

**Calling for Help: Explaining the
outcome of the call
Training workshop for police control
room staff**

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PLEASE NOTE: This working paper is a live document intended to inform and stimulate discussion and debate within the partner organisations involved in this specific research project, but also to contribute to a wider conversation involving academic and police related colleagues. PLEASE DO contact us if you have any comments or questions or would like to discuss the ideas in this document further: Please contact the lead author Dr Alexandra Kent (a.kent@keele.ac.uk)

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Keele & Staffordshire Universities Police Knowledge Fund Discussion and Policy Documents

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This series of discussion and policy documents and presentation slides is intended to inform and stimulate discussion and debate within the partner organisations involved in this specific research project, but also to contribute to a wider conversation involving academic and police related colleagues. The views expressed in these documents are those of the individual authors and should not be regarded as representative of the views or official policies of any of the Police or related agencies that have collaborated in our research.

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These documents are intended to be accessible to non-academic readers, and to provide an overview of a range of ideas, concepts and outputs from our research. We want these documents to stimulate debate and develop further knowledge exchange and production with a wider range of potential partners. If you have any comments or questions or would like to discuss the ideas in this document further, please feel free to contact the project lead cited on the title page.



Calling for Help: Explaining the outcome of the call

Training workshop for police control room staff

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Feedback Summary for Call Handler Operational Knowledge Workshop - 30th March 2017

27 out of 30 workshop attendees completed an evaluation survey at the end of the session:

- 78% found it useful or very useful to learn about how conversation works (22% Neutral)
- 83% found it useful or very useful to listen to recordings of real police calls (17% Neutral)
- 96% found it useful or very useful to listen to Dr Kent's analysis of the calls (4% Neutral)
- 78% found the guidance given on asking questions useful or very useful (22% Neutral)
- 83% found the guidance given on explaining the outcome of a call useful or very useful (17% Neutral)
- 65% found the time for discussion with colleagues useful or very useful (35% Neutral)
- 91% were confident they could implement the skills taught in the workshop (9% Neutral)
- 57% would voluntarily attend a future session even if not required to by management (26% Neutral, 17% would only attend if it was mandatory)
- 65% would recommend the workshop to other police control room staff (35% Neutral)

Additional open comments from control room staff included:

- "Very informative and interesting. I found I could identify the areas talked about with my own performance"
- "Good presentation. Easy to understand"
- "Interesting in relation to how conversation works"
- "Really nice to hear Dr Kent say that police calls are not like call centres and we are human. Good to hear that being a 'human' is a valued characteristic of police staff."

Control room staff suggested that future training should cover dealing with angry and aggressive callers and how to remain calm after a "10hour barrage of calls". Staff felt it would be useful to have some evaluation of individuals' own calls so they can personally identify areas for improvement. A comment also suggested that staff would welcome a structured and continuing exploration of the extent to which the advice provided gets implemented in practice.

There were a small number of Front office staff who attended the training. Their feedback comments suggest they whilst they found the workshop interesting, they did not view the focus on phone conversations as relevant to their face-to-face conversations. They would welcome future training on how to handle face-to-face confrontations.

In light of this feedback I will redesign the format of the workshop to make it easier for staff to hold productive discussions and interact more during the session. For future workshops where front office staff are expected to attend, I will include some examples of face-to-face interaction to show that the same principles operate in all environments.

Outline of the Workshop

The heart of a call handler's job is the ability to hold an effective and efficient conversation under challenging circumstances:

- A inexperienced, distressed, impaired or resistant conversational partner
- A complicated (and frequently changing) procedural framework within which to make decisions
- Concurrent engagements with computer forms and searches

Aims for today

- Explore the science behind how conversations work
- Apply this knowledge to conversations during police calls
- Discuss strategies for improving the effectiveness of your 999 & 101 conversations
 - Today's specific focus is on how to tell a caller what the outcome of their call will be.

Conversation is...

Organised. Conversation is structured in predictable and orderly ways to support social action

- We take turns to speak
- We respond to what has just been said

Situated. Everything we say happens in the moment and is shaped by and for the very local environment in which it takes place

- A. Where has the roast beef gone?
- B. The dog looks happy

Action. Our words do things.

- When listening to someone, don't think about what they mean, think about what they are doing

Sequences of talk

- Sequences of talk are built around pairs of actions
- What we say is influenced by what came before and will shape what comes next.
Turns are organised into paired actions:
 - Greetings -> Return greetings – Questions -> Answers
 - Requests -> Acceptances or Refusals

- 1 ((ring))
- 2 Clara: Hello
- 3 Nelson: Hi.
- 4 Clara: Hi.
- 5 Nelson: Whatcha doin'.
- 6 Clara: Not much.
- 7 Nelson: Y'wanna drink?
- 8 Clara: Yeah.
- 9 Nelson: Okay

Summons – Answer
Greeting – Return Greeting
Availability check – Go ahead
Invitation – Acceptance
Sequence Closing Third

Paired actions are normal. So if you do anything that varies, it is noticeable and you can be held accountable for the variation.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 A: Is there something bothering you or not | 1 Ch: Have to cut the:se Mummy. |
| 2 (1.0) | 2 (1.3) |
| 3 A: Yes or no | 3 Ch: Won't we Mummy |
| 4 (1.5) | 4 (1.5) |
| 5 A: Eh? | 5 Ch: Won't we |
| 6 B: No | 6 M: Yes |

If you do something weird or out of sequence then the caller will notice and might react negatively

- Not answering straight away, or asking an unlinked question implies disagreement, which encourages resistance from the caller
- If you are concentrating on the log more than the conversation you will miss places where you should have responded to information provided by the caller

Control the sequence: If you know how talk is sequentially organised, you can design your talk to plan both the route and the destination for the conversation

Challenge or align

- Initiating actions (e.g. requests) often have alternative responses (e.g., accept / refuse)
- Alternative responses are not equivalent:
 - Some 'align' with the initiating action and help it to progress – Others don't align with the initiating action and stop it's progress
- Aligning actions are easy to do. They are the ones that feel the most natural or usual. They are often done early and briefly
 - A: Would you like to join us for dinner tomorrow?
 - B: We'd love to!
- Non-aligning actions are harder to achieve in interaction. They are often avoided or delayed and minimised.

Aligned responses	Non-aligned responses
Prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin 'on time' (or 'early') 	Delayed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pausing before answering • Hesitation markers (e.g., "Well" or "Uh::")
Unqualified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No uncertainty, hedging, conditions 	Qualified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response is indefinite, uncertain, conditional • May be softened ('mitigated')
Brief	Elaborated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispreference is 'expansion implicative'
Non-accountable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No explanations, excuses, justifications, etc. needed 	Accountable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressions of appreciation • Response is explained, excused, justified a

You can use the power of sequence and alignments to your advantage

- You can make it easier or harder for the caller to resist your suggestions
- You can set up lines of questioning that lead the caller towards the outcome you want
- Design your questions so that it's easy for the caller to agree with your proposed outcome to the call
- Describe what will happen next from the caller's perspective, not yours
 - "I'll get a job on now"
 - "I'll just get an incident started"
 - "I'll send that through to dispatch"

3 steps to explaining the outcome of the call:

1. State the chosen course of action – What's going to happen?
2. Confirm that it is the correct procedure – Why is it is right thing to do?
3. Confirm that it will solve the caller's problem – How will it help?

Do you deal with problems or incidents?

- Identify the caller's problem, not the police incident classification
- Need to get to the heart of the problem itself.
- Unresolved problems lead to repeat callers.
- This can happen when the response to the 'official incident' doesn't address the caller's problem

Incident versus problem

- If callers think you are moving towards granting their request, they will align with your questions as much as possible to keep the conversation progressing as quickly as possible
 - This presents a challenge when you are trying to get complete and honest answers to your questions.
- If they think you are moving towards a decision they don't like, they are more likely to challenge and disrupt your questioning

Person or process

- If you want to control the conversation you have to work with the structures of conversation, not against them.
- If you perform unexpected actions that are not obviously linked to what the caller has just said, they will think you aren't listening to them.
 - If someone isn't listening to you, you are likely to:
 - Repeat what you've already said
 - Resist any actions they try to initiate in favour of pushing your own agenda
- Focusing on the 'processes' involved in call handling can disrupt the sequential organisation of talk and make the conversation difficult

Person to person

- Building rapport: Don't fake it! Respond to what they've just said
- Think about what they are doing, not what they mean – What is the action being performed?
- Alignment: Is the action something you need to challenge or align with?
- Sequence: What actions are relevant next? Control the sequence and you can control the conversation

All of this relies on putting the person you are talking to first instead of the institutional processes