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Time Sensitive Interviews with Suspects, Witnesses, and Informants: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Obtaining information quickly is crucial in many law enforcement, security, and military operations, particularly in time-sensitive scenarios such as terrorist attacks, hostage situations, or dynamic operational contexts. This article examines the challenges inherent in the task of eliciting time-sensitive information, focusing on the difficulties faced by both interviewers and interviewees in high-pressure or time-limited situations. We review current legislative provisions for urgent interviews and identify a significant gap in empirical research on effective methodologies for information gathering in such scenarios. Here we argue for the adoption of rapport-based approaches, supported by empirical evidence, to improve the efficacy of time-sensitive elicitation. In particular, we examine the adaptability of the ORBIT model of communication and the recently developed rapport-based Time-Critical Questioning (TCQ) protocol for this context. Research to date indicates that rapport-based strategies, that emphasize clear and adaptive communication, foster focus and cooperation and increase the yield of actionable intelligence in time-sensitive situations. Finally, we outline a roadmap for future research and practice, encouraging collaborative efforts to develop evidence-based practice and training that address the unique challenges of time-sensitive interviews and enhance operational outcomes.

Keywords: Time-sensitive interview, rapport, ORBIT, suspect, witness, urgent interview, intelligence

Getting information quickly is crucial across a range of law enforcement, security, and military operational contexts. The need to get information quickly can be due to the *urgency of the intelligence requirement*. In the apocryphal 'ticking bomb' scenario, productive interactions with hostile suspects or their associates that capture time-sensitive, actionable intelligence may avert a terrorist

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atrocity. However, terrorist suspects in law enforcement or military contexts are not the only sources of time-sensitive intelligence: effective interactions with witnesses, victims, or other sources are also vital for informing dynamic operational response or facilitating the efficient triage of resources. For example, in a siege or hostage-taking incident, accessing key details about the perpetrators, weapons, locations, or escape routes in a timely manner from released or escaping hostages can inform strategic and tactical response. Witnesses to a marauding terrorist attack or complex coordinated attacks may hold information that, if accessed quickly, can guide real-time decision-making, inform the allocation of resources, aid in on-going threat assessment, and help neutralize distributed activities. In these examples, collapsing incident timelines create an urgent information requirement reliant on effective time-sensitive interactions to access information of immediate priority or tactical value.

In other operational scenarios, the need to get information quickly may be due to the *nature of the interaction context*. For example, a handler or other interviewer might have only a brief window of time in which to debrief an intelligence source safely due to the pace of a live operation or specific contextual considerations, such as debriefings in custodial environments. For instance, prolonged or unaccountable absence could cause suspicion and place the informant or other detainee perceived to be communicating with the authorities in danger. Irrespective of the operational context, nature of the information requirement, or cooperativeness of the interactants, time-sensitivity is a core feature of many real-world interactions. In this article, we examine the challenges inherent in time-sensitive information elicitation, identify approaches that are likely to be productive in such interactions and outline a route map for future research and practice.

Current Provisions for the Conduct of Time-Sensitive Interviews

While there are numerous scenarios in which time-sensitive information elicitation is necessary, only one context has been the focus of specific legislative provision. In law enforcement contexts where there is a potential threat to life, damage to property, risk of alerting co-offenders or likelihood of interfering with evidence, police officers may be authorised to conduct an urgent interview (Roberts, 2011). For example, in both the UK and US, legal frameworks allow for the conduct of such urgent interviews (sometimes referred to as imminent threat interviews, safety interviews, or public safety interrogations) whereby certain usual procedural safeguards for the treatment of suspects, including right to legal representation, may be temporarily suspended if there is risk of imminent threat to life, serious injury or property damage. Procedures for the conduct of urgent interviews are closely regulated, documented, and intended to be used only in exceptional circumstances. The same is true of other jurisdictions internationally where the conduct of urgent interviews falls under legislative provision (e.g., Australia) or within in the

remit of relevant criminal codes (e.g., The Netherlands). In England and Wales, such interviews fall under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and its associated Codes of Practice, particularly Code C. In the US, conditions for the conduct of urgent safety interviews are largely determined by case law, particularly the landmark Supreme Court case New York v. Quarles (1984). In both frameworks, it is imperative that normal safeguards are restored once the immediate threat has been averted. While safety interviews are permitted in any criminal investigation, they are, unsurprisingly, most usually conducted in counterterrorism contexts (Hill, 2015). In the context of intelligence gathering, it is also worth noting that the UK Code of Practice for Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS; Home Office, 2022) also makes specific provision for changes to formal arrangements (e.g., oral authorisation instead of written; Section 5) in urgent cases.

Although legal frameworks provide for the implementation of time-sensitive interviews, to date there has been very limited research on how such interviews are conducted. Indeed, most writing on the subject has focused on consideration of relevant legislative frameworks and related legal rights (e.g., Hill, 2015; Mendelle & Bajwa, 2009; Roberts, 2011). Beyond the work conducted by our respective teams, we are not aware of any empirical research pursuing this issue, despite the extensive wider literature on investigative interviewing and interrogation. Most critically, until recently, there has been no concerted focus on the actual format most appropriate for such interviews or the development of dedicated approaches or techniques to support interviewers. Furthermore, the wider context of time-sensitive elicitation beyond interaction with suspects, has been entirely ignored in most discussions of this topic. Given the importance and critical nature of contexts in which time-sensitive interactions are necessitated, and the unique elicitation challenges present in such interactions, this is a surprising and dangerous oversight. In the following section, we examine the key challenges from an elicitation perspective for both the interviewer and interviewee.

Challenges for Time Sensitive Elicitation

Challenges for the Interviewer. Consider a scenario in which a terrorist attack has been perpetrated; for example, the detonation of an explosive device at a high-profile public event resulting in many civilian fatalities and causalities. Combine the emotionally charged environment of the immediate aftermath with operational uncertainty about whether this attack is a singular event or merely a decoy in advance of a secondary attack. In such circumstances, the conduct of urgent safety interviews with a just-apprehended suspect places the interviewer under significant psychological pressure. Surmon-Böhr et al. (2020a) examine precisely such a scenario in the context of the Boston bombing where one of the perpetrators, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, was interrogated on arrest to determine the level of ongoing or associated threat. Drawing on this and

related examples, Surmon-Böhr et al. (2020a) argue that urgent safety interviews likely reflect a psychologically distinct form of interview given the nature of the pressure exerted on the interviewer due to the urgency and high stakes nature of the information requirement. These elicitation challenges for interviewers can be examined at the cognitive, motivational and emotional levels.

At the cognitive level, interviewers in such scenarios are likely to experience significant cognitive load and demands arising from both the context and the task itself, which is often under-specified in terms of what precisely is required and how exactly it should be carried out. Cognitive load theory identifies three types of load (Sweller, 1998, 1994), all of which pertain to the time-sensitive elicitation context. Intrinsic load concerns the load imposed by the nature of the information being processed and complexity of the task (Schnotz & Kurschner, 2007). Extraneous load is associated with external factors, which notably, can include time pressure (Galy et al., 2012). The final load component is germane load which is associated with the application of skills in a novel environment (Paas et al., 2004). In investigative interviewing more broadly, there are several features of interviewing that contribute to cognitive load, for example, generating questions, identifying topics, detecting discrepancies, seeking clarification, identifying information gaps, and ultimately seeing the overall picture, or sense making, of the account provided. In a series of studies examining the effect of cognitive load on interviewers in simulated forensic interviews, Hanway et al. (2021) found that the demands placed on cognitive resources during interviews resulted in a reduction in performance including less accurate recall of what the interviewee said. The time pressure imposed by an urgent information requirement likely exacerbates this challenge, impeding concurrent information processing. Worse still, under such conditions, informational or motivational biases become an increasing hazard for interviewers – with risks further exacerbated in a context of incomplete, inaccurate, or dynamic incoming information (Lin & Jia, 2023). In such scenarios, early (and potentially incorrect) information may play an unduly influential role in the conduct of the interview; questioning may become agenda-driven or worse, confirmation seeking (Jonas et al., 2001). Given the urgent information context, there may be little time or opportunity to detect such bias and even less for course correction. Finally, in the aftermath of a devastating attack, emotions and associated physiological responses, including stress response, are likely to be elevated with largely negative impacts on higher-order cognitive performance, including sense-making, ‘bigger picture’ perception and decision-making capacity (Reale et al., 2023). These challenges may well be experienced in the context of an atrocity which still holds the potential of further violence. Unsurprisingly, the goal of preventing further atrocities may weigh heavily on the interviewer, creating a high pressure and complex psychological state with attendant potential for

moral injury[1] (e.g., Čartolovni et al., 2021; Tapson et al., 2022). As noted by Roberts (2011) and echoed in Surmon-Böhr, et al. (2020a), such interviews are "one of the most difficult situations a police officer may encounter and represent a powerful test of professionalism and integrity" (p.10–11). Even in less acute scenarios where time is of the essence, interviewers still operate in a psychological and communication space that is significantly different to that associated with longer-format investigative interviews (e.g., a detailed Cognitive Interview) and with little opportunity for consolidation and review.

Scenarios where there is limited time to talk to a particular person due to contextual factors also present a challenge for interviewers. Consider a situation in which an interviewer operating overseas has an opportunity to speak with a particular person of interest in detention. While there may not be the same level of urgency or time-sensitivity as in the sharp-end scenarios discussed above, there is pressure on the interviewer to make maximum use of this limited window of opportunity and gain as much priority or actionable intelligence as possible. This may, after all, be the only opportunity to gain intelligence from this particular source. Therefore, the interviewer must attempt to build rapport and gain the trust of an interviewee in a fraction of the time they would usually have to do so. If the interviewee does choose to engage, the interviewer must then decide what information to prioritise and seek further clarification on in the limited time available. This may be particularly challenging, in terms of cognitive load and decision-making capacity, in situations where the interviewer is unsure of the full extent of information potentially available.

Challenges at the Interviewee Level. Mass event scenarios, such as terrorist attacks, not only impact on those tasked with acquiring information but also those who hold information. For an apprehended suspect withholding information about secondary attacks or escaping terrorist associates, the goal may involve little more than remaining silent or deploying counter-interrogation tactics (obfuscating, waffling, deception) to waste time and scupper the interviewer's attempts to extract actionable intelligence in a collapsing incident timeline. In other instances, suspects may derail the interview by using it as a platform to expound on ideology, declare objectives or make demands to frustrate their captors (Alison et al., 2014). However, not all urgent interviews are likely to be so clear cut. For example, in the case of the Boston bombing, analysis of the interaction shows that the suspect Tsarnaev was clearly concerned for his brother (who died while escaping), friends and wife (see

[1] Drescher et al. (2011) define moral injury as "disruption in an individual's confidence and expectations about one's own or others' motivation or capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner. This injury is brought about by bearing witness to perceived immoral acts, failure to stop such actions, or perpetration of immoral acts, in particular actions that are inhumane, cruel, depraved, or violent, bringing about pain, suffering, or death of others." (p. 9)

Surmon-Böhr et al., 2020a). Resistance, and in particular resistance accompanied by the suspect signalling that there may be some room for discussion (e.g., revealing areas of potential leverage) needs to be met with a sophisticated response unlikely to be conveyed through closed questioning tactics.

Interviewees, whether resistant or cooperative, are also likely to experience the psychological and physiological effects of arousal and attendant effects on cognitive performance. Even for entirely cooperative interviewees the task of attempting to remember and report relevant and accurate information quickly while being fully cognizant of the distressing scenario and associated urgency is likely to present an obstacle to fluid reporting. At a purely cognitive level, focusing on the task at hand and initiating retrieval in order to provide interviewers with the required information may be challenging in busy, distracting, traumatising, or unfamiliar field environments, particularly if an incident is on-going. Although an immediate interview may benefit from limited opportunity for forgetting, retrieval attempts may be hampered by sub-optimal encoding resulting in weaker memory traces. This could be due to a range of factors including focus of attention, viewing conditions, velocity of the incident, confused immediate aftermath etc. Witnesses or victims may be injured or have legitimately distracting concerns for others in the vicinity while processing their own emotional response to the incident (Eliashar et al., 2024; Schlenger et al., 2002; Schuster et al., 2001). Interviewees may struggle to organise and reproduce their recollections in a time-sensitive interaction, even in a less challenging encoding environment where the urgency of the interaction has been signalled by the interviewer. Recent research by Hope et al. (under review) found that in time-limited interviews about an extended interactive experience, some participants apparently struggled to organise and initiate the reporting of target information about what happened, particularly when approached in a more direct manner. A further risk at the interviewee level, is that the severity of the incident and desire to 'help' may be a risk for 'over-compliance' with the interview (Roper & Shewan, 2002). This vulnerability becomes particularly dangerous if the interviewer reduces the interaction to a series of closed questions (Oxburgh et al., 2010). Finally, just as those charged with obtaining information, witnesses may well be in an emotional, distressed or even traumatised state. Although the neuropsychological literature indicates that moderate levels of stress are, in fact, beneficial for memory (Goldfarb, 2019), encoding and retrieval in chaotic and potentially dangerous environments is most likely to result in impaired or at the very least reduced recall of the details of dynamic or threatening events, a phenomenon that has been empirically observed in simulations involving operational responders (e.g., Hope et al., 2012, 2016).

This section has considered only some of the wide-ranging interviewer and interviewee factors likely to be present in the context of time-sensitive interviews, ranging from the effects of cognitive load, particularly as

exacerbated by time pressure, through motivational and other psychological challenges, including heightened emotional response. Irrespective of these difficulties, however, the challenges present for the interviewee become challenges for the interviewer to overcome in the course of time sensitive elicitation, while simultaneously regulating and monitoring their own response and securing reliable or actionable information. An over-arching challenge at the interviewer level is that in the absence of dedicated evidence-based frameworks for time-sensitive elicitation, interviewers are left out on a limb with essentially two options: (i) resort to maladaptive practices in terms of approach or questioning or, best case scenario (ii) fall back on, or attempt on-the-hoof adaptations of, approaches better suited to long format interviews or interrogations. Clearly, neither option is optimal and neither option addresses the real challenge of time-sensitive information elicitation: communicating effectively with appropriately moderated intensity to convey both urgency and the motivational or leverage rewards of providing priority information.

What Happens in Time-Sensitive Interviews?

Given the sharp-end nature of contexts involving time-sensitive interviews, and particularly the (temporary) loosening of legal safeguards in the case of urgent safety interviews, legal scholars have expressed concern that, in such circumstances, officers are likely to resort to accusatorial, manipulative or aggressive methods to obtain information (Roberts, 2011). While there is historical evidence of harsh, unethical and ultimately ineffective approaches being implemented in some contexts (e.g., military; see Gage, 2011), other sources suggest this is not necessarily a typical default, especially in policing and law enforcement contexts. Reporting on interviewer behaviours observed during high fidelity simulation-based police training exercises designed to reproduce some of the contextual challenges present in urgent interviews, Surmon-Böhr et al. (2020a) noted behaviours ranging from ineffective attempts to convey urgency by ineffective domineering and maladaptive methods (e.g., shouting, banging on the table) to ineffective attempts to build rapport by being patronizing and over-familiar, while simultaneously failing to convey seriousness or urgency. Critically, these two areas of communication competency (conveying urgency, building rapport) likely underpin elicitation success in time-sensitive interactions, particularly around areas of reluctance or resistance (discussed in further detail below).

Another feature noted both by Surmon-Böhr et al. (2020a) and anecdotally by practitioners is a tendency to resort to poor quality questioning practices (e.g., use of closed, rapid-fire, generic, or potentially leading questions) in time-sensitive situations. This is unsurprising in the absence of evidence-based approaches or widely endorsed guidance (depending on jurisdiction and tasking), as questioning practice tends to be driven by the interviewer's immediate priorities. Practice in the field often relies on tactical questioning or

use of a direct approach, both of which typically involve a sequence of focused or closed questions. Although elements of this approach may be useful if questions are well-formulated and appropriately sequenced, other aspects are problematic in the context of time-sensitive interactions with witnesses, victims or other largely cooperative interviewees. Firstly, these methods typically allocate little time for building rapport, which impedes the development of trust and cooperation, potentially reducing the interviewee to a mere 'question answerer' (Vrij, Hope, & Fisher, 2014). Consequently, success hinges entirely on the interviewer knowing and posing the 'right questions'. This can be problematic if the interviewer is unaware of the full extent of information the interviewee might possess or lacks insights into the incident or the interviewee's experience. Inevitably this situation produces significant cognitive workload. Furthermore, if the interviewer is working with an incomplete or inaccurate representation of the information requirements, this kind of questioning approach can be off-track or even at cross-purposes with the interviewee's experiences. In such cases, valuable time might be squandered on irrelevant questions, while crucial questions that could elicit significant information remain unasked. Rapid-fire questioning is also susceptible to counter-interrogation tactics or obstruction by uncooperative individuals who can easily deflect relevant questions with a 'don't know' response (Hope, 2018).

Secondly, direct questioning is unlikely to produce particularly detailed or informative responses, especially if the interviewer relies on closed questions that prompt brief or one-word answers (Oxburgh et al., 2010) rather than more informative detail. Thirdly, initiating direct questioning without establishing clear expectations about the interaction's objectives may lead to unfocused or incomplete information. Worse, it may result in a complete misalignment between the goals or understanding of the interviewer and interviewee, resulting in a frustrating interaction at cross-purposes. Finally, a harsh, abrasive, or otherwise maladaptive approach is unlikely to foster rapport or encourage the sharing of information, even by the most cooperative individuals. Worse still, in some intelligence situations where an initial interaction may necessitate a follow-up interview, a poor initial interaction is likely to be difficult to overcome in terms of repairing the relationship with the interviewee (Oostinga et al., 2018).

Finally, a key challenge for interviewers, irrespective of whether the interviewee is resistant or cooperative, is shifting gears and having the flexibility and versatility to adapt their approach for the psychological challenges of time-sensitive elicitation.

Why Time-Sensitive Interviews Need a Rapport-Based Approach

The practice of rapport-building has been empirically and anecdotally linked to numerous positive outcomes in interrogation, investigative interviewing, and human intelligence debriefings. A growing body of scientific research

demonstrates that fostering rapport helps create a non-coercive environment conducive to cooperation and information sharing (Abbe & Brandon, 2013; Alison & Alison, 2017). Data from laboratory studies, simulation exercises and real-world investigative interview indicate that rapport-based interviewing encourages adaptive interpersonal behaviour in both suspects and victims, which leads to increased information yield (Alison et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020). Research has also shown that rapport-based techniques can decrease terrorist suspects' deliberate use of strategies that are employed to resist cooperating with police and other law enforcement agencies (Alison et al., 2014).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that rapport-building and associated positive or adaptive communication may be key to the conduct of effective time-sensitive interviews. The critical question however is how interviewers can build rapport, convey a sense of time scarcity and initiate the reporting of priority or actionable intelligence by interviewees when time is limited whether due to urgency of the information requirement or the nature of the reporting context. In independent but conceptually aligned programmes of work, we have explored this issue pertaining to the approaches most likely to be effective in time-sensitive interview contexts.

Rapport in Time-Sensitive Interviews with Suspects

The direct applicability of the ORBIT approach (Observing Rapport-Based Interpersonal Techniques (ORBIT; Alison et al., 2013) to time-sensitive elicitation seems obvious. ORBIT is an evidence-based model of communication based on extensive observation and analysis of over 2000 hours of real police interviews. It combines (i) humanistic therapeutic principles to define and operationalise rapport in an investigative context, and (ii) theories of personality and interpersonal relating to help interviewers understand how to manage different types of interviewee behaviour. The model is built on an understanding that suspect interviews are inherently interactionist (i.e., an interviewer's approach impacts the suspect and vice versa) but recognises that it is up to the interviewer to create an environment conducive to rapport.

In a series of studies examining investigative interviews, the ORBIT research team identified that interviewers who (i) came across as open-minded about the investigation and did not show any judgment towards the individual in front of them; (ii) showed interest in the suspect and focused on drawing out their values and beliefs; (iii) were able to adapt fluidly to what was being said by the suspect (instead of rigidly controlling the agenda), and (iv) emphasized the suspect's right to choose to talk or not, usually had a good relationship with the suspect as demonstrated by higher levels of suspect engagement and obtaining increased evidentially useful information (Alison et al., 2013; Surmon-Böhr, et al., 2020b; Humann et al., 2023). These notions are operationalized in ORBIT's six cornerstones of rapport known as the HEEAAR

principles: Honesty, Empathy, Evocation, Adaptation, Autonomy and Reflection. With respect to application in time-sensitive scenarios, interviews with eight experienced interviewers after conducting a time-sensitive interview simulation, revealed that practitioners recognise the importance of rapport in time-sensitive interviewing (Alison & Surmon-Böhr, 2021). Specifically, interviewers perceived that the most important rapport-based strategies for time sensitive interviews were being clear, upfront, and honest with the suspect, as well as careful and reflective listening, and identifying the suspect's values and beliefs. These insights suggests that the principles of honesty, empathy, evocation and reflection may be of particular importance in time sensitive contexts.

The second part of ORBIT focuses on understanding how to manage difficult suspect behaviour based on theories of personality and interpersonal relating (Leary, 1957; Birtchnell, 1994). For the interviewer to get to a point of productive conversation and opportunity to build rapport, they must first manage the suspects' behaviour. In ORBIT, this is called interpersonal style and relates to the behaviours that are present between individuals when interacting with each other. Based on Leary's (1957) interpersonal circumplex, ORBIT contains an Interpersonal Behavioural Circle (IBC) that maps behaviours along two axes: a vertical axis of dominance–submission and a horizontal axis of hostility–friendliness. The theory is that the vertical axis works on a rule of correspondence (that is, dominant behaviour invites submissive behaviour and vice versa) and the horizontal axis works on the rule of reciprocity (that is, friendliness invites friendliness and hostility invites hostility). The model also distinguishes between adaptive (likely to promote communication) and maladaptive (likely to hinder communication) forms of relating (see Figure 1 for a schematic representation of the ORBIT IBC). The ORBIT interpersonal circle allows the dyadic interaction between interviewer and suspect to be measured. The inner circle represents adaptive behaviours, and the outer circle represents the maladaptive variants. For example, an interviewer might be adaptively in charge and advising, but, if they stray too far, they could become bossy and demanding.

ORBIT training encourages increased self-awareness and emotion regulation to manage one's own behaviour, recognizing that any behaviour, if too intense, can become problematic. It also focuses on three key interpersonal skills – interpersonal sensitivity (ability to accurately judge the nature of the person they are dealing with); interpersonal competence (displaying adaptive interpersonal behaviours and avoiding maladaptive ones); and interpersonal versatility (ability to deploy a range of different behaviours as and when they are needed). Interestingly, experienced interrogators seem to have an inherent awareness of the importance of these elements of interpersonal skill. Russano et al. (2014) found in interviews with 42 highly experienced military and federal government interrogators that individuals who were seen as 'good' interrogators were those who were both highly interpersonally skilled and

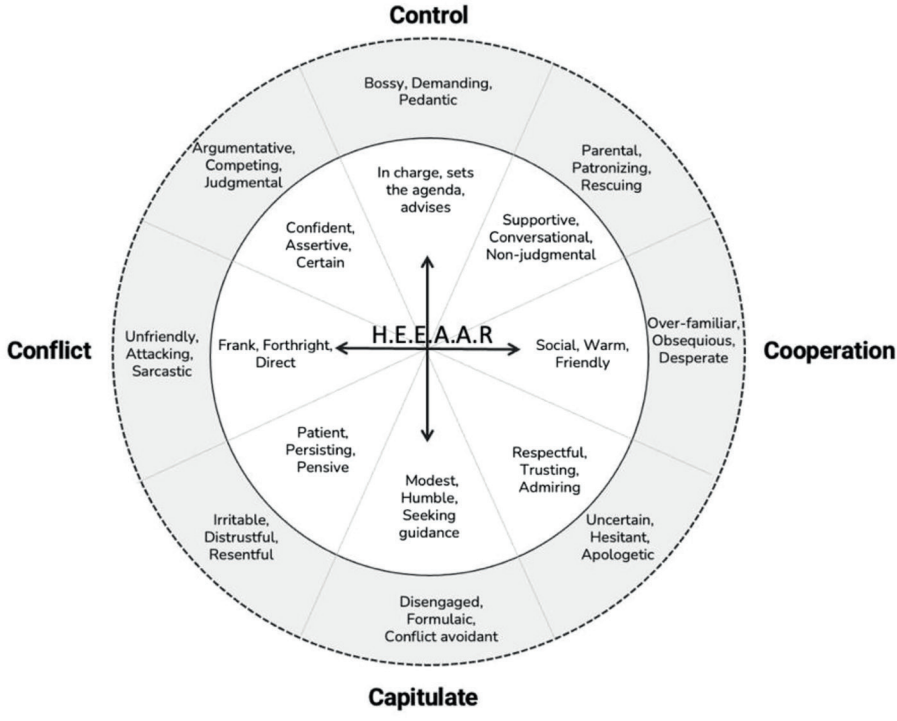

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the ORBIT interpersonal wheel

adaptive to the particular context or interaction. Alison and Surmon-Böhr (2021) reported similar findings, with participants suggesting that the best interviewers were those with naturally good interpersonal skills, self-awareness, mental agility/flexibility as well as mental 'toughness'. Clearly, and as noted by participants, these skills are likely to be key in the conduct of challenging time sensitive interviews.

So how can interviewers build rapport, create intensity and convey a sense of urgency to a suspect effectively to elicit actionable intelligence in time sensitive contexts? From an interpersonal perspective, it seems that interviewers need to adopt adaptive control and adaptive confrontation behaviours (upper and left quadrants of the IBC), at least to start with, to create intensity and convey a sense of urgency to the suspect. This means being in charge/setting the agenda, assertive/confident (adaptive control) and being direct, frank and forthright (adaptive confrontation).

Observations from simulation-based training exercises involving urgent safety interviews with 'suspects' reveals not only where interviewers struggle to progress elicitation but also where they succeed (Surmon-Böhr et al. 2020a). In a complex terrorism scenario exercise involving a simulated terrorist attack and police interviewing exercise, interviewers faced with the challenge of getting information quickly often (i) appeared to struggle to take a robust (i.e.,

positive, adaptive) approach to questioning the suspect, and (ii) sometimes failed to convey urgency or intensity with respect to resolving the imminent threat without resorting to more maladaptive behaviours (see Surmon-Böhr et al. 2020a for more detail). However, training in ORBIT improved performance within the exercises (and notably, individuals previously trained in ORBIT tactics performed most effectively). Improved performance pertained to two key areas, (i) taking an adaptive confident, frank approach to the conduct of an urgent interview; and (ii) use of effective evocation, through reflective listening and skilled use of evocative prompts to draw out the views and focus of the suspect, rather than imposing those of the interviewer. Good evocation entails the interviewer being curious and patient rather than judgmental and pressuring. This may seem contradictory to the idea of gaining information urgently, but if pressuring and imposing the interviewer's own views on the suspect shuts them down, then being patient, curious and taking time to understand the suspect's own views and values could actually be the fastest way to gaining information. Very skilled interviewers are able to guide the suspect to the reasons they hold themselves for cooperating with and talking to the police (for example, a suspect who cares very little for the consequences for themselves but is conflicted about the impact of his behaviour on his children). With knowledge of what a suspect does care about, officers are in a better position to guide the suspect to talk based on their values. As documented in the extensive coding of real-life interviews (Alison et al., 2013), understanding beliefs, motivations and values paves the way to accessing routes towards cooperation and information gain.

To illustrate how interviewers may potentially utilise evocation (understanding an individual's beliefs, motivation and values), we provide an example from the urgent interview conducted with Wayne Couzens, a former police officer, who was convicted of the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard in 2021. Bodycam footage released to the public[2] shows a seven-minute interaction which takes places in the suspect's home six days after the victim went missing and her whereabouts were still unknown. In the clip, the officers are seen conducting an urgent interview to try and find out whether Couzens has any information about where the victim is.

Officer: So we're here to talk to you about Sarah. Let me just show you a picture [shows picture]. Do you know Sarah?

Couzens: I don't, no.

[2] Footage of the Wayne Couzens interview can be found online - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zwpd7Fq4xa4

Officer: Okay. Sarah went missing – I'll show you some pictures of her on the day.

Couzens: Okay.

Officer: Sarah went missing on Wednesday. Her parents obviously and her family are really worried about her.

(Officer Attempts to Connect with Couzens by Reference to the Victim's Family's Distress.)

The enquiry that's been conducted so far had led us to come speak to you about it and see what you know about Sarah, okay. So… do you know where Sarah is?

Couzens: No.

Officer: Right, okay. Do you know anything about what happened?

Couzens: I know she went missing up in London somewhere what a week ago or so, just what I got from the news.

Officer: Okay. Have you ever personally met her?

Couzens: No, not personally, no, no.

Officer: You had any interactions with her at all?

Couzens: No. Why…why would I personally have interactions with her?

Officer: Well, it's very difficult because I can't go into a lot of the evidence because that's not part of what an urgent interview is okay. This interview is just about finding her.

Couzens: Sure

Officer: Because she's been missing for a while now

Couzens: [interrupts] Well I'm sat in handcuffs and you're asking what I know [about] her. So you must have something to say that I know her.

(Couzens Seeks a Direct and Forthright Explanation From the Officer About why they have Connected Him to the Victim.)

Officer: Well as I've said, you've been arrested on suspicion of kidnap and we believe you've been involved in her disappearance and taking her away from her family.

(Officer Again References the Impact of her Disappearance on the Victim's Family.)

Couzens: Okay…

Officer: So, we are trying to find her. Obviously, everybody is really worried about her. She's got, you know, she's got parents, she's got siblings, she's got a boyfriend. There's a lot of people that care about her

(Officer Again References the Impact on the Victim's Loved Ones and how Many People Care for Her.)

Couzens: Sure, sure (nods)

Officer: You've seen on the news, the number of people that are reaching out about her

(Officer Refers to the Scope of how Many People Care About the Victim).

Couzens: Sure

Officer: Out there looking for her every day and she's missing. So, our job, our primary job here is to try and find her and try find her safe and well.

Couzens: Okay

Officer: Now, we believe that you know something about where she is and that's why we're here to look for her and to try find her. And that's why we're talking to you now to try and get you to have a good think about it and tell us anything you can about where we might be able to find her.

(Officer Indicates that they have Reason to Believe Couzens Knows where Victim is.)

Couzens: Okay, um, well… I am in financial sh**, um and I've been um leant on by I don't know who they are – a group, a gang, whatever and they told me

I need to go and pick up girls and give them to them. So, I said, 'it's not happening' and it then came through that they are going to harm my family, take them away, and use them instead and at that point I had no option but to try and find somebody. So, I don't um, there's a couple of names… I was told a place to take her, that's it, that's all I know and handed her to this group of people.

(Couzens Admits that he has Taken the Victim, but Frames this as an Action that He did Under Duress, that he Initially Resisted, but that he Had no Choice in Order to Protect his Own Family.)

Officer: Tell me about them, I need to find them, tell me everything you know

Couzens: Okay… there was a white Sprinter van. Um they um…are…were between Lenham, Maidstone area that I dropped her off. Um I still don't know, I don't know, they just… I just parked my car up and then the van came up behind me, flashed me, they all jumped out and then they took this girl. They said… b******s, they said, 'you done good' and… I don't know whether my family is going to be alright still. They, they threatened… they threatened to take my family away from me, so with that point… I'm doing what I can to protect my family. That's it all I know it was a roundabout; we could drive there now, I could show you roughly… I don't know the Lenham, Maidstone area at all.

(Couzens Again Emphasises that His Actions were Under Duress and to Protect his Family.)

Officer: If we did it on google maps, would you like to do that?

Couzens: I drove from Ashford to Maidstone

Officer: [officer types into google maps] okay, yeah.

Couzens: There's a roundabout that breaks up I guess over, is it the first big round about you get to and it carries straight over to Maidstone. But instead, I went round that round about and back up another road. And at that point I was flashed and pulled over. Three guys got out, opened my door, opened that door and pushed me out against the front of the car, took the girl, drove off, that's it. They said we'll be in touch. So I'm here, I'm off work with stress, because I'm here to protect my family and I want to be here 24/7 for my family. They come for my family. I've got nothing myself. I got no choice.

(Couzens for a Third Time Protrays his Terrible Actions as Something he has Done for a Noble Reason - to Protect his Family.)

Officer: I'll go back to the route with you in a minute alright, but how do they contact you? How did you contact them?

As this is an urgent safety interview, the interviewer is understandably and appropriately goal directed, focusing on trying to find out any information the suspect may have about the victim's whereabouts. He is interpersonally adaptive and non-judgmental throughout - even when Couzens changes his story from denying knowing the victim to admitting to kidnapping her. This adaptability and focus helps to keep the suspect engaged and he continues giving an account that can be probed for critical details. In fact, as the interview continues, the officer continues this non-judgemental but persistent probing of the account and the plausibility of Couzen's story quickly begins to break down.

Going back to the start of the account, the officer does repeatedly reinforce a value to encourage Couzens to provide an account - the image of how the victim's loved ones would be terribly affected by her disappearance. Couzens, however, does not overtly connect with this value and instead introduces the focus on *his* family and his responsibility to protect them. He is revealing that he wants to be seen as a good person who had done a terrible thing for a noble reason. Clearly, we now know that the reality is the absolute opposite, but Couzens is revealing how he *wants* to be seen by the officers. It is important to note that proper use of evocation does not encourage the operator to agree or condone the displayed value (e.g. incorrect use - *of course, you had to protect your family*), simply that the connection is built by acknowledging the value on display (e.g. correct use - *So you are saying that they threatened your family and you felt you had no choice. Tell me who threatened you.)*. It is particularly important for practitioners in police suspect interviews to be able to acknowledge a view from the suspect without indicating agreement or support for that view. Accurate use also ensures that the view is coming from the suspect and not being influenced by the interviewer.

There is an interesting point where Couzens gives a clear indicator to the officer to be more direct – "*Well I'm sat in handcuffs and you're asking what I know [about] her. So, you must have something to say that I know her."* Here, the suspect is seeking information from the interviewer about why they are being spoken to. It is another window into the immediate headspace of the suspect - he is not thinking of how the victim's family is suffering, he is thinking *'what evidence have you got linking me to this?*' This is of course a difficult situation for the officer who must make a quick decision about how much information to disclose in this urgent interview context (if indeed they know that information at this point). However, one of the most important factors influencing a suspect's decision to talk is the strength of evidence against them (Moston & Engelberg, 2011), so being more direct and honest

about exactly why Couzens is suspected of being involved could impact his decision making about what information to give. The interviewer deals with this issue with a more general statement - "*you've been arrested on suspicion of kidnap, and we believe you've been involved in her disappearance and taking her away from her family"*. Couzens then does admit to taking the victim- and attempts to frame a story to explain these actions in which he has done so only under duress and to protect his family.

It is at this point that the interviewer could shift his reflection to the values that Couzens has introduced. The interviewer began with an appeal on behalf of the victim's family but now that Couzens has indicated his concern is for his own family the interviewer has been given clues to what Couzens is indicating he cares about. This is a common issue with using both empathy and evocation in this context. An appeal on behalf of a value that is very strong for the interviewer but is irrelevant to the perpetrator. For example, o*fficers are searching your property and we don't want any of them to be harmed. Is there anything in your property that could harm them?,* is unlikely to appeal to someone who either does not care or actively desires that officers come to harm. Effective operators develop the skill of 'value-spotting' within what the other person is saying and reflecting and acknowledging the things the interviewee indicates they care about to generate rapport.

Rapport in Time-Sensitive Interviews with Witnesses, Victims and Sources

While interactions with interviewees who at least present as broadly cooperative may seem like a straightforward task in comparison to obtaining information from resistant suspects, the task of obtaining key information, a targeted subset of all the information the interviewee may have, and accessing this information quickly remains a challenge. Again, building rapport is likely to play a key role in promoting a productive time sensitive interaction. In particular, establishing an 'effective working alliance' that comprises a shared understanding of the purpose of the interaction and the roles, goals and expectations involved is likely to be beneficial in the context of a complex experience, unfamiliar interaction and limited timeframe. This notion of a working alliance has been previously associated with rapport in investigative contexts (e.g., Alison et al., 2013; Vanderhallen et al., 2011) and draws on the wider literature on efficacy of therapeutic interventions (e.g., Hatcher & Gillaspy, 2007). In the investigative interviewing domain witnesses' perceptions of the use of clarity and of a humanitarian interviewing style (e.g., showing empathy and a positive attitude) are positively related to the development of a working alliance between interviewer and interviewee (Vanderhallen et al., 2011). In addition to a working alliance, fostering positive social dynamics is likely to be helpful in any time sensitive interaction. Promoting active interviewee participation is an important feature of the Cognitive Interview and is achieved through transfer of control,

autonomy, establishing roles and setting expectations in the interviewee-interview interaction (Fisher, 2010). Taken together, these elements establish the 'landscape' for the interaction between interviewer and interviewee.

Recent experimental work by Hope et al. (under review) operationalised this idea in the development and testing of a time-critical questioning (TCQ) protocol for use with cooperative interviewees. The TCQ comprises the I-RELATE instructions and effective follow-up questioning. I-RELATE is an acronym for the instruction components which aim to align roles, goals, and expectations across the interaction through building a working alliance, agenda mapping, and cuing priority topics (see Hope et al., 2023). Specifically, the interviewer **introduces (I)** themselves and establishes the **role (R)** of the interviewee as the generator of information effectively transferring control of the interview to the interviewee. The interviewer details their **expectations (E)** relevant to the specific context of the interaction, while working to **line (L) up the goals** of both parties in the interaction. The next step involves mapping the **agenda (A)** for the interaction and providing priority **topic (T) cues** to facilitate reporting of relevant information by the interviewee. Finally, the interviewer provides an **explanation (E)** about the procedure, which ensures the interviewee knows what to do and expect.

Initial testing of the TCQ involved participants having to 'escape' from a complex confined location by completing various tasks. Interviewers then had only 10 minutes to obtain key information about 'how to escape'. Participants in the TCQ interview-groups reported significantly more correct information of tactical value (cf. a more direct approach which only included basic rapport building) at no cost to accuracy. In a more recent study, using a scenario in which participants had encountered details of a terrorist plot, the promising findings for the TCQ approach were replicated for remote interactions in time-limited situations (Hope et al., 2024). The TCQ approach has also been applied in a live hostage-taking counter-terrorism scenario training exercise. Interviewers were trained in the TCQ protocol and, a few days later, officers used it to interview 'hostages' who had escaped from a stronghold. One of the main perceived benefits of the TCQ framework commented on by practitioners to date has been that this approach provides a useful structure for framing the initial interaction with an interviewee. This ongoing programme of research provides the first empirical evidence that a carefully-structured orienting instruction focused on aligning the roles, goals, and expectations of interviewer and interviewee delivered at the outset of a brief interview can significantly and positively impact the information provided by an interviewee under time-limited conditions.

These observational and empirical insights from suspect and witness interviewing contexts highlight the importance of robust rapport-based approaches in time-sensitive situations. Although the ORBIT approach and TCQ protocol focus on different interviewee and informational scenarios, the theoretical framework underpinning both approaches is related. Indeed, the

development of the TCQ explicitly acknowledges drawing on components effective within the well-established ORBIT model, including those derived from techniques effective in other domains e.g. motivational interviewing. For example, one specific area of overlap pertains to the use of agenda mapping to agree specific priorities and direct and maintain focus on target issues (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). In any case, irrespective of whether interviewees are resistant or cooperative, it appears that forthright and cooperation-oriented communication that is clear about the objectives of the interaction is likely to be most productive while remaining consistent with international ethical principles (e.g. Méndez Principles; Association for the Prevention of Torture, 2021).

Other Issues for Consideration in Time-Sensitive Scenarios

Beyond the challenges examined so far in this article, several thorny issues persist in time-sensitive elicitation, none of which have to the best of our knowledge been the focus of empirical examination. The first relates to credibility assessment. In any sharp-end scenario, expending resources on timewasters, attention-seekers, or malicious deceptive actors could be devastating so the application of quick and effective methods of credibility assessment to either individuals or their accounts is highly relevant. However, the current most effective approaches to deception detection are largely based on establishing verbal differences between truthtellers and liars in strategic long form interviews (Vrij, Hartwig, & Granhag, 2019). Other technological methodologies may offer insights in the future (e.g., specially developed concealed information tests) but results so far often reflect a lack precision diagnosticity and such methods are unlikely to be implementable with sufficient speed. However, it should be possible to adapt current strategic interviewing approaches (e.g., strategic use of evidence; Granhag & Hartwig, 2015) for time-sensitive interactions while integrating these methods with robust and forthright interpersonal communication required in such scenarios. This approach warrants further consideration.

Another issue that warrants attention in is the role of cultural factors and how these may affect the outcomes of the interaction, particularly the provision of information by cooperative interviewees. To date, research shows sizeable cultural differences in the amount of information provided about witnessed events (e.g. Anakwah et al., 2020). Cultural differences in the reporting of misinformation in response to questioning have also been noted (e.g., Anakwah et al., 2024) as have differences due to power distance (Anakwah et al., 2020; see Hope et al., 2022). Given that cultural differences may be exacerbated by power distance in time-sensitive interviewing contexts, further work should focus on how best to build rapport with the goals of reducing power distance and making the information requirement as clear as possible.

Finally, although many time-sensitive interactions with suspects or witnesses are likely to be one-time interactions focused on the elicitation of

information for immediate application to a live operational scenario, there are other contexts where additional considerations of the nature of the interaction become salient. For example, if an initial time-sensitive encounter necessitates a longer form follow-up interview, it is vital that some degree of rapport and trust have been established in the initial encounter. Additionally, understanding the potential implications of a time-sensitive interview on subsequent retrieval of information may also be vital.

Roadmap Forward for Research and Practice

What is needed to advance the neglected field of time-sensitive interviewing? We have several suggestions for a forward roadmap. First, laboratory, fieldwork, and practice in the field should work together to move forward, with observations from the field feeding back into empirical testing. This approach may be especially relevant to identify the most effective methods for cueing or prompting target information in time-sensitive scenarios while avoiding leading or suggestive questioning. Relatedly, more work is needed on the development of effective questioning strategies that maximise the interviewer's ability to facilitate interviewee focus on the detailed reporting of a target subset of information known. It would be beneficial to further explore the most effective and empathic ways to question people who may be distressed or, although cooperative, individuals who are finding it difficult to provide their information coherently, including for reasons of neurodivergence. It would also be informative to explore the adaptability of certain longer-form techniques (e.g. strategic use of evidence) for use in time-sensitive scenarios. Critically, future empirical research will need to be conducted in the context of novel methodologies that meaningfully increase the intensity and urgency of interviews to facilitate greater generalisability to the field.

It may also be important to identify which individuals are most suited to conducting sharp-end interviews under pressure in time-sensitive situations. Strong interpersonal skills, self-awareness, adaptability and mental agility, including working memory capacity which may be important in managing the mental workload associated with these scenarios, are likely to contribute to effective time-sensitive interviewing – but further empirical research is needed. Even those with natural ability will need to engage with robust and effective training programs to ensure that they are well-prepared to handle the demands of time-sensitive interviews. Moving forward, there is likely to be a role for AI in the training, formulation and facilitation of time-sensitive interviews (see, for example, Li et al., 2024). Where possible, training should incorporate dynamic and immersive field scenarios to simulate both the operational and psychological challenges of a collapsing incident timeline or limited window of opportunity.

To conclude, collaboration between researchers and practitioners will be key to developing the most effective and adaptable techniques for accessing

priority or actionable information in time-sensitive scenarios. Undoubtedly different operational contexts and different interviewees place very different demands on those charged with time-sensitive interviewing. However, theory-driven, rapport-oriented evidence-based approaches combined with effective selection practices and robust training, will likely pave the way for effective time-sensitive questions.

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