Qualitative Research Workshop: In-depth Interview Method

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for

ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

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Overview

- Qualitative Research & the In-depth Interview Method
- Quality Design Considerations & Best Practices
- Interviewer Skills & Techniques
- Modes & Online Modes
What is Qualitative Research?

- Qualitative research embraces the idea that
  - Researchers need to go **beyond the obvious & expedient** to reveal plausible interpretations of behavior & attitudes.

- **Context & interconnections** are central to understanding human thought & behavior.

- A response to any single research question lies in a host of **related questions**.
  - One facet of something **adds meaning** to another facet
Qualitative Research – Unique Attributes

Absence of absolute “truth”

Thematic analysis

Unique online & mobile capabilities

Researcher skill set

Flexibility of design

Types of issues & questions

Importance of context

Importance of meaning

Participant-researcher relationship

Researcher as instrument

In-depth Interview Method

A one-on-one qualitative research data collection method that gains a nuanced understanding of the “thinking” that drives behavior and attitudes. The interviewer-interviewee relationship is at the heart of the method, and the intense and individualistic nature of in-depth interviews makes it one of the most personal of all qualitative research methods.
Three basic types of interview

- Structured
- Semi-structured
- Unstructured
In-depth Interview Method

Why in-depth interviews (IDIs)?

• IDIs are not the answer to every research question
  —Focus group discussions are better for:
    • Dynamic conversations/debates of the issues
    • Hearing how people think, how attitudes shift
    • Topics that benefit from a supportive environment

• From a quality standpoint, the IDI method:
  —Produce granular data rich in details
  —May reduce response bias
  —Allows flexibility in the interview mode
### IDI Method – Strengths

#### Strengths

- **Interviewer-interviewee relationship**
  - Reduces response bias & nonresponse
  - Increases question-answer validity

- Ability to gain a thorough understanding of **complex issues**
  - Provides important **contextual data**
  - Tells a **story**

- Fosters a **supportive** one-on-one environment
  - Strengthens data quality, e.g., sensitive topics

- Effective in accessing **hard-to-reach** or vulnerable individuals
IDI Method – Limitations

Limitations

▪ Interviewer-interviewee relationship
  • Interviewer effects
    • Personal characteristics, values, beliefs, assumptions
  • Social context
    • “Power dynamics” (Kvale, 2006)

▪ Interviewer skills & techniques
  • Bias & inconsistency
“If it is agreed that qualitative research can, in fact, serve worthwhile (‘good’) purposes, then logically it would serve those purposes only to the degree that it is done (‘executed’) well…” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p.20)
The Total Quality Framework (TQF)

**CREDIBILITY**
Completeness & accuracy of the data

- **Scope** (Representation: coverage, sampling, sample size, unit nonresponse)
- **Data Gathering** (construct validity, inter-researcher reliability, question-answer validity, internal consistency, researcher bias, researcher-participant interaction, item nonresponse)

**DATA COLLECTION**

**ANALYZABILITY**
Completeness & accuracy of the analysis & interpretations

- **Processing** (transcriptions, coding)
- **Verification** (peer debriefings, reflexive journal, triangulation, deviant cases)

**ANALYSIS**

**TRANSPARENCY**
Completeness & disclosure in the final document

- **Reporting** (thick descriptions, rich details, enabling the reader to determine applicability – transferability – to other contexts)

**REPORTING**

**USEFULNESS**
Ability to do something of value with the outcomes
(Advancing the state of knowledge via new insights, actionable next steps, and/or applicability to other contexts)

- Support or rejection of current hypotheses and/or emergence of new hypotheses
- Validity of the interpretations and recommendations to the extent they are supported by the methodology
- Transferability of the research to the extent that the documentation discloses its strengths and limitations
TQF-Credibility (Data Collection)

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TQF-Credibility – Scope

**SCOPE**

- **Coverage**
  - *Representativeness* of participants to the population
  - Working with *complete & accurate lists* (if applicable)

- **Sample design**
  - *Purposive* – not convenience or snowball – sampling
  - When working with highly targeted lists
    - *Stratify* the list based on known characteristics
    - Conduct systematic, random *selection across the entire list*

- **Nonresponse**
  - Gaining access to & cooperation from participants.
How Many IDIs to Conduct

- **At the design stage**
  - **Diversity** of the target population
  - **Breadth & depth** of the research topic/issue
  - **Expected variation** of results
  - **Schedule & resources**
## 10 Questions to Evaluate Interview Completions at the Field Stage

1. Did every IDI cover every question or issue important to the research, or are there critical areas that were not discussed with all interviewees?

2. Did all interviewees provide clear, unambiguous answers to key questions or issues, or does the researcher need to go back to some interviewees for clarification?

3. Do the data obtained thus far answer the research objective?

4. To what extent are new ideas, themes, or information emerging from these interviews?

5. Can the researcher identify the sources for variations and contradictions in the data, and the extent of unexplained differences?

6. Does a review of the researcher’s reflexive journal reveal any concerns about objectivity and interpretations of the data?

7. Do the data confirm or deny what is already known about the subject matter?

8. By way of triangulation (e.g., inter-interviewer, peer review), do the data confirm or deny the researcher’s preliminary interpretation?

9. Do the data obtained thus far tell a story? Do they make sense and do they describe the phenomenon, life story, culture, or other subject of the study? Are there sufficient data to tell a story about each of the sub-groups or sample segments?

10. Are new, unexplored segments or avenues for further research emerging from the data?
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Gaining Cooperation

• Explaining the **purpose** of the study

• **Nonmaterial** incentive, e.g., make things “better”

• **Material** incentive, e.g., cash, charitable contribution

• Effect of identifying the **sponsor**

• Nature of advance **communication**, e.g., personalized

• Tailoring the **recruit** to each individual rather than a one-size-fits-all approach

• **Flexibility of mode**

• Use of **gatekeepers** for hard-to-reach segments
Confirmations are critical to cooperation

- **How many** confirmation contacts will you make?
- **When** will these contacts be made?
- **Who** will do these confirmations?
- Must the person confirming **speak directly** to the participant?
- How do you judge the **adequacy** of a confirmation?
- What happens when confirmation is judged **weak**?
DATA GATHERING

- Are our outcomes valid?
  - **Content/information** obtained
    - Interviewer **guide**
  - **Researcher effects**
    - Interviewer **bias**
    - Interviewer **inconsistency**
  - **Participant effects**
    - **Willingness/ability** to provide information
The interview guide is an outline

- Overall **flow** (organization) of the interview
- **Topics/issues** to be covered
- **Main questions** within each topic
- Follow-up **probing questions** to be considered

- It is a **guide**, not a script

- It has a “funnel” 4-stage design – moving the interview from the **general to the specific**
A Funnel Approach to Guide Development

STAGE 1
Introductions

STAGE 2
General information related to the topic

STAGE 3
Awareness, attitudes &/or behavior related to particular issues

STAGE 4
Attitudes specific to the targeted objective or research question

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Example:
An IDI study for GuideStar with a broad range of users of nonprofit data & information

Objective: To understand current & future information needs among nonprofit information users to aid in the development of new product/service concepts
Interviewer Bias

- Interviewers can **negatively impact the credibility** of an interview by
  - Failing to maintain **objectivity** or interjecting their own opinion
  - Losing track of the conversation & not identifying **inconsistencies** in the participant’s comments
  - Their physical **appearance** (face-to-face mode)

- A **reflexive journal** can help identify ways the interviewer may have biased the interview(s).
What do I think I “know” from this/these participants? How do I think I “know” it?

What assumptions did I make (what did I assume to be true) about the participant(s)? What assumptions did I make about comments/responses to my questions?

How did my personal values, beliefs, life story, and/or social/economic status affect or shape the questions I asked, the interjections I made, my listening skills, and/or behavior?

How will my emotions or feelings for the participant(s) affect the analytical process and my ability to draw valid interpretations from the data?

Physical environment and logistics
How did the physical setting/location of the research event alter how I related to the participant(s), and vice versa?

How did the physical setting/location impact data collection?

What were the logistical issues (e.g., in gaining access) that contributed to the “success” or weakness of the outcomes?
Interviewer Inconsistency

- Inconsistency in the data can happen if the
  - Interview **guide is not fully covered** in all interviews
  - Key **definitions, concepts, or terminology are presented differently** from one interview to another
  - Interviewer **does not follow up** on important topic areas across interviewees
  - Interview **guide is not scaled appropriately** for the particular mode to maintain consistency in what & how topic areas are covered, e.g., when conducting telephone & in-person IDIs
## Interviewer Skills

### Four Key Interviewer Skills

An in-depth interviewer needs to know how to:

- Build rapport
- Actively listen
- Maintain sensitivity to verbal & nonverbal cues
- Stay focused on the objectives
Interviewer Skills – Building Rapport

Rapport & a trusting relationship

Participants are able & willing to share candid thoughts

Moves you closer to your objectives, what you need to learn from the interview

Quality data & useful outcomes
Building rapport – Before the interview

- Contact each participant prior to the interview date
  - Purpose of the study & the interview
  - Breadth & depth of content to be covered
  - Length of the interview
  - Incentive
  - Participant’s questions
Interviewer Skills – *Rapport* - *During*

- **Building rapport – During the interview**
  - **Actively listen**
    - Participants want to talk with someone who cares about what they have to say, who is *genuinely interested*
      - Show **UPR** – **U**nconditional **P**ositive **R**egard – acceptance & support irrespective of what is said
    - **Verbal or textual** listening
      - “I see”; “go on, tell me more”; “aha”; “thanks”
      - Interject subject-specific follow-up questions
    - **Nonverbal or quiet** listening
      - Eye contact, head nod, smile (face-to-face mode)
      - Be patient, allow for silence/time to respond
      - Energy, enthusiasm
Building rapport – During the interview (cont.)

- Pick up on participant’s cues
  - **Verbal or textual**
    - Consistencies & inconsistencies in participant’s comments
    - Use of particular words or phrases
    - Word/phrase repetition
  - **Nonverbal or quiet**
    - Facial expressions, gestures, posture (face-to-face mode)
    - Eye contact, seating distance (in-person mode)
### Four Key Interviewer Skills

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- Build rapport
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- Maintain sensitivity to verbal & nonverbal cues
- Stay focused on the objectives
Interviewer Skills – Focus on Objectives

- Stay focused on the objectives
  - Consistently probe to clarify similar areas of content & areas of high importance to the research objectives
  - Identify & assess the relevance of unanticipated topics
  - Question wording should not vary for definitions, concept statements, etc.
  - Manage time to ensure that priority areas are covered
Interviewer Skills – Note-taking

“Handwritten note-taking compels the interviewer to fully engage with the participant and fosters highly reflective behavior in the researcher. You might say... note-taking helps to maintain the all-important participant-researcher relationship throughout data collection and analysis; a relationship that can be too easily lost when utilizing more mechanical processes such as the reliance on audio recordings and data transcripts.”
Interviewer Techniques – Asking Questions

3 C’s of Direct Questions

Context
Comparison/contrast
Clarification
Questions that give **CONTEXT**
Please describe a research project you are currently working on or recently completed. How do you stay current with the general dance world?

Questions that give **COMPARISON/CONTRAST**
How would you compare the information you gain from printed books with that from e-books?

Questions that give **CLARIFICATION**
You stated that you consult magazines and journal articles in electronic format but prefer printed books. What makes one format better than another for certain sources of information?
Interviewer Techniques – “Why” Question

- **Evokes rationality.** Researchers are in essence asking participants to justify their attitudes and behavior. In contemplating a justification, participants seek a response that “makes sense” or is otherwise deemed appropriate.

- **Stifles the researcher-participant conversation.** It stops the flow of conversation while the participant considers rational scenarios that hopefully “makes sense.”

- **Clouds question meaning.** “Why is the library important to your research?” is difficult and confusing for the participant compared to “What are the specific aspects of the library that make it important to your research?” which is more straightforward.

- **Asks a different question from the one intended.** The question “Why do you use Google Scholar?” is essentially a different question than “What are the benefits you derive from using Google Scholar compared to other databases?”
Interviewer Techniques – *Indirect Questions*

- **Enabling techniques** probe by modifying direct questions
  - **Sentence completion**
    - “I have found that the most effective way to manage the information I obtain is to ________.”
  - **Word association**
    - What is the first word or words you think of when I say, “library subscription music service”?
  - **Storytelling**
    - Tell me about a time when you consulted with a librarian during your research process.
Interviewer Techniques – Participant Types

- Answers **off-topic**, answers a different question
- Answers are too detailed, gives **too much information**
- Answers are too short, too abrupt, **lack detail**
- Participant may **stray from the guide**
  - Interviewer must decide **what is relevant or not relevant**
- Shy participant, **uncomfortable opening up**
- **Fast talker**, interviewer can’t keep up
- **No time to talk**, **wants to rush through the interview**
### IDI Method – *Traditional Modes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-person</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Most similar to <strong>natural conversation</strong></td>
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<td>▪ Facilitates building <strong>rapport</strong></td>
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<td>▪ Better able to share stimuli &amp; recognize <strong>cues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ More <strong>complete &amp; in-depth</strong> interview</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phone</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ <strong>Scope</strong> (wide coverage, more IDIs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Gaining <strong>cooperation</strong> (convenience in scheduling, participation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Absence of visual cues that may <strong>mitigate bias</strong></td>
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## IDI Method – *Traditional Modes*

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<td>▪ <strong>Interviewer bias &amp; participant effects</strong> (physical presence may bias results)</td>
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<td>▪ Weakened ability to establish <em>rapport</em></td>
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<td>▪ Absence of visual <em>cues</em> that aid in interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Shorter IDI length/less <em>in-depth</em></td>
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IDI Method – Online Modes

Online Video
- Substitute For In-person
- Usability Research
- Concurrent Mixed Methods

Mobile
- In-the-moment Research
- Location-specific, Geofencing
- Study a Process or Event

Email/Discussion Board
- Sensitive Topic
- Diary/Life Story
- Professionals
Online Modes – Strengths

Strengths

▪ Representation & cooperation
  • Coverage & access (geography & population segment)
  • Convenience & flexibility for participants
  • Relevant form of communication, esp., for certain demographics, job type

▪ Data accuracy & depth
  • Added dimension via visual elicitation & multimedia – text, video, images
  • Allows for detailed, thoughtful responses (async)
  • Mitigates recall error (async)

▪ May be efficient use of resources
Online Modes – *Limitations*

**Limitations**

- **Important visual &/or verbal cues** may be missing
- **Analysis** – Lots of data (in volume & formats)
- **Fraud**, misrepresentation – “*Identity is fluid and potentially multiple on the Internet*”
- **Security**, confidentiality, anonymity
- **Internet access** & technical glitches
- **Text-based** communication (mobile & email)
Online Modes – **Online Video**

**SCOPE**
- **Representation**
  - Geographic coverage
  - Access to pop segment
  - Requires access & technical know-how
- **Cooperation**
  - Flexibility of location
  - Requires reminders & instructions

**DATA GATHERING**
- **Validity**
  - Depth due to showing stimuli, participant markup
  - Weakened ability to establish rapport
- **Researcher Effects**
  - Consistency, ability to follow guide
  - Bias due to visual cues
- **Participant Effects**
  - Willingness to respond due to rapport, use of visual/audio cues
  - Social desirability responding
  - Observers &/or recording(s) may stifle responses

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Online Modes – Mobile

--- SCOPE ---

Representation
- Geographic coverage
- Access to pop segment
- Access & tech comfort with app

Cooperation
- Engagement with video technology
- Requires reminders & instructions

--- DATA GATHERING ---

Validity
- Absence of broader context/meaning
- Weakened ability to establish rapport
- Depth due to verbal, nonverbal, & contextual cues

Researcher Effects
- Mitigates on-site social interaction bias

Participant Effects
- Inconsistency, difficulty following guide
- Mitigates recall error
- Selection bias, choosing what to share
- Altered behavior

SCOPE DATA GATHERING
- Representation
- Cooperation
- Validity
- Researcher Effects
- Participant Effects
Online Modes – Email/Discussion Board

Email/Discussion Board

SCOPE

- Representation
  - Geographic coverage

- Access to pop segment

- Exclusion of some segments

Cooperation

- Comfort level with mode

- Flexibility of location

DATA GATHERING

- Validity
  - Depth, complex data from follow-up & “homework”

- Researcher Effects
  - Mitigates bias due to ability to reflect

- Participant Effects
  - Mitigates social desirability responding

- Willingness to discuss sensitive topic due to privacy, safe environment

- Low text skills

- Length & perceived burden may lead to dropouts

- Weakened ability to establish rapport

- Potential bias due to participant’s words & how text is typed
Online Mode – Platforms

- There are many QR-dedicated platforms
  - Aha!
  - Civicom
  - Discuss.io
  - FocusVision InterVu
  - iTracks
  - 20|20 Research
  - VisionsLive
Online Mode – *Platform Features*

**Platform Features – Markup**

![Image of EPA logo with markup tools highlighted]
Online Mode – *Platform Features*

**Platform Features – Markup**

[Diagram showing a software interface with options circled and marked with red crosses.]
During the Pleistocene Epoch, over 15-thousand years ago, a huge ice sheet covered the ground all the way from Canada down to the Ohio River. On the edges of this ice sheet, great herds of giant mastodons, wooly mammoths and ground sloths were attracted to the warm salt springs that still bubble from the earth at Big Bone Lick State Park. The salty marsh that attracted these prehistoric visitors sometimes proved to be a fatal attraction. Animals became trapped and perished in what the early pioneers called "jelly ground," leaving skeletons and interesting clues about life in prehistoric Kentucky. The fossilized remains of these prehistoric animals were discovered in 1739 and displayed extensively at museums throughout the world. Notable Americans such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin personally examined the fossils, many of which are on display today at Big Bone Lick Museum. The scientific community recognizes the site as the "Birthplace of American Vertebrate Paleontology."
Online Mode – Platform Features

Platform Features – Observer Chat
Online Mode – **Platform Features**

**Platform Features – Mobile In-the-moment Research**

![Platform Features](images)
Mobile diary

- Capture participants’ thoughts, feelings, & behavior at the moment they are happening
  - Marketing researchers have used mobile diaries to understand shopping behavior
    - Online-to-offline purchase experience

- Possible use in library assessment research?
  - e.g., to understand the attitudes toward & use of library resources before, during, & after
Online Mode – Mobile Diary

**Strengths**

- Multiple locations, activities, time periods can be covered
- Access to otherwise “hidden” aspects of participants’ lives

**Limitations**

- Disrupts & potentially alters natural behavior & experiences
- Participant controls what is or is not shared, jeopardizing data quality
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References


