

A very brief and fairly interesting guide to qualitative interviews

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Adapted from Moisander and Valtonen (2006)

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Background

- Qualitative analysis is interpretive – it is an investigation into meanings
- Qualitative research is a dialogue and involves the participation of the researcher
- Qualitative research is rich, deep, and aims to increase understanding of specific contexts
- Qualitative research is not readily generalizable – and is not intended to be

Background - Therefore

- Qualitative data is about opening perspectives and understanding to phenomena, not answering "*what is?*" questions
- The interviewer will always have a bias – this is not to be conquered, but recognized and even capitalized upon

Types of qualitative interviews

- Structured interview
 - Asking specific questions
 - Reflects the point-of-view of the interviewer
 - Used to create copious amounts of data when the important questions have already been identified
- Semi-structured interview
 - Asking questions that are based on specific themes, but allowing freedom to the interview setting
 - The themes can build upon each other and grow as the interview progresses
- Unstructured interview
 - Carrying out a dialogue about a context, but not restricting the discussion to any preset questions
 - Reflects the point-of-view of the interviewee
 - Best suited for gaining exploratory understanding about the context – what are the overall important themes?

-> THE THEMES OF THIS SLIDESHOW PRIMARILY FOCUS ON SEMI-STRUCTURED AND UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESSES!

Role of the researcher (1/2)

- Think of yourself as a detective solving a *murder mystery* – you must understand the setting, the motives and drivers of the actors
- The researcher uncovers what a phenomenon is about "what is the *big picture*" – "what does this phenomenon *mean*"
- Therefore the researcher is not interested in explicit answers to explicit questions – but is interested in the themes that facilitate that "*what seems to occur*" behind the scenes
- The researcher therefore carries out a dialogue with the interviewee, and the reoccurring themes and notions that are present in the interview are then interpreted to build meaning

Role of the researcher (2/2)

- Be very careful about framing the subject matter to the interviewee (i.e. do you understand the concept "marketing" the same way the interviewee might)
- Usually it may be beneficial to not expose the interviewee to the concepts at all – it is up to you to analyze what is actually discussed

-> When the interview becomes framed, it is difficult to obtain any rich data beyond the frame

-> As stated, the frame may be misleading and "wrong" in terms of what is intended to be researched

Possibilities for interpreting the data

- The position of the interviewee can be a starting point for interpretation
- Extremization – the interviewee describes extreme cases of the phenomenon – why is this?
- Stake – the interviewee assumes responsibility/denies responsibility about the phenomenon – why is this?
- Attitude – the interviewee is comfortable/uncomfortable about the phenomenon – why is this?

Practicalities

- Always record every interview with sufficient quality instruments – usually laptop internal mic is enough – how about a backup recording system?
- Do initial analysis immediately after the interview to better capture the meanings that were conveyed
- Whether transcribing the interview or only writing down the central concepts, it is beneficial to also keep notes of how the interview progressed and how it relates to earlier findings