**INTERVIEWING**

Interviewing requires *investigation, representation* and *interpretation.* The investigation is aimed at designing a set of interview questions appropriate for the aims of data collection. Representation relates to the gathering and recording of information obtained during the interview. Finally, interpretation assesses the validity and reliability of the data collected.

There are *six steps* in interviewing:

* Define objectives (goals) for the interview.
* Create a list of interviewees.
* Create the interview questions.
* Arrange the interview.
* Conduct the interview.
* Analyse the interview.

Remember, interviewing costs time - the interviewer’s time and also the interviewee’s time. The direct benefit of the interview is for the interviewer (why would he/she bother otherwise?). It is not always clear (at least not to the interviewee) whether there is a benefit for the person being interviewed. On the contrary, the outcome of the interview might well be that the interviewee’s job is affected. Therefore consider it a favour to be allowed to interview someone and behave accordingly. Be polite, but insistent, suggest rather than demand, explain rather than disagree.

**Define Interview Objectives (Goals)**

The objective of an interview is to extract information. Therefore it is essential to define the reason for the interview before it takes place. It is also important to share this with the interviewee at the beginning of the interview, so that both sides can aim for that common goal.

**Create a List of Interviewees**

It is critical for the success of the investigation to choose the right people to be interviewed. Considerations:

* Managers and supervisors will be able to answer general questions and questions about strategy.
* Specialists will be able to answer questions about details.
* Never under-estimate anyone! The “most lowly worker” can have the most startling ideas and suggestions! So-called ‘difficult people’ might be considered difficult because they have alternative ideas!
* Make sure that the people on your list cover the whole spectrum of your investigations.

**Create the Interview Questions (Prepare for the Interview)**

Newspaper journalists are taught to always ask for WHY, WHEN, WHO, WHAT, WHERE and HOW. Add to that HOW MUCH and you have a reasonable guidelines when you prepare your interview questions.

There are three important things to be considered when preparing for an interview: the *format* of the interview the *wording* of the interview questions for maximum understandability and answerability; the *translation of concerns* into words.

There are three general formats for interviews: The *unstructured* format is used primarily in preliminary work. There is no particular order to the questions asked. The interviewer listens to responses to general questions (often open ended) and directs the conversation more or less to the topic at hand. There is a natural tendency to wander. In exploratory work however, the issues are not clear, the structure of the problem is probably misunderstood by the interviewer, and the interviewees are more expert in the topic discussed.

In a *semi-structured* interview, specific questions are asked, usually in a set order, but tangents are followed and probes are inserted when the interviewer feels that more information is necessary. Advantages: important questions are always asked, but leads to new questions can be followed for a while.

A follow-up interview may be held in a *structured* format. In this format a specific set of questions is asked (often closed questions) in a predetermined order and the responses should be factual and to-the-point.

**Arrange the Interview**

In larger organisations, it is essential that people are approached via the “hierarchical line”. You need approval from managers or supervisors to interview an employee. Explain the reasons for your request. If you are unfamiliar with the organisation or department, consider a written request as the first step. Allow enough lead-time for people to make time available for the interview. After all, they are key people (the reason for your request!) and are therefore busy people!

One-hour interviews should be the ordinary maximum. Planning and rehearsal of the  interview schedule can help determine the actual length. The opening (including handshakes, introduction and finishing paper work) may take 10 minutes. Similarly, the final five minutes may be taken up with the protocol of ending the session. This leaves about 45 minutes at the most for questioning, which may actually tire people who have to concentrate very well indeed.

Ideally, the interview should be conducted in the interviewee’s environment unless that area is noisy, distracting, threatening or too public.

**Conduct the Interview**

* Appear as the interviewee expects and on time.
* Seek commonality; attempt to put the interviewee at ease.
* Disclose intentions (explain WHY).
* Check that intentions are understood and agreed to.
* Do not impose your ideas. LISTEN.
* Articulate questioning without “third degree”.
* Never criticise the interviewee or other staff members.
* Do not be afraid of silence.
* Prompt unguarded answers to the interviewee’s questions.
* Listen actively and responsively.
* Show positive body language.
* Ask checking questions.
* Take notes. Tape recorders might be intimidating!
* Do not be in a hurry.
* Summarise points made by the interviewee.
* “Did I forget to ask you anything important”.
* Ask open-ended questions when seeking information. Ask closed questions if you need a commitment from your interviewee.
* Avoid asking leading questions: the answer may be as expected but the facts may be different!
* Keep the initiative (What you just said there a moment ago, struck me as very important…….)
* Follow up any issues raised.

**Analyse the Interview**

* Write a *Contact Report* (See Appendix)
* Compare the results of the interview as described in your Contact Report with the objectives (aims) set before the interview took place. Have the objectives been achieved?
* Cross-check with other information for verifications.
* If appropriate, don’t hesitate to send a (sanitised?) version of your Contact Report to the interviewee(s). They will appreciate this and will be able to verify and possibly correct some wrong impressions you have got.
* Often you will decide to contact your interviewee again to ask some more searching questions.

**Possible Problems**

Although interviewing is possibly the most valuable tool for information gathering, there are limitations.

1. The interviewee may refuse to cooperate with the interviewer because of fear of redundancy, demotion, or an inability to cope with new technology. This fear may take the form of a direct refusal to be interviewed, or (more likely), being vague or incomplete answering questions.
2. Interviewees may feel that they should tell the interviewer how the tasks, which they carry out, *should* be performed rather than how they actually *are* performed. It is common for people to cut corners, not follow work procedures, and to adopt alternative practices. All of these may be more efficient than the officially recommended practices. But it is difficult for the interview ee to be honest in this area.
3. Clerical workers do tasks. They generally do not have to describe them and may not be articulate in doing so. They might not know the overall picture in which their task is a component.
4. The interviewer cannot completely avoid filtering all that the interviewee says through his/her own view of the world. The interviewer’s background and preconceptions may interfere with the process of communication. One of the hallmarks of good interviewer is their ability to think themselves into the interviewee’s frame of mind: Empathy.

**The Art of Listening**

Two simple rules apply to all interviews, no matter what their purpose:

1. Everything that motivates an interviewee to give full and considered answers to questions is GOOD.
2. Everything that prevents the interviewee from doing so is BAD.

Good questions are vital in motivating the interviewee to respond as openly as possible. However, listening to the answers is just as important as asking questions.

A good *information-gathering interview* should consist of 15% talk by the interviewer, 85% by the interviewee. The interviewer’s role is to ask questions briefly and to the point, and to *listen* to the answers.

Listening is also one of the most effective methods by which the interviewer establishes a *good rapport* with interviewees. If interviewees know that the interviewer is listening they will feel confident and positive towards the interviewer. As a result they will show this by responding as fully as possible to the questions asked.

There is, however, *listening* and *good listening*. Good listening is more than just registering words like a tape recorder. It means hearing the feelings that lie behind the words. It means getting to the truths behind the half-truths, the evasions, and sometimes even the lies. Good listening involves how you look, how you sit, and how you sound.

**The Drawbacks of Documentation**

The problem with using documentation, as a source for information, is that there is often a great deal of it. The analyst has to read extensively in order to gather a small amount of useful information. Unlike interviews, where the analyst can direct the information that is provided by targeted questions, documents are less easy to probe.

Documentation may be out of date and the analyst has no easy way of knowing this. The last thing to be changed, when a clerical procedure is changed, is usually the documentation describing it. Despite all this, documentation is a useful channel for information gathering.

**Contact Report**

**To:** (replace text with name) **C.C.** (replace text with name)

**From:** (replace text with your name)

**Date:** (replace text with date)

**Date of meeting/interview:** (replace text with date)

**Those present:** (replace text with names)

**Objectives:** (replace text with your own)

(start here)

(Body of your report here)

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Your name here) (The client’s name here)