



Association of  
Corporate Investigators

— **INSIGHT** INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICE

# The Art of the Investigative Interview

**Human judgement still matters in the age of AI**

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***“Please don’t put me in front of an avatar or a bot – it’s impersonal, inhuman and doesn’t understand how I feel.”***

**A WITNESS INTERVIEWED DURING A TRIAL OF AI-LED INTERVIEWING**

These are the exact words from a witness who was interviewed as part of an investigation, and as part of a trial using AI to conduct the interview.

Corporate investigations increasingly sit at the centre of organisational life. They help businesses respond to misconduct, protect people, understand risk, satisfy regulators, and make decisions that are fair, defensible and evidence-based. The Association of Corporate Investigators (ACi) has a mission to champion professional excellence in corporate investigations, connecting and informing investigators across more than 70 countries, and supporting work carried out with rigour, integrity and independence. In that context, the investigative interview remains one of the most important—and most human—skills in the investigator’s craft. The mission could easily fail if we don’t preserve some of the fundamental assets belonging to the investigator, interviewing included.

The ACi Corporate Investigator’s Handbook (published in association with GIR) puts the point plainly: interviews form an integral part of the investigative process. Documents, emails, chat records, access logs and transaction data may establish the underlying facts. But facts rarely speak in full sentences. They do not always explain why something happened, what a person understood at the time, whether a decision was deliberate or mistaken, or how competing accounts should be weighed. That is where interviews matter. They bring context, sequencing, rationale and credibility into view.

At its best, an investigative interview is not adversarial, an interrogation, a script-reading exercise or a box-ticking compliance event. It is a structured professional conversation. It has a purpose, but it also requires listening. It has a plan, but it must adapt. It seeks evidence, but it must respect the dignity of the person being interviewed. Investigators know the value of listening to understand and not responding. Comprehending explanations is critical. Comprehension is human understanding not merely AI interpretation. Whether the individual is a reporter, concern raiser, witness, affected party, subject of investigation or third party, the handbook guidance stresses the need for equal regard. That principle is easy to write down and difficult to practise well. It requires discipline, empathy, patience and judgement.

## 01 Preparation is the first mark of a good interview

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Preparation is the first mark of a good interview. The old saying that poor planning leads to poor performance is particularly apt in investigations. Before an interview begins, the investigator should understand the investigation plan, the issues in scope, the available evidence, the legal and cultural context, and the purpose of speaking to that particular person at that particular time. In cross-border matters, local law and practice may shape what can be asked, how the interview should be recorded, who may attend, and what warnings or protections are required.

A human-led process recognises these dimensions before the first question is asked.

## 02 Where AI helps — and where it does not

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This is also where the debate about artificial intelligence needs balance. AI can be extremely useful in corporate investigations. It can help identify patterns in large data sets, summarise chronologies, cluster documents, translate material, surface inconsistencies and support preparation. Used responsibly, it can free investigators to spend more time on judgement-intensive work. But the interview itself should not be handed over to AI, because an interview is not simply a data extraction event. It is a live human encounter in which trust, fairness, proportionality and interpretation all matter.

An AI system can generate questions, but it cannot carry accountability in the way an investigator must. It cannot truly understand organisational nuance, personal vulnerability, hesitation, silence, cultural context, workplace power dynamics or the significance of a witness correcting themselves after reflection. It may detect linguistic patterns, but it does not know whether a person is confused, intimidated, guarded, traumatised, overconfident or simply trying to be precise. A skilled investigator notices not just what is said, but what needs to be clarified; not just what is missing, but whether the absence is meaningful.

**AI may assist in mapping contradictions across material. It should not be the arbiter of credibility.**

The credibility assessment that often follows an interview is also profoundly human. It must be careful, evidence-led and free from lazy assumptions. Credibility is not about whether someone appears confident, polished or emotional. It is about the consistency of their account with the

evidence, the plausibility of explanations, the opportunity they had to observe events, the limits of their recollection, and how their evidence sits within the wider investigation. AI may assist in mapping contradictions across material. It should not be the arbiter of credibility.

There is a further issue: confidence in the process. Employees, regulators, boards and courts expect investigations to be fair, independent and robust. A person asked to participate in an interview must believe that they are being heard by someone capable of understanding their account and treating it appropriately. If organisations outsource that human engagement to a machine, they risk weakening trust in the process. They may also miss the very insights the interview is designed to obtain: context, intent, concerns, pressures, culture and lessons for the organisation.

## 03 Investigator-led, technology-enabled

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The better approach is not “AI or investigator”; it is investigator-led, technology-enabled practice. Investigators can use AI to prepare better, test hypotheses, organise evidence and reduce administrative burden. But interview strategy, questioning, rapport, challenge, safeguarding, fairness and final evaluation should remain with trained professionals. The ACi’s emphasis on professional excellence, shared standards, education and peer collaboration is especially relevant here. The future of investigations should not be less human. It should be more disciplined about where human judgement is indispensable.

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## 04 The practical lesson for leaders

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For leaders, the lesson is practical. Invest in interview training. Give investigators time to prepare. Ensure interview plans are aligned with the investigation strategy. Respect local legal requirements. Record interviews accurately. Treat all interviewees with equal regard. Use technology thoughtfully, but do not confuse speed with quality or automation with fairness. The strongest investigations are not those that simply collect the most data. They are those that ask the right questions, listen properly to the answers, and integrate human accounts with documentary evidence in a careful and defensible way.

The investigative interview is an art because it combines structure with judgement, evidence with empathy, and challenge with fairness. It is also a professional discipline, grounded in preparation, legal awareness and ethical practice. AI will change how investigators work, and in many respects it already has. But the central conversation—the moment when one person seeks to understand another person's account of events—should remain human-led. In corporate investigations, that is not nostalgia. It is a safeguard for accuracy, fairness and trust.

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