Qualitative Interviewing

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The Uses of Qualitative Interviewing

1. Describing social and political processes (how and why things change)
2. Fill in historical blanks (often ignored are the marginalized voices)
3. Delve into important personal issues
4. Decision makers can use the data to shed light on problems
5. Helps us to understand our work lives
A Family of Qualitative Interviews

Concept clarification: purpose is to explore the meaning of shared terms
Investigative interviewing: learn what happened in a specific instance
Elaborated cases: find out what happened and what it means more broadly; generalize
Ethnographic interpretation: sketch an overall cultural setting
Theory elaboration: pick a specific problem and examine to find themes for broader significance
Oral history: explore past events
Organizational culture: hone in on specific rules, roles to help new members
Action research: discover if programs and policies are working
Interview Design

1. Choosing a research topic: think about issues that concern you; topics often reflect one’s personality or work requirements

2. Moving from topic to puzzle: the puzzle is your “research question”; think about the opposite of what you’re seeing or hearing

3. Determine if qualitative interviewing is appropriate: are you looking for nuance and subtlety? Is an entirely new perspective needed? Are you trying to explain the unexpected?

4. Making the research credible: attempt to find interviewees who have a variety of perspectives
Your Role as Researcher

• How you feel and how you act can greatly impact the quality of the interview
• Understand and accommodate your own personality
• Resist the urge to make strong statements during the interview that can impact the responses
• Strong personal feelings and biases can distort what you are hearing
Ethical Responsibilities Towards the Interviewee

- Respect is shown in how you act toward your interviewee
- Remind interviewee that notes from the conversation will be used in the study
- Protect confidentiality
- In many cases, allow interviewees to look at notes before final report for clarifying and accuracy purposes
- Do not pressure interviewees to respond to specific questions; doing so can cause stress and impact results
Types of Interviewing Techniques

The Structured Interview:

~ Interviewer asks all respondents the same series of questions in the same order
~ Questions are created prior to interview
~ Generally little room for variation in responses and few open-ended questions
~ Interviewer plays a neutral role and acts casual and friendly, but does not insert their opinion in the interview
Types of Interviewing Techniques

Semi-Structured Interview:

~The interviewer and respondent engage in a formal interview
~Interviewer develops and uses an “interview guide” of questions/topics to be covered
~Interviewer follows guide, but is able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide when deemed appropriate
Types of Interviewing Techniques

Unstructured Interview:

~ Interviewer and respondent engage in a formal interview whereas the only “guide” is the interviewer’s plan on the focus of the conversation.
~ Questions are very open-ended and express little control over responses.
~ Many ethnographic studies employ this technique as a way to honor the lived experiences of the respondents.
Role Play!

• Structured
• Semi-Structured
• Unstructured
Other Types of Interviewing Techniques

- Informal Interviewing: interviewer talks with people in the field informally without the use of an interview guide
- Focus Groups: usually involves a group of participants at the same time and collects data through a semi-structured process
Evaluating Your Interview

- Was your description of the topic too broad, too narrow, or too abstract, giving the interviewee incorrect signals about what you needed to know?
- Did you build strong rapport with your participant and was that evident in the data collected?
- Did you miss some key places where second or third questions could have been posed?
- Did you express your own opinions in any way?
- Did your questions flow naturally from the answers you heard and did you stay on-topic?
- Were you carefully listening to what was said and responding appropriately rather than trying to steer the conversation?
Analyzing Your Data

• Get to know your data! (Read and re-read the text to understand the nuances of the language and pattern)
• Focus the analysis (Review your purpose and what you wanted to find out, this will help you begin)
• Categorize the information (start identifying themes and organizing them into coherent categories)
  – This can be the most difficult and labor-intensive part, but by far the most important!
• Identify the patterns and connections you see in between the categories (like they said in Big Hero 6: Look for a different angle)
• Interpretation and meaning making (what does the data say about your initial question, how do you want to present it and what do you want to get from it?)
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