

Interviews are all about speaking with a purpose to someone," says Ian Brown, a senior forensic investigator with Navigant Consulting. There is, he notes, an important distinction to be drawn between information and evidence obtained during questioning, "All evidence will contain information but not necessarily vice versa." The interviewer always needs to ask whether the information obtained is evidentially acceptable; even if the initial aim is purely to gather knowledge for intelligence purposes he or she will want to keep in mind throughout if the material gleaned has potential for conversion into evidence.

In approaching an interview it is useful, Brown suggests, to follow the PEACE framework that was developed by the Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in the late 1980s in response to concerns about lack of consistent structure in law enforcement questioning. PEACE stands for Planning and Preparation, Engage and Explain, Account Clarification Challenge, Closure and Evaluation. The first stage is critical; "The single largest cause of failure is a failure of planning and preparation," according to Brown, "It may take months." Creating a rapport at the outset will build the subject's confidence; this is the engage and explain part. Clarification and challenge is the interrogation of the individual's version of events. Brown advises against using a rigid question plan as it may be hard to keep to, even beyond the first response if that leads off at an unexpected, yet possibly very useful tangent: "I put down topic heads and sometimes, if technical correctness is needed, I write out the question." Once the subject has offered their account, it can be explored and challenged. At the end of this examination, whether the subject is a witness or suspect, they will want to know what happens next. It's important to help them here, not least as their cooperation may be needed if they have to be re-

interviewed. The final, evaluation stage is twofold; firstly, it entails assessing the information gained during the interview and determining if it confirms or contradicts previous thinking, and secondly, the questioner reviews their own performance. "I've conducted interviews for 30 years," says Brown, "and I'm still learning." He re-stresses the importance of building the relationship with the subject right from the start and taking care with use of language, the wrong choice of words may all too easily create friction.

The cognitive interviewing model, which Brown favours, was developed by psychologists during the 1980s. He advises anyone interested to read "Memory Enhancing Techniques for Investigative Interviewing: The Cognitive Interview" by Fisher and Geiselman. The approach, which is grounded in research on how the memory works, aims to assist the compliant subject – witness or suspect – provide a full and accurate account of an incident. It starts from the premise that memory is not a straightforward recording process; it has to be reconstructed as different parts of an incident are stored in different parts of the brain. Unlike conventional inquisitorial interviewing, where the interrogator seeks to direct the session, the cognitive method hands control to the subject through the use of big, open questions, like "Tell me, what do you remember about that day", and close, 'active' listening to the responses. It is important not to interrupt but to store up any questions that suggest themselves. After the initial account has been given, the person is asked to think again if there's anything else that they may have missed.

The next step is to work at focussed retrieval, which means reinstating the context of the incident to be recalled, transporting the interviewee back to the time and place, asking them to include any little detail that will add colour and perhaps jog further memories. As well as visualisation



of the setting, if a series of events is under consideration the chronology may well be critical. "In my experience a person's recall of a whole day lasts between 45 and 90 seconds," says Brown. The cognitive approach aims to detail precisely everything that was done, to try to avoid the editing, unconscious or otherwise, that subjects carry out when answering. It may be necessary to home in on a specific hour, 30-minute or even shorter interval. Often tiny, seemingly insignificant facts can prove essential to solving a case. Brown uses the example of a murder inquiry when, only after witnesses had been interviewed several times did one mention seeing somebody in a red coat on the periphery of the scene. This observation, when put to other witnesses, who had viewed the event from different angles, led to confirmation that a person so dressed had indeed been present and enabled police to fix his location.

Drilling far down into the detail of a subject's narrative is also useful for gauging whether they are telling the truth. When asked to give as full an account as possible of the event as possible, most people will respond with a chronological sequence. The interviewer will then invite them to expand on particular points in the history. All questions should be as short and focused as possible. A question such as 'what did you do immediately before that?' should yield a response consistent with the rest of the narrative if the person is truthful. It is very hard for someone who is lying to preserve the integrity of their story if they are asked to relate it in reverse.

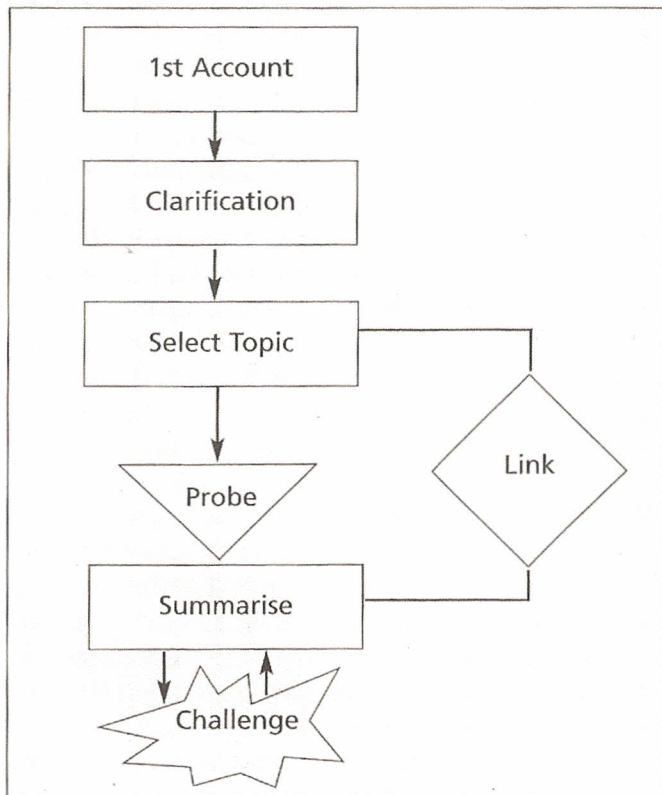
Another feature of cognitive interviewing is changing perspective. Instead of trying to remember the situation from their own point of view, the subject is asked to imagine themselves in an alternative position at the scene. Brown uses a train journey as an illustration. The subject puts themselves back in the carriage and first calls to mind who was sitting on either side. They are then asked to think about what they would have seen if they had been sitting opposite. A variation on this third person approach is to adopt the view of a CCTV camera which could be stationed above, in front, behind the interviewee; the purpose is to draw out the full 360 degrees of knowledge about the incident.

Subjects are also asked to say how they feel about the event, which may produce unexpected insights and leads. Brown cites a case in which a PA told how she was very upset when asked to complete her boss's expenses form to cover a claim for a stay in a hotel in Brighton, knowing that he had been in Paris at the time. She thought that he was having an affair when in fact the claim was purely a financial fraud on the company.

When dealing with suspects, Brown is a strong advocate of the early interview along traditional Q&A lines in which the questioner keeps control: "It may get no more than the person's account but memory does fade." He will clarify information provided and then question on a specific topic, probing for detail. This step is followed by summarising the

findings in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable understanding of the matters explored. The final and most demanding stage, which calls for as much pre-planning as possible, is to challenge the suspect's version. The process, which is illustrated in the diagram below, should be repeated for as many topics as need to be tackled.

Brown would expect a suspect to lie to avoid punishment but notes that there are other reasons for subjects to deceive: for personal advantage or to bolster their image, whether in their own or other people's eyes. The way people lie also varies but broadly falls into one of two forms: active, which entails presenting a falsehood as truth; and passive, which is akin to evasion. To actively lie



demands real thought and concentration since the person has to keep track of their 'story' while suppressing some or all of the real narrative. The mental effort required also makes it hard to lie with convincing displays of emotion. The most accomplished liars will have rehearsed their role and may have played it so often that they come to believe it – "Yes, I gained a first from Oxford." Passive lying, by contrast, is characterised by not saying something which would contradict a wrongful impression or deliberately not answering the question posed. Not all lying is bad though, Brown cautions – a degree of discretion in comments about dress and appearance, for example, is essential in personal relationships.

Ian Brown may be contacted on tel: +44 (0) 20 7015 8808; alternatively, email: [ian.brown@navigantconsulting.com](mailto:ian.brown@navigantconsulting.com). Reporting by Timon Molloy.