The Science of Interviewing and Interrogation

Christian Meissner, Ph.D.
Iowa State University
Training manuals, materials, and anecdotes contain information about common and recommended interrogation practices ... but virtually none of those documents cites or relies upon any original research, and no scientific research substantiates the effectiveness of these approaches. It also even appears that some of the conventional wisdom that has guided training and policy for half a century is at odds with existing scientific knowledge.
Experience and lessons learned offer a necessary, but insufficient, basis for determining the effectiveness of interrogation practices. A program of scientific research on interrogation practices is both necessary and highly feasible. Researchers have diverse venues available to investigate interrogation practices. Such a research program should combine experimental research with a substantial effort to perform independent and objective analyses of specific interrogation results.
High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group

Mission of the HIG is to deploy the best interrogation resources against terrorism suspects identified as having information with the greatest potential to prevent terrorist attacks against the U.S. and its allies.

The HIG also serves as the locus for interrogation best practices, lessons learned, and research for the U.S. Government.
The goals of the HIG research program include evaluating the effectiveness of existing interrogation techniques, and developing new, science-based approaches that improve the collection of information.

All HIG research is unclassified and subjected to review by Human Subjects Research Committees.
Since the HIG research program began in 2010, it has awarded more than 120 contracts and coordinated with more than 35 research teams around the world.

Projects have resulted in more than 125 publications in leading scientific journals and edited volumes.

Partnerships with federal training facilities and with federal and local law enforcement agencies have been critical to the programs success.
Laboratory from theory to interview paradigms

Training Academy evaluate vs. “current practice”

Validate Training “train the trainer” & assess efficacy

Field Validation effectiveness & adherence

Meissner, Kelly, & Woestehoff (2015)
Field Validation (2014 – 2016)

Data Collection

October 2014

14 - 19 September
N = 30

3 - 7 November
N = 30

9 - 13 February
N = 33

30 Mar - 3 Apr
N = 32

September 2015
Cooperation - Resistance

Counter-Interrogation Tactics

Rapport

Influence Principles

Conversational Rapport

Cognitive Interview

Information Yield

Training

Accusatorial