



RESEARCH INTERVIEW: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract :

Interview can be referred to as a qualitative research technique which involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation. This work is basically an evaluative study as the subject under review is a contemporary issue. Descriptive – analytical approach method of data collection was adopted. Data and literatures for this work were obtained from the analysis of the views, comments and opinions in books, articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers, internet materials, as well as speeches and addresses in seminars, conferences, workshops and meetings. Results from this study revealed that; the interviewer is considered a part of the measurement instrument and has to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency. In-conclusion, interviews provide opportunity of face to face interaction between two persons; hence, they reduce conflicts.

Keywords: Data-collection, Interview, Research, Problems and Prospects

1.1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Research is an intellectual excursion into the body of existing knowledge in space and time. Research is also the systematic investigation into the study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. Interviews can be defined as a qualitative research technique which involves “conducting intensive individual interviews with a small

number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Bhat (2018) observed that an interview is generally a qualitative research technique, which involves asking open-ended questions to converse with respondents and collect elicited data about a subject. The interviewer in most cases is the subject matter expert, who intends to understand respondent's opinion in a well-planned and executed series of questions and answers. Interviews are similar to focus groups and surveys, when it comes to gathering information from the target market, but are entirely different in their operation. Focus groups are restricted to a small group of 6-10 individuals; whereas surveys are quantitative in nature. Interviews are conducted with a sample from a population and the key characteristic they exhibit is their conversational tone.

1.2. Interviews are designed to collect a richer source of information from a small number of people about:

- Attributes
- Behavior
- Preferences
- Feelings
- Attitudes
- Opinions
- Knowledge

Interviews are most effective for qualitative research:

- They help you explain, better understand, and explore research subjects' opinions, behavior, experiences, phenomenon, etc.
- Interview questions are usually open-ended questions so that in-depth information will be collected.

What are the important steps involved in interviews?

- Design interview questions
 - Think about who you will interview
 - Think about what kind of information you want to obtain from interviews
 - Think about why you want to pursue in-depth information around your research topic
- **Develop an interview guide**
 - Introduce yourself and explain the aim of the interview
 - Devise your questions so interviewees can help answer your research question
 - Have a sequence to your questions / topics by grouping them in themes

- Make sure you can easily move back and forth between questions / topics
- Make sure your questions are clear and easy to understand
- Do not ask leading questions
- **Plan and manage logistics**
 - Do you want to bring a second interviewer with you?
 - Do you want to bring a note taker?
 - Do you want to record interviews? If so, do you have time to transcribe interview recordings?
 - Where will you interview people? Where is the setting with the least distraction?
 - How long will each interview take?
 - Do you need to address terms of confidentiality?

Do I have to choose either a survey or interviewing method?

No. In fact, many researchers use a mixed method - interviews can be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to surveys, e.g., to further investigate their responses.

Is training an interviewer important?

Yes, since the interviewer can control the quality of the result, training the interviewer becomes crucial. If more than one interviewer is involved in your study, it is important to have every interviewer understand the interviewing procedure and rehearse the interviewing process before beginning the formal study.

If you are conducting qualitative research, you may be wondering what the best interview type for your study will be. Well, the answer is that, it depends on our research design and what you want to accomplish. Let us start with the different types of interviews.

1.3. Generally, there are three types of interviews: structured, unstructured and semi-structured interview.

Structured interviews consist of a series of pre-determined questions that all interviewees answer in the same order. Data analysis usually tends to be more straight-forward because researcher can compare and contrast different answers given to the same questions.

Advantages of structured interviews:

- Structured interviews focus on the accuracy of different responses due to which extremely organized data can be collected. Different respondents have different type of answers to the same structure of questions – answers obtained can be collectively analyzed.

- They can be used to get in touch with a large sample of the target population.
- The interview procedure is made easy due to the standardization offered by structured interviews.
- Replication across multiple samples becomes easy due to the same structure of interview.
- As the scope of detail is already considered while designing the interview, better information can be obtained and the researcher can analyze the research problem in a comprehensive manner by asking accurate research questions.
- Since the structure of the interview is fixed, it often generates reliable results and is quick to execute.
- The relationship between the researcher and the respondent is not formal due to which the researcher can clearly understand the margin of error in case the respondent either disagrees to be a part of the survey or is just not interested in providing the right information.

Disadvantages of structured interviews:

- Limited scope of assessment of obtained results.
- The accuracy of information overpowers the detail of information.
- Respondents are forced to select from the provided answer options.
- The researcher is expected to always adhere to the list of decided questions irrespective of how interesting the conversation is turning out to be with the participants.
- A significant amount of time is required for a structured interview.

Unstructured Interviews are usually the least reliable from research viewpoint, because no questions are prepared prior to the interview and data collection is conducted in an informal manner. Unstructured interviews can be associated with a high level of bias and comparison of answers given by different respondents tends to be difficult due to the differences in formulation of questions.

Advantages of Unstructured Interviews:

- Due to the informal nature of unstructured interviews – it becomes extremely easy for researchers to try and develop a friendly rapport with the participants. This leads to gaining insights in extreme detail without much conscious effort.
- The participants can clarify all their doubts about the questions and the researcher can take each opportunity to explain his/her intention for better answers.
- There are no questions which the researcher has to abide by and this usually increases the flexibility of the entire research process.

Disadvantages of Unstructured Interviews:

- . As there is no structure to the interview process, researchers take time to execute these interviews.
- The absence of a standardized set of questions and guidelines indicates that the reliability of unstructured interviews is questionable.
- In many cases, the ethics involved in these interviews are considered borderline upsetting.

Semi-structured interviews contain the components of both, structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, interviewer prepares a set of same questions to be answered by all interviewees. At the same time, additional questions might be asked during interviews to clarify and/or further expand certain issues.

Advantages of semi-structured interviews:

- Questions of semi-structured interviews are prepared before the scheduled interview which provides the researcher with time to prepare and analyze the questions.
- It is flexible to an extent while maintaining the research guidelines.
- Researchers can express the interview questions in the format they prefer, unlike the structured interview.
- Reliable qualitative data can be collected via these interviews.
- Flexible structure of the interview.

Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews:

- Participants may question the reliability factor of these interviews due to the flexibility offered.
- Comparing two different answers becomes difficult as the guideline for conducting interviews is not entirely followed. No two questions will have the exact same structure and the result will be an inability to compare or inferring results.

Advantages of interviews include possibilities of collecting detailed information about research questions. Moreover, in this type of primary data collection researcher has direct control over the flow of process and she has a chance to clarify certain issues during the process if needed. Disadvantages, on the other hand, include longer time requirements and difficulties associated with arranging an appropriate time with perspective sample group members to conduct interviews.

When conducting interviews, you should have an open mind and refrain from displaying disagreements in any forms when viewpoints expressed by interviewees contradict your own ideas. Moreover, timing and environment for interviews need to be

scheduled effectively. Specifically, interviews need to be conducted in a relaxed environment, free of any forms of pressure for interviewees whatsoever.

Respected scholars warn that “in conducting an interview the interviewer should attempt to create a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere. Much as one does with a cover letter, the interviewer should give a brief, casual introduction to the study; stress the importance of the person’s participation; and assure anonymity, or at least confidentiality, when possible (Connaway & Powell, 2010).

There is a risk of interviewee bias during the primary data collection process and this would seriously compromise the validity of the project findings. Some interviewer bias can be avoided by ensuring that the interviewer does not overreact to responses of the interviewee. Other steps that can be taken to help avoid or reduce interviewer bias include having the interviewer dress inconspicuously and appropriately for the environment and holding the interview in a private setting (Connaway & Powell, 2010).

It is however interesting to note, that each interview type has its advantages and its disadvantages, as briefly outlined above. Selecting one depends on your research design and what you want to get out of your interviews. If you take some time to review your research design, this will help you determine, which interview type works best for your study.

1.4. Aspects 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 question. Interviews are generally easier for respondents, 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 on how to respond to any contingency (Valenzuela and Shrivastava, 2005).

1.5.0. Four Forms of Research Interview

Moore in (2014) stipulated four forms of Research Interview. They are:

1.5.1. 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”.

1.5.2. 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.

1.5.3. 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.

1.5.4. Closed, fixed-response interview -where all interviewees are asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from among the same set of alternatives. This format is useful for those not practiced in interviewing (Moore, 2014).

1.6. Telephone Interview

Advantages

- 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.

1.7. 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.

1.8. When is an Interview an Appropriate Research Method?

Interviews are an appropriate method when there is a need to collect in-depth information on people's opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Interviews are useful, when the topic of inquiry relates to issues that require complex questioning and considerable probing. Face-to face interviews are suitable when your target population can communicate through face-to-face conversations better than they can communicate through writing or phone conversations (e.g., children, elderly or disabled individuals (Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006).

1.9. Characteristics of Qualitative Research Interviews

Seidman (1998) observed some basic characteristics in the conduct of effective research interview.

They are:

- Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on what the interviewee says to be conformed and done.
- Interviews are a far more personal form of research than questionnaires.
- In the personal interview, the interviewer works directly with the interviewee.
- Unlike with mail surveys, the interviewer has the opportunity to probe or ask follow up questions.
- Interviews are generally easier for the interviewee, especially if what is sought are opinions and/or impressions.
- Interviews are time consuming and resource intensive.
- The interviewer is considered a part of the measurement instrument and has to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency.
- Interviews provide an opportunity of face to face interaction between 2 persons; hence, they reduce conflicts.

1.10. Steps in Conducting an Interview

Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006, opined basic steps essential for conducting Interview Research. They are:

1.10.1 Before the Interview:

1. Define your objectives → identify what you want to achieve and the information you need to gather. Make sure, an interview is the appropriate way to meet your objectives.
2. Choose the type of interview → Review your required information, budget, time, and potential respondents and decide whether you need to conduct structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews.
3. Choose the appropriate respondents → Depending on the type of interview, decide on the characteristics of interviewees and the number of interviews required.
4. Decide how you will conduct the interviews → Consider telephone or face-to face interviews. For large surveys, consider computer-aided interviewing and recording.
5. Decide how to recruit your respondent's → Obtain contact information for a number of respondents larger than the number of interviews you need, since some may not

respond. Contact them by phone, e-mail, or regular mail and introduce yourself, your organization, and your project. Explain the purpose of the interview, the importance of their participation, and set up an appointment.

6. Decide how you will record the interviews → Depending on the type of interview, you may fill in a prepared form, use written notes, voice recorders, or computer aided devices.
7. Make a list of questions and test them with a sample of respondents→ the questions must be aligned with the type of interview. If you are running structured interviews, see our Tip Sheets on “Questionnaire Design” and Survey Research Methods” for more information.
8. Decide who will conduct the interviews → develop an information kit that includes an introduction to the research topic and instructions. For unstructured interviews, you may need to hire skilled interviewers.

1.10.2. During the Interview:

1. Introduce yourself and initiate a friendly but professional conversation.
2. Explain the purpose of your project, the importance of their participation, and the expected duration of the interview.
3. Be prepared to reschedule the interview, if a respondent has a problem with the timing.
4. Explain the format of the interview
5. Tell respondents how the interview will be recorded and how the collected information will be used, if possible, obtain their written consent to participate
6. Ask respondents if they have any questions.
7. Control your tone of voice and language → remain as neutral as possible when asking questions or probing on issues.
8. Keep the focus on the topic of inquiry and complete the interview within the agreed time limit.
9. Ensure proper recording → without distracting the respondent, check your notes and voice recorder regularly.
10. Complete the session → make sure all questions were asked, explain again how you will use the data, thank the respondent, and ask them, if they have any questions.

1.10.3. After the Interview

1. Make sure the interview was properly recorded make additional notes, if needed.

2. Organize your interview responses → responses from unstructured and semi-structured interviews need to be transcribed. Responses from structured interviews need to be entered into a data analysis program.
3. Get ready for data analysis → search for resources for analyzing qualitative and/or quantitative data (**Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006**).

1.11. Interviewer's Judgement

According to Hackman and Oldman (1975) in **Seidman, (1998)** noted several factors can bias an interviewer's judgment about a job applicant. However, these factors can be reduced or minimized by training interviews to recognize them.

Some examples are:

1.11.1. Prior Information

Interviewers generally have some prior information about job candidates, such as recruiter evaluations, application blanks, online screening results, or the results of psychological tests. This can cause the interviewer to have a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards an applicant before meeting them.

1.11.2. The Contrast Effect

How the interviewers evaluate a particular applicant may depend on their standards of comparison, that is, the characteristics of the applicants they interviewed previously.

1.11.3. Interviewers' Prejudices

This can be done when the interviewers' judgement is their personal likes and dislikes. These may include but are not limited to racial and ethnic background, applicants who display certain qualities or traits and refuse to consider their abilities or characteristics.

In-conclusion, an effective interview will be one that provides researchers with the necessary data to know the object of study and that this information is applicable to the decisions researchers make.

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