ST3004: Research Methods

Data Collection - Interviews
Types of Interviews

- **Structured**
  - Use questionnaires based on a predetermined and ‘standardised’ set of questions
  - Can be referred to as interviewer-administered questionnaires or quantitative research interviews

- **Semi Structured** and **Unstructured** (in-depth)
  - ‘nonstandardised’.
  - Often referred to as ‘qualitative research interviews’.
Semi-Structured Interviews

- Have a list of themes and questions to be covered

- **Participant interview** - the interviewer directs the interview and the interviewee responds to the questions of the researcher.

- Questions may vary from interview to interview.

- The order of questions may also be varied depending on the flow of the conversation.

- Additional questions may be required to explore your research question and objectives given the nature of events within particular organisations.

- Data usually recorded by audio-recording the conversation or note taking.
Unstructured Interviews

- Informal

- Used to explore a general area in which you are interested in depth.

- No predetermined list of questions (although you need to have a clear idea about what you want to explore).

- **Non-directive** interaction - The interviewee is given the opportunity to talk freely about events, behaviour and beliefs in relation to the topic area.

- **Informant interview** - the interviewee’s perceptions guide the conduct of the interview.
Which to use?

- Depends on your research question (again!)

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✓✓ = more frequent, ✓ = less frequent.

- Your research may incorporate more than one type of interview (multiple methods).
Use Semi-Structured and Unstructured

- When you want to
  - undertake an exploratory study
  - find out the relationship between variables (e.g. what caused it?)
  - explore the reasons for decisions
  - ‘probe’ answers (you want your interviewees to explain, or build on, their responses)
When Personal Contact is Important

- Managers are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than complete questionnaire.

- Provides them with an opportunity to reflect on events without needing to write anything down.

- Concerns about the way in which information will be used.

- May feel it’s not appropriate to provide sensitive and confidential information to someone they have never met.

- Therefore may achieve a higher response rate than using questionnaires.
The nature of the questions

- where there are a large number of questions to be answered;

- where the questions are either complex or open-ended;

- where the order and logic of questioning may need to be varied.
Length of time required and completeness of the process

- Expectations should be clearly established about the length of time required.

- Participants need to understand and agree with the objectives of the research interview.
Data quality issues

- Reliability;
  - lack of standardisation

- Forms of bias;
  - Interviewer bias (non-verbal cues, choice of questions, interpretation of responses…)
  - Interviewee/response bias (perceptions about the interviewer, sensitivities, eagerness to please)
Data quality issues

- **Validity**
  - High level of validity is possible due to
    - the questions being able to be clarified,
    - meanings of responses probed and
    - topics discussed from a variety of angles.

- **Generalisability**
  - Cannot be used to make statistical generalisations about the entire population.
Overcoming Data quality issues

- Make and retain notes relating to
  - your research design,
  - the reasons underpinning the choice of strategy and methods, and the data obtained.

- This will be referred to by other researchers in order to understand the processes that you used and your findings and, where appropriate, to enable them to reanalyse the data you collected.
Preparation

- **Level of knowledge** You need to be knowledgeable about
  - the research topic and
  - The organisational or situational context in which the interview is to take place.

- **Level of information supplied to the interviewee**
  Providing participants with a list of the interview themes before the event (where this is appropriate).
Preparation - Interview themes

- Interview themes may be derived from
  - the literature that you read,
  - the theories that you consider,
  - your experience of a particular topic,
  - common sense,
  - discussions with co-workers, fellow students, tutors and research participants...
  - a combination of these approaches.
Interview themes - Example

Karl was interested in understanding why some employees in his organisation used the IT Help Desk whilst others did not. He decided to provide his interviewees with a list of themes that he wished to explore during the interviews. After some deliberation and reading of the academic literature he came up with the following list:

- what employees understand by the term ‘IT Help Desk’;
- the extent to which the IT Help Desk is meeting employees’ needs;
- the nature of support employees feel they are receiving;
- the extent to which employees feel they know how to use the IT Help Desk;
- the services employees feel the IT Help Desk should be providing;
- knowledge of service level agreements.
Interview Guide

- List of topics that you intend to cover in the interview
- Initial questions
- Probes that may be used to follow up initial responses and obtain greater detail from the participants
Interview Guide

- Try to ensure
  - that the order of questions is likely to be logical to your participants
  - that the language you use will be comprehensible.

- Using your guide, you will be able to develop and/or explore research themes across multiple interviews that you conduct.

- This helps to identify and test relationships between them.
Interview Guide - Example

Karl was interested in understanding why some employees in his organisation used the IT Help Desk whilst others did not. Using his interview themes he began to develop his guide:

Help Desk Support

1. To what extent does the IT Help Desk meet your needs?
   - Probe: In what ways? [ask for real-life examples]
   - Probe: Can you give me an example (if possible) of when you received good support from the IT Help Desk?
   - Probe: Can you give me an example (if possible) of when you received insufficient support from the IT Help Desk?

2. Do you consider you have enough support from the IT Help Desk?
   - Probe: How is this support provided (e.g. telephone, face to face)? Probe: What else (if anything) could usefully be done
Appropriateness of location

- Choose a location
  - which is convenient for your participants,
  - where they will feel comfortable
  - where the interview is unlikely to be disturbed.
  - that is quiet so that outside noise will not reduce the quality of your recording of the interview.

- Have regard to your own personal safety.
Appropriateness of your appearance

- Adopt a similar style of dress to those to be interviewed.

- Essentially, you will need to wear clothing that will be generally acceptable for the setting within which the interview is to occur.
Nature of the opening comments

- Important because of the impact on your credibility and the level of the interviewee’s confidence.

1. Thank the participant for agreeing to the meeting.
2. Briefly outline the purpose of the research and its progress to date (give the participant an information sheet to keep).
3. Reiterate the right to confidentiality and anonymity.
4. Emphasise the participant’s right not to answer any question and that the interview will be stopped if the participant wishes.
Nature of the opening comments

5. Tell the participant about the nature of the outputs to which the research is intended to lead and what will happen to the data collected during and after the project.

6. Restate the offer to provide a summary of the research findings to the interviewee.

7. Restate the request to record the interview electronically.

8. Before the substantive discussion starts, again request permission to undertake the interview, summarise the themes to be covered, confirm the amount of time available and request that the participant read and sign the informed consent form.
Approach to questioning

- Your questions need to be phrased clearly, so that the interviewee can understand them.

- You should ask them in a neutral tone of voice.

- The use of open questions should help to avoid bias.

- These can then be followed up by the use of appropriately worded probing questions.
Nature and impact of the interviewer’s behaviour

- Comments or non-verbal behaviour, such as gestures, which indicate any bias in your thinking should be avoided.

- Try not to look bored!

- Sit slightly inclined towards the interviewee and adopt an open posture, avoiding folded arms.

- Tone of voice - project interest and enthusiasm. Try to avoid any impression of anxiety, disbelief, astonishment or any other negative signal.
Listen!
Test understanding

- If you are unsure, summarise an explanation provided by the interviewee.

- This will allow the interviewee to evaluate the adequacy of the interpretation and correct where necessary.

- You may also ask the interviewee to read through the factual account that you produce of the interview
Approach to recording data

- As well as audio-recording your interview it is important to also make notes
  - Provides a back-up if your audio-recording does not work,
  - Provides another way for you to show that your participant’s responses are important to you.

- Immediately after the interview has taken place you should compile a full record of the interview including contextual data.
Approach to recording data

- **Contextual Data:**
  - the location of the interview (e.g. the organisation, the place);
  - the date and time;
  - the setting of the interview (e.g. was the room quiet or noisy, could you be overheard, were you interrupted?);
  - **background information** about the participant (e.g. role, post title, gender);
  - your **immediate impression** of how well (or badly) the interview went (e.g. was the participant reticent, were there aspects about which you felt you did not obtain answers in sufficient depth?).
Interviewing competence

- opening the interview;
- using appropriate language;
- questioning;
- listening;
- testing and summarising understanding;
- recognising and dealing with difficult participants;
- recording data.
Questioning - *Open questions*

- Allow participants to define and describe a situation or event.

- Likely to start with, or include ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why’.

**Examples:**

- ‘Why did the organisation introduce its marketing strategy?’
- ‘What methods have been used to make employees redundant?’
- ‘How has corporate strategy changed over the past five years?’
Questioning - *Probing questions*

- Can be used to explore responses that are of significance to the research topic (may be prefaced with things like ‘That’s interesting . . .’ or ‘Tell me more about . . .’).

- They may be worded like open questions but request a particular focus or direction.

**Examples:**

- ‘How would you evaluate the success of this new marketing strategy?’
- ‘Why did you choose a compulsory method to make redundancies?’
- ‘What external factors caused the corporate strategy to change?’
Questioning - *Probing questions*

- May also be used to seek an explanation where you do not understand the interviewee’s meaning or where the response does not reveal the reasoning involved.

- **Examples:**
  - ‘What do you mean by “bumping” as a means to help to secure volunteers for redundancy?’
  - ‘What is the relationship between the new statutory requirements that you referred to and the organisation’s decision to set up its corporate affairs department?’
Questioning - *Specific and closed questions*

- Similar to those used in structured interviews.

- They can be used to obtain specific information or to confirm a fact or opinion.

- **Examples:**
  - ‘How many people responded to the customer survey?’
  - ‘Did you lose money? Break even?’
Group interviews and focus groups

- Typically group interviews involve between four and eight participants,

- The more complex the subject matter the smaller the number of interviewees.

- Participants are normally chosen using non-probability sampling, often with a specific purpose in mind.
Group interviews

- In a group interview your role will be to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to state their points of view and answer your question and that these data are captured.

- This type of interview can range from being highly structured to unstructured, although it tends to be relatively unstructured and fairly free-flowing.

- Group interviews can also be used to identify key themes that will be used to develop items that are included in a survey questionnaire.
Focus Groups

**focus group**, sometimes called a ‘focus group interview’, is a group interview that focuses clearly upon a particular issue, product, service or topic and encompasses the need for interactive discussion amongst participants (Carson et al. 2001).
Uses of Focus Groups?

- Politics
- Product Design
- Product testing
- Marketing
Focus Groups

- If you are running a focus group, you will probably be referred to as the **moderator** or ‘facilitator’.

- Your role is to
  - keep the group within the boundaries of the topic being discussed;
  - generate interest in the topic and encourage discussion, whilst at the same time not leading the group towards certain opinions.
How to Run a Focus Group

1. Identify Objectives
2. Plan and Prepare
   ▶ Open ended questions
   ▶ Questioning plan
   ▶ Sample
3. Select Environment carefully
4. Bring materials – whiteboard, pen & paper etc...
5. Brief participants
6. Be aware of bias
7. Encourage all to participate
8. Manage group dynamics
9. Encourage conflicting opinions
10. Record: audio, video, note-taking
Useful phrases for facilitators

- ‘What do you think, Mary....’
- ‘What do other people think about this?’
- ‘How does Mary’s point relate to the one that you raised, John?’
- What do you think about Mary’s suggestion?’
A few tips..

- Understand the research objectives
- Understand the role of the facilitator
- Capture impulsive reaction (e.g., Thumbs up/down)
- Ask people to write things down to avoid bias
  - Eg. If one person gives a response participants base their answers relative to that
- Be aware of what is NOT being said
- Don’t judge/distract the participants
Telephone interviews

- May allow you to make contact with participants with whom it would be impractical to conduct an interview on a face-to-face basis because of the distance and/or cost involved

- Disadvantages:
  - Lack of personal contact – establish trust
  - Recording
  - Controlling the pace
  - Miss non-verbal cues
  - Low response rate

- Can be good for follow-ups and clarifications
Electronic interviews

- Can be
  - Synchronous – skype, chat…
  - Asynchronous – email, forums…
Electronic interviews

- Advantages:
  - Good for geographically dispersed population
  - Software can automatically record thereby removing problems associated with audio-recording and transcription such as cost, accuracy and participants’ apprehension.

- However, relatively narrow bandwidth of electronic media when compared with face-to-face communication means that it’s unlikely to achieve the same high levels of interactivity and rich and spontaneous communication
Forms of Interviews

Standardised

Interviewer-administered questionnaires

One-to-one

Face-to-face interviews

Telephone interviews

Internet and intranet-mediated (electronic) interviews

Non-standardised

One-to-many

Group interviews

Internet and intranet-mediated (electronic) group interviews

Focus groups

Focus groups