

The fundamentals of interview, its advantages and difficulties

[Media](#), [Interview](#)



Everyone thinks they know something about interviewing and quite rightly too! The images of media are prevalent. A crime series shows the rough, tough police officer interrogating the suspects to find the “ truth”, reporter interviewing a politician trying to dig out clear and unambiguous statements or street surveys where ‘ random’ passers-by are interviewed for their views about some topic of the day, product, or service. However, the interview we are discussing about is quite different. Interview is the primary data collection technique for gathering data in qualitative methodologies. Oakley states ‘ Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets.’ Sidney and Beatrice Webb describe the method of the interview as being ‘ conversation with a purpose’. Similarly, Schostak (2006) consider Interview as the space between views, not the views themselves but the condition under which people may express their views to each other & self.

Interview can be individual (in-depth interview), key-informant interviews, and in groups which is used to gain more deeper understanding of the subject using range of techniques described in forthcoming paragraphs. Interview requires a trained interviewer or skills from experience such as making respondent comfortable; probing without respondent making feel harassed; remaining neutral; encouraging talking openly; listening carefully; and extracting required insights from hour’s long discussion. Barbour and Schostak (2005) view a presumed power, social status and knowledge of the researcher that may be used to manipulate the interviews.

There is also a need to deal with some major concerns of interviews such as what does the interviewer really want, what is it that the interviewee keeping secret, what is it that the interviewer is really going to do with the data collected, in whose interests will it be used, and what benefits will he/she get. Therefore, an interviewer should try to response these concerns before starting. Interviewer can also use some strategies such as adopting the pose of the listener in a way that parallels the language, body-gestures and manners of the interviewee; not to impose or objectivize own “presumed power”, “social status contexts’ and “knowledge” over the person who is invited to speak. Clearly, the interview is much more than just a tool.

Fontana and Frey (2000) remind us three basic types of interview. First one is unstructured interview which have no specific questions or order of topic to be discussed, are customized according to the participants, generally starts with the respondent narratives and do not have pre-planned flow. Second is semi-structured interview which generally starts with few specific questions and then follows the individuals’ tangents of thoughts with interviewer’s probe. Third is structured interview which uses a detailed interview guide, is similar to questionnaire guiding the question in order, are fixed having specific way to ask questions and generally questions remains open-ended. Interviews can also be classified into other types such as close-ended; face-to-face (being able to observe non-verbal & verbal behavior); phone/online (conduct more interviews throughout wider geographic area); individual in-depth interviews, group interviews, oral history, cultural

interviews, life histories, critical incident technique, sequential interviewing and so on.

There are many advantages of the interview, one of which is its adaptability as interviewer can catch up thoughts, probe reactions and examine intentions and emotions. In addition to that, interview not only gives opportunity to expound in a way that is not possible with other methods, for example, survey, they likewise are capable to offer data with researcher in their own words and from their own points of view instead of being requested to fit those viewpoints into the maybe restricted reaction alternatives given by the researcher. Also, as interviews are designed to extract detail information it becomes useful for researcher to examine social procedures. Interviews also have advantage to go beyond oral reporting as respondent's non-verbal communication, and even her or his decision of time and area for the interview, may give a researcher helpful information.

In terms of difficulties, qualitative interviews depend on respondents' capacity to precisely and genuinely review whatever insights about their lives, conditions, considerations, opinions, or behaviors that are being asked about. Esterberg (2002) suggests using observation instead of interview if a researcher wants to know what people really do rather than what they state they do. Qualitative interview is time intensive and can be very costly.

Transcribing interviews is not only labor intensive but emotionally exhausting as interviewer needs to hear stories that can be shocking, infuriating, and sad. The danger of bias is always there into interviews, as interviewers are human beings and not machines, and their manner may have an effect on

respondents. Genuine bias may appear in data analysis with a group of interviewers but bias may be steady and go unnoticed with only one researcher. There can also be complications over understanding because one individual's just and impartial point of view may be judged to be 'prejudice' by another.

So, we should be prudent and cautious, critical of our explanation of the data, frequently question our practice and wherever possible triangulate. Moser and Kalton portray interview as 'a discussion between interviewer and respondent intending to extract certain information from the respondent'. This might be a clear-cut matter, but the accomplishment of a successful interview is much more complex than this statement might suggest. Wiseman and Aron equate interviewing to a fishing excursion. Following this analogy, Cohen adds that 'like fishing, interviewing is an endeavor which requires thorough preparation, ample endurance, and substantial practice if the ultimate reward is to be a worthy catch'. Not only this, qualitative interview must adapt dramatic changes of communication technology happening in the world to survive.