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The in-depth interview

An unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single participant is questioned and probed by an experienced interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic.

The emphasis should be upon a full interaction to understand the meaning of the participant's experiences and life worlds.

The interviewer should

- Develop an empathy with the participant.
- Ensure participant is relaxed and comfortable.
- Be personable to encourage and motivate.
- Note issues that interest participant.
- Not be happy to accept 'yes' or 'no' answers.
- Note where probing is necessary.

Advantages and challenges of in-depth interviews

Advantages:

- depth of insight
- attribute responses
- no social pressure
- easier to arrange

Challenges:

- lack of structure
- length of interview, combined with high costs
- analysis and interpretation of data

The in-depth interview helps to overcome

- *Hectic schedules.* The best participants tend also to be the busiest and most successful people. Groups exclude the best participants.
- *Heterogeneity.* The group discussion is dependent on the group's composition being fairly homogeneous; the job backgrounds of business people make them too varied to be entirely comfortable in a group.
- *Live context.* A lot of information comes from seeing the participant at his or her desk, which is missed in a group discussion.
- *Interviewer reflection.* Groups do not allow the researcher enough thinking time. Individual interviews give much more scope for experimentation. If one way does not work, it is only one participant, not a whole group that is affected.

Laddering

A technique for conducting in-depth interviews in which a line of questioning proceeds from product characteristics to user characteristics

It is made up of a linking or ladder of elements that represent the link between products and the consumer's perception process. It enables an understanding of how consumers translate product attributes, through personal meanings associated with them

Laddering questions

- The interview revolves around three basic questions based on the A – C – V chain. The questions posed would be:
- *Values*: How important is this for you? (e.g. health)
- *Consequences*: What does this difference mean? (e.g. not fattening)
- *Attributes*: What is different about these alternatives? (e.g. low calories)

Repertory grid technique

A technique developed by George Kelly in 1955 to explore the meanings that people attach to the world around them, which they find particularly hard to articulate. (what people think about a given topic)

Data grounded in the culture of participants as they choose the elements and constructs that will be evaluated.

Helps to access the underlying realities in situations where participants may feel constrained to answer in a way they think they should as opposed to how they really feel.

Stages in the repertory grid technique

- Element selection
- Construct elicitation
- Element comparisons
- Data analysis

The Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique

- A technique that creates a 'mental map' of the consumer's view toward a particular product.
- It uses images and metaphors to reveal how consumers think and feel about brands,
- It does not ask consumers 'what they think about the things researchers think about'.
- It lets participants' own frames of reference shape the in-depth interview, without losing sight of research aims.

Projective techniques

An unstructured and indirect form of questioning that encourages participants to project their underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, or feelings regarding the issues of concern.

Projection techniques: what they are and when they should be used

- Association
 - Completion
 - Construction
 - Expressive
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- Used because the required information cannot be accurately obtained by direct questioning.
 - In an exploratory manner to elicit issues that participants find difficult to conceive and express.
 - To engage participants in the subject, by having fun in expressing themselves in interesting and novel ways.

Association techniques

A type of projective technique in which participants are presented with a stimulus and are asked to respond with the first thing that comes to mind.

For example, Word association

- A projective technique in which participants are presented with a list of words, one at a time. After each word, they are asked to give the first word that comes to mind.

Completion techniques

In **completion techniques**, participants are asked to complete an incomplete stimulus situation. Common completion techniques in marketing research are sentence completion and story completion.

Construction techniques

Are closely related to completion techniques.

Construction techniques require the participants to construct a response in the form of a story, dialogue or description. In a construction technique, the researcher provides less initial structure to the participants than in a completion technique. The two main construction techniques are picture response techniques and cartoon tests.

Expressive techniques

Participants are presented with a verbal or visual situation and asked to relate the feelings and attitudes of other people to the situation. The participants express not their own feelings or attitudes, but those of others. The main expressive techniques are role playing, the third-person technique and personification.

Advantages of Projective Techniques

- They may elicit responses that participants would be unwilling or unable to give if they knew the purpose of the study.
- Helpful when the issues to be addressed are personal, sensitive, or subject to strong social norms.
- Helpful when underlying motivations, beliefs, and attitudes are operating at a subconscious level.

Disadvantages of Projective Techniques

- Suffer from many of the disadvantages of unstructured direct techniques, but to a greater extent.
- Require highly-trained interviewers.
- Skilled interpreters are also required to analyse the responses.
- There is a serious risk of interpretation bias.
- They tend to be expensive.
- May require participants to engage in unusual behavior.

Table 8.1a A comparison of focus groups, depth interviews, projective techniques and qualitative observation

Criteria	Focus groups	In-depth interviews	Projective techniques	Ethnographic techniques
Degree of structure	Can vary from highly to loosely structured	Can vary from highly to loosely structured	Tends to be loosely structured	Loosely structured, though can have a framework to guide observation
Probing of individual participants	Low	High	Medium	None when used in isolation and in a covert manner
Moderator bias	Medium	Relatively high	Low to high	None when used in isolation and in a covert manner
Uncovering subconscious information	Low	Medium to high	High	High

Table 8.1b A comparison of focus groups, depth interviews, projective techniques and qualitative observation

Criteria	Focus groups	In-depth interviews	Projective techniques	Ethnographic techniques
Discovering innovative information	High	Medium	Low	Medium
Obtaining sensitive information	Low	Medium	High	High
Involving unusual behaviour or questioning	No	To a limited extent	Yes	Perhaps on the part of the observer