



FH KREMS
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED
SCIENCES

Qualitative Research Methods



erlebnis → studium

Interviewing Skills

Your role as an interviewer:

- Body language, eye contact
- You have to be clear about what you want to find out (preparation)
- Be prepared for surprises!

The interviewee:

- Expectations what the researcher might want to know – what is it s/he wants?
- Right to know the research process

Reflexivity

- The relationship between the researcher and research subject is an integral part of the data generated.
- Critical self scrutiny
- Consider own actions, interpretations and role in research
- Subject these to the same scrutiny as the rest of the data
- Recognise the decisions you are taking

Flexibility

- One wants the interviewee to speak freely and in his/her own terms about a set of concerns you bring to the interaction plus whatever else the interviewee might introduce.
- Interviewees set their limits in what they tell you – tension between interest of researcher and interviewee.

The social world is complex and not amenable to neat classification. Systematic explanations of behaviour are not easy to come by, because of the complexity of social interactions. Qualitative researchers recognise this complexity and seek to understand the world from the point of view of the people they are investigating.

(Sarah Cunningham-Burly, 2003)

In-depth interviews/ expert interviews

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is ...

- to get inside someone's head and enter into their perspective.
- to find out things like feelings, memories and interpretations that we cannot observe or discover in other ways.

1. Before conducting the interview:

- Sort out your **objectives** (within the context of the whole project)
- Reflect on the resources available, and the investment needed in analysis
- Prepare an **interview guide** (range of topics covered; how to ask; matching the “level” of questions to the ability of informants; breadth/depth; probes: where, when, why; **pre-test** and get feed-back on your skills as an interviewer) but stay flexible and help the flow.
- Memorise your interview guide

In interview guides, the emphasis is on obtaining narratives or accounts in the person's own terms. One wants the character and contours of such accounts to be set by the interviewee. The researcher might have a general idea of the kinds of things that will compose the account, but still be interested in what the interviewee provides on his or her own and the terms in which her or she does it.

(adapted from Lofland and Lofland, 1995)

- Consider analysis implications of questions
- Make a preliminary decision on analysis strategy
 - Transcript-based analysis
 - Tape-based analysis
 - Note-based analysis
 - Memory-based analysis
- Conduct several interviews
- Revise the decision on analysis strategy, if necessary

2. Conduct the interview

- Explain the **purpose of the study** and your role (researcher).
- **Confidentiality** must be guaranteed.
- Ask for permission to audio-tape.
- Explain as to why the interviewee has been selected for interviewing.
- Start with some general questions – **from general to particular**.
- Obtain background information on participants if necessary.
- Questions should be evoked from conversation – **interactive** – not too strict – let things come up – direction is determined by respondent's replies.
- Use **open-ended** questions and "**active listening technique**" (feeding back dialogue in the researcher's own words).

- **Avoid leading questions** like...
 - Don't you think that...
 - Try instead: What do you think about...
- **Listen for inconsistent and for vague or cryptic comments and probe for understanding** (to clarify):
 - You mentioned...could you tell me more?
 - Tell me what you mean by...?
 - Would you like to add anything else?
 - You said you...what happened next?
- Use the **respondent's terms** rather than academic ones.
- Never interrupt an answer, never evaluate an answer.
- **Tape-recording** is essential (ask for permission).
- Make **notes!**

- **At the end:**

- ask if there are **any other points that could have been raised**
- (offer a brief summary and seek confirmation – **participant verification**)
- **thank the respondent** for his/her precious time.

3. Immediately after the interview

- Check tape
- Reflect on process and content of the interview (write a summary)
 - most important themes or ideas expressed
 - most noteworthy quotes
 - unexpected or unanticipated findings
 - comparison and contrast of this interview with other interviews
 - usefulness of questions and need for revision/adjustment
- Label and file all field notes, tapes, and other material
- Transcribe the interview!

Try practising!

- Really listening
- Remember what people have said and what you have already asked
- Keep balance between talking and listening
- Observe and pick up cues

Exercise

Focus Group Discussions

- Focus groups may be used differently according to the purpose of the research and the background of the researcher.
 - **Social Science Research** (in the exploratory and developmental phases of research):
 - Obtaining general background information about a topic of interest;
 - Generating research ideas that can be submitted to further research and testing using other approaches;
 - Interpreting previously obtained quantitative results.

- **Marketing Research** (specific marketing issues):
 - Stimulating new ideas and product concepts;
 - Diagnosing the potential for problems with a new programme/service/product;
 - Generating impression of products, services, etc.
- The greatest use of FG methodology is about:
 - learning how respondents talk and construct their own understanding about the phenomenon of interest.

1. Before conducting FG

- Reflect on the purpose of the study, the objectives, the resources available, and the investment needed in analysis
- Prepare an **interview guide/protocol** (sequencing of questions to allow maximum insight!)
- Memorise your interview-guide!
- Consider analysis implications of FG questions
- Make a preliminary decision on analysis strategy
 - Transcript-based analysis
 - Tape-based analysis
 - Note-based analysis
 - Memory-based analysis
- Conduct several FG
- Revise the decision on analysis strategy, if necessary

2. Conducting a FG discussion

- Welcome all participants, explain the purpose of the study and your role
- Confidentiality must be guaranteed – ask for permission to use the data and names, ask for permission to tape-recording!
- Let participants to shortly introduce themselves
- Draw a diagram of the seating arrangement
- Start with some warm-up questions (general questions) and then go into more specific ones
- Use open-ended questions, avoid leading questions
- Interactive – active listening!
- Don't interrupt an answer
- Avoid academic jargon
- Obtain needed background information on participants if needed

- Listen to inconsistent comments and probe for understanding
 - “Earlier you said..., and now you’ve indicated thatThese seem to me to be different from each other. Help me understand how you feel about this issue.”
- Listen for vague or cryptic comments and probe for understanding
- Take careful notes of the FG
- Tape or video recording is essential
- At the end:
 - Ask if there are any other points that could have been raised
 - Consider a final preference question or brief **personal summary** and seek confirmation (**participant verification**)
 - Thank the participants for their precious time!

3. Immediately after the FG

- Spot-check the tape recording to ensure proper operation
- Conduct moderator and assistant moderator **debriefing** on process and content of the interview (write summary):
 - most important themes or ideas expressed
 - most noteworthy quotes
 - Unexpected or unanticipated findings
 - comparison and contrast of this FG with other groups or with what they had expected
 - usefulness of questions and need for revision or adjustment
- Label and file all field notes, tapes, and other material
- Transcribe the interview!

Characteristics of Effective Focus Group Moderators

- **Superior listening ability:** must not miss comments, paraphrase to ensure that the content of the comments is clear...
- **Excellent short-term auditory memory:** correlate comments made early with comments made later...
- **Well organised:** logical sequence from general to specific, ensure focus on issues and topics relevant to the research
- **Quick learner:** pick up cues, identify key points, probe nuances, make on-the spot decisions about content and sequence of the interview...
- **High energy level:** inject energy, keep interest level high, encourage
- **Personable:** develop rapport that participants “open up”..., interview should feel like a “conversation with a purpose”, help the flow
- **Social skills:** sensitive to participants needs and rights, showing respect and courtesy to participants, orchestrate interaction, handle the social dynamics, recognise when people become bored, tired, angry, upset, embarrassed

- **(0,2):** **pauses** – within and between speaker turns, in seconds.
 - **Word:** **underlining** - shows emphasis
 - **WORD:** **capital letters** - increase in amplitude
 - **(words...):** **parentheses** – uncertain transcription, including the transcriber's "best guess"
 - Leave enough space for coding (margin!)
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- Single-space when the same person is speaking
 - Double-space between speakers
 - Double-space between paragraphs of the same speaker