Skills in Qualitative Market Research Interviewing

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Skills in Qualitative Market Research Interviewing, Written by Joanna Chrzanowska, Genesis ConsultingInterviewing is the most widely used method of data collection in qualitative market research.? Researchers have found many ways of enhancing the interviewing process to generate the information they require; and in most market research projects, group interviews are the most cost-effective option.? To many casual observers, research interviewing does not seem to require a great deal of skill.? (Depth) interviewers or (group) moderators make it look easy and often enjoyable.
â€˜Wellâ€¦.qualitative research is really easy? â€¦? all it is is chatting to a few people for an hour or so.â€™?
(Young advertising planner quoted in Gordon 1997.)
The interview or group flows well, everybody contributes, insights appear, there is occasional laughter, and the whole endeavour seems to be a relatively effortless method of gathering rich and relevant data.
What is not so apparent is that the researcher is using him or herself as the research instrument, and is working simultaneously at the levels of content â€“ dealing with the questions â€“ and of process, actively building the interviewing relationship.? In a feat of multi-level processing, the moderator is sensitive to the energy level of the group; to the personalities and needs of individual respondents, is listening deeply to what is being said (and what is not being said), and is developing new lines of questions based on rolling hypotheses developed from the information just obtained.?
As one research trainee put it, â€˜Moderators are like ducks â€“ everything looks smooth on the surface, but they are paddling furiously underneath.â€™? While experienced moderators donâ€™t paddle quite so energetically, a great deal goes on that is n visible to an observer.
The qualitative approach relies on much more than asking open-ended questions and setting up topics for discussion...?
??Eliciting information without asking too many direct questions, without leading or suggesting ideas to the respondent.
??Honed listening skills to unlock the insights.
??Being alert enough to hear mundane or everyday speech in new ways, to question and go beyond the obvious.
??Sensitivity to notice non-verbal indicators of emotional states, and probe appropriately.
??Creating enough trust and empathy for respondents to feel safe in expressing their private thoughts and feelings.
??Using non-verbal techniques such as music, images and actions to access the â€˜knowledgeâ€™ people have stored as a series of impressions or feelings, to avoid premature rationalisation
??Keeping people focused on narrowly defined objectives, maintaining interest and energy and exploring topics in different ways, and
??Managing projects that have extensive social, environmental, or economic consequences â€“ transport issues for example, maintaining the breadth of vision, while still providing the insights clients need.
All this requires versatility, an ability to be non-judgemental, and enough self-awareness to be able to bracket (temporarily set aside) oneâ€™s own preconceptions.? Being able to think on your feet is also essential â€“ and to cope with being watched by clients while doing it.
The researcher has to be keenly aware of the importance of emotion as an essential component of motivation and decision-making, and has to be willing to work with emotional issues.
The qualitative way of thinking must be fluid and the interviewer prepared to change the nature of the questions that need to be asked.? Interviewing provides the basic materials for analysis.? It follows that the richer and more creative the interview, the more potential there is for making meaning in the analytical process.
In work with groups, the dynamics between the respondents provide creativity, shared understandings, and individual differences; yet can also be a source of tension and difficulty.? This can silently undermine the research, unless the moderator knows how to notice and deal with it.
The quality of a research interview is affected by the quality of the interviewerâ€™s presence â€“ the extent to which they can give their attention fully to somebody else.? This ability is perhaps best described as a qualitative way of being.? It is possible to know all the theory of qualitative research and not be able to do it at all.? It is also possible to do qualitative research by following the practices and guidelines and to do it well, but the most challenging projects require an engagement in the process at every level.
â€˜I really believe there has to be the appropriate connection at any given time, with each individual in the room.? And that is why I love this job, you have to care about them, you have to love them, you have to be at their level and they will open up and talk to you.â€™ (Moderator interview)

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