

What information to Get during the Interview

In regard to methodology, it is as much art as it is formal scientific procedure. And I probably can't tell you anything you don't already or have heard, but here is how I think of it.

When I started my research on the apparel industry (and now banking), I generally followed a loose outline of the kinds of questions I wanted to ask. Personally, I find it hard to stick to a script because each interviewee goes off on different paths when they begin to tell you stories about their relationships and how they form. They also bring up things you don't expect and so you have to be flexible to take advantage of opportunities.

I find that I have to commit all my questions to memory and to be prepared to pull questions from my mental list at the appropriate time. This means that if I have questions a, b, c, d, e, and f, then I can have 5! possible sequences of combinations of those 5 questions. A good way that I have found to reduce errors is to do 1 or 2 pilot interviews. This will give you a sense and feel for how the "conversations" will go. Also, if you have some expectations about which interviewees will be the most helpful or least helpful then you should start with the least helpful because mistakes won't be as costly.

In general, depending on the articulation of the interviewee, you may generate as much as 15 pages in a 40 minute period with as few as 10 questions. So, quality of questions is more important than quantity. By quality I mean that they are questions which illicit a response from the interviewee that begin with, "Now that's an interesting question....." It means you have hit pay dirt because the interviewee is telling you that you have touched on something important to them. Not every question will hit this high note but there should be enough to keep the conversation engaging.

This material goes with the material in your syllabus regarding the manager case analysis and provides more detail on the information to collect during your interview and the interview process.

The main purpose of the report is to learn how others build networks and then use them to accomplish some valued outcome for the firm and/or their career.

Doing the interview

With this goal in mind, try to get your interviewee to relax and tell stories about her or his experiences and activities in the firm. These stories help reveal the logic he/she uses in building and managing their network. As they tell stories, listen carefully and identify the "concepts" we have discussed in class and identify how the concept relates to performance.

Lastly, a good interview and a good report can be written even if this is your first time interviewing. Interviewing skills are an important tool for collecting

information about competitive processes and for educating others about your qualities but are rarely consciously developed. So, this project is also an opportunity to test and develop your skill base.

You will probably go into the interview with a set of questions. Use these questions as an outline. If you try to stick too closely to your outline you are likely to lose the interviewee's attention and stall the interview when the conversation shifts in another direction. So, be flexible and ready to follow up on interesting points that are unanticipated.

What Information to Get

- 1. Get your interviewee to describe the structure of their network (number of ties, number of broker positions they occupy, number of client positions they occupy, etc). These components define the resources and constraints affecting the interviewee behavior. Ask -- Who are the people that you go to for professional advice? Why do you go to these persons and not others like them? What are their positions? What makes these persons of particular value to you professionally? What would happen if this person or these persons exited the network? Drawing a sociogram during the interview can help clarify relationships.**
- 2. Find out how your interviewee manages different relationships in the network. Does your contact use trust and/or reciprocity to build strong ties? What kinds of information and resources are exchanged? Ask – how long have you known this person? Do you trust them with personal information or sensitive issues about work? How did you build trust? What kind of give-and-take defines the relationship? Can they count on this person in a crisis?**
- 3. Find out how the structure of your interviewee's network and the type of relationships your interviewee maintains helps the interviewee get things accomplished (i.e., find a job, build a team, overcome power plays, motivate teammates, launch a new product). For this information, it is a good idea to know something about the person's job and what kind of pressures they frequently face. For example, are they trying to start a new program? Are they new to their job? Is their department going through a restructuring? Are they close to a job change? Do they have to negotiate with suppliers to get prices down? Who do they depend on for resources and what are their particular sources of supply for each resource (information or budget). Then ask about how they use their network to manage these problems.**

Here is a edited example of an interview from a previous EMP paper to give a sense of the flow of an interview. Your interview questions will vary with your industry, relationships and interviewee characteristics. The objective is to

understand aspects of their jobs and to link your questions about their networks to how they get things done.

Emper: Can you tell me about who the important people are in your network contacts. Important people are people you go to for work-related and personal advice?

Interviewee: I have someone that is important to me in marketing. Their initials are XX. There is also someone in manufacturing and in finance and at our bank.

Emper: Why are these persons important to you?

Interviewee: The firm is marketing driven and I need to be able to get good information about the most recent market trends and strategies to help me think about product design. XX and I have known each other for 10 years and she supplies me with timely information that I can't get from because

Emper: Is she the only person that could supply that information? What makes working with her special? How do you know her information is accurate? Does she have an interest in the relationship with too? If so, do you do anything to make that less of a problem? What if she left the firm. What would you do and have you thought about those consequences?

Interviewee:.....

Emper: How did you develop a relationship of trust with her over the years? What kinds of things happened and what did you do to increase the level of trust?

Interviewee: There was a crisis and she did x, y, z to help me adapt

Emper: Are there people in your network that you have to work with but you don't trust? How do you manage that relationship and the risks involved?

Interviewee:.....

Emper: Are there persons in your network that you interact with infrequently but which are important for your future or potential career goals? How do you maintain relationships with them? Are they trust based? Interest based? How did you meet these people? How do you evaluate them?

Interveiwee: XX was a mentor.

EMPer: What is the basis for this relationship and how have you relied on it over the years?

Interviewee: We were introduced by an acquaintance when I was at

Emper: At the other extreme, what people working at your company have made it the most difficult for you to carry out your job responsibilities? Again, just list the person's first name or initials (and remember that these data will not be released from the Research Program).

Emper: Who are the people who have contributed most to your professional growth and where are they in the network? What is the basis for building an effective professional network? What is the tradeoff between social relationships and professional relationships when they involve the same person?

And so on,.....

How to Collect Information

Start with general questions that describe the structure and composition of the network. Here are some questions to get you started – they are far from exhaustive or sufficient and should be added to the questions listed in the syllabus. You should discuss what and how you will ask questions with your other group members. Be prepared and try to know your interviewee's job so that you can ask analytical and interesting questions.

- If you look back over the last six months, who are the four or five people with whom you discussed matters important to you? Just list their first names or initials.**
- Who are the members of your knowledge networks and why? How do you nurture relationships with them. How does your style of interaction differ depending on who you're interacting with?**
- Who do you see as your single, most important contact for your continued success and where are they in your network?**