Introduction

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INTERVIEWING

This book is a sequel to *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Entrepreneurship*, which provided a reference point for some of the most essential elements and critical choices in qualitative research design, collecting and analysing information. Our aim in this volume is to build on that foundation and to more specifically assist young researchers in particular by providing step-by-step explanations of some of the techniques that have been used by more experienced researchers to explore entrepreneurial phenomena.

Our experience of teaching and working with doctoral students confirms that choosing the most appropriate technique is actually one of the most challenging tasks in the research process. Problems in figuring out precisely the most appropriate data collection and analysis techniques to employ can result from a lack of understanding and knowledge about the origins and subsequent development of many of the methods which have been employed. We believe this has been complicated by two main factors. First, techniques for collecting and analysing data are rarely addressed in detail in published articles, which by default have very short accounts of the methodology adopted and often do not include a philosophical rationale for the choices made. Second, the constant development of new 'tools' and refinement of existing tools employed in qualitative research studies has meant that researchers often face a confusing range from which to choose.

The recent trend in entrepreneurship research, from the dominant positivist tradition, which treats entrepreneurs as fixed entities and being entrepreneurial as an intrinsic property of the individual, to one which emphasizes the role of entrepreneurship within the contemporary business world, also places greater demands on researchers to make the most appropriate data collection and analysis choices. From de-reifying entrepreneurship to exploring the ways in which entrepreneurs involve, engage with and are influenced by the environments in which they operate highlights the importance of context and the social world. Increasingly, researchers acknowledge that entrepreneurial behaviour is better understood within the industrial, geographical, personal,

situational, social, cultural, temporal and institutional domains in which it is embedded. As such, entrepreneurship is viewed not as something ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered but as an enacted, socially situated practice (Bruni et al. 2004). However, while the importance of the constraints and opportunities, which social and institutional contexts have on new ventures and industries was acknowledged almost 30 years ago (see, for example, Aldrich and Zimmer 1986; Low and MacMillan 1988; Aldrich and Fiol 1994), most entrepreneurship research to date has focused on context as just a variable (Welter 2011). Indeed, positivism, with its focus on generalism, universalism and validity irrespective of time and place, is anti-contextual. On the other hand, non-positivist perspectives, which adopt largely qualitative methods, are more appropriate for obtaining nuanced contextual understandings of entrepreneurial phenomena.

While a variety of data collection methods are used in qualitative research (including observations, textual or visual analysis from books or videos), the most common method employed in entrepreneurship is the one-on-one or group interview. While there are three fundamental types of interview – structured, semi-structured and unstructured – most researchers seeking to obtain deep and rich understanding of entrepreneurial processes and practices tend to adopt either of the latter two. However, this broad categorization masks the vast choice of approaches at a researcher’s disposal. Given the complexity of entrepreneurial phenomena and the increasing sophistication of qualitative studies, it is important that scholars are able to make the correct choices to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of their research. Thus, in order to provide a guide, in this handbook we focus on presenting five relatively under-used techniques that have been used to elicit and analyse information from entrepreneurial actors. The studies in which these techniques have been employed have variously emphasized process, dynamism and context, and have led to detailed understandings of the particular social settings in which specific entrepreneurial behaviour has been enacted.

VARIOUS TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

When lay people talk about interviews, they generally refer to those which they hear on television or radio, or are reported in newspapers. These are generally conducted by journalists and, although the techniques employed are actually very similar to those used by researchers, there are also some differences. However, journalists are usually trained in particular questioning techniques, whereas we, as researchers, rarely receive such training, at least if we operate in certain parts of the sciences. Indeed,

doctoral students often report that there is a lot of focus on training them in quantitative research methods and techniques, but rather less with regard to qualitative methods and techniques, even though it is just as important to be able to ask the right questions in the right way as it is to know how to construct a Likert scale.

Although one can be critical of journalistic interviewing and particularly the way in which such interviews may be rewritten in order to fit the purpose of the journalist – we guess that many researchers have taken part in interviews where what is written afterwards bears little resemblance to what was actually said – and, although the research interview certainly differs from a journalistic interview, there are things that we can learn from journalism. In journalism it is usual to distinguish between five types of interviews: (1) the experiential interview, (2) the expert interview, (3) the investigative interview, (4) the portrait interview, and (5) the opinion interview (see Table I.1).

The interview may be defined as being either soft or hard. The former is where both the interviewer and the interviewee have similar aims, for example, the portrait interview, the latter when the interviewer's objective is to find out something that the interviewee may not particularly want to divulge, for example, the investigative interview. Journalistic interviews can take place in carefully prepared situations or spontaneously, for example, on the street. The qualitative research interview usually takes

Table I.1 Types of journalistic interviews and their characteristics

The experiential interview	The expert (fact finding) interview	The investigative interview	The portrait interview	The opinion interview
Is used to create a narrative about the interviewee's experiences	Is used to support certain facts to be presented	Is used to investigate a certain area in depth to uncover specific issues that are not immediately accessible. Asks the interviewee to relate to the material already found as well as statements from other interviewees	Is used to provide an understanding of the life of the person interviewed to create a neutral portrait	Is used to create a varied picture of a given situation by involving the opinions of more than one individual

place in a predetermined place, such as at the interviewee's place of business or in the researcher's office. It is easy to imagine that some of these interview forms can be invoked within qualitative research in entrepreneurship because we want to understand in depth the complexity of what is going on. In some way, any research is 'investigative', although this word may not have the same connotation within research as it has within journalism or criminology. Although qualitative researchers do try to find evidence of the particular issue that they are investigating, they tend to be less critically investigative, but usually try to understand the world through the eyes of the interviewee and then interpret this through the lens of theory. Phenomenological interviewing would, for example, attempt to create narratives about the entrepreneur's experiences.

THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEW

According to Holstein and Gubrium (2003: xx), 'the interview as a procedure for securing knowledge is relatively new historically'. Indeed, there is an increasing literature on the subject, which means that we can probably expect there still to be developments in how we approach interviewing as a research technique.

In general the qualitative research interview is defined as a 'specialized pattern of interaction' (Kahn and Cannell 1957: 16), a two-person face-to-face dialogue, where one person asks the questions and the other answers them to the best of his or her ability. Interviews are used when the objective of the research concern human experience, perceptions and beliefs, and the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to explore in depth these beliefs, experiences and views connected to this experience (see, for example, Kvale 1994). Indeed, we undertake qualitative interviews because we believe that they provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than those obtained through quantitative interviews such as surveys/questionnaires. Mishler (1991: 10) states that the distinguishing characteristic of the research interview is that it is a 'meaningful speech between interviewer and interviewee as speakers of a shared language'. According to Brinkman and Kvale (2005) the qualitative research interview is a method for gaining knowledge about human existence in detail. The objective of the interview is to obtain the interviewee's own views, feelings, beliefs and motives as clearly as possible but on their own terms, and it is designed to produce knowledge and provides access to a subjective experience of an individual and opportunity for the researcher to describe aspects of that individual's life world. The interaction that takes place influences both the interviewer and the interviewee.

Whichever technique is used there are some prerequisites that are essential to all:

1. Choose your interviewee carefully. Not all interviewees are equally worth listening to. The interviewer therefore has to choose interviewees purposefully in order to gain precisely that information which will help answering the research question/s in the best possible way (Neergaard 2007).
2. If possible, use more than one interviewer: the primary interviewer who asks the primary questions and the secondary who listens carefully, takes notes and can follow up on golden leads that the primary interviewer overlooks because he or she is concentrating on doing the interview and making sure that all the necessary areas are covered.
3. Careful preparation and familiarization with the background of the interviewee is absolutely necessary. This has several purposes: (a) that the interviewee will notice that you have prepared, which will help you ask more relevant questions and make him or her feel more at ease; (b) that you may use this knowledge to help you establish a relationship, which will possibly make the interviewee talk more openly; and (c) from a person's past you learn what questions are likely to trigger a response.
4. An interview is about the interviewer listening, not talking; silence is golden. It is the interviewee who should do most of the talking. The interviewer should ask as few questions as possible, and follow up on replies with probing. Hence, knowing how to probe is essential. This also involves preparing potential probing questions in advance.
5. It is essential to manage your time. Interviewees will usually have set aside a time for you (which needs to be agreed in advance). This ranges typically from about 20 minutes to two hours, depending on whether the interview is completely open ended or very structured. Sometimes the interview will carry on beyond the set time, but do not count on it. So all necessary questions need to be asked within the set time, and then if more time is available it is possible to ask extra questions. Here a related issue crops up. When you turn off the tape recorder, then the interviewee usually feels less restrained and may start to talk more freely. Make sure you take notes if that happens, and ensure that before you leave you obtain permission to use these notes. We also suggest that you make note of the surroundings, even if these are not part of your research. Where the interview takes place can have a huge impact on the information you get. For example, if you interview in a canteen, there might be noise around you, which can affect the quality of the recording. However, it may also tell you something about your

interviewee's relationships with other people at the company if they are comfortable with coming up and interrupting the interview, this might denote that your informant is really approachable and that this is part of the culture of the company.

6. If upon return the tape reveals that it is the researcher who has done most of the talking, the risk is that the information needed to answer the research questions may be lacking. Therefore, in evaluating the quality of the interview there are a number of criteria that the interview has to fulfil: (a) the extent of spontaneous, rich and specific replies; (b) the longer replies the better; (c) did the interviewer remember to follow up and probe; and (d) is there a story that does not require further comment or explanation? If the story is not self-explanatory or there are gaps, then it is necessary to return to the interviewee to fill these gaps.

FORMS OF RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Generally, in qualitative research we operate with three different forms of research interviews: the structured interview, the semi-structured and unstructured interview, and the open-ended interview. Their characteristics are summarized in Table I.2.

The structured interview should not be confused with the standardized survey/questionnaire (Gillham 2005), nor are they just verbally, face-to-face administered questionnaires as some sources tend to define them (Gill et al. 2008). In the structured closed interview, the interviewees are asked the same questions, in the same way and may be presented with various categories to choose from, but can formulate their own answers, and not just choose from among Likert-like scale replies – for example, 1–5 where 1 is none and 5 is high. In this handbook, we distinguish between the type of questions used by, for example, critical incidence technique (CIT) and the repertory grid, the former being defined as semi-structured and the latter as structured. Although the CIT was originally developed as a positivist methodology, in entrepreneurship it has found its use in both critical realist and social constructivist settings. The repertory grid technique (RGT) is much more structured in that interviewees are asked to choose between predetermined triad groups of elements from which they then have to choose how two are similar and different from the third. Thus, there is more freedom of choice for interviewees in CIT than in RGT.

The semi-structured interview uses key themes and questions derived from theory, which allow the researcher to explore and pursue new avenues of thought based on the response. According to Wengraf (2001: 3), it has

Table I.2 *Forms of research interviews*

	Unstructured/ conversational interview	Semi-structured interview	Structured interview
Interviewer	Neutral role Asks a beginning question as a start to the conversation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please tell me about . . . ● Think of a time when you . . . and describe it in as much detail as possible Follow-up questions for clarification or elaboration	Interview guide or protocol is used and questions are organized according to themes – or key terms. Interviewer initiates questions and follows up with ‘probes’ such as: ‘I noticed that you mentioned . . . could you tell me a little more about that?’ or ‘can you describe that in more detail?’	Interviewer follows a predetermined ‘standardized’ interview guide in a certain sequence
Interviewee	The interviewee answers in own words	The interviewee answers questions and responses are guided by interviewers questions	Interviewee chooses responses from a range of mostly fixed options
Analysis	Data analysed inductively		Data analysed more deductively
Technique	Constant comparative analysis (Part I) Metaphors (Part II)	Critical incident (Part III) Focus groups (Part IV)	Repertory grid (Part V)

to be planned and prepared for like other forms of research activity but what is planned is a deliberate half-scripted interview: its questions are only partially prepared in advance and will therefore be largely improvised by the interviewer. But only largely; the interview as a whole is a joint production, a co-production, meaning-making, sense-making and co-construction of understanding by interviewer and interviewee. Hence, in the general interview guide the researcher prepares a basic checklist prior to the interview based on the a priori conceptual framework. This forms a common set of questions that all interviewees are asked. Hence, this approach assumes that there is common information to be obtained from

all persons interviewed (Patton 1990). However, it is flexible in as much as the interview guide is adapted in terms of wording and sequence to the specific interviewees. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area but also to ask spontaneous questions, and to develop the conversation into a more conversational style within the boundaries of the interview guide. The researcher is therefore free to follow up on unexpected leads and threads of inquiry in the same way as is possible in an unstructured interview, however, the guide ensures that all questions that are asked help inform the research questions in a way that aims at achieving depth rather than breadth. Some researchers may categorize focus groups as more structured; but this depends on how you use the focus groups. Focus groups should be used to explore opinions and perceptions in a group setting, and not merely to achieve information about questions that a survey would have adequately answered.

The unstructured interview is also called the narrative interview or conversational interview. This type of what we could call phenomenological, ethnographic interview is concerned with lived experience, and forms a mostly uninterrupted narrative. The unstructured interview focuses on eliciting the 'direct description of a particular situation or event as it is lived through without offering causal explanations or interpretive generalizations' (Adams and Van Manen 2008: 618) and is frequently guided by very few open questions, maybe only one or two, with follow-up questions concerned with clarification or elaboration on what is said. Open questions are those that provide broad boundaries within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics of interest for the interviewer. Questions beginning 'Tell me about . . . ' invite interviewees to tell a story, and can generate very detailed descriptions. These descriptions can then be further explored when the interviewer follows up on what has already been said by asking further open-ended follow-up questions, or 'probes', that incorporate the interviewee's own words to elicit further description, such as 'you mentioned that . . . can you describe a specific example of that?', or 'what happened afterwards?'

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into five parts that reflect the three forms in Table I.2: constant comparative techniques and metaphor techniques, critical incident techniques and focus group techniques and, finally, repertory grid techniques, each consisting of three chapters illustrating different ways of applying the technique with a focus on 'how to'. The three chapters in each part reflect a range of applications and contexts within entrepreneurship.

Each part commences with an introduction, outlines the origin and provenance of the technique and introduces each of the chapters. Hence, we will not repeat that exercise here in this introduction. Each part is completed with a postscript with considerations about the future of the technique in entrepreneurship research and, in some cases, deliberations concerning quality assessment and the challenges and limitations of this particular method.

Part I: Constant Comparative Technique

Based on the reliance of both techniques on analytic induction, in this part grounded theory is linked with the constant comparative technique. Regarded as a technique, it is purely qualitative and relies on reasoning that allows concepts and relationships between concepts to be modified throughout the research process. With reference to the development of a study on a network for new entrepreneurs, which charted network emergence, change and evolution, in Chapter 1, Jack et al. show how the constant comparative approach can be used to develop theory and understanding about the entrepreneur and the practices in which he or she engages. Through their approach and discussion they demonstrate the usefulness and applicability of the technique and its potential value to entrepreneurship. In Chapter 2, Smith and McKeever offer a practical guide, which they advocate that researchers should adopt when employing constant comparison as a method of analysis. Specifically, they argue that it is the totality of the process of undertaking constant comparison, which contributes to the research journey. Chapter 3 by Bøllingtoft provides a useful and detailed exposition of the process involved in adopting a grounded-theory perspective. In addition to demonstrating its strengths and weaknesses she also shows how the method might be adopted in a way to help overcome criticisms.

Part II: Metaphor Methodologies

Metaphors abound in entrepreneurship research where they are used intentionally or unintentionally, for example, biological metaphors are used prolifically to explain the foundation and growth of entrepreneurial ventures. For instance, we talk about gestation, nascent firms and incubators. This part showcases three different studies which purposefully study this widespread use of metaphors and explain how analysing these can contribute to a better understanding of the field. In Chapter 4 Drakopolou Dodd and de Koning explain the various stages employed when analysing metaphors, and elucidate the benefits and drawbacks of

using the methodology, illustrating this with ample evidence from existing research. In Chapter 5, Smith discusses how textbooks on entrepreneurship communicate messages via metaphors in both text and pictures. He explores the more subtle impact that this use may have in the classroom. Chapter 6 by Bjursell investigates the use of metaphors in academic writing and how we as researchers use metaphors to communicate our research.

Part III: Critical Incident Technique

This part outlines the nature and potential contribution of the critical incident technique (CIT) as an approach to entrepreneurship research. All the chapters draw on Flanagan's (1954) original framework but have adopted this to suit the interpretivist tradition. In Chapter 7, Chell revisits and updates earlier work which considered how CIT might be utilized from a phenomenological perspective which enabled her to show the technique could be used to link some critical aspect embedded in a business context to strategies and tactics for handling the situation, and the consequences of doing this (Chell 1988, 2003). In this extension, Chell applies the technique to investigate the entrepreneurial process of opportunity recognition and demonstrates its power in comparison with other qualitative techniques. In Chapter 8, Leitch and Hill reflect on their use of the qualitative variant of the technique, which they employed as a means of gathering data in a research study focusing on women seeking external finance for the development and growth of their businesses. In order to ensure rigour and robustness they developed a guiding framework, rooted in Flanagan's original principles, for the process of operationalizing the research. This, they argue, helps to address the concerns that the method morphs into a generic qualitative interview thus losing its inherent distinctiveness and potency. Chapter 9 by Harrison outlines the nature and potential contribution of the critical incident technique in entrepreneurship. Specifically, he develops Flanagan's original use of the technique within a case study research design. In so doing, he extends the range of methodologies used in CIT studies to include explicative data collection, which draws on the phenomenological tradition.

Part IV: Focus Groups

The part on focus groups exemplifies both traditional and virtual online focus groups. Focus groups constitute a special case of interviews in that they are always conducted in smaller or larger groups. The first example, presented in Chapter 10 by Watson et al., uses focus groups to explore how images of female entrepreneurs visually constructed and

represented in television documentaries were perceived and interpreted differently by groups of aspiring and existing female entrepreneurs. In the second example, focus groups were used to explore the findings of two prior studies, which used other methodologies to determine whether those studies provided a sufficiently exhaustive set of influential factors. The two examples discussed in Chapter 11 by Soutar et al. clearly demonstrate the potential benefits of adopting group support system (GSS) technology when undertaking a focus group study with small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners. In particular, the results suggest that GSS sessions generate more ideas and, while there are additional costs involved in running these sessions, these additional costs are more than offset by the transcription cost savings. In Chapter 12 the role of computers and information technology in overcoming some of the potential difficulties in conducting traditional focus groups is further examined by Newby and Watson in relation to the use of online focus groups. The two examples discussed clearly demonstrate that useful outcomes can be achieved using technology to facilitate online focus groups (either in real time or asynchronously) with participants whose views and opinions might otherwise be difficult to obtain because they are geographically dispersed.

Part V: Repertory Grid Technique

Chapter 13 by Hagedorn introduces the repertory grid as a data collection technique applicable to entrepreneurial studies. She investigated personal factors that motivate founders to use different business support agents (BSAs) during the venture creation process, concentrating on the personal experience of founders with these different agents. In Chapter 14 Díaz de León and Guild present repertory grids as a useful research method to assist early-stage investors, who are seeking to manage new product portfolios of start-up ventures, in assessing the intangible aspects of new ventures. They present three examples of how the repertory grid technique has been applied in different entrepreneurial settings. In Chapter 15 Dima presents a social constructivist approach to the repertory grid technique which draws on the author's experience conducting studies related to environmental entrepreneurship in Ontario's (Canada) wine industry.

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