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**Masterclass in
Eliciting Intelligence Information**

CREST
REPORT

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The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) is a national hub for understanding, countering and mitigating security threats.

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Masterclass in Eliciting Intelligence Information

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Specialist Masterclass

ELICITING INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION

Introduction

The Masterclass was jointly organised between the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats ([CREST](#)) and the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group ([IIIRG](#)).¹ Around 50 practitioners from a range of European government, police, and military organisations heard presentations from leading academics researching effective and practical techniques for eliciting high quality information in interviews.

Col (retired) Steve Kleinman, Ambassador for CREST's Eliciting Information Core Programme, chaired the afternoon. Gathering reliable information is the foundation of good intelligence work, he explained, and interviewing is a key method of gathering intelligence.

His career in the US military and intelligence organisations included 30 years as an interrogator but, Kleinman said, his practice had been guided largely by anecdote and experience. Only later did he come to realise the critical importance of ensuring interviewing practice was grounded in scientific evidence. He is now a keen advocate of the importance of scientifically-grounded practice, arguing his case right up to the highest levels of the US Government. He believes that the application of scientific research can fundamentally change the landscape of intelligence interviewing: reducing false confessions, eliminating the need for coercive methods, and developing a culture that promotes a search for truth over the desire for confession.

Kleinman introduced the presenters, all of whom had been actively engaged in reaching out to practitioners instead of "loitering in campuses". Most have received funding from the FBI's High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG) as part of a world-leading research programme that, over the past few years, has led to the development of research that is changing the way in which the police and intelligence community conduct interviews.

Col Kleinman is CREST Ambassador for the Eliciting Information Core Programme.

¹ IIIRG was established in 2007 with the aim of building closer ties between the research and practice communities. It now has more than 560 members in more than 30 countries.

The Scharff Technique: How to elicit information from sources

Professor Pär-Anders Granhag

The focus of Professor Granhag's talk was on the interview technique of a World War II interrogator, Hans Scharff. Scharff had interrogated over 500 US and British prisoners of war (POWs) and had been extraordinarily successful at eliciting information from them. After the war Scharff was employed by the Pentagon, and was recognised as a role model for interrogation. Granhag's research team set out to test what elements of Scharff's technique contributed to its success.

Scharff had no formal training in interrogation but developed his technique by first observing POWs' counter-interrogation strategies. His strategy was based on seeing an interview through the interviewee's eyes so as to anticipate his source's intentions and reactions.

Granhag's team broke down Scharff's technique into five core tactics, which they have since been testing in a series of experimental studies:

1. Be friendly. His affable, polite and respectful approach undermined the expectations of POWs and made them more likely to listen to him. Some even commented, in a 'guestbook' that Scharff kept, that they enjoyed the experience.
2. Do not demand information. Scharff asked very few explicit questions, instead eliciting information through apparently innocuous conversation.
3. Give the illusion of 'knowing it all'. Scharff opened the interview by saying that the prisoner probably wouldn't be able to help, and then setting out the evidence he had.
4. Present claims. Scharff would present claims in a creative way that prompted a reaction from the POW, and prompting them to confirm or disconfirm the claim.
5. Downplay the value of elicited information. When POWs gave up information Scharff would ignore it or downplay its importance, so the POW did not realise that he had provided something useful.

Granhag's team have conducted 10 studies so far, testing Scharff's tactics in the laboratory and the field. The early laboratory studies showed that using the Scharff technique results in more information from interviewees, and that those interviewees underestimate how much new information they have revealed and are less likely to work out the interviewer's objectives.

What about in the field? So far Granhag and his colleagues have conducted two training studies with Norwegian police and military intelligence officers. Although the data analysis is not complete, early indications are that officers can be taught the tactics effectively in under three hours. Compared to untrained interviewers, Scharff-trained officers posed many fewer questions - in fact half of them did not pose a single explicit question - yet elicited more information. Compared to people interviewed by untrained officers, people interviewed using the Scharff tactics perceived the interviewers as being much less eager to collect information, were more willing to meet the interviewer again, and found it harder to determine the interviewers' objectives. Granhag's research demonstrated that although rapport is an

important starting point for an effective interviewer, specific tools and tactics – like the Scharff technique – can enhance intelligence elicitation still further.

Professor Granhag (University of Gothenburg) is Principal Investigator on a CREST Commissioned Project exploring new techniques to support interviewers. Read more:

Granhag, P.A., Oleszkiewicz, S., Strömwall, L.A. & Kleinman, S, M. (2015). Eliciting intelligence with the Scharff technique: Interviewing more and less cooperative and capable sources. *Psychology, Public Policy & Law*, 21, 100-110.

Granhag, P.A., Kleinman, S. & Oleszkiewicz, S. (2016). The Scharff technique: On how to effectively elicit intelligence from human sources. *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 29, 132-150.

Why tough tactics fail and rapport gets results

Professor Laurence Alison

Professor Alison introduced his team's research based on the analysis of more than a thousand hours of law enforcement interviews with a range of terrorist suspects. Alison highlighted how interview strategies could tap into conscious and unconscious beliefs that underlie an interviewee's response to questions. By moving from questions about behaviours to questions about feelings and then thoughts, the interviewer may be able to elicit information that helps access deeply held beliefs.

Alison focused on one important aspect of those interviews: what happens when the interviewer is unable to give a plausible reason to the interviewee for why they are being interviewed.

Being able to give a credible and straightforward answer to the question "why am I here" means that the interviewer can move onto the main purpose of the interview. When an interviewer is unable to give a credible answer, this tends to lead to resistance and antagonism from the suspect, and usually signals a rapid deterioration in an interview, particularly if the interviewers counter the suspect's antagonism by attempting to take control of the interview and engage in rational persuasion attempts.

Faced with resistant and evasive interviewees, Alison suggested that instead of arguing or persuading, an interviewer should use a set of non-confrontational tactics that can be described under the mnemonic "SONAAR":

- Simple reflection of words and phrases
- "On the one hand" (double sided – highlight inconsistencies)
- Not arguing (roll with resistance)
- Amplifications (exaggeration / amplification to provoke a correction)
- Affirmations (select positive statements in something they said)
- Reframing – invite them to examine their reflections through a different lens.

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Alison suggested that using these tactics subverts an interviewee who is using arguing as a counter-interrogation technique. Instead of meeting resistance and aggression, the interviewee is faced with an interviewer who remains calm, polite, and curious. Reflective interview techniques, combined with strong interpersonal skills is, Alison argued, the way to overcome roadblocks and deal effectively with an antagonistic interviewee.

Professor Alison (University of Liverpool) is Principal Investigator on a CREST Commissioned Project on decision making in crisis situations. Read more [here](#).

Eliciting Information using a multi-modal Timeline Technique

Professor Lorraine Hope

Professor Hope started with an overview of the many ways in which human memory can be damaged, from a failure to encode information in the first place, to the inevitable decay of information over time, to the misinformation that can easily creep in to 'contaminate' your true memories. Memory, argued Hope, is fragile and needs to be protected, particularly when remembered information can be crucial to a police or intelligence investigation.

Hope went on to describe how interviewers working with people who have valuable information and want to share it can help them retrieve the most complete and accurate information from memory. One example is a technique she developed to respond to practitioner requirements for a method for eliciting information about complex, multi-perpetrator events. Instead of a normal interview where an interviewee might be asked "tell me what happened during the event", Hope devised a method that allows the interviewee to organise their recalled information themselves along a timeline.

In practice, this involves an interviewee reporting details of actions and people directly onto a physical line representing the event. As such, the technique uses a 'timeline' of the relevant time period to provide a structure for remembering and reporting. This approach helps interviewees by giving them an intuitive way of organising their recall and reporting, which makes it easier to organise their thoughts and reduces demands on working memory.

The Timeline Technique has been shown in Hope's studies to lead to more information and more accurate information about remembered events. You can read more about the technique in a CREST guide [here](#).

*Professor Hope (University of Portsmouth) is Co-Investigator for the CREST Eliciting Information [Core Programme](#). Read more: Hope, L., Mullis, R. & Gabbert, F. (2013) Who? What? When? Using a timeline technique to facilitate recall of a complex event. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 2, 20-24.*

Strategies for understanding others and helping them understand you

Professor Paul Taylor

Professor Taylor's presentation examined the conversational dynamics between interviewer and interviewee and the need to try and understand an interviewee's motivation for saying what they say. He suggested that what a person says can be understood in terms of three motivational frames:

1. Instrumental: where the purpose is to convey 'substance' such as facts or requirements
2. Relational: where the purpose is engaging in affiliation, building trust, and enhancing liking
3. Identity: where the conversation is focused on the interviewee's identity, their social position, beliefs and values

A relationship can be built most effectively if the two conversation partners have motivational frames that align. For instance, they might both focus on each other's instrumental requirements, or both engage in relationship-building chit chat. When two people are talking across frames – perhaps an interviewee is concerned about how his cooperation might appear to others (identity) whilst the interviewer is trying to elicit facts (instrumental) - then communication is impaired, and both sides are more likely to make negative judgements about each other's cooperativeness and credibility.

Taylor explained that in conversation people also tend to engage on one of three orientations: cooperative, competitive, or avoidant. As with motivational frames, two people talking might be on the same level – ideally, both will be cooperative – or one might be attempting to be cooperative whilst the other is competitive or even avoiding engagement altogether. Effective engagement – in an interview or any other situation where good communication is crucial – is about managing and aligning frames and levels, said Taylor. His studies have shown that alignment is associated with cooperation and conciliation in interview and negotiation settings. Skilled interviewers recognise when they are out of alignment, switch to 'listen' mode (reducing the amount they talk by up to 40% when alignment slips), adjust their personal framing toward the other person, and this way get back in sync.

Monitoring for alignment is particularly important when you are interacting with someone from another culture, as cross-cultural and second language interactions normally start with a lower baseline alignment. Taylor also suggested that people from different cultures favour different frames. For example, the use of rational persuasion, an instrumental tactic, tends to fail badly with people who come from cultures where instrumental frames are not usual in conversation. Direct pressure in interviews tends to be reciprocated by individuals from honour cultures because it is seen as an identity threat. Being kind is not reciprocated in cultures that don't place high value on identity. Some cultures tend not to engage in 'relationship' focused conversations and thus find small talk irrelevant.

Whilst these broad generalisations can help an interviewer prepare for an interview with someone they have not met before, Taylor's research also shows that once in the interview room there is no substitute for listening carefully to how the interviewee talks and aligning your motivational frame to theirs.

Professor Taylor (Lancaster University) is Director of CREST. Read more [here](#).

Implicit cognition in investigative interviewing: Using priming to promote disclosure

Professor Maria Hartwig

Professor Hartwig gave an overview of research on 'priming' in interview contexts. The research is grounded in the theory that our bodily states affect our mental states and vice versa. Several studies over the last few decades have suggested that this theory is borne out in practice: people who feel physically warm can feel more emotional warmth towards another person, and people who are ostracised feel physically colder ("frozen out"). This bidirectional influence between mind and body occurs below our conscious awareness and is open to manipulation. The deliberate manipulation of context to achieve these effects is known as 'priming'.

Hartwig set out to test whether the theory holds in an interview setting. In one study, she examined whether being primed with physical cues to openness makes interviewees more likely to be open with their information. Her experiments show that people in open spaces (large rooms with windows) tend to reveal more information than people in small, windowless interrogation rooms. In other studies, she primed a feeling of security by asking interviewees to think about someone they strongly trusted before their interview. These interviewees also volunteered more information than people who had not been primed.

Priming is a controversial area of social psychology – other researchers have failed to replicate some striking and well-known findings, so we should be cautious about some of the claims made for the power of priming. While Hartwig's results still need to be replicated in more realistic interview conditions (in real life settings with potentially uncooperative interviewees, for instance), her results are a promising indication that small changes to the physical environment could pay big dividends in terms of information elicitation.

Professor Hartwig (John Jay University, New York) specialises in research on the psychology of deception and its detection, and on interview and interrogation techniques. Read more [here](#).

Cognitive Credibility Assessment: A theoretical and empirical overview

Professor Aldert Vrij

Professor Vrij started by debunking some of the myths about detecting deception. Research has demonstrated that nonverbal cues to deceit (such as fidgeting or gaze aversion) tend to be faint and unreliable. Research has also questioned the validity of anxiety based techniques (those based on the theory that liars will be more anxious than truth-tellers). Over the last decade Vrij and his research team have instead focused on interview strategies that involve questions that liars find more difficult than truth tellers. Such questions either elicit reliable cues to deceit or amplify differences between liars and truth-tellers. These strategies increase the amount of thinking the interviewee, particularly a liar, has to do. The Cognitive Approach to deception detection has been shown to result in a significant increase in accuracy rates compared to other deception detection approaches.

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Vrij gave three examples of Cognitive lie detection techniques. The first – the Model Statement Technique - involves encouraging interviewees to say more. Liars tend to struggle with providing detail in their deceptive stories and prompting them to add detail means they have to make things up on the hoof. This makes their stories less plausible. The 'model' statement is an audio recording of someone giving a great deal of detail about an event, unrelated to the topic of investigation, which is played to interviewees to demonstrate the level of detail that they are expected to give. Studies show that both liars and truth-tellers give longer statements when they have been played the model statement, but liars tend to sound less plausible and give fewer details about the core event. More detail on the technique can be found in the CREST guide to the [Model Statement Technique](#).

The second approach is the Unexpected Question Technique. Liars prepare themselves before an interview and this can make their lies difficult to detect. The trick for the interviewer is to ask questions for which interviewees may not have prepared, but which are easy for a truth-teller to answer. For example, interviewees might anticipate questions about what happened during an event (e.g., a visit to a particular location) but not about the process leading up to that visit (e.g. the planning for the visit). When someone has genuinely experienced the entire event they will be able to recall contextual details without difficulty, whereas liars may not have prepared to answer such questions. Read more about the [Unexpected Question Technique](#) in our CREST guide.

Finally, Vrij outlined the Verifiability Technique, which involves asking interviewees to provide details that the interviewer can check. An interviewee, for instance, might give details of when they used an ATM or of a specific people they were with and to whom the interviewer can speak. Liars tend to struggle to provide such detail, which can make their deception easier to detect compared to just being asked to provide an account of an event. The Verifiability Technique is the subject of a CREST guide which can be downloaded [here](#). Although none of these techniques are fool-proof, they do tend to make it harder for liars to get away with their deceit and enhance the interviewer's ability to judge truthful from deceptive accounts. More work needs to be done to test the techniques in field settings to check that they live up to their promise in real world settings.

*Professor Vrij (University of Portsmouth) is Principal Investigator for the CREST Eliciting Information Programme. [Read more:](#) Leal, S., Vrij, A., Warmelink, L., Vernham, Z., & Fisher, R. (2015). You cannot hide your telephone lies: Providing a model statement as an aid to detect deception in insurance telephone calls. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 20, 129-146. DOI: 10.1111/lcrp.12017*

*Vrij, A., Leal, S., Mann, S., Vernham, Z., & Brankaert, F. (2015). Translating theory into practice: Evaluating a cognitive lie detection training workshop. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 4, 110-120. doi:10.1016/j.jarmac.2015.02.002*

*Vrij, A., Fisher, R., Blank, H. (2015). A cognitive approach to lie detection: A meta-analysis. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*. DOI:10.1111/lcrp.12088.*

Panel Session

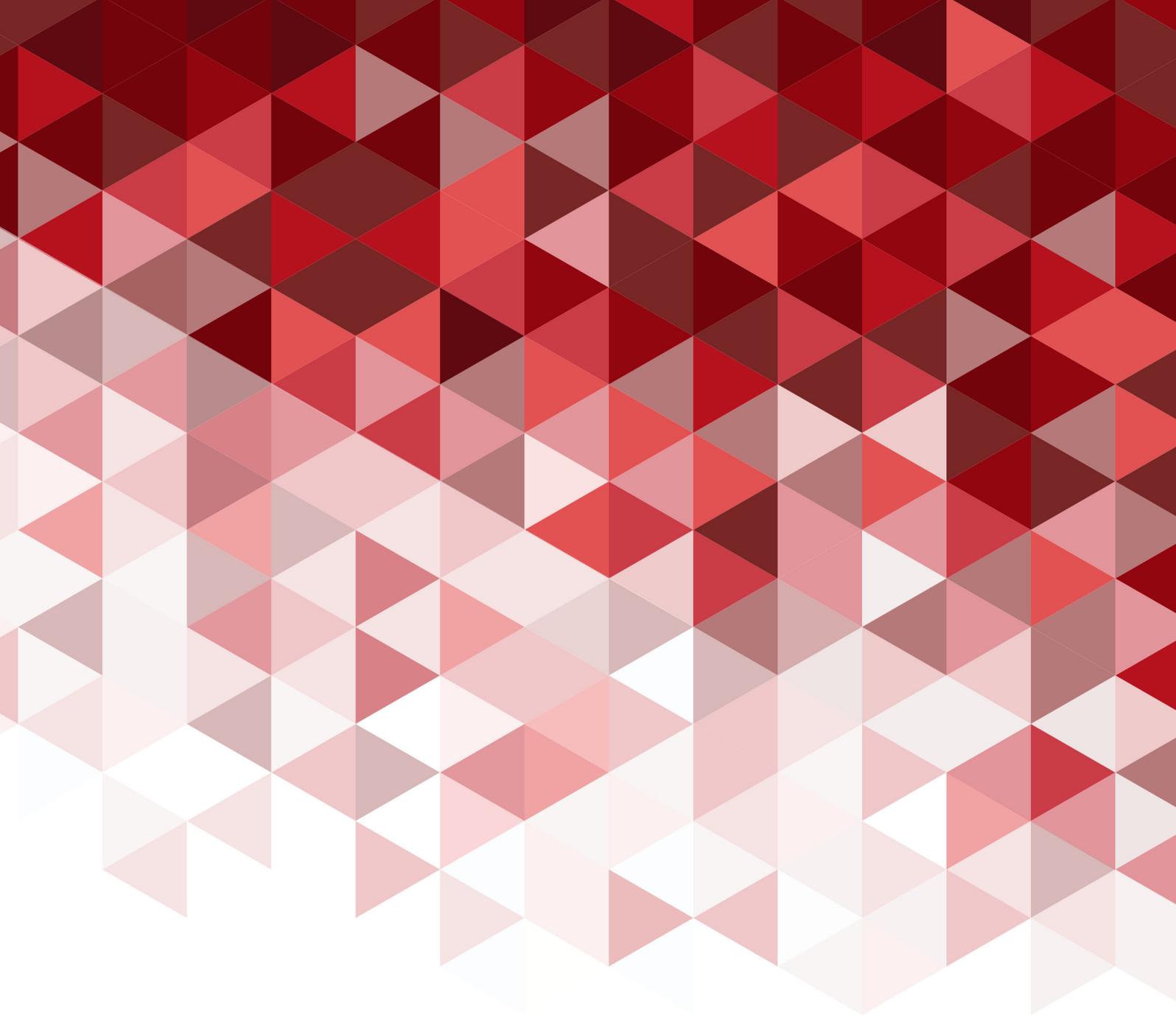
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The Masterclass finished with a Question and Answer session with the researchers. One question of particular interest concerned how interviewers can manage their own cognitive load – the complex task of coming up with good questions and deploying interview techniques effectively whilst still attending to the answers being given. One suggestion from the panel was to use two interviewers to spread the load, and also to use structured retrieval methods like the Timeline Technique to take some pressure off the interviewer.

Another question was about techniques for interviewing a number of individuals from the same group (a terrorist or organised crime cell, for instance). Interviewing people separately can reveal significant differences in their stories which might help interviewers detect when they are being misled, but the panel warned that interviewers should be cautious when using inconsistency as a cue to deceit – people naturally remember different details differently, so even truth tellers may give inconsistent stories. Vrij spoke about studies he has done on detecting lies by pairs of people. Interviewing them together and forcing them to take turns to tell the story makes it very difficult for lying pairs, which can reveal their deceit.

Finally, the panel was asked what advice they have for interviewers about when to use which technique. The panel said that this was the next step in the research – to determine which techniques are most effective with which sort of interviewees and in what sort of context.

Although plenty remains to be done, the Masterclass demonstrated the huge progress in academic research on investigative interviewing and gave the practitioners new ideas to use in their work.



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