

The Scharff technique:

Examining how to frame key pieces of information to establish the illusion of knowing it all.

Sanouk Poppinghaus

The Scharff technique is used to effectively and ethically elicit human intelligence. The third tactic, creating the illusion of knowing it all, can be seen as the core of the technique. The essence is to share detailed information with a source to create an illusion where the interviewer seems more knowledgeable than s/he really is. However, an interviewer is not always in the position where he or she can share sensitive information with the source. The current study examined a different way to establish the illusion of knowing it all, without disclosing all information. This was done by describing the information in abstract terms instead of describing it in concrete terms, which resembles the traditional way. Participants ($N = 55$) were randomly allocated to concrete story approach or the abstract story approach. The experiment measured the participants' perceptions regarding the interviewer's knowledge about an upcoming attack. The results were mixed but show support for a more optimal illusion of knowing it all. That is, if the interviewer shared less detailed information the source still perceived that she or he had more knowledge regarding the attack. It resembles the illusion, which would be perceived as valid when the interviewer seems to have more knowledge than what is the case.

A number of coordinated terrorist attacks at the evening of November 13 (2015) in Paris, resulting in 130 deaths, seems to have been the beginning of a sequence of attacks in Western-Europe. In the following years the major cities of Brussel, Istanbul, Nice, Berlin, London, Stockholm, Manchester, and Barcelona faced the horrendous consequences of terrorist attacks. In addition, the Global Terrorism Index (2017) describes the year of 2016, due to terrorist attacks, as the deadliest in Europe and other developed countries since 1988. A crucial aspect to prevent terrorist attempts is to improve methods for collecting information by interacting with people, commonly referred to as human intelligence (HUMINT) gathering (Oleszkiewicz, Granhag, & Kleinman, 2017). In accordance with the just mentioned statistics, reports have brought our attention to a large number of unethical methods being applied in the field (see, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014; Hoffman et al., 2015). This has demonstrated a large gap in our knowledge regarding what methods are both effective and ethical with respect to gathering reliable and actionable-information (Evans et al., 2013). This has resulted in the development of evidence-based methods for gathering HUMINT, which has subsequently influenced a scientific conceptualization of a HUMINT-gathering technique used in WWII: the Scharff technique (Oleszkiewicz, Granhag, & Kleinman, 2017). The general aim of the current study is to further examine the Scharff technique.

Human intelligence gathering

According to Justice, Bhatt, Brandon, and Kleinman (2010) HUMINT gathering is the collection of information through the interaction between two or more people, for example an interrogation, and revolves around the concept that information is gathered through human communication. A particular form of HUMINT is information elicitation, which can be defined as the process under which the source (a) underestimates the amount of new information revealed to the interviewer, and (b) remains unaware of the interviewer's information interests during the exchange. (Oleszkiewicz, Granhag, & Kleinman, 2014).

The Scharff technique

Hanns-Joachim Gottlob Scharff (1907 – 1992) was an interrogator during WWII who refused to use abusive methods to gather intelligence. He was part of the Luftwaffe (the German Air Force) and interrogated nearly 500 British and American pilots of the Allied Air Force. He became an interrogator because he spoke fluent English and was well accustomed to their cultural norms (Toliver, 1997). Scharff emphasized a friendly, respectful and (perhaps most essentially) a perspective-taking approach, which clearly distinguished his methods from more coercive alternatives. Perspective taking is a person's ability to understand events from another person's viewpoint and facilitates the possibility to anticipate this person's reaction or behavior (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008). Scharff would imagine himself in the prisoner's position and analyzed which strategies the prisoner would use during an interrogation. According to Clemens (2013), a source will invent resisting tactics when facing an interrogation (counterinterrogation strategies) attempting to appear credible and convincing. Scharff used perspective taking to identify counterinterrogation strategies and subsequently adjust his tactics to them. He distinguished three common strategies: 1) "I will not tell very much during the interrogation"; 2) "I will try to figure out what they are after, and then make sure not to give them what they want"; and 3) "It is meaningless to withhold or deny what they already know" (Granhag, 2010).

Scharff tactics

Scharff used at least five tactics to counter the strategies adopted by his prisoners, hereafter the source (Granhag, 2015). The first tactic is a *friendly approach*, the essence relies on an equality-oriented and- conversational approach instead of coercive methods. The

second tactic is *not pressing for information*, instead of demanding information by asking explicit questions, Scharff told long stories and gave the source opportunities to correct errors or add details to his story. The third tactic is *the illusion of knowing it all*. By telling the source an elaborated story, Scharff showed that he was well-informed regarding the situation the source was interrogated about. The importance of creating this story is twofold. First, if the source wants to show cooperation, s/he must share more than the information the interviewer already possesses. Secondly, when overestimating the interviewer's possession of information, the source might share new information; holding the thought that the interviewer already knows it (Granahag, Oleszkiewicz, Strömwall, & Kleinman, 2015). The fourth tactic is *confirmation/disconfirmation*, the essence is to present statements instead of asking questions directly. When presenting a statement, e.g., 'we already have information telling us that the bomb will be set off in the evening', the source is likely to be more willing to confirm or disconfirm the statement compared to answering a direct question about it, e.g., 'when will the bomb explode?' (Granahag, 2010). New information can be extracted even when the source says almost nothing (e.g., only a yes or no). The fifth tactic is to *ignore new information*. When the source presents new information, it is essential to treat the information as not significant, and thereby give the impression that the information was already known or not relevant.

Scientific evaluation of the Scharff technique

Previous studies on the Scharff technique shows that it results in more new information than the direct approach (asking open-ended and explicit questions in a business-like manner), which is a standard interrogation method in the U.S. (United States Army, 2006). Additionally, sources interviewed with the Scharff technique commonly underestimate their contribution of new information and have a more difficult time understanding what information the interviewer seeks to collect (May & Granahag, 2015). The positive effects as a result of using the Scharff technique have been mainly attributed to establishing the illusion of knowing it all (Granahag, Montecinos, & Oleszkiewicz, 2015). Granahag, Kleinman, and Oleszkiewicz (2016) have provided a more elaborated description about this conclusion. That is, the importance of the illusion is connected with the source's information management dilemma. Fundamentally to the tactic illusion of knowing it all is sharing information to create an illusion to be more knowledgeable than you actually are. Convincing the source this illusion is valid, the interviewer tells a detailed and credible story. The information

management dilemma, that source often have to navigate due to divided loyalties, (Oleszkiewicz, Granhag, & Kleinman, 2017) is that the source needs to show a cooperative gesture towards the interviewer but cannot share everything s/he knows about the topic (e.g., fear of retaliation). The illusion creates a setting where the source is more willing to be cooperative and share information. This willingness is due to two factors, 1) the cooperative source cannot repeat the information what the interviewer already shared as that would not signal cooperation and therefore provides new information and 2) the source makes wrong assumptions thinking if the interviewer possesses information A, B, & D, s/he also knows C. Subsequently, the source provides new information holding the thought that the interviewer already knew this (Oleszkiewicz, 2016). With respect to the other tactics, the illusion of knowing it all can be seen as the core of the technique, however the implementation of the illusion can be more optimized (Meissner, Surmon-Böhr, Oleszkiewicz & Alison, 2017).

May and Granhag (2015) examined an alternative for creating the illusion of knowing it all. The study contained two experiments where a source is being interviewed about an upcoming attack. The first experiment tested to what extent the source perceived the interviewer's knowledge. The traditional way of establishing the illusion of knowing it all starts with providing a statement such as: "I already hold most of the important information". Participants were randomly allocated to two conditions 1) *the just start condition* where the illusion is created without the explicit statement and 2) *the traditional condition* where the illusion is created with the explicit statement. The participants had to remember 14 pieces of background information regarding the attack. The illusion is further created by sharing information on seven themes regarding the attack. After the interview the participants filled in a questionnaire concerning the perceptions on how much knowledge the interviewer possessed. Results showed that the source believed that the interviewer possessed more information in the just start condition compared to the traditional condition. The second experiment tested the source's perception of the interviewer's knowledge gaps. The method of the second experiment was the same compared to the first experiment, except the post-questionnaire. The participants filled in a questionnaire concerning the perceptions on the interviewer's knowledge gaps. Results showed that the participants in the just start condition searched less for gaps in the interviewer's knowledge compared to the traditional condition. The purpose of establishing the illusion of knowing it all is to increase the source's perception regarding the amount of knowledge the interviewer holds. By using a different opening statement for creating the illusion, the source believed that the interviewer held more

information compared with the traditional way (May & Granhag, 2015). This study showed a first attempt in obtaining more knowledge contributing to an advanced implementation of the ‘illusion’ tactic which resembles the aim of the current study.

Because a problem in practice is that it can be a tactical mistake to share information. Up until now, research did not investigate this problem, which resembles a science gap on how to increase the illusion without sharing critical details. It can provide alternative ways when the interviewer is in a position where s/he cannot share all information in detail, what is usually done in the Scharff technique.

Construal level theory

The concept psychological distance represents a person’s recall of an event in the past or in the future in relation to the here and now (Geurts, Granhag, Ask, & Vrij, 2016). Each person has its own subjective experience of an event; everyone has a different point of view and describes it in different ways. So if an event occurs further in the past or future the experience of psychological distance increases (e.g., having an exam next week instead of tomorrow). The cognitive representation of these subjective experiences can be explained as construals. The construal level theory (Liberman & Trope, 1998) states that people are processing construals with greater psychological distance in more global, abstract terms (a high-level construal). In contrast, a construal with a lesser psychological distance is processed in detailed, concrete terms (a low-level construal). For example, we think about going on vacation next week in concrete terms: what to pack, how to ride to the airport or what are the cultural attractions. We think about going on vacation next year in more abstract terms: a sunny country, an active vacation or staying in Europe. Subsequent to the theory, when we think about an event in concrete terms we have a concrete mindset. A person’s concrete mindset gives someone the feeling that the event occurred recently.

To withhold key pieces of information and simultaneously establishing the illusion of knowing it all, an abstract story instead of a detailed story could be used. However, when replacing a concrete description with an abstract description the next problem may arise. The process abstraction includes a loss of useful information regarding the specific event (Trope & Liberman, 2010). The source will be less convinced the illusion is valid using an abstract description than using an elaborated description. Because detailed statements are more perceived as true than less detailed statements (Mac Giolla, Granhag, & Liu-Jönsson, 2013).

The potential answer to this problem is provided in the study of Kyung, Menon, and Trope (2014). The study showed that if a person has more knowledge regarding an event and that event would be described in abstract terms, s/he can have the feeling that it occurred recently. This finding represents the opposite of what the above described construal level theory presumes. That is, an event is processed in more concrete terms when closer in time and processed in more abstract terms when it is further away (Trope & Liberman, 2010). When creating the illusion of knowing it all with detailed, concrete terms (i.e., Scharff's traditional way) s/he can have the feeling the event just has occurred. For this study, we want to create the same effects as the traditional way to acquire the same efficacy of the illusion. Kyung, Menon, and Trope (2014) stated that having more knowledge regarding an event reverses the relationship between processing events in abstract and concrete terms. Therefore, using abstract instead of concrete terms to establish the illusion can have the same efficacy regarding a person's feeling of how recently an event occurs. The Scharff technique is used to interrogate people who are more knowledgeable about a specific topic and hence have a greater knowledge regarding the interrogations subject. The above described findings of Kyung, Menon, and Trope (2014) substantiates the use of abstract terms for creating the illusion of knowing it all.

The source's perception of the illusion using a story without detailed information can still be provided under the same circumstances compared to the traditional way used by Scharff. In accordance with the construal level theory there are methods for translating concrete descriptions to abstract descriptions (Trope & Liberman, 2010). When making such translations it is important to determine the extent to which a term can be abstracted without losing its meaning. That is, objects and actions have hierarchically divided categories which are important for translating. In the process of abstraction, the broader the category, the more abstract the representation of the object or action will be. For example an AK-47 can be translated back to a rifle, or even more abstract, a weapon. The additional information of the weapon does not have to be important for creating the illusion (e.g., it is only important that a weapon was used, not which). These methods provided by Trope and Liberman (2010) has been applied in the present study.

The present study

The aim of the current study is to further examine the efficacy of the Scharff technique. More specifically, the third tactic of this technique, creating the illusion of knowing it all. The

specific aim of the study is to establish the illusion of knowing it all, without sharing all key pieces of information to the source. The foundation of the tactic is to provide a detailed story, by sharing pieces of already known information, to someone who has knowledge about ongoing or upcoming criminal activities. Normally when establishing the illusion of knowing it all, an elaborated story is created that explains a current situation in very detailed and concrete terms (e.g., we know that the bomb will be set off in the National park at 11 pm). At the same time, the interviewer is not always in the position to share key pieces of information with the source (e.g., the source is not in custody and could misuse the information).

According to the construal level theory, concrete terms can be translated to more abstract terms and subsequently contains fewer pieces of key information (e.g. we know that the bomb will be set off in the evening in a public space). When using abstract terms the source can have the feeling the event occurs recently, what a source normally would have similar with a detailed story (Kyung, Menon, and Trope, 2014). Therefore using abstract terms for creating the illusion can have the same efficacy as using concrete terms. That is appearing as more knowledgeable than what is the case. This reasoning is guided by one theoretical assumption because the literature on this topic is relatively sparse. Because it seems more logical that when person A provides more detailed information regarding a topic compared to person B who is providing abstract information, person A seems to have more knowledge. However, this study will attempt to make person B appear more knowledgeable than person A. In line with above findings, the following hypotheses have been formed:

Hypothesis 1: the source will perceive that the interviewer has more knowledge when the interviewer is using abstract terms compared to using concrete terms when creating the illusion of knowing it all.

Hypothesis 2: the source will perceive that the interviewer demonstrated less information when using abstract terms compared to using concrete terms.

Hypothesis 3: the source will perceive that less information is unknown to the interviewer when the interviewer uses abstract terms compared to using concrete terms.

Hypothesis 4: the source will perceive that the interviewer possesses more concealed information using abstract terms compared to using concrete terms.

Hypothesis 5: the source will perceive that the interviewer demonstrated less information and have more concealed information using abstract terms, whereas the source will perceive that the interviewer demonstrated more information and have less concealed using concrete terms.

Method

Participants

Fifty-five adults (27 women, 26 men, 2 unknown) between 18 and 59 years of age ($M = 24.1$, $SD = 8.7$) were randomly assigned to the two different experimental conditions: 28 in the concrete story approach and 27 in the abstract story approach. The participants were recruited online by the Sona System of the University of Twente. Additionally, due to the difficulty in recruiting participants, the author also had acquaintances participate in the study. The study was described as following: “Using the Scharff technique in interrogations - can you assess the agent’s intentions in an interrogation?”. Requirements for participation was to understand English to a decent level and a minimum age of 18 years. The data was normally distributed and there were no exclusions. The study was granted approval by the Ethics Committee of the faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences at the University of Twente.

Procedure

All the participants were provided with a link to the study on Qualtrics. The study started with an informed consent, which contained the purpose of the study and information regarding the experiment. Both experimental conditions contained identical instructions for the participants, asking them to take on the role of a fictitious criminal (hereafter: source) with social ties to a terrorist organization. After agreeing with the informed consent, the participant read some background information about their motivation to talk to the police (Appendix A). Briefly put the source holds information about a terrorist attack, and would need to reveal some of this information to the Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD) in order to receive AIVD’s help to leave the country. Then, the participant read information about the planning of the upcoming terrorist attack (Appendix B). The information was divided into three parts: (i) the source’s relation to the terrorist group, (ii) general information and (iii) specific details about the attack. After reading their criminal background and the information regarding the attack the participants had to complete a memory test. The memory test contained eleven pieces of information regarding their knowledge about the planning of the attack (e.g., “*In what device will the bomb be delivered?*”). The participant was allowed to make one mistake, otherwise s/he had to retake the memory test. After completing the memory test the participant had to read their dilemma (Appendix C). The source’s dilemma

was to strike a balance between not telling too much about what they knew about the planned attack (hence risking retaliation by the terrorist group), and not revealing too little about the planned attack (hence risking to lose their the deal with AIVD). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the two interview conditions; the abstract story approach or the concrete story approach.

Interview

Before listening to the interview, it was made clear that headphones were recommended and that the audio would start immediately when the participant pressed the link. When having pressed the link, the participant listened to a pre-recorded interview. The participant did not have to respond to the interviewer, only listen. The purpose of the interview was used to establish the illusion of knowing it all tactics by sharing a detailed story with key pieces of information regarding the attack. Specifically, there were two different recording of the interview, a concrete version (i.e., concrete story approach) and an abstract version (i.e., abstract story approach). The structure of the interviews was identical except the description of key pieces of information (for the differences in interviews, see Appendix D). In the concrete version the interviewer mentioned each unit of information as detailed as possible. In the abstract version the interviewer mentioned the units of information in an abstract way. Hence, the participants in the first condition listened to more concrete statements whereas participants in the second condition listened to more abstract statements (for the full protocols, see Appendix E). The time of the interview in the concrete story approach was 2 minutes and 43 seconds and in the abstract story approach 2 minutes and 39 seconds.

Post-questionnaire

After having listened to the interview, the participant filled in a questionnaire. Before filling in the questionnaire it was made clear that the participant should not imagine themselves in their role anymore and to answer the questions as honest as possible. The first three questions concerned the participant's perceptions of the interviewer. The first question was "*How much information did you think your police contact already had on the group and their activity?*", where the scale ranged from 1 (no information at all) to 7 (a lot of information). The second question was "*How easy was it to understand what information*

your police contact was aiming to collect?”, where the scale ranged from 1 (not easy at all) to 7 (very easy). The third question was “*Which information has been revealed during the interview?*”, for answering this question the participant filled in a checklist. The checklist contained 33 key pieces of information regarding the attack. For example, the group planning the attack is called MDA (for the full checklist, see Appendix F). The participant had to mark all 33 pieces of information in a green, blue or red color. The participants were instructed to select the (a) green color if they perceived that the information was revealed by the interviewer during the interview, select the (b) blue color if they perceived that the information was not known by the interviewer during the interview and select the (c) red color if they perceived the interviewer knew the information but chose not to reveal it during the interview (i.e., concealed information). After having filled out the checklist, five questions were asked concerning the participation (e.g., “*how difficult was it to understand the instructions?*”), three questions regarding the perceptions of the interviewer (e.g., “*to what extent did you think the interviewer was friendly?*”); all rated on 5-point Likert scales (e.g., 1 extremely sympathetic to 5 extremely unsympathetic), and three questions regarding demographic data. After the experiment, all participants were fully debriefed.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Participants’ participation

The results showed that the participants indicated that they had adopted their role as a criminal moderately serious ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.90$) and treated their information management dilemma moderately serious ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.91$). The participants found the instructions neither easy nor difficult to understand ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.09$). No difference was found between the two conditions regarding the participant’s seriousness adopting the role $t(53) = 1.16$, $p = .25$, and the participant’s seriousness following the dilemma $t(53) = .98$, $p = .27$. With respect to the participant’s understanding of the instructions, no difference was found between the two conditions $t(53) = .054$, $p = .96$. The quality of the audio was rated as good and understandable ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.00$) and no difference was found between the two conditions $t(53) = 1.72$, $p = .09$.

Other components of the Scharff technique

Establishing the illusion of knowing it all is a tactic of the Scharff technique. This technique contains more tactics what have been taking into account when conducting this experiment. The following analyzes have been executed to test if the experiment represents the different components of the Scharff technique. The results showed that participants perceived that the interviewer had a friendly approach to the source ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.91$) and that the interviewer was perceived as sympathetic toward the source ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.87$). No difference was found between the two conditions regarding the interviewer's friendly approach, $t(53) = 0.04$, $p = .97$, and regarding to what extent the interviewer was sympathetic, $t(53) = 0.36$, $p = .72$. The participants perceived that the interviewer was not pressing for information ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.94$). No difference was found between the two conditions, $t(53) = 0.03$, $p = .98$. With respect to the participant's perception regarding the interviewer's information interests a mean score beneath the midpoint of the scale has been obtained ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.65$), which is not in line with the Scharff technique. There were no differences found between the two conditions, $t(53) = -1.63$, $p = .11$.

The sources' perception of the interview

The first hypothesis stated that the source perceived the interviewer as more knowledgeable using abstract terms compared to using concrete terms when creating the illusion of knowing it all. An independent t-test did not support hypothesis 1, comparing the concrete story approach ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.03$) with the abstract story approach ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.26$), $t(53) = 0.81$, $p = .42$.

In order to map how both conditions scored on the checklist, an independent t-test was conducted for each color's total (green, red and blue). The first test analyzed the source's perception of how much pieces of information (ranging from 1 – 33) the interviewer had demonstrated during the interview. It showed that in the concrete story approach ($M = 14.21$, $SD = 4.77$) the participants perceived that the interviewer had demonstrated significantly more information compared to the abstract story approach ($M = 10.78$, $SD = 4.28$), $t(53) = 0.76$, $p = .007$. Thus hypothesis 2 is supported. The second test analyzed the source's perception of how much information was unknown to the interviewer. No significant difference was found between the participants' perception of how much information was unknown to the interviewer in the concrete story approach ($M = 12.61$, $SD = 3.77$) compared

to the abstract story approach ($M = 14.59$, $SD = 4.58$), $t(53) = -1.76$, $p = .08$. Thus hypothesis 3 is not supported. The third test analyzed the source's perception of how much concealed information the interviewer possessed. It showed that the participants' perception of how much concealed information the interviewer possessed was higher in the abstract story approach ($M = 7.63$, $SD = 4.05$) compared to the concrete story approach ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 3.60$), but not significantly $t(53) = -1.41$, $p = .17$. Thus hypothesis 4 is not supported.

A mixed ANOVA with the two interview conditions as the between-subjects factor and the demonstrated and concealed variable as the within-subjects factor was conducted. The interview X demonstrated and concealed variable interaction showed that the difference between the perceived amount of demonstrated information and the perceived amount of concealed information depended on the interview condition, $F(1, 53) = 6.20$, $p < 0.02$. The interaction was analyzed further by the use of simple effects tests for each interview condition. The sources in the *concrete story approach* perceived that the interviewer significantly demonstrated more information ($M = 14.21$, $SD = 0.86$) and possessed less concealed information ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 0.72$), $F(1, 53) = 34.12$, $p < 0.001$, whereas the sources in the *abstract story approach* perceived that the interviewer demonstrated significantly less information ($M = 10.79$, $SD = 0.83$) and possessed more concealed information ($M = 7.63$, $SD = 6.15$), $F(1, 53) = 5.05$, $p = .03$ (see Figure 1). Thus, found support for hypothesis 5.

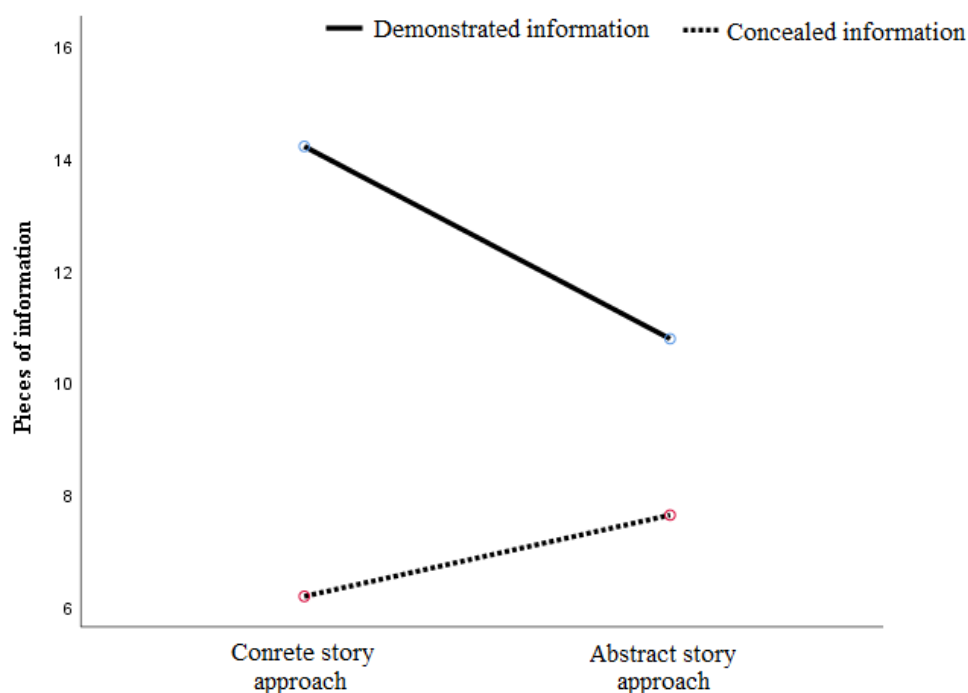


Figure 1. Illustrating the interaction effect for the demonstrated and concealed scores within and between the two interview conditions

Discussion

The current study was conducted to further examine the Scharff technique. The aim was to test two different ways of establishing the illusion of knowing it all, which is considered the core tactic of the Scharff technique. The first approach was to create the illusion using detailed, concrete pieces of information (i.e., resembling the traditional way). The second approach was to create the illusion using general, abstract pieces of information (i.e., resembling an alternative way). The idea was to optimize the illusion so that it can be used in situations when the interviewer cannot share all the information that he or she knows.

Establishing the illusion of knowing it all with abstract terms

When comparing the use of concrete terms with using abstract terms for creating the illusion of knowing it all, it showed some different effects. The first result showed that the sources' perception of the interviewer's knowledge was similar in the abstract story approach as in the concrete story approach. That is, the source perceived that there was no difference in how much knowledge the interviewer possessed using abstract or concrete terms, which did not support the first hypothesis. This expectation was based on a modification of the construal level theory. The construal level theory states that people are cognitively processing events close in time in detailed/concrete terms. In contrast, events further away are cognitively processed in abstract terms. The modification of this theory postulates that this relationship can be reversed with retaining the same efficacy. Thus, it should give the source the same feeling when s/he is listening to the interview recorded with the detailed story compared to the interview with an abstract story. However, the findings were not in accordance with the theory in this context.

The results of analyzing the checklist showed that sources in the abstract story approach perceived that the interviewer *demonstrated* fewer pieces of information during the interview compared to the source's perception in the concrete story approach, which supports the second hypothesis. This finding is in line with creating a more advanced illusion of knowing it all because the first essential part of a more optimal illusion (compared to the traditional way) is to demonstrate less sensitive information. However, the sources' perception of how much information regarding the attack was *unknown* to the interviewer did not differ in the two conditions, which did not support the third hypothesis. The source's perception that the interviewer is more known is the second essential part of a more optimal

illusion. That is, to create a valid illusion of knowing it all the interviewers must be seen as more knowledgeable, thus little information is unknown about the specific topic. There were no differences found in the sources' perception of how much *concealed* information the interviewer possessed, which did not support the fourth hypothesis. The third essential part of the illusion is that the interviewer would be perceived as having more concealed information. That is, to influence the source to believe, by drawing their own inferences about the interviewer's knowledge, that the interviewer knows more than s/he in fact does. For example, if the interviewer knows information piece A, B, and D, s/he probably knows C too. The final goal of a more optimized illusion in relation to the traditional way is to demonstrate less information, appearing as less unknown and possess more concealed information. The findings showed that using abstract terms instead of concrete terms accomplished one out of three components, creating the illusion of knowing it all with less demonstrated information. The other two components were not established better by using abstract terms (i.e., be less unknown and possessing more concealed information).

In support with the *fifth hypothesis*, results showed that the sources in the abstract story approach, compared to sources in concrete story approach, perceived that the interviewer demonstrated less information about the attack and possessed more concealed information. These findings suggest that with the abstract story approach the illusion could be established in a more optimal way than the concrete story approach. Specifically, the concrete story approach showed that the interviewer is demonstrating more information with the source while s/he gives the impression to have less knowledge about the specific topic. In contrast the abstract story condition showed that the interviewer demonstrated less information to the source but gives the impression to have more knowledge. Which is in according with establishing the illusion of knowing it all. The illusion is perceived as valid by the source when the interviewer seems to have more knowledge than what is the case.

In sum, the above findings showed partly support for an alternative way of creating the illusion of knowing it all, using abstract terms instead of the traditional concrete terms. For further research it may be necessary that the source perceives that interviewer has more concealed information compared to the traditional way. Because the amount of concealed information represents the perception that the interviewer holds the information but choose not to reveal it. It contributes in a positive way to the source's consideration if the illusion is valid or not. That is, if the interviewer did not reveal information, the participants still can think the interviewer knew it on the basis of how it is phrased. For example if the interviewer

shared information piece A, B, and D, the participant could think that the interviewer also knew C. Resulting in that the interviewer shared less information (leaving out C) but still has more knowledge (participant think the interviewer knows C), which can serve as an alternative way of creating the illusion of knowing it all when the interviewer cannot share all information.

Implications

The predicted effect that using abstract terms (instead of concrete terms) created a more optimal illusion of knowing it all did not receive all the empirical support. However, it is the first study which can help practitioners create the illusion of knowing it all with both abstract as concrete terms. Depending on the information's sensitivity practitioners can use both ways and the Scharff technique does not have to be avoided when an interviewer cannot share all information. The study provides a first step in the direction of an alternative way of creating the illusion with abstract terms representing the sharing of less sensitive information.

The study may have provided a better understanding of the illusion of knowing it all's foundation. First of all, it has provided more knowledge with respect to the different components of the illusion. Previous studies regarding the Scharff technique did not examine the parts differently or provided a clear terminology for how to present information about the different parts up until now. In the current study the illusion has been divided and analyzed in three different components, which can provide a better insight into the illusion of knowing it all:

1. *Demonstrated information*: The pieces of information that the source perceives have been revealed by the interviewer.
2. *Unknown information*: The pieces of information that the source knows but perceives that the interviewer does not know.
3. *Concealed information*: The pieces of information that the source perceives to be known by the interviewer, but not demonstrated by the interviewer.

Limitations

A first limitation is that some aspects of human intelligence interaction are very difficult to simulate in a laboratory setting. Accordingly, participants perceived the

interviewer as not realistic. They had to imagine the interview setting only on the basis of listening to the interviewer. In other studies on the Scharff technique the interviewing method is also used, but instead of listening to a recorded interview there was a face-to-face role-playing part. Compared to the current study's method, a face-to-face setting itself would be more realistic. So, despite the fact that it is still difficult to simulate a HUMINT interaction using role-playing, for further research using this method can still be perceived as more realistic than the method used in the current study. The second limitation is that the study is mainly based on a student sample, what is in contrast with the typical source. It is believable that real-life sources who have to navigate the information management dilemma are commonly more motivated, than the student sample, to explore the interviewer's knowledge and information objectives. The third limitation is the sample size of the study ($N = 55$) because some of the results pointed in the good direction for supporting the hypothesis but were not significant. If the study contained more participants the differences could have been bigger and the effects may have been significant.

Conclusion

Following the increased threat of terrorist attacks and the horrendous consequences, there is a need for both effective and ethical human intelligence gathering. The present study examined how the illusion of knowing it all, the third tactic of the Scharff technique, could be established in a more optimal way. In conclusion, the study has demonstrated that using abstract terms could help in creating a more optimal illusion of knowing it all. The findings showed that there were mixed results on how effectively the illusion was created. However, there is support that if the interviewer disclosed less specific information, s/he still can be perceived by the source as more knowledgeable regarding the attack. Providing the first results of an alternative way of creating the illusion of knowing it all when the interviewer is not in position to share all the information with the source.

“What did he get out of me? There is doubt in my mind that he did extract something, but I haven't the slightest idea what” – Hubert Zemke

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Appendixes

Appendix A – Background information

Imagine that economic problems, not caused by yourself, made you participate in the robbery of an armored car carrying cash in the fall of 2017. The actual robbery went fine, but three months ago the other three who were involved in the act got arrested. The only one who is still free is you, but you feel that this is only a matter of time. You know where most of the cash (approximately €5 million) is kept. You understand that your time is scarce, and you immediately need to get the cash and move yourself and your money out of the EU.

Some time ago you got an idea of how this could be accomplished, and briefly your plan is as follows: Through a close friend, you have received information that a radical political group has plans to perform a terrorist attack in Enschede. Your plan is to reveal information about this planned attack to the police, and in favor of providing information receive free transport out of the EU.

You contacted the AIVD ten days ago and carefully asked if there was any interest in talking further about this matter. The officer said they were very interested in talking more closely with you, and that the free transport would be granted if you would provide “satisfactory” information. The officer also firmly explained that the free transport will not be discussed during the upcoming conversation, as the AIVD is not officially allowed to offer such exchanges (and your conversation has to be recorded for the record). You recognized that you had no choice but to agree to these terms.

Appendix B – Planning of the upcoming attack

What you know about the planning of the upcoming attack is as follows:

General

You know that the group planning the attack is called MDA, it consists of approximately 10 members and is located in Rotterdam. You also know that the group has been around since 2015 and came to existence as a result of the riots in Rotterdam in that year. You know that the group, in cooperation with two Germans, had plans to execute a bomb attack during 2017 against a conference center in The Hague where a political top meeting was held at the time. But that operation was cancelled due to internal conflicts. This conflict resulted in one of the leading figures of the group, Willem Verhoek, leaving MDA.

Your Relationship to MDA

Peter Janssen, who is your close friend, and Willem Verhoek founded MDA. You know the background of the internal conflict that occurred in The Hague. In brief, Willem Verhoek wanted to increase the effect of the attack with human casualties, something the Germans refused to go along with. Since the other members sided with the Germans, led this dispute to Willem leaving MDA. Willem and Peter are currently bitter enemies, as it was Peter who introduced the Germans to MDA.

Specific Details about the Upcoming Attack

You know that five persons are working more specifically with the planning of the attack. Among these five there are two Germans (a male and a female) who are both experts on explosives. You also know that these two German bomb experts participated in the planning of the bomb attack that would have been performed in The Hague (2017), which was cancelled. You know that the shopping mall subjected for the planned attack is *De Klanderij in Enschede*, and you know that the attack will take place during a public holiday, namely *Liberation Day (2018)*. You also know that the plan is to plant the bomb during daytime, and that the bomb will be detonated at 11PM via an advanced remote detonator. The bomb will be placed in a TV, which will be brought for repairs at 5.55PM. That is, five minutes before closing time. The store, Mediamarkt, where the TV will be repaired is centrally located in the mall. You do not know what kind of bomb it is. You do not know where the bomb is located at the moment (or if it is manufactured yet).

Appendix C – Information management dilemma

At this moment you know your background story and the intel about a terroristic attack. The interview will start in any moment, however you are only listening and not going to reveal actual information. But it's important that you imagine that you would reveal intel and below is a description of the dilemma you are facing.

DILEMMA

You are not a member of the terrorist group and you are not involved in their planning, but you are a close friend to one of the members and you feel some sympathy for the group's opinions.

When speaking to the police you **cannot tell them everything** you know. First of all, you have a negative attitude towards the police in general. Also, if you were to tell the officer too much information, there is an obvious risk that MDA will find out that it was you who "sold them out," which means that you will be hunted by the entire group. You are not prepared to go that far.

On the other hand, you **cannot reveal too little**, because if you do so, there is a risk that the police won't find your contribution to be significant enough to grant you free transport out of the EU. You thus realize that you have to show some degree of good will and signal that you are prepared to cooperate with the interviewer, as you understand that securing this deal provides you an easy way out of a very difficult situation.

Appendix D – Differences between the two interview conditions

Concrete Framing	General Protocol	Abstract Framing
	Welcome, good that you have signed in.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bombings 	Well, there's an important reason for you contacting me, but first just let me say that I understand the difficult situation you're in. At the same time you must understand that we can't just allow _____ like this to take place. That's why I have to make sure that the information you have really can help us. So, to make this conversation a bit more effective, let me start with sharing some of the information that we already know.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you and Peter are good friends 	We know that _____, and that you have known each other for quite some time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you are good friends with a key member of the group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter • MDA • Willem • radical groups • about 10 years. 	<p>We also know that it was _____ who founded _____ together with _____.</p> <p>They were both moving around in _____, long before they got to know each other _____ ago.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this good friend • the group • another key member • other similar groups • quite some time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willem • in The Hague 	But now the times have changed, and you know as well as we do that _____ is no longer a part of the group after everything that happened _____.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the other member • in 2017.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willem • other members • Peter 	<p>Fortunately for the group, and in contrast with the ideas of _____, the _____ don't have any problems with the Germans.</p> <p>Well, of what we understand, it was _____ who got to know the Germans and brought them into the group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the former member • rest • your good friend
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willem • blowing stuff up 	Which actually explains why _____ got so angry at him. Because, he had a completely different philosophy than the Germans when it comes to _____.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the other one • getting things done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Okay, let me get a bit more specific. • MDA 	_____ _____.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Okay, without getting too specific. • the group

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a left-wing extremist group which was • riots in Rotterdam in 2015 	<p>In addition to all this, we know that _____ is _____ formed during the _____.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quite liberal and was • protests in 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they consist of approximately 10 members • Willem is out of the picture • The actual execution 	<p>When it comes to the current situation, we know _____</p> <p>and that _____. We also know that not everyone in the group will be involved in _____ of the attack.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the number of members has increased • their leadership has changed • the critical aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shopping mall 	<p>We understand the purpose of carrying out an attack at a central _____ is to create headlines for the cause, something that will be greatly increased since this is planned to take place around a holiday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and public spot
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDA • 5th of May 	<p>And although we don't have to tell you that we take this very seriously and that we must prevent the attack at all costs. Because, even if _____ doesn't aim to hurt innocent people,</p> <p>The time of the attack is very critical given the number of people that will be around during the _____.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the group • a public holiday
	<p>Well, that was a bit of an overview of what I know, I hope you didn't mind that I took the initiative like that. Once again, I'd just like to point out that I understand the difficult situation you find yourself in. But I want you to understand that I have no intentions of selling you out.</p>	
	<p>And since you now know what I know, you should understand that we are already in possession of some useful information ... but of course, you are more than welcome to tell us what you know.</p>	

Appendix E – Both interview protocols

The Scharff-technique Protocol, Interview 1 – Concrete description

Welcome, good that you have signed in.

Well, there's an important reason for you contacting me, but first just let me say that I understand the difficult situation you're in. At the same time you must understand that we can't just allow bombings like this to take place. That's why I have to make sure that the information you have really can help us. So, to make this conversation a bit more effective, let me start with sharing some of the information that we already know.

We know that you and Peter are good friends, and that you have known each other for quite some time. We also know that it was Peter who founded MDA together with Willem. They were both moving around in radical groups, long before they got to know each other about 10 years ago. But now the times have changed, and you know as well as we do that Willem is no longer a part of the group after everything that happened in The Hague.

Fortunately for the group, and in contrast with the ideas of Willem, the other members don't have any problems with the Germans. Well, of what we understand, it was Peter who got to know the Germans and brought them into the group. Which actually explains why Willem got so angry at him. Because, he had a completely different philosophy than the Germans when it comes to blowing stuff up.

Okay, let me get a bit more specific. In addition to all this, we know that MDA is a left-wing extremist group which was formed during the riots in Rotterdam in 2015. When it comes to the current situation, we know they consist of approximately 10 members and that Willem is out of the picture. We also know that not everyone in the group will be involved in the actual execution of the attack. We understand the purpose of carrying out an attack at a central shopping mall is to create headlines for the cause, something that will be greatly increased since this is planned to take place around a holiday. And although we don't have to tell you that we take this very seriously and that we must prevent the attack at all costs. Because, even if MDA doesn't aim to hurt innocent people, the time of the attack is very critical given the number of people that will be around during the 5th of May.

Well, that was a bit of an overview of what I know, I hope you didn't mind that I took the initiative like that. Once again, I'd just like to point out that I understand the difficult situation you find yourself in, I get that you're probably feeling overwhelmed. But I want you to understand that I have no intentions of selling you out. And since you know what I know, you should understand that we're already in possession of some useful information ... but of course, you're more than welcome to tell us what you know.

The Scharff-technique Protocol, Interview 1 – Abstract description

Welcome, good that you have signed in.

Well, there's an important reason for you contacting me, but first just let me say that I understand the difficult situation you're in. At the same time you must understand that we can't just allow events like this to take place. That's why I have to make sure that the information you have really can help us. So, to make this conversation a bit more effective, let me start with sharing some of the information that we already know.

We know that you are good friends with a key member of the group, and that you have known each other for quite some time. We also know that it was this good friend who founded the group together with another key member. They were both moving around in other similar groups, before they got to know each other quite some time ago. But now the times have changed, and you know as well as we do that the other member is no longer part of the group after everything that happened in 2017.

Fortunately for the group, and in contrast with the ideas of the former member, the rest don't have any problems with the Germans. Well, of what we understand, it was your good friend who got to know the Germans and brought them into the group. Which actually explains why the other one got so angry at him. Because, he had a completely different philosophy than the Germans when it comes to getting things done.

Okay, without getting too specific. In addition to all this we know that the group is quite liberal and was formed during the protests in 2015. When it comes to the current situation, we know that the number of members has increased and that their leadership has changed. We also know that not everyone in the group will be involved in the critical aspects of the attack. We understand the purpose of carrying out an attack at a central and public spot is to create headlines for the cause, something that will be greatly increased since this is planned to take

place around a holiday. And although we don't have to tell you that we take this very seriously and that we must prevent the attack at all costs. Because, even if the group doesn't aim to hurt innocent people, the time of the attack is very critical given the number of people that will be around during a public holiday.

Well, that was a bit of an overview of what I know, I hope you didn't mind that I took the initiative like that. Once again, I'd just like to point out that I understand the difficult situation you find yourself in. But I want you to understand that I have no intentions of selling you out. And since you now know what I know, you should understand that we are already in possession of some useful information ... but of course, you are more than welcome to tell us what you know.

Appendix F – Checklist

You can select the information in the text below by clicking on parts of statements and select:

- **Revealed** if you think the information has been revealed to you;
- **Unknown** if you think the information is not known by the interviewer;
- **Known** if you think the interviewer knows the information, but chose not to reveal it.

Revealed **Unknown** **Known**

The group planning the attack is called MDA, consists of approximately 10 members and is located in Rotterdam.

The group has been around since 2015 and came to existence as a result of the riots in Rotterdam in that year.

The group, in cooperation with two Germans, had plans to execute a bomb attack during 2017 against a conference center in The Hague where a political top meeting was held at them time.

But that operation was cancelled due internal group conflicts.

This conflict resulted in one of the leading figures of the group, Willem Verhoek, leaving MDA.

Peter Janssen, who is your close friend, and Willem Verhoek founded MDA.

Willem Verhoek wanted to increase the effect of the attack with human casualties, something the Germans refused to go along with.

Since the other members sided with the Germans, this dispute forced Willem to leave MDA.

Willem and Peter are currently bitter enemies, as it was Peter who introduced the Germans to MDA.

Five persons are working more specifically with the planning of the attack.

Among these five there are the two Germans (a male and a female) who are both experts on explosives.

The two German participated in the planning of the bomb attack that would have been performed in The Hague (2017), which was cancelled.

The shopping mall subject for the planned attack is De Klanderij in Enschede, and the attack will take place during a public holiday, namely Liberation Day (2018).

The plan is to plant the bomb during daytime, and that the bomb will be detonated at 11PM via an advanced remote detonator.

The bomb will be placed in a TV, which will be returned as "defect" at 5.55PM, five minutes before closing time.