

Clip 5: How does qualitative interviewing differ from structured interviewing?

I'm going to talk about how qualitative interview differs from structured interviewing.

Structured interviews follow a fairly rigid interview format. All respondents have a similar experience in that they are asked very similar types of questions and have to give answers that are predetermined in a way that the researchers constructed. In these terms structured interviews emphasize reliability through standardisation.

Closed questions predominate, that is, it's giving a range of different answers that they can choose from. However, open questions are possible but they are usually subject to pre-planned coding frames. So regardless of what the answer to that open question is the researcher will have a coding frame that will enable that answer to be inserted into a pre-planned structured. In these terms, structured interviews are researcher driven, rather than interview driven.

Now on the other hand, qualitative interviewing is more open. It's much more like guided confirmation. You have a good idea of what you want your participant to talk about but you don't know what they are going to say or where they might go with your questions. And indeed they react around a respondent in a structured interview and a participant in a qualitative interview that demonstrates that level of engagement that you would expect the participant to have in a qualitative interview.

So, whilst qualitative interviews are planned and structured they're also dynamic, responsive and fluid. And it's actually this balance between planning but also responding that make them quite difficult to do because you have to plan the question and listen to the respondents trying to rephrase questions or pick upon bits of information that they are giving you and you have to do all of this at the same time, this can make it intellectually exhausting and indeed interview scales are very important in this process just because you are doing something that is much more open, doesn't mean that you have to plan what you are going to try and have the participant to say you have to plan for all of the different ways an interview can go in and try and make some assessment of all this contingency or at least try and work out where you might go next and how you might go there. But because of the emphasis on the interviewee participating within the conversation this tends to mean that qualitative interviews have higher validity because they are much more tuned to what the interviewee thinks and feels. They are not structured solely around the need of the interviewer.

However, regardless of whether you are doing qualitative interviewing or structured interviewing pilot, pilot, pilot! You need to know what types of things produce useful set of data and where the possible dead ends in any of that question formatting might be. So, pilot, pilot, pilot!