Research Methods for Business Students

Chapter 9

Tang Weijun (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)
Contact

Tang Weijun
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

E-mail: wj.tang@yahoo.com.cn

URL: http://www.drtang.org/
Learning points

- Able to classify research interviews in order to help you to understand the purpose of each type.
- Aware of research situations favoring the use of semi-structured and in-depth interviews, and their limitations.
- Able to analyze potential data quality issues and evaluate how to overcome these.
- Able to consider the development of your competence to undertake semi-structured and in-depth interviews, and the logistical and resource issues that affect their use.
- Aware of particular issues and advantages associated with the use of group interviews and those conducted by telephone.
9.1 Introduction

- The use of interviews can help you to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to your research question and objectives.
- In reality, the research interview is a general term for several types of interview.
9.2 types of interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

- Types of interview:
  - Structured interviews
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Unstructured interviews
9.2 types of interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

- Structured interviews use questionnaires based on a predetermined and standardized or identical set of questions.
- In semi-structured interviews the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be covered, although these may vary from interview to interview.
- Unstructured interviews are informal. You would use to explore in depth a general area in which you are interested.
9.2 types of interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

- Each type of interview has a different purpose.
- Structured or standardized interviews can be used in survey research to gather data, which will then be the subject of quantitative analysis.
- Semi-structured and in-depth discussions not only to reveal and understand the “what” and the “how” but also to place emphasis on exploring the “why”.
9.2 types of interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

- Your research may incorporate more than one type of interview.
- Uses of different types of interview in each of the main research categories
  - See table 9.1 in page 248
- We can see that the various types of interview have a number of potentially valuable uses in terms of undertaking your research project.
9.3 Situations favoring qualitative research interviews

- The nature of the approach to research
- The significance of establishing personal contact.
- The nature of the data collection questions
- Length of time required and completeness of the process
9.3 Situations favoring qualitative research interviews

- The nature of the approach to research
  - Where you are undertaking an exploratory study, or a study that includes and exploratory elements, it is likely that you will include qualitative research interviews in your approach.
  - Semi-structured and in-depth interviews also provide you with the opportunity to “probe” answers, where you want your interviewees to explain, or build on, their responses.
9.3 Situations favoring qualitative research interviews

- The significance of establishing personal contact.
  - We have found that managers are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire, especially where the interview topic is seen to be interesting and relevant to their current work.
  - Potential research participants who receive a questionnaire through the post may be reluctant to complete it for a number of reasons.
9.3 Situations favoring qualitative research interviews

- The nature of the data collection questions
  - Where there are a large number of questions to be answered.
  - Where the questions are either complex or open-ended.
  - Where the order and logic of questioning may need to be varied.
9.3 Situations favoring qualitative research interviews

- **Length of time required and completeness of the process**
  - The needed to obtain the required data may mean that an interview is in any case the best or only alternative.
  - Your aim will be obtain answers to all of the questions that you ask, allowing for the right of participants to decline to respond to any question, and where you conduct the event skillfully an interview is more likely to achieve this than the use of a self-administered or telephone questionnaire.
9.4 Data quality issues and how to overcome them

- Data quality issues
  - Reliability
  - Forms of bias
  - Validity and generalisability
9.4 Data quality issues and how to overcome them

- Overcoming data quality issues
  - Reliability
    - Using a qualitative, non-standardised approach, i.e. to transform an aspect perceived to be a weakness by some into a strength based on realistic assumptions about the ability to replicate research findings.
9.4 Data quality issues and how to overcome them

- Overcoming data quality issues
  - Interviewer and interviewee bias
    - Preparation and readiness for the interview
    - Level of information supplied to the interviewee
    - Appropriateness of the researcher’s appearance at the interview
    - Nature of the opening comments to be made when the interview commences
    - Approach to questioning
9.4 Data quality issues and how to overcome them

- Overcoming data quality issues
  - Interviewer and interviewee bias
    - Nature and impact of the interviewer’s behavior during the course of the interview
    - Demonstration of attentive listening skills
    - Scope of test understanding
    - Approach to recording data
    - Cultural differences and bias
9.4 Data quality issues and how to overcome them

- Overcoming data quality issues
  - Generalisability
    - Two arguments
    - The first relates to the situation where a single case study is used because of the in-depth nature of the research.
    - The second relates to the significance of this type of research to theoretical propositions.
9.5 The researcher’s interviewing competence

- Opening the interview
- Using appropriate language
- Questioning
- Listening
- Testing and summarizing understanding
- Behavioral cues
- Recording data
9.5 The researcher’s interviewing competence

- Questioning
  - Open questions
    - An open question is designed to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and developmental answer, and may be used to reveal attitudes or obtain facts.
  - Probing questions
    - Probing questions can be used to explore responses that are of significance to the research topic. They may be worded like open questions but request a particular focus or direction.
9.5 The researcher’s interviewing competence

- Questioning
  - Specific and closed questions
    - These types of question may be used to obtain specific information or to confirm a fact or opinion, and are more generally used in questionnaires.
9.5 The researcher’s interviewing competence

- Recording information
  - The task of note making is a demanding one. So you can use tape-recording.
  - Advantages and disadvantages of tape-recording the interview.
    - See box 9.2 in page 264
  - Permission should always be sought to tape-record an interview.
  - Where a recorder is used, it will still be necessary for you to continue to listen attentively.
9.6 Logistical and resource issues and how to manage

- Logistical and resource issues
  - Interviewing is a time-consuming process.
  - Your choice of an approach that involves data collection through interviewing will have particular resource issues.
9.6 Logistical and resource issues and how to manage

- Managing logistical and resource issues
  - You need to consider very carefully the amount of time that will be required to conduct an interview.
  - Arranging two or more shorter interviews in order to explore a topic thoroughly.
  - Consideration also needs to be given to the number of interviews that may be undertaken in a given period.
  - These are all factors that need to be considered in the scheduling of semi-structured and in-depth interviews.
9.7 a checklist for using semi-structured and in-depth interviews

- checklist for using semi-structured and in-depth interviews
  ➢ See box 9.3 in page 267
9.8 A final word about telephone and group interviews

### Telephone interviews

- Attempting to conduct qualitative interviews by telephone may lead to advantages associated with access, speed and lower cost.

- However, there are a number of significant issues that militate against attempting to collect qualitative data by telephone contact.

- There are also some other practical issues that would need to be managed.

- We believe that qualitative interviewing by telephone is likely to be appropriate only in particular circumstances.
9.8 A final word about telephone and group interviews

- **Group interviews**
  - In a group interview you will act as a facilitator or moderator of the discussion that occurs. This type of interview is likely to be relatively unstructured and fairly free-flowing.
  - Group interviews can also be used to identify key themes that will be used to develop items that are included in a survey questionnaire.
  - Some specific issues about using group interviews:
    - See *the 6 points in pp 271-272*
9.9 Summary

- The use of qualitative research interviews should allow you to collect a rich and detailed set of data, although you will need to develop a sufficient level of competence to conduct these and to be able to gain access to the type of data associated with their use.
- Interviews can be differentiated according to the level of structure and standardisation adopted. Different types of interviews are useful for different research purposes.
9.9 Summary

- Qualitative interviews include two broad types that are generally referred to as unstructured or in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews. You can use qualitative interviews to explore topics and explain other findings.
- You research design may incorporate more than one type of interview.
- In-depth and semi-structured interviews can be used in quantitative as well as qualitative research.
9.9 Summary

- There are situations favoring qualitative interviews that will lead you to use this method to collect data.
- Data quality issues, your level of competence and logistical and resource matters will all need to be considered when you use in-depth and semi-structured interviews.
- Apart from one-to-one interviews conducted on a face-to-face basis, you may consider conducting such an interview by telephone in particular circumstance. In addition, you may consider using group interviews.
The End
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THANK YOU!

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