

INTERVIEW DESIGN



As noted in the Overview to this part, all qualitative research techniques, whether lab or field, group or individual, rely on interviews. These interviews have to be designed, same as the questionnaires used in survey research. The major elements of interview design are selecting the questions to be asked, arranging these questions into an effective sequence, and deciding what if any supplements should be added. Interviews use a style of questioning appropriate for face-to-face interactive conversation, and this style is quite distinct from that seen in questionnaires and other quantitative research techniques. The purpose of this chapter is to flesh out that distinction with specific examples of the kinds of questions that make best use of the opportunity presented by an interview. Subsequently, Chapter 10 will similarly treat the very different style of questioning appropriate to a survey questionnaire.

In addition to constructing specific questions, the design of interviews also includes the assembly of these questions into a workable ensemble. This entails decisions about sequencing topics, and about including and excluding topics and questions. Beyond devising and arranging questions, this chapter also covers issues associated with what might be called the stance, attitude, or mental set of the interviewer. There is an irreducible element of spontaneity in qualitative interviews. To be effective, a qualitative researcher has to be prepared to exploit unexpected avenues that open up and respond to disconcerting replies that may be made. How could it be otherwise, when the purpose of interviews is to explore and discover?

STYLE OF QUESTIONING

In terms of question style, the key distinction lies between what are called “open-ended” versus “close-ended” questions. An open-ended question sounds like this: “What would you like your next smartphone to do that your present smartphone cannot?” Compare a close-ended approximation: “Do you want your next smartphone to run more than one app at a time?” or the even more close-ended, “How many phone apps do you need to have running at the same time—one, two, three, or more?” In any open-ended question, the possible answers are left unspecified and “open”: In the example, the respondent is left free to formulate the gap between present and future performance in terms of his or her choosing. The customer might even answer in terms of support or surrounding infrastructure, rather than capabilities of the smartphone itself. In a close-ended question, by contrast, the possible answers are pre-supposed: either “yes” or “no,” as in the second instance, or specific multiple choices, as in the third instance.

Thus, the first and most important guideline for constructing good interview questions is: *emphasize open-ended questions and minimize the use of close-ended questions*. Minimize is not the same as eliminate; close-ended questions do have a role to play in interviews. So the sense of the rule is to lead with open-ended questions, and allocate the bulk of the time available to open-ended questions, while confining close-ended questions to a supporting role, as when these are used to “close” an extended discussion triggered by an open-ended question.

A second important distinction regarding the style of questioning proper to a qualitative interview lies in the nature of how the interviewer treats the answers to whatever questions get asked. In quantitative research answers are taken at face value, left alone as it were, so that these can be counted and tabulated. Their surface is opaque. “Yes” means yes, “no” means no, and the point of the research is to determine the precise proportion of “yes” answers, and to discover if this position represents the majority view, a strong minority, a niche sentiment, or a rare outlier.

Interviews are different; since we are generally not asking yes or no questions, the answers will be quite a bit more complex and fuzzy than “no,” and ought not to be recorded verbatim and then let be. The purpose of an interview question is not so much to be answered as to initiate a conversation. Answers, in an interview, are simply the launch platform for additional discussion.

Interviewers aren't seeking an answer to be tabulated so much as an entry point into the world as it appears from the customer's point of view. In quantitative research, proper phrasing of the question stem, and careful specification of the answer set, is crucial to getting value out of the research. In qualitative interviewing, the attitude of the interviewer counts for more than the words used to ask the question, because the question itself is just a pretext to get the customer talking. The value of the research lies in what the interviewer takes away from the resulting dialogue, and not in the spoken answers per se.

A final point of distinction is that interviews require a blend of spontaneity and preparation. By contrast, the questionnaires used in surveys are all preparation, zero spontaneity. You cannot get the desired precision from a survey unless the exact same questions are asked the exact same way in the exact same sequence, in every single administration. Conversely, interviews won't be successful unless the interviewer permits him or herself to vary the question phrasing and sequence to suit the particular needs of the human being participating in today's interview, who may be quite different from both the customer interviewed yesterday and from your mental image of the prototypical customer. The need for spontaneity and flexibility follows directly from the previous distinction: Since the goal is to spark a discussion on the topics of concern, you needn't be too particular about whether you use a wooden match, a butane lighter, or a magnifying glass held up to the sun to deliver that spark. Furthermore, because the aim is to spark a discussion, which may then take an unexpected path, a good interviewer has to have the flexibility, and the fluency, to come up with good questions on the spot.

At the same time, there must be enough preparation for the interviews to consist of more than "management by wandering around." It won't do to approach the interview with a few jotted notes and a vague sense of what topics might be interesting; this would be like trying to run a meeting without an agenda. But indeed, what you need is more analogous to an agenda than a questionnaire—you need a guide, not a script.

A key part of preparation is scrutinizing potential questions for their fitness and probable information yield. Any number of questions may occur to you when the purpose of the interview is truly exploratory; but there is time to ask only a small subset of these. In terms of fitness, there are a variety of question phrasings that have proved useful over the years across different contexts. And there are definitely some phrasings that should generally be avoided during an interview. There are also some questioning gambits that

have limited applicability but can be productive in specific situations. And there is a further set of what might better be termed devices rather than questions per se, that still fulfill the basic purpose of any qualitative interview question, which is to get the customer talking. All of these will be laid out in a subsequent section; but I think it might be helpful to begin with a description of the procedure by which interview questions come into being and get assembled into a workable set. The desired output from this procedure is termed a “discussion guide,” and these are reasonably similar in structure across virtually any kind of interview.

PROCEDURE FOR QUESTION SELECTION

1. Start by revisiting your research objectives. This should give you insight into the major topics that will have to be covered in the interview.
2. Get a sheaf of blank paper, if working alone, or a white board, if performing this step as a team; either is feasible.
3. Depending on personal or group cognitive style, either list at a high level the 6 to 10 major topics to be covered (topics correspond to areas where you’d like to have a discussion), or start brainstorming specific open-ended questions. Either approach will work, but most people gravitate toward the one or the other entry point—general topics or specific questions—as most natural.
4. [This next step is best done by an individual.] Take the raw output of the initial session and organize it into a discussion guide, using the template in Exhibit 7.1. At this point you begin to “freeze” on what the key discussion areas will be, and you should have at least some good discussion launch questions. All of this material needs to be gathered together into a workable sequence that you believe will flow well. Your output is a draft discussion guide suitable for circulating among team members and other constituents.
5. Next, if at all possible, circulate the draft to team members, to managers who have funding authority, and to any constituent you expect to have to act based on the research results (you want early buy-in from these people). Ask for a detailed markup: missing topics or questions,

superfluous topics, alternative ways to broach a topic, alternative sequences. If you are working alone, sleep on the draft for a few days, and then undertake this markup yourself. Two spaced iterations are best; it's tough for an individual to duplicate the panoramic perspective of a team.

- a. *Focus group note:* If there is an outside moderator who will actually conduct the interviews, as will typically be the case with focus groups, the team leader's role more or less stops here. The remaining steps will be undertaken by the professional moderator in consultation with the team.
6. Prepare the final version of the discussion guide for use in the interviews. In my own work, I print the guide as an outline following the template in Exhibit 7.1, using two to three pages, and allowing for lots of white space on which to scribble notes.
 7. If the project is important enough, conduct one or two pilot interviews, to give the discussion guide a test run, as it were. You can use a colleague who used to be on the customer side, or even a well-known and friendly local customer. Sometimes you'll discover that your one-hour discussion guide is really a two-hour guide, or vice versa, or that a much better sequence of topics is possible.
 - a. By the way, this step only applies to customer visits and individual interviews. Part of the logistical challenge of doing focus groups is that there are no dry runs.
 8. Last but not least: Allow the discussion guide to evolve as the interviews proceed. Again, this is not a questionnaire that has to be executed the same way every time if it is to have any precision, but a kind of agenda, which can be modified as needed to optimize interview outcomes. In most cases, you can't really anticipate the very best way to guide an interview until you're already half way through the project.

The result of this procedure will be something that follows the template in the exhibit. The task in a discussion guide is first, to map out a sequence of discussion; second, to indicate the major discussion topics; third, to state key questions that will open each major discussion topic; and fourth, to provide reminders

to the interviewer to probe for specific issues if these are not volunteered. A further note on sequencing topics: It is generally best to proceed from the general to the specific, and from issues likely to be familiar to the customer (past, present) to those more remote (i.e., the future). A final tip is that if you are going to expose the interviewee to stimuli, such as a concept statement for a new product, or drafts of advertisements, these properly come in the late middle of the interview. To introduce them earlier is to poison the well, to bias what was supposed to be the interviewee's unprompted response to your initial open-ended questions.

Exhibit 7.1

Template for a Discussion Guide

- I. Opening
 - A. Introductions, purpose
 - B. Key orienting questions (job role, applications of the product)
- II. Current situation/issues
 - A. Changes in environment
 - B. Likes and dislikes regarding existing products
 - C. Problems and hassles
- III. Desired future (enhancements, corrections, replacements)
 - A. Specific needs and desires
 - B. Underlying motivations
- IV. Reaction to concepts [if any]
- V. Miscellaneous issues (e.g., vendor selection process)
- VI. Closing

Note: The template assumes a customer visit within a B2B market and that the customer visited is an existing account. See the Suggested Readings at the end of the focus group chapter for examples of discussion guides appropriate to B2C markets and focus groups.

SOME GOOD (AND BAD) QUESTIONS

A good question is one that opens up the customer and triggers an on-topic discussion that taps into the customer's honest or native worldview. A bad question is one that shuts down discussion or produces a response that reflects

something other than the customer's true, natural perspective on these matters. Good questions are most likely to flow from a proper stance or attitude on the part of the interviewer, so a subsequent section goes into some detail on good and bad interviewer behaviors. Interviewer mindset is crucial, since so many questions have to be devised on the spot, without preparation. Here I focus on helpful versus problematic question phrasing, in the case of questions that can be prepared in advance.

Workhorse Questions

The paradigmatic interview question is one that launches a discussion some minutes in length. Therefore, the most common "good" interview question is the follow-up question that keeps the discussion going, helps steer it in a desired direction, or takes it deeper. These are generic, in the sense of applying across B2B and B2C interviews, individual and group interviews, and so on. Examples of such workhorse questions include "What else?"; "Any other [problems, issues, etc.]?"; "Could you give me an example?"; "What specifically was the [problem, outcome, etc.]?"; "What happened after that?"; and "How did you respond?" These workhorse questions get asked over and over, as needed, in a good interview.

The next category of workhorse questions concerns the customer and his or her actions. Not every draft discussion guide recognizes this imperative. An old joke runs, "That was no customer visit—it was nothing but a *product* visit!" Sad to say, all too many interviews are structured so as not to be about the customer, but about the product, which, after all, is often what is front and center for the interviewer. It's as if a chatty partygoer turned to you after a long monologue and said, "Well, enough about me—what do *you* think of me?" Me, me, me is the bane of interviews. The point is to learn about the customer. Your product will come into the discussion, but it should be neither central nor foundational.

Examples of customer-centric questions in a B2B context would include questions about task demands ("What does this product accomplish for you?" or "What job did you 'hire' this product to do?"), context ("What other devices supply this instrument with input, and where does its output go?"), and supporting infrastructure ("Who uses this product—who's responsible for its output?"). The animating idea behind these questions is that no one really cares about products per se; the driving force, and the unit of analysis, is the

task the product performs for the B2B customer. Products are just one of many resources that a business brings together to accomplish its goals, and the key to understanding how a product could be improved or made more competitive is to understand what the customer does with it.

In B2C contexts, the same principle holds, but it is expressed differently. Not all B2C products are utilitarian, so the language of task demands fails. Instead, you ask about motivations, specific uses, and/or occasions for use. Whereas firms are organized to accomplish tasks, consumers pursue life projects: finding a mate, staying fit, being a good parent, and so on. The point again is that consumers are not single-purpose product choice engines floating in the ether. People make life choices and gather the products and brands that can assist them in acting on those life plans. Therefore, in B2C contexts customer-centric questions seek to situate the product or service within the life world of the consumer.

A very powerful instance of a customer-centric question is to ask about problems, hassles, and gaps (“Is there anything you need to do with this product that the present model can’t do?”; “Where does this product fall short—what can’t it do?”; “Is there an application where this product has failed, or not been very successful?”; or “What’s the worst part of using this product?”). To ask explicitly about “your unmet needs” is often much less successful. Only product marketers walk around with needs lists in their heads. Customers spend their time worrying about problems, and the way to get at unmet needs is to perform a gap analysis. Unmet needs, therefore, are best gleaned by identifying the set of unsolved problems.

Yet another category of workhorse questions provides a bridge between the customer and the product. In almost every case where the person interviewed currently owns the product of interest, it will be appropriate as the interview progresses to ask “What do you like, and what don’t you like, about [product]?” With a firm understanding of task and context laid, asking about likes/dislikes will help you understand how the present product fulfills (or doesn’t) the customer’s expectations. The important thing is to get all the likes and dislikes out on the table, and to follow up on each one. You don’t want to move on until you understand why *this* customer likes or dislikes *this* aspect of the product. That understanding requires tying that liking back to the task demand or life choice that drove the purchase in the first place.

A similar bridging role, also appropriate to the middle of the interview, is played by questions about the decision process for B2B customers, or

purchase occasion and process for B2C customers. How formalized is this B2B customer's buying process? Who gets involved in what role? How are vendors vetted and qualified? How do purchase criteria get identified? A perfectly functional B2B product may fall short of its potential if the vendor doesn't understand how its products are purchased differently in different segments or submarkets.

Specialized Questions

A good open-ended question, properly followed up, may produce a dozen or more answers—specific problems, sets of likes, and so on. When the customer has run dry, it is appropriate to step back and get some sense of the priority among answers. Typical focusing questions include “Of all those you mentioned, what are the top three?” or “If you had \$100 to spend to solve all these problems, how would you allocate those dollars?” The important thing is not to just tabulate the answers, as when doing a survey (“The average rank importance of X across the 15 customers interviewed was ...”), but to use the customer's stated priority as a device to probe further (“Why did you place half your budget on solving this one problem?”). You can't learn the true rank order in the market from a small number of interviews; but you can gain further insight into a particular customer's worldview from this follow-up.

A related gambit is to push customers to make trade-offs. Quite often customers will express potentially contradictory desires: They want the process to be faster, and they want fewer errors. The industry knowledge of the interviewer may suggest that either goal is feasible, but that it will be very expensive, or even technically impossible, to achieve them both. It is quite appropriate at that point to confront the customer with the trade-off, and ask which goal they'd pick if they could only afford to realize one. Here again, the goal is not to count how many customers make which trade-off, but to set up the opportunity for further probing into the customer's reasons.

Another specialized question of note is to focus *your* customer on the issue of who is *their* customer, and what does it take to satisfy that downstream customer. Most B2B customers are part of a value chain, and asking about the next “customer” downstream can be helpful in breaking out of a narrow product focus to get at the fundamental task your customer is trying to accomplish.

A final example of a specialized question comes into play when you must question customers about a certain kind of event that is reasonably rare, so that

the last occurrence may have been months ago, with other occurrences strung out over the preceding years. To ask about that type of event in the abstract may well draw a blank. It is more effective to use the question stem, “Think back to the last time you [installed a new operating system, had to qualify a vendor, etc.]” This stem is designed to surface the most recent concrete instance of that type of event, which you can then probe with open-ended questions in the standard way. It’s much easier to get a rich discussion going in the case of a specific event. Later you can ask “How about the time before that?” to get additional examples of the event in question. Once you’ve surfaced and probed several concrete instances, you can go deeper into the nature of the customer’s response to that type of event.

Interview Devices

A device is anything that isn’t a question per se, but that serves the same goal of stimulating discussion. The major categories are: (1) concept statements, (2) advertisements, (3) physical products, and (4) projective stimuli. A concept statement presents a new product idea in terms of half a dozen bullet points, or even, in some B2B markets, as a small PowerPoint presentation conveying key elements of product design. Ads can be roughs of future ads or actual ads, your own or competitors’. Products can be actual products obtained from the factory or purchased from the store, and also prototypes or mock-ups. Projective stimuli run the gamut from comic strip panels showing a customer situation with a blank word balloon, to little stories, to prompts like “If each of these brands were an animal, which animal comes to mind for each?”

The goal of any device is to give the customer something concrete to grapple with, and thereby make the discussion richer and more meaningful. With all the devices mentioned, the key again is not to tabulate responses, or take votes, but to use the responses as opportunities for further probing. You don’t care whether the customer in front of you today likes the new product idea or not; your task is to understand *why* they like or dislike each element and why they are or are not favorably inclined toward the overall concept. Particularly with the presentation of new product ideas in a self-managed customer visit, the temptation can be very strong to go into sell mode (“Don’t you see, this feature would be great for you because ...”). Your goal is to learn enough now that you won’t have to sell so hard later, because the product is designed to be just right for its intended segment.

Bad Questions

A bad question, again, is any gambit that shuts down discussion or produces an artificial or slanted take on the customer's actual position. One of the arguments for the use of professional moderators, as in focus groups, is precisely the expectation that outside professionals will bring a higher degree of interview skill, with minimal risk that bad questions will be asked. Conversely, a major risk factor in self-managed customer visits is the danger that the people doing the visits haven't a clue about what makes a particular question worthwhile or a waste of time. Historically, the conventional academic view was that managers couldn't be trusted to be either skilled or objective in self-conducted interviews with customers, so that research had to be outsourced to independent professionals. I prefer to think of the danger of bias as a risk to be managed, rather than as a knock-out argument against managers interviewing their customers. In the end, an interview is simply one human being conversing with another, seeking information in a goal-oriented way. There are varying levels of skill, but a basic capacity to interview is widespread.

The goal of this small section, then, is to alert you concerning a few of the more common types of bad questions. These include: (1) unclear questions, (2) unproductive questions, and (3) inappropriate questions. Unclear questions include those that are too long (shorter is better), those whose syntax is too complicated (a question that contains a semicolon is likely to be unclear), and those that use jargon (such as too many TLAs).¹ In terms of avoiding unclear questions, let the KISS (keep it short and simple) principle be your guide. The ear is much more limited than the eye when it comes to processing long or complex material. When complex issues must be broached, it is imperative to build up the complexity in a series of simple steps, rather than trying to get there all at once.

An unproductive question is one that is either too hard or too easy, too vague or too narrow. Open-ended questions that are too open are one example; imagine starting an interview with "What's going on?" It's certainly short and it's very simple, but the customer can't break into such a vague and sweeping offer. Productive questions give the customer something to grab hold of: "What challenges have you faced in moving functions to the cloud?" This question identifies "challenges" as the focus and names a specific sphere of

¹Three-letter acronyms (TLAs) are the bane of most technical fields.

operations (it does presume that earlier conversation has established that the customer *has* moved some functions to the cloud; otherwise it prejudices the issue). Overly technical and specific questions, especially early in the interview, may strike the customer as too hard and hence unrewarding to pursue. There is likewise a problem with asking too many close-ended questions early in the interview; these are too simple and unrewarding.

Inappropriate questions are those that impose the interviewer's preconceptions or worldview on the customer, obscuring what might have been learned if the customer had been allowed to speak for him or herself. More specifically, inappropriate questions typically take the form of either leading or biased questions. Like most practicing researchers, I've encountered a few hilarious instances over the years ("Wouldn't you agree that our Model TJ-X55 offers the highest level of performance in the industry?" or "We know that ads from competitor X irritate our customers—what do you dislike about them?"). A good rule is to avoid questions that begin with a negative contraction (e.g., "Don't you think that ..." or "Isn't it the case that ..."). These lead the witness. Also helpful is to avoid any question that begins with an assertion about what you know or what "everybody knows," or that in any way reveals your position—no matter how certain you may feel that this customer shares your view. Any such tipping of the hand may bias the customer's reply.

GOOD (AND BAD) INTERVIEWER BEHAVIORS

Because the human being is the primary measuring instrument in interview research, and because so many interview questions have to be devised on the spot as the conversation moves in unexpected directions, the success of an interview depends much more on the mindset and stance of the researcher than in the case of most other forms of market research. In terms of mindset, a suggestion I have found helpful in training interviewers is that you should treat each customer as an "expert informant." This puts the customer in the role of knowledge-holder, and the interviewer in the role of apt pupil. Imagine how you would behave around somebody that you regarded as a distinguished expert in an area that you badly wanted to learn more about. This attitude or mental stance will serve you well in market research interviews. It encourages a respectful focus on what the customer knows that you do not, and it will go far to shape questions that occur spontaneously to you in a helpful direction.

Another behavior that must be cultivated by good interviewers is to probe. Customers are just human—even a terrific open-ended question will sometimes elicit only a vague reply or gobs of word salad. At other times, customers will respond beautifully to a question with a thoughtful answer, but the thing to remember is that there may still be more answers there. If they identify one challenge, there is probably another; if they identified two challenges, there is often a third, and if there were three, there may be more. The proper response to both the word salad and the articulate answer is to probe further. Good interviewers are constantly asking “What else?” or “Anything else?” Much of the real labor of interviewing is performed by such follow-up questions. With practice, you will also develop an ear for when the customer has given a partial, vague, or wandering answer, and will almost automatically ask “Can you give me an example?” or “What specifically was the problem?”

Conversely, most bad interviewer behaviors stem from taking a self-centered or egotistical approach to this human interaction. Bad interviewers spend time asserting their own viewpoints, knowledge, or expertise; the interview becomes a monologue by and about the interviewer rather than a dialogue with the customer. The customer is either put off, or shrugs and thinks “okay, let’s take the free education on offer from this apparently quite knowledgeable visitor, and forget about conveying my own views.” Either way, you are sunk. Adopting the attitude that the customer is an expert informant is a helpful corrective.

Alternatively, bad interviewers badly want the research to produce a specific finding, and labor mightily to shape the interview so as to produce exactly that finding. This produces leading and biased questions, or even arguments with the customer to convince them that they think a certain way. These can be seriously off-putting to customers, who then tend to withdraw from the interview and terminate early.

The bad interviewer behaviors described are obviously much more of a risk in self-conducted customer visits than in interviews outsourced to a professional moderator. The task of the outside professional is much easier: it’s not his product, it’s not her career path, and outsiders literally don’t care whether the product succeeds. Their commitment is to professionalism: performing well in the interview and earning their fee. And the outside professional’s experience base is much greater. What drives self-conducted visits is the need for technical and industry knowledge of the sort that can

only be possessed by a product manager immersed in the issues. Plus, it is vendor firm management that must ultimately gain a clear vision of the customer, and it is not clear that achieving that vision can benefit from outsourcing.

To sum up, a research interview is a human interaction. Human beings, by and large, speak most freely and most informatively when they feel well-treated by, and favorably disposed toward, the fellow human being who is asking them questions. The technical term for this tenor of relationship is rapport. Successful interviewers know how to establish rapport with a complete stranger within a few minutes. The purpose of regarding the customer as an expert informant is precisely to instill an attitude of respect and rapt listening, calculated to foster such rapport. It is not the only way to bring about rapport, but whatever stance the interviewer adopts, rapport must be created if an interview is to be the site of productive discussions.

DOs AND DON'Ts

Do focus on the customer. Make each customer central to the interview. Take a respectful stance that leaves you and your own views in the background.

Don't talk too much. The customer should be speaking about three fourths of the time.

Do ask lots of questions, but keep each question short.

Don't ask too many close-ended questions, however pleasingly specific these might seem back at your desk.

Do follow up on customer answers. Your job is not to record what they say but to understand how they think.

Do prepare for the interview by organizing your questions into a sequence that will flow for the customer, and do work on the best way to phrase key questions.

Don't try to control too tightly the course of the interview, and don't worry if every interview covers the same broad territory using a different path.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both interviews and surveys consist of questions devised by the researcher along with the customer's attempt to answer these questions. In terms of distinctions between the two, in the one, the questions are spoken, without too much "version control" (i.e., many differences in wording across interviews), while in the other, question wording is fixed. Another difference is that interviews are generally few in number, surveys many.
 - a. What else is similar across interviews and surveys, and what else is different?
 - i. In your answer, please assume a self-administered web survey, and an in-person interview.
 - b. Is there a kind of question that can *only* work in surveys, or can anything that can be asked in a questionnaire also be asked out loud in an interview?
 - c. Same question in reverse: Are there questions that "work" in an interview, but would not work when written down in a questionnaire?
2. One of the ways to conceptualize a process that takes place in time, such as an interview, is to divvy it up into a beginning, a middle, and an end. The middle occupies the bulk of the time and, of course, fulfills multiple purposes; but beginnings and endings may have a more specialized function. Assuming this to be a useful conceptualization, answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the primary function of the beginning of the interview? What actions or types of questions have to be avoided at the outset of an interview, if that function is to be fulfilled? What particular actions and questions would be notably helpful and useful?
 - b. What function(s) have to be performed at the conclusion of an interview? What actions or types of question should be avoided here? What particular actions and questions would be notably helpful and useful at the end of the interview?

3. Although risky, it is possible to present a product concept or other stimulus to customers in an interview and have a dialogue about their response.
 - a. How would you word the first question to the interviewee after presenting the concept?
 - b. Assuming the product concept can be decomposed into particular elements, would it be best to present the complete concept, and follow up with a discussion of individual elements? Or, better to present the elements one at a time, discuss each, and then step back and discuss the ensemble? Explain your answer.
 - c. What exactly are the risks when a product concept is floated during an interview? Who is subject to these risks?
 - i. Many observers would argue that the risks are greatest when, as in a customer visit, the person who presents the concept is part of the management team, and not, as in a focus group, an outside moderator. What risk, exactly, is feared here? Are there any compensating advantages to having an insider rather than an outsider present the concept?
4. Studies of when market research is likely to get used and when it is likely to be ignored suggest that surprising and unexpected results were particularly likely to be ignored by executives who commissioned the market research.
 - a. What are the implications for qualitative research, which is often pitched as a discovery tool for exploring unfamiliar aspects of the customer experience?
5. An old joke defines a consultant as “someone who borrows your watch to tell you what time it is, charges you a fee for so doing, and then walks away with your watch when done.” Assume and research that the joke holds a grain of truth about the perils and opportunities of outsourcing market research. Now relate the joke to the risks and benefits of self-conducted customer interviews in a highly technical B2B product category.

6. *Exercise.* Assume that you work for an architectural design firm. You have received the contract to design a new building for the business school at a leading university. The new building will primarily contain faculty offices and meeting spaces. You are preparing to interview 16 members of the faculty to get a sense of their needs and requirements relative to the building design. Your team has brainstormed a motley mix of topics and questions to make up the discussion guide for these interviews, as listed below.
- First, there are likely to be one to three “duds” in the list—questions that are either inappropriate for a qualitative interview, or not helpful or relevant to the task of designing this building. Cross these out.
 - Next, rearrange the remaining questions into a sequence that would flow well and be effective. What’s the best beginning or opener from this list, and what questions need to be postponed until late in the interview?
 - Extra Credit:* Flesh out your sequence in (b) into a complete discussion guide, adding any questions or topics that appear to be missing. Reword or rephrase any of the starting questions as appropriate

Brainstormed topics and questions:

- Which building(s) on campus work particularly well/poorly?
- What are your likes and dislikes concerning the present business school building?
- State three features that the new building must have to be a success in your eyes.
- Would you like the new building to contain a cafeteria?
- Where on campus should the new building be located?
- What kind of features would you like to see in the new building?
- How many square feet should a professor’s office have?
- Should the windows in the new building be capable of opening, or be fixed in their frames?
- What features should be omitted/avoided in the new building?

SUGGESTED READINGS

See the Suggested Readings sections in the chapters on customer visits and focus groups.	The books listed there have chapters that focus on interview design and the kinds of questioning strategies that work well in qualitative research.
Payne, S. L. (1951). <i>The art of asking questions</i> . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.	A classic, timeless book on effective and ineffective ways to word questions.

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