THE HUMAN TRAIL

1. We discover a subject
2. We create a hypothesis to verify
3. We seek open-source data to verify the hypothesis
4. We seek human sources
5. As we collect the data, we organize it - so that it is easier to examine, compose into a story, and check
6. We put the data in a narrative order and compose the story
7. We do quality control to make sure the story is right
8. We publish the story, promote and defend it

“When something goes wrong, decent people find a way to let the press know.”
“Somewhere, somehow, somebody knows.”

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Types of sources

PRIMARY
Those that relate direct experience

SECONDARY
Secondhand accounts ("I had a friend who...")

Who your sources can be

• Witnesses
• Whistleblowers
• Tipsters
• Victims
• Government
• Experts
• Business
• NGOs
• International agencies
• Gatekeepers, door openers
• Blogs and Internet chatrooms / Social media

Remember to look for...

Friends and enemies (Frenemies)
Losers and winners

Evaluating your source

CREDIBILITY: Reputation for honesty
RELIABILITY: Track record of trustworthiness
ACCOUNTABILITY: Responsibility over the subject matter
FAMILIARITY: Proximity
ACCESSIBILITY: Can the source be reached?
Finding Sources

- Directories
- The Internet
- Mailing lists
- Computer databases
- Who’s been interviewed

- Via lectures, seminars
- Via friends
- Via NGOs, academe
- From one source to another
- “Out of the box”

Nurture sources

- It’s not just the boss you need
- Cultivate mid-level officials as sources
- Pay attention to secretaries, receptionists, guards, janitors
- Meet and greet
- Leave your contact details

INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING

REMEMBER THE BASICS

- Research
  - Check clips, read, ask around
  - So you ask good questions, you won’t get fooled
- Plan
  - Who to interview first? Where to interview? How to interview? What’s the focus or theme?
- Organize
  - Minimum interview plan
  - Questions: Good vs bad
- Inner interviewing
  - Warm up, think of an icebreaker.
Interviewer’s skills

- Asking good questions
- Listening
- Speaking
- Observing
- Remembering
- Note-taking / Recording

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Asking for the interview

- Walk in
- Phone in
- Stake out
- Write or email
- Advertise
- Intermediary
- Formal interview request

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Interview approaches

- **FORENSIC** interviewing / fact-finding
  - Recreate how they wrongdoing was committed
  - Pinpoint responsibility/ accountability
- **ADVERSARIAL** interviewing
  - Confront the wrongdoer

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Structure: Broad to narrow

- Warm-up: I’d liked to ask a few things about you and your office so I get everything right.
- Basic information: How many times did your committee meet on the application of Company 123?
- Confirming question: Mr. X said he wasn’t in the meeting. Is this correct?
- Soft question: What did the committee recommend?

Sample questions: Warm-up to Soft

- Basic info, including confirming Qs
- ‘Soft’ questions
- ‘Hard’ questions

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Sample questions: HARD

- What about reports that say you were the one who lobbied for a change in the rules to favor Company 123?
- Here’s a copy of letter you sent on this date to members of the committee. In the letter, you proposed the changes and asked your fellow members to give their full support.
- Are you saying that the committee members are lying when they said the letter came from you?

Examples of pinning down questions

- Is it true that you...
- You did...didn’t you?
- Where were you when...
- Did X happen?
- What do you mean?
- Let’s be more specific. Are you saying...
- Exactly how much money?
- Who’s responsible then?

PROBLEMATIC INTERVIEW SITUATIONS

Tell us what you’d do if...

What would do if...

1. Someone approaches you with a tip but you don’t know him that well?
2. An important source, including the subject of your investigation, refuses to see you?
3. The source refuses to answer your questions or keeps saying “no comment”?
4. The source keeps demanding that you keep his/her statements “off the record” during the interview?
5. The source’s publicist or handler keeps answering the questions for him/her?
6. The source seems to be lying?
7. The source gets angry and starts shouting at you?
8. The source asks you to show your story first before it is published or aired?
Don’t trust your source too much

• Corroboration: Check statements of one source with another, either a document, another source or observation (Triangulation)
• Consistency: Don’t rationalize inconsistencies; explore the gaps
• Co-orientation: Get feedback for correction

Back to your story idea and investigative hypothesis

ACTIVITY TIME

List the sources you need
  • Secondary sources
  • Primary sources
  • Smoking gun evidence

Order your list
  • Number them from the most to the least important

Toughest questions
  • Write down the “hard” questions you have to ask in an adversarial interview

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