Social Engineering

Lecture 3: Elicitation

What's in the word (Wiktionary)

- Borrowed from Latin *elicitus* from *eliciō* ("draw forth").
  elicit:
  1. To evoke, educe (emotions, feelings, responses, etc.); to generate, obtain, or provoke as a response or answer
      Shouts of laughter were elicited
  2. To draw out, bring out, bring forth (something latent); to obtain information from someone or something
      Fred wished to elicit the time of the meeting from Jane.
      Did you elicit a response?
  3. To use logic to arrive at truth; to derive by reason
      Synonyms: deduce, construe

- All these get used in social engineering, too

Framing

- **Physical world**: surroundings, context, view (also worldview)
- **Social sciences** in general: a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies perceive and communicate about reality
- **Psychology**: a cognitive bias - people decide on options based on whether they are presented with positive (gain) or negative (loss) connotations. Example: "kill the dog" vs "put the dog to sleep"
- **Social engineering**: strive to understand and learn to blend into the target's frame! (or, learn to see with the target's eyes)
- Dynamic, not static! (think about the crazy things you did when younger!)

Aligning the frame

- Bridging – becoming somebody/thing that matches the target's frame (=> pretext)
  - "Every human being is a puzzle of need. Learn to be the missing piece and they will give you anything" – Matron in *Red Sparrow*

- Amplification – reinforcing the target's frame by affirming his/her a) values, or b) beliefs (and showing that you are "even more in it")

- Extension –   invoking new aspects/factors to strengthen the target's frame (e.g. "what you do is very important for social justice!")

- Transformation – reframing, or redefining some concepts/terms to match the target's frame (sample terms: saved, comrade, woke)

- https://archiv.soms.ethz.ch/teaching/OppFall09/SnowFrame1986.pdf

- We will come back to framing later!

Rapport

- Back to the previous lecture – the four questions at first contact:
  - Who are you?
  - What do you want?
  - Are you a threat?
  - How long will this take?
- An important factor: tribe mentality
- Think of two cases (the questions above!):
  - a visibly homeless person lying on the ground at a bus stop
  - a "normal" person at the same place
- Rapport acts as a bridge enabling communication

Building rapport

- Use artificial time constraints ('spare a minute?')

- Accommodating nonverbals (match the pretext, no threat)

- Use a slower rate of speech / R.S.V.P. (rate, speed, volume, pitch)

- Employ sympathy / assistance themes (emotional connection!)

- Suspend your ego (= boost the other; laughing at yourself can help a lot – e.g. "hey, that's some funny shit I find myself in daily - must be born like this!")

- Validate others (listen and accept, compliment)

- Ask how, why, when -questions

- Use *quid pro quo*

- Employ reciprocal altruism (show that you are actually going out of your way to help)

- Manage expectations (try to be the missing piece!)

(Based on Robin Dreeke and Christopher Hadnagy)

Discussion break

- Bring examples of using framing when at a
  - sports facility (trainer vs fellow practicioners)
  - clinic (medics vs fellow patients)
  - car dealer (staff vs fellow buyers) (bridging/pretext; amplification (values/beliefs), extension)
- Using which rapport-building techiques would feel most natural for you (personally)?

Elicitation

- "Getting the information you never ask for" (Hadnagy)
- Yet, it is often about asking – but the point is, how
- Among other things, it means finding and using a suitable frame
- Also, needs certain amount of rapport to work

Elicitation just works, because...

- ...most people have the desire to be polite, especially to strangers

- ...professionals want to appear well informed and intelligent

- ...if you are praised, you will often talk more and divulge more

- ...most people would not lie for the sake of lying

- ...most people respond kindly to people who appear concerned about them
  - (Christopher Hadnagy 2011)

Part of the process

- **Information gathering** - the initial homework, "passive scan"
- **Initial pretext** (if needed) – might be required for the next step
- **Elicitation** - information in, more information out
- **Pretext** – created from the acquired information "for something bigger"

Hadnagy's three main rules

- Be natural

- Educate yourself
  - Don't try to be more than you can handle (e.g. playing a general is more difficult than a simple soldier)

- Don't be greedy
  - Listen rather than talk

  - Give and take

  - You can go on tomorrow if you don't burn it

Click, whirr

- … as defined by Robert Cialdini
- Fixed-action patterns: sequences of actions 'preprogrammed' into humans (and animals alike; the mother turkey example)
- Click: trigger/activation; whirr: 'playing the appropriate tape'
- NB! the patterns are usually learned, not inborn – and *for most of the time*, do work well
- (more about this in the psychology topic)

A mandatory example (sometimes it fails)

"Because... just because"

- A common response by children when asked why they did what they did

- Actually a click/whirr moment – people will do favours more readily if given a reason, even if it is weak or nonsense
  - "Can I go before you? My Mother is waiting for me"
  - "Can I go before you? I have to get there"
    - "Why did the chicken cross the road?"

Why?

- **Shortcuts** for complex decisions – the world is too varying to allow for constant analysis

- **Judgmental heuristics**: "expensive = good", "expert = authoritative opinion", "discount = cheap"

- Dangers:
  - Costly failures (when it does not work)
  - Exploiting by knowledgeable people (among other things, for eliciting information)

Discussion break

- Find examples of tribe mentality used to build rapport – can it work differently with different tribes?

- Can you add any rapport-building tips to the ones listed above?

- Find examples of the *click-whirr* (automatic responses) – have you spotted any on yourself?

Techniques: preloading

- **Prescribing the feeling**:
  - "You were sure that this problem is unsolvable – but we have the solution!"

- Also, **planting the ideas**:
  - "You have told me for ages that the Restaurant X has the best fish in town. What if we go there?"
    - (in fact, the other guy had never mentioned X)

Techniques: ego boosting

- "Wow, you must be rich if you eat here"

- Subtle flattery is the key:
  - "I read about a really interesting study"
    - Accidentally, the other guy carried it out

- On narcissist types, not-that-subtle ways work, too ("You are the only one with brains here!") - on others they may backfire

Techniques: ego appeal

- A softer and safer version of the previous one
- Showing appreciation of the other
  - Sincerity
  - Realism (not "Wow, you must be Miss Universe!")
- Needs proper amount of trust/rapport, but will help in increasing it
- One of the few SE techniques that can actually be practiced safely anywhere :)

Techniques: common ground

- Stressing common features/background/experiences
  - "Great, we both like to go to gym"
  - "You did your army service in X? So did I!"
- In elicitation, used to build camaraderie (often also against some common enemy like bosses/managers)
- Can backfire if too obvious

Techniques: the world is flat, ain't it?

- Making a deliberately wrong/incorrect statement

- The other would correct and establish a supposedly vertical relationship ("I know better")

- Downplaying oneself also helps in dissolving suspicion ("Mike? No way, he is absolutely dumb in everything related to computers!")

Techniques: free information

- Freely submitting (seemingly) important information
  - "Did you hear that the new plant had an accident?"

- May help to produce
  - Obligation - "I need to give something back"

  - Compassion - "if things are so bad, I have to help"

  - Superiority - "He must be clueless to tell me that"

- …

Techniques: hinting and booze

- Hinting to possess some 'internal knowledge' can help establishing oneself as 'belonging there'

- May be bluffed, but having some actual background (which can be obtained by using more SE!) is better

- Finally, the great multiplier: alcohol (Hadnagy says it would greatly increase the effect of all previous techniques)

Discussion break

- Discuss the techniques described above – which ones are more
  - universal (all contexts) vs specific (only certain contexts)

  - (relatively) failsafe vs prone to failure

  - low risk (for the user) vs high risk (dangerous in case of backfire)

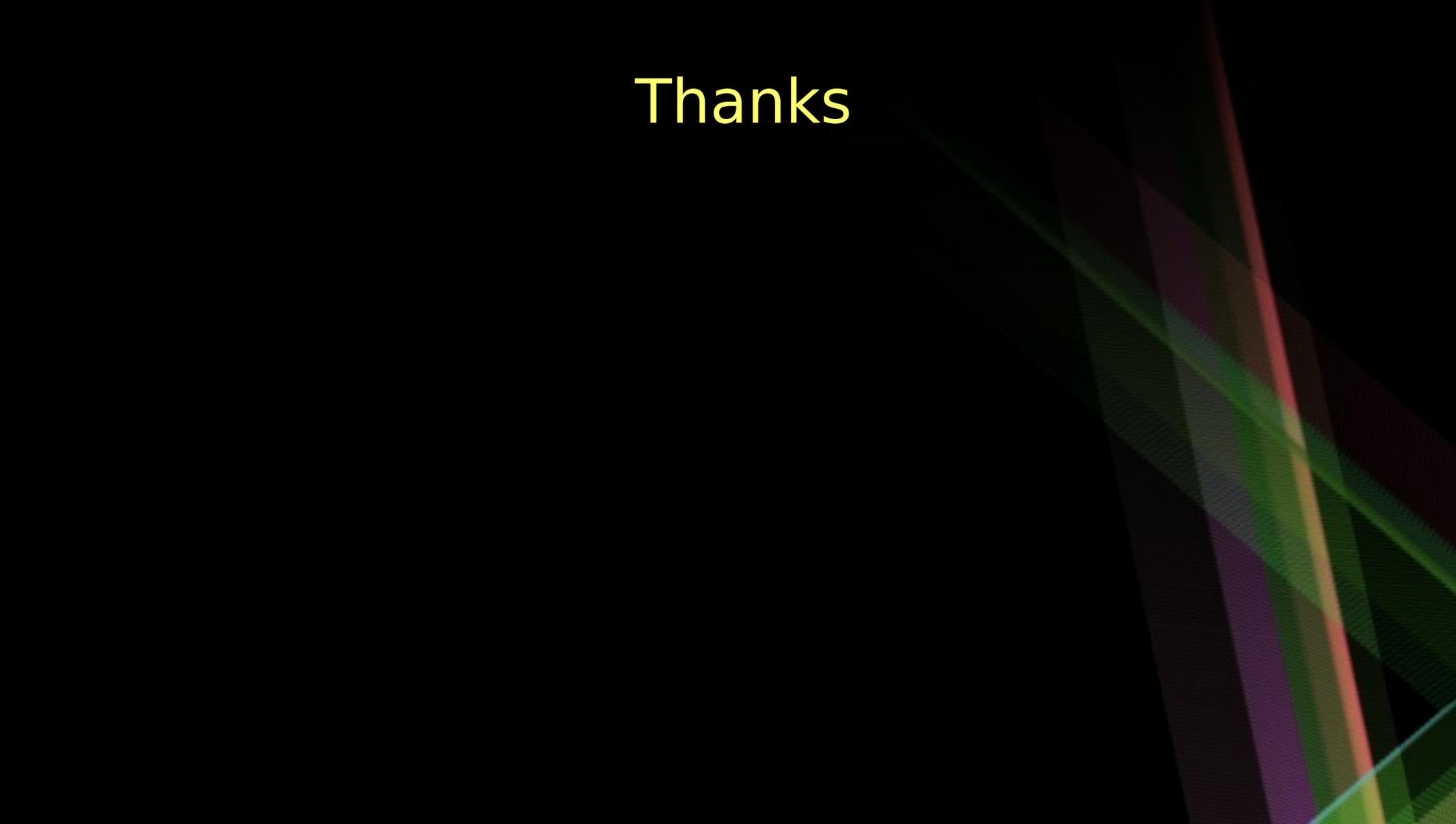- Which techniques might students use at an exam? :)

Asking questions

- Open-ended: why, how etc
- Closed-ended: yes/no, true/false, how much..
- Leading: aren't you?
- Assumptive: "Why did Mr X take the book?" (did he?)

- In addition:
- Too many questions: danger of target shutting down
- Too few: danger of 'awkward silence'
- One question at a time!

Summing up

- Basically, elicitation is the art of asking (even if you seemingly do not ask anything)

- Keys to success:
    - Knowing the person/ality
    - Knowing the background/circumstances
    - A period of preloading (if possible)
    - Mastering the techniques
    - Flexibility/creativeness in unexpected situations

- Next week: pretexting

Thanks