

Key-Informant Interviews

One-on-one interviews can be used when you want to fully understand someone's impressions, experiences or opinions. They are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. Interviews can also be used to follow up on unclear questionnaire responses, nonrespondents, or focus groups (if someone had more that they wanted to say, but couldn't in the group). Before designing the interview, it is important to have a clear idea of what information is required, and what the information will be used for. This will help with the development of the interview.

Advantages

- Skilled interviewers can often elicit longer or more complete answers than people will give on their own to a mail survey or in a group setting.
- Interviewers can ask for clarification of unclear responses and answer any questions the interviewee may have.
- Longer interviews are sometimes tolerated, especially when they have been arranged in advance.

Challenges

- Data can be hard to analyze and compare.
- Interviewer can bias responses.

Interviews Types

- Informal, conversational interview – there are no predetermined questions; the interviewer “goes with the flow”.
- General interview guide approach – a general guide is developed to ensure certain areas of information are addressed.
- Standardized, open-ended interview – the same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees.
- Closed, fixed-response interview – all interviewees are asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from a set of alternatives.

Topics Addressed

- Behaviours – about what a person has done or is doing.
- Opinions/values – about what a person thinks about a topic.
- Feelings – differentiate from thoughts/opinions.
- Knowledge – to get the facts about a topic.
- Sensory – about what a person has seen, touched, etc.
- Background/demographics – age, education, etc.
- All questions can be asked in terms of past, present, and future.

The Interviewer

The role of the interviewer is key in ensuring the success of the project, and in gathering pertinent information. The interviewer is responsible for motivating respondents to participate fully and thoughtfully, and for accurately and completely recording responses. The knowledge an interviewer needs prior to conducting interviews includes:

- understanding of why neutrality is important.
- information about the project so as to answer questions.
- objectives of the project.
- principles of confidentiality.
- ability to initiate and maintain a conversation with a stranger.

The skills and actions of an effective interviewer include:

- initiating the conversation with the participant who is usually a stranger, in a friendly way and make an effort to establish rapport.
- speaking clearly and use correct grammar.
- using appropriate language that the respondent can understand.
- delivering the interview in a flowing, casual manner.
- recording responses accurately.
- judging verbal and nonverbal cues and record.
- responding professionally to unexpected questions and situations.
- remaining neutral by keeping personal opinions out of the interview process.
- motivating reluctant respondents to participate, by restating the question, noting their unease and giving more time.
- probing incomplete answers in an unbiased manner for more useful results.
- multitasking (e.g. read, write, listen, etc.)
- regulating behaviour so as not to influence answers.

Establishing Rapport

One of the most important steps in the interview is establishing rapport. Having rapport with the respondent will help him or her to feel more comfortable sharing information, and will help facilitate the process. The weather, activities in the area, or observations of the community are topics that can be used as icebreakers by interviewers. Committing a moment or two at the beginning of the interview to chat about something in common will also help establish rapport.

An effective way of gaining rapport is to thank the participant for meeting with you, allowing you to visit them at their home, place of work etc and to emphasize the importance of the respondent's participation to the project.

Terminating the Interview

Once the interview is completed, it is important to thank respondents for their time and responses. Let the respondent know where they may access the final results of the study when it is completed.

Helpful Hints for Conducting Interviews

Preparing for the Interview

- Choose a comfortable setting with few distractions.
- Explain the purpose of the interview.
- Address confidentiality.
- Explain the format of the interview.
- Indicate how long you expect the interview to take.
- Ask participants if they have any questions before you start.
- Don't count on memory – ask permission to record answers, either mechanically or by taking notes.

Asking Questions

- Get the respondents involved in the interview as early as possible.
- Ask about facts to “warm up” the individual before asking about controversial or emotional matters.
- Intersperse fact-based questions throughout the interview so as to avoid long lists of factual questions and disengaging with the respondent.
- Ask questions about the present before asking about the past or future.
- Allow time at the end for the respondent to add any information they wish and their impressions of the interview.
- Wording of questions should be open ended.
- Questions should be as neutral as possible.
- Ask questions one at a time.
- Questions should be worded clearly.
- Be careful of “why” questions – may make the respondent feel defensive, unable to answer, etc.

Conducting the Interview

- Ask one question at a time.
- Attempt to remain neutral and not influence answers – don't show strong emotional responses, act as if “you've heard it all before”.
- Encourage responses: nod your head, “uh-huh”, etc.
- Provide transitions between major topics.
- Don't lose control of the interview – keep respondent on topic, don't allow run-on answers, etc.
- Ensure that any recording devices are working.

Immediately After the Interview

- Clarify written notes.
- Write down observations made during interview.