

Chapter 10

Collecting primary data using semi-structured, in-depth and group interviews

Research interviews

Definition

‘An interview is a purposeful discussion
between two or more people’

Kahn and Cannell (1957)

Types of interview used in research

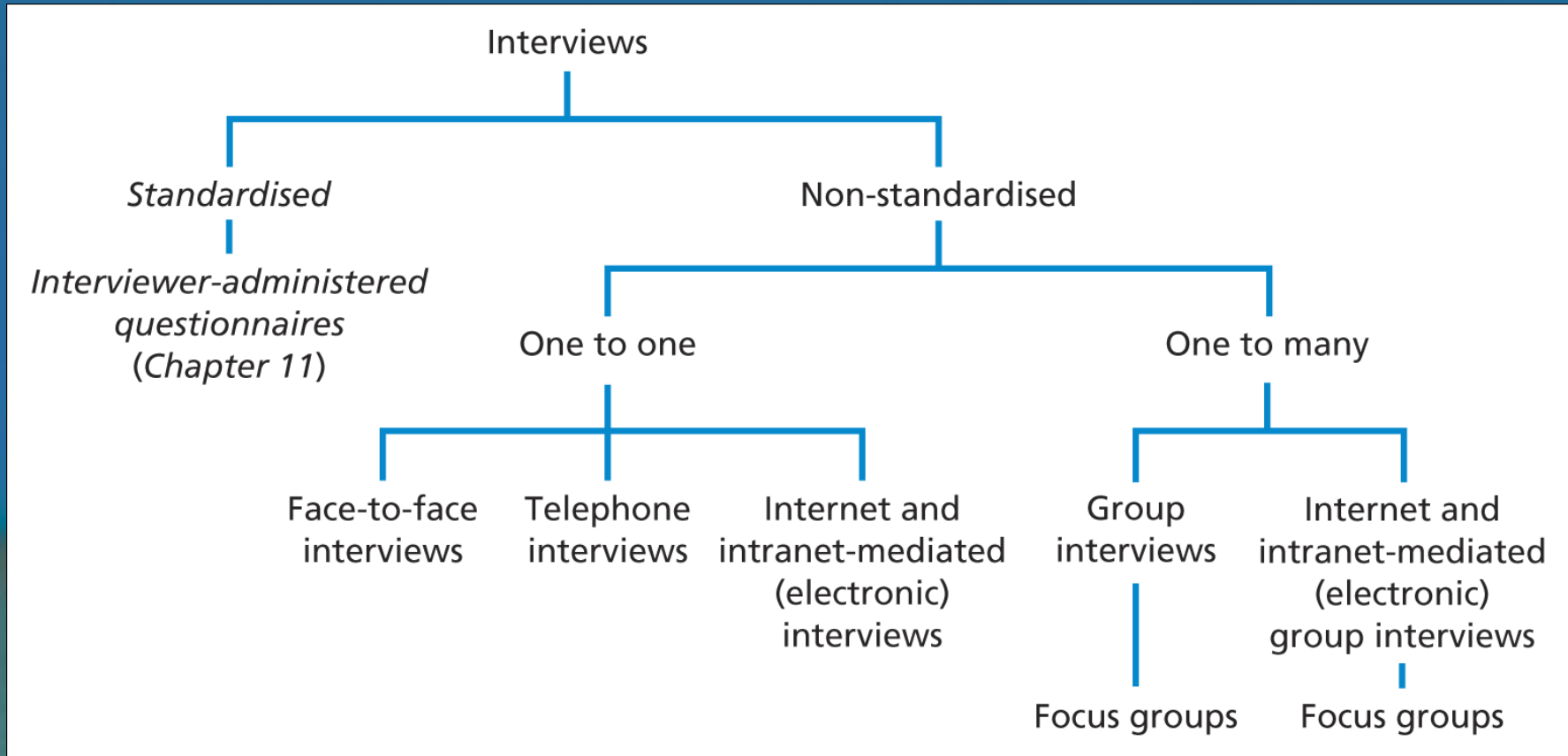
Semi-structured
In-depth

Structured
Group

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Research purpose and strategy (1)

Forms of interview



Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Figure 10.1 Forms of interview

Types of interview

- Structured interviews: use questionnaire based on a predetermined and 'standardized' or identical set of questions and we refer to them as interviewer administered questionnaires.
- Semi-structure interviews: the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be covered, although these may vary from interview to interview. This means that you may omit some questions in particular interviews, given a specific organizational context that is encountered in relation to the research topic. The order of questions also be varied depending on the flow of conversation.

Continued

- On the other hand, additional questions may be required to explore your research question and objectives given the nature of events within particular organizations.
- Unstructured interviews: are informal. You would use these to explore in-depth a general area in which you are interested . We therefore, refer to these as in-depth interviews. There is no predetermined list of questions to work through in this situation, although you need to have a clear idea about the aspect or aspects that you want to explore. The interviewee is given the opportunity to talk freely about events behavior and beliefs in relation to topic area.

Continued

- So that this type of interaction is sometimes called ‘nondirective’. It has been labeled as informant interview since it is the interviewees perceptions that guide the conduct of the interview. In comparison, a participant (or respondent) interview is one where the interviewer directs the interview and the interviewee responds to the questions of the researcher.
- We can also differentiate between types of interview related to the nature of interaction between the researcher and those who participate in this process. Interview may be conducted one to one basis, between you and single participant(face to face)(telephone)(internet) (intranet)

Continued

- There may be other situation where you conduct a number of participants to explore an aspect of your research through a group of discussion that you facilitate.

Interview and type of research

- In an exploratory research study, in-depth interviews can be very helpful to find out what is happening and to seek new insight. Semi structured interviews may be used in relation to an exploratory study.
- In descriptive studies structured interviews can be used as a means to identify general patterns.
- In an explanatory study, semi structured interviews can be used in order to understand the relationships between variables, such as those revealed from a descriptive study, structured interview may also be used in relation to an explanatory study, in statistical sense.

Research purpose and strategy (2)

Uses of different types of interview in each of the main research categories

	Exploratory	Descriptive	Explanatory
Structured		✓✓	✓
Semi-structured	✓		✓✓
Unstructured	✓✓		

✓✓ = more frequent, ✓ = less frequent.

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Table 10.1 Uses of different types of interview in each of the main research categories

Non-standardised (qualitative) interviews

Four key aspects

- Purpose of the research
- Significance of establishing personal contact
- Nature of the data collection questions
- Time required and completeness of process

Data quality (1)

Issues to consider

- Reliability
- Forms of bias
- Validity and generalisability

Data quality (2)

The importance of preparation – the 5 Ps

‘prior planning prevents poor performance’

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Interview preparation (1)

Associated issues

- Interviewer's level of knowledge
- Level of information supplied to interviewees
- Creating an interview guide
- Appropriateness of location

Interview preparation (2)

Associated issues

- Researcher's appearance – dress code
- Shaping the interview - opening comments
- Approach to questioning – clarity and reducing bias
- Use of critical incident technique

Interview preparation (3)

Associated issues

- Appropriate interviewer behaviour- verbal and non-verbal
- Attentive listening skills and testing understanding
- Approaches to data recording - notes and tape-recording
- Cultural differences and bias

Interviewing competence

- There are several areas where you need to develop and demonstrate competence in relation to conduct of semi structured and in-depth research interview . These areas are:
- Opening the interview;
- Using appropriate language;
- Questioning;
- Listening;
- Testing and summarizing understanding;
- Recording and dealing with difficult participants;
- recording data.

Interview preparation (4)

Checklist Box 10.12

Complete the Checklist in Box 10.12
to help you prepare for your semi-structured or
in-depth interview

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Interviewing competence (1)

Approaches to questioning

Open questions

Probing questions

Specific and closed questions

Open questions

- The use of open question will allow participants to define and describe the situation or event. An open is designed to encourage the interviewee to provide an extensive and developmental answer and may be used to reveal attitudes or obtain facts. It encourages the interviewee to reply as they wish. An open question is likely to start with or include, one of the following words: ‘what’, or ‘how’, or ‘why’,.

Propping 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.

Specific and closed questions

- These types of questions are simpler to those used in structured interviews. They can be used to obtain specific information or to confirm a fact or opinion.

Interviewing competence (2)

Advantages and disadvantages of audio-recording interviews

Advantages

- Allows interviewer to concentrate on questioning and listening
- Allows questions formulated at an interview to be accurately recorded for use in later interviews where appropriate
- Can re-listen to the interview
- Accurate and unbiased record provided
- Allows direct quotes to be used
- Permanent record for others to use

Disadvantages

- May adversely affect the relationship between interviewee and interviewer (possibility of 'focusing' on the audio-recorder)
- May inhibit some interviewee responses and reduce reliability
- Possibility of a technical problem
- Time required to transcribe the audio-recording (Section 13.3)

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Table 10.3 Advantages and disadvantages of audio-recording the interview

Interviewing competence (3)

Other issues to consider

- Dealing with difficult participants –Table 10.2
- Managing resources – logistics and time
- Obtaining participants' permission for interview records (written and taped)

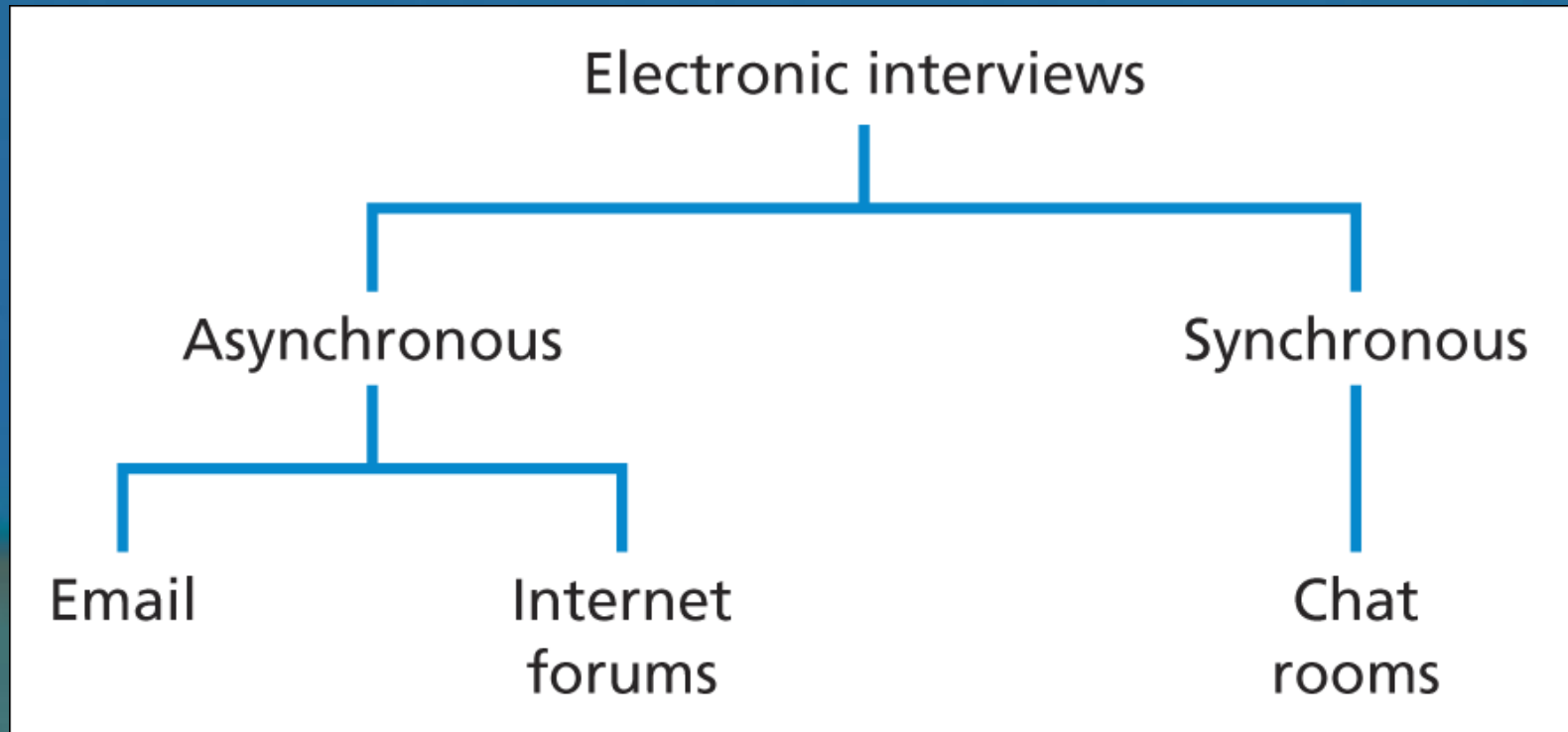
Interviewing competence (4)

Additional forms of interviews:

- Group interviews
- Focus groups
- Telephone interviews
- Internet and intra-net mediated interviews

Interviewing competence (5)

Forms of electronic interviews



Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Figure 10.2 Forms of electronic interviews

Summary: Chapter 10

- Use of non-standard (qualitative) interviews should generate rich and detailed data
- Different types of interview are useful for different research purposes
- Qualitative interviews are generally categorised as in-depth (structured) and semi-structured
- Research design may incorporate more than one type of interview

Summary: Chapter 10

- Using qualitative interviews is related to the research strategy and data collection questions
- Establishing personal contact with subjects and the length of time required are significant factors
- Data quality issues, interviewer competence and resource management are important considerations
- Face-to-face (individual, group and focus group) and electronic interviews can all be advantageous