**Stage 1 Registered Report**

**Exploring how members of illicit networks navigate investigative interviews.**

***Comments: Lorraine Hope***

**This Stage 1 Registered Report (RR) outlines a novel methodology to explore an interesting and neglected question in the field of information elicitation. Specifically, the experiment outlined seeks to examine how several individuals who are collectively members of an illicit network behave in terms of information disclosed when placed in an information management dilemma. This is an important applied question with implications for the investigation of organised crime, terrorism, and other serious/complex crimes. However, it is also of significant scientific merit as our field rarely takes into account the more complex social relationships and dependencies that likely drive interviewee output in such contexts. As such, scientific insights to date are limited by this singular focus and, as such, we have no real insights into the impact of this limited ecological validity. As such, I think there is also a strong scientific rationale for the general approach outlined in the RR. I also find the methodology outlined innovative with respect to tackling a challenging question.**

**I have a number of comments and questions for the authors. First, I would like to note that all of my comments/questions are offered in the spirit of good faith and the goal of providing constructive feedback. Given than this is an RR, I’m also trying to frame my comments as an open research development discussion – as opposed to a review focused on potential flaws (which is why I’ve included some references to our own recent experiences with similar paradigms – apologies if this is in any way inappropriate). I should also note that I have completed this set of comments under significant time pressure so I expect other thoughts will come to mind later which I’ll be happy to forward if they seem sensible as I’m excited by this work and genuinely interested in seeing it come to fruition.**

**Before getting into the specifics of the RR, you might find a recent experience of our using (another) online information management dilemma paradigm interesting (happy to discuss in a more informal context if useful). We ran a number of pilots where we presented a detailed/rich scenario (with varying ‘seriousness’ of information) and required participants to manage disclosure in a subsequent online interview. Our repeated pattern of findings across pilots and the actual study was that participants could be incredibly strategic about the kinds of information they were willing to ‘give away’ and what they were more reticent about providing. There was also a good deal of overlap in their strategies. So, based on our recent experience, I have two observations:**

1. **All illicit information is not equal.**

**I like the way the DOM model formulates this – and I will take a closer look at the predictions when I have more time. However, our pilots showed that low stakes information was very ‘off-loadable’ in a context where the interviewees had to give something to avoid suspicion falling on themselves – in online contexts at least.**

1. **Methodology matters.**

**In a first pilot we use the forced-choice interview method you propose here – essentially to determine that our manipulation worked. I think it was useful to demonstrate that our information management dilemma actually produced a dilemma and resulted in reluctant interviewees. However, in a second pilot, we used open question responses. While we still found a pattern of reluctance (greater reluctance, if I recall correctly) there wasn’t a like-for-like mapping. However, I entirely understand why you have opted for this format in an initial study – it makes sense to limit some of the wider strategies, at least in an initial test. I appreciate the exploration of the ecological validity issue in the RR but I agree entirely that as an initial step in formulating a methodology, it is important to insert control as necessary – and this can be gradually loosened in future work.**

**Overall, with respect to the RR, I have the following comments:**

1. **“To what extent does network membership predict the type of information the interviewee will choose to reveal” – I don’t think the design speaks to the specific way in which this question is formulated in the Introduction. The next sentence does clarify though [“Are two different people from the same network likely to disclose same information or does disclosure in this context better resemble individuals independently managing outcomes of revealing information”]. I think sharpening up the Introduction will also help with reader understanding later (see additional comments below).**
2. **One thing I wasn’t clear on pertains to the weighting of the information items (as % safe; % unsafe). Again, I completely understand the rationale for this approach having done some work on risk-taking/costs-benefits and elicitation recently. However, I got rather lost in the third para of p.12. If I’ve understood correctly, the ‘weightings’ of information will be randomly generated. Is this likely to be plausible/make sense to the participant? Are they likely to off-set some of this information and resort to decisions informed by plausibility based on general understanding of the world or too much Netflix (i.e. it is highly unlikely to matter in any way what X is, but Y is almost certainly going to be sensitive in some way)? Do you have any sense of this from piloting – if not, it might be worth piloting before burning resources on the whole study.**
3. **Absent (largely) from the RR is any discussion of role/place in the network. While I appreciate adding in hierarchy is likely beyond the scope of this initial study, it is almost certainly the case that such networks produce hierarchies in which different members have different roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Such relationships are likely to play some role in how people make decisions about disclosure. Even in the experimental paradigm, the participant discussions will almost inevitable produce ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’. I think it might be very difficult to build in at this stage but this issue should probably be highlighted within the background – even if only to offset later criticism. I like that you’ve included a measure of affiliation with the group - perhaps also asking some questions about such perceptions / leadership / hierarchy might be beneficial in terms of exploring and developing the methodology in the future.**
4. **Regarding the methodology in Phase 1, has money laundering actually taken place? My subsequent reading of the actual materials suggest it has (or at least there’s been some dodgy activity) but the actual status of illicit behaviour should be clear in the Procedure also. In general, I would suggest adding more detail throughout the Procedure (e.g., which three topics will they be interviewed about – and then provide the example, p.9) as clearly as possible. A Figure illustrating the procedure may also be helpful (especially for future replication).**
5. **With respect to the planning phase, will the group ‘commit’ somehow to what the plan is? If not, is it a risk to rely on individual participants later reporting it accurately (what if they misunderstood it or forgot it?)? Group discussions are notoriously difficult to parse for meaning/final outcome without some kind of explicit commitment phase (i.e., everyone has to agree to X or similar).**
6. **Performance feedback (p.14) – when I first read this, I thought it meant that the individual interviewee would receive feedback about the on-going group performance average. Is that the case? If yes, I cannot see the rationale as it will likely confound the very phenomenon you want to look at. So, I’ll assume this is individual level feedback with reference to the contribution to the group? This section needs some clarification.**
7. **The sample size appears well justified and the analysis plan looks broadly appropriate for a nested design. How/will you add any measures of affiliation or similar to this plan?**
8. **The writing style is over-complex / convoluted in places. Given the complexity of the design and procedure, a revision should work to be as precise and concise as possible. Similarly, I think the Introduction/Background might be clearer.**