

ONE THING

BEYOND THE FURNITURE INTERVIEW ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS



Are you setting yourself up for interview success by providing a proper environment for your subjects?

For many investigators, interviews have to be given in spaces that weren't originally designed for the purpose. Even when there is a limited amount of time and flexibility to adjust a room to better fit their needs, interviewers should do their best to observe and adapt to both the visible and invisible factors of their environment.

Visible Environment

- Is there a clear path to the door?
- Can the chairs be appropriately placed?
- Can distracting decor be removed?
- Do you look professional but approachable?

Invisible Environment

- Does the location feel private?
- Are there distracting noises nearby?
- Can any unpleasant odors be masked?
- Is there any reason that the subject would have a negative emotion about this location?

By being aware of more than just the room's layout, an interviewer can better understand possible stressors and obstacles to gaining full cooperation.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The importance of room setting
- How environment affects behavior and encourages cooperation
- The visible and invisible environment



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EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENT ON RAPPORT BUILDING

Excerpted from '[Improving the Disclosure of Information in an Investigative Interview: Rapport building and the Physical Environment](#)' (Hoogestyn, Meijer, Vrij, Merckelbach. In-Mind Magazine, April 2018)

At the core of the information-gathering approach is relationship building, often referred to as rapport. Building rapport with an interviewer involves three main components: mutual attention, positivity, and coordination. Mutual attention involves displaying interest and involvement to the interviewee. Positivity consists of behaving in a friendly and approachable manner. Coordination refers to the harmony and "in sync" pattern of interaction that the investigator and interviewee develop throughout the interview.

Through rapport building, investigators are able to develop a constructive relationship with the interviewee, creating an atmosphere that encourages cooperation and supports the task of obtaining information.

Social psychological research suggests that the environment can also help in creating an atmosphere conducive to obtaining information. When we communicate, aspects of our environmental surroundings influence our behavior, in turn influencing how we interact with each other. For example, we assess our environment in terms of how familiar it is to us; unfamiliar environments can cause us to behave more cautiously towards others.

We also assess our environment based on perceptions of warmth; feeling warm (psychologically, not just physically) can help us relax and feel at ease. Other dimensions include perceptions of privacy, formality, and both emotional and physical distance. All of these dimensions are of consequence when interviewees assess their environment during investigative interviews, and can in turn influence the dynamic, the rapport they build with the investigator, as well as their disclosure.

The interview room is set, but what does it feel like from the subject's point of view?



"I've written about it, I've read about it, I've conducted the interviews – but I've never experienced it from the 'other side of the table.'"

–Dave Thompson, CFI

Read about a virtual reality experience that allows us to get as close as possible to understanding what it feels like in that room. [Virtual Reality: Inside the Interrogation Room](#)