

Qualitative Interview Questions and Techniques : Improving the Quality of your Research

Research and Methodology Special Interest Group

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Introduction

Presentation Structure

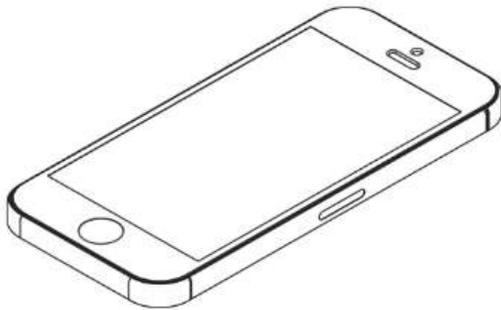
- Opening
- Mentimeter Engagement
- Background
- **Interviews**
 - Format of Interviews
 - Considerations such as Structure
- **Interview Questions**
 - Types of Questions
 - Techniques to improve Data quality
- Questions



Opening Remarks Snap Survey



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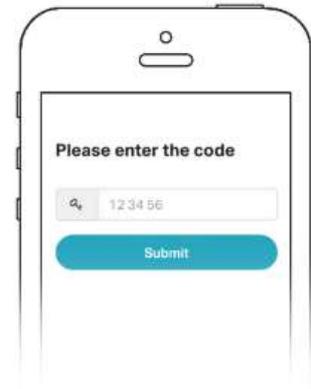
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Opening Remarks



The interview in phenomenological research is one of the most underemphasized aspects within the process (Bevan, 2014).

- Do students / novice researchers understand and apply interview process and techniques effectively?
- Do students/researchers know how to formulate high quality questions to interrogate the 'lived experience' of the research phenomenon?

Some Challenges

[1] Different Epistemological Approaches



- The Phenomenological epistemology is essentially postmodern, in recognizing that human experience is complex, is grounded in the world which is experienced intersubjectively, and has meaning (Mason, 2002).
- **BUT**
- The challenge of a Postmodernist epistemology:
 - Postmodernism is not clearly defined and is an opposition against rational thinking.
 - Postmodernists deny that there are aspects of reality that are objective.
 - Reality, knowledge, and value are constructed by discourses; hence they can vary with them.
 - There are no absolute truths.

Increased responsibility on researchers to ensure interview data are valid, reliable and accurate

Impact of a Post-Modernist Paradigm



- Daniel Dennett – American Philosopher: “ *It is an intellectual fad that made it respectable to be cynical about truth and facts.*”
- *Epistemic relativity has become part of the research landscape.*
- There is no fixed reality. Creating a culture where relativized views of facts and knowledge seem acceptable.
- Lost touch with reality due to technological advances and globalism.
- Undermining the intellectual respect for and belief in objective knowledge.
- Power is not found in structures like the state or class – it is formed by language and discourse.
- Particular discourses become dominant and shape our understanding – discourses have therefor power over us.

[2]. Difference between Research Questions and Interview questions



- *Research questions are not the same as interview questions.*
- **The research question** describes the issue you want to learn about, or the problem that needs to be investigated and solved. (High level)
A research question is specific, actionable and practical.
- **Interview questions** are questions to collect the data to interpret and analyze the research problem. (Granular). Humans are way better at fabricating answers than remembering past events accurately.

Research Question: Example

How do families with school-age children decide how to spend money on vacations?

Interview Question

Walk me through your last vacation from planning it until when you arrived back home.”

Considerations and Options for Interviews



- Interviews: Neutral / non-accusatory / To collect relevant information related to the research question.
- Questioning: More probing and intense than an interview.
- Interrogation: Serious level of questioning. This is aimed specifically at determining if the person suspected of the crime is guilty or innocent, by utilizing special information gathering techniques and technology.

Considerations in Choosing an Interview Format



- Qualitative vs Quantitative
- Target and Sample sizes
- Time constraints / budget

Differences in Qualitative Information gathering



- Differences in Format - [Synchronous vs Asynchronous]
- Differences in Type – [Interviews, Questioning, Interrogation]
- Differences in Structure [Structured, Unstructured, Semi-structured]
- Differences in Question types [Open ended, closed, Leading]

Purpose of an Interview



- Data collection method to reveal other people's views, descriptions and perspectives on the themes which are addressed (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019).
- Purpose may vary according to the research question and the disciplinary perspective of the researcher.
- Perspective of the researcher. [Always be aware of bias]
- To collect relevant information related to research question(s).
- Consideration of the population (language / vulnerability)

Types of Qualitative Interviews



| | |
|---|--|
| | |
| Phenomenological Interviewing | Interviews are commonly used to elicit detail concerning descriptions of concrete lived experiences, that is the Life World. |
| Ethnographic Interviewing | <p>To explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their cultural worlds, expressed in their own language. focus of ethnographic interviews is on generating participants' descriptions of key aspects related to the cultural world of which he or she is a part – that is space, time, events, people, activities, and objects (Spradley, 1979).</p> <p>Mostly Unstructured - Ethnographers gather data through participant observation and record field notes as they observe from the sidelines</p> |
| Dialogic and Confrontational Interviewing | Interview practice that develops knowledge rather than simply conveying experience. that seeks to foster public dialogue on topics of concern. In this kind of dialogue, interested citizens – including the interviewer – must be willing to justify, argue, defend, and perhaps even change, their accounts. |

Types of Research Interviews



Large Scale Interventions

- Nominal Group Technique
- World Cafe

Methods for engaging and involving the whole system, internal and external, in the change process and enhancing everyone's understanding of the system and its context. - Alban and Bunker, Large Group Interventions, 1997.

Nominal group technique (NGT) is defined as a structured method for group brainstorming that encourages contributions from everyone and facilitates quick agreement on the relative importance of issues, problems, or solutions. Team members begin by writing down their ideas, then selecting which idea they feel is best.

Group Interviews

- Delphi method

- The Delphi method works especially well when the goal is to improve our understanding of problems, opportunities, solutions, or to develop forecasts.
- In-depth interviews are used to discover shared understandings of a particular group. The sample of interviewees should be fairly homogenous and share critical similarities related to the research question.
- Solicit expert opinion / iterations

Individual Interviews

Phenomenology

- Open ended questions / Debate about structured or unstructured interview process.
- Interrogating the "lived experience of the phenomenon.
- "SLOW" technique
- Bracketing.

Interview Formats

Advantages and Disadvantages



| | Time | Place |
|--------------|--|---|
| Synchronous | Face-to-Face Skype/Messenger Telephone | Face-to-Face |
| Asynchronous | Email | Email Skype / Messenger Telephone |

Recordings: (Audio, Video)

- Specific consent required (at times)
- Excessive background noise, weak batteries, placement of the recorder and other issues are all factors influencing the quality of recorded interviews.
- Transcribing: Manual / Computer Assisted
- Transcribers often have difficulties capturing the spoken word in text form because of sentence structure, use of quotations, omissions and mistaking words or phrases for others

Interview Structure



| Structured | <p>The main purpose of structured interviews is to ask the same set of questions from every participant. This makes it easier to compare data between participants or groups later.</p> <p>To maintain consistency across interviews, it's important to follow these guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All questions should be written in advance (including probes)• Questions should be written in great detail so that they can be used verbatim during interviews.• The sequence of questions should be pre-decided and consistent across interviews. | <p>Thinking back to your childhood days in Chelsea, can you remember what kind of local music was popular at the time?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do you think it was so popular?• Where was it played?• Were there other popular genres? |
|-------------------|---|--|

Interview Structure



| Unstructured | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neither the questions nor the topics are pre-decided. Questions are formulated during the interview based on what the interviewee observes or hears during the conversation .• Each unstructured interview is different and the questions change over time. | |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Semi-structured | <p>Prepare an interview guide that describes which <u>topics will be explored</u> during the interview, but the actual questions are not pre-written.</p> <p>In semi-structured interviews the interviewer has the freedom to word their question spontaneously and explore topics in more detail.</p> | <p>What problems did the participant face growing up in the community?</p> <p>Topics: Personal. Education-related. Related to their immediate family. Related to the community in general.</p> |

Body Language and Non-Verbal Cues



- Importance of developing rapport with the interviewee.
- Importance of Non-verbal clues to determine validity of responses.
- The way in which a response is made (tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation) can provide information that a written response cannot reveal.
- Eye contact – Keeping eye contact with the interviewers were judged to be more sincere, trustworthy, professional, interested, and confident.
- Posture – do not cross arms.
- Gestures / fidgeting.

Interview Questions

The Importance of High-Quality Questions



- Some estimates indicate that 90% of social science researchers use interview data.
- Garbage in – Garbage out – GIGO concept
- Impact on quality of decision-making.
- Operational and Organizational research are expensive in both time and money.

Example of Research Questions:

Clarity, Focus and Complexity



| | Clarity |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>Unclear</i> | Why are social networking sites harmful? |
| <i>Clear</i> | How are online users experiencing of addressing privacy issues on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter? |

| | Focused |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Unfocused</i> | What is the effect on the environment from global warming? |
| <i>Focused</i> | How is glacial melting affecting Antarctica? |

| | Simple vs Complex |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Too simple</i> | How are doctors addressing diabetes in the USA? |
| <i>Appropriately complex</i> | What are common traits of those suffering from diabetes in America, and how can these commonalities be used to aid the medical community in prevention of the disease? |

From Topic to Research Question



Explore Questions

- Ask open-ended “how and “why” questions about your general topic.
- Consider the “so what” of your topic? Why does it matter to you/others/industry/organization?

Determine and Evaluate your research Question

- Which specific aspect of the more general topic will you explore?
- Is your research question clear?
- Is your research question focused?
- Is your research question simple or sufficiently complex worthy of doctoral research?

Hypothesize

- If you make an argument what will you say?
- Why does your argument matter?
- How might others challenge your argument?
- What kind of sources will you need to support your argument?

5W2H



What?

What will be done?
Action steps,
description.

Why?

Why will it be done?
Justification, reason.

Where?

Where will it be done?
Location, area.

When?

When will it be done?
Time, dates, deadlines.

Who?

Who will do it? Who's
responsible for it?

How?

How will it be done?
Method, process.

How much?

What will it cost to
make? Costs or
expenses involved.

Patton's Six Types of Questions for Qualitative Interviewing



| Kind of Question | Description | Example |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Experience and behavior questions | Questions about what a person does or has done aim to elicit behavior, experiences, actions and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present | If I followed you through a typical day, what would I see you doing? What experiences would I observe you having If I had been in the program with you, what would I have seen you doing? |
| Opinion and values questions | Questions aimed at understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes of people ask about opinions, judgments, and values. Answers to these questions tell us what people think about some experience or issue. They tell us about people's goals, intentions, desires, and expectations | What do you believe? What do you think about ____? What would you like to see happen? What is your opinion of ____? |
| Feeling questions | Feeling questions aim at eliciting emotions –feeling responses of people to their experiences and thoughts. Feeling tap the affective dimension of human life. | How do you feel about that? |
| Knowledge questions | Knowledge questions inquire about the respondent's factual information –what the respondent knows. | Certain things are facts, such as whether it is against the law to drive while drunk and how the law defines drunkenness. These things are not opinions or feelings. |
| Sensory questions | Sensory questions ask about what is seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled. Responses to these questions allow the interviewer to enter into the sensory apparatus of the respondent. | When you walk through the doors of the program, what do you see? What does the counselor ask you when you meet with him? What does he actually say? |
| Background/Demographic questions | Age, education, occupation and the like are standard background questions that identify characteristics of the person being interviewed. Answers to these questions help the interviewer locate the respondent in relation to other people. Asking these questions in an open-ended rather than closed manner elicits the respondent's own categorical world view. | |

Open, Closed and Leading Questions

- ❖ Avoid closed and leading questions:
- ❖ Closed questions are questions which invite a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Sometimes you may need to ask questions in this way for clarification, but generally it is to be avoided.
- 'Do you remember the General Strike?' (Answer: yes/no)
- 'Is politeness important to you? (Answer: yes/no)

Leading questions are those questions which suggest an answer in the question. Ask a question like this and you may well have your choice of words, rather than the interviewee's, coming back at you in the answer.

- 'Don't you think ...'
- 'Wouldn't you say that....'
- 'That must have been....'
- 'Don't you agree that...'

Interview Questions and Techniques



Articulating the research question follows as one of the chief challenges the researcher faces. This involves formulating questions to actively engage the participant in exploring the depths of his/her perspectives, while not foregrounding the researcher's preconceptions which interfere with this process.

| Techniques | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Memos | Writing memos throughout data collection and analysis as a means of examining and reflecting upon the researcher's engagement with the data – "free of constraint." |
| Bracketing interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increases the researcher's clarity and engagement with participants' experiences by unearthing forgotten personal experiences;• Bracketing protect researchers and participants in emotionally charged research topics, and simultaneously develop the researcher's capacity to understand the phenomena in question.• Bracketing requires a researcher to become aware of his or her own natural attitude, immersion in the life-world and it is taken for granted. It is a dialogue with the self, to become reflexive when asking questions. (Bevan, 2014). |
| Reflexive Journal | Should start prior to defining the research question, in which preconceptions are then identified throughout the research process (Ahern, 1999). The maintenance of a journal can enhance researchers' ability to sustain a reflexive stance. Aspects to explore in the reflexive journal include: the researchers' reasons for undertaking the research; assumptions regarding gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status; the researcher's place in the power hierarchy of the research; the researcher's personal value system (Hanson, 1994); potential role conflicts with research participants; feelings such as blame or disengagement that may indicate presuppositions. |

The “slow” Interview technique



‘Slow’ Interview

‘Non-slow’ interview

The interview situation

- The tempo in the interview is slowed to the speed of the note taking.
- The tempo provides time and space for reflection.
- Informants are more relaxed due to the dialogue-based quality assurance process
- The notes (the interview) are demystified.

- Use of technology influences the meeting between the interviewer and the informant.
- Voice recording may increase the risk of alienation.
- The tempo in the interview leaves less time for reflection.

The dataset

- Approximately verbatim reproduced but with somewhat subjective selection during the interview.
- Time for reflection during and after the interview.
- Quality assured/feedback loop safeguarded/verifiability of data.
- Both the interviewer and the informant have a sense of strong ownership of the material.

- Verbatim reproduction on tape
- Time available to register the behavior of the interviewee. (Observe body language.)
- Full transcription vs. noting main themes.

Cognitive Interviewing



- Cognitive interviewing (CI) is empirically validated as a technique for retrieving accurate and thorough recall.
- *It enables retrieval not only of events, but also their meaning for interviewees*
- It has affinities with qualitative interviewing, whilst enjoying clear criteria of competence.
- Cognitive interviewing relies on the principles of cognition and memory retrieval.
- Cognitive interviewing is a structured interview technique in which the interviewer guides the interview to collect additional information regarding the subject's response to the survey questions in order to help determine if the question is successful in garnering the intended information.
- The subject may be asked to recall everything about a situation (even if it seems irrelevant), recall events in a different order, or recall from a different perspective in order to enhance recollection.

Summary

1. Quantitative research is an important research methodology in the social sciences and in business, education and health research.
2. Researchers will have to guard against the effects of a post-modernist paradigm not to allow qualitative research in becoming diluted and reduced to an epistemic relativity.
3. Interview structure and Questions are important parts of Qualitative Research but is often underemphasized and poorly understood.
4. Many different aspects to consider including type and format of both the interview itself and the interview question.
5. Concepts like Epoché, Bracketing, Phenomenology Reduction, Deliberate Naivety and Imaginative Variation are generally not well understood or applied within phenomenological research.



Questions



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<https://www.indianscribes.com/preparing-qualitative-research-questions-for-an-interview/>

Additional Notes

