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Consultancy Project

**Primary Research Skills- Collecting Data:
Interviews & Focus Groups**



Last time



- To highlight when and how questionnaires may be used as a research tool
- To recognise the advantages and disadvantages of using questionnaires
- To explore key considerations in questionnaire design
- To identify key requirements in relation to questionnaire design
- To recognise the dangers associated with poor planning and design
- To acknowledge one's responsibilities as a researcher

Reminder – The Project's key stages

- Bid for work
- Ethical approval (Form E3)
- PID agreed (and signed)
- Feedback
- **Plan research methods in detail**
- Undertake research
- Analyse findings
- Brainstorm with client
- Present findings and informed ideas
- Report
- Action!
- Feedback/analysis
- Does the project achieve the PID goals?

Activity

What are the main advantages and disadvantages of using interviews as a primary research method?

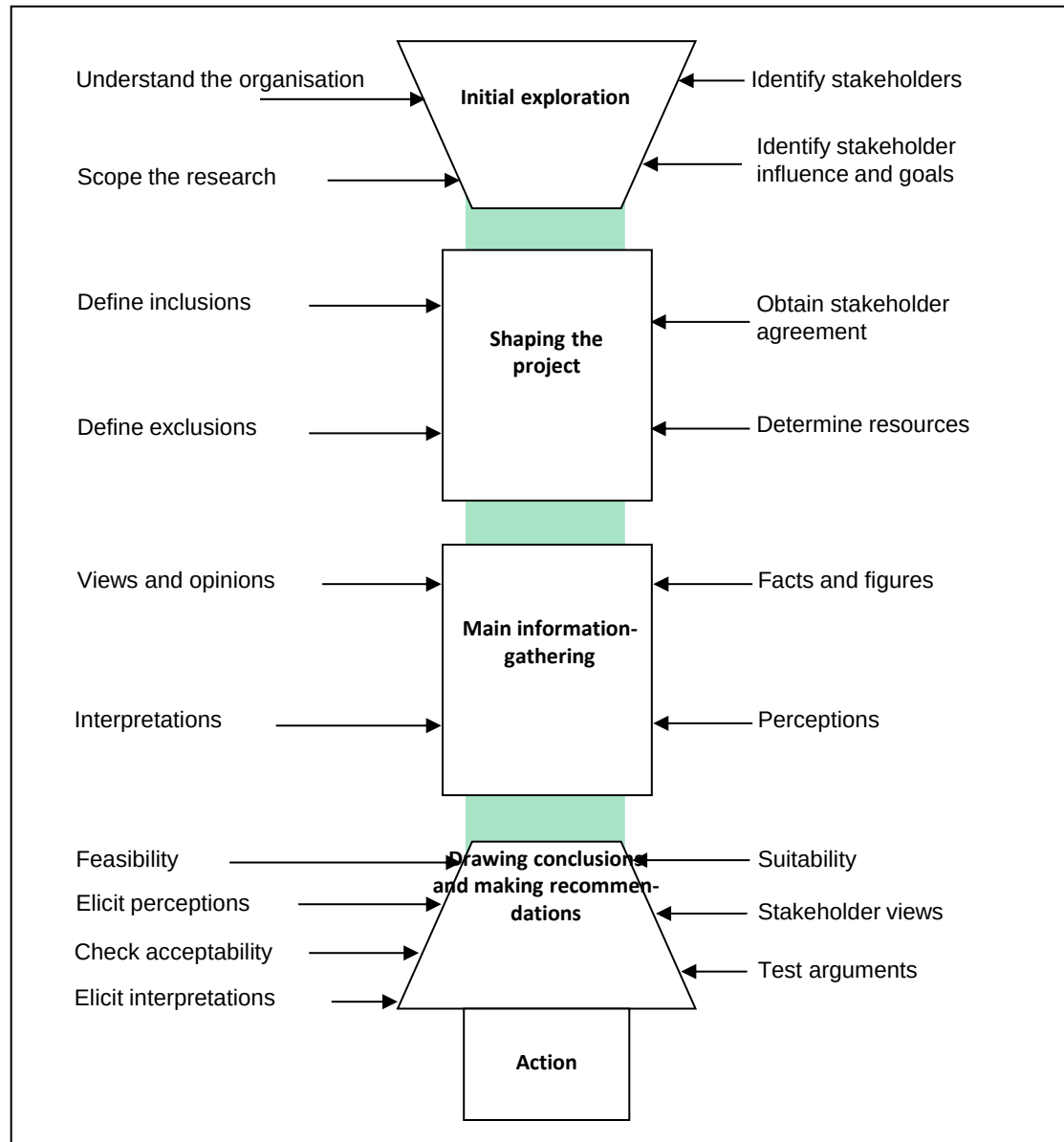


"Actually, we're not hiring. We hold lots of interviews like this one, so our competition thinks we're busy."

Interviews (phenomenological)

- ✓ Suitable for *open-ended and/or complex questions*.
- ✓ In depth, narrative, qualitative data.
- ✓ Flexible – can insert new questions during the interview.
- ✓ Interviewer can create *rappport* with the interviewee.
- ✓ 'Unusual' behaviour and *sensitive topics* are more easily discussed.
- ✓ *Non-verbal communication* can be considered.
- × Interviews are *time* consuming and more difficult to analyse.
- × The process is *expensive*.
- × Interviewees may give what they consider to be 'correct' or '*acceptable*' responses.
- × The interviewer's tone of voice, intonation and phrasing of questions may *bias* the questions and distort the findings.

Interviews serve many purposes



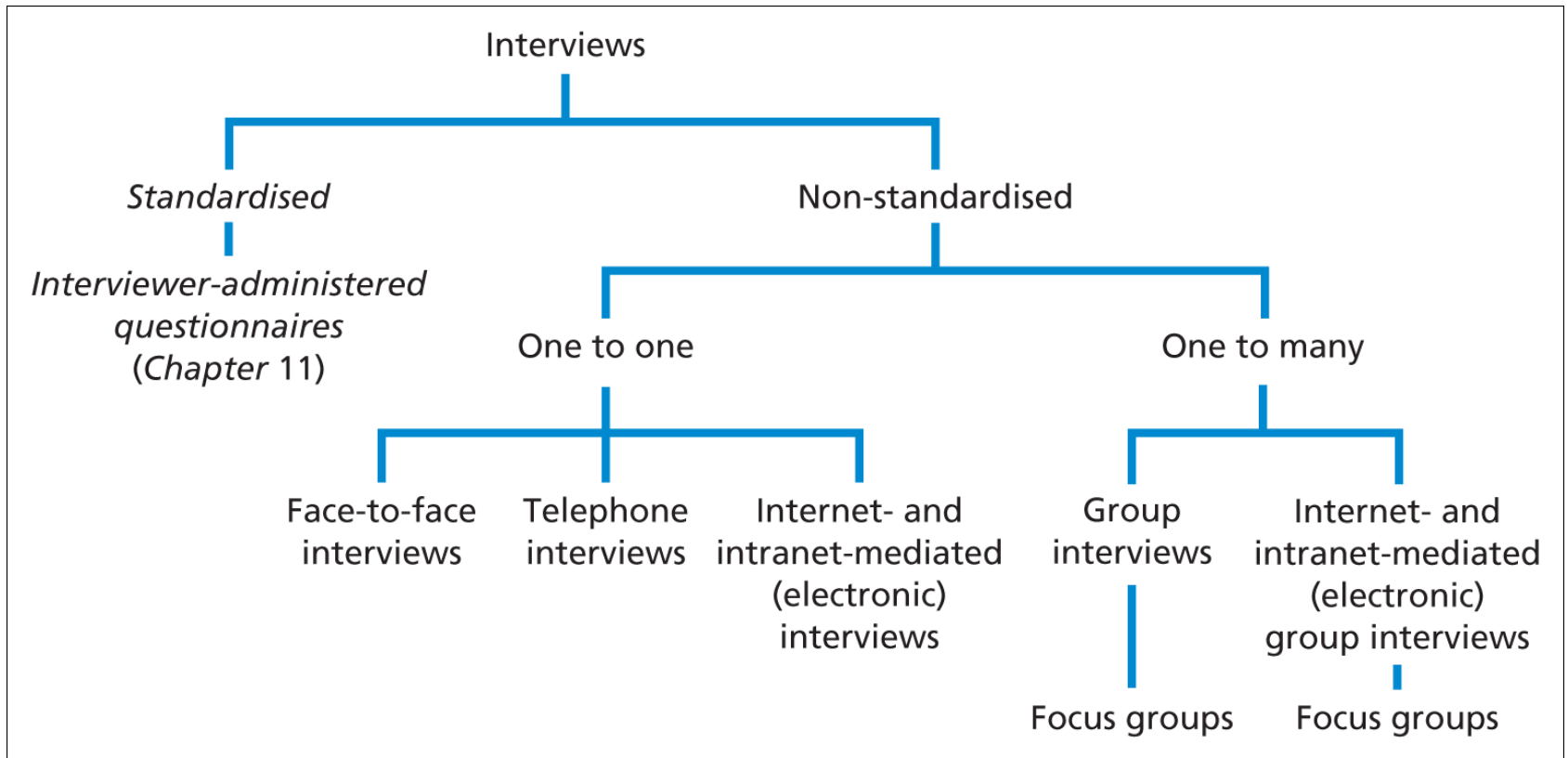
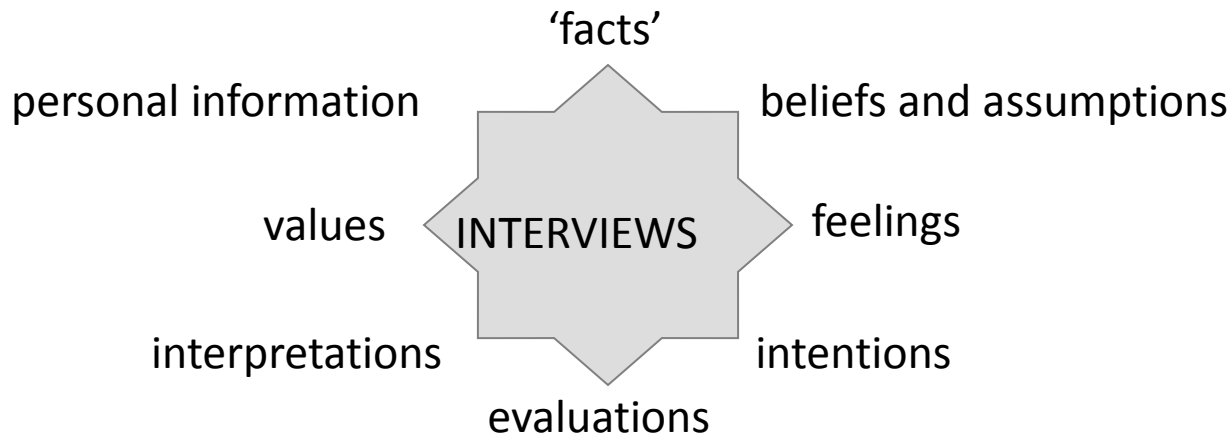


Figure 10.1 Forms of interview

Interviewing for information

Information that interviews can usefully elicit:



Advantages and disadvantages

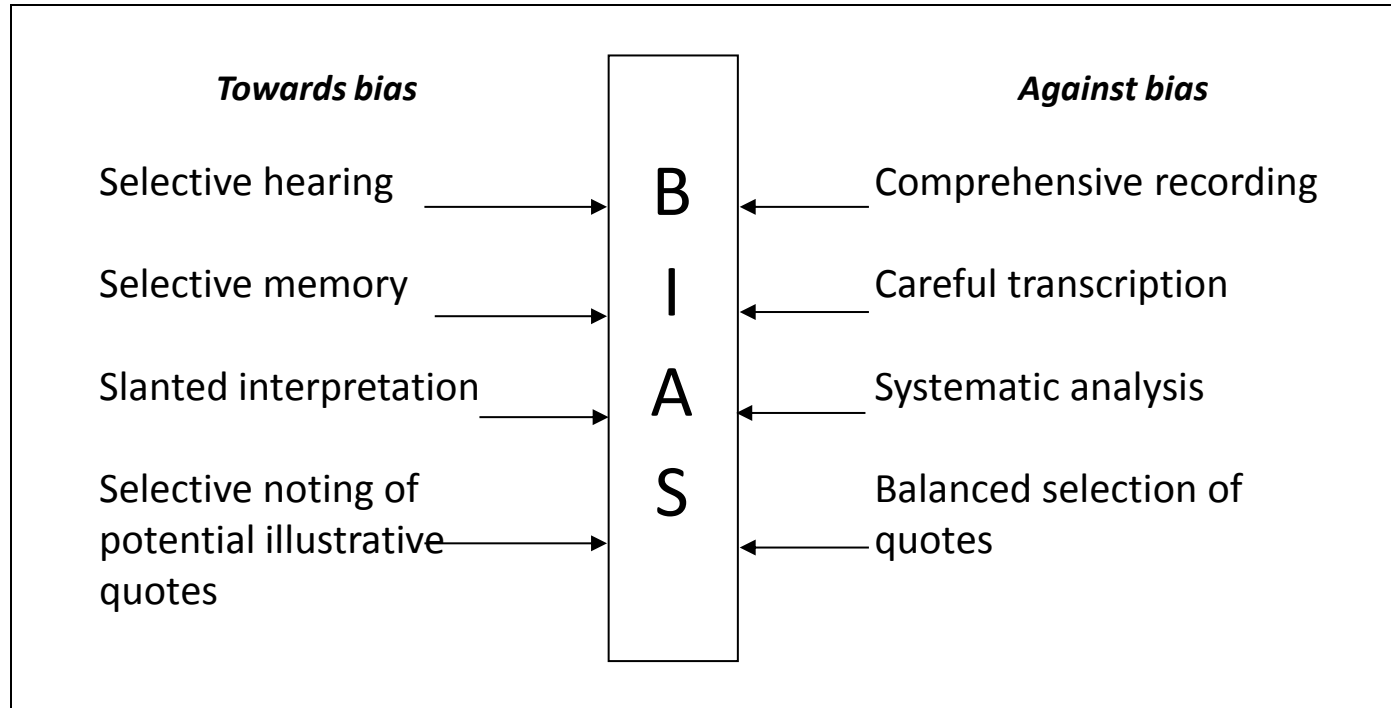
INTERVIEWS	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Face validity Flexibility Interactivity Various types of data obtained Richness of information Exploration of meaning Illustrative quotes to record Networking opportunities	Not a simple method Time-consuming Sample size is smaller Susceptibility to influence Lack of comparability Scope for misinterpretation

Not just a conversation

- If interviews are to form the basis for trustworthy and credible conclusions, great care is needed over
 - Interviewee selection
 - Question design
 - Interviewing skills
 - Recording, analysis and reporting of interviews
 - Practical considerations
 - Ethical issues

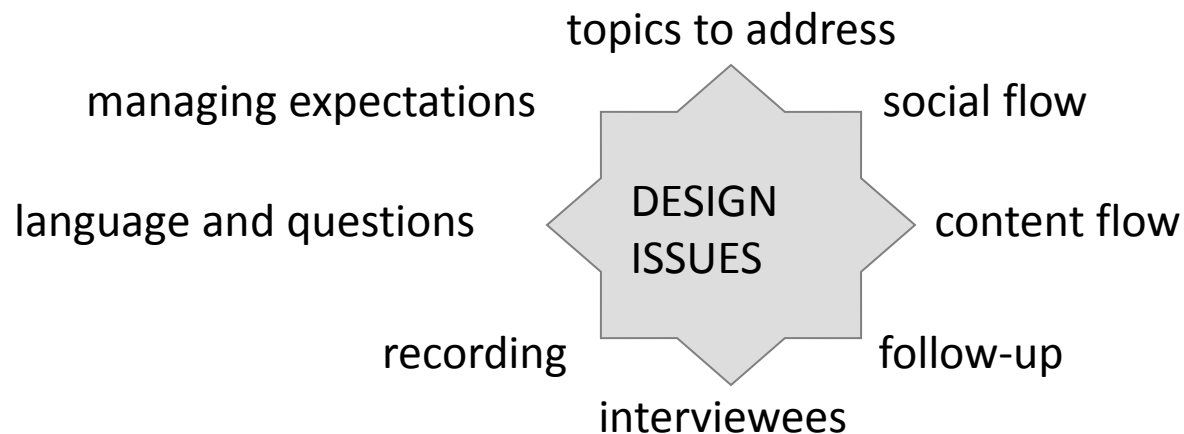
Minimising bias is essential

Forces for and against bias:



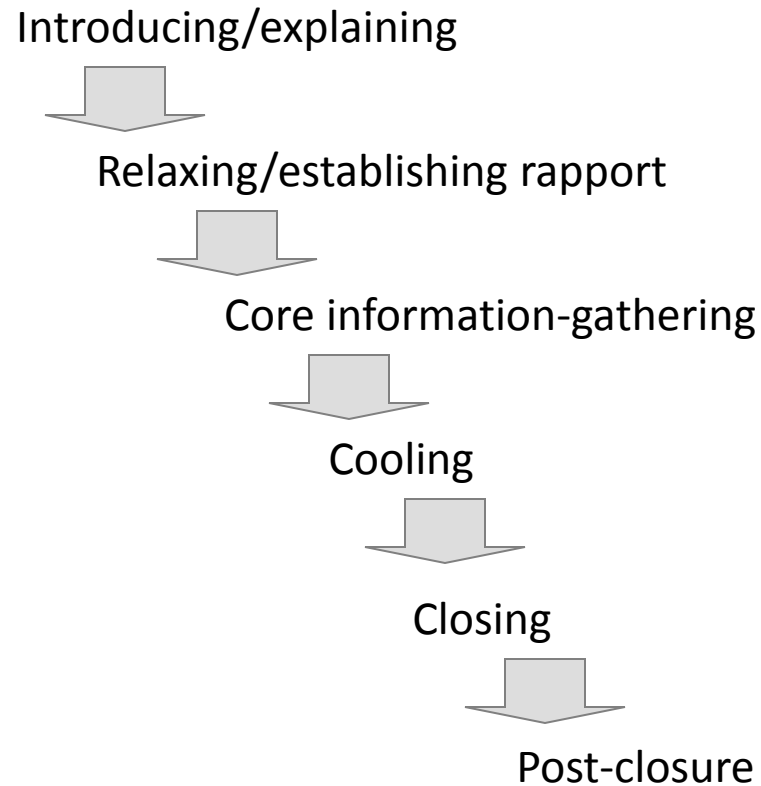
Interviews need careful design

Aspects which need to be 'designed':



Social flow

The social flow of an interview:



Establishing rapport

- Helpful behaviours:
 - Smiling
 - Mirroring physical postures
 - Mirroring language type
 - Listening carefully
- *Note: Too much rapport can engender bias via the desire to please*

Structured or unstructured?

Structured interviews

– akin to a questionnaire

Advantages:

face validity, reliability, generalisability, ease of analysis, low interviewer influence, less skill needed: higher response rates likely than for a questionnaire

Disadvantages:

lack of flexibility, value limited by prior decisions re appropriate questions: takes more time than a questionnaire

Structured or unstructured?

Unstructured interviews

Advantages:

Flexible, open, unconstrained by interviewer's pre-existing mindset, ideal for issues when you have few preconceived ideas

Disadvantages:

Potential for interviewer selectivity and influence, hard to analyse, low comparability and generalisability, may lack credibility with readers of a positivist persuasion

Semi-structured or a mix?

Semi-structured interviews

Balance of advantages/disadvantages depends on context:

semi-flexibility, semi-openness, some comparability and generalisability, relatively high face validity, easier to analyse than totally unstructured, harder than structured ones

- Mixed structure uses different degrees of structure at different points in the interview

Question types

- Open
- Closed
- Prompts
- Probes
- Tests of understanding
- Plus – not quite questions – Summaries

Note:

All questions need to be clear, be unambiguous, address a single point, and not 'lead' to a biased answer

Uses of closed questions

Closed questions can elicit specific information and also, in a mixed structure interview:

- act as filtering or streaming questions
- vary the pace of the interview
- serve to 'pull back' someone who is becoming too verbose
- check understanding

Before interviewing . . .

Planning and preparation is crucial:

- Decide which questions will provide the most useful information
- Consider whether your questions or the context might influence the interviewee
- Pilot the questionnaire with people similar to your intended sample
- Plan how you will record and analyse your interview findings: use audio recording wherever possible

Ethical issues

- Ensuring genuinely free and informed consent
- Question design
- Honesty
- Confidentiality
- Power issues



What is a focus group?

Focus groups involve a facilitated discussion between members, *focused* on a topic or area specified by the researcher.

When are focus groups useful?

- at the exploratory and framing stages of an investigation
- in inquiries where you are seeking to understand how people make sense of issues
- in action-oriented projects

The advantages of focus groups

Focus groups allow you to look at the nature as well as the content of interactions. They:

- show visibly different perspectives
- offer observable interactions
- allow you to observe sense-making
- surface and allow you to capture concerns.

They can also:

- help build commitment to the project.

Challenges focus groups present

Running focus groups is not easy:

- A high level of group facilitation skills is needed
- Recording interactions may be difficult
- Transcription is extremely time-consuming
- There is a risk of individuals dominating the discussion
- Participants may be inhibited and/or contribute 'in role'

The facilitator role

As a facilitator you need to:

- Establish the purpose of the group
- Make people comfortable with the context and process
- Pose questions to stimulate discussion on your chosen topics
- Ensure that the discussion:
 - is relevant but not constrained by your preconceptions
 - provides enough detail and context to be useful
 - explores feelings as well as facts where relevant
 - involves all members

Focus group or workshop?

- Some workshops can generate similar information to focus groups, and be more acceptable in some contexts.
- If the workshop has another explicit purpose, it is important to be open and honest about your research agenda, how and what you will be recording, and what use will be made of recordings.

Drawing conclusions from focus groups

- Subjective judgements are needed as to the extent to which the group composition and the context influenced the discussion.
- Any conclusions need to be cautious, and ideally reinforced by further data.

Ethical issues

- Honesty, confidentiality and power have additional dimensions in the group context.
- *Honesty* includes research purposes, use of recordings and exercising appropriate caution over conclusions
- *Confidentiality* needs to be observed by participants as well as the researcher
- *Power* issues need to be considered even before forming groups

Next steps

- Next week: Producing the Report
- Advice on draft Questionnaires/Interviews

Happy Research designing



**KEEP
CALM
AND
GOOD
LUCK**