



Interviewing

*A Guide for Preparing, Conducting and
Managing Interviews*

19 September 2012

The environment in which NATO operates is not a pristine, sterile laboratory. Many of the issues, challenges and insights we need to understand in order to improve the Alliance exist in the form of *information, knowledge, experience and expertise* inside the minds of individuals ...it is not right out in the open for “easy picking”. Uncovering this critical information and knowledge requires conscious effort...and one of the main ways to achieve this is through interviews.

However, interviewing is not simply a matter of casually sitting down with someone and asking them a few questions. A lot of factors complicate the process. First, the information is often deeply buried in the mind of the individual and the line and nature of questioning you will need to follow will not always be “straight forward”. Second, consideration must be given to the influences language and cultural will have on the feel and nature of the interviews. Third, people are busy...and they will have pressing tasks that, to them, are higher priority than our analysis. And finally, availability and access to these individuals is often limited and if the interview does not go well, there are few chances for “do-overs”.

Because of these issues it is essential that interviews be conducted in the most efficient and effective manner possible in order to make the most of every opportunity and to assure the required data is collected for the analysis.

Helping you become aware of and prepared to address the numerous issues and challenges associated with the interview *process* are the reasons this handbook was developed. The descriptions of the *process*, as well as the tips, tools, techniques, interviewing strategies and tactics presented here are derived directly from “lessons from the field”. This hands-on approach is adopted throughout and further emphasized by the inclusion of the “*Quick Reference Field Guide for Interviewing*” as the final annex.

As part of our 10th Anniversary as NATO’s Lead Agent for Joint Analysis and to help usher in our 2nd decade In Support of Intelligent Change across the Alliance, I am pleased, to make available to the NATO community this brochure: “*Interviewing: A guide for Preparing, Conducting and Managing Interviews*”.

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Interviewing

Interviewing is notable in that nearly everyone has the basic skills to conduct interviews: asking someone questions and recording their responses. However, a major challenge is to be able to take these skills and to enhance them such that you are no longer just asking questions but are eliciting responses that *provide the specific information you need* in order to understand the issues and topics in detail. This is a level of interviewing skill few acquire. Part of the reason is that much of interviewing is more *art* than *science*. This includes being confident in your own interviewing abilities; being able to “read” the interviewee and help them feel relaxed; being able to continually visualize what the interview needs to cover and the level of data you need to collect; and, being able to listen closely while simultaneously thinking ahead. Acquiring these skills requires practice and experience.

Although experience is always the best teacher, there are tools, tips and techniques you can learn in advance that will enhance the chance your interview will be successful. These include not only interviewing techniques but also ways you can prepare both yourself and the interviewee, in advance of the interview, to get the most out of the short window you will have to ask them the questions. This handbook, therefore, is designed to help you prepare, conduct and manage interviews.

Structure of the Handbook

The handbook consists of a main body and two annexes. The main body covers *advance preparations* and *conducting / managing the Interview*.

Within these two broad areas, the materials are further divided into the following five chapters.

1. Preparing yourself
2. Preparing the interviewee
3. Final preparations once deployed
4. Tips, tools and techniques.
5. Interviewing strategies and tactics

The five chapters are further detailed in the table below which lists the sub-topics the chapters touch upon.

In addition, *Annex A: Interview Methodologies* provides summary descriptions of a variety of established interviewing methodologies that you may be able to employ directly or adapt to meet your specific interviewing needs. Although seldom can methods such as these be applied directly “as is”, being familiar with the approaches may provide you insights into how you might want to approach your interviews.

The final portion of this handbook, *Annex B: is the Quick-Reference Field Guide*. This is designed to provide a concise summary of key points and issues covered in the main body that you can take with you as you go to conduct interviews. It is meant to serve as a

practical guide for you when you are in the field: to be carried with you, referenced, written on, altered as you see fit for your specific interviewing requirements.

<i>Preparations to Optimize the Interview</i>			<i>Conducting / Managing the Interview</i>	
Chapter 1: Preparing Yourself	Chapter 2: Preparing the Interviewee <small>(inform them of...)</small>	Chapter 3: Final Prep Once Deployed	Chapter 4: Tips, Tools & Techniques	Chapter 5: Strategies & Tactics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Working from Data Collection Plan ➤ Clarify info needs ➤ Identify who has this info and why they are important ➤ Identify interview topics ➤ Plan order, flow, priorities of interviews ➤ Identify potential initial probes ➤ Become familiar with terms & acronyms ➤ Conduct Rehearsals ➤ Estimate time required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ...WHO you are ➤ ...WHERE you are from ➤ ...WHAT you are doing ➤ ...Why you are doing it ➤ ...WHO asked you do to it ➤ ...WHY you need to speak with them ➤ ...WHAT you wish to speak to them about ➤ ...HOW MUCH of their TIME it will take ➤ Begin scheduling the Interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Configuring your Interview Team ➤ Team Roles in the Interview ➤ Managing Handoffs ➤ Military Rank Considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Starting the Interview ➤ Managing/controlling the interview flow & direction ➤ Handling awkward situations ➤ Capturing your interview data ➤ Challenging interviews ➤ Rules of thumb / lessons ➤ Critical Skills ➤ Probe techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Approaches</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Broadening ➤ Deepening ➤ System Mapping <u>Frameworks</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Decision-Centred ➤ Situation Awareness-Centred ➤ Context-Centred ➤ Expertise / Knowledge-Centred

Chapter 1: Preparing Yourself

What you can do to prepare yourself in advance of the interview

One of the most important things in interviewing is to have a clear understanding of the information you need to get out of the interview. If you have a good handle on this, then you have laid the basic foundation for a successful interview. This understanding not only allows you to prepare better for the interview but allows you to begin to see the type of questions and probes you will need to employ to get this information.

Ideally, the initial parts of what are required for your advanced preparations will have been done during the data collection planning phase and incorporated into your data collection plan (DCP). The DCP should already have identified the analysis topics and where and who it is that might have the information you need. During this earlier stage you should also have asked yourself questions such as: “What are the best methods to use to collect these data?” and identified the areas and issues that will be best explored by using interviewing as well as planning for who, or in what areas, you will need to interview.

In other words, coming out of the DCP stage, before you even start thinking about the interviews themselves, you should have a sense of who you will need to interview and the main topics you need to cover during these interviews/discussions.

By building each subsequent step of your approach based on the previous, you will be able to clearly make the connections all the way from the Analysis Requirement to the Analysis Objectives; the Analysis Objectives to the DCP; and the DCP to your current thinking with respect to the information you need to collect, including where this information likely exists, and why the preferred collection method is to have individuals conduct interviews.

Chapter 1: Preparing Yourself

- Working from Data Collection Plan
- Clarify info needs
- Identify who has this info and why they are important
- Identify interview topics
- Plan order, flow, priorities of interviews
- Identify potential initial probes
- Become familiar with terms & acronyms
- Conduct Rehearsals
- Estimate time required

A Note on the DCP

Although your DCP is your “plan for collecting data”, you will have to collect some preliminary data just to build this plan. This might be through document review or possibly even exploratory interviews or questionnaires. The issue is that you need information to help you understand the problem and issues enough to start building your DCP.

At this point, since you have a fairly good idea of what you need to collect and who you need to interview, you need to start working out the details and preparing yourself for these interviews. This includes:

- *Finalise the list of specific individuals you need to interview.*

- For each interview/interviewee, identify the specific topics/subjects you wish to cover
- Determine/prioritize the criticality/importance of each of the topics/subjects you wish to cover. The importance of this is that we seldom get as much time with the individuals as we need, particularly with Flag and General Officers (FOGOs), so prioritizing allows us to clearly see which topics we need to cover first, so that if time runs out, you've at least got the most important information.
- With the overall set of prioritized topics/subjects, you can now start thinking about the flow and sequencing of the actual interview. In this you will lay out the overall order of how you will go through the topics. This may extend beyond just the high level topics to also include sub-topics, possible "branches" (if the individual turns out to have knowledge/experience in those areas) as well as possibly determining how "deep" you want to go on any particular topic. (The concepts of broadening and deepening are covered in more detail in Chapter 5.)

You may, at this point, start thinking about the possible types of probes¹ that will get at the information you need (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

At this point you will have an overall sense for the interview. However, if you need to conduct a similar interview with more than one individual, you should consider whether you need to tailor the interviews for the different interviewees. If tailoring is needed, you can start developing the variations at this time.

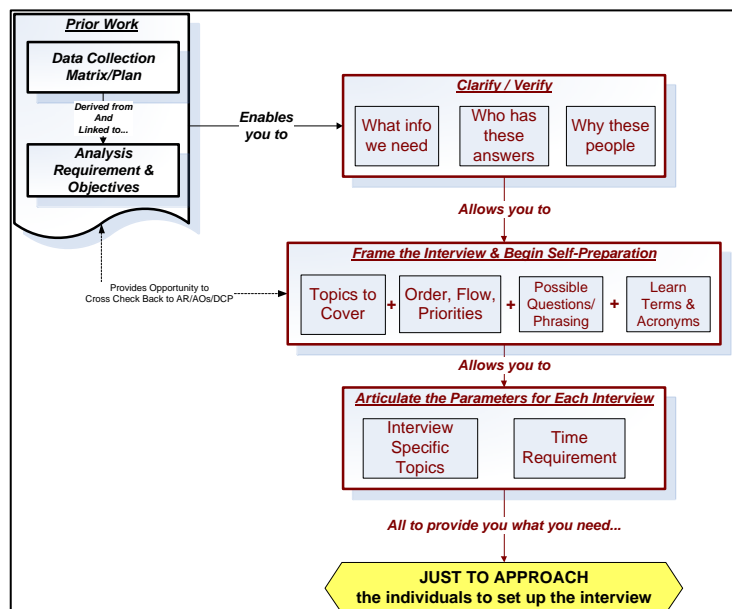
Make sure you are asking the right questions of the right person. i.e. ensure (in advance, if possible) that the interviewee has the knowledge/experience needed to give you what you want.

Get to know your interviewee. Find out as much as you can about the interviewee in advance, including their:

- Expertise
- Training/Background
- Position/rank
- Nationality
- Family
- Hobbies
- Etc.

Learn their "Language". This includes:

- Terms
- Acronyms
- Specific policy/doctrine references that they work with daily. Knowing what these documents are and what they cover will greatly



¹ "Types of Probes" refers to the actual way you phrase questions that can alter the nature of the responses you receive. It is one of the more subtle aspects of interviewing that can dramatically influence the nature of the data you collect.

improve your understanding of their responses during the interview.

It is highly recommended that you conduct a couple of interview rehearsals in which you literally go through the interview as you envision it.

This includes following the flow and sequencing through the topics, using any phrasings or questions you have worked out, etc. Sometimes this can be a full rehearsal and other times will just be mentally running through the interview in your own head.

Practising/rehearsing the interview is important for several reasons: Firstly, it gives you a feel if you are actually achieving the flow and sequencing you want and, if not, where to adjust; and secondly, it will allow you to realistically estimate the duration of the interview. If the interview is unrealistically long, you can spend time now figuring out how to shorten it...or recognize that you will need to request more time or more than a single interview session with the individual.

Next, write out how you are going to start the interview. This is always one of the hardest things about the actual interview and it is very helpful to write down a few things you want to say up front: thanking him/her for their time; how will you introduce yourself and your team; what you hope to cover in the interview; how long it will take, etc. You may not need to read it word for word, but just writing it down helps you make sure you do not forget anything important at the start. Note: This will also come in handy for when you begin to prepare the interviewee (Chapter 2).

These advance preparations provide the underlying framework for how you wish to conduct the interview: how you wish to introduce/start it; the main topics you will cover; the sequence in which you would like to go through the topics; possible specific questions you may want to use, and how much time you believe it will take. In essence, these materials form your *road map* for navigating through and managing the interview. This map provides a basis from which you can delineate the roles, functions, and handoffs between the interview team members. For example: “*I will lead through this section and then will hand-off to you for parts 2 and 3*” or “*This part is very important, listen closely here to make sure I’ve covered all of the topics.*”. (See Chapter 3).

If you take this one step further and capture these points in soft- or hardcopy form, they become the basis for your *Interview Guide*.

How can these advanced preparations benefit you?

1. *There is a clear, established connection from your interviews back to the AOs to the AR via the Data Collection Plan.*
2. *The more you know about the interviewee in advance reduces the chances you may make a mistake or be caught off guard during the interview.*
3. *Being versed in their terminology, acronyms and primary reference documents reduces the time in the interview for you to clarify.*
4. *Rehearsing helps smooth the process and the interviewing team be more comfortable, confident and knowledgeable about how the interview is to flow (allowing better tracking and management during the interview).*
5. *Much of the information you have accumulated by preparing yourself will be beneficial when you are preparing the interviewee.*

Chapter 2: Preparing the Interviewee

What you can do to prepare the Interviewee in advance of the interview

There are several challenging aspects of conducting interviews. One is that there will almost never be as much time for the interview as you need. A second issue is that often the interviewee will be suspicious of you... "Why do these people want to talk to me?" ... "Am I being evaluated?" ... "Do I need to be careful about what I say?" ... "Will I be quoted/named?" ...

However, there are things you can do in advance of the interview that will improve your chances for success and probably improve the interview itself and the data you gather. These involve laying the groundwork for the interview in advance. There are two primary reasons for doing these things: to reduce the amount of time during the actual interview itself that you spend doing "non-data collection" activities; and to help the interviewee better understand why we are interviewing him/her and to reduce their suspicions -- which almost always results in richer data.

Chapter 2: Preparing the Interviewee

(inform them of...)

- ...WHO you are
- ...WHERE you are from
- ...WHAT you are doing
- ...WHY you are doing it
- ...WHO asked you do to it
- ...WHY you need to speak with them
- ...WHAT you wish to speak to them about
- ...HOW MUCH of their TIME it will take
- Begin scheduling the Interview

What to Tell the Interviewee

Advanced preparation of the interviewee can be achieved in a variety of ways ranging from hard copy to email to telephone to face-to-face communications...or a combination of all of the above. Regardless of which medium you employ, the goal is to **proactively** provide the interviewee with preparatory information that will help support the interview. At a minimum this will include:

An introduction of yourself and the interview team:

- *My name is ____, and I am from the JALLC and I am the project manager for ____.*
- *I and ____ would like to have the opportunity to interview you for ____.*

Note: If you cannot answer this question for yourself, you need to ask why we are interviewing the individual.

A brief description of the organisation you are from (e.g., the JALLC) for anyone who is not familiar with it or you. For JALLC personnel, include in this description:

- *One full reference to "NATO's Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre".*
- *The point that we are conducting analysis rather than evaluations of individuals or HQs.*

IMPORTANT

*Early on... stress that we are conducting an **ANALYSIS** and not doing an **EVALUATION**. We are not judging the individual or their performance, but trying to understand the processes and factors that may help...or hurt them as they go about their day-to-day tasks.*

What are we doing...and **for whom** are we doing it.

- We have been tasked by SHAPE...ACT...JFCNP...COS Naples...COM ISAF...to look at X (whatever your analysis requirement is).
- The aim of this study is to ...

Note that if this is the first time you are approaching an individual, it is good to use words such as “look at” or “examine”, rather than “analysis” because they are a little softer...a little less intimidating for some people...and to never use the term “evaluate”.

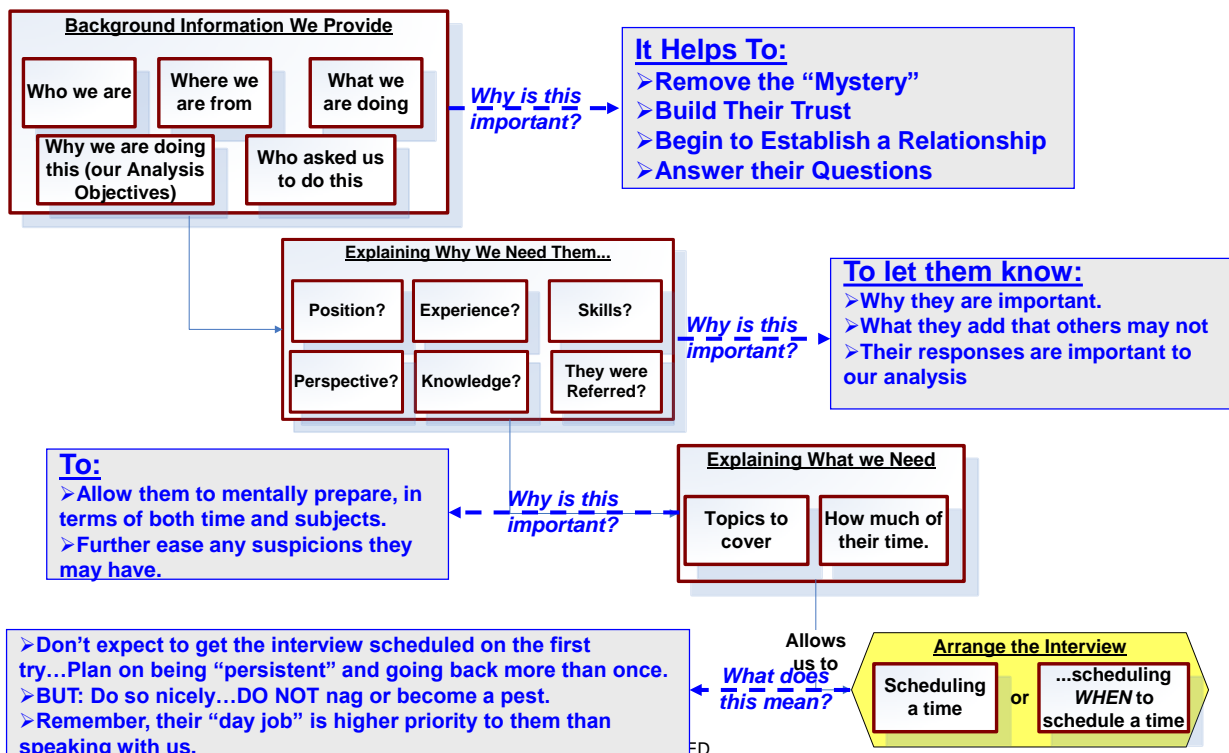
An explanation of **why we want/need to speak with them**. Why they are important for us. For example:

- The position the person fills has specific tasks/responsibilities that give them a perspective that relates to the analysis topic(s).²
- This particular person has specific Experience, Skills and/or Knowledge that are relevant for our analysis. For instance, the individual who wrote the Joint HQ’s Information Operations SOP...or the head targeteer...or the COS...etc.
- Someone else whom we have spoken with suggested we speak to this individual as well, that is, we were referred to this person as someone who has information/knowledge relevant for our analysis.

Note: If you cannot answer this question for yourself, you need to ask why we are interviewing the individual.

Provide them an idea of **what they will be “committing” themselves to** including the **issues/ topics** we wish to discuss/cover and how much of their **time** it will take.

Preparing the Interviewee



NOTE: It may be that, although the *position* carries those responsibilities, the individual may have little knowledge – if he/she is new in post, for example. In that case, you could adjust your questioning, along the lines of “what difficulties are you facing / have you identified, as you assume these new responsibilities?”

Scheduling the Interview

One of the final parts of “preparing the interviewee” is to actually schedule the interview. It tends to not be as simple as just requesting that you meet them at ??:00 PM. The following provide some insights into actually getting the interview scheduled. (*This topic is included in this section because you will occasionally begin this before you actually deploy, though often you will need to finalise the arrangements once you are on-site.*)

It is rare that the individuals will be able to commit to a specific time for the interview when you initially approach them. Often, they have only just learned that you wish to speak with them and how much of a commitment it will require on their part. They often need some time to think about the topics, to check their calendars and to get back to their friends and co-workers to find out exactly “who is this JALLC...anyone have any experience with them?” Don’t be upset when they don’t immediately rush to their calendar and pencil you in!

Setting up the interview often requires that we check back multiple times before they will be able to commit to a specific day and time. Do not let this frustrate you.

When you approach them to schedule the interview, it is important that you be sensitive to the facts that:

- *They always feel that they are extremely busy...and they usually are.*
- *Their own chain of command will be making a lot of time critical demands on their time.*
- *They have a lot of other priorities and demands on their time.*
- *Our questions and our analyses objectives will be in about 10th place on their list of immediate priorities.*

One of the most important things for us to do is to be very clear and realistic about:

- *How much of their time we will require for the interview.*
- *How many times we will need to talk with them (some individuals we may need to talk to more than once).*

It helps to be very clear (whether by face-to-face, telephone, email, or hard copy) that:

- *You recognise they are very busy.*
- *You want to give them time to think about when it would be convenient for them to speak with you.*
- *You are happy, if necessary to stop back (later, the next day, next week...whenever) to schedule the actual time for the interview. Note: You will be going back to schedule the*

Establishing good relationships with the interviewees, in advance, is one of your most powerful interviewing tools.

1. *If the interviewee is comfortable with you, they will not be guarded...they will be more open with you and willing to share their knowledge, insights and views.*
2. *If you have already established this relationship, you will not lose valuable time covering “other” things during the interview itself.*
3. *When we are explaining things to them, we are doing the talking and we are not listening to them talk. So, the more you can convey to them before the interview, the more “quality” time we will have to ask them the questions that will support and improve your analysis.*

interview...but when you do, be prepared to actually conduct it at that time...it is surprising how often they say..."Well, how about now, this is as good a time as any".

There may be times when you have to make arrangements and schedule the interview through a Point of Contact (POC) rather than personally with each interviewee. In this case:

- *Make sure the POC really understands what you are doing, what your needs are, who you want to interview, why, and for how long.*
 - *Give the POC very clear guidelines/instructions – send the background info / read-ahead package and ask that it be copied to interviewees.*
 - *Ensure that you and the POC are prepared to be flexible on the day, if people's schedules change.*
 - *In some circumstances, having COM or COS JALLC send a request to the individuals to provide some time to be interviewed can be extremely beneficial.*
 - *It is important to recognise how influential the individuals³ in a FOGO's outer office can be... both in terms of helping you get the interview...or making it nearly impossible! It is critical that you are friendly and ensure they understand what you need and why it is important.*
-

³ *Exec Officers, Military Assistants, Aide de Camps, etc.*

Chapter 3: Final Preparations Once Deployed

In the previous two chapters we discussed things that you can do in advance to prepare yourself and the interviewees. There are additional considerations and preparations you will need to make once you have deployed, whether your deployment is to an operational theatre, an exercise or an organisation (e.g., SHAPE, Joint Force Command Naples, etc.).

Upon arrival at your data collection location, there will be many potential distractions and it is easy to let these final considerations and preparations slip to the side. However, these are just as important as the preceding preparations and all of these are nearly as important as how you conduct yourself in the actual interview itself.

Chapter 3: Final Prep Once Deployed

- Configuring your Interview Team
- Team Roles in the Interview
- Managing Handoffs
- Military Rank Considerations

Configuring your Interview Team

One of the most important aspects of a successful interview is dependent on the thought you put into deciding how you will configure the interviewing team including who you have on the team as well as how many individuals will make up the team.

Experience has shown that the ideal number of individuals on the interview team is two. The reason two tends to be the ideal is that you have the right number of individuals to fill each of the key interviewing roles (described in detail in the next section) without taking the risk of overwhelming or intimidating the interviewees by having too many people sitting across the table “staring at them.”

However, from the data collection/recording perspective, it is often good to have a team of three but only if the third person is given an explicit role (e.g., being the back-up recorder monitor (see next section) or they are completely in the background and do not take an active role at all.

On rare occasions, it may be possible (or necessary) to have a single interviewer, but in these situations, the interviewer must be able to simultaneously take good notes and manage/control the interview...not an easy thing to do. It can be challenging for a native-English speaker let alone for an individual whose first language is not English.

Do not confuse (or be pressured by) “people who **want** to sit in on the interview” with “people you **need** to make the interview a success”.

Interviewing Roles: The Interview Team

In addition to the makeup (configuration) of the interviewing team, it is important that you give consideration to the roles and functions of each of the team members. Irrespective of how you configured your team, there are only two main roles/functions: Leading the interview and Monitoring/Recording the interview. These two roles, Lead and

Monitor/Recorder do not refer to individuals, but to things that are required of every interview regardless of the configuration or individuals. As such, these roles can switch back and forth amongst members of the interview team (whether 2, 3 or however many). They are:

LEAD: Roles and Responsibilities

- *Makes the necessary introductions and gets the process moving*
- *Conducts the interview*
- *Asks the questions*
- *Does most of the talking for the interview team*
- *Keeps the interview on track.*
- *If necessary, ‘nicely’ redirects the interviewee back to the main topics you need to address.*
- *Determines the conceptual path to follow to cover the required topics...different people have different ways to get to a point or ask a question...only one should have this role in the interview or it will become frustrating for all.*
- *Decides when to temporarily hand-off “Lead” to the other interviewer (at which point, “Lead” becomes “Monitor/Recorder” for a short period).*

Think of the roles of a 2 person interview team as being similar to a helicopter crew’s roles of “Pilot Flying” and “Pilot Not Flying” including the use of very rigid protocol for switching roles.

Monitor/Recorder: Roles and Responsibilities

- *Records the data*
- *Take extremely detailed notes*
- *Tends to the tape recorder (if one is present)*
- *Monitors and Tracks the interview progress in terms of the predetermined interview goals⁴ you established before the interview:*
- *What topics have been covered...not been covered*
- *Listens for points/issues that should be further pursued. These are usually signalled by key “flag words” (see text box). The lead will be focusing on conducting the interview and it is not unusual for some points to come up that they do not pick up.*
- *Keeps track of his/her own*

*“Flags” are words or phrases that should alert the interview team that **there is more going on here than he just said**. Flags indicate places where you may want to go back and ask additional questions about the points/issues that were raised.*

A few examples of Flags are words/phrases such as: “usually”; “difficult”; “it was challenging”; “we decided”; “we knew it was [wrong/ right/ odd/ strange...]; “important”, “critical”, and so forth.

Usually you do not want to interrupt the interviewee right when a flag comes out, but you do want to make a note of it to go back to later. If the Lead follows- up immediately you can scratch this out but often he/she will not catch these flags since their focus is on managing the interview itself.

This means the Monitor/Recorder will need to take note of these so that he/she can follow up later when Lead passes control over to them or asks them for ideas/questions.

⁴ *Predetermined Interview Goals:* Before the interview, the Interview Team should discuss what they want or need to get from the particular interview. This should include the topics that you need to cover, the level of information you need to get and possibly even some specific questions you need to have answered (to get specific data you know you will need for the analyses).

questions to ask when the interview is handed over by Lead.

- When “control” of the interviewed is handed-off by Lead:
 - Goes back and fills in any gaps he/she noticed from the earlier part of the interview.
 - Follows up with any additional questions he/she may have of his/her own.
 - Returns control back to the original Lead (unless you agreed in advance on some other arrangement).

“Other” Roles:

There are none. Extra people tend to create more distractions than benefits. It is difficult enough “choreographing” an interview with two interviewers...every additional person complicates it further. If other people do insist on going along it must be made clear beforehand that:

- They have no role...they are spectators ONLY.
- They are not to speak or interrupt (unless specifically asked to do so by LEAD or the interviewee).
- They must avoid being restless or distracting by trying to get the LEAD’s or the interviewee’s everything they wish to add something.

If you find you need to take more than two people to the interview, there are still only two roles and you need to make sure all attendees understand what part of which role they are playing, and when.

Deciding how you will manage the Handoff between Lead and Monitor/Recorder

Concerning hand-offs, it is important to recognise that these need to be proactively anticipated and managed. Handoffs are dynamic points in the interview which can be very awkward if the team does not have a clear idea how and when they will take place. The easiest is to pre-determine who will handle which portions of the interview and where the handoff will occur. However, there will be occasions during which additional handoffs may be required and it is best to establish signals/indicators to smooth these unanticipated situations. That is, although you can divide responsibilities up such that you agree in advance that A will lead during this portion and handoff to B for the other sections...there will be times when the Lead will want the other team member to step in for a few minutes while he collects his thoughts. These require that the team agree upon signals to indicate a handoff needs to take place. These can be hand signals, scratching one’s head, eye-contact, set phrases...and so on. These signals need not only apply to the Lead, but can also be used by the Monitor/Recorder to indicate he/she feels they have a very important line of questioning they would like to follow at the earliest possible time.

Considering the Impact of Rank on the Interview

When Members of the Interview are of Different Ranks

Although, rank should not be the main factor that determines who leads an interview, in a military environment, rank does play a role. It is important that the Interview Team discuss and agree upon how they will handle this before the interview. Consider:

If one team member is already well-known to the interviewee, you may decide that it would be best for that person to lead the interview, regardless of rank (but see also the following sub-paragraphs).

Note: Even if the ranking officer is not very familiar with the interview objectives at first, he/she will usually pick up enough to be able to assume the Lead role after sitting in as the Monitor/Reporter on just a few interviews.

Have the individual who is most familiar with the analysis objectives lead the actual interview. If this is the ranking officer, the choice is easy.

If it is the lower ranking officer, consider have the ranking officer conduct the initial introductions at the beginning and then hand off the actual interview lead to the more familiar team member.

If the interviewee continues to direct their answers to the higher ranking officer, even though they are not the lead, consider switching the lead to this person right away.

This needs to be a conscious “hand-off-of-control” that is discussed among the team before the interview takes places

Although Rank is the issue discussed in this section, an interviewee may direct his/her answers to someone else for a variety of reasons including nationality, sex, service branch, etc. Regardless of the reason, if it happens, consider switching the lead to this person.

When the Interviewee is a Higher Ranking Individual

Interviewing higher ranking individuals, especially flag officers, can be challenging for a variety of reasons including:

They are often very busy people and you will have less time with them than you actually need...it will be a highly time constrained interview.

The fact that they are higher ranking is intimidating for some officers. It is just a reality that comes with the military culture. Overcoming this intimidation is very important for the success of the interview. If you do not set it aside you may find the individual talks about what he/she wants to and not what you need to speak with him about. That is, if you are overly intimidated you will not adequately “manage” or “control” the interview...you will let the interviewee take it where he/she wants.

Establishing connections and relationships with individuals in advance will usually be to your advantage...and will almost always improve the interview.

Suggestions:

- 1. Assign the interview to individuals who are closer to the interviewee’s rank...or people who are less intimidated. However, it is very important that you have at least one person on the interview team who knows the interview objectives; otherwise you may jeopardize the interview.*
- 2. If there no one else available, you’ll just have to do the interview yourself. If so, make sure you are very clear in your own mind about what you want to ask (even if you need to write out the individual questions in advance) and prioritise the topics/questions by importance in the event the interview is even shorter than you expect/hope or it gets interrupted.*

The more you conduct interviews like this the more at ease you will become and the better the interviews will be. It’s good practice for you.

Chapter 4: Interviewing Tips, Tools & Techniques

Conducting and Managing the Interview

*Every interview will be different...
Every person you interview will be unique...
There is always something you can learn...*

The first three chapters have focused on things you can do in advance to increase your chances of having a successful interview. This chapter offers a wide variety of tips, tools, lessons and techniques that should help you just prior to and during the interview itself. Many of these are based on lessons learned, established best practices, and prior “experiences from the field”. All are included to provide you with some ways to help the interview proceed smoothly...both for you and the interviewee.

Starting the Interview: Your Introduction

It is important to keep your entire introduction as short as possible...just 2 or 3 minutes if possible. Interview times are always limited...so there is no time for long drawn out introductions. That means you have to decide in advance what you need/want to tell them and then be clear, direct and brief. Don’t “make it up as you go” or you’ll likely find yourself just rambling on and on. Suggestions:

- *Thank them for giving you the time (acknowledge that you realize they are very busy)*
- *Reiterate to them how long it will take (and stick to this unless they “allow” you to go longer).*
- *Introduce the team members (they should already know where you are from).*
- *Briefly review the topics you would like to discuss with them*
- *Clarify again why you need to speak with them ...*
 - *Their job/role...*
 - *Their expertise/experience...*
 - *Their perspective is important...*
 - *They were referred to as a person to ask about...*

Chapter 4: Tips, Tools & Techniques

- Starting the Interview
- Managing/controlling the interview flow & direction
- Handling awkward situations
- Capturing your interview data
- Challenging interviews
- Rules of thumb / lessons
- Critical Skills
- Probe techniques

Have your first question ready in advance so you can open the actual interview with a concise, clearly phrased query.

Managing/Controlling the Interview Flow and Direction

In your earlier preparations (see Chapter 1), based on the information you needed to elicit during the interview, you determined the flow, direction and sequencing of how you wanted to address the interview topics. This formed your Interview Guide, your “road map” for the interview and is your best tool for determining if you are still on track and for guiding (managing) and correcting (controlling) the interview.

Proactively managing/controlling an interview involves three main tasks:

1. *Making sure that, as you pose your questions, you follow the flow, direction and sequencing you planned or any deviations you take from the planned path are conscious decisions.*
2. *Keeping the interviewee from going “off on tangents” in his/her responses,*
3. *If he/she does go completely off track, bringing the interviewee back to the relevant topics. When you realize he/she is no longer providing information you asked about or need, it is important to bring the interview back in line. The following is one scenario of how one might do this:*
 - *Let the individual go for a minute or so,*
 - *Nicely acknowledge what he/she said as being interesting (or good or something), but add something like, “I like that, but because of the limited time, I’m going to pull us back to the earlier question...”*
 - *Then **either** re-pose the original question to him **or** (if it feels like this will just take him off again) move on to a different line of questioning.*

Proactively managing the interview is not always easy and can be slightly uncomfortable since, in certain respects, you are “telling” the interviewee they’re off track (not helping us). As such, it is important to use as much tact as possible. However, you must strive to achieve a balance :

- *Too much control* and the discussion is stifled
- *Too little* and it can go off in directions that will not help us with your analysis.

It is not always the interviewee’s fault when an interview gets out of control. There have been occasions when it’s a member of interview team itself who initiates and encourages these off track discussions.

Real world example:

We were interviewing helicopter pilots about the complexities of flying multi-ship missions and one of the team was so interested in the technology of helicopters that he kept asking questions and starting discussions with the interviewee about all the “cool stuff” one particular new helicopter was equipped with. I was not able to salvage that interview since it would have required criticizing the individual in front of the interviewee...it would have been very unprofessional...but we did discuss it afterwards.

***It is the interviewee’s thoughts and ideas that are important...not ours!
We can share our ideas amongst ourselves anytime!***

Awkward Situations You May Encounter

You will find yourself on occasions in situations that will feel very awkward. Some examples of these types of situations are listed below, with a few suggestions for each.

- *The interviewee gets called away and you’re sitting there waiting to see if they ever come back.*

- You can take this opportunity to quickly discuss with your interviewing partner where you are in the interview, what topics you feel still need to be covered, and if it appears that time will be short, how you to prioritise the remaining topics. Even if other individuals remain in the room (e.g., the FOGO's Military Assistant), they will not mind if you take a moment to strategize.
- If it becomes obvious that the original interviewee will not be coming back you may wish to take the opportunity to find out if any of the others present (EXO, MA, etc.) can contribute anything useful for your data collection and to also ask these individuals if it might be possible to re-schedule the interview at a later (and more convenient) time.
- *You start the interview and find the interviewee does not really have knowledge about the issues/topics you need to discuss.*
 - This can be very awkward and you really only have two options: Firstly, go ahead with the interview for a reasonable period of time and then kindly inform them that you have the information you need, thank them and end the interview (hopefully early). In this case, you recognise that the "interview" will not be a "keeper," but that is OK. Secondly, admit to the individual that you made a mistake in asking for his/her time, thank them and go ahead and leave.
- *The interviewee has their own agenda and is going to speak about what he/she wants, regardless of your attempts to keep the individual on-topic.*
 - How you handle this is largely a personal choice although one approach is to just let the individual go on, recognising the interview will not be of value, and then at a respectable time, go ahead and terminate it (hopefully early).
- *The interviewee starts to lecture you on what is "wrong" with your organisation (e.g., the JALLC, ACT, JWC, etc.) or why the AR/AOs are "completely wrong."*
 - Take very detailed notes. Ask the individual for some specifics about their "bad experiences" with your organisation, DON'T argue, debate or rationalise/defend. What you want to do is to truly capture their issues, concerns, etc. Then inform them that you will report this to your COM (boss, chief, etc.) immediately upon your return to see if it is an issue that can be rectified. If you still have time remaining, you might be able to now go into some of your original interview topics. If not, consider this as time well spent since you will have learned something about others' perceptions of your organisation and/or the AR/AOs.
- *The individual speaks so fast...or uses so many acronyms, etc. that you find you understand almost nothing about what they are saying.*
 - If they are speaking too fast, you need to ask them to slow down and/or repeat their responses. It becomes very important for you to use paraphrasing (Chapter 4) to assure you are understanding what they say. On the other hand, if you are completely overwhelmed by acronyms, you need to note as many of them as you can and, immediately following the interview, find out what they are. Ideally you will have found this information out in your advanced preparations, however there will be occasions in which an individual will use, what almost seems like, their own "language" , one that isn't contained in any agreed upon lists of acronyms and terms, whether "official" or informal (e.g., AAP-15; AAP-6; Analysis Handbook; etc.).
- *The individual makes comments or statements that you completely disagree with or are offended by.*

- This can be awkward because you should NOT follow your *normal instincts*: do not argue with them, do not show you are offended or disgusted with them. Your best approach is to ignore the offensive statements and to deepen on the issues you disagree with to find out why they feel/believe the way they do. You might find their perspective interesting and enlightening.
- You refer to the individual by the wrong rank (e.g., calling a Brigadier General, “Colonel”).
 - In NATO, there are 28 member nations, many partners and a whole variety of non-military individuals with their own titles and “rank.” You will get it wrong sometime. Hopefully your error will “promote” rather than “demote” the individual. In either case, when you recognise you made a mistake, immediately admit you did, apologise and then move on.

Capturing Your Interview Data

Taking notes

The notes the interview team takes during the interview are the only record of *the interview you know for certain you will have at the end of the session*.

However, there is a difference between taking “proper military notes” as you have been trained and the notes you will need to take to “record” the interview. The following table summarizes some of the key differences between the two methods.

Military Notes	Interview Notes
<i>Short, Concise</i> <i>Summarize important meanings</i> <i>Highlight items and tasks relevant to your duties</i> <i>Neat, Organised</i>	<i>Detailed, “noisy”</i> <i>Capture what was said...verbatim</i> <i>Includes everything...you will sort out what is important later</i> <i>Messy, spaces left to go back and add more info later</i>

When you are taking notes during an interview it is important to:

- *Be Detailed*
- *Be Accurate*
- *Capture Key Words and Phrases*
- *Capture Quotes*

Write down what they say, not your interpretation of what they said. They chose their words for a reason and it is important that we respect the subtleties. Substituting our words for theirs can change the meaning.

If an interviewee says something you feel you may want to quote, you must specifically ask their permission to do so.

A final point on interview notes. The interviews tend to be in English. Your skills with English may impact on your ability (or confidence) to be the lead, but keep in mind it may also impact on your ability to catch all that the interviewee says and to write it down concisely.

These are factors you should at least consider as you build your interview teams. You can take your notes in whatever language you prefer if it allows you to better capture what is said. Just remember that eventually you will have to transcribe these to English and that notes taken in another language *may* introduce translational errors – so just be careful!

Audio Taping

Audio taping is an excellent way to capture the exact words, etc. from the interviewee. In certain respects it is the ideal way to capture your interview data. However, some cautions are in order. It is always best to rely on your own notes to capture the essence of the interview. It is best to employ audio taping as a mechanism to **support** your data capturing, not as your primary means. There are inherent risks in audio (and video) recording that you need always be aware of, including:

- *Recorder malfunction:*
- *Battery goes dead.*
- *Tape (or memory) runs out.*
- *Background noise makes the recording inaudible (air conditioners, ambient noise, other conversations in the vicinity, etc.)*
- *There are many areas in which, for security reasons, an audio recorder is not permitted. If you are interviewing in one of these areas it is best to assume you will not be allowed to use an audio recorder. If you can it is great, but plan otherwise to be safe.*
- *Recorders are intimidating to some individuals; some people are not comfortable having their interviews recorded. You must always ask permission of the interviewee to record the session, but they may request it not be taped so you should plan for this.*
- *The Permanence / “UTube” Factor. More and more individuals, while not intimidated by having themselves recorded, are very aware that the recording is a fairly permanent transcription that can, whether intentionally or not, be posted in very public forums (e.g., on the Internet) which could be compromising for the individual. As such, some individuals are reluctant to be recorded...or they are extremely guarded about what they do or do not say during the interview. In other words, recording can, on occasions, result in the interviewee’s responses not being as candid as they might have been without the recorder running.*
- *Audio (and Video) recordings are linear records. Finding a particular excerpt on either can be a fairly time consuming and an onerous task unless one includes “time hacks” in written notes at key points. However, this can distract you from remaining closely focused on the interviewee’s comments and responses.*

An additional consideration is that every hour of interview on tape will require approximately 2 additional hours, by a trained transcriber, to generate a full transcription of the interview. This figure will be much larger for the average individual with average typing skills.

Video Taping

Many of the same pros and cons as audio taping with some variations:

- *Video Tapes provide additional information above and beyond the Audio Tapes in that they can also show body language, facial expressions, foci of attention, etc.*
- *The video equipment tends to be more invasive (tripods, mics, etc.) which can heighten the “intimidation” element.*
- *It’s Video. UTube is a video media...many embarrassing clips have shown up there.*

The bottom line is that, if you audio (or video) tape, it is best to consider these records, not as your primary capturing method, but as great tools that can be used to help you clarify specific details, quotes, etc. later as you find yourself going through the data.

One final point on tapes concerns the possibility that information included in the recording may be classified, which means you will have to have the tape reviewed by the appropriate security personnel, and then it will be treated (including its transportation) just like a comparably classified document.

Challenging Interviews

Interviewing Groups

Group interviews are those in which there is more than a single interviewee in the room at the same time. (Do not confuse “Group Interviews” with “Team Interviews”. Team interviews employ specific methodologies in order to better understand the thinking, decision making, information exchanges, etc. of the team as an organisation. While some “Team Interviews” are also “Group Interviews” many of the team methodologies require the members of the team be interviewed individually and not as a group.)

There are specific aspects of conducting interviews with multiple interviewees, most of which either directly or indirectly come back to managing and/or controlling the interview. These include:

Often one individual will be stronger than the others (or, a variation, one individual is quieter/less confident than the others) which can easily result in just a portion of the interviewees actually contributing to the interview...or if it is a confidence/rank issue, the weaker/lower individuals will just agree with the other’s comments. That is, the data you collect may not actually be representative all of the individuals in the room.

It requires the Lead be proactive in controlling the dynamics of the interviewees through his phrasing and directing of questions. This must be done in both a tactful as well as non-threatening way that “gives permission” to the quiet individuals to provide their candid inputs without appearing as though you are telling the stronger people to “shut up!”.

Managing multiple person interviews is more challenging since you now have the other interviewees in the room, all of whom have “permission to speak” and as such there is that much greater of a chance one of them will go off on a tangent (see earlier section on Managing the Interview). It’s hard enough to control this when it’s a single interviewee...and it just gets harder with more.

If you find you are going to have to interview several individuals at the same time, you might want to consider using a variation of one of the Team Interviewing techniques that are described in Annex A.

Time Pressured Interviews

Although time pressured interviews will always result in your collecting less data, there are some things that you can do to reduce the impact, including:

- *Your best defence is to make sure that you optimize the actual time you do have with the individual by doing a thorough job Preparing Yourself and Preparing the Interviewee (see earlier sections). This does not change the fact the interview is shorter than the time you need, but at least you will be able to make the most out of the actual face-to-face time you have with the interviewee...i.e., you're getting more data per minute than if you had to use part of the interview time to prepare the interviewee.*
- *For incident/event based interviews (see Chapter 5), identifying relevant incidents/events to cover in advance helps by eliminating the time that would normally be required for the interviewee to explain/describe the event to you.*
- *Pare your interview topics/questions down to the "bare bones." Identify the ones that are most critical and go right to these questions/issues. This is basically the same as the prioritizing mentioned in the Preparing Yourself section, but think of it as being much more severe.*
- *Do NOT take any extra people with you (i.e., the 3rd or 4th person). Extra people require extra introduction time...and in time constrained interviews, minutes count.*
- *Have your notebooks open to where you need them, have your interview guide/sheet out and ready. Do not lose time finding your place or your guide.*
- *Ask if it might be possible to schedule a follow-up interview at a time that would be convenient with him so you can finish the questions.*
- *"Cheat"! OK, not really, but...You can ask if it would be all right to forward him an email with any extra questions you did not get to ask. In a way you are extending your "interview time"...just not the face-to-face part of it. As he will have already heard some of your direct questions, he will have an idea of what kinds of information you are truly interested in and this tends to improve the responses over those you would normally get from a straight survey/questionnaire.*

Above all, watch the time closely and respect the time constraint the person has imposed. Be standing up and ready to leave with the time is up. Often they will allot a bit more time for you right then, but if they just don't have it, it will improve the chance you can get a follow-on interview with him/her later.

"Hostile" Interviews

Hostile interviews are those interviews where it is *very clear* that the individual just does not want to speak with us and they will often come off very hurried, brusque (short) and even angry with you. There are numerous reasons they may have this attitude but often it is because of one of the following:

- *They have been ordered to speak with us, against their will.*

- They do not like or have a lack of respect for the JALLC (for one reason or another).
- They have been inundated by a lot of other “analysts” and have been interviewed many times on the same subject...and are wondering, “Why don’t all these people share their notes?”
- The interview becomes hostile because the interviewer raises a sensitive topic. Whether intentional or unintentional the outcome is often the same...a hostile interview.
- He/She is just not a very nice person.

During a recent exercise, in an effort to respect the interviewees time and to reduce “redundant” data collection, four organisations with similar, yet distinct assessment/analysis tasks, joined forces as the “Assessment, Analysis and Reporting (A2R) Community”. By proactively coordinating interviews and observations and sharing data they were able to reduce the impact of the data collection efforts on the exercise participants.

If you find that you are one of several entities needing to collect data somewhere and there is not already a mechanism in place, you may want to consider establishing an ad hoc structure similar to the A2R to coordinate the efforts.

Regardless of the underlying reasons, hostile interviews are very uncomfortable, and can even be embarrassing. This can be especially true if the person is openly hostile or rude to you.

If you find yourself in a hostile interview, you might consider one or more of the following:

- Sometimes, the hostile individual can be “won over” if you ask the right questions or deepen⁵ at the right places. Often this will require you either ask different questions or ask the same questions differently than others who have spoken with them.
- Occasionally it helps if you can make comments that indicate you are somewhat knowledgeable about the issues/topics in his world. This of course requires that you truly be somewhat knowledgeable about these issues...whatever you do, do not pretend that you are if you aren’t!

Although you can occasionally salvage a hostile interview, this takes time and effort and will cut into the time you have for the actual interview.

In the end, it may be best to bring the interview to an early conclusion—but make sure you do so politely. In any event, it is important not to get irritated with the interviewee, no matter how he/she comes off to you. It will do no good and can even come back to haunt you if he/she chooses to “report” you to your superior. Don’t get caught in their mood!

Rules of Thumb / Lessons

- What you think does not help us...we need to know what **they** think. We can get what you think anytime.
- Hold your own thoughts until after you have completed the interview/ observations.

The most difficult challenge:
Keep yourself out of it... If you fail to do this, you will not have a successful interview.

⁵ Deepening, as a technique, is covered in detail in Chapter 5.

Expressing *your ideas and opinions can influence their answers. This is particularly true in the later stages of data collection, by which time you may already have formed some opinions; take care not to let those influence your current interview.*

- Remember that you will often need to talk to an individual on several different occasions. In other words, *the interview is not “completed” until after the LAST time you talk to them.*
- We do analysis...*not evaluation* of their performance. If you find yourself critiquing their performance or work...you have probably gone from analysis into evaluation.
- If you ask for 15 minutes... ALWAYS wrap-up the interview within that time period. *Never go longer unless* they tell you it’s OK and they have time to spend.
- *Write down what they say...not your interpretation of what they say.* There are subtleties in the words they choose to use...don’t substitute your words for theirs. It can change the meaning of what they said.
- *We can only “quote” an exact quote.* Make sure you can distinguish later which of your notes are exact statements and which ones are more general notes about what they said. Also, make absolutely sure that you have the individual’s permission to quote him/her. Quotes—especially from Commanders or senior Flag Officers— can be very powerful tools in our final reports, so the more you have the stronger our report can be.
- *If you find yourself thinking of the next question* you are going to ask and they are still discussing the last one...*you are not listening.* You are no longer being an interviewer and you are not collecting data. Also, if you are not listening, you are not writing down what they said either.
- If they say something that doesn’t make any sense, *write it down exactly but let them keep talking.* You can go back to it later for clarification.
- *DO NOT interrupt them.*
- *DO NOT argue with them.*
- If your question *takes longer to ask than it takes for them to answer, you probably did not ask a good question.*
- If they are “hostile” to you, do not get caught up in their frustrations or anger. Your job is to be neutral, so if you feel yourself becoming caught up in their emotions, try to stand back and not immediately react...and do not get caught in the trap where they have you playing “their game”.

*A general rule of thumb is that **the person being interviewed should be the one talking at least 80% of the time.** The person asking the questions should only be talking 20% of the time.*

Critical Skills – Probing Techniques:

Listening/Being Observant:

Two of the most basic skills that are the foundation for good interviewing are your ability to listen and to be observant. These are part of the “art” of interviewing and do require practice/experience to master, but they are skills you can improve all along. To do so, as you conduct your interviews, consciously attempt to:

- *Keep your focus and listen for basic facts and main ideas*
- *Be sensitive to the distinction among the attitudes, opinions, or beliefs you hear from the interviewee*
- *Train yourself not to interrupt the speaker*
- *Pick up on the “body language” the interviewee is displaying including whether they appear uneasy, trying to be humorous, looking at their watch, checking with others in the room before replying, answering to someone other than the “lead”, and so forth.*

Paraphrasing: A powerful Technique

Paraphrasing is one of the most powerful techniques for ensuring you captured what the individual meant...and not just what you *thought* they meant. To paraphrase:

- *Repeat your understanding of their comments in your own words*
- *Ask the speaker if what you have said is correct and ask for any clarifications*
- *Make sure key points by the speaker are captured*
- *Ask as a check to verify understanding*

Paraphrasing is useful to summarise points and allows participants to correct any misunderstandings, and also to introduce additional ideas and thoughts.

Question/Phrasing/Probe Variations

- **Open:** Questions that begin with how, what, which, when, who and why. Effective to encourage responsiveness and reduce defensiveness.
- **Challenges:** Questions specifically phrased which have the individual identify specific areas or points that they found to be more complicated or difficult.
- **Compare and Contrast:** Questions which ask the other person to look for and discuss similarities or differences, these types of questions help the responder to develop and express ideas while allowing the interviewer to steer the direction of the interview.
- **Strength/Vulnerabilities:** Useful to identify what worked, what did not including where a process, system, etc. is most likely to “break”. Can be seen as a variation of Compare and Contrast.
- **Extension:** A question that builds on information already provided.
- **Clarification:** Questions designed to get further explanation about something already said. Often, paraphrasing (see above) is a good mechanism to use to achieve this.
- **Laundry list:** Techniques where the interviewer provides a list of choice options to the interviewee. This encourages the other person to see beyond a single choice and to state a preference.
- **Imagining:** Any question which allows the individual to imagine or explore an alternative reality by giving themselves a different viewpoint or perspective.
- **Expert/Novice Differences:** These types of probes are helpful in identifying expertise and training gaps between more versus less skilled individuals which helps you better capture what a novice will need to learn to become better skilled.

There are two additional techniques which are powerful enough to influence the entire flow and feel of the interview: *Broadening* and *Deepening*. These are covered in detail in the next chapter: *Interviewing Strategies and Tactics*.

Chapter 5: Interviewing Strategies and Tactics

Approaches and Frameworks for Structuring Your Interview

Every interview requires a plan! Going into an interview, it is important to have an understanding of the type of data you want to be your main or primary focus (e.g., decisions, situation awareness, tasks, events, expertise, etc.) and to have an overarching strategy for your approach to the interview. Going into an interview without having a sense of where you want to go and how you plan to get there means you have no way to see if you are on track or need to adjust...that is, you have no reference points for managing or controlling the interview.

Your challenge is to select the appropriate strategic *approach* and *framework* that will leverage the most out of your data collection opportunities.

Approach refers to the *nature of the line of questioning (strategy)* you will employ. *Framework* refers to the *nature of the data* you want to have as your main focus.

This section presents two “approaches” and four “frameworks.” Although this may not seem like many, we have found that combinations of these suffice for almost every interview situation.

Chapter 5: Strategies & Tactics

Approaches

- Broadening
- Deepening
- System Mapping

Frameworks

- Decision-Centred
- Situation Awareness-Centred
- Context-Centred
- Expertise / Knowledge-Centred

Approaches

There are many variations of how to approach an interview strategically. However all tend to fall into three categories: Broadening, Deepening and a combination of the two. In the first, one probes to achieve a broad, overall understanding of a situation/event/context and in the second, one fashions probes in order to acquire detailed information and understandings of specific issues, situations, challenges, problems, etc. The third is a hybrid of the two for specific types of data collection.

Broadening

Broadening is an interviewing approach where you follow a line of questioning that is designed to *elicit a wider, more extensive (broader) understanding* of a larger issue or set of issues / topics. The approach is used when you need to acquire the “big picture” and not focus exclusively on specific events/occurrences.

Examples of broadening approaches might include eliciting:

- *The **entire** sequence of decisions that have to be made for a particular event/task/etc.;*
- ***All** tasks and duties a particular person must perform on a daily/weekly basis;*
- *An overview of an individual's contacts, interactions and information exchanges required to do his task/responsibilities.⁶*

One specific variation of Broadening is **Discovery**. One way to conceptualise Discovery is as a “verbal” Recon Mission. Discovery approaches are *intentionally unfocused*...often because there is not enough known about the topic (and sometimes even *what the topics might be*) to go into the interview more focused.

This approach can be useful when:

- *You are not sure what you should be looking for*
- *You are not sure what you need to ask.*
- *The analysis requirement itself is to look at how a new concept works or doesn't work...and you need to conduct interviews that will help you identify anything that might be problematic...but since it is a new concept, you want to keep it open and not limit the range of possible inputs you might receive.*
- *The customer wants you to “see how something works (or doesn't work)”.*

Discovery probes *tend* to be fairly open and broad and are designed to fill in large, wide gaps in your knowledge/understanding of almost anything ranging from events, roles, organisations, tasks, concepts...or about any anything. The following are a few, very general examples of potential Discovery probes:

- *“What just happened?”*
- *“What do you do for a living?”*
- *“What were you hoping would happen when you did this?”*
- *“How do you think it went?”*

As mentioned above, you're on a *recon mission* and your goal is to get a better feel for the issues, contexts, etc. that you need to examine more closely. Discovery interviews help you adjust your later interviews to be more focused and directed...and fruitful.

Deepening

Deepening is an interviewing approach where you are following a line of questioning about a specific topic or area in order to acquire a very detailed understanding of specific issues or subjects.

This approach is designed to elicit greater and greater levels of detail and specifics about a particular topic or issue and can include:

- *Decisions and Judgements*
- *Awareness of Critical Cues and/or Factors*
- *Errors/Mistakes*
- *Challenges*
- *Expertise/Skill Requirements*

⁶ This could represent the first stage of a more in-depth System Mapping, which combines both broadening and deepening techniques and is described in more detail later in this chapter.

- *Knowledge and/or Information Needs/Requirements, etc.*
- *Relationships (very detailed)*

One specific variation of Deepening is **Causality Determination**. This is a specific approach and line of probing designed to determine the factors that contributed to or caused a specific critical event such as a particular outcome, crisis, error, or accident...that is, some specific (often undesirable) end state. With Causality Determination, *you start deep* with particular end state or outcome and then move upwards (backwards) with the goal being to identify the chain of events that led up to the final point. In certain respects, it is helpful to think of Causality Determination as “Reverse Deepening” since you’re not starting at the top and moving downward into greater and greater detail, but you start at the bottom and back track through the events and factors that led to the final event.

The data acquired with Causality Determination will be directly linked to the problem and, in and of itself, only describes the chain of events/errors leading to this particular outcome. If you wish to generalize beyond this one incident, you will need to conduct additional interviews employing some of the other approaches to collect supporting data. A good example of this approach might be the investigation into an air accident / crash.

Hybrid Broadening and Deepening

Much of the world in which we operate day-to-day involves interacting and exchanging information with others. There have been in the past, and will be in the future, requests for analysis that will require us to understand the nature of these interactions and information exchanges. Usually these will be driven by the desire to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation, whether a single HQ or a combination of HQs and agencies. . Examples might include analyses where you need to understand:

- *Relationships amongst the different subsections within the organisation.*
- *Information flow through an organisation.*
- *Individual (or group) critical relationships, interactions, and information exchanges (i.e., a Social Network Analysis in its original context⁷).*

Anytime you examine the dynamic interactions and information exchanges of an organisation, you will find complex of points from which information flows to or from. Because data and findings from studies such as these are often presented visually as *networks* or *webs*, the data collection and analysis is often referred to by the same terms.

These *Network/Web* analyses usually require that you capture at least:

- *Interactions and Information Exchanges* that take place amongst individuals (or possibly amongst cells and branches, etc.)?
- The *Nature* of the interactions?

⁷ “Social Networks” have acquired a bit of a negative connotation with the advent of on-line networking tools such as Facebook. Originally, Social Network Analysis (SNA) was developed to help understand the intricate interactions, exchanges, dependencies, etc. of a set group of individuals in order to make alterations to improve their information and work flow. Variations of SNA have also been employed in military operations to be able to identify, understand, and track (or capture) significant individuals and key leaders.

- *How* (by what means) the interactions occur?
- *Why* the exchanges take place and why are they seen as *Important*?
- Which individuals are “*Key Nodes*” on the critical paths of the information exchanges/flow?
- Where there are *Disconnects* between perceived level of importance on the two ends of an interaction / exchange.
- What factors exist that serve as *triggers, constraints* and/or *enablers* for the interactions and exchanges?
- What are the *Consequences* to the organisation if an exchange breaks down?

Why is interviewing important for these?

You can get a fairly good sense of an organisation’s overall structure and its information flow and exchange through examination of its “wiring diagrams”, Standard Operating Procedures, etc. However, these only give you a broad overview and understanding of how it is *supposed to* work from a high level perspective.

Employing a variety of “automatic” data collection techniques (e.g., email exchanges, phone logs, etc.) will give you a better understanding of the *actual* interactions and exchanges that occur. However these only address the exchanges and interactions that take place through these specific traceable modalities and you have no opportunity to explore in more depth the subtle aspects such as why the exchange is seen as important, the factors that constrain/enabler the interactions, the consequences of it not taking place, etc.

This is where the importance of interviewing emerges. First, interviewing allows you to identify other types of interaction and exchanges that take place through mechanisms that are not captured via the above approaches (i.e., you **broaden** your understanding of the full nature of the network/web). Second interviewing allows you to put the exchanges and interactions in context and to fill-in critical details such as the Nature, Importance, Disconnects, Consequences, etc. of the specific exchanges/interactions (i.e., you **deepen** your understanding of the actual interactions and exchanges).

One of the unique aspects of analyses such as these is that you need to employ a combination of *coordinated* broadening and deepening techniques. First, being realistic, because of time and access limitations, you will want to coordinate your data collection by interviews to take advantage of and build on other data collections mechanisms, including what you learned about “how it’s supposed to work” from your examination of existing documentation as well as any data you have managed to collect using automatic collection methods. Second, it is important that you consciously balance (coordinate) your efforts so you can simultaneously broaden and deepen your understanding of the issues/challenges. This balance needs to allow you to: 1) Further your understanding of the true scope of the “network” by discovering interaction and exchange mechanisms not captured by the previous methods (broaden); and, 2) Provide opportunities to reassess the critical paths of the interactions and exchanges so can focus/prioritise your efforts and time on deepening the key nodes and, time permitting, expand your efforts to more outlying individuals/nodes.

Decision Centred.

With a Decision Centred interview strategy, the starting points of inquiry for the interview are the critical / important decisions the interviewee is directly involved in making. As such, your first challenge is to identify these decision points. Whether you frame your initial questions generally or anchor them to a particular context will largely depend on the analysis topics you have been tasked to address.

For example, a broad approach may be appropriate if the analysis is to develop an understanding of the intricacies of all the decisions required of a particular position in the headquarters. In which case, your query may be:

- *“What are the main decisions and judgements you need to make on a daily basis as the Chief of the Joint HQ’s Operations Directorate?”*

In comparison, if the analysis is to understand more context specific issues, such as Time Sensitive Targeting (TST), your initial query might be:

- *“As the Joint HQ senior targeting officer, what are the most challenging decisions and judgements required of you with respect to time sensitive targeting in a multi-national, joint environment?”*

Note that although the latter query was context specific, the *framework* around which the question was formulated was the *decisions and judgements*, rather than a context-centred framework which might have been more like:

- *“Describe for me the TST process in a multinational, joint environment.”*

Your goal with a decision centred interview is to be able to understand all of the critical decisions required of a particular position, task, etc. Once you have identified these decisions, you can then continue your line of questioning to uncover the expertise, critical cues and other factors that contributed to the final decisions regarding assessment of the situation and courses of action.

Situation Awareness Centred

Situation Awareness (SA) focused interviews are interesting in that SA is critical for any organisation but it is a topic that is not easy to approach head-on. Directly asking someone *“What was your Situation Awareness?”* usually does not elicit the response you need. Conducting SA-Centred interviews requires a slightly different mind-set than others. There are two constructs you must be aware of and understand in order to conduct a successful SA-Centred interview: *Situation Awareness (SA) Elaboration* and *Situation Awareness (SA) Shift*.

SA Elaboration is a point at which the individual learns something that causes them to alter (change, enhance, etc.) their assessment/awareness of a situation and possibly even to take different actions. However, this enhanced awareness of the situation is not so significant that it requires them to change their overall goals or plans. For example:

- *Information comes in that indicates the enemy is using a different avenue of approach which requires that his/her particular unit adjust their position slightly in order to assure their fields of fire adequately cover the new approach.*

In other words, they do not change their overall strategy; they just adjust its execution slightly.

In contrast, **SA Shift** is a point at which the individual learns something of such import that their assessment/awareness of a situation changes so significantly that they have to change their overall goals or plans. For example:

Information comes in that indicates that the composition of the enemy forces is Divisional rather than Battalion size which requires that they need to quickly adjust their plans from an offensive surprise to a hasty defence in the hopes of delaying the enemy's advance...and surviving themselves.

In this case, they have to completely switch their strategic approach. Their goal is no longer surprise but *delaying and survival*.

One additional characteristic of an SA-Centred interview is that, initially, it must be context centred (see below). That is, the interview must focus on a specific, real incident or event that the individual had first-hand experience with. There are different lines of questioning you will need to use later if you wish to generalise beyond this specific incident (see Annex A).

If you understand the constructs of SA Elaborations and SA Shifts and keep the interview focused on the individual's personal experiences with a specific event/situation, you have established the framework for a successful SA-Centred interview.

Your aim with a SA Centred interview is to walk away with a full understanding of all of the SA Elaborations and Shifts that occurred as well as descriptions of how their SA changed and how these reassessments affected the goals, plans, actions and/or end-states.

Context Centred

With a Context-centred interview strategy, the starting point of inquiry for the interview is a particular event, task, situation, exercise, etc. the individual was/is directly involved in. As such, your first challenge is to determine the context within which you wish to frame the interview.

With context-centred interviews, it is *very important* to frame your queries in the context of the event and to phrase them such that the interviewee understands that you need his responses to be about the parts that he/she personally experienced.

Whether you frame your initial questions generally or anchor them to a particular context will largely be dependent on the overall analysis topic you have been tasked to address. Some examples of the initial Context Centred introductions and queries might be:

- *"During the most recent TST event, what was your specific role?"*
or possibly
- *"From your perspective, as the Senior Targeting Officer and having been involved in the most recent TST, what parts of it and how could it have been executed better?"*

Note that the above examples are *leading* with context-centred questions. It is quite possible that the response may cite decision-making or situation assessment/awareness as areas (among others) where the execution could be improved, at which time you may want to deepen on particulars, but this will depend on your analysis requirement.

Expertise / Knowledge Centred

With Expertise / Knowledge Centred interviews, your primary goal is to gain an understanding about how the individual's expertise, knowledge, skills and/or prior experiences enhanced (or degraded) their performance in their job, tasks, specific events/crises, etc.

Interestingly, the starting point of Expertise Centred interview is to first *clarify the context* within which you want to explore the impact of expertise. Below are just a few examples of *expertise / knowledge /skills contexts*:

- *The expertise required to identify Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).*
- *The expertise involved in conducting Time Sensitive Targeting (TST)*
- *The expertise and skills required for operational planning using Crisis Response Planning (CRP)*
- *The nature/importance/impact of a Load Master's expertise / experiences with respect to loading cargo planes.*
- *The expertise, experience, knowledge and/or skills that are essential for setting up and conducting successful historic battlefield tours.*
- *The expertise, experience and knowledge required to be a successful comic book collector.*

Note that although these types of interviews require a focused Context, the *primary focus is the expertise*. The context just provides a more concrete framework for understanding how, and under what conditions, expertise is important.

An effective way to get at expertise is to employ "Expert-Novice" type probes. Even if you are not planning to interview a novice, at one point in time, the individual you are interviewing was less experienced...i.e., *he/she was more of a novice*. You can take advantage of this with queries such as:

- *"You just explained what you were able to observe that allowed you to make the decision you did—but **how would you have acted differently when you were just starting?**"*
or possibly
- *"What **do you know now**, what have you learned or experienced since then that helps you handle the situation better?"*
or possibly
- *"What **did you not know then** that contributed to your not making as good a decision?"*

Again, it is important to *keep the person speaking about things that he/she has personally experienced* when you are identifying Expertise, Knowledge and Skills. Even if you use the "expert / novice" approach we mentioned above, the person's response needs to be about

his/her own personal experiences...unlike asking a more generic question such as "*How might someone else with less experience have handled this?*"

Annex A: Interview Methodologies⁸

This annex includes descriptions of a variety of formal, tested interview methodologies. Some of the methodologies are designed specifically for interviewing individuals while others can be used for both individuals and groups⁹. However, these will only be valuable if you understand them well enough to be able to adapt them to your specific needs. In other words, the strength of these methodologies is not the application of the following descriptions, but rather how they can be tailored and combined with other approaches to provide you hybrid methods to enhance your data collection efforts.

As you read through these, we stress that you will seldom be able to apply the methods *exactly as they are described*, but will require tailoring to the knowledge/ information/data requirements that your project's analysis needs.

Critical Decision Method (CDM)

CDM is a useful interviewing technique for collecting information about both individuals, and with minor modifications, groups. CDM reveals critical decisions that are made, situation awareness development and shifts, cues and strategies used to develop that situation awareness. It also develops a time line of events that provides insight into how the event unfolded and how the individual managed the incident.

CDM should be conducted as a context specific interview, with the context being one that the interviewee personally took part in. As such, CDM involves information-gathering sweeps through the incident, including:

- a. *Identification and selection of an incident;*
- b. *Time line verification, including identification of events in which the interviewee participated and a detailed time line of the events;*
- c. *Progressive deepening, including shifts in situation awareness and information management issues; and*
- d. *"What-if" queries.*

Basically, the first sweep involves broadening probes, the second sweep begins to slightly deepen in that you are clarifying specific aspects, the third sweep switches to Deepening...and the final one, if you have time, allows you to go outside the person's specific experiences and begin to get a feel for other ways it might have been done.

⁸ The Critical Decision Method, Wagon Wheel, Decision Requirements Exercise and Distributed Team Assessment methodology descriptions contained in this annex are used by permission and adapted/ summarized from Klinger, D. W., Phillips, J., & Thordsen, M. (2000): *Handbook for Team Cognitive Task Analysis* (Report prepared under Aptima Contract #0009). Fairborn, OH: Klein Associates Inc.

⁹ In Cognitive Psychology, "Teams" refers to a specific type of "Group" that has trained to work together toward common goals, etc. However, in order to not confuse these types of "teams" with the "Interview Team", we will refer to these teams you are studying as "Groups".

If you need to speak to them about something that occurred in the past, it is helpful for the interviewee to identify cases that are non-routine, especially challenging or difficult (their recall will be better for these). If you are interviewing them about a much more recent situation (e.g., the exercise they are on) then your main goal is to help them identify the non-routine, challenging and/or difficult aspects of these events. The following is a general description of the steps involved in a CDM:

1. Walk the individual through the incident a second time (sweep two) in order to make sure their account falls into structured and sequentially organized segments. One of the best ways to do this is to, with pencil and paper (or whiteboard), construct a timeline that includes rough estimates of the time between the key segments/events.
2. After the entire incident has been captured, identify the points in which the individual was required to make a critical decision or judgement, provide information to a decision maker or act on a decision. If you are conducting a CDM on a group you will need to do the same, focusing on the same critical points where they had a direct impact (e.g., made the decision) for each of the different members of the group.
3. At this point, depending on your time, you will want to quickly determine which of the above "points" are of greatest interest to your analysis requirement/objectives and then begin to Deepen on each of these areas. That is, you are gradually switching from a Broadening strategy to a Deepening one.
4. Asking a series of deepening probes designed to focus attention on particular aspects of the incident. The probes are designed to progressively deepen understanding of the event, and to build a comprehensive, detailed, and context-specific account of the incident from the perspective of the decision maker.
5. The information you elicit depends on the purpose of the study, and might include:
 - *The presence or absence of salient cues and the nature of those cues;*
 - *Assessment of the situation and the basis of that assessment;*
 - *Expectations about how the situation might evolve;*
 - *Goals considered;*
 - *Options evaluated and chosen;*
 - *Information sources and targets;*
 - *Support from or consultation with other group members.*
6. If you have time remaining in your interview, it can be informative to conduct a fourth sweep through the incident in which you provide the interviewee the opportunity to shift perspective, to move away from their personal experiences and allow them to "what if" the situation. For instance, you can pose various changes to the incident account and ask the participant to speculate on what would have happened differently. In studies of group/team decision making, examples of the queries might be:
 - *"At this point in the incident, what if information coming from a particular group member suddenly stopped?"*
 - *"What would have happened if you had known a particular piece of information?"*
 - *"What pieces of information would have made your decision easier to make?"*
 - *"What cue would have caused you to make a different decision?"*

Summarizing, the CDM is a very methodical approach that allows you, in a variety of "sweeps" to initially develop a broad perspective of an incident, clarify this by developing a detailed timeline, deepen on critical points and finally, time permitting, to expand beyond

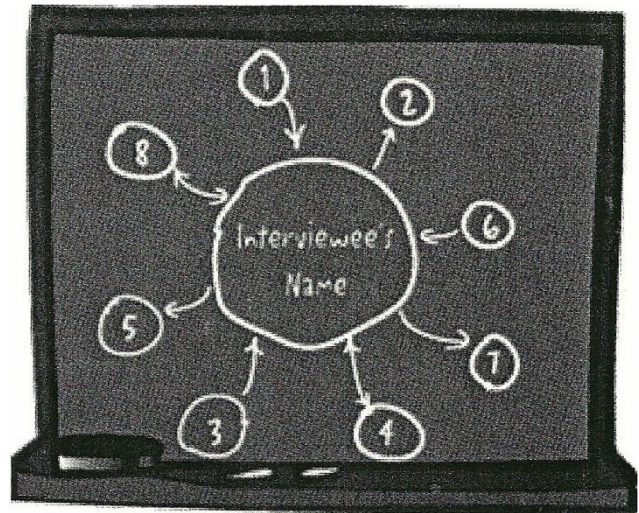
the specific incident to begin to develop a feeling for how it might have been handled differently.

Wagon Wheel Method

The Wagon Wheel Method provides a quick and easy snapshot of information exchanges, relationships, and communications.

The goal of the method is to identify the main communication – exchange – relationship nodes and the nature of the exchanges, for an individual...or in the case of groups, for each position on a group.

The technique is best applied, whether for individuals or groups, in a one- on-one interview setting. It is also important to have a white board, large piece of paper, or some other common point of reference for you and the interviewee to record the communication patterns.



The basic steps of conducting a Wagon Wheel are as follow:

1. Begin by placing the name of the person you are interviewing at the centre of the whiteboard, pad, etc.
2. Follow up by asking whom he/she communicates with when they are working. These names or positions are arranged around and connected to the centre node with arrows that indicate the *direction* of the communication. This provides you a snapshot of whom the interviewee communicates with and whether they are typically receiving or passing information, or both.
3. This initial diagram is basically a “map” of the interactions that are critical to the individual.
4. The next step is to determine the *nature of the communications* (i.e., the arrows drawn from them to each of the points on the perimeter). To simply indicate to whom a group member speaks does little to uncover the true nature of the information flow so this step is where you probe (deepen) *for information regarding the nature of these connections*. Take one connection (i.e., spoke in the Wagon Wheel) at a time and ask a series of questions such as:
 - *What type of information is passed?*
 - *From where did you receive the information you are transmitting?*
 - *From where did he/she receive the information he/she is transmitting to you?*
 - *Did you modify the information in any way? (The goal of this question is to determine if the information was simply passed in its original form or if it was altered, filtered, prioritized, etc., in any way.)*
 - *What decisions does this information affect?*
 - *How do you know they received the information?*
 - *How do you know when to provide them with this information?*
 - *Would you consider this piece of information to be critical to the group's success?*
 - *What's the impact to the group if this communication line is broken?*

Depending on the goals of your project, you may wish to ask more specific questions about each link. For example, if the goal is to introduce new technologies, you may ask whether the information can be passed digitally instead of by voice. If the goal is to redesign their physical workspace (e.g., a command post) you may want to ask questions regarding the importance of face-to-face communications with specific co-workers, etc.

The aim is to develop a fairly detailed understanding (map) of the individual's communication / exchange network that includes the nature and importance of the exchanges. If you are employing this approach for a Group, this will be the *first of many* overlapping "Wagon Wheels" since you will then conduct similar interviews with each identified "node" along the spokes of the Wagon Wheel...and with additional Wheels these individuals construct.

Wagon Wheels are best conducted with two interviewers. One (Lead) asks questions, is at the whiteboard and diagrams the Wagon Wheel while the other (Monitor/Recorder) records the data associated with the links. The importance of the Monitor/Recorder is that, although the Lead may be creating the diagram (e.g., on a Whiteboard, pad of paper, etc.), there will be so much information conveyed by the interviewee that there is never enough room to capture it all graphically and someone needs to capture this extra (often very detailed and important) data.

Rapid (Social) Network Prototyping (A Time Constrained Wagon Wheel Variant)

The following describes a variation of the Wagon Wheel that was developed in order to conduct some interviews with AWACs personnel under fairly tight time constraints (about 30-45 minutes) and under less than ideal circumstances (in a car).

The variation has the following elements.

1. Identification of a context for the queries to focus upon. Examples of these include but are not limited to the individual's:
 - *Daily activities*
 - *Tasks/duties during a particular type of mission*
 - *Performance of a specific task*
 - *Efforts to accomplish [something]*
2. This becomes the framework for the interview and it will be the foundation for how you navigate through the interview. The following is one example of what a Wagon Wheel line of probes might look like:
 - *(Lead-in): "When you first start (doing X), what is it you are initially needing to do?"*
 - *(Follow-on): "While you are doing this, If you could magically have any two or three people right beside you at that time, who would they be?"*
 - *(For each individual the person places in the "seats" beside them): "Why do you need this person close? --What do they provide you? --What do you provide them? -- What would you not know or would miss if you could not communicate with them?"*

At this point you should have a fairly good understanding of *what* the individual is attempting to do and *who has information, knowledge or expertise that is important for him to achieve his tasks/duties.*

You now move the interview context forward with probes such as:

- “*Is it these same individuals you want close to you all day or is there a point at which you would want to (magically or otherwise) have different individuals in the seats right beside you?*” This type of question is important for three reasons:

Any point at which the interviewee indicates they need other individuals “sitting close” is a flag that your interviewee is now engaged in some other type of task or function than previously and that it has different information, knowledge or expertise requirements. You should at these points *directly* ask why/how the situation is different that requires him/her to want different individuals close.

Once you begin to deepen and are asking the same type of questions about this point as previously, the interviewee will already be familiar with the nature of information you are trying to obtain and will usually be able to provide you the equivalent data very rapidly and concisely...i.e., you will be able to collect the same amount of information faster.

Note that each time the individual indicates they need a “seat switch” *usually* indicates they are switching to a different stage or primary area of concern. (i.e., they’re focusing on something different now).

Repeat the above (g.) until you have progressed through the main stages of the context. Usually you should find around 5 to 7 of these stages. If you have only one or two, you may be grouping issues too broadly, that is, you need a bit more specification and detail. If you have many more than 5 to 7, you are probably going too far “down into the weeds...the details” and you need to pull back just a bit and look for the main stages. You can delve into these more detailed, sub-stages later in the interview.

To help make this a bit less ambiguous, the “stages” identified by the Senior Director on and Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft were:

- Bringing the systems on-line (computers, radar, electronic collection, etc.)
- Understanding how the systems were configured
- Developing an initial picture of the threat.
- Building the friendly picture
- Understanding how we are addressing the threats
- Check and follow mission progress
- Watch for unexpected events...adjust

If you wish, as with the Wagon Wheel, you can expand your understanding further by conducting similar interviews with individuals identified in this first interview.

Decision Requirements Exercise

Decision Requirements **Tables** (see figure below) have been used extensively to break down the subtleties of decisions (i.e., decision requirements) made by individuals operating within complex environments.

The Decision Requirements **Exercise** (DRX) is a methodology to help the interviewer fill in the details of these informative tables. The DRX is flexible enough to be effective across a wide range of domains, application areas and research goals. Much like the Wagon Wheel, the DRX is an efficient way to meaningfully represent data since the individuals (or the individuals as a group) develop the tables themselves...your role is just to facilitate this.

As the table is developed, you will begin to understand the issues from the individual's and/or the group's (decision-centred) perspective. The fact they are directly engaged in the development of the table facilitates them identifying gaps in the data they have provided and usually results in them filling in these holes.

What Decisions Were Made?	What Made those decisions difficult?	What Cues or Information Were Used to Make This Decision?	What Would You Do Differently Next Time?

Table 1: Decision Requirements Table

Some contexts in which the DRX is effective include:

- *Uncovering what cues, factors, and other pieces of information are necessary to make decisions.*
- *Clarifying the group's roles and functions, and, subsequently, the requirements of each group member.*
- *Identifying/highlighting barriers to information flow, especially those that are due to a lack of awareness of information requirements across the group.*
- *Sharing knowledge and expertise across group members.*

As with many of the methodologies designed to get at an individual's personal experiences/expertise, DRX is best when used in a *context specific framework*, in which the individual, or the entire group, was/were personally involved; however, it can also be employed more generally as well.

Your role in conducting a DRX is as a "facilitator interviewer", focusing on helping the individual(s) identify explicit information and nuances about their own decision making

Step 1: Introduce the Decision Requirements Exercise-

Because a DRX "interview" is a bit different than most interviewees will have experienced, there are a couple things that are helpful to do up front, right at the beginning. First, introduce them to the DRX concept itself. That is, explain to them exactly what you and they are going to do. Here is an example of what a DRX "introduction" might look like:

For this situation, I would like to use an approach called the Decision Requirements Exercise. I will draw a table on the whiteboard and we will start by listing all of the important critical decisions you made in the first column. Once we have identified all of the important decisions, we will look at each of them individually and fill in the

other columns of the table as we move forward. At end of the session, everyone will have a clearer picture of all of the decision processes such that you can make these decisions more efficiently next time.

Immediately following the introduction you should draw a table on a whiteboard, including a heading for each column. Prior to the DRX, you will need to have identified which aspects of decision-making are most relevant to the group and your analysis requirements and, based on this, determine all of the column headings for your table. For DRX, the first column should be "*Critical Decision or Judgement*".¹⁰

You need to also fill in the heading for each of the other columns. The actual column headings will depend on your analysis needs. Some examples of possible headings include:

- *Why Difficult?* - The reasons the decision is challenging (including barriers).
- *Common Errors* - The errors inexperienced people tend to make when addressing the decision.
- *Cues* - The pieces of information from the environment that are used to make the decision (e.g., readings of the radiation level at a certain time).
- *Factors* - The pieces of information known prior to the event that are used to make the decision (e.g., standard operating procedures, available assets, etc.).
- *Strategies* - How individuals say they make the decision (e.g., weigh certain cues and factors more heavily than others).
- *Information Sources* - Where the information used to make the decision comes from.
- *Suggested Changes* - How the group could better support the decision.

Once you have the table and column headings drawn and filled in, ask the participants to identify the critical decisions they had to make. List these in the first column. At this point, only ask questions to clarify the decision or judgement. Do not yet probe to fill out the remaining columns of the table, just get a fairly complete list.

If the interview time is limited, ask the interviewee group to identify the five (or whatever number seems appropriate) most critical decisions. Take each of these, one at a time and have the interviewee fill out the remainder of the columns of the table for that decision. The probes you use will depend on the column headings you have employed.

As you conduct a DRX, it is important to:

- Keep everyone involved in the discussion. Do not focus all your questions on the person who made the decision in the exercise. Ask other participants what they would have been thinking if they had to make the decision.
- Do not be afraid to stop exploring one decision and move to another. Sometimes it is difficult to know beforehand if a decision is complex, and whether or not there is

¹⁰ *However* the DRX is quite flexible. If you need to conduct an interview that is not decision centred, you can easily adjust the DRX to have different focuses, e.g., a "Situation Awareness Exercise" or "Critical Cue Exercise", in which case the first column will reflect the focus of the interview (decisions versus situation awareness versus critical cues, etc.).

room for improvement around a particular decision. If one decision is not facilitating discussion, pick another one and start again.

- Distributed Team Assessment¹¹
- Make the group focus on what they knew at the time the decision was being made, not what they know in hindsight.

*Make sure to keep the group focused on **what they knew at the time the decision was being made, not what they know in hindsight.***

A distributed team is geographically separated, whether in different countries, rooms, or over the next hill. The Distributed Team Assessment Method (DTA) is an interview approach that will enable the user to assess aspects of the coordination performance of distributed teams, such as communication and synchronization.

This method is conducted in "threads" (segments) and then pieced together. Threads are common themes of questions asked by all data collection teams, and they allow the data collection teams to connect the "what," "when," "where," "whom" and "how" of the actions and interactions of distributed team members.

The primary requirement is that all interviews have a common focus. That is, each interviewee must have either been involved in the same incident or they must have extensive knowledge of a particular type of mission. The DTA provides a research team with very powerful data, and a common incident described by various team members from various perspectives. The method helps identify miscommunications, poorly shared situation awareness, and how decisions are made. It is often very difficult to determine exactly who is making decisions in teams, and even more difficult in teams that are geographically separated.

However, as implied by the above, it is important to plan and coordinate prior to the interviews to ensure that all of the interviews cover the same ground, even though each will be from the individual interviewee's perspective.

DTA is a very effective method for a team that is widely separated. You can conduct one set of interviews on one coast, for example, and a second set on the opposite coast. As long as the team members maintain a common focus, the method provides very rich data from a variety of perspectives. If there is no common focus ("threads"), another method will likely yield better results.

Your introduction is important. You must clarify (or agree upon), with all of the interviewees, *exactly* which mission or incident (i.e., the common thread) will be the focus of the discussion.

¹¹ As the method is entitled "Distributed Team Assessment," for this section the use of the term "Team" refers to the group/organisation you are studying...*not your Interview Team.*

After the introduction, ask for his or her function within the team. It is important to probe the individual about what they *really do* (not what doctrine or the corporate plan describes). Ask for a description of the participant's function and ask the participant to tell you his or her goal within the given mission or incident. You want to know what they really do, not what they were told they were supposed to do.

You will also want to ask questions concerning the participant's interactions with other team members. This will provide you with a common thread of team member communication and coordination. The need for team members to interact often identifies an information requirement (information they need or information they possess that they have to distribute) and the context in which this interaction is required. It is here that a Wagon Wheel representation might be of benefit.

Applying a combination of the two approaches can be a powerful tool for discovering overlaps in roles and functions, exposing goal conflicts and identifying opportunities for improved information exchanges.

The next step is to walk the interviewee back through the incident or mission and have them identify the major "points." The points should be described as anything that changes the way the team operates, anything that increases the "pulse rate," or anything that is difficult for the team to accomplish. After the points are identified, the following questions should be asked about each point:

- *What is the current situation?*
- *What do you think is going on?*
- *What do you need to accomplish, decide...?*
- *If you could collocate your team which people would you want sitting near you? ("Seat").*

Now, for each of the above "seats" follow up with:

- *Why do you need or want them?*
- *What is it about the situation that makes you require them?*
- *What do they provide you?*
- *What do you need to provide them?*

This helps you understand who the critical members are for each person at each major stage in the incident or mission. It is this information that allows the researcher to redesign a command post, restructure communication networks, or identify critical team members.

Summary

These are tested methods that have been used in many diverse domains. If you become familiar enough with these methodologies so that you can begin to adjust and tailor them to your particular analysis issues and interview objectives you will find they provide the foundation for very powerful interviewing.

The key lies in the selection of the appropriate method (or combination of methods) and adapting them to leverage the most out of your data collection opportunities. To aid in this

selection, a Methodology Selection Guide is included as part of the Quick Reference Field Guide (Annex B).

Annex B:

Quick Reference Field Guide for Interviewing

This section is specifically designed as a quick reference guide for your interview data collection efforts. It includes some “checklists” to help you make sure you’ve done all of your advance preparations and as well as synopses of central points covered in detail in the main body of the guide.

This annex is available on the JALLC SharePoint Server if you wish to print additional copies.

Checklist 2 (Preparing the Interviewee): Have you completed the following?

<input type="checkbox"/>	√ ? Informed the Interviewees about:
<input type="checkbox"/>	• Who you are?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• Where you are from?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• What you are doing?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• Why you are doing this project?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• Who asked you to do this project?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• Why it is important for you to speak with him/her?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• What topics you wish to speak with him/her about?
<input type="checkbox"/>	• How much of his/her time you will need?
<input type="checkbox"/>	For key individuals, have you formally requested an interview from them?
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Notes/Comments/Reminders:

Overall Strategies

Broadening is an interviewing approach designed to *elicit a wider, more extensive (broader) understanding* of a larger issue or set of issues / topics. The approach is used when you need to acquire the “big picture” and not focus exclusively on specific events/occurrences.

Discovery (a variation of Broadening). One way to conceptualise Discovery is as a “verbal” Recon Mission. Discovery approaches are *intentionally unfocused*...often because there is not enough known about the topic (and sometimes even *what the topics might be*) to go into the interview more focused.

Deepening is an interviewing approach where you are following a line of questioning about a specific topic or area in order to acquire a very detailed understanding of specific issues or subjects. You start at a high-level general issue and continue to probe until you have a very detailed understanding of the specifics.

Causality Determination (a variation of Deepening). An approach and line of probing designed to determine the factors that contributed to, caused or led to some specific undesired end-state (e.g., a problem, a crisis, an error, an accident, etc.). *You start deep* with the some undesired end state and then move upwards (backwards) to identify the chain of events that led up to the final point, i.e., “Reverse Deepening”.

System Mapping involves a combination of broadening and deepening techniques that are specifically designed to elicit some type of mapping of a “system”. System mapping is used when you need to identify the relationships and interactions inherent to and/or important for the “system” which can include an individual’s “social network”, the information flow/channels of an organisation, and even the relationships and interdependencies inherent in an organisation’s sub divisions.

Interview Frameworks

Decision Centred. Decision-centred interviews focus on the critical / important decisions the interviewee is directly involved in making. The technique involves first identifying the points where important decisions were required. You then probe in depth about the intricacies involved in being able to make these decisions. “Intricacies” include, but are not limited to: situation awareness, critical information, their knowledge, expertise and previous experiences that contributed to the decision.

Situation Awareness (SA) interviews focus on the individual’s level of understanding/awareness of the world around him, whether generally or in a specific context. Conducting SA Centred interviews requires an understanding of the constructs for **SA Elaboration** and **SA Shift**.

Context-centred interviews are those in which the focus of *all probes* centre around one specific event, task, situation, exercise, etc. that the individual *was/is directly* involved in. The first series of questions are geared to identify and describe this context. Once the context/incident is clear, the interview may then explore nearly any direction including decisions, situation awareness, specific problems/challenges, etc. The challenge of Context-Centred interviews is to always frame your queries in the context of the event and to phrase them such that the interviewee understands that you need his responses to be about the parts that he/she personally experienced.

Expertise / Knowledge Centred interviews are those that are constructed specifically to gain an understanding about how the individual’s personal expertise, knowledge, skills and/or prior experiences enhanced (or hurt) their performance in their job, tasks, decision making,

specific events/crises, etc. Expertise/Knowledge centred interviews require that they be Context centred.

Team Configuration

Checklist 3 Configuring your Team: Have you considered...discussed?

<input type="checkbox"/>	The Rank of the interviewee?
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Nationality of the interviewee?
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Service of the interviewee?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Whether someone may have prior relationships with the individual?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Who has the most familiarity with the topic/issue to be discussed?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rank differences within the interviewing team and how you might address these?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Language skills within the team?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consciously configured the interview team based on the above considerations?

Interview Roles Summary

Lead

- Makes the necessary introductions and gets the process moving
- Conducts the interview
- Asks the questions
- Does most of the talking for the interview team
- Keeps the interview on track.
- If necessary, 'nicely' redirects the interviewee back to the main topics you need to address.
- Determines the conceptual path to follow to cover the required topics...different people have different ways to get to a point or ask a question...only one should have this role in the interview or it will become frustrating for all.
- Decides when to temporarily hand-off "Lead" to the other interviewer (at which point, "Lead" becomes "Second" for a short period).

Monitor/Recorder:

- Records the data
- Take extremely detailed notes
- Tends to the tape recorder (if one is present)
- Monitors and Tracks the interview progress in terms of the predetermined interview goals you established before the interview:
 - What topics have been covered...not been covered
 - Listens for points/issues that should be further pursued. These are usually signalled by key "flag words". The lead will be focusing on conducting the interview and it is not unusual for some points to come up that they do not pick up.
 - Keeps track of his/her own questions to ask when the interview is handed over by Lead.
- When "control" of the interviewed is handed-off by Lead:
 - Goes back and fills in any gaps you noticed from the earlier part of the interview.
 - Follow up with any additional questions you may have of your own.

- Return control back to the original Lead (unless you agreed in advance on some other arrangement).

Rules of Thumb

- *What you think does not help us...we need to know what **they** think. Expressing your ideas and opinions can influence their answers.*
- *If you find yourself critiquing their performance or work...you have probably gone from analysis into evaluation.*
- *Never go longer than the time you requested **unless** they tell you it's OK and they have time to spend.*
- *Write down what they say...not your interpretation of what they say.*
- *We can only "quote" an **exact** quote and only with the individual's permission.*
- *If you find yourself thinking of the next question you are going to ask and they are still discussing the last one...you are not listening.*
- *If they say something that doesn't make any sense, write it down exactly but let them keep talking, go back later to clarify.*
- *DO NOT interrupt them.*
- *DO NOT argue with them.*
- *If your question takes longer to ask than it takes for them to answer, you probably did not ask a good question.*
- *The person being interviewed should be talking at least 80% of the time.*
- *If they are "hostile" to you, do not get caught up in their frustrations or anger.*
- *Keep your focus and listen for basic facts and main ideas*
- *Be sensitive to the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs you hear from the interviewee*
- *Be sensitive to the "body language" of the interviewee*
- *Use Paraphrasing frequently*

Question/Phrasing/Probe Variations

- **Open:** *Questions that begin with how, what, which, when, who and why. Effective to encourage responsiveness and reduce defensiveness.*
- **Challenges:** *Questions specifically phrased which have the individual identify specific areas or points that they found to be more complicated or difficult.*
- **Compare and Contrast:** *Questions which ask the other person to look for and discuss similarities or differences, these types of questions help the responder to develop and express ideas while allowing the interviewer to steer the direction of the interview.*
- **Strength/Vulnerabilities.** *Useful to identify what worked, what did not including where a process, system, etc. is most likely to "break". Can be seen as a variation of Compare and Contrast.*
- **Extension:** *A question that builds on information already provided.*
- **Clarification:** *Questions designed to get further explanation about something already said. Often, paraphrasing is a good mechanism to use to achieve this.*
- **Laundry list:** *Techniques where the interviewer provides a list of choice options to the interviewee. This encourages the other person to see beyond a single choice and to state a preference.*
- **Imagining:** *Any question which allows the individual to imagine or explore an alternative reality by giving themselves a different viewpoint or perspective.*

- **Expert/Novice Differences:** *These types of probes are helpful in identifying expertise and training gaps between more versus less skilled individuals which helps you better capture what a novice will need to learn to become better skilled.*

Methodology Selection Guide

The following table is provided as a guide to help you determine which method(s) may be appropriate for the situation and type of interview you are conducting.

Characteristics	Team CDM	Wagon Wheel	Decision Requirements Tables	Distributed Team Assessment	Team Audit ¹²
Domain					
Distributed Team	X	X	X	X	X
Co-located Team	X	X	X	X	X
Design for Envisioned World		X	X		
High Information Flow	X	X	X	X	X
High Level of Uncertainty	X	X	X	X	X
Frequent, Short Incidents		X		X	X
Incidents have Long Duration	X		X	X	
Interviewees					
Lots of Expertise	X	X	X	X	X
Very Little Expertise		X		X	X
Interviewing One Person at a Time	X	X		X	X
Interviewing Groups		X	X	X	
Time Constraints of Interviews					
Less than 1 Hour		X	X		X
1 hour to 2 Hours	X	X	X		X
More than 2 Hours	X			X	X
Purpose of Data Collection					
Dissecting Information Flow		X		X	
Identify Roles and Functions		X		X	X
Identify Decisions	X		X	X	X
Identify Information Requirements	X	X	X	X	X
Identify Decision Requirements	X		X	X	X
Identify Barriers to Decision Making			X	X	X

¹²A description of the Team Audit was not included in Annex A as it was deemed to not be as applicable in the settings in which we conduct most of our interviews. However, if you would like to learn more about it, please contact the authors.

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