Handout 15: Interviewing

Interviews are formal face to face research tools. They are not overhead or chance encounters. Interviews may be conducted one on one or with a group.

The qualitative interview is different to a questionnaire. The qualitative interview does not ask all respondents the same question in the same order. In fact there may be no formal questions at all. The interview is seeking to understand a point of view or a persons perspective by probing, reflecting and encouraging discussion.

Initially the interviewer should attempt to understand the interviewees language and perspective. Over time and by asking more detailed questions the researcher seeks to understand how or why they construct their perspective in a particular way.

Constructing an Interview Guide

- Draw up a list of possible topics to be covered
- Devise several suitable questions in each identified area. These questions should be open
- The guide need not be rigidly followed rather it should act as a prompt
- Additional topics may be added as more people are interviewed and the researchers understanding grows
- Validity in Qualitative Research.

To ensure the validity of your research there are 6 factors that should be considered

1) Time: the more time you spend with people the better the quality of your material
2) Place: Consider the influence of the physical setting on actions/discussions. Note the physical environment
3) Social Circumstances: The more varied your opportunity see people in different social situations the more you will understand them
4) Language: The more familiar you are with the groups language the more able you are to interpret events
5) Intimacy: The greater you personal involvement with people the more able you will be to understand and to extract meaning from their words and actions
6) Social Consensus: Your ability to interpret cultural meanings within the group is critical to your understanding of the way people interact and interpret social circumstances.

It is also important to take time once you have left the field to reflect upon your observations and experiences. A detailed analysis isn’t possible until you have left the field. The use of other peoples research and theoretical material to interpret your experiences is also paramount.
Interpreting the Data

Focus on events to see if they are typical or widely spread. You may need to compare the experience to theories to either prove or disprove these.