

Interviews: a conversation with a purpose (gather information).

• The interviewer asks questions and interviewee (informant, respondent, subject) provides As, art of questioning and interpreting As.

Advantages

□ Use of open ended Qs gives participants opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than from fixed responses.

□ allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses that is, to ask why or how. Thus aid in further elaboration on their answers.

• can take place in an individual (one to one) or (focus group).

Why interviews can only give perspectives of events?

• all forms of data collection is well suited for certain purposes and poorly suited for others.

• The data collected through interviews is in the form of words, not actions, and shaped by the perspectives of the respondents.

• You can ask people about things that they don't really know, and you can get answers this way, but won't be valid data on the topic.

• In contrast, you can ask people what they think about things that they don't know the As will be good data, not about the topic, but about how people think about the topic.

• Let us consider the sorts of things people can reliably discuss in an interview. They can give us their thoughts and feelings on a topic, though it is often difficult to really articulate one's feelings.

• They can tell us how they remember behaving sometime in the past, or how they intend to act in the future, they can tell us why they think or act the way they do, although those descriptions are not likely to be precisely accurate.

• So interviews can give us a glimpse into how people think they think. We can address preferences and intentions, ask people what they want, like, or feel good or bad about.

• You can learn about the narrative structure by which someone makes sense of the events of their life. But you cannot call that the "true" story of those events because they form one story, from one perspective. Interviews give us that perspective.

• **Types of individual interviews:** the major difference is their degree of rigidity with regard to presentational structure

□ **Structured (formal, standardized):** the interviewer asks interviewees a series of pre-established questions. may be thought of as a kind of survey interview.

• uses a formally structured "schedule" of interview questions, or script, interviewers are required to ask subjects to respond to each question, exactly as worded.

• The rationale is to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so responses - ideally, will be comparable (Qs in same order for all respondents).

- rigid (interviewer reads from a script and deviates from it as little as possible).

- Since researchers take a very active role in question design, there is a possibility that they inadvertently or overtly bias data collected.

- Highly standardized procedures are designed to substantially reduce the probability of the results being influenced by the interviewer's bias.

USES:

1- data to be gathered concerns tangible information (recent events or relatively simple matters of opinion) without further probing Qs about thoughts / interpretations.

2- multiple interviewers or teams are to conduct comparable interviews in different settings, keeping each interview on the same track makes it possible to aggregate the data despite differences among the interviewers or subjects. very large research projects, multiple interviewers collect the same data from the same sample pool.

3- longitudinal studies in which the researcher wishes to measure, as closely as possible, exactly the same data at multiple points in time.

• In sum, standardized interviews are designed to elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subjects' thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about study related issues.

□ **Guided Semi-structured (focused, semi-standardized)**

• located somewhere between the other 2

• involves the implementation of a number of predetermined Qs and special topics.

• These Qs are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress (expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions.

• Certain assumptions : If Qs are to be standardized, they must be formulated in words familiar to people being interviewed (in vocabularies of the subjects).

□ **Unstructured (informal, non-standardized, ethnographic).**

- More flexible , do not use predefined questions.
- Rely entirely on the spontaneous generation of Qs in the natural flow of an interaction.
- Can be considered as a natural extension of participant observation, because they so often occur as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork .
- the structure of the interview can be loosely guided by a list of Qs= an **aide memoire or agenda**: a broad guide to topic issues that might be covered in the interview, rather than the actual Qs to be asked, doesn't determine the order of the conversation and is subject to revision based on the responses of the interviewees. No specific questions need to be scripted. As much as possible, the interviewer encourages the informant to lead the conversation. In place of an "interview schedule," researchers prepare a looser set of topics or issues that one plans on discussing, possibly with a preferred order in which to address them.
- guidelines serve as notes, or possibly a checklist, for the interviewer. One way or another, by whatever route you and your informant follow, guidelines indicate the subject matter that you intend to cover and keep the conversation heading in the right direction the details are generated in the verbal exchange .
- The interview is therefore like an improvised performance in which the performers have agreed in advance on the underlying themes and purposes, but left the details to be worked out in the moment.
- The basic framework of questions that you have prepared only serves to open the doors to an entirely different discussion. With an unstructured approach, that can lead to a successful interview of surprising richness, surprises are good, because we then learn about important aspects of our topics that we had not known at the start. Of course, not all surprises or forms of improvisation are without risk, which is one reason that IRBs are often quite uncomfortable with unstructured interview approaches.
- note taking is likely to disrupt the natural flow of the conversation. Thus, when possible, it is preferable to audio record the interviews by tape or digital recorder.
- The individual responses and reactions are the data that we want.
- much more like a regular conversation in which the researcher responds to the informant as much as the other way around (subject determines flow of Topics not interviewer).
- permit researchers to gain additional information about various phenomena they might observe by asking questions.

Uses:

1-Loosely structured interviews sometimes used during the course of field research to **augment field observations**. Ex, Diane Barone (2002) undertook a field study that examined literacy teaching and learning in two kindergarten classes at a school considered to be at risk and inadequate by the state. Barone conducted observations in the classrooms and wrote weekly field notes. In addition, however, she included ongoing informal interviews with the teachers throughout the yearlong study.

2-optimal for dynamic and unpredictable situations, and situations in which the variety of respondents suggests a wide variety of types of response.

* operate from a different set of assumptions than those of standardized interviews.

1-interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what all the necessary Qs are. Consequently, they cannot predetermine a complete list of Qs to ask.

2- assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like worded questions in short, that subjects may possess different vocabularies, SO rather than papering over individual differences, by forcing each interview down the same path, it encourages and pursues them.

- typically seek to learn the nature of the informants' meaning system itself, whereas highly structured interviews assume that the researchers and informants share a system of meaning SO instead of assuming that our Qs mean the same thing to all subjects, we explore the meaning that each subject brings to or discovers in the questions.

Challenges

- Requires a significant amount of time to collect the needed info Because each interview is highly individualized, Especially when the researcher first enters the field and knows little about the setting.
- for researchers to exert the right amount and type of control over the direction and pace of the conversation.
- When a new topic emerges in the discussion, it is difficult for the researcher to know whether to follow it and risk losing continuity, or to stay on the major theme and risk missing additional useful information.
- Training and experience are important to controlling interviews.

Analyzing the data

a great deal of effort is needed to analyze the data systematically& patterns because the Qs asked in each interview were dependent on the context of the interview and so can vary dramatically which will generate different responses.

Interview 1

- Interviewer: What do you plan to do when this job draws to a close?
- Respondent: Well, I have a few options that I'm looking into, but I might just use the downtime to finish my training certification.

Interview 2

- Interviewer: What do you plan to do when this job draws to a close?
- Respondent: Why do you need to know that?

Guidelines Development Question order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

- The specific ordering (sequencing), phrasing, level of language, adherence to subject matter, and general style of questions may depend on backgrounds of the subjects, as well as their education, age, and so forth.
- researchers must take into consideration the central aims and focuses of their studies.
- there are no hard and fast rules or rigid recipes for sequencing questions in an interview schedule. However, it is good to begin with Qs that will be fairly easy to answer, and which are largely regularly asked Qs that are not sensitive or threatening

EX: demographic Qs : frequently about educational levels, date of birth, place of residence, ethnicity, religious preferences, and the like, without a delay getting into the more important material for too long.

- The underlying rationale for this sort of a question sequencing:
 - 1-allows the interviewer and the participant to develop a sense of rapport before more serious and important questions are asked.
 - 2- fosters a degree of commitment on the part of the interviewee, since he or she will have already invested sometime in the interview by answering these easy questions.
- you risk establishing a pattern of short Qs and As that may discourage deeper responses when you need them. At worst, informants may feel ambushed or coerced when you finally get past the easy part and spring some more threatening Qs on them.
- even where the most important Qs are not threatening at all, you might have established an undesirable pattern if you had begun with a series of short, irrelevant Qs.
- SO it might be best to begin with simple Qs that are very much part of the research itself, and not waste your opening on minor details that you already know or don't need.

• a general sequencing of types/categories of Qs for a semi-standardized interview EX:

1. Start with a few easy, nonthreatening questions.
2. Next, some of the more important Qs for the study topic (preferably not most sensitive Qs) should stick to a single concept or topic.
3. More sensitive Qs can follow (those related to the initiated topic).
4. Ask validating Qs (restating important or sensitive Qs, worded differently than previously asked).
5. Begin the next important topic or conceptual area of Qs (may include the more or most sensitive questions).
6. Repeat steps 3 and 4, and so on, through your major topics.
7. Return to any key concepts that you might have had to bypass or skim .
8. End by filling in any remaining simple factual points you have not already recorded

•It is also important to note that each time you change from one topical area to another, you should use some sort of a transition which allow the interviewer to lead the direction of conversation without taking too much initiative away from the informant.

, This may be a clear statement of what is coming next, such as: "Okay, now what I'd like to do is ask some Qs about how you spend your leisure time." Or, "The next series of Qs will consider how your family feels about voting."

•The logic here is to assure that the interviewee is aware of what specific area he or she should be thinking about when answering Qs, and to signal an end to the previous topic even when the informant might have more to say.

•In order to draw out the most complete story about various subjects or situations under investigation, four types or styles of questions possibly written into the interview instrument:

1. Essential questions: exclusively concern central focus of study.

• may be placed together or scattered throughout the survey, but they are geared toward eliciting specific desired information.

2. Extra questions: roughly equivalent to certain essential ones but worded slightly differently.

• included in order to check on the reliability of responses (through examination of consistency in response sets) or to measure the possible influence a change of wording might have.

•ex, having earlier asked an informant something general, such as, "How well do you get along with members of your family," you might want to return to the subject by asking, "Are there people in your family who you particularly look forward to seeing, or seriously dread seeing?."

3. Throwaway questions: incidental or unnecessary for gathering important info being examined in the study. but, may be invaluable for drawing out a complete story from a respondent. Frequently, you find them toward the beginning of guideline instrument.

•may be demographic/ general used to develop rapport .

•You may find certain Qs sprinkled throughout a survey to set interviewing pace or to allow a change in focus in the interview.

••On occasion may serve the additional purpose of cooling out the subject .

4-Probing Questions: probes, provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects. intended to be largely neutral.

- frequently ask subjects to elaborate on what they have already answered to a given question. Ex: "Could you tell me more about that?" "How long did you have that?" "What happened next?" "Who else has said that about you?" or, simply, "How come?"
- if an informant is telling stories about things that happened without much examination of the meanings of the events, the interviewer can toss in the occasional "how did that work out for you?" or "why not?" to encourage more reflection from the informant.

- In standardized or semi-standardized interviews, researchers incorporate a structured series of probes triggered by one or another type of response to some essential question.

- In non-standardized interviews, it is still worthwhile to anticipate patterns of responses and to have in mind the kinds of probes that will encourage further elaboration, often by echoing back to the informant ideas that they have offered up themselves.

Wording of Questions

- In order to acquire information while interviewing, researchers must word questions so that they will provide the necessary data.

- Thus, you must ask questions in such a manner as to motivate respondents to answer as completely and honestly as possible.

- As in the saying about computers, "garbage in, garbage out (GIGO)". If the wrong Qs are asked, or asked in a manner that inhibits or prevents a respondent from answering fully, the interview will not be fruitful- garbage will come out.

- We can think of Qs as invitations to the informants to speak their minds. We conduct interviews in order to learn what people think, not to tell them what we think.

- Among the more common problems that arise in preparing guidelines or schedules is the **double barreled question:** asks a subject to respond simultaneously to two issues in a single question he will tell you about the second of them, losing sight of the first.

- The logical solution is to separate the two issues into separate Qs.

- Keeping questions brief and concise allows clear responses and more effective analysis of the answers.

Communicating Effectively

- Perhaps the most serious problem with asking questions is how to be certain the intentions of the questions have been adequately communicated.

- Researchers must always be sure they have clearly communicated to the subjects what they want to know.

- The interviewers' language must be understandable to the subject; ideally, interviews must be conducted at the level or language of the respondents.

Pre-testing the schedule

- Once researchers have developed their instrument and are satisfied with the general wording and sequencing of Qs, they must pretest the schedule.

Ideally, involves at least two steps.

1- the schedule should be critically examined by people familiar with the study's subject matter technical experts, other researchers, or persons fitting the type to be studied. (facilitates the identification of poorly worded Qs, Qs with offensive or emotion laden wording, or Qs revealing the researchers' own biases and personal values .

2- assess how effectively the interview will work and whether you will obtain the information you seek.

- You should record and transcribe the practice interviews and compare the transcripts to the interview guidelines.

- Make note of any point at which you had to clarify or repeat a question; you may want to modify the wording.

- At what points, if any, did your subjects become reticent, angry, defensive, or otherwise upset? Those sections might need to be moved, reworded, regrouped, or more carefully introduced.

- There might be follow up Qs that you found useful in more than one interview. They should probably be added to the guidelines.

- In general, look for evidence that your research subjects were more or less motivated, more or less likely to go off topic, or likely to give very short As.

- Look for signs if Qs had a different meaning to subjects than you intended.

- Finally, you should code the practice interviews as you would any "real" data and attempt to analyze the patterns of responses. Ask yourself whether, if you had more data like this, you would know how to answer your research question.

- A careful pretest of the instrument, although time consuming in itself, usually saves enormous time and cost in the long run.

On emotional Qs & cooling the subject.

- On these occasions, a throwaway question (or a series of them) may be tossed into an interview whenever subjects indicate to the interviewers that a sensitive area has been entered upon.
- The interviewer offhandedly says something to the effect of, "Oh, by the way, before we go any further, I forgot to ask you. . . ." By changing the line of questions, even for only a few moments, the interviewer moves away from the sensitive area and gives the interviewee a moment to cool down.
- This change in focus from sensitive issues to simple facts may also help to remind your informants that your goal is to collect information, not challenge, judge, or argue with them. (Of course, as the interviewer you also need to remember that, and avoid reacting emotionally to statements with which you disagree.)
- Throwaway questions are not the only technique for reacting to emotional tension in an interview, and may not be the best.
- At times, it is better to address the matter directly. For example, if you perceive that your respondent is getting agitated or defensive with some line of questioning, you might consider saying, "I hope these questions aren't inappropriate," or "I am getting the sense that you're not entirely comfortable with what I'm asking. Is there a different way of thinking about this topic that I haven't considered?"
- In either case, you acknowledge what appears to be a real emotional response on the part of the respondent and offer them the chance to redirect the conversation, up to a point.
- Pressuring a respondent to answer questions that they don't want to answer is only likely to get you false or highly edited responses. People aren't going to tell you things that they don't want to tell you. But if you can redirect the flow of conversation onto more comfortable grounds, or work to establish a more trusting rapport, you can often continue to discuss the same topic without such tensions. Again, there is a degree of art to the performance

Probing Questions

- Lofland and Lofland (1984, p. 56) wrote the following:
In interview[s] . . . the emphasis is on obtaining narratives or accounts in the person's own terms. . . . You might have a general idea of the kinds of things that will compose the account but still be interested in what the interviewees provide on their own and the terms in which they do it.
. . . If something has been mentioned about which you want to know more, you can ask, "You mentioned _____; could you tell me more about that?" For things not mentioned, you might ask, "Did _____?" or "Was _____ a consequence?"

Pre-testing the schedule

- The following questions may guide assessment of interview schedule (Chadwick, Bahr, & Albrecht, 1984):
 1. Has the researcher included all of the questions necessary?
 2. Do Qs elicit the types of response that were anticipated?
 3. Is the language of the research instrument meaningful to the respondents?
 4. Are there other problems with the questions, such as double meaning or multiple issues embedded in a single Q?
 5. Are the questions in logical order?
 6. Finally, does the interview guide, as developed, help to motivate respondents to participate in the study?

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