Interviewing Tactically to Detect Verbal Deception.

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Abstract

We report research where experienced police investigators ($N = 6$) are trained to use potentially incriminating information in a tactical (incremental revelation) and strategic (late revelation) manner during face-to-face interviews with mock suspects, versus a control (early revelation). While officers' veracity judgments were significantly more accurate (for judging deceivers) when they used evidence tactically and strategically, a tactical approach to the revelation of evidence was found to be the most effective (for both deceivers and truth tellers). Mock witness' perceptions of their interview performance is reported and discussed with recourse to investigators' veracity performance.

Introduction

When investigating wrong doing, contradistinguish liars and truth-tellers in an interview setting is of high import. However, the literature reveals that this is a complex task, most generally performing at around chance levels (e.g., Ekman, O'Sulivan, & Frank, 1999; Mann, Vrij, & Bull, 2004; Vrij, 2000, 2004; Vrij & Mann, 2001). We report the findings of a UK government study examining the efficacy of a novel approach to conducting information gathering interviews, the aim being to improve the detection of deception.

Drawing heavily on the Strategic Use of Evidence (SUE) programme of research (Granhag & Stromwall, 2004; Granhag & Vrij, 2005; Hartwig et al., 2006),

we too have taken advantage of the increased processing capacity demands associated with constructing, verbalizing, and maintaining a deceptive account during face-to-face interactions (e.g., Kohnken, 1999; Sporer & Zander, 2001; Sporer & Schwandt, 2006; Vrij, 2000; 2008) to devise a Tactical interview procedure.

The SUE procedure is described, thus "interrogations started with the Introduction step, followed by a free recall...after which the interrogator posed a number of specific questions...the final specific question concerned whether the suspect confessed to the crime. After this the evidence against the suspect was presented" (Hartwig, et al., 2005, p. 475), and trained police officers have found it remarkably effective for detecting deception (truth accuracy 85%; lie accuracy 85.7%) versus non trained officers (truth accuracy 57.1%; lie accuracy 55%; Hartwig et al., 2006). However, only small amounts of evidence (3 items), and in 'real life' there are likely to be far more information items to contend with, hence the bulk revelation of evidence/information in the aforementioned manner may be less effective in such situations.

Interviews are dynamic, evolving situations, and in the absence of any immediate electronic assistance, the SUE approach dictates that investigators perform several concurrent cognitive operations. First, they have to recall what an interviewee has said, in both the free account and questioning phases, and retain this information until the closing stages of the interview process. Simultaneously they have to construct and pose appropriate questions concerning the evidence, without revealing it, while being cognizant of the information provided earlier to appropriately and productively challenge to any discrepancies. Accordingly, we have taken a tactical, rather than strategic

approach to the revelation of evidence in an effort to assist investigators to detect verbal deception in more complex interview situations.

Our Tactical Use of Evidence procedure (TUE) treats each item of information individually, counselling that they be manoeuvred in relation to each other using a 'drip feed' revelation approach. In brief, interviewees are pressed to account for each item of potentially incriminating evidence, and are challenged immediately (where appropriate), before revealing what that information is, and then moving to the next. In short we are seeking to limit a deceptive interviewee's verbal options sooner than is the case with SUE (important when dealing with large amounts of information), resulting in tangible advantages earlier in the procedure in terms of immediately highlighting statement/evidence (in)consistencies.

We hypothesized i) that both TUE and SUE would prove more cognitively demanding, for deceptive interviewees, than the control, but that the former would be more demanding than the latter , ii) TUE would enhance trained police investigators' deception detection accuracy (for both deceivers and truth tellers).

Method

Participants

Mock suspects. 180 graduate and postgraduate students participated (78 male and 102) female participants; mean age of 27.3 years (SD = 2.69).

Interviewers. Interviews were conducted by six experienced police investigators (M = 24.7 years of interviewing experience), each of whom underwent a 4 days training prior to participating. In brief, interviewers were initially sent a DVD (featuring example interviews) and an instruction manual,

outlining each of the three interview techniques (TUE; SUE; Control). Interviewers then attended a face-toface one training course run by the research team, which included numerous practice interviews, and extensive performance feed-back.

Design and Procedure

Each interviewer conducted 30 (counterbalanced) interviews, 10 from in each *interview* condition (TUE, SUE, & Control) and with five participants from each *group,* (deceiver and truth-teller). The study comprised four phases, (i) participants played an interactive, immersive computer game (see Bull & Dando, 2009; Dando et al., 2010) as either truth-tellers or deceivers; (ii) they were interviewed (individually) about their gaming behaviour; (iii) participants immediately completed a post–interview perceptions questionnaire; (iv)

interviewers were asked to complete a post interview

veracity questionnaire. Six items of potentially incrimination evidence (by this we mean information pertaining to individual's gaming behaviour) were used during each interview.

Interview Conditions

Interviews comprised the same number of phases in the same order differing only when (during which phase), and how the potentially incriminating evidence was presented and challenged (see Fig. 1).

Materials

Interviewees and interviewers each completed a questionnaire comprising 14 and 10 questions respectively, collecting qualitative and quantitative data using a variety of dichotomous, Likert style, and open–ended questions.

Control	SUE	TUE
Explain	Explain	Explain
Full disclosure of potentially incriminating evidence & free account	Free account	Free account
Questions & challenge (where appropriate)	Questions about potentially incriminating evidence (consecutively), when answered reveal all evidence & challenge account (where appropriate)	Question about potentially incriminating evidence item 1, reveal evidence and challenge (where appropriate), moving to evidence item 2, individually and incrementally.
Closure	Closure	Closure

Figure 1. Interview phases across conditions

Results

Deceptiveness/truthfulness

Deceivers (*M* = 5.65, *SD* = .15) reported being significantly more deceptive than

Truth-tellers (*M* = 1.59, *SD* = .19), F (1, 174) = 291.116, *p* < .001, η_2 = .53. There was

no main effect of interview, F (2, 174) = 1.445, *p* = .239. However, a significant

group X interview interaction emerged, F (2, 174) = 4.076, *p* = .03, η_2 = .33:

deceivers reported being more deceptive in the control (*M* = 5. 10, *SD* = 1.14) and

SUE conditions (*M* = 4.84, *SD* = 1. 12), than in TUE (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = 1.51).

Cognitive Demand

Significant main effects of both interview, F (2, 174) = 42.010, *p* < .001,

η_2 = .13 and group F (1, 174) = 49.847, *p* < .001, η_2 = .22 emerged. TUE (*M* =

4.71, *SD* = 1.41) and SUE (*M* = 3.70, *SD* = 1.37) conditions were more

cognitively demanding than the control (*M* = 2.08, *SD* = 1.50). Truth-tellers reported

finding both SUE (*M* = 3.42, *SD* = 1.69) and TUE (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = .93)

conditions more demanding than the control (*M* = 2.58, *SD* = 1.45). Deceivers

reported finding TUE (*M* = 5.63, *SD* = 1.20) more demanding than both SUE (*M* =

4.35, *SD* = 1.30) and control (*M* = 3.81, *SD* = 1.07), the former being more

demanding than the latter.

Veracity

The dichotomous truth/lie judgment results are displayed in table 1. The veracity questionnaire lie/truth scale data (where 1 = definitely not telling the truth and 7 = definitely telling the truth) was used as the dependent variable for a 3 (interview) x 2 (group) ANOVA. Interviewers were significantly more accurate at judging the veracity of deceivers ($M = 1.78$), and truth-tellers ($M = 5.81$) in the TUE condition compared to both the SUE ($M = 2.69$; $M = 3.98$ respectively) and control ($M = 3.99$; $M = 3.15$) conditions ($p = .002$), and more accurate when detecting deceivers in SUE than in the control ($p = .02$), with no difference between SUE and the control for detecting truth-tellers ($p > .05$).

Table 1. Trained police interviewers' percentage veracity performance across conditions.

Condition	Truth-teller	Deceiver
Control	46%	53%
SUE	49%	64%
TUE	67%	73%

Discussion

Our hypotheses were supported. We found TUE to be effective in terms of increased cognitive demand during interviews, using increased items of potentially incriminating evidence. Although truthful interviewees also found TUE demanding, this did not reduce investigators' accuracy for detecting truth tellers. TUE interviewees reported being less deceptive, suggesting that the

procedure reduced opportunities for verbal maneuvering: the incremental methodology employed during the TUE questioning phase may have constrained mock suspects in terms of not allowing them i)to construct a deceptive account as easily as in the control or SUE conditions, and/or ii) to remain true to their lie scripts. Considering deception detection accuracy, trained investigators performed significantly higher than chance for both groups (deceptive and truthful) in the TUE condition than the control. SUE deception detection performance was significantly better than the control, but no better for detecting truth-tellers.

The implications of these finding, and the limitations of this study will be presented and discussed.