

Qualitative Interviewing - Working paper

– Simon Lind Fischer.

“It is crucial to consider what an interview actually is and which challenges and which potential it might have? My own approach as a researcher has been to leave as much space as possible for the interviewees to expand on their experiences rather than narrowing down to possible responses.”

This text is a quick preparation to understanding what a qualitative interview is - and how you can prepare for and perform the qualitative interview.

According to Brinkmann, the qualitative interview is regarded as the most common qualitative method within social sciences (Brinkmann, 2016). Taking a critical and reflective stance is important e.g. in relation to the fact that an interview is not a natural relation between two individuals – you do not have a direct, unlimited access to the world of the respondent (Brinkmann, 2016). A professional approach would be to prepare the right questions both in terms of content and language.

Another important aspect is to establish a good relationship with the respondent and a comfortable ambiance and atmosphere in the interview room. To go beyond the facade of the respondent is a fundamental goal of the interview. This is important as we live in a so-called *interview-society* (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997. In Brinkmann, 2016), in which the respondent is used to or even trained to answer questions – and potentially affected by the way they have seen numerous respondents answer question in TV.

Even though this is rarely the case, interviewing can seem easy and straight-forward. Latour stresses that people perform their roles really well which challenge the interview as a method (Latour, 2000. In Brinkmann, 2016). The visible or hidden pressure, which the respondent is under, is often a barrier to the goal of the interview – to obtain open and honest answers. Brinkmann & Kvale argue that it is impossible to avoid playing a role in the interview for the interviewer in a non-structured interview.

“An interview is literally an inter-view, an interchange of views between two persons, conversing about a theme of mutual interest. Con-versation” in its Latin root means “dwelling with someone” or “wandering together with,” and the root sense of “dia-logue” is that of talk (logos) that goes back and forth (dia-) between persons” (Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995, p.4. In Brinkmann, 2013).

Fontana & Frey suggest the empathic interview as an interview approach (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Here, the researcher takes a positive, listening and understanding position towards the views and emotions of the respondent. One way of building empathy is to share your own experience with the respondent and thus try to build a bridge or foundation of shared interests and challenges (Ellis & Berger, 2003).

Applying the empathic position is not without difficulties, as it can attract criticism if it used too much as in instrument in which case it can be perceived as unethical behavior (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

According to Kvale, a good qualitative interview should be the opposite of an alienated relation between researcher and respondent. Instead, one should try to form authentic and personal relations. The difference between a conversation and an interview is that an interview has a clear purpose and distribution of roles (Kvale, 2006).

Having considered the methodological approach, you are now better prepared to investigate practice.