

# Topic 2: Elicitation

Social Engineering (II909)

Kaido Kikkas

2018 Kaido Kikkas. This document is dual-licensed under the GNU Free Documentation License (v 1.2 or newer) and the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike (BY-SA) 3.0 Estonia or newer license

# What's in the word

- **Wiktionary:**

- Borrowed from Latin *elicitus* from *eliciō* ("draw forth")
- **elicit** (third-person singular simple present elicits, present participle eliciting, simple past and past participle elicited)
  - 1. To evoke, educe (emotions, feelings, responses, etc.); to generate, obtain, or **provoke as a response or answer**
  - 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**

# 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)

## Part of the process

- Information gathering - the initial homework, “passive scan”
- (Pretext) – might be required for the next step
- Elicitation - information in, more information out
- Pretext – created from the acquired information “for something bigger”

# 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

- 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)

# an obligatory example: sometimes it fails



[https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/starwars/images/e/ec/Qui-Gon\\_mind\\_trick.png/revision/latest?cb=20130120033437](https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/starwars/images/e/ec/Qui-Gon_mind_trick.png/revision/latest?cb=20130120033437)

# “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)

# 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!”), for others they may backfire

# 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)

# 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 producing
  - **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)

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

# Thanks!

- Next week: pretexting