PRODUCTIVE FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

Nouhad J. Rizk

ABSTRACT
Dealing with interviews effectively requires one to see what is happening from the other's point of view as well as one's own. This helps to predict what happens next. It is worth emphasizing that interviewing is not just about asking questions; to do it well one's needs to know how to use the answers. Through qualitative interviews, researchers evaluate all kinds of projects and programs, whether for social reform or managerial improvement. The depth of understanding required to do qualitative interviewing makes it difficult for qualitative researchers to remain value-free or neutral towards the issues raised. Interview credibility is insured by combining the kind of information researched with the understanding, knowledge, and insights of the interviewees. Therefore, qualitative research blurs easily into advocacy and efforts to find solutions to problems. This study looks at some of the basic building-blocks of an interview, points out potential pitfalls, and suggests ways for the researcher to avoid them, in order to produce a set of questions that have the best chance of generating reliable, accurate data on the topics of interest. It concludes with certain recommendations, which may be the basis for a policy-maker in an institution setting effective rules for improvement and for leading the institution to a more effective role.

INTRODUCTION

Survey research methodology has often been used to take in data from institutions. It involves collection of information by asking people in some structured format. Depending on the unit of analysis used, the survey is either a quantitative method or a qualitative method conducted to advance scientific knowledge or to develop theory grover99.

Regardless of the methodology type, the survey must be carefully implemented so that the collected information is reliable for policy-makers. Therefore, "researchers should be cautious about evaluating or comparing alternative theories based solely upon empirical evidence unless the appropriateness (validity) of some of the measures has been determined." (Cote and Buckley, 1988)

There are two major types of survey research (Kerlinger, 1986). The first type can be classified as "exploratory". These surveys are useful in determining the difficulties that may be associated with facing different problems that impede the successful implementation of the surveys. Some exploratory research is useful in the early stages of studying a phenomenon. It is called *descriptive*.

The second type of survey research is "explanatory" research devoted to finding causal relationships among variables. It is done from theory-based expectations on how and why variables should be related. These may be either basic hypotheses(i.e., relationships that exist) or directional (i.e., positive or negative) (Chaudhry, 1997).

Surveys can be divided into three categories: written, oral, and electronic. Written surveys include mail surveys, group-administered questionnaires, and drop-off surveys. Mail surveys have many advantages. They are relatively inexpensive to carry out. Exactly the same instrument can be sent to a large number

of people. They allow the respondent to fill out the instrument at his or her own convenience. But there are some disadvantages as well. Response rates from mail surveys are often very low. Further, mail questionnaire are not the best method for asking for detailed written responses (Dillman, 2000).

A second type of written survey is the group administrative questionnaire. A sample of respondents is brought together and asked to respond to a structured sequence of questions. Traditionally, questionnaires have been administered in group settings for convenience. The researcher can give the questionnaire to those who are present and be fairly sure that there will be a high response rate (Sanchez, 1992; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). If the respondents are unclear about the meaning of a question they can ask for clarification. A less familiar type of questionnaire is the drop-off survey. In this approach, a researcher goes to the respondent's home and hands the respondent the instrument. Like the mail survey, the respondent can work on the instrument in private when it is convenient. Like the group-administered questionnaire, the interviewer makes personal contact with the respondent. This approach is usually adopted when there is no trust in the response rate of mail surveys.

Oral surveys are considered more personal forms of survey than the written or electronic methods. Oral surveys are generally used to get detailed opinions and impressions from the respondents (Kalton and Schlna, 1982). They can be administered in several different ways, e.g. through the group interview where respondents work in groups to answer the questions together while one person takes notes for the whole group. The interviewer works directly with the respondent, and he or she has the opportunity to ask probing questions. Interviews can be very time-consuming and they are resource intensive (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002).

Another more familiar form of oral survey is the phone survey (Dillman, 1978). It can be used to get short one-word answers "yes" or "no", as well as longer answers. They enable the researcher to gather information rapidly. Like the personal interview, they allow for some personal contact between the interviewer and the respondent. Also, they allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions. But they have some major disadvantages; many people do not have publicly-listed phone numbers, some do not have telephones, and people often do not like the intrusion of a caller in their homes.

With the growth of the Internet and in particular World Wide Web and the expanded use of electronic mail for business communication, the electronic survey is becoming a more widely-used survey method. Electronic surveys may take many forms. They can be distributed as electronic mail messages sent to potential respondents. They can be posted as World Wide Web forms on the Internet. And they can be distributed via publicly available computers in high-traffic areas such as libraries and shopping malls (Groves and Mathiowetz, 1984; Martin et al., 2002) . Respondents fill out a survey on a computer rather than on paper (Guin et al., 2002). Finally,an electronic survey can be an online group discussion called *chatting* or a virtual interview. There is an opportunity for well-thought-out responses. However, the analysis will be limited, as the moderator cannot see the respondents' expressions or hear their natural voices. The internet significantly reduces two major cost factors in comparison with conventional survey techniques: the logistics of communication and the data entry (Dillman, 2000).

Finally, interviewing in the 21st century employs an immense variety of technical innovations designed to improve research procedures and findings. So, this study discusses several technical advances that add new dimensions to the collection and management of interview data, in section 2. The strengths and weaknesses of interviews are presented in section 3. Then, a comparison between standardized and interactive interview is discussed in section 4. The credibility issue is discussed in section 5. Findings emphasize the importance of the conversational interview with respect to certain ethical considerations. Finally, the conclusion suggests that accurate values resulting from a well-prepared face-to-face interviews help in decision making.

DATA COLLECTION MODES

The data-collection instrument (DCI) is a document containing questions presented in a systematic, highly precise fashion. The DCI's purpose is to enable the evaluator to obtain uniform data that can be compared, summed up, and, if it is quantitative, subjected to additional statistical analysis. The structured interview is a type of interview that uses a DCI to gather data, either by telephone or by face-to-face or computer-assisted interview. In a structured interview, the evaluator asks the same questions of numerous individuals in a precise manner, offering each individual the same set of possible responses. In contrast, an unstructured interview contains many open-ended questions that are not asked in a precise, structured way.

The growth of the Internet has impacted on virtually every aspectof society. Survey research is no exception. The computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) is a form of telephone interview where the DCI is stored in a computer and the interviewer records responses directly into the computer. Four years ago in an informal research of Yahoo, Kay and Johnson identified over 2,000 Web-based surveys in 59 areas (Kaye and Johnson, 1999). The interest in Web-based surveying is not surprising as it offers a number of distinct advantages over more traditional mail and phone techniques. Examples include reducing the time and cost of conducting a survey and avoiding the often error prone and tedious task of data entry (Medin et al., 1999). Email offers one option for distributing Internet surveys. Up until a few years ago email surveys were the predominant means for Internet surveying. As the World Wide Web (WWW) has grown in popularity, the use of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) forms or Web-based surveys are becoming the dominant method of gathering survey data (Couper, 2000). These forms streamline the data collection process by formatting and entering responses directly into a database for analysis. Since HTML forms can be made programmable, it is also possible to have real-time error checking and correction, increasing the accuracy of the data collection process. The formatting capabilities of HTML allow the creation of easy-to-read and a attractive forms that may improve response rates. In addition, the programmability of HTML forms makes it possible to randomly order responses and tailor options, on the basis of information the respondent has supplied earlier in the survey. Combining an email "cover letter" as a means of contacting sampled people with the use of an HTML form for data collection provides an especially effective and efficient approach to Internet surveying. Modern email packages automatically convert universal resource locators (URLs) or web-addresses into the text of an email into a hyperlink. Placing the URL of the survey form in an email cover letter allows the respondents to "click" their mouse on the URL to display the survey form and subsequently fill it out.

These are challenging times for survey methodologists. The telephone appeared to be more a practical choice for conducting surveys than face-to-face interviews in the late 1970's. Nowadays, the internet is being proposed as a unique solution for specific survey topics and populations (Dillman, 2002). Selecting the appropriate type of survey directly affects the research time as well as the quality of the answers (Kalfs, 1993). Thus, there is a need to consider the various survey methods by examining them according to five criteria: cost, speed of response, sampling error, non-response bias, response bias and confidentiality.

The greatest disadvantage of the face-to-face and telephone survey is the cost. In contrast, electronic surveys are cost-saving. It is less expensive to send questionnaires online than to pay for postage or for interviewers. Email surveys are low in cost compared to other methods of surveying (deLeeuw and Nicholls, 1996).

Use of telephoning is the fastest survey method. But, because of the personal contact this method requires, it takes considerably more time than the mail survey, whereas questionnaires can be delivered to recipients in seconds. Internet surveys also are fast, especially in collecting data.

Often, it is difficult to obtain a list of the people to be used in the sample. For example, in electronic surveys, population and sampling are limited to those with access to computer and online networks.

Similar problems occur with telephone surveys, in addition to the fact that people move, some do not have telephones, and others do not list their telephone numbers. In most situations the advantage lies with the personal interview (Seidman, 1991).

The personal interview suffers least from non-response. Although in telephone interviews call-backs are expensive, they can be scheduled to ensure a higher probability of reaching respondents. Compared to a telephone survey or face-to-face survey, the written survey has a very low response rate. Therefore, results may be misleading or even erroneous (Suchman and Jordan, 1990). It is possible to estimate the non-response bias in certain surveys such as mail surveys. Another approach is to extrapolate responses across two or more waves. This can reduce non-response bias by half (Armstrong and Overton, 1977;Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). Another approach to reduce the non-response bias is to make intensive efforts to contact at least a small sub-sample of non-respondents by follow-up mails and/or by telephone.

Response errors can seriously distort a survey's results. Response bias may occur when respondents deliberately falsify their responses. This error greatly jeopardizes the validity of a survey's measurements (Devault, 1990). Response order bias may occur when a respondent loses track of all options and picks one that comes easily to mind rather than the one that is most accurate. Response set bias occurs when respondents do not consider each question and just answer all the questions with the same response. For example, they answer ``disagree'' or ``no'' to all answers. Unfortunately, response bias is difficult to eliminate (Mumby, 1993), but can be reduced through careful development of the survey questionnaire. The responses frequently differ on sensitive issues, such as the importance of making a good personal impression when people feel that their responses may be used against them (Sudman and Bradburn,; Kalton and Schulna, 1982). Thus, using the face-to-face interview may introduce bias, from either the interviewer or the interviewee, but these errors can be reduced by a careful and thorough preparation of questions. Although some research suggests that for most issues the responses from mail, telephone, and personal interviews are similar. Anderson argues that interviewing is time-consuming and costly but produces rich data and is the most accurate (Anderson and D.C.Jack, 1991).

Electronic surveying has a low level of confidentiality, due to the open nature of most online networks, where it is difficult to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality. Besides, dealing with the issue of response rates seems to be difficult to handle. Thus, electronically some members of the sample will simply refuse to respond. Others have the best of intentions, but cannot seem to find the time to send in the questionnaire by the date they are due (Forester, 1993).

Other criteria are not subject to being a comparative variable; they may be important for one type of survey and not for the others. For example, respondent attitude; many respondents hang up when they have been interrupted during dinner or a meeting by a phone interviewer. The ability of a respondent to answer a survey is a criterion related to written surveys where respondents may have physical disability or low literacy level or low reading level and therefore might not be able to answer the questions accurately. Also, scheduling in group survey research requires a specific time that is convenient for all respondents.

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF DIFFERENT SORTS OF INTERVIEW

At one time, face-to-face interviewing was the only practical means available to researchers who wanted to learn from strangers. As for the issue of whether face-to-face interviewing is necessary to obtain useful responses or whether this can be accomplished using cheaper telephone technology, researchers have investigated the relative adequacy of face-to-face and telephone interviewing and continue to explore the nuances of the differences between the two methods (Platt, 1996; Couper, 1997; Singletin and Straits, 1999; Hansen, 2000). Although, by and large, telephone interviewing is cheaper, findings on the informational utility of the two techniques are mixed; the differences depend, among other things, on the nature of the questions asked and how cut-and-dried the answers are expected to be,

as well as on the sensitivity of the issues being explored. For interviewing in which questions are likely to elicit brief and fairly straightforward responses, the telephone can be adequate, usually suiting the purposes of large-scale surveys. In fact, the greater expense of in-person as opposed to telephone interviewing, regardless of the research findings in this area, has made a real difference in the long run, so that telephone interviewing is now commonplace in the survey industry. The use of the telephone was the first major technological leap forward for survey interviewing, and it was accompanied, at the data management and analysis stages, by the rapid expansion of electronic information processing.

A second major technological leap forward in this area is currently upon us; this advancement centers on the internet and its potential for allowing researchers to learn from strangers. Although this change is computer driven, curiously enough in some ways it offers the possibility of returning the survey interview to some of the openness, if not also the charms, of the face-to-face interview (Mann and Stewart ., 2000). The richly textured exchanges that are more likely to be accepted in the in-person interview are now the stock-in-trade of many Internet sites, where chat-room proceedings and virtual on-line individual and group interviews can be very detailed. Further these exchanges can also be immediately turned into codable transcripts at fairly low cost. This eliminates the expense and complication of actually doing on-site interviews, which can sometimes be prohibitive (Ryen and Silverman, 2000). This, of course, is balanced by the expense entailed in providing computers and internet access to all interview participants. Although little actual research has been conducted on the comparative informational utility of the Internet over other vehicles for interviewing (Mann and Stewart., 2000; Hansen, 2000), it seems safe to say that cost will again be a critical factor in decision-making at this technological forefront.

Certain advantages and disadvantages are associated with each type of interviewing, and researchers who decide to use one type of interview may benefit from realizing what they gain and lose in the process. Therefore, this study focuses on the relative benefits and disadvantages of four data gathering methods: face-to-face interview, telephone interview, mail questionnaire and virtual interview.

In nearly all types of interviewing, a researcher designs the interview and collects the data. Once the goals of the interview are established, the researcher initially must (a) develop a sampling plan, (b) devise appropriate questions, and (c) select the interview mode. Selection of the interview mode depends on several factors, including study goals, nature of the questions, the target population, and funds and other available resources. The objective is to select the interview mode that maximizes data quality by minimizing error within cost and resource constraints. Face-to-face interviews, in comparison to telephone interviews, offer more flexibility in terms of question content and target population, tend to generate higher response rates, are more appropriate for long interviews with complex questions, permit the use of visual aids in presenting questions and response options, and enable unobtrusive interviewer observations of the respondents and their surroundings. Besides, the face-to-face interview enables the interviewer to establish rapport with the respondent allows the interviewer to observe as well as to listen, permits more complex questions to be asked than in other types of data collection, and is an effective method of gathering data when the DCI is lengthy. Among the use of the face-to-face interview in the field of education are getting before-and-after data about a lesson module or a change in administrative procedure and gathering opinions on a specific learning or teaching technique (Suchman and Jordan, 1990).

By comparison, telephone interviews are cheaper and easier to administer, require a shorter data collection period, and permit greater control over interviewer training, supervision, and data collection quality (Singleton and Straits, 1999). Besides, the telephone interview is less costly than the personal interview, takes less time than the personal interview, simplifies recording of data if CATI is used and is most effective when the number of questions is relatively small and time available to gather data is short. Some uses of telephone interview in the field of education is gathering information on parent satisfaction with the educational program and determining awareness of programs and tools available in the educational institution district.

Using a non-structured interview method such as the mail questionnaire is the least costly but slowest method of collecting data. It requires precise question design to match reading comprehension of the respondents. A practical example of mail questionnaire in the field of education is to get opinions on potential new programs, if they can be clearly described in the questionnaire.

On the other hand, in the process of gathering data, social science researchers expend considerable time and effort that can make in-person interviewing impractical. Doing field work such as interviewing, observing, carrying out surveys and other kinds of data gathering, is often the most difficult and time-consuming part of the research task. Because time is precious, researchers may try to figure out ways to reduce their work, short-cutting the data gathering or finding other ways to meet deadlines and get their projects done. One method of reducing field-work time that researchers may consider is conducting interviews by using the internet instead of meeting with subjects in person or making phone calls or sending mail. This type of interview, done by posting the design on the Internet, is called *virtual interview*. If the population involved is dispersed over too broad a geographic range, using efficiently a personal interview may be possible but less feasible. However, posting the design on the Internet to a nationwide sample seems to be better solution than conducting phone interviews with the people involved (Dillman, 2002). However, the question remains of whether or not a computer assisted interview (CAI) is the most reliable type of interview.

CAI methods offer several advantages; apart from automating interviewer tasks, they can reduce the costs of data collection, speed up data delivery and improve data quality by reducing item omissions and data inconsistencies (Kaye and Johnson, 1999). In computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), the interviewer carries out the survey using a laptop computer that he or she brings to the respondent's home; in computer-assisted self-administered interviewing (CASI), the responder records his or her answers on a computer provided by an interviewer or researcher (Baker, 1992; deleeuw and Nicholls, 1996; Martin et al., 1993).

CASI can be used with or without an interviewer present and either as an adjunct to personal interviewing or as a stand-alone method. Several studies have shown that self-administered surveys, including those conducted using CASI, increase the reporting of illegal or embarrassing activities, such as illicit drug use alcohol consumption, and sexual activities (Tourangeau and Smith., 1996; Johnson et al., 1999). Given the trend for surveys to collect increasingly sensitive information, it seems likely that the use of CASI also will increase.

Besides, Nicholls et al. have deduced that comparisons of CAI and paper-and-pencil interview (PAPI) methods may become irrelevant " as CAI becomes the new standard for survey data collection " (Nicholls et al., 1997). As this occurs, they argue, research on CAI methodology "should be refocused to inform choices of collection mode, questionnaire design, and field work procedures". Instrument design or layout is particularly important in CAI surveys because the computer exerts greater control over the flow of the interview and the interviewer becomes more dependent on the work of the designer (Couper, 2000; Hansen, 2000).

Despite the presumed potential of CAI to reduce measurement error, however, extant studies tend to show that CAI is at best marginally superior to PAPI.

Although the research on Internet-based surveying is limited, findings are beginning to appear in the literature. Several studies have found that response rates for Internet surveys are lower that equivalent mail surveys. As noted by Crawford and colleagues, this may be due to our lack of knowledge on how to achieve high response rates when using the Internet surveys (Crawford et al., 2001). The lower response rates for internet surveys may also reflect coverage bias, lack of familiarity with the media and/or lack of convenient access to the Internet. In the author's experience, Web congestion can also be a factor in lowering response rates for Web surveys, particularly with people who have relatively little experience with the Internet.

In a study of email-based surveying, Kittleson found it was possible to double the response rate with follow-up memos, though in a general this may be somewhat optimistic (Kittleson , 1997). As with mailed surveys, repeated follow-ups have diminishing returns and at some point risk irritating potential respondents without noticeably increasing response rates. Additionally, Dillman and his colleagues found that relatively plain Web surveys that loaded quickly resulted in higher response rates than "fancier" surveys that take longer to load (Dillman, 2001). They found that a relatively high percentage of potential respondents stopped completing the surveys 1) when encountering the first question, 2) when encountering a complex question grid, and 3) when asked to supply their email address. This suggests that some potential respondents have difficulty with the media and give up early in the process of completing the survey or when encountering complex questions. Others may be reluctant to give out personal information such as an email address.

The degree to which a researcher should consider either face-to-face or telephone interviewing or Internet-based interviewing more appropriate depends on many variables based on, and growing out of, the following criteria: the type of interview to be carried out, the type of information sought, the attitudinal variability, safety, and workload of the interviewers, the need for consistency and/or uniformity among a numbers of interviewers, the social variability of individual participants, the need for contextual naturalness of response and setting, the need to let participants generate responses with little or no influence from the questions, the complexity of the issues and questions, and the economic, time, and location constraints of the project.

Because of the criteria just cited, CAPI has become the most challenging and rewarding form of interview, and perhaps the most commonly used method of face-to-face data collection today.(Tourangeau and Smith., 1996)

STANDARDIZED VERSUS INTERACTIVE INTERVIEW

Until recently, survey research was carried out via face-to-face or telephone interviews or by way of mailed questionnaires. Developments in computer-assisted interviewing and Internet-based surveys (Hansen, 2000; Couper, 2000), however, have challenged the traditional distinction between an interview survey and a mail survey. Now it is more appropriate to think of the various modes of data collection as falling along a continuum from the most to the least interactive. At one end of this continuum, involving all channels of communication is the face-to-face interview; this is followed, in turn, by telephone interviews, Internet interviews, computer-assisted self-interviews, and self-administered questionnaires.

For the past three decades, researchers have been attempting to increase standardization through the application of computer technology that automates various data collection tasks. Computer-assisted interviewing (CAI) techniques replace paper-and-pencil forms with a small computer or computer terminal. Interviewers (or respondents) read the survey questions as presented on the computer screen and enter the answers via the keyboard. The application of this technology began in the 1970s with the development of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), which is currently widely used to manage the sampling process, control and monitor interviewer tasks, and expedite data processing. Specifically, CATI systems can automatically dial phone numbers, schedule call-backs, and even screen and select the person to be interviewed at each sampled phone number, can prompt the interviewer with appropriate introductions, probes, and questions in the proper sequence, can skip irrelevant questions, and can identify responses inconsistent with replies to earlier questions. It can alert the interviewer when an illegitimate code is entered and record responses into a computer data file. It can maintain records of interviewer productivity that are accessible to survey supervisors and can reproduce an interviewer's screen at a supervisor's terminal to allow for audio monitoring (Nicholls, 1988).

From the perspective of cognitive processing, obtaining reliable and valid responses requires that the respondents (a) comprehend the literal and intended meaning of the question, (b) retrieve the information requested from the memory, (c) formulate a response in accord with the question and the

information retrieved, and (d) communicate a response deemed appropriate (Sudman et al., 1996). The question-answer task breaks down when question wording is vague, when the purpose of the question is misunderstood, when there is insufficient time to access relevant information from memory, when the accessed information does not fit the response options provided in the question, and when the respondent modifies the information to project a favourable image to the interviewer.

From a conversational perspective, face-to-face interviews are social encounters between highly trained interviewers and respondents. Being interviewed is an uncommon, sometimes anxiety-provoking experience for many respondents. Sudman and his colleagues suggest that many common types of response errors stem from respondents' adherence to the four principles of conversation: truthfulness, relevance, no redundancy and clarity (Sudman et al., 1996).

These principles imply that interviewers will ask only clear questions that respondents are capable of answering promptly. That is, asking the question presupposes that it can and should be answered. Because respondents will perceive vague, ambiguous, and difficult questions as relevant, they will feel pressure to respond immediately, even if their replies are random guesses or hasty estimates. Unless an explicit "don't know" option is part of an attitudinal question, people without opinions may feel obliged to provide some. The methodological strategy of exploring complex topics by asking a series of related questions runs counter to the conversational principle that the same information will not be requested twice. Consequently, when a general question on a topic (e.g., general life satisfaction) follows a related specific one (e.g., marital satisfaction), respondents try to be informative by not reiterating information provided earlier in their responses to the specific question. That is, they interpret the second question as asking for new information about general life satisfaction apart from their marital satisfaction.

CREDIBILTY AND INTERVIEW BASED RESEARCH

Although Web-based surveying is very attractive, at this point it should be used with caution. Currently the biggest concern in Internet surveying is coverage bias or bias due to sampled people not having, or choosing not to access, the Internet (Kaye, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999; Crawford et al., 2001; Couper, 2000). Despite expediential growth of the Internet there are still large numbers of people who do not have access and/or choose not to use the Internet. It is also clear that there are wide disparities in Internet access among ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Robson and Selwyn, 1998). There are specific populations where Internet access is extremely high and coverage bias is likely to be less of a concern. Even though coverage bias may be less of an issue in such groups, experience and comfort with Internet-based tools such as Web browsers is another serious potential source of bias both in response rates and in the way people respond to the survey (Dillman et al., 2001). Web-based surveying is still in the early stages of development. The WWW is a unique media and it is not clear to what extent the knowledge we have gained over years of experience with more traditional surveying techniques fully applies to Internet surveying. Researchers are just beginning to do studies in order to learn the optimal ways to structure and format Internet surveys to limit biases and increase response rates. It is also likely that the best way to design an Internet survey depends in part on the familiarity and comfort of the respondents in using Web browsers. It is also quite likely that the type of Internet connection as well as the hardware and software used in accessing the Internet will impact on response rates and possibly in how a person responds to an Internet-based survey.

Most of the available comparisons between telephone and face-to-face interviewing concentrate on the interviewer (Groves and Kahn, 1979). Quality and quantity of responses are the focus of a report finding from an earlier study that had concluded that the tilt of research findings was toward better-quality data in personal interviews (de Leeuwe and van der Zonwe, 1988). Another comparison study found that respondents were more acquiescent, evasive, and extreme in their responses in telephone interviews than when they were interviewed face-to-face (Jordan et al., 1980). It is difficult to assess the appropriateness of telephone interviewing versus face-to-face interviewing in all potential contexts. Researchers in different disciplines use interviewing for quite different purposes and seek distinct kinds of information.

In a qualitative face-to-face interview, design takes shape gradually, as the researcher listens and hears the meaning of data. Concerns that appear important at the beginning of the research may seem less vital later, and points that seemed unimportant when the study began may turn out to be valuable. To adapt what the interviewer is learning, his or her design has to be flexible. In preparing the design, the interviewer has to suspend his or her own assumptions about the way things work and actively solicit ideas and themes from interviewees (Horowitz, 1986). Soliciting ideas involves an interactive process during which the final design slowly emerges. At each stage of the interviewing, the interviewer gathers information, analyzes, and tests; then, basing himself on the analysis and testing, the interviewer refines or changes his or her questions, and perhaps chooses a different set of interviewees, and repeats the process. After several repetitions, the interviewer will have formed an explanatory theory or narrative description that closely fits the interview data and is based on the experiences and understanding of interviewees.

There are many issues related to the facility of doing the interview, and of evaluating the cost, time and personnel needed. For example, the scheduled interview is obligatory. Therefore, no method of collecting information is free of faults but working out the interview and revising it avoids the interference of motives which may prevent respondents from being unable and unwilling to give accurate information (Bowman et al., 1984). Therefore, the credibility of a qualitative research is judged by its transparency, consistency-coherence, and communicability. These factors are obviously relevant in the most interactive and qualitative type of interviewing, the face-to-face. The vitality of accuracy in conducting an interview is a major factor in making it a creative and a productive interview. Therefore, as some people try to put obstacles between the interviewer and themselves, the conversational spirit of the interview should be harmonious and sincere and should contain no threatening approaches. In this way, the communication flows freely and achieves its goal of knowing how to make appropriate decisions.

CONDUCTING A PRODUCTIVE INTERVIEW

To conduct a successful interview and truly hear what people say requires skills beyond those of ordinary conversation and takes considerable practice (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Therefore, a qualitative interview is a successful interview with an approach to learning. The philosophy of learning has three components. One element of this philosophy is that understanding is achieved by encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own terms. A second component of this philosophy is that interviewing involves a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee that imposes obligations on both sides. Third, this philosophy helps define what is interesting and what is ethical and helps provide standards for judging the quality of the research, the humanity of the interviewing relationship, and the completeness and accuracy of the write-up.

Interviews require a personal sensitivity and adaptability as well as the ability to stay within the bounds of the designed protocol. Conducting an interview is the interviewer's responsibility. The interviewer has to be convinced of the importance of the research and of the good preparation that is always the best way to ensure interview success. Thus, the interviewer's role is complex and multifaceted. It includes the following tasks: (1) locating and enlisting cooperation of respondents, (2) motivating respondents to answer accurately, (3) clarifying any confusion or concerns, (4) observing quality of responses, and (5) conducting a good interview. Even though, interviewing is used for many different purposes, there are always rules which govern the flow of information, determining who can ask what, of whom, and when, as well as the shape that answers can take. According to the type of interview, the rule differs in specificity and formality.

There is a risk of collecting only the information which supports the predefined solution (Campion et al., 1994). Assuring a consistently high-quality face-to-face interview is a challenge that requires constant effort, starting with the definition of the problem to be solved before gathering information which may be misleading. Even though purposes can change sometimes because new information has altered the picture, the purpose of the interview should be stated and defined clearly so that respondents

will not try to guess the purpose. When they have guessed wrong, as they usually do, they have given answers that were not useful. Therefore, the problem of getting complete information is based on which decision will be made, and therefore is a real problem (Wilson and Hollwitz, 1993).

It is true that envisioning the ideal form of an interview, and looking for the kind of information that will help to produce that form objectively, will lead to a more productive interview. However, in all the models, the interviewer should double-check his or her understanding of the concept and should be sure of the appropriate background research on the subject that she or he has done previously (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002).

Some factual questions are particularly valuable for laying a foundation of knowledge before proceeding with more complex questions. The creative questions emerge when one treads forward beyond the limit of present knowledge. The form of the question is based on what is known about the topic through documentary research, previous interviews, and general knowledge. The spontaneity of asking questions makes the interview plan flexible and permits one to follow down new conversational pathways not envisioned in the planning stage.

ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS

Research ethics are about how to acquire and disseminate trustworthy information in ways that cause no harm to those being studied (Neuman, 1994; Rubin, 1983). To obtain high quality information in interviews, one is dependent on the cooperation of one's conversational partners. Interviews are primarily a way to gather information, not a conversational exchange of views. When one encourages people to talk openly and frankly, one incurs serious ethical obligations to them.

These ethical obligations require avoiding deception, asking permission to record, and being honest about the intended use of the research. The obligations also include ensuring that interviewees are not hurt emotionally, physically, or financially because they agreed to do the virtual interview. The interviewer has an obligation to warn interviewees if something they are saying may get them in trouble and to give them an opportunity to retract what they said or ask for the material not to be used or the source identified. Protecting interviewees from harm might mean leaving out exciting material from the final report or slightly distorting the results so as to keep people out of trouble. The interviewer may have to make some trade-offs between the accuracy and punch of his/her report and protecting his/her interviewees, but with some thought the interviewer can usually protect individuals and still get his/her points across. For more detailed information on how to handle ethical concerns, the reader may refer to the codes of ethics published by professional associations whose members do social research (Neuman, 1994).

Many institutions and other social research organizations insist that researchers show in advance how interviewees will be protected before the research is allowed to begin (Hess, 1989). Institutional review boards (IRBs) composed of professionals from the researcher's organization and informed community members review research proposals and can request changes to protect the subjects of the research before approving the proposal. The interviewer should be aware of these requirements and use them to consider beforehand the possible consequences of his or her research. Most professional codes of ethics and IRBs encourage researchers to obtained signed informed consent statements from people they are studying. An informed consent statement describes the purposes of the research, provides background on the researcher, and points out both the benefits and possible risk to those involved. It usually promises to share results with those being studied, indicates the degree of confidentiality of the findings, and, most important, emphasizes that participation is fully voluntary. These measures emphasize to the researcher that those who are providing the data in the research are people who deserve respect and concern, not objects or impersonal cases.

However this formal approach to research ethics creates difficulties for those following the iterative design model but not for those following the qualitative research. Planning the entire design for a

qualitative project in advance is difficult, because the design changes as the interviewer learns from the interviewing (Lock et al., 1987). However, one can begin the work with a rough and tentative design, talk with potential interviewees, sort out initial ideas, and refocus the research. Thus, qualitative interviewing design is flexible, interactive, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance.

CONCLUSION: BUILDING UP DECISIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

By the end of the data analysis, the interviewer has worked out the major themes from the interviews, clarified the concepts, and put together an overarching description or explanation. The last step in the research is to put this information into a report that is convincing, thought-provoking, absorbing, vivid, and fresh (Blauner, 1987; Hess, 1989). The report communicates in detail what the interviewees described about their lives and experiences so that policy makers can explore a new world of knowledge. To communicate what the interviewer has learned, the researcher organizes the material so that policy-makers can follow the logic of his or her argument. The interviewer should write about the core themes and concepts clearly, letting the voices of the interviewees come through at appropriate moments.

The feasibility, the avoidance of bias issue and the controlled questions can help in selecting the face-to-face type by rating some questions which may help us to decide, and to make our choice based on the quantitative result. The aim of all interviews is to reach a decision from the collected information. The decision-making model chosen should depend on the nature and the organizational procedures to be applied. The control of any distortion done by the interviewee or the interviewer should by done implicitly by selecting the appropriate survey type and by preparing questions thoroughly to ensure success (Meton et al ., 1990).

While taking part in planning interview, by defining the purpose, by conducting pre-interview research, by developing specific areas of inquiry and by assessing interests, the interviewer may benefit from the advice that philosopher-educator William James gave to teachers: Know your subject thoroughly and then trust to luck.

Once the subject is known, composing appropriate questions is one of the key elements in conducting useful research and gathering reliable information. And the basis for doing this is designing questions and questionnaires that get the kind of information from which the researcher can draw valid conclusions.

Three main criteria exist for writing appropriate questions: relevance, selection of the proper respondents, and ease of answering. Relevance means that questions should be directly related to the purpose of the study and have a good probability of yielding the kind of data desired. When selecting respondents, one must bear in mind that even though a question may be relevant to the study, it may not be answerable by the people to whom it will be asked. Ease of response means that questions need to be relatively easy to answer and should not create embarrassment for, or an undue burden on, the interviewee. Among the types of questions that should be avoided are those that would require respondents to consult records or other information sources, would make them uncomfortable for any reason, would reflect negatively on them, would make the interview confrontational, or would have no specific answer.

Finally, according to Riessman "Good reports can be as valuable as good research in persuading people" (Riessman, 1993). Therefore, a brief summary of the findings and certain recommendations for change help in making decisions. Other issues are valuable in decision-making such as description of the objectives, details of sample: response rate and method of data collection used, and providing results where available. Whether or not computer assistance is used with a face-to-face interview, the interviewer's voice and role should be apparent in the report. Therefore, a good qualitative interview is often a product of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. They keep on exploring ideas together and coming to a joint conclusion.

Learning from a qualitative interview is based on the credibility of the answers which help policy makers to take the right decision. True learning is accompanied by pain, says the philosopher Aristotle. But the painful truth is that human nature dictates a behaviour that tends to cover up gaps in knowledge. Thus, a policy-maker has to be a professional art designer in balancing the size of the sample against the depth of information gathered.

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Nouhad J. Rizk
Computer Science Department
Notre Dame University
P.o.Box 72 Zouk Mickael
Zouk Mosbeh – Lebanon
E-mail : nrizk@ndu.edu.lb

Leicester University
Education Management
Leicester LE1 7RF, UK