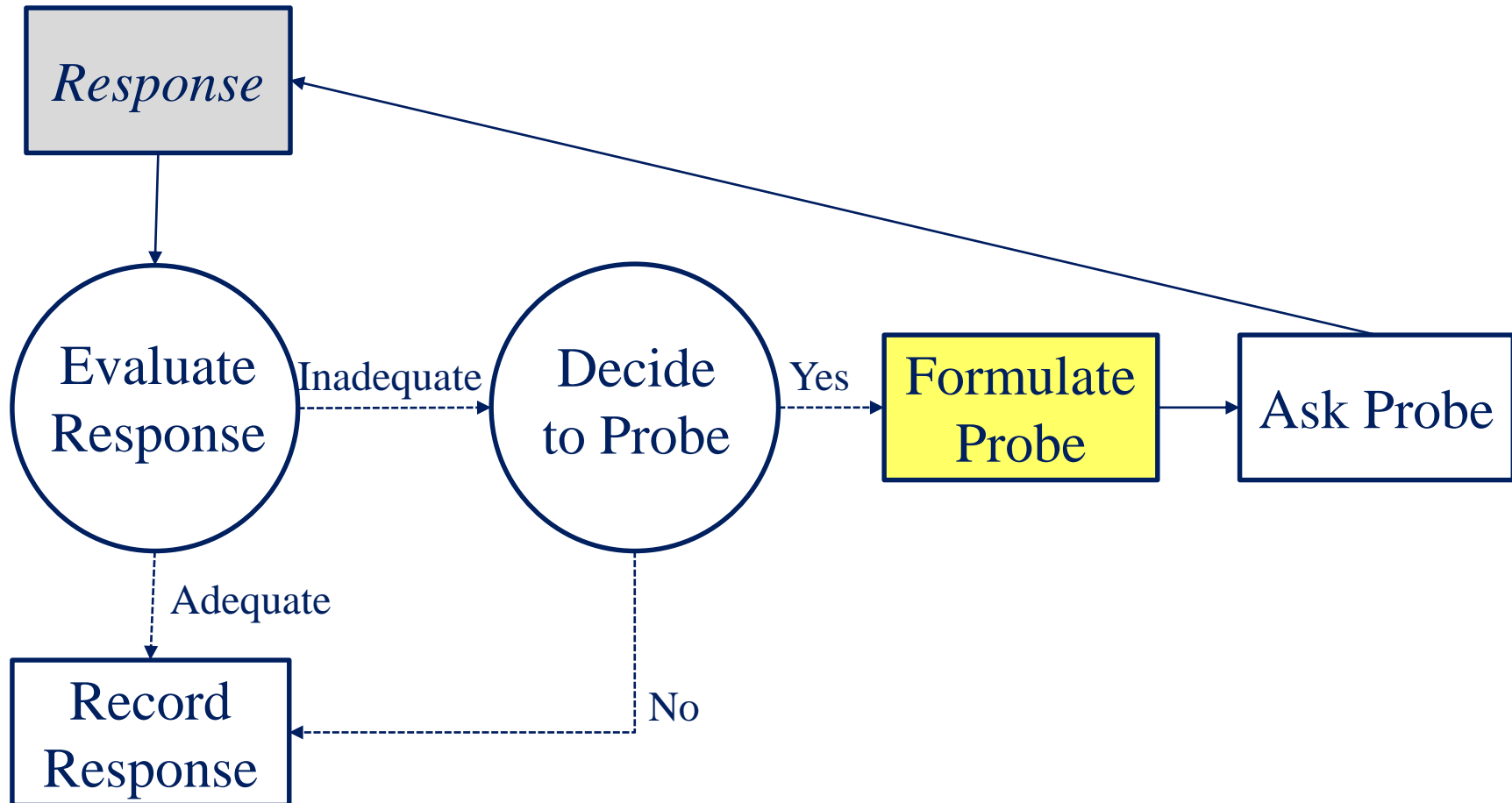


Formulate probe

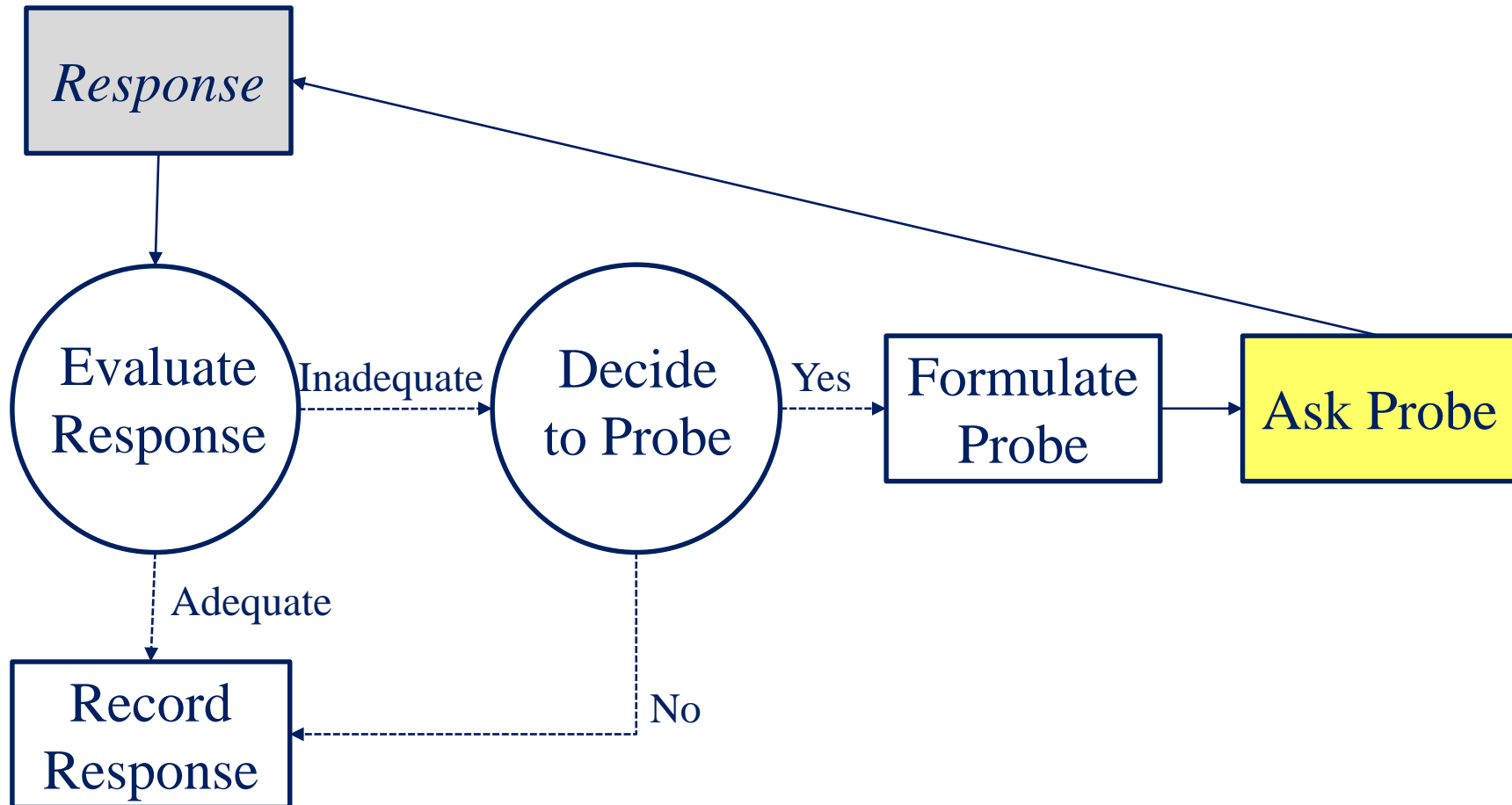
1. Choose which type of probe to use
 - ▶ Why was the response inadequate?
 - ▶ Which probes could be used right now?
 - ▶ Which probe is most likely to result in an adequate response?
 - ▶ Which probe is most likely to reduce burden?

Interviewers may not use the same probes all the time, but they could be using the same probes in the same circumstances

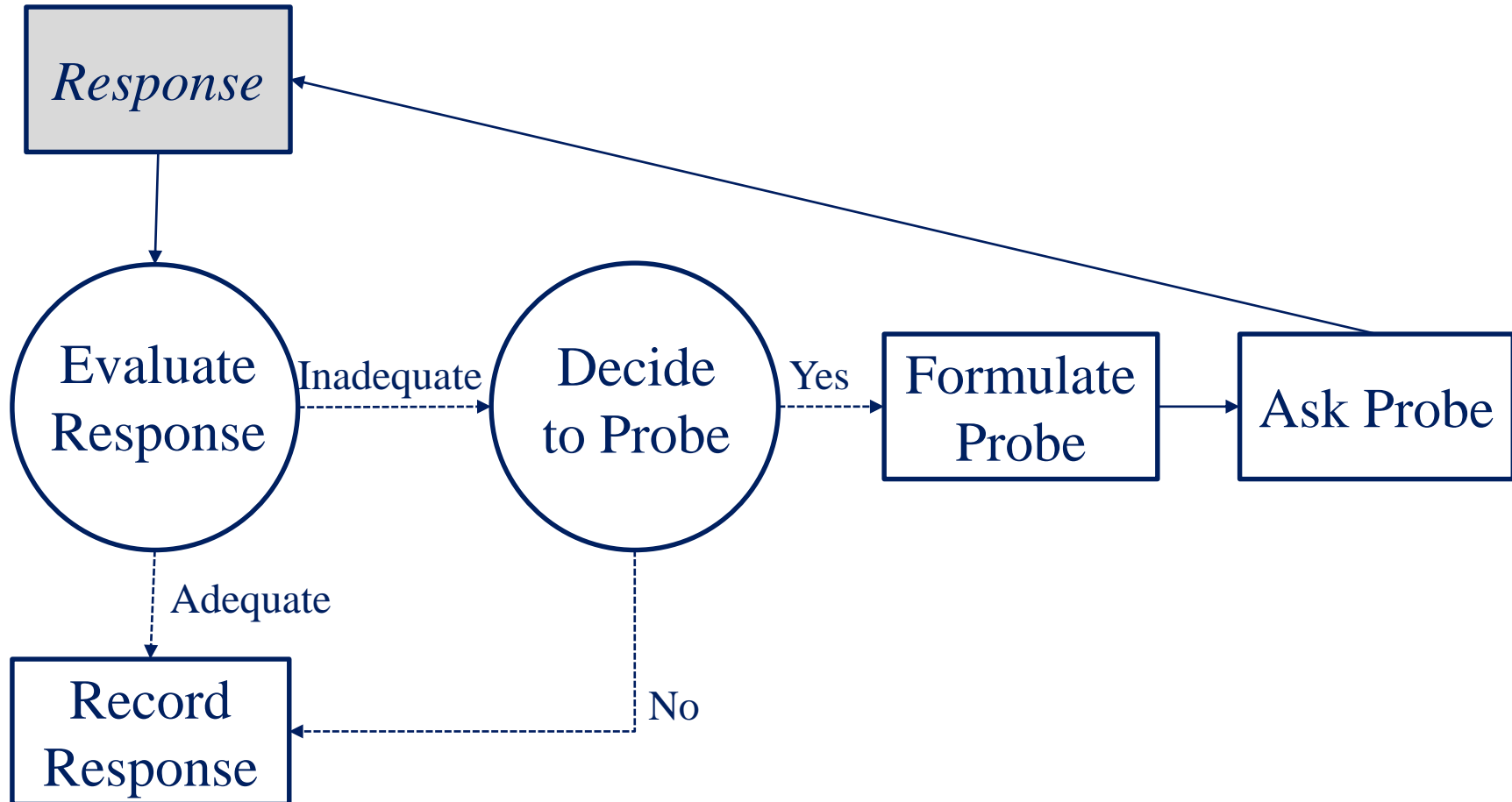
Model of Interviewer Probing



Model of Interviewer Probing



Model of Interviewer Probing



Main Takeaways

- Interviewers are currently approaching probing inconsistently
 - ▶ No longer “standardized”
- The probing process is complex but it can be broken down into trainable components
- Training needs to prepare interviewers for the different types of responses that happen in the field

Contact Information

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What are all the things you have done to find work during the last 4 weeks?

ACTIVE

- Contact employer directly/interview
- Contacted public employment agency
- Contacted private employment agency
- Contacted friends or relatives
- Contacted school/university employment center
- Sent out resumes/filled out applications
- Checked union/professional registers
- Placed or answered ads
- Other active

PASSIVE

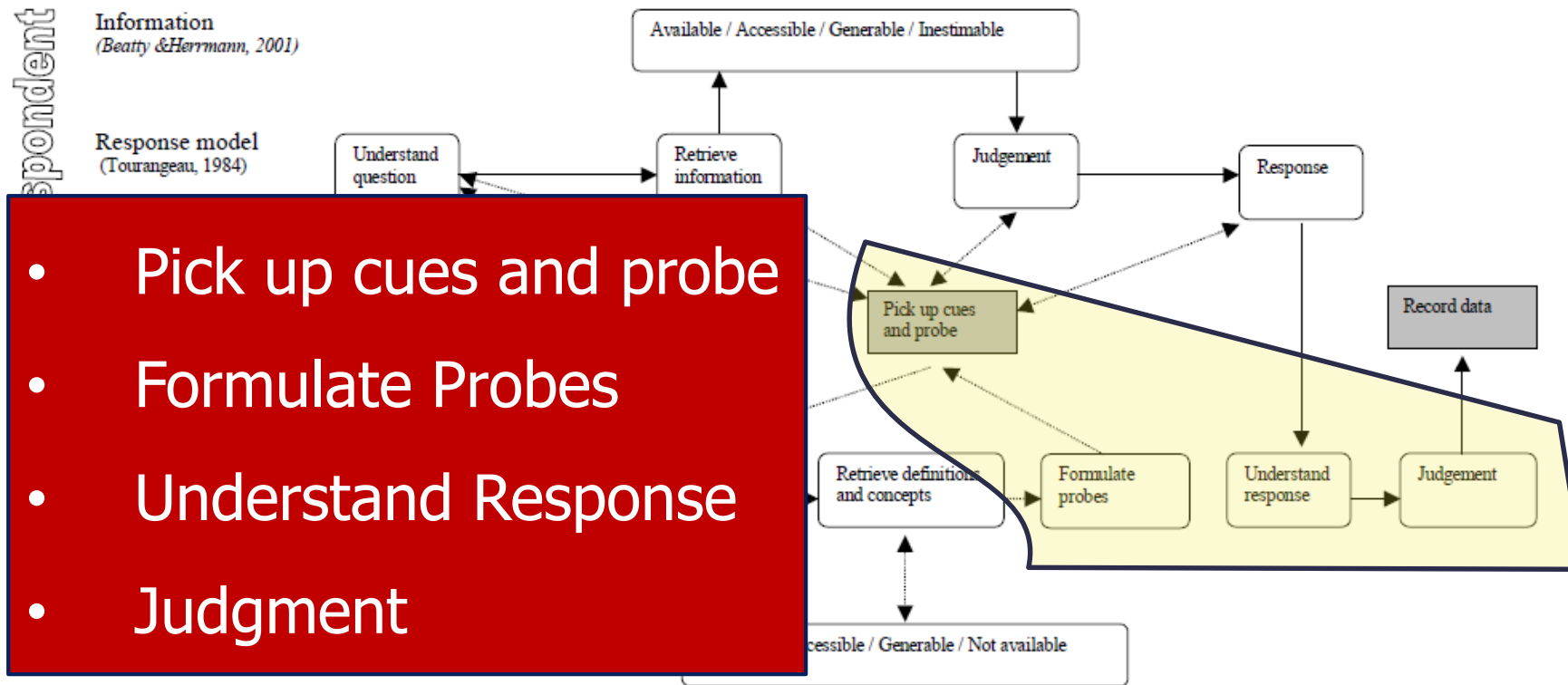
- Looked at ads
- Attended job training programs/courses
- Other passive
- Nothing

Interview process

spont

Information
(Beatty & Herrmann, 2001)

Response model
(Tourangeau, 1984)



- Pick up cues and probe
- Formulate Probes
- Understand Response
- Judgment

Figure 1

Lilli Japac, Statistics Sweden, February 4, 2002

Example coding instructions

Use the "other active" precode if the job search method could result in a job offer without any further action by the jobseeker (e.g., auditioning for directors and producers or bidding on a contract).

Use the "other passive" precode if the job search method could NOT result in a job offer without further action on the part of the jobseeker. These include studying for a real estate broker's license, picking up an application, or completing a resume.

Example coding instructions

Select (2) contacted public employment agency for persons who contacted a public employment agency. These operate at any level of government, Federal, State, or municipal, but are typically referred to as the State Employment service (Job Service).

The individual must have inquired about job opportunities rather than simply about unemployment insurance or job training programs.

Example probing instructions

How to probe

When the respondent's answer does not meet the question's objective, probe to clarify or expand his or her answer.

The probing procedures listed below are useful in stimulating discussion. Introduce these devices casually as a natural expression of interest.

Repeating the question or listing the response categories (when applicable) is useful when the respondent does not understand the question, misinterprets it, seems unable to make up his or her mind, or strays from the subject.

Repeating the respondent's reply is useful in helping to clarify the response and prompting the respondent to expand upon his or her statement. Be sure to adhere strictly to the respondent's answer and do not interject your own ideas.

Example probing instructions

Neutral questions (probes) in a neutral tone of voice will bring fuller, clearer responses. For example:

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

OR

“Which figure would you say comes closest?”

Current Training on Probing

- Use non-directive probes
 - ▶ “I’m not sure what you mean”
 - ▶ “Whatever it means to you”
- Probe to clarify or expand the answer
- Repeat the question
- Repeat the respondent’s answer
- Employ an expectant pause

Interviewer Judgment and Decision Making

- When should interviewers probe?
 - ▶ Always probe?
 - ▶ When data quality is likely to improve?
 - ▶ When respondent burden is low?
- How should interviewers choose which probe to use?
 - ▶ Always use neutral probes?
 - ▶ Tailor probes using previously reported information?
 - ▶ Minimize burden on respondents?