INTRODUCTION

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The interview is a popular technique within social sciences research. In the interview we have a method that can be used with different levels of structure; in a range of epistemological traditions; and which produces data that can be analysed in a variety of different ways. Hence, the interview is attractive to business, management and organizational researchers because of its variety and flexibility. Furthermore, the term interview is a familiar one, so potential interviewees will know what to expect when we ask if they are prepared to take part in an interview. It is important to state right at the outset that the research interview is somewhat different from other interviews we may encounter, such as selection interviews or other interviews in our social lives more generally. Rather, the research interview is a conversation where the researcher seeks information from an individual or group with the aim of using that information in order to progress their research. Therefore, one key difference of the research interview is that it is conducted as part of a research project and must produce data that can be analysed appropriately to come to some conclusions regarding a research question or area of interest.

The aim of this book is to provide an accessible guide to how to conduct interviews as part of a management, organization or business graduate-level research project, and throughout the book I use those domain terms interchangeably. The book covers a range of different interview types including structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The assumption is that the interview data collected will form the empirical base of a tightly time-bound graduate research dissertation. In this introductory chapter, a brief history of the interview in organizational and

management research is provided. We then consider the role of the interview and how it can be used; explore the kind of data that can be collected from an interview; and outline the approach taken to interviews and interviewing in the book overall.

HISTORY OF THE INTERVIEW

The interview has had a long history within the field of business and management research. Fontana and Frey (2005: 699) suggest that the development of interviewing in the twentieth century emerged from two major trends within the social sciences. The first was the need to gain a 'quality of responses' in the areas of counselling and clinical diagnosis, and the second was the increased concern with using interviews as the basis for psychological testing and management, a trend that emerged during the First World War. Perhaps the first classic study within the organizational field to rely on interviews was the Hawthorne Studies: a series of experiments conducted at the Western Electric company's Hawthorne works outside Chicago between 1924 and 1932. The focus of the experiments was on the different factors that impacted on the production levels of workers working in groups (Mayo, 1945). These studies were part of what came to be known as the Human Relations movement. Hollway (1991) suggests that interviewing as a qualitative data collection technique became prevalent around the same time as the human relations movement, because at this time within organization behaviour there was a move away from scientific management approaches where the worker was seen as cog in a machine, to a focus on the worker as an emotional human being. Interviews were seen as a valid way of collecting reliable and objective measurement data about the subjective aspects of worker experience, previously unacknowledged in the research of the time. The Second World War again saw an increase in the use of interviews both underpinning the development of psychological measurement (Hollway, 1991) and the documentation of the mental and emotional lives of soldiers (Fontana and Frey, 2005). In parallel developments, interviews were also being used as components of some of the classic ethnographic studies that underpinned the development of the organizational and management field. Examples include Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel's (1972) intensive study of an unemployed community, Marienthal; Melvin Dalton's (1959) classic work of managerial practice, *Men who manage*; and *Working for Ford* (Benyon, 1973). These all drew on interview data as well as on a range of other data collection techniques.

By the 1970s and 1980s, interviews had become common place in social science research, and were evident in published work in the organizational and management field. During this period, different interpretations of the interview, according to the

underlying epistemological stance, began to emerge. The increasing focus on new paradigms, and not least the linguistic turn that emerged in the 1980s, led to a range of new critiques of the interview and how it was used in organizational research. A particular challenge emerged from the critique that the interview was an 'active' process (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) and could not be seen as a context-free occurrence or an isolated one-off event. These epistemological developments led to the variety of interview types we see today where the interview is used extensively in business, organizational and management research, and can be used to collect data in a variety of ways.

A cursory look at any of the main journals in the business and management field will highlight a variety of studies where interviews have been used. For example, in the first issue of the *British Journal of Management* published in 2014, three of the studies reported in the papers published drew on interview data. These were Bondy and Starkey's (2014) study of multinational companies and CSR; Kelan and Mah's (2014) study on gendered identification and MBA students; and Mallett and Wapshott's (2014) study of the use of humour in SMEs. As well as being extensively used in business and management research, organizations also make use of interviews, hence the ubiquity of the interview today.

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTED

It is possible to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in an interview though it is typically thought of as a technique for qualitative data collection. The type of data collected should link in with the research question that the researcher is seeking to answer and the analysis that is planned for that data. By quantitative data, we are referring here to the use of numerical scales, for example to assess people's attitudes or views. The use of quantitative methods tends to accompany a positivist paradigmatic stance. Here, the concern is with hypothesis testing and systematically measuring and analysing the relationships between variables through the use of statistics. Therefore, a key aim of quantitative methodological approaches is to conduct objective and replicable research. The procedures for conducting interview research from this perspective are therefore fairly standardized. So, for instance, as part of an interview, we could ask the interviewees to mark on a scale from 1 to 5 their views about a new product recently launched on to the market. This approach effectively means that the interviewee is completing the interviewer's questionnaire in the interview and is a strategy often used by telephone marketeers. This generation of quantitative data can be combined with qualitative, more open-ended questions too.

In terms of qualitative data, there are many different types of qualitative data and qualitative methods can be used in a range of philosophical traditions (Duberley

et al., 2012). By qualitative data, we are referring here to non-numerical, textual or visual data where the focus is on the subjective understanding, meaning or sense-making processes of people or groups. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding these experiences within the appropriate context or seeking what has been described as an insider view or account. Hence, the interview is particularly well-suited to the gathering of qualitative data. Qualitative methods are also more flexible in that we can focus on emerging themes during the research process (Cassell and Symon, 2004). So in an interview, for example, if the interviewee raises an interesting issue that we had not previously thought of and included in the interview schedule, we can follow that up and ask them more about it. The qualitative data produced can be quite diverse, depending on the type of interview used. For example, in life history method (see Musson, 2004) the interviewer can ask questions about the life of an individual to gain data regarding what experiences influence how they understand a given phenomena such as social class or gender in the workplace, whereas with critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) we may ask about specific events in the workplace to see how they are understood. Additionally, it may be that a researcher is interested in collecting qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. This is appropriate if the researcher's aim is to identify a statistically significant pattern across a given data set which can be enabled by quantitative analysis, yet also to access a more in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon for which qualitative analysis is required.

Hence, the flexibility of the interview enables us to collect either qualitative and quantitative data, or a combination of both. Given that in the majority of cases interviews are used as a way of accessing qualitative data, this will be the major focus of this book.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERVIEW IN RESEARCH DESIGN

The interview can be used for a range of different purposes, depending on the research question and scope of the research. In examining the different roles that the interview can have in a research design, once again we find that there is considerable flexibility. For example, interviews can be used to explore a particular phenomenon – an exploratory interview – or can be used to clarify data derived from other sources in a confirmatory way. Here, we identify how interviews can be used in different ways as part of a research design: as part of a single method design; as part of a mixed methods design; and as part of a multi-method design. In some cases, depending on the research question, a graduate dissertation can be comprised of a series of interviews only, as a single method study design. A set of qualitative interviews in itself can provide a rich enough data set – see Box 1.1.

1.1   Using interviews in a research design based on interviews only

Jane is studying for a Masters in Human Resource Management. For her dissertation project, Jane wants to find out how men experience first-time fatherhood and the impact this has on their experiences in the workplace. From her literature review, Jane has discovered that there is little research about fathers in the workplace and how they manage their work–life balance after fatherhood, whereas there is a lot written about women returning to work after their first child. Given the little research in the field and her focus on individual experiences, Jane decides to base her research on a series of exploratory interviews with men who have become fathers in the last six months. Jane conducts in-depth interviews with 10 new fathers for her dissertation project.

The interview can also have a role in a mixed methods design project. Here, mixed methods refer to where qualitative and quantitative methods are used together. Hammersley (1996) characterizes three approaches to mixed methods research: triangulation, facilitation and complementarity. Interviews can be used in each of these approaches. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012: 683) define triangulation as 'The use of two or more independent sources of data or data collection methods within one study in order to help ensure that the data are telling you what you think they are telling you'. So, a study could involve conducting interviews and using a questionnaire to answer a given research question. In triangulating the findings from the two methods, the researcher would be looking for some consistency. In the facilitation approach, qualitative research can facilitate quantitative research through providing hypotheses – for example, a researcher could conduct a few interviews with key stakeholders in an organization to garner their views of a change process and use those findings to design a questionnaire to survey the views of all members of the organization. In terms of complementarity, quantitative research can lead to qualitative research, for example through enabling the selection of interviewees or in filling in the gaps (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 649). So, we could start by surveying the views of the whole organization, and, through an analysis of the findings, seek out some interviewees who can elaborate on those findings in more detail. An example is provided in Box 1.2.

1.2   Using interviews in a mixed methods design

Samir is studying for a Masters degree in Marketing and Customer Relationship Management. He is particularly interested in customer loyalty schemes and how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can potentially use such schemes to

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ensure customer loyalty. In considering the methods he wants to use for his research dissertation, he is keen to use interviews because he would like to talk with customers face to face about why they choose some loyalty cards and not others. However, he would also like to say something more generally about the use of loyalty cards by customers of SMEs in his local region. Samir decides to use the qualitative research interview as a way of facilitating the quantitative stage of his study. Working with a local SME, he first conducts interviews with six of their regular customers about their behaviours regarding loyalty cards more generally. From the data analysis, he analyses a range of factors that impact on loyalty card use. He then designs a questionnaire about the relative importance of those factors to send to 100 customers so that he can make some general statements about loyalty card behaviour. Hence, Samir is using interviews as part of a mixed methods research design.

The interview can also be used as part of a multi-method study where different data from different methods can provide different insights into a given organizational phenomenon. Interviews can be used alongside other qualitative methods such as diary studies or observation, for example. The latter is particularly the case with case study or ethnographic designs which rely on a range of different methods, as can be seen in Box 1.3.

1.3   Using interviews in a multiple qualitative methods design

The focus of Ravi's MBA dissertation is on evaluating the success of a leadership training programme in his own organization. Ravi knows that there are some complex issues when researching your own organization, particularly in relation to how people respond to you in your role as researcher rather than in your role as colleague. He believes that in using his own organization as a case study, the best way to seek a range of views about the leadership programme is to use different qualitative methods together. Case studies typically involve the use of a variety of methods. Ravi has already read and analysed some of the important company policy documents that relate to the leadership programme, such as the staff development strategy of the organization. Hence, next he plans to conduct five exploratory key stakeholder interviews with those involved in designing the programme and also ask 10 of those who have just completed the programme to keep a diary for three weeks afterwards to record instances in the workplace where they believe their experience on the leadership programme has impacted on the decisions that they make. Hence, Ravi is using the interview as part of a case study design using multiple qualitative methods.

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP INTERVIEWS

The interview is not necessarily confined to individuals alone and one alternative is to conduct a group interview. There is a variety of different types of group interviews – for example, Delphi studies where the opinions of various experts are sought in turn, or focus groups which have become particularly popular in the market research field. Steyaert and Bouwen (2004) suggest that there are two key characteristics that differentiate between group methods. The first is whether the group is a naturally occurring group within an organization, for example a project group or work team, the alternative being a group manufactured for research purposes, for example a focus group. The authors suggest that this is not always a clear distinction and that the role of the researcher is important here in the extent to which they have an influence on creating the group context. The second characteristic is the aim of the researcher. Here, the researcher could be seeking the exploration or description of ideas within the group, where the aim is to understand the context. An alternative is where the researcher is seeking a generation of ideas, for example about a re-organization of systems in the workplace. A further aim of the research could be to actually intervene within a given group, for example a team-building intervention in an already existing group or the creation of a taskforce group to plan an intervention in job design. In each of these situations, a group interview can be used. As with any other form of interview, there should be a clear rationale for why the group interview is considered appropriate and how it fits with the research question and research design. A summary of the different types of group method within which interviews can be used can be found in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1   Different types of group method

Group setting/purpose of research	Natural	Created
Exploration	Work groups/group observations	Group interviews/focus groups
Generation	Work-team study/group experiments/role plays	Group simulations/group meetings
Intervention	Team building/action research	Project groups/taskforce analysis

Source: Steyaert and Bouwen (2004: 141).

APPROACH TAKEN WITHIN THIS BOOK

As has been stated, the interview offers the researcher a range of opportunities. In the chapters that follow, we consider what some of these opportunities are. An underlying assumption throughout is that the interview will be the basis of a graduate research project and that the reader may have had little or no previous experience

of conducting a research interview. The chapters that follow address the relevant issues the prospective interviewer might encounter as they plan their research study. Chapter 2 introduces readers to the different types of interviews that can be conducted and introduces a framework that can be used to differentiate the different types of interviews in use, and inform the choice of one interview design over another. Chapter 3 introduces the different components of the research interview and provides advice about each of the stages of interview design from the design of questions to piloting. Chapter 4 considers the interview itself and focuses on some of the practicalities of conducting an interview, including interview location and transcription. It also considers a range of contextual issues the researcher needs to bear in mind that potentially complicate the process. These issues include ethics, power, reflection and reflexivity. Chapter 5 provides some more detailed illustrations of how interviews are used in the business, organization and management literature. Chapter 6 then reviews the advantages and disadvantages of using interviews and offers some suggestions about what makes a good interview. In the final sections, the next steps after the interview is complete, such as thinking ahead to data analysis, are considered.

My assumption in writing this book is that it will not be too onerous to read nor too long, therefore the expectation is that the reader will read it from beginning to end rather than dip in and out of the different chapters. The aim is that all of the key points are covered from the start to the finish of the interview process. The interview offers many opportunities for business, management and organizational researchers. One of the joys of qualitative research is the opportunity to access the interpretations and views of organizational participants. Conducting interviews can be an insightful, rich and interesting experience, but can also be frustrating and problematic at times. Reading this book cannot guarantee that you are more likely to experience the former, but the intention is that you feel better prepared in approaching interviews as part of your research endeavours.