

 SAGE researchmethods

Episodic Interviewing

In: Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound

By: Uwe Flick

Edited by: Martin W. Bauer & George Gaskell

Pub. Date: 2011

Access Date: August 18, 2021

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications Ltd

City: London

Print ISBN: 9780761964810

Online ISBN: 9781849209731

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849209731>

Print pages: 76-92

© 2000 SAGE Publications Ltd All Rights Reserved.

This PDF has been generated from SAGE Research Methods. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

Episodic Interviewing

KEYWORDS

argumentation

biographical narrative

communicative validation

critical incident technique

episode

episodic memory and knowledge

narrative

narrative interview

repisode

semantic memory and knowledge

subjective definition

Qualitative research has been developed and is applied against a variety of theoretical backgrounds. One common feature of the different research traditions and methodological branches of qualitative research (among other common features: see Flick, 1998a) is that almost every method can be traced back to two roots: to a specific theoretical approach; and also to a specific issue for which the method was developed. The method presented in this chapter was developed in the context of a study on the social representation of technological change in everyday life (Flick, 1996). This issue can be characterized by several features that influenced the elaboration of the method. First, a social representation is a form of social knowledge, which means that it is shared by those who are members of a specific social group and that it is different from the knowledge shared in other social groups (Moscovici, 1988; see Flick, 1998b for an overview). Secondly, technological change has an impact on more or less every part of everyday life, and on the life of almost everyone, although the degree and time may vary in which new technologies are accepted and used. Thirdly, on the one hand change occurs in concrete situational contexts: somebody buys a personal computer and this has an impact on the way he or she writes from then on. On the other hand, such little changes sum over

time to a more or less general change in some parts of everyday life: today's childhood is completely different from earlier childhoods because of various new technologies and their different impacts. These impacts sum to a more general impact that is independent of particular situations, and becomes part of knowledge in a broad sense.

To study this situation, a method had to be developed that was sensitive to concrete situational contexts in which small changes occur, and to the broad, general accumulation of such changes. The method should also facilitate comparisons among cases from different social groups.

Underlying concepts

Narrative psychology

The episodic interview is based on several theoretical assumptions that can be traced back into different fields of psychology. One of its roots is the discussion about using people's narratives for collecting social science data (see Flick, 1998a: Chapter 9; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riemann and Schütze, 1987; Riesmann, 1993). In this context, a narrative is characterized as follows:

First the initial situation is outlined ('how everything started'), and then the events relevant to the narrative are selected from the whole host of experiences and presented as a coherent progression of events ('how things developed'), and finally the situation at the end of the development is presented ('what became'). (Hermanns, 1995: 183)

This discussion can be seen as embedded in a wider discussion in the social sciences about the narrative structure of knowledge and experience (Bruner, 1987; Ricoeur, 1984; Sarbin, 1986). One of its sources is James (1893), who held 'that all human thinking is essentially of two kinds - reasoning on the one hand and narrative, descriptive contemplative on the other'. This distinction has been taken up in discussions about a narrative psychology or narrative thinking in Sarbin (1986). Here, narratives are seen as:

the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. (Polkinghorne, 1988: 1)

In this context, it is taken into account that experience and life do not have a narrative structure *per se*. Rather, they are constructed in the form of a narrative:

On reflecting on the incident, trying actively to understand it, you are constructing an account the structure of which is essentially narrative. (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986: 118)

Therefore, narrative thinking is seen as consisting 'of creating a fit between a situation and the story schema. Establishing a fit, that is, making a story out of experience' (1986: 111) and as the 'projection of story form onto some experience or event' (1986: 113). This reconstruction of experiences as narratives involves two

kinds of processes of negotiation. Internal/ cognitive negotiation between experience and the story schema includes the use of prototypical narratives given in a culture. External negotiation with (potential) listeners means either that they are convinced by the story of the event, or that they reject or doubt it for the most part. The results of such processes are contextualized and socially shared forms of knowledge.

Episodic and semantic knowledge

A second background is the distinction between episodic and semantic memory (going back to Tulving, 1972), which has been taken up to distinguish episodic from semantic knowledge, for example in expert systems (see Strube, 1989). According to this discussion, episodic knowledge comprises knowledge that is linked to concrete circumstances (time, space, people, events, situations), whereas semantic knowledge is more abstract and generalized, and decontextualized from specific situations and events. The two types of knowledge are complementary parts of 'world knowledge':

Episodic knowledge is part of the world knowledge, whose other part - corresponding to semantic memory - is the general (i.e. not concrete, situatively anchored) knowledge, e.g. conceptual knowledge, rule knowledge, knowledge of schemes of events. (1989: 13)

In order to make accessible both parts of knowledge for studying a concrete issue like technological change, an interview should meet specific criteria:

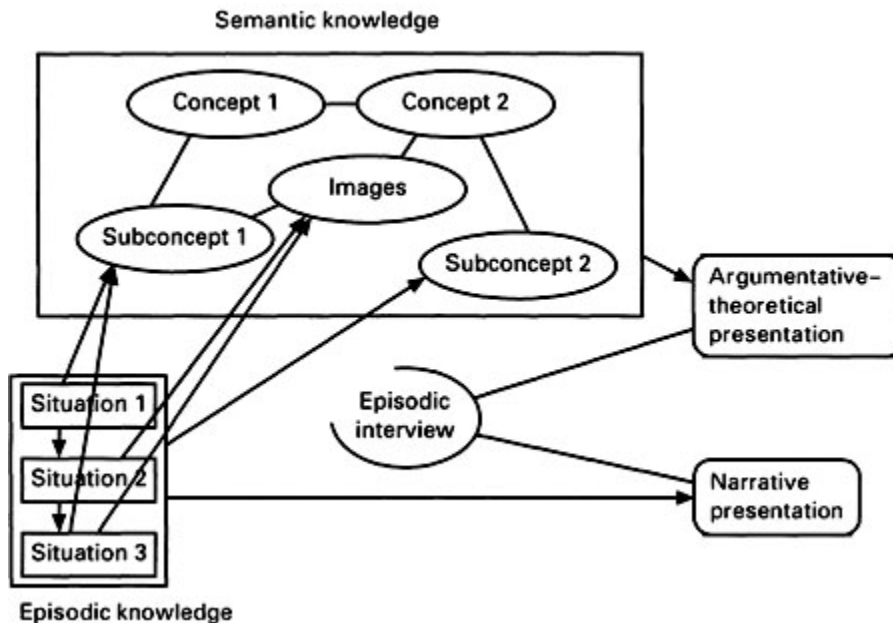
- It should combine invitations to recount concrete events (that are relevant to the issue under study) with more general questions aiming at more general answers (such as definitions, argumentation and so on) of topical relevance.
- It should mention concrete situations in which interviewees can be assumed to have had certain experiences.
- It should be open enough to allow the interviewee to select the episodes or situations he or she wants to recount, and also to decide which form of presentation he or she wants to give (for example, a narrative or a description). The point of reference should be the subjective relevance of the situation for the interviewee.

Figure 5.1 summarizes these relations on the level of knowledge and presentation.

Episodic interviewing: how to get things going

The episodic interview was created to put this conception into concrete terms. It may be outlined in nine phases, each of which is a step towards the goal of analysing the interviewee's everyday knowledge about a specific issue or domain in a way that allows us to compare the knowledge of interviewees from different social groups - that is, as a social representation. The examples given below come mainly from our study of people's understandings of technological change, but to illustrate the procedure beyond the context in which it was developed, some questions taken from a study on the social representation of health in different social groups are also used as examples.

Figure 5.1 Forms of knowledge and presentation in the episodic interview

**Phase 1: preparation of the interview**

The episodic interview is based on an interview guide in order to orient the interviewer to the topical domains for which narratives and answers are required. The interview guide may be developed from different sources: from the researcher's experience of the area under study, from theoretical accounts of this area, from other studies and their results, and from preparatory analyses of the area for relevant domains. In this step, it is important to develop a preliminary understanding of the area under study so that all relevant parts can be covered, questions can be formulated, and the guide can be left open enough to accommodate any new aspects that may emerge or be introduced by the interviewee.

In the technology study, the guide covered the following major areas of everyday life and technology (for more details, see below). The general first part of the interview focuses on the interviewee's 'technology biography' and the 'mechanization of his/her everyday life'. In the central part of the interview, the focus is on particular technologies - in this study, computers and television. Then, more general topics related to technological change are mentioned again: questions refer to consequences of technological change, to responsibility (for change and consequences), to trust, and to fears concerning technologies.

It has proved to be useful to examine the guide and the questions in one or two test interviews. If several interviewers are working on the same study, or if the interview is used in the context of research seminars with students, the interview training is a useful way of checking and learning the principle of the interview, the crucial questions, and the principle of situation narratives.

Phase 2: introducing the interview principle

The first part of the actual interview is the instruction of the interviewee. To make the interview work, it is important to explain the principle of the questions to the interviewee, and to familiarize him or her with this

principle. The interview may be introduced by a sentence such as:

In this interview, I will ask you repeatedly to recount situations in which you have had certain experiences with ... (e.g. technology in general or specific technologies).

It is extremely important to take care over this introduction, and to check whether the interviewee has understood and accepted its message.

Phase 3: the interviewee's concept of the issue, and his/her biography in relation to it

To introduce the topic, the interviewee is first asked for their subjective definition of the issue in questions such as:

What does 'technology' mean for you? What do you associate with the word 'technology'?

or

What is 'health' for you? What is related to the word 'health' for you?

Then, the interviewee's path into the field under study is constructed by asking them to recall the first encounter they can remember with the issue under study:

When you look back, what was your first experience with technology? Could you please tell me about it?

or:

When you look back and remember, when did you first think about health? Could you please tell me about that?

In questions like these, the main principle of the episodic interview is applied: to ask the interviewee to remember a specific situation and to recount it. Which situation he or she remembers or selects in order to respond to this invitation is not fixed by the interviewer. This decision may be used in the later analysis, for example to compare the interviewee's degrees of proximity to the issue under study. The route through the interviewee's personal history with the issue is then pursued by asking for particularly important or meaningful relevant experiences:

What was your most relevant experience or contact with technology? Could you please tell me about that situation?

or:

What was your most significant experience of health? Could you please tell me about that situation?

Here again, it is the interviewee's subjective relevance that determines which technology and which situation he or she talks about. Whether an interviewee refers to keeping healthy or to a bout of more or less severe

illness is his or her decision. Later these priorities go into the comparative analysis of the different cases. Especially in interviews where an indirect access to the issue (such as health) is chosen by the interviewee, a refocusing may be indicated. Then the interviewer should continue by asking:

There are times when we feel more healthy than at other times. Could you please tell me about a situation in which you felt particularly healthy?

or:

When does health become an issue for you? Could you please tell me about a situation of that kind?

Phase 4: the meaning of the issue for the interviewee's everyday life

The next part of the interview aims at clarifying the role of the issue in the interviewee's everyday life. In order to enter this realm, the interviewee is first asked to recount a day with reference to the issue:

Could you please tell me how your day went yesterday, and where and when technology played a part in it?

or:

Could you please recount how your day went yesterday, and when health played a role in it?

This kind of question aims at collecting narratives of a chain of relevant situations. Then those areas of everyday life that are regarded as relevant for analysing the issue are mentioned in greater detail. There the interviewer can choose one of several different strategies. In the technology study, we asked people whether they thought that technology had become more important in their lives these days:

If you look at your life, do you have the impression that technologies today play a bigger role in it than they did before? Could you please recount a situation for me in which technology takes up more room than it did before?

Then the interviewees were asked various questions about areas of their everyday life that are free of technology, and areas that they wished were free of technology; and about areas where they wanted more or better technologies. They were also asked to describe situations to exemplify their answers for the interviewer.

In this study, areas such as the household, work and leisure were mentioned in sequence. For each of these areas a question like this was asked:

If you look at your household, what role does technology play in it, and what has changed here? Could you please tell me about a situation that is an example of that?

In the health study, the domains to explore were 'everyday life and household' and 'work and leisure':

If you think of food, what role does health play in this context for you? Please tell me about a typical situation.

or:

Who in your household or family takes care of health? Please tell me about a typical situation.

These questions help the interviewee to reflect on the general meaning and relevance of the issue for different aspects of his or her everyday life.

Phase 5: focusing the central parts of the issue under study

The next part of the interview concentrates on the key aspect of the issue as defined by the actual research question of the study. In the technology example, the study focused not only on technology in general, but especially on computers and television as key technologies that have produced changes in everyday lives. Here again, the interviewee's subjective definition of each technology was mentioned first:

What do you associate today with the word 'computer'?

Which devices do you count as computers?

The interviewee's first encounter with each technology is the next step to mention for each technology:

If you look back, what was your first encounter with a computer? Could you please recount that situation for me?

These questions are followed by several other questions focusing on the use of computers in different areas of everyday life. The same procedure follows for television:

What do you associate with the word 'television' today?

If you look back, what was your first encounter with television? Could you please recount that situation for me?

What part does television play in your life today? Could you please recount a situation that makes this clear for me?

How do you decide if and when to watch TV? Could you please recount a situation that makes this clear for me?

In the health study, the central focus was on the interviewee's dealing with prevention and intervention in questions as:

Do you avoid situations that are risky for your health?

Please recount a situation in which you avoided a danger to your health.

What do you do if you don't feel well? Please recount a typical situation.

What do you expect from your doctor with regard to your health? Please recount a typical situation.

This phase of the interview aims to elaborate the interviewee's personal relationship to its central issue. The questions just given as examples open the doors to the interviewee's personal experiences. A main task of the interviewer is to respond with deepening enquiries to the interviewee's answers and narratives in order to make the interview as substantial and deep as possible.

Phase 6: more general relevant topics

Finally, some more general topics are mentioned in the interview, in order to enlarge the scope further. Accordingly, the interviewee is asked for more abstract relations:

In your opinion, who should be responsible for change due to technology? Who is able to take the responsibility or should take it?

or:

In your opinion, who should be responsible for your health? Who is able to or should take responsibility?

A further aspect is the interviewee's fantasies concerning expected or feared changes:

Which developments do you expect in the area of computers in the near future? Please imagine these developments, and describe for me a situation that shows them.

This part of the interview aims at elaborating the cross-situational framework knowledge that the interviewee has developed over time. As far as possible, the interviewer should try to link these general answers to the interviewee's more concrete and personal accounts given in earlier phases of the interview in order to make apparent any discrepancies and contradictions. Applications of this interview have demonstrated that in many cases discrepancies and contradictions can emerge between the more general argumentation in this phase and the personal experiences and practices that have been reported earlier.

Phase 7: evaluation and small-talk

The final part of the interview is devoted to its evaluation by the interviewee ('What was missing from the interview that could have given you an opportunity to mention your point of view?'; 'Was there anything bothering you during the interview?'). As in other interviews, it seems fruitful to add a period of small-talk to allow the interviewee to talk about relevant topics outside the explicit interview framework ('what I forgot to mention ...'; 'What I actually wanted to say ...'; 'My wife had a funny experience, I don't know if this fits in your study, but ...').

Phase 8: documentation

In order to contextualize the narratives and answers received from the interviewee, a context protocol should be written immediately after the interview. It has proved helpful to use a prepared sheet as orientation for

Criterion	Episodic interview	Critical incident technique	Focused interview	Narrative interview
Indication for using the interviews	Everyday knowledge about certain objects or processes	Comparative studies of problematic situations	Evaluation of specific stimuli (films, texts, media)	Biographical processes
Openness to the interviewee's viewpoint by:	The selection of the situations to recount Giving room for narrative	Asking for detailed accounts of incidents	The criterion of specificity	Giving room for a comprehensive narrative
Structuration of the data collection by:	The interview guide Types of questions (for definitions and for narratives)	The focus of critical incidents The orientation on facts in the events	Giving a stimulus Structured questions Focusing feelings	Generative narrative question in the beginning
Technical problems	To make the interviewee accept the concept of the interview Explication of the principle Handling the interview guide	Reduction of the data to categorization of (many) incidents	Dilemma of combining the criteria	To maintain a narrative once begun by the interview Problems in directing the narrative to the the narrative to the issue Big masses of barely structured data
Limitations	The limitation on everyday knowledge	Restricted to problematic situations	The assumption to know objective features of the object in question	More case sensitive than ready for comparisons

The critical incident technique

The critical incident technique of Flanagan (1954) may be regarded as some kind of 'historical ancestor' of the episodic interview with regard to some common intentions. This method is mainly applied for analysing professional activities and demands. The concept of the 'critical incident' on which it is based is similar to the concept of episodes and situations in the episodic interview. Differences can be seen from the following characterization:

The critical incident technique outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria. By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects. (1954: 327)

This outline shows that the critical incident technique deals with clearly defined situations with regard to

intentions and effects, which are analysed in order to draw conclusions and make assessments about the acting person. It is more the event, and less its situational context, that is in focus. Compared with this, the episodic interview allows the interviewee to decide which type of situation to mention in order to clarify a certain type of experience. Therefore, the episodic interview is more oriented towards obtaining narratives of different types of situations, rather than of situations that have been defined according to criteria fixed in advance. In an episodic interview, special attention is paid to the subjective meanings expressed in what is recounted, in order to find out the subjective and social relevance of the issue under study. The critical incident technique, on the other hand, is more interested in the facts in what is reported:

it is clear that the critical incident technique is essentially a procedure for gathering certain important facts concerning behaviour in defined situations ... The extent to which a reported observation can be accepted as a fact depends primarily on the objectivity of this observation ... It is believed that a fair degree of success has been achieved in developing procedures that will be of assistance in gathering facts in a rather objective fashion with only a minimum of inferences and interpretations of a more subjective nature. (1954: 335)

Where the episodic interview aims at *contextualizing* experiences and events from the interviewee's point of view, the critical incident technique stresses instead a *decontextualization* of the factual content of the reported events. Accordingly, huge amounts of incidents are collected with this method (up to 2000 events in one study), which are classified and reduced afterwards. In the centre is

the classification of the critical incidents ... Once a classification system has been developed for any given type of critical incidents, a fairly satisfactory degree of objectivity can be achieved in placing the incidents in the defined categories. (1954: 335)

More recently Wilpert and Scharpf used the critical incident technique to analyse problems in the contact between German and Chinese managers:

The interviews relied mainly on the Critical Incident Technique ... whereby managers were asked to report particularly problematic incidents as detailed as possible. (1990: 645)

Here again, the factual events in the reports are more in focus than they are in the episodic interview. Furthermore, Flanagan's method is in general more restricted to a specific fragment of experience - particularly problematic events - which is justified in the research in which it is applied. The episodic interview is more open in this respect, because it focuses not only on problematic situations, but also on positive, surprising, satisfying, etc. situations: an issue like technological change does not necessarily have to be reduced to its problematic aspects. The episodic interview gives space to the interviewee's subjectivities and interpretations in the principle of situational narratives; it does not reduce and classify them immediately, but instead discovers the context of meaning in what is recounted.

The focused interview

The focused interview may be seen as a prototype of semi-structured interviews. Some of its principles and criteria for successful application (see Merton and Kendall, 1946) are also relevant for the episodic interview.

The criterion of *non-direction* was a guideline for the decision not to confront interviewees for reasons of a higher comparability and standardization with given situations, but instead to ask them to select and recount those situations that seem for them particularly relevant to a particular topic.

The criterion of *specificity* is put into concrete terms when the interviewee is asked to recount situations, and as far as possible situations in which he or she has had specific experiences. It is his or her decision whether and how far to take up the invitation to give a detailed narrative, and whether this criterion can be met in the interview. Merton and Kendall define their criterion as follows:

Subjects' definition of the situation should find full and specific expression. (1946: 545)

The same is the case for the criterion of *range*: in episodic interviews no specific area of experience is defined for which one narrative is stimulated (as in the narrative interview of Schütze, for example: see below). Rather, the interviewee is asked for narratives of relevant situations coming from a variety of everyday areas. This comes closer to the criterion of Merton and Kendall, who postulate:

The interview should maximize the range of evocative stimuli and responses reported by the subject.
(1946: 545)

Finally, the episodic interview also tries to meet the fourth criterion of Merton and Kendall by focusing on situations:

Depth and personal context: the interview should bring out the affective and value-laden implications of the subjects' responses, to determine whether the experience had central or peripheral significance. (1946: 545)

Again, the embedding of information to be collected in its context across narrative stimuli offers a way of meeting this criterion.

The narrative interview

The narrative interview was developed by the German sociologist Fritz Schütze (1977; see Riemann and Schütze, 1987; Bauer, 1996; Flick, 1998a: Chapter 9). Here, the following principle is applied:

In the narrative interview, the informant is asked to present, in an extempore narrative, the history of an area of interest in which the interviewee participated ... The interviewer's task is to make the informant tell the story of the area of interest in question as a consistent story of all relevant events from its beginning to its end. (Hermanns, 1995: 183)

After one 'generative narrative question' (Riemann and Schütze, 1987: 353), the interviewee is expected to recount in a long, extensive, extempore narrative his or her history with the issue under study - mostly his or

her (professional or illness) biography. The interviewer's task is to refrain from any directive intervention once the narrative has started, until a clear signal (a coda) is given that the interviewee has arrived at the end of his story. Only then should the interviewer try to lead the interviewee back to aspects he or she has not yet narrated in full detail, and to try to make him or her take up these parts again and recount the missing details. Only in the very last part of the interview is the interviewer allowed to ask non-narrative questions. The quality of the data is assessed mainly by answering the question of whether and to what extent they are narrative data. Basic assumptions underlying the method are that the interviewee - once he or she has accepted the setting and has begun to narrate - will be driven not only to finish the story but also to tell true facts:

In the narrative-retrospective edition of experiences, events in the life history (whether actions or natural phenomena) are reported on principle in the way they were experienced by the narrator as actor. (Schütze, 1976: 197)

This strength is attributed to narratives differently from other forms of interview. Narratives obtained with the narrative interview can be extremely long (up to 16 hours in some cases) and rather difficult to orient towards specific experiences and issues. This produces problems in the interpretation of data and in comparing data from different cases. Its strength is that it produces rather complex and comprehensive versions of the subjective views of interviewees. The episodic interview is more oriented towards small-scale situation-based narratives, and it is therefore easier to focus on the data collection. It refrains from claims for 'true' data and focuses instead on constructive and interpretive achievements by the interviewees. It does not give priority to one sort of data, as the narrative interview does with narrative data, but uses the advantages of different forms of data - episodic and semantic knowledge, and narrative and argumentative expressions.

Only answers? Good and bad use of episodic interviews

The episodic interview reveals its advantages over other methods especially when the interviewer receives many rich and detailed narratives. A bad application is one in which the interview generates only answers that name topics, rather than recounting narratives.

There are different types of situations that may characterize the response of the interviewee. The following examples illustrating these different types of situations are taken from the technology study mentioned above.

Types of situations in the episodic interview

The first and main type is the *episode*, that is a particular event or situation the interviewee remembers. In the following example, the interviewee recounts how he learnt to ride a bicycle:

Well, I can remember, the day, when I learnt biking, my parents put me on the bicycle, one of these small children's bikes, sent me off, it was not that long, that I went by myself, my father gave me a push and let me off, and then I continued to ride until the parking lot ended and then I fell on my nose ... I believe this is the first event I can remember.

A second type is *repisodes*, that is representations of repeated episodes (in the sense of Neisser, 1981):

a situation that occurs repeatedly. One interviewee was asked for a situation that made clear the factors affecting his decisions to watch television, and he replied:

Really the only time when television has a particular relevance for me is New Year's Day, because I am so struck, that I can do nothing else but watching TV, well I have been doing this for years, spending New Year's Day in front of the TV.

A third type is *historical situations*, referring to some specific event. One interviewee referred to Chernobyl when he was asked for his most relevant experience with technology:

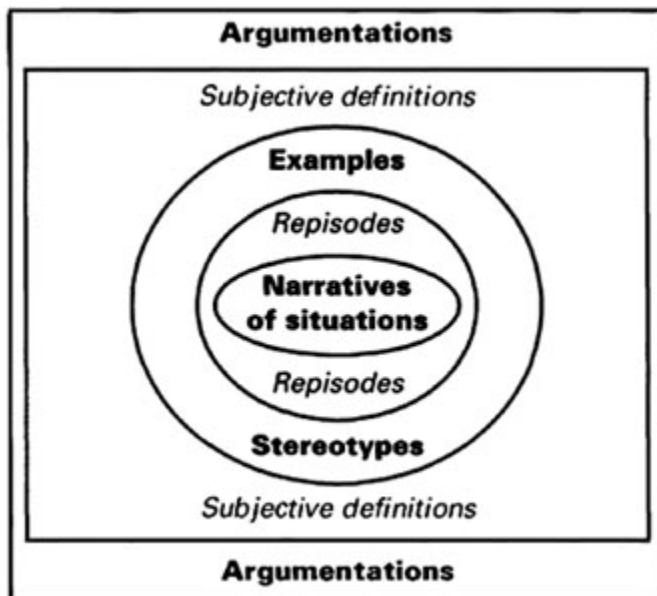
Probably, well the reactor catastrophe at Chernobyl, because that has intrigued rather decisively the lives of many people, that made it clear for me the first time, how much one is at the mercy of technologies.

Types of data in the episodic interview

Applications have shown that the episodic interview generates not only recollections of these different types of situations, but also the following different types of data (see Figure 5.3):

- *situation narratives* on different levels of concreteness
- *repisodes* as regularly occurring situations, no longer based on a clear local and temporal reference
- *examples*, which are abstracted from concrete situations, and metaphors, also ranging to clichés and stereotypes
- the subjective *definitions* (of technology or health) explicitly asked for
- linked to these, *argumentative-theoretical statements*, e.g. explanations of concepts and their relations.

Figure 5.3 Types of data in the episodic interview



Quality indicators in episodic interviews

The quality of interviews cannot be judged simply by applying criteria such as reliability and validity in their traditional sense (for more detail see Flick, 1998a: Chapters 11 and 18). But some aspects of quality are closely linked to these criteria. The *reliability* of episodic interviews can be increased by the interview training mentioned above, and by a detailed analysis of the test interviews or the first interview. A second step towards greater reliability of the data obtained with the episodic interview is a detailed and careful documentation of the interview and of the context of what has been said and recounted. The third step is a careful transcription of the whole interview. *Validity* of the data may be increased by introducing a step of *communicative validation*, in which the interviewee is shown the data and/or interpretations resulting from his or her interview so that he or she may consent, reject or correct them. His or her consensus then is a criterion for the validity of the data. Finally, the episodic interview is in itself an attempt to put into concrete terms the idea of within-method *triangulation* (Denzin, 1989; see also Flick, 1992) by combining different approaches (of narrative and argumentative type) to the issue under study in order to raise the quality of data, interpretations and results.

STEPS IN EPISODIC INTERVIEWING

1 Prepare an interview guide based on a pre-analysis of the field under study. Run test interviews and interview training. Prepare a documentation sheet for the context of the interview. Does the interview guide cover the area under study? Did the interviewer(s) internalize the principle of the interview? Does the documentation sheet cover the information relevant for the research question?

2 Prepare a good introduction for the interviewee, and pay attention to its clarification to the interviewee. Did the interviewee understand and accept the principle of the interview?

3 Prepare questions for subjective definitions of relevant concepts. Prepare questions covering relevant steps in the interviewee's personal history with the issue or the field under study. Pay attention to any point where a deepening enquiry is needed. Do the questions touch relevant aspects of the subjective meanings for the interviewee? Are the questions oriented towards narratives of (relevant) situations? Did the interviewer enforce the narrative principle of the interview and ask additional questions to bring more depth into the interview?

4 Try to cover relevant areas of the interviewee's everyday life. Are questions heading for situation narratives? Are they open enough for the unexpected?

5 Try to get into the detail of the central parts of the issue under study. Try to increase the depth and richness of the interviewee's responses by additional enquiries. Has the

interviewee gone into details and depth? Has the interviewer been sensitive for any extra depth on which to focus?

6 Try to avoid too general reasoning without any personal or situational reference in the interviewee's responses. Has the interviewer managed to lead the interviewee's responses back to the level of personal concerns?

7 Evaluation and small-talk: make room for some conversation, for critique and for additional aspects. Were additional aspects mentioned?

8 Use the documentation sheet, and make a good tape recording and a detailed transcription. Is all additional information (not on the tape) documented?

9 Choose an appropriate method for coding and interpreting the narratives and answers. Does the method take the quality of the data into account (e.g. the narrative structure of accounts)?

UweFlick

References

Bauer, M.(1996) 'The narrative interview - comments on a technique for qualitative data collection', in *Papers in Social Research Methods - Qualitative Series*, Vol. 1.London: London School of Economics, Methodology Institute.

Bruner, J. *'Life as narrative'* 54(1987)11–32.

Denzin, N.K.(1989) *The Research Act*, 3rd edn.Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Flanagan, J.C. *'The critical incident technique'* 51(1954)327–58.

Flick, U. *Triangulation revisited - strategy of or alternative to validation of qualitative data'* 22(2)(1992)175–97.

Flick, U.(1996) *Psychologie des technisierten Alltags - Soziale Konstruktion und Repräsentation technischen Wandels in verschiedenen kulturellen Kontexten*.Opladen: Westdeutscher.

Flick, U.(1998a) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*.London: Sage.

Edited by: **Flick, U.** (ed.) **(1998b)** *Psychology of the Social*.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hermanns, H.(1995) 'Narratives interview', in Edited by: **U. Flick, E. von Kardorff, H. Keupp, L. von**

Rosenstiel and **S. Wolff** (eds), *Handbuch Qualitative Sozialforschung*. Munich: Psychologie Verlags Union. pp. 182–5.

James, W.(1893) *The Principles of Psychology*(1950).New York: Dover.

Merton, R.K. Kendall, PL. *'The focused interview'* 51(1946)541–57.

Moscovici, S. *'Notes towards a description of social representation'* 22(3)(1988)211–50.

Neisser, U. *'John Dean's memory: a case study'* 9(1)(1981)1–22.

Polkinghorne, D.(1988) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*.Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Ricoeur, P(1984) *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1.Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Riemann, G. and Schütze, F.(1987) *Trajectory as a basic theoretical concept for analysing suffering and disorderly social processes'*, in Edited by: **D. Maines** (ed.), *Social Organisation and Social Process - Essays in Honor of Anselm Strauss*.New York: Aldine de Gruyter. pp. 333–57.

Riesmann, C.K.(1993) *Narrative Analysis*.London: Sage.

Robinson, J.A. and Hawpe, L.(1986) *'Narrative thinking as a heuristic process'*, in Edited by: **T.R. Sarbin** (ed.), *Narrative Psychology - the Storied Nature of Human Conduct*.New York: Praeger. pp. 111–84.

Edited by: **Sarbin, T.R.** (ed.) (1986) *Narrative Psychology - the Storied Nature of Human Conduct*.New York: Praeger.

Schütze, F.(1976) *'Zur Hervorlockung und Analyse von Erzählungen thematisch relevanter Geschichten im Rahmen soziologischer Feldforschung'*, in Edited by: **Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen** (eds), *Kommunikative Sozialforschung*.Munich: Fink. pp. 159–260.

Schütze, F.(1977) *'Die Technik des narrativen Interviews in Interaktionsfeldstudien, dargestellt an einem Projekt zur Erforschung von kommunalen Machtstrukturen'*. Manuskript der Universität Bielefeld, Fakultät für Soziologie.

Strauss, AL.(1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, AL. and Corbin, J.(1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research*.London: Sage.

Strube, G. *'Episodisches Wissen'* 385(1989)10–26.

Tulving, E.(1972) *'Episodic and semantic memory'*, in Edited by: **E. Tulving and W. Donaldson** (eds), *Organization of Memory*.New York: Academic Press. pp. 381–403.

Wilpert, B. Scharpf, S.Y. *'Intercultural management - joint ventures in the People's Republic of China'*
25(1990)643–56.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849209731.n5>