

Interview as a Method for Qualitative Research

Adapted From Dapzury Valenzuela ??

Definitions

- The qualitative research interview seeks to describe the **meanings** of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to **understand the meaning of what the interviewees say**.
- Interviews are particularly useful for **getting the story behind** a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. (McNamara, 1999)

Characteristics of Qualitative Research Interviews

- Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on what the respondent says.
- Interviews are a far more personal form of research than questionnaires.
- In the personal interview, the interviewer works directly with the respondent.
- Unlike with mail surveys, the interviewer has the opportunity to probe or ask follow up questions.
- Interviews are generally easier for respondent, especially if what is sought is opinions or impressions.
- Interviews are time consuming and they are resource intensive.
- The interviewer is considered a part of the measurement instrument and interviewer has to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency.

Types of Interviews

General interview guide approach - the guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee.

- **Informal, conversational interview** - no predetermined questions are asked, in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities; during the interview the interviewer "goes with the flow."

Types of Interviews (Cont.)

- > **Standardized, open-ended interview** - the same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees; this approach facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared.
- > **Closed, fixed-response interview** - where all interviews are asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from among the same set of alternatives.

Telephone Interview

- Telephone interviews enable a researcher to gather information rapidly.
- Like personal interviews, they allow for some personal contact between the interviewer and the respondent.

Disadvantages:

- Some people may not have telephones.
- People often dislike the intrusion of a call to their home.
- Telephone interviews need to be relatively short or people feel imposed upon.
- Many people don't have publicly listed telephone numbers.

Training of the Interviewer

- Since the interviewer can control the quality of the result his/her training becomes crucial.
- It is important to organize in detail and rehearse the interviewing process before beginning the formal study.

Point for Interviewer Training

- **Describe the entire study** - interviewers need to know more than simply how to conduct the interview itself. They should have background of the study and why the study is important.
- **Explain the sampling logic & process** - naïve interviewer may not understand why sampling is so important. They may wonder why you go through all the difficulties of selecting the sample so carefully.

Interviewer Bias

- Interviewer needs to know the many ways that they can inadvertently bias the results.
- Understand why it is important that they not bias the study.
- By slanting the results they might jeopardize the results or purpose of the study.

Preparation for Interview

- Choose a setting with the least distraction.
- Explain the purpose of the interview.
- Address terms of confidentiality.
- Explain the format of the interview.
- Indicate how long the interview usually takes.
- Provide contact information of the interviewer.
- Allow interviewee to clarify any doubts about the interview.
- Prepare a method for recording data, e.g., take notes.

Qualification Criteria for the Interviewer

- Knowledgeable – being familiar with the topic.
- Structuring – outline the procedure of the interview.
- Clear – simple, easy and short questions which are spoken distinctly and understandably.
- Gentle – being tolerant, sensitive and patient to provocative and unconventional opinions.
- Steering – to control the course of the interview to avoid digressions from the topic.
- Remembering – retaining the subject information from the interviewees.
- Interpreting – provide interpretation of what is said by the interviewee.

Types of Topics in Questions

- Behaviors – what a person has done or is doing.
- Opinions/values – what a person thinks about the topic.
- Feelings – what a person feels rather than what a person thinks.
- Knowledge – to get facts about the topic.
- Sensory – what people have seen, touched, heard, tasted or smelled.
- Background/demographics – standard background questions, such as age, education, etc.

Sequence of Questions

- Get the respondents involved in the interview as soon as possible.
- Before asking about controversial matters, first ask about some facts.
- Intersperse fact-based questions throughout the interview.
- Ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future.
- The last questions might be to allow respondents to provide any other information they prefer to add and their impressions of the interview.

Stages of Interview Investigation

- Thematizing – the *why* and *what* of the investigation
- Designing – plan the design of the study.
- Interviewing – conduct the interview based on a guide.
- Transcribing – prepare the interview material for analysis.
- Analyzing – decide on the purpose, the topic, the nature and methods of analysis that are appropriate.
- Verifying – ascertain the validity of the interview findings.
- Reporting – communicate findings of the study base on scientific criteria.

Procedure of the Interview

- Occasionally verify the tape recorder (if used) is working.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Attempt to remain as neutral as possible.
- Encourage responses.
- Be careful about the appearance when note taking.
- Provide transition between major topics.
- Don't lose control of the interview.

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After the Interview

- Verify if the tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the interview.
- Make any notes on your written notes.
- Write down any observations made during the interview.

Qualitative Research Methods

- In-Depth Interview
- Focus Group
- Observation, and
 - ▶ Participant Observation Techniques

In-Depth Interview

In-Depth Interview DEFINITION

In-depth interviewing – a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant's perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in her or his own words.

In-depth Interviewing

- A conversational process.
- Unstructured or semi-structured format.
- Typically conducted face-to-face.
- Relies on verbal accounts of social realities.
- Typically individual interviews but can be groups.

In-depth Interviewing

- Predominantly used for theory building as opposed to hypothesis testing.
- Often used in exploratory studies.
- Results may be used to design a questionnaire.

Conducting the Interviews

- Who will you interview?
- How many respondents/informants will be interviewed?
- How many interviews will you conduct?
- How long should you allow for the interviews?
- Where do you conduct the interviews?

Conducting the Interviews

- How much information do you give the informant?
- Confidentiality is an issue.
- Establish a rapport.
- Prepare in advance. Do your homework.
- Prepare an interview guide.
- Use transitions during interview to keep on track.

Conducting the Interviews

- Be a good listener and observer.
- Funneling – broad questions progressing to more specific issues.
- Story-telling – Asking questions so as to elicit a story from the respondent.
- Written narratives.

Types of Questions

- Descriptive – broad, good starter questions.
- Structural questions – explore how respondents organize their knowledge.
- Contrasting – respondent must make a comparison.
- Opinion/value – “What is your opinion of....?”

Types of Questions

- Feeling questions – Emotional responses.
“How do you feel about that?”
- Sensory – Questions about sensory perceptions (seen, heard, touched, etc.).
- Background demographic questions.

Probing

- Questions used to elicit more information after an initial question. Follow-up questions.
- Devil's advocate questions.
- Hypothetical questions.
- Posing the ideal.

Forms of Probing

- Non-verbal nudging.
- Verbal nudging.
- Reflective probe or paraphrase.

Recording the Interview

- Tape-recording.
- Note taking.
- Each has advantages and disadvantages.
- May be used in combination.

Listening Skills

- Empathic listening.
- Non-judgmental or tolerant appearance.
- Good advance preparation helps.
- Listening skills improve with practice.

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Focus Group?



All You Need to Know About
Focus Group!

What is a Focus Group? (continued...)

- A form of qualitative research based on interaction between group members
- Typically organized and directed by a moderator
- A tool to generate and to answer research questions

What is a Focus Group? (continued...)

Focus Groups are Appropriate When the Goal is to:

- Understand differences in perspectives
- Uncover influential factors
- Hear a range of ideas
- Collect information to design a quantitative study
- Shed light on pre-existing quantitative data
- Capture comments or language used by a target audience

Basic Uses of Focus Groups

- As the primary source of data in a study
- To supplement other data collection methods
- Combined with other means of gathering data

Linking Data Collection Methods

- ✓ Focus groups and individual interviews
- ✓ Focus groups and participant observation
- ✓ Focus groups and surveys
- ✓ Focus groups and experiments

Strengths of Focus Groups

- Expedient and efficient
- Ability to ask questions directly
- Opportunity to “Share and compare”
- Less structured than one-on-one interviews
- Group interaction stimulates memories
- Puts a “human face” on statistics

Weaknesses of Focus Groups

- Not a natural social setting
- Self-report, limited to verbal interaction
- Less control
- Less time with each participant
- The interviewer may lead answers
- Group dynamics vs. individual interviews

Necessary Decisions in Focus Group Research Design

- Who
- What
- Where
- How

Participant Selection

Based on:

- Knowledge or insight
- Shared, relevant trait
- “Homogeneous strangers”
- May need to control factors such as race [ethnicity], age, etc.
- Selective sampling
- Telephone screening caveat
- Over recruit by at least 20%

Strategies for Finding Participants

- Use a preexisting list
- Schedule around another event
- Recruit at a target rich environment
- Snowball sample
- Use a screening/selection service
- Select names from the telephone directory
- Run an ad or announcement

Size and Number of Groups

- 3-5 groups composed of 6-10 participants
- Factors determining size of focus groups:
 - Level of interest
 - Level of detail required
 - Experience of moderator
 - Number of available participants
- Factors affecting number of groups:
 - Time allotted and size of the staff
 - Level of heterogeneity
 - Level of structure

Questions for Planning

- ✓ What is the problem you are trying to research?
- ✓ What is the purpose of the study?
- ✓ What kinds of information are you looking for?
- ✓ Are there areas of interest that are of particular importance?
- ✓ Who will be interested in the results?
- ✓ How will you use the information?

The Questioning Route

- A set of open-ended questions to guide discussion
- Maximum 12 questions
- Follows the introductions
- Includes four types of questions
- Have an easy beginning
- Sequence naturally, move from general to specific
- Manage time effectively

Components of a Questioning Route

(Continued...)

- Opening Question: getting to know you
- Transition Questions: specifics of the topic
- Key Questions: 2-5 questions that ask for very specific information about the topic
- Ending Question(s): closure and time for final thoughts

Good Focus Group Questions Should

- ✓ Include good directions
- ✓ Sound conversational
- ✓ Be easy to say
- ✓ Be short and clear
- ✓ Be open-ended
- ✓ Use words the participants use

Types of Questions

- Listing questions
- Rating questions
- Choosing among alternatives
- Drawing a picture
- Imagination questions
- Bringing something to the group

Before the Focus Group

- Be alert
- Practice the introduction and questioning route
- Be comfortable with the questions
- Practice making small talk
- Gauge time per question
- Know which are key questions
- Balance memorization and reading

Pre-Session Strategy

- Set up before participants arrive
- Create a friendly atmosphere
- Greet participants at the door
- Seat participants strategically based on personality types
- Keep the conversation light and general
- Provide refreshments

Improving Turnout

- Provide incentives
- Be sure there is no conflict with major events
- Make personal contacts with potential participants
- Remove barriers such as child care, transportation, etc.
- Send a personalized follow-up letter
- Make a reminder phone call

The Role of the Moderator

- Ask questions
- Listen
- Keep the conversation on track
- Make sure everyone shares
- Take notes
- Remain unbiased
- Know your audience and dress accordingly

The Role of the Moderator

- Believe what participants are saying is important
- Have sufficient background in the area of interest
- The moderator should be homogeneous with the rest of the group
- Utilize the assistant moderator

Introductions

- Introduce yourself and the assistant moderator
- Go over the ground rules:
 - Speak one at the time
 - Be courteous
 - Ask questions
 - Have fun!
- Emphasize full participation
- Make introductions honest but general

Managing Questioning Time

For a 2 hour focus group:

15 minutes: introduction and late arrivals

15 minutes: questions and summary

90 minutes: actual questioning time

Consider:

- Complexity of questions
- Category of questions
- Level of participant expertise
- Size of the focus group
- Level of discussion

Questioning Tips

- Use phrases like “think back to a time when...”
- Avoid “why”; use phrases like “what prompted this”
- Try not to give examples
- Ask positive questions before negative
- Give respondents a chance to comment on both positive and negative
- Try not to rephrase questions

Tips for Moderating a Focus Group

- Make it clear you are there to learn
- Exclude anyone who arrives late
- Try having people write down their thoughts on the topic
- Be prepared to improvise and use probes and pauses as necessary
- Track what participants are saying throughout
- Be prepared for repetition

More Moderator Tips

Tips for showing that you care:

- Lean forward as you listen
 - Take notes
 - Interact informally before and after
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- Follow-up by telephone to thank participants

The Pause

- The pause is 5-10 seconds of silence after conversation on a given question has stopped
- The pause should be coupled with eye contact

Tips for Answering Questions

- Ask a group member to answer
- Use the pause
- Postpone the answer
- Answer the question directly if it will not bias the responses or if it is unavoidable
- Answer lingering questions by the end
- Be prepared to answer - anticipate

Dealing with Different Types of Participants

Four main types of participants:

- Self Appointed Experts
- Dominant Talkers
- Shy Participants
- Ramblers

Preparing for the Unexpected

- If nobody shows up
- If few participants attend
- If people bring children
- If people bring adult guests
- If uninvited people show up
- If probes and pauses are not working
- If participants do not want to leave

Analysis and Reporting

- Take data that is similar between groups and discuss themes
- Learn ways of coding data
- Review the responses of at least one or two of the groups for patterns
- Qualitative vs. quantitative
- What is interesting vs. what is important

A Few Final Tips

- Pilot, pilot, pilot!
- Leave time to energize.
- Videotape or audio tape?
- Monitor your body language.

References

- Krueger Richard A., Casey Mary Anne. (2000) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Merton Robert K., Fiske, M., Kendall, P. L. (1990) *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*. (2nd ed.) New York: Free Press
- Morgan David L. (1997). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.



Adapted from: Dreeszen and Associate and Penn Sate

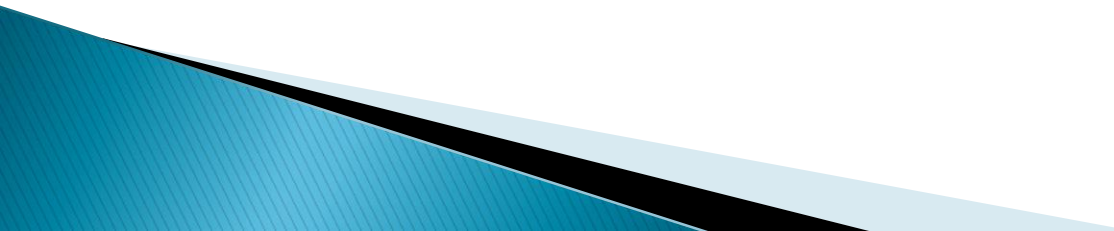
Anything Wrong with this Focus Group?



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Observation Method/Technique

Generally, there are three types of observational research:

- ▶ **Covert observational research –**
 - ▶ **Overt observational research –**
 - ▶ **Researcher Participation –**
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Participant Observation Method/Technique: An Overview



- Participant Observation
- History
- Fieldwork Roles
- Validity
- Entering the Field
- Skills of a Participant Observer
- Stages of Participant Observation
- Questions

Participant Observation



- Qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research, whose objective is to help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations

Source: Qualitative Research Methods; A Data Collector's Field Guide, Module 2, Family Health International

Characteristics of Participant Observation



- The foundation of cultural anthropology.
- It involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives.
- Produces ethnography.

Characteristics of Participant Observation con't



- A humanistic method and scientific one.
- Usually involves fieldwork.
- A strategic method, like, experiments, surveys, or archival research.
- Involves going out and staying out, learning a new language, and experiencing the lives of the people you are studying as much as you can.

Characteristics of Participant Observation con't



- Involves immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly.
- When done right, participant observation turns fieldworkers into instruments of data collection and data analysis.

History



- **Bronislaw Malinowski**

- Did not invent participant observation, but is widely credited with developing it as a serious method of social research.
- Studied people of the Trobriand Islands, in the Indian Ocean, before World War I.
- Methods – spend lots of time studying culture, learn the language, hang out, stay aware of what's really going on.

Fieldwork Roles



- Fieldwork can involve three different roles:
 - Complete Participant
 - Participant Observer
 - ✦ Observing participants
 - ✦ Participant observers
 - Complete Observer
 - ✦ Little if any interaction

How long does Fieldwork Take?



- Anthropological field research traditionally takes a year or more.
- Some studies are done in a matter of weeks or a few months.
- The amount of time you spend in the field can make a big difference in what you learn
 - Anthropologists who stay in the field at least a year are more likely to report on sensitive issues like witchcraft, sexuality, political feuds, etc.

Rapid Assessment



- **Rapid assessment**
 - Going in and getting on with the job of collecting data without spending months developing rapport
 - Will usually be prepared with a set of questions to ask
 - Participatory mapping
 - ✦ Draw maps of villages to locate key places on the map

Validity



- Five reasons for insisting on participant observation in the conduct of scientific research about cultural groups:
 1. Participant observation opens things up and makes it possible to collect all kinds of data.
 2. Participant observation reduces the problem of reactivity – of people changing their behavior when they know they are being studied.
- *Presence builds trust, trust lowers reactivity = Means Higher Validity of Data

Validity con't



- 3. Participant observation helps you ask sensible questions, in the native language.
- 4. Participant observation gives you an intuitive understanding of what's going on in a culture and allows you to speak with confidence about the meaning of data.
- 5. Many research problems simply cannot be addressed adequately by anything except participant observation.

Entering the Field



- Five rules to follow when making an entry:
 1. There is no need to select a site that is difficult to enter when equally good sites are available that are easy to enter.
 2. Go into the field with plenty of written documentation about yourself and your project.

Entering the Field con't



3. Don't try to wing it, unless you absolutely have to.
4. Think through in advance what you will say when ordinary people (not just gatekeepers) ask you:
What are you doing here? Who sent you?
5. Spend time getting to know the physical and social layout of your field site.

Skills of a Participant Observer



- Learn the language
- How to learn the language
 - Learn a few words and say them brilliantly
 - Capture pronunciation, intonation, the use of your hands, and other nonverbal cues
- Build explicit awareness
 - The little details in life

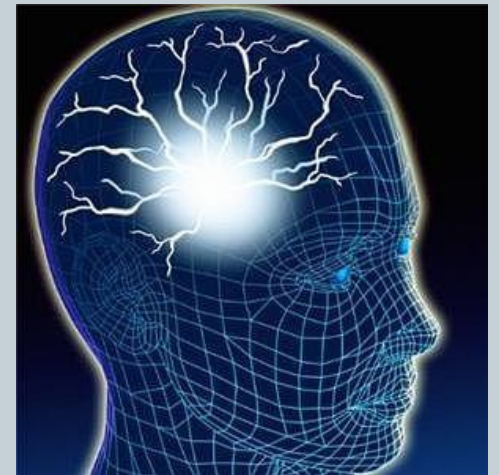


Skills of a Participant Observer con't



- **Build memory**

- Don't talk to anyone before you get your thoughts down on paper
- When you sit down to write, try to remember things in historical sequence, as they occurred throughout the day
- Draw a map of the physical space where you spent time observing and talking to people that day



Skills of Participant Observer con't



- **Maintain Naiveté**
 - Develop your skills at being a novice – someone who genuinely wants to learn a new culture
- **Build writing skills**
 - Good writing skills will carry you through participant observation fieldwork, writing a dissertation, and publications

Skills of Participant Observer can't



- Hanging out, gaining rapport
 - Hanging out builds trust, or rapport and trust results in ordinary conversation and ordinary behavior in your presence
- Objectivity

Stages of Participant Observation



- Initial Contact
- Culture shock
- Discovering the obvious
- The break
- Focusing
- Exhaustion, the second break, and frantic activity
- Leaving the Field

Questions



- Describe the three different roles of fieldwork.
- List and describe the five rules to remember when entering the field.
- Notes compiled from, Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, by H. Russell Bernard (2006)

Thank You!

