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Planning the Qualitative Research Interview

by

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Abstract

This working paper discusses a method for planning the qualitative research interview. The paper briefly considers the variety of purposes for which the interview is used and focuses on increasing the rigour of the investigative interview as a qualitative research technique. A range of dimensions which can be found in any number of interviews are described. A model is presented for dealing with the way in which these dimensions are taken into account in the planning of the qualitative interview. The research context is the determining factor in selecting which dimensions are to be focussed upon and when analysing the degree to which any one of them can impact on any given qualitative interview.

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Introduction

A key feature of the qualitative research interview is the nature of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. ...the qualitative researcher believes that there can be no such thing as a relationship-free interview. Indeed the relationship is part of the research process, not a distraction from it. The interviewee is seen as a 'participant' in the research, actively shaping the course of the interview rather than passively responding to the interviewer's pre-set questions. (King, 1994:15).

The qualitative research interview is a data collection tool which is pivotal to the qualitative research endeavour (Morgan, 1988). Qualitative researchers, because of the subjective nature of the research are stimulated to rigorously improve standards against which the interview process can be measured. This working paper is designed to put in place some strategies for demonstrating the rigour that can be brought to the interview process, especially in the planning stages.

Theoretical Construct for Qualitative Research Interviewing

Traditionally the methods of inquiry dominating research have been bounded in the 'scientific method' and developed within the 'classical model of rationality' or 'instrumental rationality' (Hargreaves Heap et al, 1992). The scientific paradigm as the universal view holds that there is a single, tangible reality which remains undisturbed by the inquiry taking place around it. The resulting body of knowledge is irrefutable and value free. It can be generalised and the results reproduced in other contexts with predictive confidence (Guba, 1985:83). A quantitative study is based on the assumption that there is a reality to be apprehended and captured in factual form. Research interviews based on this assumption may aim to clarify facts, describe events, measure the extent of positive and negative attitudes, verify existing or predicated data. This approach is both desirable and efficient when data being collected is concrete and factual. The benefits of neutrality can be gained.

The 'non-scientific' approach to the 'science' of inquiry does not espouse the neutrality of the researcher. The researcher's involvement in the research context is as an active agent. In contrast to the more scientific and objective approach, the inquiry is value bound in both the

research context and the inquirer. (Guba, 1985:85). The research context will embrace multiple constructions of reality. These are not visible, explicit, factual and apprehendable in an objective sense and the interview is used to a subjective and unique end.

The differentiation between the two orientations of inquiry, the 'scientific' and the 'non-scientific', are to be found as early as Aristotle. In his discussion of 'practical sense' he says,

Successful deliberation is the main function of the man with practical sense. The man who deliberates successfully is able to make a reasoned aim at the greatest good that man can attain through action. Practical sense is not concerned just with universals as the man of science is concerned; it has to know particulars too. It is concerned with actions that have to do with particulars (Wise, 1979).

The qualitative researcher seeks to understand both the world as it is, and the social world at the level of subjective experience (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:29; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The qualitative research interview is an effective way of 'getting inside' the thoughts of a number of subjects and so examining how they each see the reality under discussion and the meaning that they construe around that perceived reality. Weber (1978:4) refers to meaning as either in the concrete or subjective case. While not everyone involved in the transfer of subjective meaning will have the same experiential basis on which to draw for establishing subjective meaning, Brand (1990:34) explains that communicative action (in this case the qualitative research interview) 'does not draw on explicit knowledge' but 'takes place against the background of an enormous fund of non explicit, taken for granted notions.' These taken for granted notions have their origins and relevance in the very environment that, as researchers, we aim to scrutinise. This world (Brand, 1990:27-29) which we seek to understand can be at the same time, objective (the world), social (our world) and internal (my world). The qualitative research interview is a communicative action in which the principal focus is placed on eliciting feedback so that the message sent retains its meaning in the message received.

One way of looking at the kinds of knowledge sought by quantitative and qualitative researchers is to consider classical and bounded rationality in contrast to Habermas' social 'communicative action'. Habermas (1984) argues that rationality is a socially based phenomenon requiring the involvement of many 'actors'. This is in direct opposition to the strong classical model which assumes an 'individual' rational actor. Habermas moves away from the Weberian 'philosophy of consciousness' where rationality is goal rationality (i.e. goal directed) to a new paradigm of 'communications theory'. He argues that reason is situated in all subject-subject relations which he refers to as communicative rationality. The key focus of communicative rationality is to achieve a shared understanding of what acts of

cognition and manipulation of objects mean. Habermas describes this shift in paradigm as follows;

The focus of investigation thereby shifts from cognitive - instrumental rationality to communicative rationality. And what is pragmatic for the latter is not the relation of a solitary subject to something in the objective world that can be represented and manipulated but the intersubjective relation that speaking and acting subjects take up when they come to an understanding with one another about something. In doing so, communicative actors move in the medium of natural language, draw upon culturally transmitted interpretations, and relate simultaneously to something in the one objective world, something in their common social world and something in each's own subjective world (Habermas, 1984:392).

Brand argues that the human use of language implies a common endeavour to achieve consensus and hence there is an inbuilt thrust for achieving Habermas' *ideal speech situation* in which discourse can fully unfold its potential for rationality.'

Ideal Speech

Qualitative research interviews, when approached from an Constructivist position, may therefore be viewed as an act of 'ideal speech'. The rationality which underpins the interaction between interview participants is not one of observer and subject(s). Here the observer seeks to validate any hypothesised (specific and discrete) cause and effect relationships through the placement of predefined and standardised questions. Rather, the participants in the interview are engaged in a process of gaining understanding through an appreciation of another's point of view. Understanding of a particular version of the question is of equal importance to any understanding of the answer. This is in direct contrast to Positivist approaches (Smith, 1983), where language is seen as a simple medium or conduit, analogous to the piece of wire which conducts electricity from a powerpoint on a wall to an electric heater.

Communication, if it is to be meaningful in a research context, needs to be 'rational' in some respect. Rationality may be viewed from a number of perspectives for example the 'rational actor' of classical economics and game theory. The concept of 'bounded rationality' as described by Simon (1976) and Cyert and March (1963) become important here. Freudian views on the conscious and subconscious aspects of human behaviour embodied in the principle that people communicate within some kind of common framework of meaning and understanding is common to both Positivist and Constructivist views of the social world. The qualitative research interview, as one of the most complex and socially interactive forms of

social research activity, exemplifies that there will always be a conscious and rational as well as a subconscious and irrational view of reality seeking expression.

Rationality is an important consideration when planning the qualitative research interview. The following argument shows that along a spectrum of classical to social communicative rationality, a match needs to be made with the style and content of interview schedules. Weber (1947: 92) considers rationality as a spectrum which culminates in an 'ideal type' or extreme, similar to a Platonic 'form'. Weber (1947: 184 - 185) further defines rationality in the economic context as being 'formal' and 'substantive'.

Formal rationality is the term used by Weber to 'designate the extent of quantitative calculation or accounting which is technically possible and actually applied'. Thus, 'formal rationality' corresponds closely to a 'strong' 'classical' model of rationality alluded to above. The interviewer here could expect to find 'matches' of allusions to things that actually exist in reality.

'Substantive rationality' is the 'degree to which a given group of persons ... could be adequately provided with goods by means of an economically oriented course of social action' which may comprise 'a variety of different possibilities'. In the same quotation Weber suggests that 'economic activity is oriented to ultimate ends'. 'Substantive rationality' is therefore seen by Weber as a social process, but one which is geared to specific 'strategic' (in Habermas' terminology) outcomes. This would impact on the way the prospective interview is presented as well as the wording of questions.

Habermas saw Weber's approach to rationality (the 'philosophy of consciousness' Brand, 1990:5-6) as being limiting and constricting because it focused on man's domination of nature at the expense of human subjectivity. He therefore proposed a paradigm shift away from the 'philosophy of consciousness' and towards 'communications theory'. This shift poses a challenge to the Positivist paradigm.

Communications theory has as its key element the concept of shared interpersonal understanding. Brand (1990: 6) states that the 'subject - object relation', characterised by 'cognition and manipulation' is replaced by a situation where 'the subject - subject relation is put central'. A critical consequence of this shift from a 'subject - object' to 'subject - subject' orientation is that social norms may be included under the umbrella of rationality as well as the elements of the physical world considered by physical science.

Norms are often conveyed by verbal and non verbal language. Speech itself is an action, whereby the speaker 'engages' with the listener in order to achieve common understanding. Grounds and justification are provided through constative and regulative speech acts respectively (McCarthy, 1978: 285).

D'Agostino (1996) provides a detailed exposition of 'adjudicative discourse' which fits closely to Habermas' model of the 'ideal speech situation'. D'Agostino introduces the concepts of realism, fallibilism, rationalism and respect as the basis of adjudicative discourse. Realism assumes that if A asserts P and B asserts NOT P, then either A or B must be wrong. This position eliminates relativist stances whereby A and B might both be right in their own, different frames.

In an interview operating under the conditions of ideal speech, participants must have an appropriate understanding of the issues being discussed. It is entirely possible that respondents may occupy different (social) reference frames which attribute different meanings to the same event or situation. A woodchip producer may attribute a meaning to the felling of a tree which is simply incomprehensible to a conservation activist.

Fallibilism assumes that either A or B must accept that they may be in error, and that the other party coming from his/her frame of reference may after all be right in his/her own way. In the Constructivist interview context, the person initiating the interview (i.e. the 'interviewer') needs to embrace the concept of fallibilism. During the course of an interview the 'question' may appear to be inappropriate or misdirected because of the frame of reference. If this becomes apparent, then the interview initiator must be both willing and able to change tack and pursue emerging meaning.

Rationalism assumes that either A or B may be persuaded to change their mind on proposition P if the other party can provide arguments supporting their position which are superior to those originally held by the first party. In other words, if A (who supports P) can present arguments which are superior to those advanced by B, then B will accept A's arguments and hence change from opposing P to supporting P.

In the interview context, this requirement is entirely consistent with the Constructivist pursuit of intersubjective understanding.

The 'epistemic ethos' (D'Agostino 1996: 8) which incorporates the principles of realism, fallibilism and rationalism can be seen to embody a social process in which equality and respect for the other's position are paramount. The process is a social one because A and B

advance arguments to support their position which may be publicly confirmed or refuted. Equality and respect are prerequisites for a fair exchange of ideas which are not biased by external influences such as power, intolerance or self deprecation. In the Constructivist interview situation, these requirements can be considered as mandatory.

Discourse

Continuing on the theme of subjective, interactive speech where ideally, meaning is negotiated between frames of reference, discourse alerts the interviewer to the need to recognise structural aspects and to ‘read between the lines’ of conversations.

A concise definition of discourse in line with the perspective of this paper, is the one by Henriques, who defines discourse as ‘a regulated system of statements and practices that defines social interaction’ (Henriques and Hooloway, 1984:105) elaborates on this definition by saying that discourse; ‘refers to the way in which things are discussed and the argumentation and rhetoric used to support what is said. It also refers to reading between the lines what remains unspoken or taken-for-granted, such as assumptions or evasions.’

This reading between the lines feature of discourse has significant implications for research interview planning. It is suggesting that we have to develop strategies to explore and tease out unspoken meanings in the subjects responses. How is this done?

Legge (1995) draws on ideas from Derrida (1973), Saussure (1974), Derrida (1976), Cooper and Burrell (1988), Cooper (1989), Cooper (1990) and others to further explain that discourse is about ‘issues of representation’. These writers say that words do not merely reflect what is being talked about, but they actually construct and even constitute *what* is being talked about.’

There are a number of issues that arise. Firstly, there are clear rules of regulation and control described as; The Principles of Discourse Regulation (Davies and Mitchell, 1994). This explanation suggests that an interviewer will need to identify the principles and rules that govern discourse in specific organisational settings of specific situations, through language and social interaction.

Secondly, it is also suggested, that not only is discourse regulated, it is also context specific. The context of the discourse is created from the ‘discursive interactions’ which becomes the environment in which ‘further interactions’ occur. Potter and Wetherell (1987) also alludes to context as being an important factor to consider in discourse analysis. So once again the interview plan will need to reflect some kind of context seeking strategy.

Thirdly, many organisational discourses activate a metalanguage. In short, the metalanguage is a fabricated version of someone's reality. The metalanguage talks about the 'object' language. For example a doctor will provide the patient with a highly clinical explanation for a pain in the stomach. This concept is related to Foucault's notion of the relationship between knowledge and power. From an interview planning perspective there is a clear need to develop contingencies to deal with metalanguage.

Finally, there is the problem of numbers. How many discourses are we likely to encounter? The answer to this is, probably as many as there are identifiable social groups.

The Principle of Discourse Regulation expressed by Davies and Mitchell (1994) uses Foucault's work as the basis for explaining their model of the principles of discourse regulation. Like Foucault they argue that discourse regulates behaviours through language and social interaction;

The rules that govern a discourse operate through language, and social interaction, to specify the boundaries of what can or cannot be said in a given context, and which actors within that discourse may legitimately spread or act. (Foucault, 1979) argues that the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a number of procedures.

Davies and Mitchell (1994) summarised Foucault's claims about the regulatory role of discourse. Foucault proposes that discourse can never be free, because it is regulated and is bound by the contextual constraints of history (Foucault, 1972). Professional groups constrain discourses, through the accumulation of knowledge within the discourse (Foucault, 1975). Discourses are built into societal structures to maintain a corrective 'gaze' through disciplinary procedures (Foucault, 1979). Discourses develop truth and falsity about all elements of society, including the individual's notion of self, through building legitimisation structures to control the undesirable, paradoxically making the undesirable a more continually debated object and so more central in societal life (Foucault, 1978). Foucault showed how historical analyses can display patterns of paradoxes which shape societal structures through denial of the 'unclean', which creates debates and needs for control, thus reifying the 'unclean' as a central to any society's ideology (Foucault, 1986).

The Interview

The interview is a face to face method of gathering information in such a way that spontaneous construction and reconstruction of 'realities' can take place. Focus group interviews (Kreuger, 1988; Morgan, 1993) and individual interviews, either structured or unstructured are examples. Typically the whole person interacts, that is verbal language and

body language combine to form a conversation. The qualitative interview is a data collection device that is unique in the sense of allowing clarification ‘testing’ and re-expression to take place so that those concerned can negotiate shared understanding of what is being asked.

There is evidence that interviewing has been used as an effective tool for gathering data for several thousand years. The Egyptians (Babbie, 1992) and later the Romans (Jones, 1974) conducted a form of inquiry using the oral question and answer to gain census data on their respective populations. Since then the interview has been used in a myriad of contexts. There is the job interview (Ilkka, 1995) which explores the possibilities of one person’s potential to fill a particular position or role. The highly structured interview was designed for the purpose of psychological assessment in the aftermath of World War II (Merton and Lazarsfeld, 1950; Lazarsfeld, 1972). The counselling interview and the clinical diagnostic interview (Fontana and Frey, 1994) are other types of interviews which are used in the field of psychology but have less structure. The investigative interview used by police (Fisher, 1995) seeks to establish information, that perhaps even the interviewee is unaware at the outset, can be delivered. The qualitative researcher makes use of these interview techniques as required by the research context. Literature (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Janesick, 1994) posits that the interviewer becomes part of the data collection instrument. dealing with the interview in a constructivist context. The label qualitative research interview best describes the interview as a subjective interaction which enables the researcher to gather and interpret information in a paradigm which is constructivist and interpretivist (King, 1994).

The Qualitative Research Interview

Patton (1990) has identified three interview qualitative types as the informal conversational interview (unstructured or nonstandardised), the general interview guide (standardised nonschedule or semi-structured) and standardised open-ended interview (standardised schedule or structured). Most writers dealing with interview types tend to use classifications which fall broadly into these three groups (Berg, 1989; Denzin, 1989). King (1994) has used three classifications but has named them *the qualitative research interview*, *the structured interview* and *the structured open-response interview*.

The qualitative research interview is our tool for exploring levels of meaning and understanding. Cannell and Kahn (1953) discuss three limitations of the interview. When these limitations are viewed from an epistemological standpoint which is strongly positivist it is argued that they interfere unduly with research process. When the epistemology on which the research stands is interpretivist these limitations take on a different hue.

The first of these limitations is, they claim, ‘the involvement of the individual in the data he is reporting and the consequent likelihood of bias.’ In the qualitative research interview the interaction between interviewer and interviewee is on a personal level. This interpersonal interaction defines the role of the interviewer as that of participant/observer. For the qualitative research interviewer this means that involvement of the researcher in the data being collected is an essential aspect of the data collection exercise.

The second limitation is seen as ‘the inability of the respondent to provide certain types of information’. This is a challenge that the researcher/interviewer faces but it does not deny the interviewer the ability to question in such a way that the data which emerges is reliable and can be suitably interrogated. This is similar to the investigative interview which Fisher (1995) writes about and is designed to bring participants to a point where they are able to give relevant information which they were unaware they had. For the qualitative research interviewer this means that the information being sought may not always be readily forthcoming. It also calls for expertise in understanding and recognising the cues that signal recessive or suppressed information.

Memory bias or selective memory is seen as the third limitation. When memory bias is a factor that impacts on the data collection there are strategies such as triangulation which allow the qualitative researcher to gain data from multiple perspectives and a variety of data types. For the qualitative research interviewer this means that multiple data sources are capable of bringing to light a wholistic picture which any one source, in isolation, may appear to either deny or contradict.

Given that the interview in a qualitative study is essentially a conversation between two people we need to examine all the dynamics that make up the conversational interaction. There is the language, be it English, Mandarin, Bahasa or whatever. To understand the words one needs to have a knowledge of the vocabulary and the language constructs. However it is possible to ‘listen’ to someone and gain meaning from other cues as well.

Planning for the Interview

Some of these cues operate a range of dynamics that fall within body language. Paralinguistics, proxemics, gender issues, status and timing are important influences on the planning and administration of the interview. All of these elements will not always be present in the same way in different interview situations nor will they necessarily all be there. The research context will dictate which ones and the manner which they are demonstrated or taken into account.

In being true to the research paradigm the elements which are dealt with from one interview to another will be dictated by the research/interview context. Jones, (1985) suggests that where literally thousands of behaviours can be considered as the focus for observation the ones chosen will be a function of the question of interest. Elements that are considered to be operative within the research context can be described definitively. For the purposes of this paper we will consider paralinguistics, proxemics, gender issues, status and timing.

Paralinguistics

When the words are being said there are also elements at work which can be described as that part of speech which enhances the language. They are the dynamics that give emphasis to the intention of the speaker. This includes the explosive impact on one word for emphasis. It can be the lowering of the voice to imply secrecy and sharing or trusting. Thumping the table or punching the air in accompaniment to the words will change the conveyed meaning of simple words such as 'yes' or 'no'. They include dynamics such as tone of voice, rate of the utterance, overall pitch and range of the voice as well as facial expressions. These enhancers of the language are described as paralinguistics (Alberts, Kellar-Guenther and Corman 1996). They are 'factors associated with but not essentially part of a language system' which accompany speech (Delbridge, 1990). In the course of the interview these paralinguistic devices are essential companions to the words. Attempts at determining categories of meaning must take such an interview component into account.

Proxemics

As cited in Jones (1985), proxemics (Edward Hall, 1966), spatial behaviour (Burger et al., 1983), personal space (Sommer, 1969) and territoriality (Altman, 1975) are all strongly associated nonverbal characteristics impacting upon human interaction.

Virtually everything that a person does is associated with space. Proxemics is the study of human transactions as s/he perceives and uses intimate, personal, social and public space in various settings (Hall, 1974). Proxemics as the study of space between individuals both physical and psychological is a critical issue for the research interview context.

If we want the interviewee to relax an awareness of their psychological reaction to space is essential. Impacting on this reaction will not only include physical space but additional factors such as the relationship/rapport (Berg, 1989) between the interviewee and interviewer, the perceived status, gender, culture and age of the interviewee and overall body movements (Abrams, 1992).

Research has shown that the more comfortable we are with somebody the less space there is between us. Within the 'proxemics zones' researched and identified (Hall, 1974) the distances range from less than 18 inches, to greater than 12 feet. The Intimate Zone is less than 18 inches. A Personal Zone, between 18 inches and 4 feet, is usually reserved for friends and family. A Social Zone of between 4 and 12 feet is usually associated with business activities. A Public Zone of 12 feet and over is usually found in stage performances or presentations.

The distance maintained when speaking to someone communicates a message. If you are sharing something personal or a confidential message then it would be a contradiction to maintain an impersonal distance (Buhler, 1991). When attempting to develop a rapport of confidentiality with the interviewee (Berg, 1989) it would be inappropriate to assume an intimate or personal distance unless initiated by the interviewee.

When dealing with executives or individuals of high status the expectation of space and distance is greater. The invasion of their territory is usually more than a perception of discomfort but a feeling of disregard for their position and overall aggression on the part of the interviewer (Abrams, 1992).

From a gender perspective, men too often make the mistake of changing spatial zones with women they perceive as attractive, potentially resulting in the woman becoming psychologically uncomfortable. If the woman invades the male's territory she is often perceived as being too aggressive (Abrams, 1992).

With older people, there is a tendency to have less space and distance yet their perception of space and distance is no different. When interviewees are comfortable, there will be direct eye contact with, and less space and distance between the interviewer and the interviewee. The individual will perhaps lean forward and might even nod in agreement. When interviewees are uncomfortable there will be greater space and distance, indirect eye contact and they may even turn their body away from us, cross their legs and arms or take other evasive actions. If the interviewee begins to fidget then we are losing their attention and we need to change the topic or our delivery (Abrams, 1992).

Gender

Sociology assumes a simple society relating to men and women in which generalisations can be made about all participants yet men and women actually live in different social worlds

which must be considered (Harding, 1987). The reality can be that men and women often live in different worlds whilst still being in the same physical place (Harding, 1987).

Reinharz and Davidman (1992) relate the research of sociologist Rosanna Hertz. She claims, they say, that male/female roles as demarcated by society have led men to be less overt about their feelings preferring brevity on emotional questions and responses. This was demonstrated in her study of dual-career families where it was mostly the women who provided the data. Men's answers were very short or stated that they never reflected on the issue.

Studies (Harding, 1987) have shown that women interviewees respond differently to men interviewers and vice-versa. Scott (1985:74) cited in (Allan and Skinner, 1991) confirms that 'the presence of personality of the interviewer are recognised as variables in the research process and they affect the data at all stages.'

In research on the topic of abortion and there was a marked difference between the data obtained by the female researcher compared with that obtained by a male researcher. None of the women interrogated by the male interviewer told him that they had undergone an abortion while those interviewed by the female researcher said so although they were not directly questioned on this aspect. It can be concluded that the gender of the interviewer does make a difference in this instance (Padfield and Procter, 1996).

Gender is a significant factor in the researcher/respondent relationship. Scott (1983b) in (Bell and Roberts, 1984) explains that when interviewing men it is claimed that young women will obtain more information than men. Rosalie Wax (1971) cited in (Bell and Roberts, 1984) advises the interviewer 'remember that a coquette is in a much better position to learn about men than a nun'.

Both the research context and the research topic will impact in varying degrees on the gender issues relating to interviewer/interviewee interaction. The research context will incorporate the social dimensions which are dictated by cultural and ethical morays. The research topic will similarly impact on the same dimensions. A research topic focussed on sex or abortion issues will be affected by the gender issue in a different way by possibly to the same extent as the research topic focussing on displays of power.

Status

'Who you are - what status you carry in the organisation - tends to 'flavour' the receipt of your communications. The more status you build, the more seriously your communications

will be taken - and the more accurately they will be received because others will take more care to ensure that they pay attention to receive the actual message being sent.' (Buhler, 1991).

Whiteley (1995) suggests that there is a strong link between the status symbols and the structural symbols of an organisation. This culturally embedded relationship means that a qualitative researcher needs to be alert to the symbols of an organisations and the messages that they convey. To disregard this relationship could mean that there are counter messages operating in the interview situation which would put far greater limitations on the interview process than those dealt with earlier by Cannell and Kahn (1953).

It follows that there are cultural and gender influences which impact on the status demonstrated by those who participate in an interview. These in turn can be linked to the proxemics and the paralinguistics that dominate the interview situation.

Timing

Timing can impact on the interview in two main arenas. One is the timing of the interview in relationship to the events surrounding the interview. What occurred in the last half hour before interview can colour the responses and attitudes of the respondent to an extent that data given by them in a different time setting may be totally different and devoid of emotional overtones. For example someone who has just received word of some personal disaster may be strongly affected in their responses even though the event may have nothing to do with the workplace or the topic of the interview. The interviewer is not always privy to these details and it cannot be assumed that the obvious solution is to not conduct the interview. This timing in relationship to the interview event is possibly more difficult to account for than the second aspect of timing.

In the interview situation the timing of questions and responses on the part of the interviewer are somewhat controllable while the speech patterns and behaviours of the interviewee are out of the immediate control of the interviewer. It is the timing of the interaction sequences in the conversational encounter which will either enable or inhibit the respondent. This is entirely in the control of the interviewer. This dimension includes such dynamics as pauses, hesitations, silent deliberations and possibly day dreaming or distractions.

Poyatos (1975) discusses the way in which pauses are demonstrated in conversation. There are filled and unfilled pauses. An example of the filled pause is the drawn out vowel sound which can precede actual speech. This often denotes the speaker is organising thoughts prior

to committing them to speech. Other sounds can denote a state of mind such as frustration, impatience. The unfilled pauses are the ones that fall into the second aspect of timing. Poyatos (311-312) describes four types of unfilled pause. The *initiator pause* is, like the filled pause described above, a brief moment of mental organisation. The *transitional pause* occurs at turning points in the conversation. The *hesitation pause* is usually demonstrated by a fixed gaze on the ceiling or floor. This type of pause can indicate that the person is not engaging in the interaction and waiting for further cues as to what is expected of him/her. Skill and patience is required of the interviewer if this pause is to eventually yield further information on the topic as the usual intent of the participant is to convey that they have nothing more to say even when this is not necessarily the case. The *feedback-seeking pause* unlike the hesitation pause seeks to engage the other person with a fixed gaze as if inviting some form of input. The *termination pause* is often accompanied by a gesture, such as opening the arms in a 'that's all' gesture, or positioning of the mouth in a distinctive signal of closure.

Discussion

The dimensions described here, paralinguistics, proxemics, gender, status and timing whilst not exhaustive are important. They serve as examples for the mapping model presented as Figure 1.

Take a proposed interview scenario where the interviewer is forty-eight years old, male, academic (or academic looking). He has a fairly elaborate linguistic code, speaking fluently. However he can converse quite easily in the restricted code as that was his childhood training. The interviewees are apprentices of 16-17 years old. They are industrial engineers - all male. They have a more restricted linguistic code, often speaking in the imperative at a somewhat erratic pace.

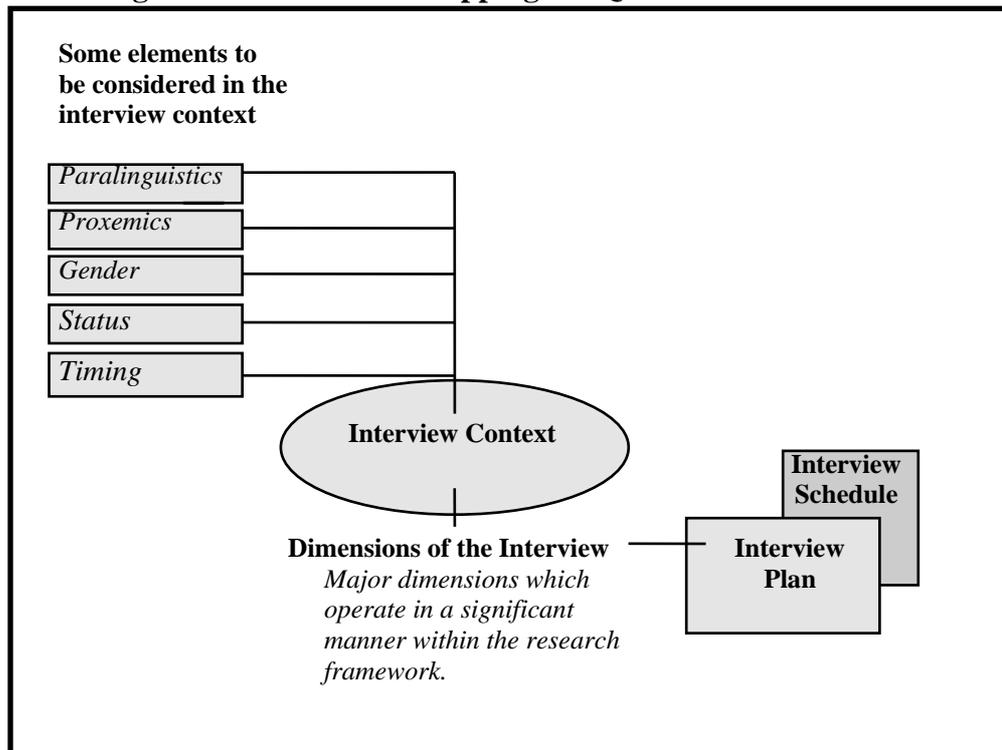
Clearly some dimensions will be more important than others. Those that are more important need to be examined to see whether preliminary investigations need to take place even before the interview schedule is designed.

For example let us say that the paralinguistic gap appeared to be great at first glance. Apprentices when observed for even a short time appear to punch each other, seemingly affectionately. One raised eyebrow seems to have some particular meaning as does a certain type of shrug.

Secondly there appears to be a protocol concerning how close ‘adults’ can get to apprentices. This seems to be less close than apprentices are allowed to get to each other. What about status? At this initial observation, some apprentices seem to command high status but this does not appear to relate to job seniority or age.

Using the mapping device, it would appear that paralinguistics, proxemics and status dimensions need more explanation before the interview plan and then the interview schedule can be finalised.

Figure 1: A Model for Mapping the Qualitative Research Interview



Decisions arising from this analysis inform the optimal interview structure, present action and delivery. Participant observation, non-participant observation, ‘inside’ conversations with people with similar profiles are all possibilities. In order to demonstrate as well as practice rigour, the ‘dimensions research’ would need to be designed as seriously as the interview schedule.

There are any number of elements which may be considered as contributing to the qualitative research interview. The important feature of each element is that as a dimension of the interview it will stand up to analytical appraisal of what it adds to the interview situation either by way of limitation or enhancement. These elements are retained or rejected from the interview approach in so far as the research context justifies such action. In this way the research context acts as a sieve for the range of possible dimensions. Those dimensions

which emerge as relevant to the research context are those which are then identified by the researcher as the major dimensions operating in a significant manner within the interview. These dimensions can then be identified as being at work in the interview plan.

The interview plan is not to be confused with the interview schedule. In the interview plan the researcher is able to identify the objectives of the interview and articulate the various non verbal informants which make up the major dimensions of the interview. The interview schedule is shaped by this planning process. The content of the interview schedule is determined largely by the research question and a desire to understand better certain aspects of the research context. The interview schedule is the data collection tool used by the interviewer as the basis of the qualitative research interview which will at all times retain its conversational characteristics.

This approach to the task of data collection by qualitative research interview heightens the researchers' awareness of interactive non-verbal behaviours. The application of the model in Figure 1 reduces the chance element in the gaining of important data in the qualitative interview. The implication is that being more finely tuned to these dimensions of the interview the researcher is in a better position to interpret the added meaning that they convey when analysing the data.

Conclusion

Once the interview is completed there are dimensions of the interview which can be examined in the light of the eventual outcome. Some of these are dimension which a researcher will aim to achieve in any interview situation but cannot be planned for or accommodated in the same way as the elements that are considered in the approach to the interview. These dimensions are analysed in the light of the interview outcome and will include such features as rapport, co-operation and other interpersonal features. The way which these aspects of the interview reveal themselves are best dealt with after the event.

In a face to face interview, proxemics will be an element of the interview and the interviewer will have considered what may be suitable or unsuitable proximity for seating. However if the decisions made prior to the interview about proximity interfere with establishing good rapport in the interview (Berg, 1989; Fontana and Frey, 1994) the interviewer can alter this arrangement in a hope that good rapport will be gained. Rapport is an outcome established within the interview process. The objective of this working paper is to examine the approach to the qualitative research interview. There is no intention here to examine further the other dimensions of the interview which emerge from the process itself.

Implications of such an approach to the qualitative research interview do not cease with the development of the interview schedule. Berstell and Nitterhouse (1997) discuss the need to get 'outside the box' in the analysis of the research. This raises for qualitative interviewers the challenge of demonstrating in analysis how such dimensions can be taken into account. To meet such a challenge will ensure the researcher that others will not be free to make use of transcript quotes devoid of all the contextual meaning.

The integration of rational theory, communications theory with paradigmatic choices according to the research context is a fruitful area for future research into the interview process.

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