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UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce readers to the different types of interviews that can be conducted in organizational and management research; to introduce a framework which can be used to differentiate the different types of interviews in use; and to highlight what influences the choice of one interview design over another. We start with a consideration of some of the different conceptualizations of the interview within the business and management literature and then consider the different types of interview a researcher can use.

HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND INTERVIEW VARIATION?

Within the organizational literature, there are numerous typologies of research interviews. These focus on the dimensions or continua along which interviews differ. Here, we consider two ways of characterizing different types of interviews. The first relates to the epistemological commitments that underpin the interviewer's research. These are important in that they frame how a researcher interprets the researched and the research process more generally. The second concerns the level of structure in the interview, which is a key feature discussed in much of the literature on interviewing.



PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

An important factor that influences the nature of the research interview is the underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher. For example, the standardized or more structured interview is likely to be informed by positivist epistemological commitments, where the emphasis is on generating objective data which represents some truth about the interviewee's world. As such, the intention will be to minimize any contamination that may occur as a result of the social or active nature of the interview, including the impact of the interviewer on the interviewee.

King (2004a) differentiates between three sets of ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying qualitative interviews: the realist, phenomenological and social constructionist. Definitions of ontology and epistemology can be found in Box 2.1.

2.1 Defining philosophical assumptions

Ontology is the philosophical study of being, existence and reality. Ontology deals with questions regarding whether or not entities can be said to exist. If we subscribe to a realist ontology, then we believe that the phenomena we are interviewing about – for example, job satisfaction, marketing strategy or financial markets – exist as real entities in the social world before we enter it. If we subscribe to a constructionist ontology, then we believe that the phenomena we investigate do not exist independently from ourselves as researchers. Rather, they are artificial creations that come into existence through our talk or discourse. The world does not exist independently of us.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and the criteria by which we can know what does, and does not, constitute warranted or scientific knowledge. Interviewers who take an objectivist approach to epistemology assume that the social sciences are similar to the natural sciences in that researchers seek to explain and predict by searching for regularities and causal relationships, avoiding contaminating the research setting. Interviewers who take a subjectivist approach to epistemology assume that the researcher does not have a privileged vantage point. Rather, we all interpret and make sense of the world in different ways and the interviewer can only report their own interpretations without any claim to privilege.

Within a realist approach, the interviewer is keen to access the interviewee's understanding of a particular organizational phenomenon that is seen to exist outside of the person and then compare their account with other interviewees. Within a phenomenological approach, the concern is with the researcher reflecting on how their own presuppositions may impact on the data collected, as well as exploring the life world of the interviewee. Within social constructionist approaches, the interview is seen as

the co-production of a text, rather than as an account of any real-world phenomenon. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) highlight that from a constructionist position, how interviewees represent reality in the interview situation may have more to do with how they are understanding and constructing the discursive context of the interview itself, rather than being any reflection of an enduring, external reality. Therefore, the interview from this perspective is a very different encounter from how it is perceived by those working in other epistemological traditions such as positivism.

There are also other traditions where the underpinning philosophical commitments may involve seeking to empower participants. Limerick and O'Leary (2006: 108), for instance, in their discussion of how feminist qualitative research can inform the management field, reflect on their use of interviews in a study of women's careers as a way of giving women a 'voice' in the 'co-creation of knowledge claims'. Similarly, Mirchandani (2003) describes how open-ended qualitative interviews in the context of an anti-racist feminist theoretical approach enabled her to identify the use of emotion work by the interviewees, which was not the intention of the original research study.

A further way of considering different positions on interviews is to explore the different knowledge claims that are enabled by different stances. Inevitably, such distinctions will also be informed by an epistemological approach. Alvesson (2011) characterizes three major positions taken on interviewing: neo-positivism, romanticism and localism. Neo-positivism is similar to what King (2004a) identifies as a realist approach in that the intention is to access via the interview the truth about behaviour, attitudes, interests, and so on, in as objective a way as possible. In this way, the aim is that the knowledge generated can be generalized. In a romanticist approach, the interview is seen as an authentic dialogue fostered in good interpersonal relationships. The aim here is to achieve a deep understanding of the research issue through building trust with the interviewee so that both parties can jointly construct meaning and access organizational reality. Such an approach is associated with interpretivism in its broadest sense. Localists, on the other hand, are interested in the interview in itself as a contextually specific process. Therefore, an interview is a genre of conversation that should be studied as such, rather than a tool for data collection (Silverman, 2006; Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012). Hence, localists see the interview as ontologically different from neo-positivists and romanticists. Here, the interview is not a reflection of some pre-existing reality but rather a distinctive social encounter.

How does the novice interviewer account for these different epistemological stances in their own approach to interviews? The first stage is to recognize our own epistemological assumptions and how they might influence how we frame the interview. The key point here is that the format and process of an interview will be influenced by the epistemological approach of the research overall, making this an important factor that influences the variety found in management and organizational research interviews (see Box 2.2).

2.2 Understanding your epistemological approach

Wen Wen is studying for a Masters degree in Accounting and is looking forward to the prospect of conducting some original research for her dissertation. She is interested in how auditors make evaluative decisions about company accounting practices and is privileged to have gained access to a regulatory body and to firms of auditors in her home country to conduct her research. The plan is to conduct interviews with a number of auditors to find out the intentions behind accounting standards. Although initially finding epistemology a daunting concept, Wen Wen is keen to be clear about her own philosophical stance. Her view is that there is a real world out there but that auditors experience and interpret some of the practices of companies in different ways within that real world. After reading around the subject, she decides that her approach to how she understands auditors' practice is informed by a realist ontology. However, because she believes that auditors will all interpret those practices differently, her approach to epistemology is interpretivist. Hence, her interviews will explore how these different interpretations impact on their practice.

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

It is common to differentiate interviews according to the level of structure the interviewer uses to determine the progression of the interview according to their pre-existing ideas; the research questions; and the resulting questions in the interview schedule. Interviews are usually differentiated as structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Structured interviews will have a set script of questions that all interviewees will be asked in the same order, therefore ensuring consistency across interviews. In semi-structured interviews, there will be a list of questions and prompts but the interviewer deviates from the schedule, depending on the responses of the interviewee. Hence, there is the opportunity to follow up on interesting issues that the interviewee raises that may not have previously been considered by the interviewer. With unstructured interviews, although the research may have a theme or topic to focus the discussion on, there are few, if any, pre-formulated questions, so the interview can go in any direction as a result of the interviewer's or interviewee's interpretations of the topic. Clearly, the more unstructured the interview becomes, the more active thinking the interviewer has to do throughout the interview in relation to questioning. Therefore, a high level of skills is required in order to manage the interview which means the unstructured version may not be a suitable choice for a Masters dissertation.

The structure of an interview is linked to its purpose. Usually, the more structured formats are associated with the quantification of the data generated, whereas in qualitative approaches typically interviews are semi-structured, or unstructured,

encouraging the interviewee to talk at length around a subject and shape the direction of the interview as necessary. Therefore, as King (2004a) suggests, one of the key things that differentiates the various approaches to interviews is the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. In highly structured interviews, the aim is to minimize any bias that may occur from the role of the interviewer, hence the standardization of the questions and format. Within more qualitative, less unstructured approaches however, it is recognized that the interviewee takes an active role in constructing the nature of the interview, and can direct it as appropriate.

The distinction between different levels of structure in questioning is not as straightforward as it initially seems. For example, there are a number of different ways of structuring qualitative interviews designed to generate open-ended data in a particular format, such as those that use repertory grid, cognitive mapping or critical incident. Hence, in terms of thinking further about the different types of interview structure available, we now focus on how we might characterize interviews based on their purpose. We now explore these differences in more detail. Table 2.1 summarizes the different types of interviews according to level of structure and purpose and therefore provides a summary of what follows.

Table 2.1 Purposes of interviews

<i>Level of structure</i>	<i>Type of interview</i>	<i>Purpose of interview</i>
Structured	Information gathering	Gather attitude/opinion data that can be quantified for analysis
	Hypothesis testing	Gather data for quantification and theory testing
Semi-structured, thematic format	Exploratory	Gather information about a given topic
	Theoretical	Generate data to enable theory development
Semi-structured, distinctive format	Event based	Generate data through understanding how interviewees make sense of different events
	Comparative	Generate data through forcing the interviewee to make comparisons
	Narrative	Encourage interviewees to tell stories from their own perspective
	Biographical	Gain insights into the interviewee's experiences through chronological reflection
	Visual techniques	Generate data by encouraging participants to project their own views or feelings onto a visual stimulus
Unstructured	Phenomenological	Gain insights into an individual's lifeworld

DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEW STRUCTURE FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES

In this section, we consider the link between structure and purpose by examining different varieties of structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

Structured interviews

As previously mentioned, the key purpose of structured interviews is usually to enable the objective comparison of interview data across interviewees, hence enabling the qualitative data collected to be quantified for analysis. Here, we can categorize them into two different types: information gathering and hypothesis testing.

Information gathering

In some research projects, the interviewer may be interested in collecting data regarding the attitudes or opinions of organizational members or the general public on a particular issue. However, they may choose to do this as part of an interview rather than as part of a questionnaire survey. Furthermore, they might be keen to be able to quantify the qualitative data so that it can be content analysed at a later stage. The aim may be to run some statistical tests on the data and make some conclusions regarding the generalization of the findings. Hence, the purpose of the structured interview in this case is information gathering, and a standardized interview schedule enables all interviewees to be asked the same questions in the same order. The structured nature of the interview also means that, in theory, it will be reliable in that the interviewee will produce the same answers regardless of the characteristics of the interviewer. In many cases, the structured interview is equivalent to a questionnaire that is administered by the researcher rather than self-administered (see Ekinci, 2015). For example, Cassell, Nadin, Gray and Clegg (2002) used a structured interview survey with 100 SME managers to ascertain their usage of a variety of human resource practices. In practice, structured interviews are more usually thought of as questionnaires completed by an interviewer rather than the interviewee (see Ekinci, 2015). An example of a structured interview for information gathering can be found in Box 2.3.

2.3 Designing a structured interview for information gathering

Hui is studying for a Masters degree in Management Strategy. As part of her research, she is interested in the extent to which SMEs are using a range of different tools for strategic analysis of the environment, for example stakeholder analysis and SWOT analysis. Hui is keen to conduct a structured interview where she gathers information

about whether companies use these kinds of strategic tools and how effective they are. She is keen to talk with managing directors in person rather than asking them to fill in a questionnaire and has arranged a number of telephone interviews with local companies. Hui wants to be able to statistically analyse the data collected so that she can make generalizations about how effective different tools of analysis are. Within the interview schedule, Hui has a list of different tools such as balance scorecard, PEST analysis, SWOT analysis, and so on. The plan is that each managing director will be asked whether they use each of those tools and asked to answer yes or no. They will then be asked to rate how effective they think those tools have been on a scale of 1 to 5. Through using the structured interview to gather information in this way, Hui will be able to statistically analyse the managing directors' views of the success or otherwise of the different strategic tools.

Using an interview for hypothesis testing

When seeking to use an interview as a way to test theory, researchers are usually working within a positivist paradigm. In order to test hypotheses, it is important that the relevant variables are clearly operationalized to ensure the reliability and validity of measures. Hence, hypothesis testing can be problematic in interviews unless the interview is highly structured. Reliability is about the consistency of measures and validity focuses on whether a measure actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Replication is also seen as important, as is generalization. Therefore, in terms of reliability, a structured interview schedule means that each interviewee will be asked the same questions in the same order. The structured nature of the questions and ordering also mean that different interviewers should, in theory, generate the same response from interviewees, meaning that the interview as a research encounter is potentially replicable. The ability to generalize from interview findings depends on the sampling strategy and we will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter. It is difficult to meet these demanding criteria from an interview study, so if this is your aim, the more structure in the process the better! An example is offered in Box 2.4.

2.4 Designing a structured interview for hypothesis testing

Wayne is investigating gender differences in perceptions of organic products for his Marketing dissertation. He is interested in a range of products and is keen to access the views of enough customers so he can look at the impact of gender

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differences. He is also interested in investigating the extent to which a positive attitude towards a product impacts on the customer buying the product for use. Wayne therefore wants to test three hypotheses in his research. Hypothesis 1 is that attitude towards a product is not related to intention to purchase the product. Hypothesis 2 is that there is no influence of gender on attitudes to green products. Hypothesis 3 is that there is no influence of gender on the intention to purchase green products. Given these hypotheses, Wayne has decided to have a structured interview where all interviewees are asked the same questions in the same order. The intention is that the data Wayne gathers can then be quantified for analysis so he can test his hypotheses. Wayne has decided to use a structured Likert scale to ask interviewees the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement on a five-point scale. Wayne has structured his interview schedule into three sections. The first has statements about attitudes towards organic products including 'Using organic products is better for the environment' and 'Eating organic food enables children to have a healthier diet'. The second set of statements is related to the intention to purchase organic food - for example, 'I plan to buy some organic vegetables during the next week'. The final section of the interview has a range of demographic variables such as gender and age within it so that Wayne can test all three of his hypotheses.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: THEMATIC FORMAT

The area with the greatest variety and number of options is the semi-structured interview. There are some that have a pre-set format of questioning that the interviewer should follow whereas others are more open. To differentiate between these types, here I classify them as semi-structured interviews with a thematic format and semi-structured interviews with a distinctive format.

Included in this category are interviews where the interviewer has a particular topic or research question that they wish to investigate which they address by devising a list of thematic questions.

Exploratory semi-structured interviews

The purpose of this type of interview is to explore a particular organizational issue from a range of different perspectives. The interviewer devises a range of questions around particular themes that enables them to gather information about the topic or question. For example, I may be interested in exploring the views of international MBA students about their experiences of studying in the UK. Hence, I will devise a series of

questions under different themes. These could include, for instance, their experiences of transitioning to live in the UK more generally; their experiences of the Business School culture; and their social life in whichever place they have chosen to live. These questions will be open-ended and will form the basis of my semi-structured thematic interview.

Theoretical semi-structured interviews

This interview is again semi-structured but here theory plays a role in how the interview questions are structured. In most cases, the data are collected to enable the development of theory. Therefore, the questions in the interview schedule may be thematically organized around exploring different theoretical aspects of an organizational phenomenon. For example, in researching how people experience decision making and fairness in organizations, I may be interested in drawing on theories of organizational justice. Therefore, I may thematically organize my interview schedule around the different types of organizational justice that have been identified in the theoretical literature on that topic, for example distributive, procedural and informational justice (see Colquitt et al., 2001). The intention is that the analysis of the data from the interview will enable me to develop theoretical insights into how organizational justice is experienced or perceived.

A further approach is where we want to use the interview data to develop theory using the processes of induction. Gill and Johnson (2010) suggest that induction involves moving from observation of the empirical world to an interpretation of those observations and theories about what has been observed. So, the researcher will develop theory through the process of analysing their interview findings. Here, the purpose of the interview is to generate data that can be analysed in such a way as to enable theory development (see Box 2.5).

2.5 Designing a semi-structured theoretical interview

Alfredo is interested in exploring how organizational commitment changes as a company goes through an organizational change project as part of his Masters programme in Human Resource Management. He is interested in exploring theories of organizational commitment in a qualitative way with employees. He is pleased to have gained access to a large local company that has just undergone a merger with a US-based multinational company. Alfredo wants to use the interviews to ask about the organizational commitment of interviewees both before and after the merger so he can explore theoretically how organizational commitment may

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change over time. Alfredo has read some of the extensive literature on organizational commitment and knows that there are a number of different dimensions of commitment. Hence, his aim is to structure the interview into a series of themes that will address those different dimensions of organizational commitment so that his findings and analysis will enable him to comment theoretically on organizational commitment and change.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: DISTINCTIVE FORMAT

As noted earlier, there are a range of different formats that can form the structured part of the semi-structured interview. These usually form one part of the interview and then there is also space for other questions. Each of these can be used in an exploratory fashion or be used in the development of theory. The most often used ones are outlined in this section.

Event-based interviews

The aim of an event-based interview is to ask the interviewee to focus on a particular event and, in exploring their experiences of that event, to generate insights into how they explain various organizational phenomena. An event in this context could be a number of things - for example, an incident, a relationship, an experience or any other specific entity. One of the most popular event-based approaches is the critical incident technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954; Chell, 2004). Here, data are collected about a specific significant incident. Examples of the use of CIT in the literature include the study of entrepreneurship (Chell, 2004); service research (Gremier, 2004); and team performance (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003). In the interview, the interviewer asks the interviewee to describe a particular incident and then follows up with a series of questions about the incident. For example, if researching customer service or safety, the interviewer could say, 'Tell me about a time when you experienced good customer service' or 'Tell me about a time when you encountered a potential safety issue in your workplace'. After the initial identification of the incident, the interviewer goes through a series of follow-up questions. These could include questions such as what happened; when it happened; why it happened; the short- and long-term consequences of it happening; who was involved and why; how people responded; and how it was explained. At each stage, the interviewer can seek clarification and rich detail about the incident. Interviews may focus on more than one incident to look for patterns in an organizational phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective (see Box 2.6).

2.6 Designing a critical incident technique interview

Chelsea is studying for a Masters degree in Finance and Banking. Before starting her course, Chelsea had an internship with a large merchant bank. During her time with that institution, Chelsea became particularly interested in how market share announcements impacted on analyst behaviour. Having learnt about the efficient market hypothesis as part of her postgraduate programme, she is now keen to interview market analysts about their views regarding the impact of share announcements. Chelsea had read the relevant literature in the area and has decided that it would be useful to study the impact of share announcements by the top 10 companies in the FTSE index. She is in the lucky position that she has access to market analysts in the bank where she did her internship and they have agreed to be interviewed. Chelsea decides that she will use critical incident technique and she will ask interviewees to talk about their views of the impact of the share announcements of those 10 companies. Hence, each announcement will be treated as a critical incident. From hearing how interviewees talk about these specific incidents, she aims to generate insights into the extent to which markets are efficient.

Comparative interviews

The aim of these kinds of interviews is to encourage the interviewee to make distinctions based on comparisons. The most well-known of these techniques is the repertory grid. The repertory grid is based on George Kelly's personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955). Kelly believed that individuals were scientists who made sense of their worlds through drawing on their own set of personal constructs to make distinctions between phenomena. He created repertory grid technique as a way of accessing an individual's personal constructs. Originally devised for a therapeutic context, repertory grid is now used in a range of different management research areas and has been used to access - amongst other things - constructions of safety in the workplace (Gammack and Stephens, 1994); performance in manufacturing (Duberley et al., 2000); gender and performance (Shaw and Cassell, 2007); and organizational culture and change (Langan-Fox and Tan, 2011). The aim of the interview is to develop a detailed understanding of the individual's different constructs and how they are organized. The process is that the interviewee is asked to make distinctions between a triad of elements to create their own set of personal constructs.

The grid data can be analysed using either qualitative or quantitative techniques. A number of authors have pointed out that the grid in itself is not the only source of data to emerge from a repertory grid interview and that discussions whilst the grid is being produced are also informative. Gammack and Stephens (1994) describe the

repertory grid as a 'conversational technology' to capture the nature of the talk that goes on in the interview as part of the process (see Box 2.7).

2.7 Designing a repertory grid interview

Mohammed is studying for a Masters degree in Marketing. For his dissertation project, he has chosen to do a piece of research that his supervisor is particularly interested in him investigating. The research question is what attracts students to apply to some business schools to study their Masters degrees rather than others. Mohammed has decided that the most appropriate way of accessing such insights is to use repertory grid technique. In seeking to elicit constructs, Mohammed will use a number of different business schools both in the UK and overseas for the elements. He will then interview students enrolled in Masters programmes at these different universities to see how their constructs highlight the different criteria they use when selecting a school to apply to.

Narrative interviews

The aim of the narrative interview is to encourage interviewees to tell stories about their own experiences of organizational phenomena. The choice of narrative interviews is informed by a constructionist stance in that the use of narratives or stories is seen as an important way in which individuals make sense of their organizational experiences. Therefore, the researcher can seek to access both individual and organizational narratives through their questioning. For example, individual narratives can focus on biographical elements such as career stories (Cohen and Mallon, 2001). Organizational narratives refer to stories about organizations which Czarniawska (1997) suggests are one of the main ways in which communication takes place in organizations. In seeking to access narratives and stories, we do not expect them to be true in a realist sense; rather, the expectation is that there will always be competing narratives for interviewees to draw on. Furthermore, the performative nature of the interview is particularly recognized here in that we know that when we ask people to tell stories, there is often an entertainment expectation involved (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004).

Narrative interviews are used in a range of different areas of management and organizational research, though they are particularly found in research on change and identity. This reflects how many writers see narratives as a part of identity construction (e.g. Vaara, 2002) which has an important role in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The recognition that narratives are temporal in that they change over time is why this approach is particularly popular amongst organizational change researchers. An example can be found in Box 2.8.

2.8 Designing a narrative interview

Sven is studying for a Masters degree in Operations and Supply Chain Management. He is interested in how the personal relationships between key individuals in different parts of a supply chain influence the success of that supply chain. In addressing this issue, he is keen to talk with the key organizational stakeholders in one supply chain about their relationships. In terms of accessing rich data about relationships, Sven decides to conduct a series of narrative interviews. The intention is to focus on the manager's stories of the stakeholders in the supply chain and how the relationships between them all have developed. His aim is to gain insights into the informal processes that underpin the effective operation of the supply chain, which often remain hidden.

Biographical interviews

The aim of the biographical interview is to gain insights into the interviewee's experiences through chronological reflection on their life more generally. An example of this approach is life history method. There is some overlap between this approach and individual narrative interviews in that if you ask someone to talk about their life you are asking them to tell their life story. Therefore, as Musson (2004) highlights, this approach focuses on prioritizing individual interpretations of their lives and events. As such, it is rooted within an interpretivist tradition where the concern is how individuals interpret and make sense of their organizational experiences. However, a whole range of research questions can be addressed by the biographical interview. Examples include the impact of gender, age or class on workplace experiences or socialization, career development or experiences of team working. A biographical interview is particularly useful when seeking to understand some of the complex processes that lead to different interpretations of the same organizational phenomena, as the assumption is that different life experiences help construct or inform different interpretations. One aspect that is distinctive to biographical interviews is that questions tend to be asked in a chronological order and the use of 'timelines' is an increasingly utilized way of doing this (e.g Mazzetti and Blenkinsopp, 2012). Box 2.9 provides an example of a biographical interview.

2.9 Designing a biographical interview

Julian is interested in conducting research for his MBA dissertation to further his own understanding of how leaders influence their followers. He knows that there is a lot of literature in this area, but his pre-MBA experience has taught him that

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really successful leaders have a certain kind of charisma that it is often hard to identify and pin down. He suspects that there might be something interesting about successful leaders' early experiences of being led themselves which might contribute to the development of charisma. Julian is lucky that there is a network of senior leaders associated with the alumni organization of the school where he is conducting his MBA. So far, 10 of these leaders have agreed to be interviewed for Julian's research dissertation. Julian has decided that he will conduct biographical interviews with them all in that he will ask the leaders to talk through their careers and see if, through the analysis, he can ascertain the links between early career experiences of being led and a leader's charisma.

Visual techniques

There are a range of different techniques that are used as part of the interview to encourage participants to interpret visual stimuli. Visual images are a very powerful medium. For example, Stiles (2004) points out that long after the newspapers stopped talking about 9/11, the images of the aeroplanes hitting the twin towers remained in many people's memories. Given the impact of images, it is not surprising that visual techniques have long been used as part of an interview process. Projective techniques have had a long history in psychological research and emerged from therapeutic settings where the assumption derived from psychoanalytic theory was that an individual would project their own feelings onto a visual stimulus which could then be readily interpreted by the therapist. Examples of such techniques include the Thematic Apperception Test (Morgan and Murray, 1935) where respondents are invited to construct a story based on photographs and drawings, and the Rorschach *inkblot* test (Rorschach, 1942) where perceptions of inkblots are analysed. Such stimuli have the advantage of enabling the same stimulus to be shown to each interviewee.

More likely to be found in research interviews nowadays is the use of other types of visual methods. Here, photographs or pictures can be given to interviewees to interpret. Alternatively, interviewees can be asked to draw something, for example a person (Stiles, 2004), with the interviewer looking at patterns across the drawings of different interviewees. Drawings can also be used as part of focus group interviews as a way of stimulating discussion. Again, these methods are underpinned by interpretivist philosophical stances (see Vince and Warren, 2012). The use of visual images is helpful when you want to encourage people to talk about a subject that may not be that easy to talk about or when you are not sure where to start. It is also a useful way of encouraging creativity on behalf of the interviewee (see Box 2.10).

2.10 Using visual images in the interview

Lila is studying for a Masters degree in Corporate Communications. She is particularly interested in cultures of consumption and in how advertisers use images of celebrities from the popular media to appeal to young people and encourage them to buy their products. Lila thinks that there are particular sub-cultures of young people that might react negatively to some of the celebrities used in advertising campaigns and she is keen to explore whether this is the case or otherwise. Lila has a sample of undergraduate students who have agreed to be interviewed, each of whom feels happy with labelling themselves as a member of a particular sub-culture. As part of her interview schedule, Lila will show her interviewees examples of different advertisements and ask them a variety of questions about their responses to the visual data.

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

More than any other approach, the unstructured interview is based on the recognition that it is the interviewee that guides the interview process rather than the interviewer. The questions are adapted according to the responses of the interviewee and will be different for different interviewees. Hence, these types of interviews are located within an interpretivist or constructionist stance and fit in with a romanticist view of the interview (Alvesson, 2011). There is no list of questions; rather, the interviewer focuses on building up rapport with the interviewee and encouraging them to open up and direct the talk in their own way.

Phenomenological interviews

One type of unstructured interview is the phenomenological interview. Cope (2005: 168) suggests that the aim of phenomenological inquiry is 'to understand the subjective nature of "lived experience" from the perspective of those who experience it, by exploring the meanings and explanations that individuals attribute to their experiences'. Therefore, the goal of the phenomenological interview is to gain a description or an insider account from an individual about a given phenomenon, such as entrepreneurship or management. There is little, if any, structure to the interview schedule and the interviewees are told of the overall topic of the research and are asked to tell their own story. The intention is that they will not be restricted by the imposition of the researcher's frame of reference or views which typically form the basis of the questioning in semi-structured interviews. The potential of such little control over the interview may be somewhat daunting for the graduate student and this is a

risky approach for someone conducting their first piece of research. Although where in-depth accounts are sought phenomenological interviews have much to offer, the concern for a Masters student using this approach would be that if the data generated is not as rich as originally hoped for, there is little time available to recover the project overall.

SUMMARIZING INTERVIEW STRUCTURE AND PURPOSES

In summary, there are a variety of different ways of structuring interviews which all relate to the different purposes which an interview can serve. Therefore, when choosing the type of interview to use with a given research question, these are the issues to consider. The diversity in choices available for interview methods offers many interesting opportunities for the graduate researcher. We now turn to the question of how to prepare for the research interview.