

Two Fundamental Approaches to Interviewing

Regardless of interviewing type, the interviewer may select from two fundamental interviewing approaches: **directive and nondirective**. In a **directive interview**, the interviewer establishes the purpose of the interview and, at least at the outset, controls the pacing. An aggressive interviewee may take command as the interview progresses, but the initial intent is for the interviewer to control. Typical directive interviews include information giving, information gathering (surveys and opinion polls), employment selection, and persuasive interviews (sales). The directive interviewing approach has several advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

1. It is easy to learn.
2. It takes less time.
3. It can provide quantifiable data.
4. It can supplement other methods of data collection such as questionnaires and observations.
5. It can be replicated by controlling variables such as voice, facial expressions, and appearance.

Disadvantages

1. It is inflexible.
2. It is limited in variety and depth of subject matter.
3. It limits the interviewer's range of techniques.
4. It often replaces more effective and efficient means of collecting data.
5. The validity of the information may be questioned because of variables such as voice, facial expressions, and appearance.

The following is a directive interviewing exchange:

Interviewer: Who are you working for at the present time?

Interviewee: The First National Bank.

Interviewer: And how long have you been with the First National Bank?

Interviewee: About two and a half years.

Interviewer: Apparently you went to work for First National as soon as you graduated from college?

Interviewee: Yes, that's correct.

Interviewer: What is your current job title?

In a **nondirective interview**, the interviewee, by decision of the interviewer, may control the purpose, subject matter, and pacing of the interview. Typical nondirective interviews are **counseling, performance appraisal, and problem solving**. The nondirective approach has several advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

1. It allows the interviewer to probe deeply into subject matter.

Disadvantages

1. It is time-consuming.

Advantages

2. It gives the interviewer greater flexibility.
3. It gives the interviewee greater freedom to give lengthy answers and to volunteer information.
4. It tends to generate more information.
5. It allows the interviewer to adapt to each interviewee.

Disadvantages

2. It requires acute psychological insight and sensitivity.
3. It often generates unneeded information.
4. It tends to generate excessive information.
5. Adaptation to each interviewee may reduce replicability.

The following is a nondirective interview exchange.

Interviewer: Tell me about your present position.

Interviewee: I'm in personnel with the First National Bank and have been with the bank since I graduated from college about two and a half years ago.

Interviewer: Um-hmm?

Interviewee: I began as a manager trainee and discovered that I really enjoyed working with people, particularly in employee selection and appraisal. When an opening in personnel occurred last October, I applied for the position and got it.

Interviewer: What are your responsibilities in personnel?

Interviewers such as journalists, social service counselors, personnel directors, and sales representatives often need to use an appropriate *combination* of directive and nondirective approaches. For example, a social service counselor might use a nondirective approach while assessing a family's problems and switch to a directive approach when explaining benefits and requirements. A personnel director might use a nondirective approach early in an interview to relax the applicant and establish a feeling of trust, then switch to a more directive approach while asking challenging questions, and return to the nondirective approach at the end by giving the applicant an opportunity to ask questions. Each interviewer must be able to determine when a particular approach seems most appropriate and when to switch from one approach to another. Chapter 11 on health care interviewing further discusses directive and nondirective interviewing approaches.

Summary

We define interviewing as a process of dyadic, relational communication with a predetermined and serious purpose designed to interchange behavior and involving the asking and answering of questions. Thus, the interview is a dynamic, ongoing, ever-changing interplay of many variables. It is a person-to-person interaction with pervasive feedback between two parties that have a mutual connection and interest in the outcome. An interview has the predetermined and serious purpose of interchanging behavior, often through asking

and answering questions. This definition encompasses a wide variety of interview settings and two fundamental approaches—directive and nondirective. Successful interviewing requires training, preparation, interpersonal skills, flexibility, and a willingness to face the risks involved in intimate person-to-person interaction.

An Interview for Review and Analysis

John Deaver is polling his neighborhood for the local Democratic party about two months prior to state and local elections. Bill and Mary Dobbins are residents of the neighborhood but are not acquainted with John. As you read this interview, think about answers to such questions as: What makes this a “process”? Why is it a dyadic process instead of a triadic process? How can this interview be “relational” when it is between strangers? What is the “pre-terminated and serious purpose,” and how is it shared between the two parties? In what ways does this interview involve a true “interchange of behavior”? Can you detect an exchange of interviewer and interviewee roles during the interview? What functions do questions serve for each party? What assumptions has the interviewer made prior to the interview? What type of interview is this? Which approach—directive, nondirective, or a combination—does the interviewer employ?

1. **John:** Hi, I'm John Deaver, and I live about two blocks up the street. I'm polling for the local Democratic party and wonder if I might have three or four minutes of your time this evening.
2. **Bill:** Hi, John, I'm Bill Dobbins. You must live close to the Frankforts. We work together at the Mars Insurance Agency.
3. **John:** Yes, in fact, they live just across the street from us.
4. **Mary:** Who is it, Bill?
5. **Bill:** It's a fellow from up the street who's polling for the Democrats.
6. **John:** I'm John Deaver, and I'd like just three or four minutes to ask you some questions about this fall's election.
7. **Mary:** Okay, but we're not involved much in politics.
8. **John:** That's fine; we're just trying to determine who is registered and how they feel about the coming election. Are both of you registered in this county?
9. **Bill:** Yes, we are.
10. **John:** And would you consider yourselves Republicans or Democrats?
11. **Mary:** We don't really belong to either party; we vote for the best candidates.
12. **John:** Would you say you generally vote for Republican or Democratic candidates?
13. **Bill:** I suppose I usually vote for Republicans.
14. **Mary:** I'm really independent and split my ticket nearly all the time.
15. **John:** Okay. Do you plan to vote for Pete Dickerson or David O'Brien for mayor?
16. **Mary:** Oh, I think we'll vote for Pete.
17. **Bill:** Yes, we've known Pete for years and feel he'll make an excellent mayor.