Business Research Skills

Primary Research

Information Interviews

Introduction
- An interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people. The use of interviews can help you to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to your research question and objectives.

Types of interview
- The main types of interview are;
  - Structured interviews
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Unstructured or in-depth interviews
- Also there are;
  - Standardised interviews
  - Non-standardised interviews

Structured Interviews

- Structured interviews use questionnaires based on a predetermined and standardised or identical set of questions. You read out each question and then record the response on a standardised schedule, usually with pre-coded answers. This type is used to collect quantitative data.

Semi-structured Interviews

- Semi-structured interviews are non-standardised. In semi-structured interviews the researcher will have a list of questions to be covered, which can change from interview to interview. The order of questions can change according to the flow of the conversation, and also additional questions may be required. The data will be recorded by audio-recording or note-taking. They are used to collect qualitative data.

Unstructured Interviews

- Unstructured interviews are informal. You would use these to explore in depth a general area in which you are interested. These types of interviews are also called in-depth interviews. There is no predetermined list of questions, but you must have a clear idea of the aspects you want to explore. The interviewee is given opportunity to talk freely.
Nature of Interaction

- We can also differentiate between types of interview related to the nature of interaction between the researcher and interviewee.
- Interviews may be conducted on a one-to-one basis, between you and a single participant, mostly face-to-face, but you can also conduct it by telephone or electronically via e-mail.
- Also, semi-structured and in-depth interviews can be conducted on a group basis.

Links to the purpose of research and research strategy

- In an exploratory study, in-depth interviews can be helpful to ‘find out what is happening’. Semi-structured interviews may also be used in relation to an exploratory study.
- In descriptive studies, structured interviews can be used as a means to identify general patterns.
- In an explanatory study, semi-structured interviews may be used to understand the relation between the variables. Structured interviews may also be used in an explanatory study, in a statistical sense.

Finding an Interviewee

- You will pleasantly be surprised to find that most people are willing to talk about the work that they do. It is part of the mentoring process to share information about a career with someone who is interested in entering the field.

Finding an Interviewee

- Call the human resources officer at a company you would like to work at and ask to speak to someone in an information interview,
- Interview a friend or relative if you know someone working in the field,
- Look in business directories for the names and telephone numbers of contacts, and/or
- Send an email request for an information interview to the human resources departments at six different companies and arrange an interview with willing contacts.

Preparation for Interview

- Information Level: You need to be knowledgeable about the organisational or situational context in which the interview is to take place. You may find materials related with the organisation or the
interviewee, on the Internet. You can also find company reports or financial data relating to the organisation.

Preparation for Interview
- **Information Level, cont’d**: The ability to draw on this type of information in the interview should help to demonstrate your credibility and therefore encourage the interviewee to offer a more detailed account of the topic under discussion.

Preparation for Interview
- **Information Level, cont’d**: Your level of knowledge about your research topic should also help to establish your credibility in the view of your research participant. This knowledge may be obtained through the review of the literature that you undertake.

Preparation for Interview
- **Level of information supplied to the interviewee**: Credibility may also be promoted through the supply of relevant information to the participants before the interview. Providing participants with a list of the interview themes before the event should help this. This way, participants can prepare themselves for the discussion in which they are to engage.

Preparation for Interview
- **Appropriateness of the researcher’s appearance at the interview**: Your appearance may affect the perception of the interviewee. It may be a good idea to adopt similar style of dress to those to be interviewed. You will need to wear clothing that will be generally acceptable for the setting within which the interview is to occur.

Structuring the Interview
- There are two aspects of interview questions: phrasing questions and types of questions. In the information interview, you want to ask questions that will help you get the information you need. Carefully-worded questions can motivate interviews to answer freely, accurately, and thoughtfully.

Structuring the Interview
- There are five factors in phrasing questions that can help or hinder the information interview process.
1. Language.
2. Relevance.
3. Information Level.
5. Information Accessibility.

Phrasing questions
- **Language**: Your language should be formal, clear and understandable.
- **Relevance**: The questions you ask should be relevant to your research topic, and also the questions should be relevant to each other.
- **Information Level**: As indicated earlier, the questions you ask should reflect the information level you have about the topic.

Phrasing questions, cont’d..
- **Complexity**: You should avoid forming complex sentences. Also, asking more than one question at a time would confuse your interviewee.
- **Information accessibility**: You should ask questions that are accessible to you, not questions like “How much salary do you get?”

Types of Questions
- Formulating appropriate questions to explore areas in which you are interested will be critical to achieving success. Questions may be primary or probing (secondary); open-ended or closed-ended; leading, loaded...There are also special types of questions we will discuss...

Types of Questions
- **Open-ended questions**: The use of open ended questions will allow the participants to define and describe a situation or event. There are two types; highly open ended and moderately open ended question.

Types of Questions
- **Highly Open-ended questions**: A highly open ended question is designed to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and developmental answer, and may be used to reveal attitudes or obtain facts. An open question is likely to start with, or include; ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why’ words...
Types of Questions

- **Highly Open-ended questions Examples:**
  - “Why did the organisation introduce its marketing strategy?”
  - “What methods have been used to make employees motivated?”
  - “How has company strategy changed over the past five years?”

Types of Questions

- **Moderately open ended questions:** These can be used to explore responses that are of significance to the research topic. They may be worded like open ended questions but request a particular focus or direction. They are mostly follow-up questions.

Types of Questions

- **Moderately open ended questions Examples:**
  - “How would you evaluate the success of this new marketing strategy?”
  - “Why did you choose a reward model for the motivation of the employees?”
  - “What external factors caused the corporate strategy to change?”

Types of Questions

- **Secondary (probing) questions:** Secondary questions are used to seek an explanation where you do not understand the interviewee’s meaning or where the response does not reveal the reasoning involved.

Types of Questions

- **Secondary (probing) questions Examples:**
  - “What do you mean by ‘interesting job interviews’?”
  - “Why don’t you think that the employees understand the need for advertising?”

Types of Questions

- **Specific and close ended questions:** These types of question are similar to those used in structured interviews. They can be used to obtain specific information or to confirm a fact or opinion.

Types of Questions

- **Specific and close ended questions Examples:**
  - “How many people responded to the customer survey?” (requires specific piece of data)
• “Did I hear you say that the new store opened on 25 March?” (requires yes/no answer)

Types of Questions
• Leading: You should avoid asking leading questions to your interviewee. This type of question implies or states the expected answer, in the question.
  Example
  • “Wouldn’t you agree that your last tv advertisement offended the elderly people?”
  • “Don’t you agree that female employees work harder than male employees?”

Types of Questions
• Multiple: You should also avoid asking more than one question at a time, as this would confuse your interviewee.
  Example
  • “Why did you choose to open your factory in Bursa? Why did you chose to become partners with an Italian company? How was the employees reaction to this?”

Types of Questions
• Loaded: Long questions or giving many unnecessary information before the question should also be avoided. It is both time consuming, as well as being confusing for the interviewee.
  Example
  • “We know that employees and their attitudes towards the job they perform, is very important for all companies. Therefore, motivating the employees is also crucial for every employer for the business to grow. So, what strategies do you use to motivate your employees?”

Conducting the Interview
• Nature of the opening comments to be made when the interview begins: Where the interview has not met you before, the first minutes of conversation will have a significant impact on the outcome of the interview. It is your responsibility to shape the start of the discussion. You will need to explain your research to the participant.

Conducting the Interview
• Nature of the opening comments to be made when the interview begins, cont’d: Most of the time, at the beginning of the interview, the interviewee often has some uncertainties about
sharing information, how the data would be used. So, a pre-prepared participant information sheet would be very helpful.

**Conducting the Interview**

- **Asking the first question:** A very specific question at the beginning of the interview can limit the whole process by locking the interviewer into a narrow focus. So, the use of open-ended questions should be appropriate. These can then be followed up by probing questions.

**Conducting the Interview**

- **Nature and impact of the interviewer’s behavior:** Appropriate behaviour by the researcher is also very important. Comments or non-verbal behavior, such as gestures, which indicate any bias in your thinking. An appearance of boredom on your part is hardly likely to encourage your interviewee!

**Conducting the Interview**

- **Nature and impact of the interviewer’s behavior, cont’d:** Your posture and tone would also effect the flow of the conversation. You should sit slightly inclined towards the interviewee and adopt an open posture, avoiding folded arms. Tone of voice can also provide a signal to the interviewee. Avoid any impressions of disbelief or astonishment. Instead, project your interest and enthusiasm through your voice.

**Conducting the Interview**

- **Attentive listening:** It will be necessary for you to explore and probe explanations and meanings, but you must also provide the interviewee with reasonable time to develop their responses, and you must avoid projecting your own views. Remember that information interview is different than the conversations you are normally engaged in, where those involved often compete to speak rather than concentrate on listening.

**Conducting the Interview**

- **Test your understanding:** You may test your understanding by summarising an explanation provided by the interviewee. This will allow the interviewee to ‘evaluate the adequacy of the interpretation and correct where necessary’. 
Conducting the Interview

- **Approach to recording data:** As well as audio-recording your interview, it is also a good idea to make notes as the interviewee progresses. Immediately after the interview has taken place you should compile a full record of the interview.
- Do not forget to ask for permission to audio-tape your interview, before the interview takes place.

Participant appears willingly only to give monosyllabic answers, ‘yes’ or ‘no’

Internet-mediated Interviews

- An email interview consists of a series of e-mails each containing a small number of questions rather than one email containing series of questions.

Internet-mediated Interviews

- After making contact and obtaining agreement to participate, you initially email a small number of questions or introduce a topic to which the participant will (hopefully) reply. You then need to respond to these ideas, specifically asking further questions, raising points of clarification and pursuing ideas that are of further interest.

Internet-mediated Interviews

- Because of the nature of email communications, such interviews may last for some weeks, there being a time delay between a question being asked and its being answered. So, keep in mind your time limit before you decide to make an interview through email.