**Techniques of Investigation**

A vital aspect of working as an investigator is skill as an interviewer. Numerous systems and methods exist for interviewing suspects and witnesses, as well as various types of interview training.

**Reid Technique**

For a long time, the Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation has been the standard for law enforcement and other professionals. This method employs basic human psychology and skills its creator learned as a polygrapher. Various law enforcement agencies have adopted the procedures and regularly use them in interviews and interrogations.

There are three components to the Reid method.

1. In the *factual analysis* phase, investigators use available evidence and testimony to eliminate improbable subjects, develop possible suspects and leads, increase confidence in identifying truthful or guilty individuals, and identify proper interrogational strategies.
2. The *interviewing* stage involves behavioral analysis wherein interviewers develop rapport and establish baseline behaviors—certain visual and verbal cues that are normal for the interviewee. Then, they ask behavior-provoking questions to see if the suspect deviates from these behaviors. If they are reasonably certain that the interviewee has committed the crime in question, the interrogation phase begins.
3. During the *interrogation* phase, investigators make sure to interrupt any attempt by the suspect to deny guilt. They also provide various themes that allow the suspect some form of moral justification for committing the crime.Interrogators “steer the subject toward a confession by offering a face-saving alternative. This process is called ‘minimization’—downplaying the moral consequences of the crime without mentioning the legal ones.”Investigators also frequently deploy the “maximization” technique, exaggerating the available evidence and the seriousness of the potential punishment. This environment can cause stress to the interviewee and break down any resistance to a confession.

**PEACE Model**

Both the United States and Great Britain recognized the potential for inaccuracy in pressurized interviewing environments. In 1992, a study of police interviews in Great Britain found approximately one-third of 400 interviews less than satisfactory. This led to the creation of the PEACE interview technique. PEACE is an acronym for the five steps of the process.

1. Preparation and planning
2. Engage and explain
3. Account clarification and challenge
4. Closure
5. Evaluation

The PEACE model focuses on determining relevant facts, as opposed to seeking confessions. With this technique, “interviewers are encouraged to be fair and open-minded and to pursue reliable, true and accurate information.”

While there certainly are similarities between the PEACE and Reid methods, especially the interviewing phase of the Reid technique, distinct differences exist in the way interviewers approach subjects. In interviews reflecting the PEACE model:

The investigators frequently asked open-ended, leading, and repetitive questions; disclosed evidence to suspects; and challenged suspect’s accounts, often by pointing out contradictions and inconsistencies. Yet, they never resorted to threats, promises and intimidation, or the kinds of maximization and minimization tactics through which threats and promises are often implied.

To date, the PEACE technique has proven as successful as the Reid at obtaining confessions from the guilty.

**Cognitive Approach**

The Cognitive Interview technique also shares similarities with the PEACE model. This method hinges on three psychological processes: 1) memory and cognition, 2) social dynamics, and 3) communication. The Cognitive method attempts to guide interviewees through their memories to obtain the richest and most relevant information possible. This usually is accomplished by using cognitive resources efficiently and asking open-ended questions followed by more specific probing inquiries. In this technique, there are separate approaches for witnesses and suspects.

For witnesses, the Cognitive approach involves five steps.

1. Introduction
2. Open-ended narration
3. Follow-up questions
4. Review
5. Closing

In this model, subjects are “encouraged to generate large amounts of information before any challenge is made.” In effect, the Cognitive technique allows interviewees to provide the details they deem important to their experience. The interviewer’s purpose in the process is “to guide the witness to those memory records that are richest in relevant information and to facilitate communication when these mental records have been activated.”

This technique does not rely on confrontation, but rather on the interviewer helping the witness revisit the scene and recall as much as possible. Interviewees should do approximately 80 percent of the talking. This distribution can be accomplished by an interviewer who relies on open-ended questions and careful guidance to assist the interviewee in invoking the external (e.g., weather, room details), emotional (e.g., fear, mood) and cognitive (e.g., thoughts) factors around the event.

When interviewing a suspect, the Cognitive model differs in that it includes eight steps.

1. Introduction
2. Narrative
3. Drawing/sketch
4. Follow-up with open-ended questions
5. Reverse-order technique
6. Challenge
7. Review
8. Close

Much like the PEACE method and the interviewing stage of the Reid system, the Cognitive technique is generally nonconfrontational. However, there are built-in mechanisms designed to increase the cognitive load on the brain.

One example of this is the reverse-order technique, wherein interviewees must tell their stories backwards. Research reveals that the reverse-order process is particularly difficult for people with fabricated stories. This is because people are used to telling stories chronologically. Changing the order requires more thinking and processing, causing liars to make mistakes in their narratives, which collected evidence and witness testimony can disprove.

**Kinesic Method**

The Kinesic Interview Technique is like the Cognitive method in that it relies on moving the mind and body out of equilibrium and on the human reaction to stress. Advocates of the technique believe that this reaction, prompted by questioning, will lead to meaningful behaviors exhibited by verbal and nonverbal indicators of deception.

The Kinesic method identifies three distinct categories into which meaningful behavior can be divided.

1. Self-initiated statements by suspects, which they make without prompting
2. Prompted verbal responses after interviewers ask certain questions
3. Nonverbal body positioning—physiological changes and gestures or lack thereof

After establishing baseline behaviors for the interviewee, investigators watch and listen for deviations from the norm.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

In recent years, the number of studies done on each of these techniques has increased, with intriguing findings. Scientists have found positives in the Reid technique, which, “among others, can be effective in eliciting true confessions largely as a result of social influence processes that have been shown to produce powerful effects in psychological studies of conformity, obedience to authority, and compliance to requests.”

However, these same social influence processes also can have a negative effect in the form of false confessions, particularly when “the techniques of interrogation which rely on pressure and persuasion, sometimes coercion, steadily break down a suspect and change their perceptions of their situation such that they come to see the act of confessing as being in their self-interest or the only way to get out of a situation.”

Although most Reid technique-trained investigators do not wish to extract a false confession, they sometimes are unaware of the psychological impact of their approach, as well as their own potential biases.

There are three sequential errors, which occur during a police-solicited false confession, that lead to a wrongful conviction. Investigators first misclassify an innocent person as guilty; they next subject him to a guilt-presumptive, accusatory interrogation that invariably lies about evidence and often involves the repeated use of implicit and explicit promises and threats as well. Once they have elicited a false admission, they pressure the suspect to provide a postadmission narrative that they jointly shape, often supplying the innocent suspect with the (public and nonpublic) facts of the crime.

The Reid and Kinesic techniques rely on the interpretation of verbal and nonverbal behaviors classified as deceptive, but science has shown that humans are not good at interpreting such signals. Research actually indicates that people are better at detecting deception when they listen only to the audio of a statement, instead of both watching and listening.In general, individuals “have little more than coin-flipping odds of guessing if someone is telling the truth, and numerous surveys have shown that police do no better.”

In one study, the only difference in the detection of deception between random people on the street and trained law enforcement officers was the confidence in their ability to do so. Students actually outperformed police officers, but the officers were more certain they were correct.

Implicit and explicit biases also come into play with each of the interview techniques described. As investigators listen to and assess interviewees, they may not take into account their own preformed opinions concerning guilt or innocence. This internal bias can be a fatal problem for each interview technique:

A volume of research has demonstrated that when a person generates a specific hypothesis early in an investigation (e.g. this person is guilty), their attention becomes focused on information that confirms their hypothesis (e.g. evidence that suggests the person is guilty), while information that contradicts their hypothesis (e.g. exculpatory evidence) tends to be ignored or overlooked.

The Cognitive and PEACE techniques have their own unique sets of strengths and weaknesses, in addition to the issues described previously. Early studies of the PEACE model have shown promise, revealing a significantly lower rate of false confessions. Still, considering the fact that most of the relevant research is from the United Kingdom, there remains some question as to how much culture plays a role in the success.

Meanwhile, studies have shown that the Cognitive system provides more valid details than other methods while maintaining accuracy. This approach also can assist individuals in recalling complex events and enhance episodic memory. Investigators were able to elicit 55 percent more information from a subject after receiving Cognitive technique training.

Weaknesses of the Cognitive method include the time it takes to administer the interview, the focus needed by the interviewer to administer the technique successfully, and the fact that it does not work as effectively on certain segments of the population.

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**Following are some verbal indicators of dishonesty:**

• Skipping around in sentences.

• Stopping sentences or leaving off the end.

• Inappropriate laughter

Starting to speak in the third person.

• Telling the interviewer that they have done things (similar to the things currently under investigation) wrong in the past.

• Repeating the interviewer’s question.

• Asking the interviewer to repeat the question.

• Asking the interviewer “are you accusing me”?

• Giving very short answers.

• Overgeneralizations (any, all, never, always etc).

• Saying “I can’t recall”.

**The following phrases are usually indicators that the subject is going to finish the sentence with a lie:**

• “I swear on the bible that I didn’t…”

• “To tell you the truth…”

• “To the best of my knowledge…”

• “You may not believe this but…”

• “I know that this sounds strange but…”

**Some signs of submission are:**

• Less forceful denials or lack of denials.

• Slumped posture.

• Eyes looking down.

• Teary eyes or crying.

• Letting out a sigh.