Doing Interviews

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Why do we do interviews?

- Two reasons and we will discuss both in this session
- To get information you can’t get anywhere else (including checking your hypotheses)
- To get color and quotes that will flesh out your writing.
- Knowing what you want and why you are there will help you structure your interviews. Interviews can be spontaneous and free flowing but you also need to keep control of the conversation.
- They are fun and interesting and a good way to get to know someone.
- Reading up on a subject is no substitute for body language and intonation and seeing someone in their own milieu.
Your hypotheses

- A large part of research (and otherwise) is based on trying to find out whether your hypotheses have any basis to them.
- The interview is often a place to quickly check whether this is the case.
- This is true of all the qualitative questions like “are attitudes shifting?” “Did people think this project changed the way they think about X”.
- Interviews can help you qualify your views, lend nuance to your findings and give you a back story and reasons you may not have thought of. (disaster reporting)
- Doesn’t mean what you hear is true, of course.
Put your request in _early_

• It’s very hard to get interviews, especially if the person is overseas.
• Reluctance
• Being busy
• Scheduling
• Put your requests in first thing. You can always decide later what you want to ask.
• Find out the best way to contact people, fax, phone, email, assistant.
• Use any contacts you can muster. If everyone agrees, it is ok to mention other people you have interviewed as this will establish your credibility.
• Ask for an hour but take less time. (30 minutes usually ok, even 20 will do if you are well prepared)
• In person the best, skype/phone acceptable, email the worst. Don’t do it.
• Great if you can go to their turf.
When you are surveying

- You can use Survey Monkey and fill in the answers as you go
- Keep questions clear.
- Don’t have too many.
- Avoid jargon and acronym as the person you are surveying may not know what you are referring to.
- Make sure the range of responses is not too overwhelming. Avoid having 7 different nuanced choices.
- Don’t ask two things in the same question ie “do you do X and Y” as you may not know what their answer refers to.
- Lots of info on surveying online
  
  http://www.surveysystem.com/sdesign.htm
Preparation

- The interview may be your one chance to get to someone so don’t waste it.
- Don’t insult them by asking them something really basic.
- Go in with a clear idea of what you want and with a deep knowledge of the subject.
- Don’t waste time asking for information you can get anywhere else

Exceptions: 1) You want to make him/her feel comfortable by starting off with something easy
2) You want to see if s/he agrees with everyone else you have spoken to.
The interview setting

• Ideally, somewhere quiet and private.
• Bring a notebook or laptop and a recording device. But you still want to make eye contact.
• Get permission to record and try not to be obtrusive.
• You must take notes. Relying only on your recording is a terrible idea.
• Since you know what you want to get, listen for it and make a note as soon as it comes up. (Star your notes and write down where on the recording it is).
• Bring lots of paper and pens/pencils, even colored pens or highlighters.
Keep control

- Fine to start with simple questions or some basic fact checking (spelling of their name and title)
- The beginning is also when you clarify the ground rules. Never at the end.
- Structure your questions so there is a narrative arc but don’t be a slave to your questions.
- Group the questions in a logical and organized way
- Make sure you have them in front of you. Don’t rustle around looking for them.
- Don’t ask too many questions.
- Don’t ask really long questions that your interviewee won’t be able to follow. This is not about your opinions. It’s about getting info.
- Don’t ask yes/no questions unless you want a yes/no answer.
- Listen carefully to the answers and adapt accordingly. Don’t miss something because you were too busy racing through your list.
- “Markers” described in the reading.
- Let the interview flow but don’t let it get off track
Being a good listener

- Be encouraging and affirmative
- Don’t talk too much. (This is not about you)
- Don’t put words into people’s mouths
- Don’t exaggerate for the sake of making your comments more interesting.
- Ask for clarification if you don’t understand something.
- Be clear on ground rules, quoting, attribution, fact checking.
- Make sure you know how to reach him later for more info. (Does he have a cell, skype or an assistant? Will he be available or is he going out of the country soon?)
Select Interview Questions

- Have you noticed a new emphasis on M&E? What impact has it had?
- How does your organization determine the impact of a specific intervention? What is considered to be a success? Failure? What are the complicating factors in determining impact?
- What specific tools do you use to carry out M&E? Reporting templates? Surveys? Focus groups?
- Do you have any examples you can share with us?
- How do you decide what to fund in media development? What role do M&E play?
- What are the forward-looking trends in the M&E of media development?
What do you notice about these Q?

- Open ended
- Shedding light on processes and thinking so will hopefully elicit some sort of answer that will illuminate their thinking.
- Non threatening
- Ask for examples
- End with something forward looking
- Also fine to end by asking if there is anything important that you forgot to ask
After the interview

- Don’t leave anything for later, such as filling in the survey. The interviewee won’t do it or will do it late and you will have to remind him/her.
- Go home and type up your notes immediately without exception. This is non-negotiable.
- If you delay you will forget the nuances and the missing words.
- You won’t be able to read your handwriting.
- Typing up will let you see immediately what you are missing or what you need to check so you can get it.
- If you delay then your interviewee may also forget what s/he told you.
- S/he may also start to regret something s/he said.
Using quotes

- As you write up your interview, you can highlight the good parts.
- The rule is to use quotes to say the good stuff, the entertaining parts and the color, the stuff you could not say.
- Paraphrase the rest.
- Eg don’t quote the CEO saying “sales were up 12% in the last quarter to 12.5 million dollars.”
- Quote her saying “this was a fantastic quarter when you think of what a mess the US economy is in right now.” [cut the right now]
An example

- In contrast, journalists who had more economics training and less journalism experience gained better writing skills as a result of the training. Journalist # 3, with three years as an economic journalist and university education, said he learned to discuss the effect of macro-economic issues on real people’s lives. He cited a piece he wrote on the impact of the price increase for rice using interviews with rice farmers as an example. Journalist # 7 agrees: “I used to say the petrol price went up by this much, but now I ask people what it means to them, so readers know what it means for the Senegalese.”
Trainees’ opinions were overwhelmingly positive, not just about the ICF-Reuters trainings, but the role of journalism trainings in general. In an optional response section of the online survey that two thirds of respondents answered, all mentioned the lack training in economics and journalism as principle challenges facing business journalists in their countries. In a personal interview, Journalist #1 describes eloquently the central role that trainings can play in such an environment: “Here in Africa, especially West Africa, journalism schools are too expensive, and journalists learn through internships on the job. We’re not trained. We need training to know how to allow the public to understand economics well.”
Example

- Journalist #6, who had had the opportunity to attend journalism school, was equally positive about the role of trainings. Newspapers editors, unlike professors, he says, don’t monitor you, which means it’s difficult to improve. “I’m someone who doesn’t let go of my work quickly, I want to make it better,” he says, and trainings help fill the void.
Another example

- What is different about how this quote is presented/used?

- Jo Weir of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, a charity that offers journalism training and legal assistance around the world, reiterates this demand – with a dose of skepticism: “Yes, I have seen a new emphasis on M&E over the last few years. Whether all of it is meaningful or not is another question, but clearly donors are looking for M&E. Doing more M&E is often at the expense of having to do less of the actual media development.”
Alternative views

Other donors, however, caution this sort of measurement only works for certain kinds of projects, for example a project where the goal is to give vaccines or hand out bed nets without coming back later to see if they are being used. Funders working on areas such as strengthening governance and democracy say gathering quantitative data does not actually reveal very much. “Many newly arrived to philanthropy from successful business backgrounds confuse quantitative measures with impact. In business, activity does have to boil down to the bottom line; in social activity, change is measured in lives changed in ways not always measurable: disease prevented, children engaged with their education, or conflicts avoided,” says Drummond Pike, founder and former CEO of the California-based Tides Foundation. Other foundation leaders make the same point in informal conversations held over the last few months. It's worth noting that in his new book on philanthropy, *My Philanthropy* (Public Affairs, 2011) George Soros, describing his philosophy and that of his deputy Arieh Neier, wrote "neither of us believes in quantitative measures for evaluating projects." Despite the debate over how much emphasis to place on quantifiable metrics, most donors feel strongly that measuring impact to demonstrate project success is crucial to the media development field.
Checking quotes

- Journalists in reputable US media outlets would probably not be allowed to show quotes in advance or show stories in advance either.
- But for the purposes of these projects you are students and so I would say it’s ok to do it. (again agree in advance what the rules are).
- OK to clean up the quotes before you show them.
- Above all, you want to be accurate.
- You can show the quotes and check the facts.