



Interview – A Purposeful Conversation

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Abstract

Interview is a purposeful conversation between the interviewer and respondent – an interaction designed to achieve a conscious purpose. In this paper various types of interviews are discussed on the basis of the manner in which they are conducted and on the purposes they serve. The process of interview begins with the introductory phase and the next step involves a sequence of actions guided towards the desired goal. Throughout the interview, the competent interviewer uses some procedures and skill for helping the respondent to achieve the objectives of the interview. The main aim of this paper is to provide a complete understanding of the process in interviewing and the basic skills of interviewing.

Key words : Interview, conservation, Interviewing skills.

Interview:

Interviewing is an art which is practiced in many situations with varying degrees of satisfaction to the interviewer and interviewee. Many people representing many different professions conduct interviews. Some people because of the nature of their work spend a substantial part of their time in interviewing such as lawyers, counselors, doctors, journalists etc.

The most obvious feature of an interview is that it involves communication between two individuals. But can all interactions between two people be termed as interview? When two friends are talking to each other is it an interview? No, it is not. Not all the talks that take place between two people can be termed as an interview. Interview is not a mere conversation but a purposeful, directed conversation. One person, i.e., the interviewer takes the responsibility for the development of the conversation. He/she sees to it that the conversation moves towards the desired goal.

The professional interview is different from an informal interview for varied reasons, the predominant feature being that it is conducted within the framework of a specialized knowledge and skill. In a professional interview the interviewer operates within the confines of a well defined setting and is backed by organised experience and recognized competence, working towards known and established purposes.,

The simplest definition of an interview is that it is a conversation with a deliberate purpose, a purpose mutually accepted by the participants. It is usually a face-

to-face interaction which involves both verbal and non-verbal communication between people during which ideas, attitudes and feelings are exchanged.

The crucial characteristic which distinguishes an interview from a conversation is that interview interaction is designed to achieve a conscious purpose. If the interaction has no purpose, it may be conversation but it may not be termed as an interview.

The point of differences between an interview and conversation are :

- Since the interview has a definite purpose, its content is chosen to facilitate achievement of the purpose. The orientation of the conversation is associational, and there is no central theme.
- If the purpose is to be achieved, one person has to take responsibility for directing the interaction so that it moves towards the goal. There are no comparable terms to indicate status, positions and role behaviour in a conversation as its participants have mutual responsibility for its course.
- In an interview between a interviewer and respondent , one person asks questions and another answers them partly because someone has to take the leadership. Here, two people are working on the problem of one.
- The actions of the interviewer must be planned, deliberate and consciously selected to further the purpose of interview whereas the behaviour of all the parties to a conversation may be spontaneous and unplanned.
- An interview requires exclusive attention to the interaction. A conversation, however, can be peripheral to other activities.
- Because it has a purpose, the interview is usually a formally arranged meeting. A definite time, place and duration are established for the interview.
- Interview has a purpose other than amusement, unpleasant facts and feelings are not avoided. In a conversation, the usual tacit agreement is to avoid the unpleasant

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

On the basis of the manner in which they are conducted, interviews are generally of the following types:

1. Structured Interview

It is also known as controlled, guided or directive interview. Under this a predetermined questionnaire is used. The interviewer is asked to get the answers to those questions only. He/she generally does not add anything from his own side. The language too is not changed. He/she can only interpret the statement wherever necessary.

2. Unstructured Interview

It is also known as uncontrolled or non-directive interview. No direct or predetermined questions are used in this type of interview. The interviewers may develop questions as the interview proceeds. It is generally held in the form of free discussions. The basic objective of this method is to get the interviewee express himself/herself freely.

3. Mixed or Depth Interview

It is a combination of structured and unstructured types of interviews. Under this method the interviewee is free to express himself/herself but at the same time structured questions provide a base of information to the interviews to compare the respondents.

The method of conducting an interview will be influential to a considerable extent by the purpose of the interview. On the basis of the purposes they serve, interviews are of following types.

1. Information gathering or social study interview

Its purpose is to obtain a focused account of the individual in terms of social functioning. The information enables the interviewer to understand the respondent in relation to the social problem situation. Knowledge about the respondent and his situation is a necessary prerequisite to an understanding of the respondent in his situation. Understanding is a necessary prerequisite for effectively intervening to bring about change.

2. Diagnostic Interviews

This type of interview is geared towards the appraisal and determination of:

- a) what the problem or the trouble is.
- b) what factors seem to be contributing to it.
- c) what can be changed and modified.

3. Therapeutic Interview

The purpose of this interview is to effect change in the respondent, in his/her social situation or in both. The goal is more effective social functioning on the part of the subject as a consequence of the therapeutic changes. Such interviews involve the use of special remedial measure to effect changes in the feelings, attitudes and behaviour on the part of the respondent in response to the social situation.

INTERVIEWING SKILLS

The whole interviewing process can be divided into three important phases

- Introductory phase
- Developmental phase
- Final phase

Though in actual practice, it may not be possible to keep the phases in watertight compartments, but for our conceptual understanding we need to demarcate and separate the various steps in the process and dwell on each one of them separate.

It is an art, a skilled technique which the interviewer can improve and gradually perfect through practice. The requisite skills however have to be tempered with adequate scientific knowledge.

The interviewer are constantly struggling to hear, see, feel and understand what the other are trying to express or hide and are well aware of the complexities of this task.

The Introductory Phase

While every phase of the interview contributes significantly to the whole process the initial phase is of particular importance for it has a special purpose which is to establish the setting, mood and pace most conducive to a productive conversation between the interviewee and the interviewer so that the interview can get off to a good start. The following skills are most useful in the Introductory phase.

1. Preparatory Reviewing

Preparatory reviewing is a skill used to examine and consider information available to interviewer. Preparatory reviewing helps him to grasp signifies factual information.

2. Preparatory Arranging

The skill of preparatory arranging is the logistic preparation for a first meeting. It includes scheduling an appointment for the interview, ensuring that there is adequate time privacy and organising the physical environment. It may include securing an interne room, arranging furniture etc. It includes considering the appropriateness of the interviewer's appearance and perhaps even hygiene.

3. Preliminary Planning

The interviewer should engage in the skill of preliminary planning before the interviewee. Many first meetings have as their primary purpose, gathering of information. In such cases interviewer might formulate a general but flexible plan

concerning what data to seek and from whom. Preliminary planning enables him to begin interview in a coherent fashion and helps him to formulate a tentative purpose to with the respondent.

4. Introducing Himself

At the beginning, interviewer should identify himself by name and profession and by age or departmental affiliation. Interviewer might also want to provide formal identification most circumstances, a friendly facial expression and a warm, firm handshake 'namaste' are helpful in making contact.

5. Clarifying Purpose

The initial phase of the interview should clarify the purpose that will engage the participants during the course of interview. The purpose needs to be of manageable proportions. Frequently the stated purpose of an interview is either far too ambitious or too ambiguously stated.

6. Probing/Questioning

When the interviewer and interviewee substantially agree about the purpose of the meeting, one may then proceed to seek information about the concerns that led to his encounter. 'Probes' are used to elicit facts, ideas and feelings concerning the person, the problem, the situation and potential means for resolving the identified difficulties. The process of probing yields information necessary for mutual understanding, assessments, contract formulation, movement towards problems resolution and goal attainment, evaluation and ending. Generally probes are phrased as questions. A good general rule regarding questioning is that it should be for the twin purposes of-

- a) Obtaining specific information
- b) Directing the conversation from irrelevant to relevant areas so as to make the interview more fruitful and meaningful.

Questions are generally of two types:

(a) Close ended questions: They are asked to elicit short responses usually a 'yes' or 'no' or one line answers. Such questions are especially useful in crisis situations where vital information must be gathered quickly. However, too many such questions should not be asked in a interview. Some closed-ended questions are known as 'leading questions' in legal terms. A leading question is phrased in such a way as to encourage a specific answer.

(b) Open ended question: Such questions are phrased in a manner that encourages people to express themselves more extensively. They are designed to further exploration on a deeper level or in a broader way. Most of the time, they tend to check a factual answer. These are 'what' and 'how' questions that enables the interviewee to react and respond in a number of ways. For example, What happened after that? How did you feel at that moment?

8. Reflecting Feelings

In order to use competently the skill of reflecting feelings the interviewer needs a sophisticated vocabulary of feeling words without which it is extremely difficult to paraphrase the feelings, emotions and sensations experienced and expressed by respondents.

The Developmental Phase

1. Organising Descriptive Information

It is the first step for assessment process to organise the information gained through exploration into a form that allows for efficient retrieval and examination. This involves arranging data according to certain categories that the interviewer consider to be significant.

2. Analyzing

Analyzing entails examining in detail the various pieces of information about the respondent in his/her problem situation. The attempt here is to pinpoint the critical elements or themes from among this information. Finding out truth with probing at a right point is a skill which may be developed with experience and sensitivity.

3. Synthesis

Synthesis builds on what is gained from analysis. It involves assembling significant pieces of information into a coherent whole by relating them to one another and to elements of his theory, knowledge and experience base.

4. Reflecting a Problem

The interviewer demonstrates to the respondent that he/she understand his/her view of an identified problem. Respondents, especially adults who voluntarily seek social services are usually quite ready to share their views about the problems of concern, but some respondents may need support guidance and encouragement to do so. Reflecting a problem is an important form of active emphatic listening.

5. Developing an Approach

In developing an approach, the interviewer and the respondent must identify who will meet with them in what context or what will be the target of change. Together they must also determine who will be involved in the change efforts and how these efforts might affect others. Both of the participants consider a number of factors and develop a scheme or problem to guide their work together.

6. Attending Behaviours and Minimal Encouragements

Attending behaviours are those observable actions of the interviewer, which indicates that he/she is interested and paying attention. An important component of attending behaviour is non-verbal, manifested in eye contact and body posture.

Minimal encouragements are short utterances with little content which have the effect of encouraging the interviewee and reinforcing his desire to continue - "uh- huh", "go on", "so". "I see", "sure" - they include non-verbal nodding.

7. Summarizing or Recapitulation

Partial or detailed summaries and recapitulations help to extend the range of communication. The interviewer briefly reviews what has been discussed and gives the interview its direction. A summary tends to pull together a section of the interview, make explicit what has not been covered. Summarizing requires a sifting out of less relevant, less significant material. It also indicates to the interviewee that the interviewer has been listening attentively and knows what has been going on.

8. Making Transitions

At times during the interview, the interviewer may decide that a change should be made in the material being discussed. The content under discussion may have been exhausted. Transitions help extend the range of interview without disturbing the relationship.

9. Advising

Making a suggestion or recommendation can be a perfectly appropriate action by a interviewer. In using the skills of advising, the interviewer must always convey that the interviewee may freely accept or reject his/her advice.

10. Confronting

In confronting, the interviewer points out to the respondents- directly and without disapproval-inconsistencies, or contradictions in their words, feelings and actions. Confrontation can have a powerful effect on respondent.

The Final Phase

1. Reviewing the Process: It is the skill of tracing what has occurred between the interviewer and the interviewee over the time they have worked together. It is a cooperative process where both share in the retrospection.

2. **Evaluating** – The interviewer also engage the respondent in a final evaluation of progress toward problem resolution and goal attainment.
3. Recording and Note-taking

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF THE INTERVIEWER

According to Cournoyer, the following qualities are desirable on the part of an effective interviewer:

1. Empathy
2. Respect
3. Authenticity
4. Self-understanding
5. Self-control
6. Understanding of work values and ethics
7. Professional social work knowledge
8. Responsible assertiveness.

"Empathy" is a process of feeling with another person rather than feeling for or feeling towards as in sympathy. Baker (1991) defines empathy as "The act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person". Empathy helps the interviewer to gain an appreciation for and sensitivity to the interviewee and helps in developing a rapport and maintaining sound working relationships.

"Respect" according to Rogers (1957), is the demonstration of unconditional positive regard. The interviewer should maintain a respect for interviewees irrespective of their class, caste and economic status. He should also recognize and respect the fundamental right of the respondent to make his own decisions.

Authenticity: Authenticity refers to a sharing of self by behaving in a natural, sincere, spontaneous, real, open and non defensive manner. An authentic person relates to others personally, so that expressions do not seem rehearsed or contrived. However, it does not give an absolute liberty to the interviewer to say or do whatever he/she thinks and feels at any given moment.

Self-understanding: It is a quality which a interviewer must possess if he/she is to use himself/herself effectively in helping others. He has to go through the process of "self exploration and self discovery".

Self-control: Self-discipline and Self-control have to follow self-understanding. Situation may be painful, upsetting, disturbing or provocative wherein the interviewer may be overwhelmed by his/her own emotions and feelings. But an enormous self-control has to be exercised. The interviewer has to direct her words and action in such a manner that they do not go against the values and ethics of the profession.

Understanding of Values and Ethics: The interviewer must pay consistent attention to professional ethics and obligations as they are applicable to almost all aspects of one's professional life. For this, he/she must have a thorough grasp of values and ethics as well as their legal obligations.

Professional Knowledge: An interviewer without professional knowledge is like a painter without a brush. He must be himself abreast with the latest development of the field to be updated and informed.

BASIC RULES OF INTERVIEWING

The basic rules of interviewing which if followed kept in mind by the interviewer, will ensure a smooth flow of interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer.

- Effective interviewing is possible only when it is grounded in a basic understanding of human nature, behaviour and motivation.

- The setting of interview is of vital significance. It should ensure some degree of privacy, provide for an atmosphere which is relaxed and physically comfortable, should be free of distracting noise and interruptions. Provide a setting with which the interview can get off to a good start.
- The length of the interview should be determined according to the purpose of the interview. It should be neither too long nor too short.
- The interviewee should be put at ease, stimulated to talk freely. Help the respondent to relax.
- The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is of utmost important. The interviewer must never forget the impact that her own personality, appearance and manner may be having on the interviewee.
- Talk in a language understood by the interviewee. The interview must always be adapted to the emotional and intellectual needs of the interviewee.
- Be a warm, receptive and patient listener. Competent listening on the part of the interviewer requires minimal attention to ones own thoughts and feeling and maximum concentration on what the interviewee is experiencing and expressing. A good interviewer is always a good listener and a keen observer.
- Listen to silence for it can be more evocative than words. Interviewer should know how to respond and manage pauses and silence. Do not be in a hurry to till the gap created by silence because an unwarranted or hasty intervention may leave a vital part of the story forever unsaid. A decent respect be shown to silence.
- Master the fine art of questioning. The type of question asked should be in accordance with the purpose of interview. The wording is important but equally important is the tone of voice in which they are put. Framed in simple words, the questions should be neither very few nor too many. A reassuring tone is better than an accusing and suspicious one.
- To understand what is said, understand what is not said, non-verbal behaviour cannot be ignored. Often it can be a more effective a message conveyer than the spoken words.
- Have a high level of awareness of interviewer's own feelings and emotions, biases and prejudices should be kept outside the purview of the interview as they have no place in a professional interview.

Once the purpose is accomplished the interviewing process is dissolved. The next step is to record systematically recording in an integral part of interview. The record should be written in simple language and simple style.

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