

Exploring the Key Criteria for Managing Interview in Business Research: A Diamond Framework

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes a structured approach to address the challenges of managing interviews in business research. Drawing upon prior literature and practical applications, the paper introduces the “Diamond Framework,” which outlines six essential criteria: the choice of interview, determining sample size, interview protocol and trial interview, the role of the interviewer, interview in a natural setting, and avoiding bias and ethical consideration. While interviews are widely used to understand individual experiences and human interaction, managing the interview process effectively remains a concern, particularly when engaging with business elites and stakeholders. This framework highlights the interpretivist foundation of qualitative inquiry and offers a practical reference for researchers aiming to obtain rich insights from participants in business contexts. The framework is intended to assist researchers in collecting high-quality data, ensuring ethical conduct, and strengthening the credibility of findings through proper interview design and execution.

Keywords: Business research interview; Interview protocol design; Interview sample size; Elite interview management; Research ethics in qualitative studies

Introduction

Business research is essential in enhancing competitiveness, fostering innovation, and promoting sustainable growth, thus constituting an essential element of strategic management for organisations aspiring to achieve long-term success in today's ever-evolving business landscape. Research in a business context offers a methodical, objective way of obtaining, recording and analysing data to produce insights that advise business decisions; the research process comprises a problem or an opportunity investigation for an organisation via systematic steps, in which exploratory research is recommended to enhance understanding as well as evaluating critical issues regarding a problem (Lim et al., 2021). Qualitative data via interview approach is a direct way to support exploratory research design.

When a researcher seeks an inquiry for data in a business context that showcases individual experiences and human interactions, the interview technique as a data collection instrument will always come to mind. Interviewing business elites, corporate executives, and other related stakeholders required an appropriate data collection method, and the interview technique has gained its credit by exploring interactions and human experiences that are

original and insightful (Natow, 2020). For example, business elites discuss their business goals, directions, organisational settings, corporate experiences, and behaviours. Such insightful information needed to be obtained to form meaningful data representing a discussion or topic centre. A study conducted by Yip and Bocken (2018) employed interview methods to propose a sustainable business model in the banking industry. Another study conducted by Roodekerk et al. (2022) has utilised interviews as another complementary data collection tool for retail analytics. Hence, it is evident that researchers are keen on using interviews as another alternative to obtain information among business practitioners.

Even so, in conducting business research, it was always a challenge for the researcher to manage interviews to obtain shared insights among individuals (Kabir, 2022; Ma, Seidl & McNulty, 2021). For example, there are issues of generating high-quality data and determining the type of interview used in a business context (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021). The literature also addressed other external barriers, such as data collection devices and interview questions used to obtain insights (Shohel et al., 2015).

Past literature highlights that qualitative study intends to understand the engagement of a group of people and comprises open questions about a particular phenomenon as it is being studied in context. As such, the interview design has been chosen to provide information related to participants' experiences and perceptions of a specific topic (Creswell, 2015; Schwandt, 2001). Notwithstanding there are numerous articles published on qualitative research and interviewing as a data collection tool, the literature mainly focuses on presenting a range of theoretical and practical considerations, such as the types and differences of qualitative interviews the different forms of qualitative interviews (Patel et al., 2020; Roulston and Choi, 2018); practicalities, challenges, and constraint of interview design and conduct (Langley & Meziani, 2020; Kallio et al., 2016); and alternative criteria of qualitative research quality (Pratt et al., 2020; Tracy, 2010). Past literature has addressed the challenges of conducting interviews in diverse disciplines (Dodgson & Trotman, 2022; Durkin et al., 2020; Ma & McNulty, 2021) and different age groups (Bassett et al., 2008), but the context in the business research remained unclear. Hence, this paper aims to provide researchers with insight into the key criteria for managing interviews in business research and, consequently, propose a framework to manage interviews.

Answering the Research Paradigm

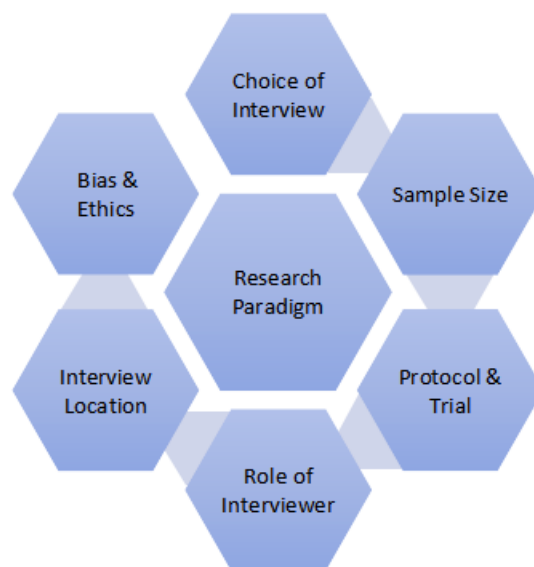
Researchers often seek to clarify the research paradigm and design to explain a study's philosophical assumption, methodological procedure, and approach. A paradigm is described as a set of theoretical presumptions in an explanation framework based on research questions or a consensus of shared assumptions and problem definition (Guba, 1990; Kuhn, 2012). Qualitative study is interpretivism-oriented by nature in which the research is socially and experientially based, and the mind constructs the reality; there will be different social interactions and experiences among a group of people, including the researcher (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim & Martin, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The roles of communication and contact are important to obtain reality (Bailey, 2007). There are possibilities to have similarities between individuals or among a group of people. As such, there is no predefinition of dependent or independent variables, but rather, the focus is on exploring and understanding how individuals make sense of a circumstance at a particular point in time based on the natural setting (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2006). Participants and researchers both play important roles in constructing the knowledge related to the study participants. The development of knowledge is based on the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Burr, 2003;

Creswell, 2015). Also, the researchers view themselves as part of the co-production in conducting the study to gain information related to the experiences shared by the participants. The reality of work and life among a group of individuals is based on communication among human interactions (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research actively requires questions and scope construction for observations, interviews and analyses (Sławecki, 2018). One of the most imperative data collection approaches for qualitative research is research interviews, whose wide applications include preliminary data collection for a pilot study (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Interviews are the most regular way to collect data for qualitative research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Considering the same quote of Fontana and Frey (1998), “We cannot lift the results of interviewing out of the contexts in which they were gathered and claim them as objective data with no strings attached” used by Qu and Dumay (2011) in their study for qualitative interview research, it is essential to look into the ins and outs of interviews due to its importance in business research.

Managing Interview in Business Research

Based on the discussion of past literature, we propose six criteria for managing interviews, namely the “A Diamond Framework”. The framework is indicated in Figure 1 and followed by details of each criterion.

Figure 1: The Diamond Framework of Interview



Source: Creswell et al., 2016; Guba, 1990; Patton, 1990; Turner, 2010; Yeong et al., 2018

The Choice of Interview

The interview has been viewed as one of the most powerful instruments for developing knowledge (Turner, 2010). Probing questions were asked during the interview sessions to ensure individuals shared more insights about the topic. Each participant was asked similar questions during the interview procedure, but the questions were written to enable open-ended responses (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). In addition, the standardised open-ended interviews enable the researcher to elicit more data by asking more questions while allowing

the respondents to provide more information if they choose to do so. As a result, the researcher will have more opportunities to develop follow-up questions, and participants will have the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and experiences thoroughly. For instance, researchers employed open-ended questions in a qualitative inquiry to explore the food waste behaviour among late adolescents (Lim et al., 2021). This approach lets participants share more insights into their consumption behaviour on unfinished foods.

Before structuring the interview protocol and deciding on the questions to be asked, the researcher should consider the type of interview questions to be used. The purpose of conducting the research has led to the selection of the types of interviews. Interviews can either be categorised as formal or informal. Informal interviews are part of daily living as people experience it (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Swain & King, 2022). Although they can be used for qualitative studies, their application is constrained due to the complexity of the research subjects, and the information obtained is used mainly for anecdotal reasons. On the other hand, formal interviews are more structured, held to higher standards, and used more prominently in the professional world. During the formal interview, the interviewer takes control of the entire process, and his/her role is to ensure that the subject gains an understanding of the issue under analysis. Formal interviews pay special attention to ethical considerations (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Different interviewers might demonstrate different levels of power during the data collection process. They are categorised according to their motive and formality and frequently classified according to their position in qualitative studies. The three common types of interviews are structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Jamshed, 2014). The researcher takes on some level of accountability in each area. Nevertheless, the degree of rigidity in this form of interview can be distinctive. The interviewer takes complete control and monitors during the data collection session, showcasing much authority and, hence, giving the interviewee less space to be flexible and casual (Stuckey, 2013). The researcher asks straightforward questions, and the topics are expected to react similarly, giving succinct, uncomplicated answers. Structured interviews have a set of guidelines which must be clearly observed by the researcher (Stuckey, 2013).

Sometimes, the participants might not have similar answers to share due to the nature of the topic discussed. During this stage, the researcher will employ semi-structured interviews as another alternative to information for obtaining insights (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In other words, there is no rigid adherence to follow, unlike the structured interviews. The interviewer will still use an outline of topics and questions, but there is more flexibility given to the participants to share their opinions (Stuckey, 2013). Their application depends on the interviewee's response to the questions or subjects the researcher has presented (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

Some of the researchers prefer non-directive interviews, and there is an absence of interview protocols in which they know the subject and manipulate him/her towards a relevant topic of interest. Most unstructured interviews are controlled conversations that bend towards the researcher's interests. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that unstructured interviews, despite having an irregular structure, are still essential for gathering qualitative data. Industry practitioners have widely used it in diverse disciplines to obtain information from the participants (Chapman, 2020; Chauhan, 2022). For example, a past study by Buor (2022) employed the unstructured interview to explore the socio-economic impact on Ghana's supply

chain industry. The mentioned approach enhances the clarity of information shared among the participants.

Lockdowns and social distancing measures resulting from the pandemic are influencing how qualitative researchers gather data, and this trend is expected to persist for a considerable period (Vindrola-Padros et al., 2020). Equitable qualitative research has been discussed by Roberts et al. (2021). Among the commonly used qualitative methods, semi-structured or unstructured interviews and focus groups traditionally take place in face-to-face settings. However, the shift to virtual video or telephone interviews is another alternative, though it introduces its own array of practical, technical, and privacy challenges. A study conducted by Weller (2017) employed internet video calls to conduct a qualitative study and measure the impact of such a method. The paper has provided a few credits and limitations for online interviews in a qualitative study.

Qualitative research often delves into challenging topics and inquiries, emphasising the importance of establishing trust and rapport with interviewees to yield valuable data. Building a human connection is more seamless when facial expressions are visible, enabling a nuanced understanding of the situation and each other's emotions. If in-person interactions are impractical, opting for video conferencing or online meetings for interviews is strongly recommended (Akbar et al., 2021). Additionally, using social media tools such as Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp might be another data collection approach for interviewing. Nonetheless, the appropriateness of using such a channel might be a concern, as using personal information and data will create huge privacy and confidentiality issues.

Determining Sample Size

A small sample size is sufficient to obtain insights to assist the researcher in understanding the interactions and human relationships (Patton, 1990). The data saturation point determines the sample size's appropriateness, not the population size (Corbin & Straus, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ting et al., 2023). In a marketing supply chain research, a total of six retailers participated in the study and shared insights on marketing mix strategies during the pandemic (Ing et al., 2020). The sampling technique addressed the importance of the sample size, which is to determine the appropriate size that focuses on the evidence relevant to a specific human interaction and topic and not the number of participants. Besides, previous literature that adopts the qualitative approach in marketing has proved that study data reach a saturation point with a sample size of between twenty and fifty interviews (Johnson & Sohi, 2016). Some qualitative studies claim that a minimum of fifteen cases or interviews is sufficient in order to collect data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, there are no specific numbers to interview for qualitative studies as they focus on the “richness” and “depth” of the information obtained from the participants (Guest et al., 2006). For example, a one-to-one interview with a sample size of twenty-five participants was employed to showcase food disposition behaviour among late adolescents. The concept of data saturation was showcased in the findings (Lim et al., 2021). When the researcher and coders do not encounter any more new information, new codes, and new themes from the data, the data is said to reach saturation, and the technique of interview is seen as a method to arrive at data saturation in one's study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Mwita, 2022). Nonetheless, no specific numbers are required to reach data saturation since the researcher cannot quantify such numbers. Instead, they depend on the desired information and insights obtained (Bernard, 2013).

Interview Protocol and Trial Interview

When a researcher enters the field to conduct an interview, an interview protocol is needed to provide an overview of the research study (Ting et al., 2018). A dependable interview protocol is essential for acquiring high-quality interview data. The protocol serves as a method to probe the background information of the participants as well as the central topic of discussion, which is related to them. It can have several layouts related to the research questions, and the design of follow-up questions is essential to probe to gain more insights into the study. Probing questions allow the participants to share their in-depth experiences related to the study's focus. The depths and richness harnessed from these questions provide diverse points of view and can lead to diverse ideas and themes that have not been anticipated as part of the study (Yeong et al., 2018).

A trial interview or pilot study is a crucial part of the interview preparation process since it helps the researcher identify the constraints, shortcomings, or other issues, enabling the researcher to make the required adjustments before the actual interviews (Majid et al., 2017). Performing a pilot test is essential before devoting time to data collection (Boudewyn et al., 2023). A pilot test will also help properly scale and price a research idea (Sampson, 2004). During the trial interview session, the researcher uses the same set of interview guidelines and asks identical questions during the interview session. Before the interview, the researcher gives an overview of the study, outlining its goals and objectives and defining some key terms. The researcher then proceeded to select the participants based on the research topics, and the languages used for the interview were predetermined during the construction of the interview guideline process. Researchers employ probing questions in addition to the primary ones to uncover additional insights. For example, probing questions have been integrated into a one-to-one interview that explores the influence of digital marketing on the effectiveness of recruitment (Rodrigues & Martinez, 2020).

The Role of the Interviewer

It is essential for the interviewer to identify their role in the study (Döringer, 2021) and to diminish any concerns during data collection (Chenail, 2011). The interviewers play many different roles during an interview. When conducting the interview, the interviewer must demonstrate specific characteristics (flexible, objective, neutral, a good listener, and so on). The researcher must realise that the interviewer could never interrupt his or her opinion of a participant's answer. The interviewer must establish what has been called "balanced rapport" while building good relationships with the participants since rapport-building is an essential part of every study due to the delicate nature of the subjects being investigated and the vulnerability of the populations being examined (Fontana & Frey, 2005). On the one hand, he or she must be approachable and relaxed, while on the other, he or she must be strict and impersonal. During the interview session, the participants might feel obliged and pressured to share their experiences since they do not participate further in the data analysis part, which can lead to insecure feelings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Wood et al., 2019).

Interview in a Natural Setting

Creswell et al. (2016) suggest that interviews be conducted in a comfortable environment where participants are not restricted from sharing information. The location of the interviews can impact the participant experience (Wood et al., 2019) and knowledge development (Bjørvik et al., 2023). While it is influential for advancing research, interviewing and

conducting business research are widely considered challenging, which might undermine the quality of data collected. Allowing the participants to choose the location of their interview can further balance the power in the relationship and communication. For instance, a qualitative study has been carried out across 26 different hotels and involved interviews and observation to assess food waste behaviour (Kasavan et al., 2019). Such arrangements enable researchers to communicate directly with the participants and enter the field to understand the human interactions among a group of people. As such, more insights can be obtained as participants are more comfortable sharing the insights without any communication and location barriers.

Avoiding Bias & Ethical Consideration

The validity of data is always a concern in qualitative research (Hayashi et al., 2019). Direct communication and the involvement of both the researcher and participants are essential to ensure that the data is valid based on the topic of discussion. Previous studies stress the need to explore individuals' experiences and human interaction in natural settings and use direct contact with participants to gain deeper insights from the interaction of individuals. This claim is supported by Patton (1990), who claims that the closeness of a researcher to data offers better insights and avoids bias. Multiple data collection methods allow triangulation of evidence to sharpen the theory. For example, the study employed the interview method and review of documents for data collection. Document analysis was also performed since the literature review is important as theoretical grounding for the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Document analysis, as supplementary to other qualitative methods, allows the triangulation of evidence and enhances reliability (Stoffelen, 2019).

The ethical issue is one of the main concerns while conducting qualitative research (Arifin, 2018). If enumerators are being hired, the researcher needs to ensure that the enumerators have been properly guided and trained to conduct the interviews ethically. The ethical considerations include anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, voluntary participation, the option to opt-out, and non-maleficence/beneficence (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). Potential participants were also formally and adequately approached. Before conducting the interview, the purpose and objectives of the research, including the data collection method, need to be informed and explained to the participants. Such information could assist the participants in deciding whether they are comfortable and convenient to be involved in the research study. During the data collection procedure, participants have the right and freedom to participate in the research and withdraw at any study stage without obligation. Data storage issues and protection need to be enhanced in the business context. For instance, the project leader is accountable for keeping the interview personal data and ensuring the data can only be accessed by the key persons.

Conclusion

It is essential to consider the research paradigm before choosing the research design for business research. Despite extensive discussion on qualitative research in the academic literature, a study focusing on critical interview management criteria is limited. The importance of people's experiences and the location setting in sharing the story is essential. As such, obtaining insights among a group of participants depends on the interaction among the interviewer/interviewee and other factors affecting the communication flows. Another key concern will be the consideration of bias and ethics in presenting the interview findings in the business context. The proposed "Diamond Framework" for interviews is expected to

provide another alternative for researchers in managing the exploratory study. The framework can be employed in different disciplines, enabling researchers to obtain top-notch data, grasp participants' perspectives, uphold ethical standards, and produce valuable insights into their research inquiries.

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