

Part I

BASIC PROCESSES OF INTERVIEWING

The six chapters in Part I are designed to present a broad outline on which the rest of this book is based. Many of the guidelines will be repeated in the different parts of this book, but it will be helpful for readers to come back periodically to these initial chapters for review because the guidelines will be covered in the most depth here. It is assumed that once you have read these chapters, you will be able to apply them to the different contexts.

The basic processes that are covered in Part I include: (1) preparing for the interview, (2) managing the interview, (3) interpreting the content and the relationship in an interview, and (4) judging your own effectiveness. In a sense, these are behavioral objectives, because when you finish reading these initial chapters, you should be able to accomplish each one of the objectives with ease.

Because we believe in the utility of a good orientation for any communication endeavor, the following overview is presented so that you will know what to expect in this part.

An interview is a specialized form of oral, face-to-face communication between people in an interpersonal relationship that is entered into to

2 BASIC PROCESSES OF INTERVIEWING

for a specific reason associated with a particular subject matter. Its effectiveness can be judged in terms of the purpose of the interview, the techniques used, the time frame, the perspective of the person doing the evaluation, and the reliability and validity of the information obtained. These are covered in Chapter 1.

The things that affect the interviewer's interpretation of messages are: motivations, purposes, perceptions, thinking patterns, language expertise, biases, attitudes, and memory. These also affect the interviewee's interpretation of the content of the interview. These are covered in Chapter 2.

Those aspects of the interview that can be planned are the purposes, agenda, questions, structure, setting, and reaction to special problems. Such planning can prepare the interviewer for any contingency that might arise within an interview. These are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The processes pertinent to managing the interview are setting the climate, listening, probing, motivating, and controlling the interview. These involve a high degree of communication technique, and relevant guidelines are suggested for each in Chapters 5 and 6.

Finally, this part is addressed to the interviewer. Nevertheless, if understanding a situation helps a person interact in that situation better, any person can read Part I with the potential of becoming a better interviewee, too.

Chapter 1

The Nature of Effective Interviewing

Most readers of this book already will have participated many times with another person in an interaction called "an interview." Probably, they have been successful at it, too.

The word "professional" as applied to interviewing implies that there are varying degrees of proficiency in those skills necessary for effective interviewing. Felix Lopez compares the professional interviewer to a professional musician.

Interviewing is very much like piano playing—a fair degree of skill can be acquired without the necessity of formal instruction. But there is a world of difference in craftsmanship, in technique, and in finesse between the amateur who plays "by ear" and the accomplished concert pianist. The self-instructed player mechanically reproduces on the keyboard certain melodies that have been committed to memory; the artist, by skillfully blending mastery of musical theory, countless hours of practice, and personal interpretation, creates an effect that is technically precise, pleasing to the audience, and expressive to the pianist's inner feeling.¹

¹Felix M. Lopez, *Personnel Interviewing* (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), p. 1.

Sometimes, the interviewer "plays by ear" and is successful. For example, an assistant dean of a business school confessed recently that she had had no training as an interviewer and that she just relied on intuition and her natural inclinations but had been so successful in her interviews that it had been decided that no one would be hired for any position in the school without being interviewed by her. What was she doing? She did not know, but she was doing it effectively. Could she teach it to others? No. Does this one experience indicate that training in interviewing is not necessary? Not at all. Just as there are some individuals who develop an effective tennis swing naturally, there are some individuals who are lucky enough to pick up effective communication skills quite naturally. You can always do a better job, however, if you know *what* you are doing and *why* you are doing it. In fact, our approach in this book is not necessarily to give you a plan of how to conduct an interview. We feel, instead, that the greatest skill that you can pick up from reading a book like this is *how to analyze* a situation, determine what your alternatives are, and then choose how you wish to proceed. We will provide you with a very basic frame of reference for your consideration.

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

Despite the way we sometimes talk, there is no such thing as "the" interview. There are a lot of different situations in which two people interact that can be called an interview. In this book, we will describe a basic framework that cuts across all of the following types of interviews, but each one has some subtle differences from all the rest.

selection	public research
appraisal	telephone
counseling	focus
disciplinary	journalistic
exit	broadcast
internal research	press conference
negotiation	medical

It is a mistake to identify one kind of interview as being relevant to only one kind of job. While journalists, for example, may be interested primarily in learning how to get information from others, they may also find themselves hiring new reporters and appraising their performances. This fact was demonstrated by a broadcast manager who recently visited us. His interest had always been in broadcast interviewing, but in the first month on the job he had to fire three people, a type of interview that he had never even considered relevant to his job. Similarly, personnel managers who normally conduct selection and appraisal interviews may find

themselves taking an in-house survey or meeting the press to announce some major organizational development in the company.

Another common misconception is that an interview is just conversation. Although a good interview may appear to be highly conversational, there are some important points that distinguish it from mere conversation. Interviewing has been defined in different ways. In their classic book on interviewing, Robert Kahn and Charles Cannell define an interview as "a specialized pattern of verbal interaction—initiated for a specific purpose, and focused on some specific content area, with consequent elimination of extraneous material."² Charles Stewart and W. B. Cash define it as "a process of dyadic communication with a predetermined and serious purpose designed to interchange behavior and involve the asking and answering of questions."³ Since the word "interviewing" in common usage refers to so many different kinds of interactions, it is difficult to write one definition that will accommodate all of them. Nevertheless, it is important that we establish a basic definition as a frame of reference. Consequently, we define an interview as a specialized form of oral, face-to-face communication between people in an interpersonal relationship that is entered into for a specific task related purpose associated with a particular subject matter. A discussion of some of the key terms of this definition will make it more meaningful.

1. An interview is *usually* an oral, face-to-face exchange. The people involved are in one another's presence and verbalize their messages aloud. This gives the interview some real advantages over questionnaires, because (a) respondents are more likely to say more than they will write, (b) people are motivated by the mere presence of another person, and (c) oral exchanges offer more immediate opportunities for probing, clarifying answers, and providing feedback.

This definition, however, is not without its exceptions or limitations. While the interview is *basically* an oral exchange, questionnaires and resumes are often used within an interview as supplements.

Even more important, however, is the fact that the face-to-face situation allows visual, nonverbal messages to be a very important aspect of the interview. They must not be overlooked. Sometimes, these visual messages reinforce the verbal ones; at other times, they contradict them. For example, a person may be saying, "I'm quite comfortable, thank you" at the same time that she is twisting a handkerchief and looking anxiously around the room. Research has emphasized the relative importance of the

²Robert Kahn and Charles Cannell, *Dynamics of Interviewing* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1963), p. 16.

³Charles Stewart and William B. Cash, *Interviewing* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, Publishers, 1978), p. 5.

visual cues and suggests that when people receive contradictory messages, they are more likely to believe the visual ones.

Finally, this part of the definition overlooks the telephone interview, which plays a very important role in marketing surveys and public opinion polls. With the telephone, two people are in one another's "presence" only orally.

2. The people in an interview are in an *interpersonal relationship*. This differentiates it from other face-to-face situations such as lectures and group meetings. Nevertheless, certain variations of the interview may include groups of people. The most notable examples are focused interviews, multiple interviewers in selection interviews, and press conferences. In its most popular form, however, an interview involves two people, and several major considerations for analyzing such interpersonal communication will be explored later.

Finally, the word "relationship" suggests that there is a certain structure that relates the two individuals to one another. This structured relationship is often described in terms of a role. A role includes the *behaviors that are associated with a position*. In other words, certain actions are associated with a given position, regardless of who the individual is in that position. The two roles that people occupy in an interview are that of the interviewer and the interviewee. Most of this book focuses on the interviewer role and behaviors that can be legitimately expected in good interviews. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the interviewer and interviewee roles are supplementary and that you can only view the interviewer role in terms of its relationship to the interviewee role. Furthermore, each role often is shaped by very personal interpretations. Generally, the interviewer role will be developed in terms of its three major functions: (1) planning strategies, (2) conducting or managing the interview, and (3) measuring the results. Each of these are developed more fully in Chapters 2 through 6.

3. People interview for task related purposes; they have something they want to accomplish, that is, select a person for a job, collect research data, admit a patient, or write a news story. It is this task related purpose that differentiates an interview from mere conversation. A conversation can go anywhere; an interview, however, must be focused on content that is relevant to your purpose. Figure 1.1, adapted from Kahn and Cannell, attempts to illustrate the difference between the two. The X's represent communication exchanges that are relevant to the interviewer's purpose. The O's, H's, F's, and D's are topics or subjects that are irrelevant.

Figure 1.1 suggests that it is desirable to weed out irrelevant subject matter and to keep the discussion relevant. In order to do this, the interviewer will have to exercise *controls* over the interaction. However, the amount of control must be decided on in the context of a given situation.

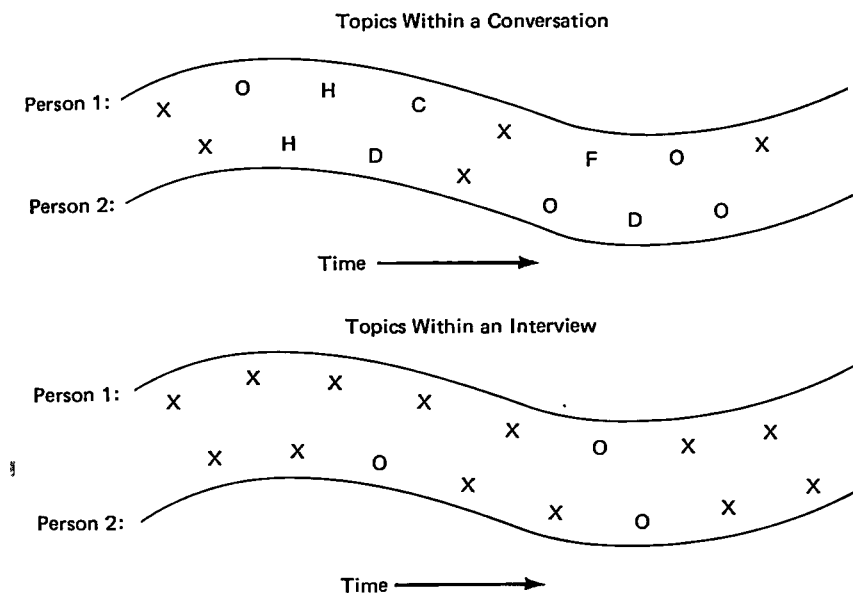


Figure 1.1 (Source: Robert Kahn and Charles Cannell, *Dynamics of Interviewing*, Copyright © 1963 John Wiley & Sons, Inc., p. 15. Adapted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)

THE INTERVIEW AS INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Since an interview is basically a unique form of interpersonal communication, it is useful to begin our analysis with a general model of communication. There are many of these, with each trying to capture a dimension of this illusive process called "communication." One of the simplest definitions or descriptions was originated by David Berlo.⁴ He identified communication as a source sending a message through a channel to a receiver. George Gerbner then tried to develop a model that would take into account more of the complexities of communication.⁵ The Gerbner model describes communication in terms of

1. someone
2. perceiving an event, person, or stimulus
3. and reacting
4. in a situation
5. through some means

⁴David Berlo, *The Process of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

⁵George Gerbner, "Toward a General Model of Communication," *Audio-Visual Communication Review* 4 (Summer 1956): 73.

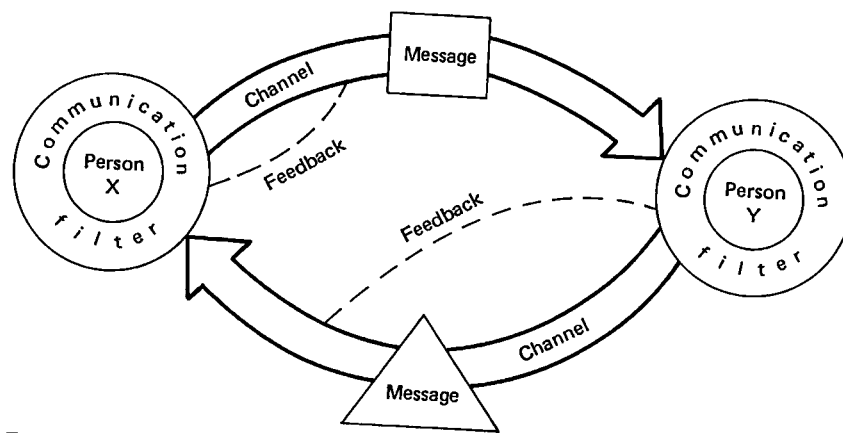


Figure 1.2 Process of communication.

6. to make available materials
7. in some form
8. and context
9. conveying content
10. of some consequence

The elements in most communication systems include people, messages, channels, and results or consequences. Consequently, we shall focus on communication as people in a relationship sharing messages by exchanging them through some channel in order to produce some consequence. This statement about communication has a number of ramifications that shall be explored throughout this book. There are several that should be identified here, however, as a basic framework for later discussions.

1. *Communication in the interview is a mutual process.* Both people in an interview contribute to the interaction, and the effectiveness of their efforts depends on their mutual cooperation. Neither person has exclusive control over the communication behavior of the other, and either can choose to block communication. In Figure 1.2, person X can communicate to person Y only if Y will listen or read the message. Y will share only those messages with X that Y wants X to have. This joint process is essential for you to remember when you try to accomplish your interviewing objectives.

The mutuality of the communication process also reinforces the idea that some effort must be expended to create a climate in which the interviewee is willing to communicate. Even in boss-subordinate interviews there is a limit to which the boss can accomplish his or her objectives based on the cooperation of the subordinate.

2. *Two-way communication is generally more effective than one-way.*

Communication. One-way communication is characterized by messages that go in basically one direction, for example, from the boss to the subordinate or from the interviewer to the interviewee. The sender is not particularly interested in the responses, questions, comments, or reactions of the receiver. Consequently, in a one-way situation the interviewer can never be certain that there is mutual understanding or that the message has been effective because there is no feedback. Feedback refers to

the process of correction through incorporation of information about effects received. When a person perceives the results produced by his own actions, the information so derived will influence subsequent actions. Feedback thus becomes a steering device upon which learning and the correction of errors are based.⁶

Many people are comfortable in a one-way situation because it is efficient in terms of saving time and also they do not have to worry about reacting to questions or comments.

Two-way communication. On the other hand, involves feedback. Messages are sent in both directions, so both individuals participate as senders and receivers, and each must be receptive to the responses, or feedback, received from the other. Two-way communication takes time. Hundreds of experiments and exercises, however, have demonstrated that the extra effort and time, and the willingness to receive feedback are instrumental in increasing the likelihood that the people involved will understand one another. The reason for this will become clearer later as we describe the different influences on the way that people interpret messages. For the moment, it may be useful to examine a couple of real cases.

In preparation for a meeting with a customer, I needed a list of computer equipment that was proposed for his system. Not having this list in my file, I called one of my subordinates in and asked him to provide me with a list of computer equipment in system XYZ. He returned a few minutes later with a copy of the purchase order for the equipment which did include a list of the equipment, but it was also cluttered with other information. This would not serve my purpose. I then explained to my subordinate why I needed this list and the general format that I wanted it in. The next list I got from him suited my purpose perfectly.

The moral to this story asserts the necessity of feedback. Communicators often erroneously assume that since they know exactly the results they want, the receiver will also. Thus, they often neglect to provide clarifying details.

Whether or not someone gets feedback is often determined by the

⁶J. Reusch, et al., *Non-Verbal Communication* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 4.

kind of climate in which the interview takes place. Sometimes the expectations of feedback are never articulated, and people do not give it. For example, a subordinate once listened to some instructions from a supervisor. The subordinate's only comment was, "Yes, sir." Later, someone asked whether or not the subordinate understood the supervisor. His comment was very revealing: "No, but you don't think that I was going to ask him, do you?" In this case, the interviewee apparently preferred to risk making a mistake than raise a question or show that he did not understand. People often react this way, so as an interviewer, you may have to make a very explicit request for feedback and build the kind of climate that permits the interviewee to give it. Examine what happens in the following case.

SUPERVISOR: Bob, will you accept responsibility for these two-dimensional calculations for our contract project?

BOB: O.K. What's involved?

SUPERVISOR: Here is a detailed list of the results requested. We need to have the job finished for the July review meeting. Does that sound reasonable to you?

BOB: I guess so. Maybe I should try some one-dimensional problems first to get a feel for the effect of material properties on the results.

SUPERVISOR: That would be fine. In fact, it is a good idea so long as you are not diverted from the main question and from making the deadline late.

BOB: Do you think it would be a good idea to take a trip to ACME Corp. and find out how they are handling some of the difficulties that I can see coming up?

SUPERVISOR: If you feel that would be beneficial, then do it, but it should be this week or next week at the latest. I am concerned about your getting started on the problem promptly so we can meet the target date.

BOB: I can't get started before the parameters for the material models are established, so I should have plenty of time to make the trip next week.

SUPERVISOR: That's right. You can't get started until the material models are ready, but they should be finished next week. I would like to see you set up and waiting rather than starting after you get the information. It's important for us to have this job completed by July 1.

BOB: O.K. I'll get started on it.

In this case, both people were exploring the thinking of the other, and neither left with a vague impression of what was important to the other.

As important as the concept of feedback is, people do superimpose some limitations or qualifications on it. For example, if you answer the

following questions, you will get an insight into some of the limitations that you can place upon feedback.

About what are you willing to receive feedback?

From whom will you receive it?

Is everybody from whom you will receive feedback equal?

Under what conditions or when will you receive it?

Are positive and negative feedback equally welcome?

Interviews occur for a purpose, and they focus on certain kinds of information. ~~One of the characteristics of being a good interviewer is the ability to control the interaction so that the purpose of the interview is achieved.~~ This means that not all comments or responses are relevant. Therefore, you may need to set limits on the kind of response that is appropriate.

~~The degree of control necessary in an interview varies widely. One important factor involves the amount of authority you have over the interviewee.~~ In certain medical, research, and business interviews control may be quite easy to maintain and quite necessary; in journalistic and information getting interviews, where the interviewee does not necessarily have to cooperate with you, control may be almost impossible to maintain. The necessity of control is illustrated by the report of an orthopedic surgeon. While there are many patients who are somewhat timid with doctors, others like to talk about a number of things unrelated to their immediate illness. The surgeon found herself getting into all kinds of time pressures because the interviews were becoming too lengthy. Therefore, she decided to cut her interview times in half in order to see all her patients. In her explanation, the surgeon said that she wanted to empathize and to have a good relationship with her patients, but the interview time "just was not a social hour." Consequently, she became very directive in the interviews and in weeding out irrelevant subject matter.

~~Since feedback is an important dimension of an interview, you will need to make a very conscious, concerted effort to obtain it if it is not volunteered. The following suggestions are useful techniques to generate feedback: (1) ask for it; (2) listen when it is given; (3) train people to expect you to be receptive; and (4) keep a climate that allows feedback.~~

~~3. Each communicator needs a balance of sending and receiving skills.~~ Often when people think of communication in terms of sending and receiving, they think of one person as the sender and the other person as the receiver. This is unfortunate because one person is then designated as the talker and the other is designated as the listener. This is particularly dangerous in a working situation because it is common practice for a manager to be identified as the sender or supplier of information and a subordinate to be characterized as the listener.

If you believe in ~~the mutuality of communication and the importance~~

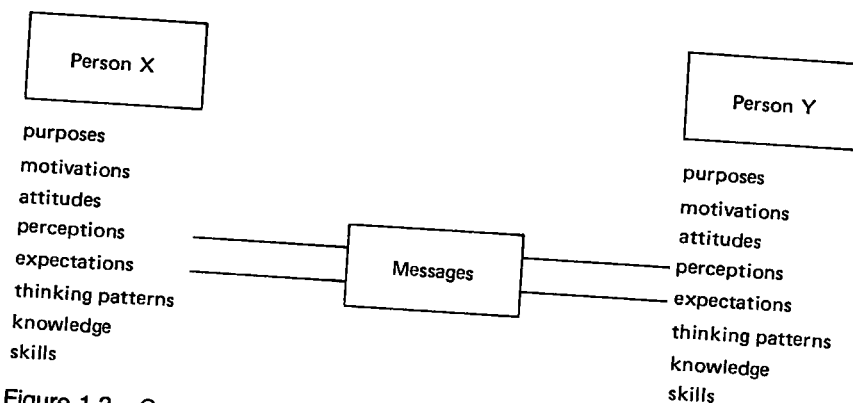


Figure 1.3 Communication filters.

of feedback, and that people are both senders and receivers, then you should agree that communicators need adequate sending and receiving skills. Obviously, you need a good facility with language in order to express your ideas well. Unfortunately, however, most people have had more training in expression than they have had in listening. Consequently, we underscore listening as one of the key communicating and interviewing skills.

4. *Each person is a unique filter of communication; therefore, expect differences.* In some ways each person is unlike every other person, and two are exactly alike. This is what makes communication so challenging: two people who are different in important ways, who have different goals, who use language differently, and who have different styles of communicating then share what they have in common.

Obviously, people are not completely different from one another; they are alike, too, in some important ways. They do have some common learnings, some shared experiences, and some common goals. To the extent that this is true in an interview, communication becomes easier. However, one of the greatest causes of communication problems is that we expect people to be like ourselves instead of being tuned in to the fact that they may be different in some important ways. When we expect people to be like us, we often take shortcuts or make assumptions that turn out to be erroneous and inefficient. Therefore, it is our purpose to challenge you to begin to expect people to be different from yourself, rather than like you. If you expect differences, you will seek ways to clarify your own point of view and you will also realize the necessity of discovering what the other person's understanding is.

Finally, some of the factors on which people may be alike or different are listed in Figure 1.3. Remember that each one of these factors operates as a kind of filter or screen through which a person's messages are sent and through which another person's messages are interpreted. Several of

these factors exert a major influence on the interview and will be treated more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

5. *Effectiveness is measured in terms of a number of different standards.* If you examine our definition, you will discover that it describes what happens in an interview very generally but never gives any explicit criteria for judging whether or not the interview is successful. How is effectiveness measured? We have asked hundreds of interviewers how they know when their interviews have been effective, and their answers are quite revealing.

By far, the most frequent answer to this question is "when I get the results I want" or "when I achieve my purpose." This is one of the most important points we want to make: you should judge your effectiveness in terms of the results. This implies, of course, that you are able to identify exactly what your purposes are. Unfortunately, it is easy to go into an interview with only the vaguest notion of what you are trying to do. The professional interviewer automatically identifies a purpose.

Sometimes, interviewers judge effectiveness in terms of the *techniques* that they have used. We feel less strongly that this should be so. Of course, the learner needs to focus on techniques, as well as to learn how to avoid leading questions, to structure the interview, and to have an impact upon the interviewee. Success does not come just from avoiding technical problems, however. It is possible, for example, for an interviewer to lose control of an interview or to have a tense period with the interviewee and still have an effective interview if the interviewer overcomes the problems and achieves his or her purposes. Therefore, we emphasize that success is not judged by the absence of problems; every interviewer may face unexpected reactions or interpretations that create real problems. The professional will not be overcome by the problem, but will quickly adapt to work through them.

In judging effectiveness, the interviewer needs to keep a time frame in mind. Every communication interaction can be examined in terms of its immediate impact or its long-range impact. Consider the sales representative who has dozens of interviews with a potential client over a six-month period and never makes a sale and then at the end of the six months walks in and receives a large order. When did this sales representative suddenly become effective? Ultimately he was not effective until the deal was closed. At the same time, the sale probably was not culminated in one day either. Everything that happened in the previous interviews influenced the final outcome. Since a number of interviews that we will consider involve long-term relationships, that is, job performance reviews, counseling, discipline, journalistic reports, and press conferences, it is useful to assess effectiveness in terms of long-term implications as well as short-term implications.

Any interview is made up of two important dimensions that can be

analyzed for effectiveness: content and relationship. The one on which we will tend to focus most often is the *content*. We conduct interviews to get information or to give information. Therefore, at one level, the content or information exchanged occupies our attention.

It is our contention, however, that the *relationship* between the interviewer and interviewee is equally important in most circumstances. In fact, the nature of the relationship may determine whether or not certain information gets passed on during the interview. For example, many interviewees are very wary of revealing negative information about themselves. A high degree of interpersonal trust may be a precondition for such revelations to be made. Consequently, the professional interviewer may build a certain relationship as a means of getting certain content introduced into the interview. There are a number of transcripts provided in this book. As you analyze them, try to examine the apparent relationship as well as the content of the interview.

An interview may also have several purposes and, therefore, mixed results. It is possible, for example, to get the content that you want and yet ruin the relationship or to accomplish one purpose and not accomplish a second. This simply underscores that effectiveness is often a matter of degree—a mixed bag, if you will—rather than being an absolute. Your degree of effectiveness may be useful to examine.

In order to judge effectiveness, you also have to ask "from whose perspective?" Communicators often have different, incompatible goals, making it virtually impossible for all to succeed. The salesperson may try to sell you something when your purpose is to resist buying. The recruiter may try to identify your weaknesses when your purpose is to prevent her or him from finding out any negative information. The journalist may need to probe areas about which you are determined to say, "no comment." Realizing that people have different purposes in an interview will make you aware of what is actually going on in the interview. This is another reason why effectiveness must often be judged in terms of degree.

A vital criterion for judging effectiveness is the *concept of validity*. This refers to the extent to which you are observing, receiving, or measuring what you think you are observing, receiving, or measuring. Another way of looking at validity is to ask, "Am I really getting truthful information?" Sometimes validity is low because people choose to lie, to deceive, or to answer only partially. At other times validity is hampered by inadequacies of techniques and tendencies toward biased interpretations of the information that is being received. This means, then, that any real communication barrier encountered in the interview may decrease the accuracy in getting or giving information and, therefore, reduces the validity of the interview. This has ramifications for any interview but is particularly crucial for scientific investigations. Finally, it is the impor-

tance of validity that makes interviewers feel the need for improving their roles as interviewers.

Somewhat akin to validity is the concept of *reliability* as a factor in judging effectiveness. Reliability is the extent to which you would get the same results if you or another interviewer were to conduct a similar interview with the same individual. If two people interview the same person on the same topic and do not get consistent information, something is wrong, and the results of both interviews would be questioned. Again, the discrepancies may occur because of a willful change by the interviewee or because of some inconsistency or inadequacy on the part of the interviewer.

For example, Herbert Hyman reported a number of studies that question the reliability of the data.⁷ In one study white and black interviewers surveyed a sample of blacks and obtained different information. The black interviewers reported more resentment about discrimination than did the whites. Why? We cannot be certain. Were the blacks purposely withholding information, or were the whites just perceptually blinded or biased? We do not know. The fact that the two groups differed, however, calls into question the reliability of the data. There are many studies like Hyman's. Similarly, when two recruiters have widely different estimates of the same candidate, the reliability is low. Since the interviewee's answers cannot be controlled entirely, the emphasis in this book is upon those things that you can do to make your interviews as reliable as possible.

THIS CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

The purpose for any beginning chapter is to provide a general orientation to a book. In this chapter several key ideas have been set out as the foundation on which the rest of the book will be based.

First, an interview cannot be reduced to a formula. People just are not predictable. At best, you can learn a variety of strategies and techniques that can be used. It is up to you to analyze a situation and to decide what strategy and technique are most appropriate.

Second, your ability to analyze an interview while participating in it is perhaps the greatest and most fundamental skill that you can develop. The discussions that follow are designed to make you aware of the relationship as well as the content factors in an interview. These two are so interwoven that you cannot separate them easily.

Third, the interview is a special form of communication. There are, of course, many books that have been written trying to explain this pro-

⁷Herbert Hyman et al., *Interviewing for Social Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

cess. All the things that are included in those books may apply to the interview in some way. On the other hand, you have already learned a great deal about communication through your own experiences. If you can bring your experiences into awareness, they can be the basic foundation for your interaction in an interview.

Fourth, you cannot improve your skills in anything unless you have some criteria for judging effectiveness. One of the basic purposes of this chapter has been to get you to think about the several different criteria that may apply. It is particularly important that you remember that communication in any interview is a joint process and that therefore people might be using different criteria to measure their effectiveness.

Finally, this chapter introduced you to three different roles that an interviewer has: a planner or strategist, a manager or controller of the interaction, and a measurer or interpreter. The next three chapters amplify these concepts. Because measurement is the ultimate objective, it is discussed first so that the planning and managing aspects of your role can be viewed in terms of the things that affect your interpretations.

PROJECTS

1. Feedback is one of the most important concepts in this chapter. Think of your own experiences. What are some of the ways in which you have been successful in getting other people to give you feedback? What are some of the reasons why you were reluctant to *give* feedback to others? In those cases in which you were reluctant to give feedback, was there anything that the other person could have done to get you to give feedback?
2. Make a list of the most important factors that you think affect interpersonal relationships. Be able to explain each and then discuss them with other people.
3. Which of the criteria for effectiveness have you used most often? Why? Were there some mentioned that you have not used? In the future, which criteria will be most useful to you?
4. What should you do if you realize that you and the other person have different purposes for an interview and are using different criteria to judge its effectiveness?
5. Think of a specific communication situation or investigate the tape or transcript of an interview. Describe the way in which the content of the messages is related to the relationship itself.
6. To what extent are you a filter of communication?

Chapter 2 Communication Influences on the Interviewer and the Interviewee

One of the main points of Chapter 1 is that interviewers filter all messages that come to them through their purposes, motives, perceptions, and attitudes. This means that interviewers are doing something to the information that comes to them and that they are actively involved with it. In this chapter our objective is to explore the ways in which you as an interviewer can operate upon that information, both consciously and unconsciously. In many ways ~~this chapter will focus on your role as a measurer of information, of people, and of circumstances, because you are constantly involved in judging the adequacy of information or the image of the other person.~~ Perhaps it would be advantageous for you to examine your role as a measurer before we examine your role as a strategist or controller of the interview. By doing so there will be a number of strategic decisions that you might make to account for the ways in which you habitually process the information received in an interview.

~~The specific influences upon you that we will examine are your (1) purposes, (2) motivations, (3) perceptions, (4) thinking patterns, (5) language expertise, (6) bias, (7) attitudes, and (8) memory.~~

PURPOSES OF COMMUNICATING

People communicate or resist communicating in order to achieve their own personal goals; they communicate, in other words, for a purpose. This is a basic assumption that has two very important implications for an interview.

First, an interview is a *special event*, and you ought to be quite clear about what you are trying to accomplish. The more concretely you can refine the statement of your purpose, the more carefully you can plan to achieve it. For example, "to get information" is not as useful a statement of purpose as "to get information about how person X makes decisions."

Second, it is useful to remember that *each person in the interview has a purpose*. When these purposes are congruent, things may work out well. At times, however, the purposes are not congruent or even compatible. If a journalist interviews you, you may cooperate in giving information so that you can get certain publicity. In such a case, the purposes are different, but they are still compatible. In a selection interview, you may want to discover a person's weaknesses or discover reasons for rejection; the candidate, on the other hand, wants not to identify weaknesses but to concentrate on strengths. In such a case the purposes are diametrically opposed. As these examples illustrate, you should always be aware that the interviewee is trying to achieve certain goals and that his or her answers are not given aimlessly. Recognition of this fact will have an impact upon how you evaluate the information that you receive.

Purposes can be a major part of filtering in another way. We have spoken to people who have said that their purposes were basically to get information. In analyzing their actions, however, it has been quite apparent that it was not just information that they were looking for, because they tended to reject any information that was not consistent with their point of view. These people did not want information but reinforcement. Consequently, their filtering would reject anything that did not comply with this purpose. This point has been demonstrated many times with people who have decided on a political candidate, bought a specific product, or stated a new idea. Once they have made their decisions, they do not want to be bothered by contrary evidence.

Finally, your purposes determine the way you listen and probe. They become the basic guide for most of your interviewing behavior.

MOTIVATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING

Your communication is influenced by your specific motivations and needs, which are frequently related to your purposes. You need not be a mentalist or amateur psychologist to detect the differences in motivations among people; you need only be a careful listener to the way people talk about themselves and their situations. Once you have picked up some

trends, you can use them in tailoring an interview to the interviewee's particular needs and interests. The following list identifies some of the most basic needs that various theorists have identified. They exist in many different degrees, and not everyone will have all of them. Furthermore, priorities change over time.

1. physiological needs—to have enough air, food; to possess healthy body functions
2. social needs—to be around other people; to be included in their activities
3. ego needs—to feel good about oneself; self-respect; self-confidence
4. security—to be free from want or fear; to avoid unpleasantness or danger
5. achievement—to make progress; to attain goals
6. affection—to love and to be loved
7. control/power—to influence one's own surroundings
8. dependency—to have others make decisions for oneself
9. individualism—to be different; perhaps to work alone
10. status—to have respect from others; to attain position; to be important; to be recognized
11. growth—to be stimulated and challenged
12. altruism—to be helpful to others without personal benefit
13. economic—to have money; to be in a healthy financial state
14. health—to be absent of disease

As an interviewer, detection of the needs relevant to a particular individual is helpful in several ways. First, you can appeal to relevant needs to get the person to participate in the interview. You may have to pay some people for an interview; some will grant you an interview to get publicity; others will enjoy talking to you; and still others will grant an interview in order to try to control the flow of information about a topic or situation. It is useful to detect the differences so that you can appeal to the different individuals.

Second, you can tailor what you say in the interview to the interviewee's needs. For example, if you are trying to get someone to accept an idea, show how it is related to that person's individual needs. Conversely, when interviewees resist an idea, it may be because they can see no concrete relationship between the idea and their needs. Probe until you are able to establish such a link.

Perhaps one of the best ways of showing how motivation can be applied is to use examples from two different theories. William Schutz has developed a means of analyzing people's basic interpersonal orientations.¹

¹William C. Schutz, *The Interpersonal Underworld* (Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1966).

He has isolated three different orientations that people tend to have toward others: (1) inclusion, (2) affection, and (3) control. Figure 2.1 explains each of these orientations. People may score low or high on each dimension, yet no value judgments are placed upon them. In other words, people are just different, and it is not more preferable, for example, to be highly sociable than to like to work alone.

Schutz's work points out how motivations may contribute to compatible or incompatible relationships within an interview. For example, if someone who has a high inclusion need is interviewing someone with a high inclusion need, you might expect a lot of socializing and interaction. Other things being equal, these people will fill each other's needs and get along well. On the other hand, suppose the interviewee is low on inclusion but the interviewer is high. This could easily become an incompatible situation. The more the interviewer tries to include the interviewee in a social relationship, the more uncomfortable the interviewee will become and the more resistance the interviewee will demonstrate. The interviewer may well wonder why the resistance occurs and press harder. If this situation continues, the interviewer will likely end up with the impression that something is wrong with the interviewee, and the interviewee might feel that the interviewer is aggressive. Neither person is having his or her own needs met.

Control is another basic orientation that has some interesting ramifications. People high in control on the Schutz scale like to lead, to make decisions, to influence their destinies, and to exercise power over others. If you put two of them together in an interview you may well develop a power struggle. People low in control like to be led, to follow, to have decisions made for them. If you put two of them together they probably will spend a lot of time encouraging each other to make a decision. You might find them talking like this:

PERSON X: What would you like to do tonight?

PERSON Y: Oh, I don't care. You make the decision.

PERSON X: But I really want to do what you want.

PERSON Y: But it doesn't really matter to me.

The most compatible situation is for one person to want to control (lead) and the other to want to follow. This works particularly well if the one high on control happens to be the interviewer or the supervisor.

The Schutz theory offers an excellent framework for analyzing what is going on in an interview between two people. First, by examining the comments in terms of showing affection, exercising control, or building a social relationship, you can find out what their basic orientations toward one another are. Second, it allows you to examine the relationship to determine how they are responding to one another. As the interviewer,

INCLUSION

Expressed: I make efforts to include other people in my activities and to get them to include me in theirs. I try to belong, to join social groups, to be with people as much as possible.

Wanted: I want other people to include me in their activities and to invite me to belong, even if I do not make an effort to be included.

AFFECTION

Expressed: I make efforts to become close to people. I express friendly and affectionate feelings and try to be personal and intimate.

Wanted: I want others to express friendly and affectionate feelings toward me and to try to become close to me.

CONTROL

Expressed: I try to exert control and influence over things. I take charge of things and tell other people what to do.

Wanted: I want other people to control and influence me. I want other people to tell me what to do.

Figure 2.1 Names and definitions for Schutz scales.

you can analyze the interaction in these terms and then increase your own flexibility in order to adapt to the basic orientations of the other person. For example, if you know that the interviewee is high on inclusion, you may spend time socializing or talking about his or her importance to the "team." If you know that the person is a loner, who works better alone and resists being included in a lot of activities, you might curtail the socializing and emphasize the importance of the interviewee as an individual. If you know that the interviewee has high control needs, you may permit him or her to take a greater role in the interview; if he or she is low on control, then you may not push very hard for participation. If the person has high affection needs, then you can fill these by making the person feel very appreciated.

David McClelland offers a second way of looking at motivation. He identifies three basic needs that people have: (1) affiliation, (2) power, and (3) achievement.²

Affiliation is similar to inclusion in Schutz's theory. The person who is high in it will tend to define most situations as social situations. Consequently, in attempting to satisfy this person's needs in the interview, you will need to demonstrate a concern for the personal relationship between the two of you as well as the interviewee's relationship with others in the family as well as at work. With this type of person you should constantly stress the person's affiliative contribution toward the work effort, be

²David McClelland, *Motivational Management* (The Forum Corporation of North America, 1976).

friendly, and take care to observe all the interpersonal niceties for building rapport. If you are a manager who must give this person negative feedback, take special precautions to separate the evaluation of the person's behavior from the evaluation of the total person. Any action that is the reverse of the ones described will demotivate the affiliative person.

The need for power is the need to engage in powerful actions that bring reputation and position. People who have it are concerned with public evaluation, and they often elicit a strong emotional reaction from others. Any way that you can provide status and control in dealing with such people is likely to satisfy their needs.

The need for achievement is the need to set realistic goals and then to attain them. Growth and competition are necessary for this type of individual. Consequently, the actions that satisfy such a person include careful planning, frequent feedback, emphasis upon the person's unique contributions, letting the person know when he or she outperforms others, and keeping the interaction interesting and challenging. It is also important to make this kind of person feel that he or she is a part of the goal-setting. Consequently, interacting with this kind of person in an interview must involve an emphasis upon goals and achievement.

In what sense then do your motivations filter communication behavior? You behave in ways that make sense to you, and what makes sense to you is generally related to your own needs. Therefore, you can be expected to send messages that will accomplish or fulfill your needs, and you will, in turn, interpret messages in terms of how they relate to your needs. Taking this into account, the wise interviewer will rarely assume that all people are motivated in the same way or that their needs are just like his or her own.

Finally, most people have one overriding need: to protect and enhance the self-image. People have images of what they are, and it does not matter that others do not share them. The self-image is one of the most important psychological constructs that a person has, and most people will react in whatever way is necessary to defend it. Thus, this defense often exercises a tremendous influence over the way a person communicates. Defensiveness sometimes blinds a person, and this is one of the reasons that supportive climates enhance communication whereas defensive ones inhibit cooperation.

PERCEPTIONS

One of the more interesting parts of your filtering role is the way that you perceive your communication.³ Perception involves the selecting, or-

³Much of this discussion is based on material from William V. Haney, *Communication and Organizational Behavior* (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1973).

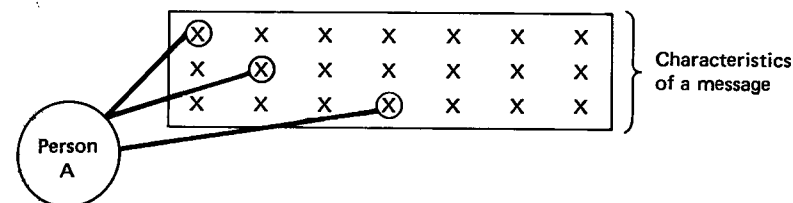


Figure 2.2 One person abstracting.

gaining, and interpreting of messages in ways that make sense to you or suit your purposes. It is essentially an unconscious activity, often dominated by learned habits. In this section it is our aim to make you conscious of some of our patterns of perception so that you can evaluate them in terms of how they affect communicative behavior.

First, there are so many cues in any communication situation that it is impossible to pay attention to all of them. Yet, any one of them can be a vital message to be interpreted. Examine the following list.

Nonverbal Communication Cues

appearance
gestures
facial expression
posture
movement
voice quality
eye contact

Verbal Communication Cues

words used
way of organizing
several ideas in one sentence
way words are said

This is only a partial list, but it illustrates the number of cues that are available for your analysis at any one moment. We can complicate this even more by suggesting that ideas do not all get equal attention; you pay more attention to some than to others.

Since you cannot pay attention to all communication cues, or messages, you select some and leave more out. This process of selection is sometimes called *abstracting*. Figure 2.2 illustrates how this works. A person perceives a message (for example, a person, an idea, or a statement) but actually only sees or hears a few characteristics of that message. This means that the parts always represent the whole. It is important that

as an interviewer you concentrate on the parts that are the most representative and valuable.

The abstracting principle can be applied to many different levels. If you look at a room, certain things will stand out; others will be neglected. If you read a message and try to repeat it, unless you have memorized it, your paraphrase is what you will remember and abstract from the total. If you summarize an interview, your summary will leave out a lot of things that actually were said and emphasize what you think were the key points.

The relevance of this principle to the interview is that everybody is abstracting or selecting out those items that are most vital to them or that make the most sense in their worlds. Consequently, when two people hear the same message, they may hear some of the same characteristics, but often they will focus on some different ones, too. Their experiences are not identical and their definitions of the message are also not identical. Therefore, one of the major communication lessons that you can learn is *to expect differences in perception*. In order to do this, you have to overcome past habits. Since perceptions constitute realities, people assume that if an experience is real to them, then it must be real for other people, too. This is an assumption that must be overcome, and you can do it when you realize how you shape what it is that you see or hear. In the abstracting process, people create their realities by choosing what they want to focus on. This is not undesirable; in fact, it is inevitable. However, it is important to recognize that people are *creating* different realities out of the same materials. This point receives special emphasis because the success of so many interviews hinges on whether or not the interviewer discovers what the interviewee's perceptions really are.

Figure 2.3 illustrates graphically how two people can focus on the "same" message, see or hear some features in common, but still focus on some different characteristics, too. Focusing on the different characteristics naturally changes the perception and thus the reality of each.

One of the best ways of demonstrating this point is to show different stimuli and identify what different people see. This can be fun, but it also provides a valuable lesson. Figure 2.4, for example, has a number of lines

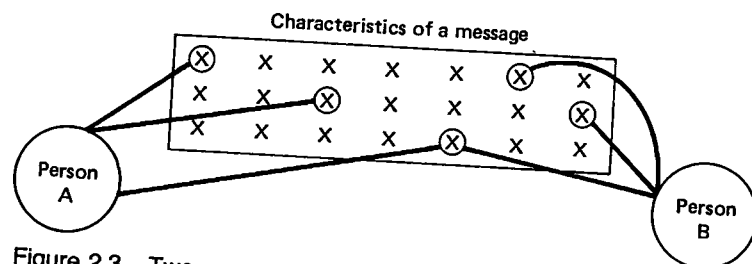


Figure 2.3 Two persons abstracting.



Figure 2.4 (Source: E. G. Boring, 1930 from Richard J. Gregory, *The Intelligent Eye* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970). Used with permission from the McGraw-Hill Book Company.

that make up a picture. Before you read further, identify what the picture looks like to you. When people see it for the first time, they perceive the lines as a woman. However, there is a great difference in their perceptions. Some see an old woman or a witch; others see a glamorous young woman dressed in stylish clothes. Which is it? Well, if you look closely, it can be either, depending on how you structure the lines. For most of us, it is difficult to keep changing our focus from an old woman to a young woman. This illustrates how difficult it is to change our perceptions after we have defined a situation. Note that the stimulus in this case is the pattern of the lines, but people organize them differently, so they actually see different pictures. This is an interpersonal perceptual problem. If we do this with pictures, how much more likely are we to do the same thing with verbal messages, where we have even greater latitude of interpretation? It has been demonstrated, for example, that the same answers on a test may be evaluated differently by different professors and that recruiters who hear the same interview will judge the person differently. In both instances, their measurements differ because their perceptions differ.

Why do we select, organize, and interpret communications as we do? There is no easy explanation to this, but it is a good question for each one of you to raise. Consequently, some of the most general influences are explored in the following pages.

Influences on Perception

~~Motives are one influence on perception. In the preceding discussion of motivation it was emphasized that people often see what they want to see and hear what they need to hear to fulfill their needs.~~ Since motives influence perceptions greatly, it is almost impossible to talk about either motivation or perception without pointing out how powerfully they interact. For example, if I do not like you, I may have a need to keep your messages from agreeing with mine; consequently, I may receive a message from you and interpret it so that I "know" that you did not really mean what you said. In work situations it is commonplace to talk about an employee's need to misunderstand in order to protect the person's own self-image because the person would be uncomfortable if the messages were interpreted any other way. These are merely suggestions of how motives affect perception in detrimental ways. Motives can also facilitate perception in constructive ways. The need to understand and be understood may enable a person to look at situations from several different angles, for example, to see both the old woman and the young woman in Figure 2.4. The point is not that all perceptions are limited by a person's motives but that they can be; when they are, motivation is a powerful influence.

~~Past experience is another major influence on perception, because experience conditions people to make sense out of their worlds in certain ways.~~ Over time this conditioning develops patterns. Since no two people have exactly the same past experiences, you can expect some differences in perceptions. For example, past experiences with interviewers will determine how people interact with you initially. If the experiences have been good, they may be receptive to you. If they have been bad, stressful, or a waste of time, the person will not be as open to your interview.

~~Frame of reference is another perceptual influence. We are all part of groups that have learned to perceive in certain ways.~~ The optimists see a bottle as half full; the pessimists see it as half empty. Republicans tend to look at the role of government quite differently from Democrats. Management and labor differ in objectives and perceptions of one another. Therefore, your reference groups play an important role in affecting your perceptions.

~~Environments differ for most people, causing subtle differences in perception.~~ Many interviews involve managers and subordinates, and here is where many differences can be pinpointed. While managers and subordinates nominally are in the same organization, their perspectives differ because they hold different positions in the organization, and, consequently, they are aware of different circumstances and influences. In sum, their environments actually differ. It has been demonstrated, for example, that in describing a subordinate's job, a boss and a subordinate may disagree on an average of 25 percent of the time. The two can

communicate, but invariably their perspectives differ. A manager almost always has a more general perspective than the subordinate. For example, the subordinate may be basically concerned about the immediate work environment, but the manager may need to be concerned about coordinating several work units. In this sense they are operating in different environments.

~~Internal states also influence perceptions. The degree of emotional involvement is a powerful influence.~~ Fear, for example, sometimes makes a person see things temporarily in shadows that are not really there. Anger or rage keeps a person from seeing things objectively. Apathy keeps a person from paying attention.

~~Mental sets influence perception because they allow for only one interpretation despite the evidence.~~ These sets seem to be rigid or frozen interpretations. Sometimes the set can be general, such as always looking at things through "rose-colored glasses." At other times it can be very specific. The following example demonstrates a number of things about communication, but one of the most important things it demonstrates is the mental set of the manager. It has a blinding impact on the manager, and he was not open to other interpretations. Furthermore, it shows that sets have great longevity. In this case it took several days to woo the manager out of his interpretation.

A new laboratory manager was assigned to head the systems engineering laboratory. A senior systems engineer, who had known the new manager only three months, wanted to impress him. Therefore, she went into the manager's office and said, "I have some time, since the job I have does not occupy me full time, and I could help you with some new assignments."

The manager answered, "Oh, you have nothing to do?"

The senior systems engineer hastily replied, "Yes, I do, but it doesn't occupy me full time."

The manager then asked, "What are you charging your time to if you have nothing to do?"

At this point, the senior systems engineer lost her temper, and an angry interaction occurred.

This example demonstrates quite clearly that the message sent was not necessarily the message received. Apparently, the culprit in this case is a mental set. Once the laboratory manager had defined the offer of help as "nothing to do," there was almost nothing that anyone could do to change his definition.

THINKING PATTERNS

There do seem to be consistent thinking patterns that evolve in each of us, and they affect the way we communicate. Some people, for example, handle concrete relationships very well but have difficulty with very

abstract theoretical materials. Others have no trouble at all with the theoretical materials. Some get into habits of inductive reasoning; others use a deductive reasoning. All of these patterns have legitimate value; they are just different. Attention will now be turned to two rather common problems associated with the way people think, and it will be very relevant to your role in the interview as a measurer or an interpreter of communication.

Inferences and Observations

The first problem is confusing inferences with observations. There is often a failure to differentiate between the two. An *inference* is a mental leap—a statement or a conclusion made about the unknown on the basis of what is already known, whereas an *observation* is a verifiable experience through one of the five senses. Obviously, all reasoning involves an ability to make inferences, but there is a distinct advantage of knowing what you are doing when you make one. William V. Haney is the leading authority on this point, and his books and films have been used by thousands. Haney contrasts observations and inferences in the following way.⁴

Statements of Observation

1. can be made only *after* or *during* observation
2. must stay with what one has observed and must not go beyond (I observed a man *wearing* a tie; his *buying* it, if he did so, was beyond my observation.)
3. can be made only by the observer (The observational statements of another person are still my inferences, assuming that I have not observed what the person has.)
4. only *approach* certainty

Statements of Inference

1. can be made at any time
2. can go well beyond observation to the limit of imagination
3. can be made by anyone
4. involve degrees of probability

In order to determine whether or not you can distinguish between observation and inference, look at the following story and answer the questions following it. Read the story as often as you wish. Then for each of the statements about the story, circle the "T" if the statement is true, the "F" if it is false, or the "?" if you do not know whether it is true or false.

⁴Ibid., p. 222.

THE STORY

Barbara Record, a campus recruiter for the *Pittsfield Herald*, was filling out forms behind a desk when Pat came rushing into the room 10 minutes late for a prescreening interview. While reaching out to shake hands, Pat accidentally knocked an ashtray off the table. Apologizing, Pat explained that the coach had kept the team longer than usual. Barbara pointed across the desk to a chair for Pat to sit in and said, "Well, we better get started to make up for lost time." The total interview lasted 20 minutes.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Barbara Record was irritated by Pat's lateness. | T F ? |
| 2. The man who knocked the ashtray over was the job candidate. | T F ? |
| 3. Pat was late because the coach kept the team overtime. | T F ? |
| 4. Barbara is a campus recruiter. | T F ? |
| 5. Pat will not get the job because of a bad impression. | T F ? |

If you have answered all the questions, the correct answers may be instructive. You should have circled all with "?" except question 4. Question 1 should be "?" because the story does not say what Barbara's internal state was. Many people would be irritated, but Barbara may not be. The story does not describe Barbara's internal state. Question 2 should be "?" because the sex of the job candidate is never mentioned. Pat is a common name for males as well as females. Furthermore, female athletic teams are on the increase. Question 3 should be "?" because it involves hearsay. Pat said that the coach kept them overtime, but we do not know that this report is accurate. Many people give false excuses. Question 4 should be "T" because it restates specifically what is in the story. Question 5 should be "?" because it asks us to make a prediction that goes beyond what the story says. No one can observe the future.

This discussion reemphasizes that any statement that goes beyond what is actually known is an inference. Furthermore, certain kinds of statements are always statements of inference. Any statement about the future cannot be an observation; only inferences (predictions) can be made about the future. Any statement about a person's motivation is an inference; behavior can be observed, only inferences about motivation can be made from it. Finally, any statement that involves a second-hand report involves inferences that the person is *capable* of telling you the truth (review the discussion on perception) and is *willing* to tell you the truth (review the discussion on motivation).

Why can the confusion between inferences and observations be detrimental? First of all, inferences involve probabilities, so there is always a

degree of risk of being wrong. Sometimes the risk is greater than at other times. At any rate, you will be on more solid ground if you calculate the risk of being wrong and be prepared. Second, inferences often allow the interviewer to fill in information that has not really been covered or stated. A recognition of the tendency to make inferences will encourage you to double-check information and not make important inferences unconsciously or haphazardly. This is why a summary is such a useful means of double-checking.

Discrimination Patterns

All people and events are unique in some important ways, and it is a healthy thinking pattern to concentrate on their uniqueness. Let us demonstrate now three ways in which the failure to discriminate leads to some problems.

First, there is often a tendency to lump people, events, or situations together because of their similarities. This is all right *unless it obscures any differences*. If you forget the possibility of uniqueness, then you are likely to stereotype people and situations. Our society is fighting a battle against stereotypes of *people* on the basis of race or sex, but there still is a tendency to stereotype *situations*. All situations are not alike, and you as the interviewer need to base your behavior on the differences among situations rather than on the similarities. The objective is to *discriminate among, not against*.

A second type of discrimination failure occurs when you do not recognize that people and things change over time. A time bound stereotype is a kind of frozen evaluation. To prevent this, some companies insist that each new appraisal must have a definite time frame; happenings previous to the time frame are not germane.

The third type of discrimination failure is to think only in terms of bipolar opposites. There are a lot of times when we find it easy to think in only two ways: agree-disagree; black-white; honest-dishonest; loyal-disloyal; or competent-incompetent. Often such bipolar fixations do not represent all the choices that really exist. For example, there are many degrees of agreement and disagreement. A person may be neutral or indecisive rather than in agreement or disagreement.

Defense of the Status Quo

One of the most frustrating thinking patterns is a closed mind. There are many people who apparently have a basic resistance to change. This resistance often takes the form of not wanting to explore the possibility that something new might work. The frustration that can occur between a proposer and a resister is demonstrated in the following example.

On the first day of my new position in California, I called my assistant in to discuss several ideas that I had regarding changes in procedures, reports, and programs. It seemed that each time I would propose something, her response was, "That can't be done." Sometimes, she would say, "We tried that before, and it won't work." My reaction to this was to reply, "Nothing is impossible; it only takes a bit longer." I was very emphatic, and the interview ended on a somewhat emotional level. The next day my supervisor called me in to state that my assistant's husband had called him to inform him that he did not appreciate "the new tornado in the office" giving his wife "a hard time."

We can see from this example just how emotional resistance can become.

To a certain extent, perhaps all of us have some resistance to new ideas. Furthermore, an idea is not necessarily good because it is new. On the other hand, communication thrives on mutual exploration of ideas. Ultimately, you may reject an idea, but it is useful from a communication point of view to at least listen to what the other person wishes to say. In other words, openness as a thinking pattern facilitates interpersonal communication.

LANGUAGE EXPERTISE

Language problems are the ones encountered most frequently in interviews. The two people involved use a common language, but the meanings associated with that language are often quite different. Examples like the following are legion.

During a budget meeting with my supervisor and district managers, the supervisor outlined a zero-based budget format to be used by both the operating and staff functions. This format was discussed by all parties, and it was agreed that we would follow the method. There were ten individuals at this meeting who would carry this information back to their offices and implement the system.

The first budget was submitted, and no two of the budget formats were the same. My own budget did meet the supervisor's expectations, but only because my job location was next to his and I could ask him questions.

This example highlights the fact that people often bypass each other with their messages and also that feedback can be very beneficial.

In order to overcome some of the problems with language we need to make several important points. We will start with the following principle:

Message ≠ Meaning

1. Discriminate between message and meaning; they are not the same even though the words are sometimes used interchangeably. There is always something physical about the message, for example, type on a page or air waves. These exist outside the body and can be sent from place to place.

2. Meanings, on the other hand, are inside people. They are the interpretations of the message. Communication is most effective when two people have similar meanings associated with a common message, but you can never send your meaning somewhere else. You send messages that are constructed in such a way that you try to *elicit* a similar meaning within the other person.

3. Meanings are learned through experience. There is no inherent connection between a word and its meaning. In order to demonstrate this, we need to list only one word from a foreign language. Let's take the German word "pferd," for example. Anyone who knows German will know that this word means "horse"; anyone who does not know German would not know what is meant because he or she has not *learned* to make the connection between the word and the object. This point is obvious when we talk about foreign languages, but it is so easy to forget when we are using a native language. People come to expect that everyone uses language in the same way, but experience teaches us that they do not.

The fact that meanings are learned also has other implications. If they are learned, they change over time. Consider what has happened to the word "cool" in the United States. Further, people may learn *many* meanings for the same word. Consider the number of different ways in which "communication" has been defined. Consequently, you should not assume that a word has only one meaning.

4. The communication problem that frequently occurs when people forget that we do not all have the same meaning for a given word is *bypassing*. We think that we mean the same thing because we share common messages or words, but we do not and this causes problems. In fact, *one of the greatest communication lessons that you can learn is that you do not have control over how others interpret your messages.*

5. The potential for this bypassing problem existing is one of the soundest reasons for getting feedback to your messages. Regardless of how clear you think your messages are, check them with the other person. Clarity is not a characteristic of a message; it is determined by the receiver's interpretation.

6. Giving feedback readily is also desirable because not only do you realize that others misunderstand you, but you realize that you also may be misinterpreting what someone else means.

7. Finally, it is possible to bypass not only in terms of words but also in terms of the way messages are conveyed. For example, a supervisor reports that his superior has told him how to select new electronic technicians. One of the requirements is to score above 50 on a test. However, the superior "did this verbally and appeared very casual and indifferent in what he was saying." After interviewing a person who had a score of only 35 on the test, the supervisor liked the candidate's answers and decided to hire her anyway. The supervisor told us what happened then: "As I

casually mentioned this to my boss, he hit the roof and reprimanded me for ignoring his specific instructions. He concluded by saying that he meant what he said. I had been misled by the mood in which he gave the instructions."

Such problems as just described happen more frequently than we care to admit. Therefore, you can make progress if you come to expect differences in interpretations, just as you should come to expect differences in perceptions.

BIAS

No discussion of communication filtering in an interview would be complete without a discussion of bias, because it certainly shapes how people react to messages and how people measure information and other people. Kahn and Cannell define bias as "any *unplanned* or *unwanted* influence in the interview."⁵ Generally, bias can be described as having a systematic influence on the communicators. It can stem from fixed attitudes, mental sets for perceiving the world, expectations, motivations, reactions to certain language, or certain patterns of making inferences. It is important that you differentiate between bias and judgment because some would claim that anytime you make up your mind you are biased. Remember that judgment involves a critical examination of something; bias is an unwanted, systematic error that leads to dysfunctional interviewing behavior.

Kahn and Cannell offer the following model of bias in Figure 2.5. The background characteristics of both the interviewer and the respondent are important because they affect the general filtering system of the communicators; they determine how a person learns to filter. The psychological factors are important because they are the mediating patterns that determine behavior. Finally, the behavioral factors are important because they determine the actual content and relationships within the interview. Much of the remainder of this book will focus on ways of overcoming some of the errors in behavior.

The greatest means of alleviating bias is to be aware of how it might occur.

What does the interviewer require in order to function effectively and without bias? We have answered this question by saying that he requires techniques for question formulation, for inducing respondent motivation, and for focusing the communication on the content objectives of the interview. We believe, however, that the interviewer needs also a deep understanding and insight into the dynamics of the interaction process of which he is a part. The

⁵Robert L. Kahn and Charles F. Cannell, *Dynamics of Interviewing* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1963), p. 176.

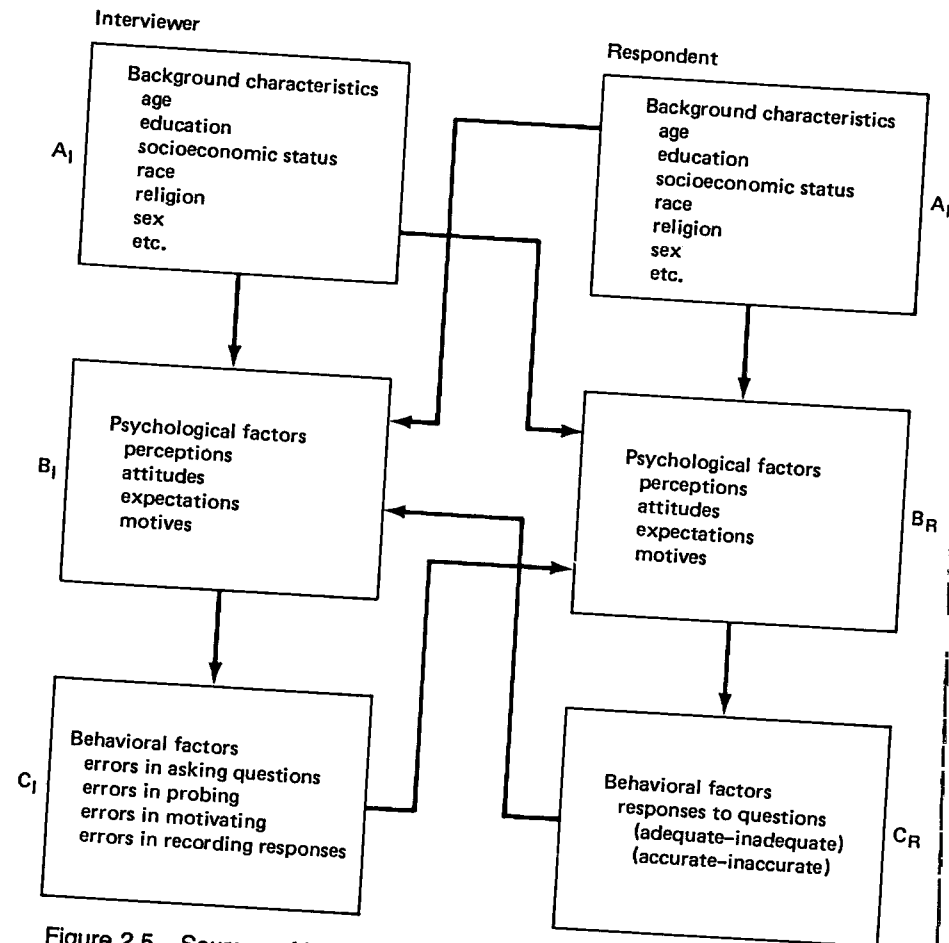


Figure 2.5 Sources of bias. (Source: Robert Kahn and Charles Cannell, *Dynamics of Interviewing*, p. 194, Copyright © 1963 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)

interview process itself is complex, and each case sufficiently idiosyncratic so that no set of rules and procedures will suffice unless the interviewer has such insight into the psychology of the interaction.⁶

ATTITUDES

Attitudes comprise one of the most important filters, both in terms of shaping messages to be sent and in interpreting the messages from other people. There are four attitudes that are particularly relevant.

First, attitude toward the other person is very important. There are

⁶Ibid., p. 202.

some people whom you like and others whom you dislike, and your attitude determines to a great extent how much time and energy you are willing to expend on the interview. You tend to devote more time and energy to those about whom you have a favorable attitude. Sometimes it also determines how much you say in the interview. In order to demonstrate the working of attitudes, we asked many managers if they ever had to communicate with someone when they hoped that the other person would fail. Generally, they were reluctant at first to admit it, but most of them recount experiences where this was true. Then we asked how this attitude shaped their behavior, and they listed such things as cutting the communication short, leaving important details out, not listening to the person, or not being patient. But when attitudes were favorable, they would go to extraordinary lengths to make certain that the messages were understood, and they also devoted more time to the communication.

From a receiving point of view, you may need to recognize that the interviewee's attitude toward you may inhibit communication. People have difficulty accepting ideas from someone whom they dislike, distrust, or oppose. Sometimes in a work situation you may need to ask yourself whether or not you are the best person to conduct an interview with the interviewee. You may not be (in terms of securing acceptance of the message). In such cases, if there is a legitimate alternative, use it.

Second, attitudes toward the message influence your behavior. When you like or support the content of a message, you may demonstrate this enthusiasm in expressing the message. When you dislike or do not support the message, you are likely to pass the buck or show by your behavior that you do not believe it. Some people even invite the other person not to believe the message with an attitude of "I don't want to tell you this, but . . ."

Similarly, it works the same way for an interviewee. The interviewee will accept some messages and reject others because of his or her attitudes toward the content. This is why criticism is often so difficult to take. If you are planning an information giving interview, one of the best things you can consider is, "How will the interviewee feel toward this message?" Your answer to this question may dictate the strategies you will choose to complete the interview successfully.

Third, attitudes toward personal, face-to-face communication are a factor. Some people enjoy oral communication, but others would much prefer impersonal writing. It is our hope that your experiences with this book will enable you to enter into these interviews with confidence and with positive attitudes. Your interviewees, however, may still be nervous. Recognizing this will help you to do things within the interview that may make them appreciate the experience more.

Finally, attitude toward self is a very great filter in communication. It shapes a lot of communication behavior. When you are confident, it shows

by your enthusiasm and your manner of expression. On the other hand, when you are not self-confident, you may experience anxiety in trying to articulate your ideas. From a receiving point of view, you may select out of your environment those messages that tend to reinforce your current self-image. Anybody can find some kind of information that contradicts any criticism that is received. In such a case the person would find himself or herself disregarding any messages that are not supportive. Unfortunately, this attitude often causes people to filter out information that could have great utility for them, both in terms of productivity and in relationships. Therefore, it may be useful simply to ask yourself, "How am I doing as a communicator?" and "How would others rate me as a communicator?"

MEMORY

Abstracting is a continuous communication phenomenon that is highly dependent upon your ability to remember. The farther you get away from an event, the more things you will forget about it and the more you will focus your recall on just a few items. Thus, memory is an important part of your personal filtering. Because interviewees are bombarded with lots of information, both verbal and nonverbal, they need some means of facilitating accurate memory.

The most common way to remember is to take notes during an interview. This practice helps document your immediate perceptions of important points, and frequently a review of your notes will call to mind things that were quickly forgotten at the end of the interview. Thus, notes—particularly verbatim comments—can be invaluable in remembering. The major liability in taking notes concerns their impact upon the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. As the interviewer, you may find that taking copious notes sometimes inhibits the flow of communication, and you may need to change your pattern. Furthermore, interviewees are often curious about what you are writing and may even request to see it.

A second means of remembering is to eliminate note-taking during the interview and to write out a comprehensive summary immediately after the interview is finished. This is a technique used by many recruiters. How well this succeeds depends upon your ability to discipline your listening and your ability to retain important points. By all means, if you use this method, force yourself to complete the summary immediately after each interview. Sometimes, interviewers who are rushed put it off until later, often with disastrous results.

A third way is to tape-record the interview, provided that the interviewee is consulted and agrees. This might be particularly important in training, as you seek to improve your techniques, or in counseling, where

you want to return to analyze the interaction in depth. We have also used it in conducting focus groups because we wanted verbatim comments and it would have been impossible to write them all down during the interview. The great liability, however, for taping interviews is that it takes as long to listen to them afterwards as it does to conduct the interview. Therefore, it is limited by time considerations.

The final means of stirring the memory is to have a second person interview with you. A discussion between the two of you is likely to call to mind most of the important things, and you can test for agreement in your assessments.

These four ways are merely options that you have, and you will need to determine which works best for you. In order to make this choice, however, you may wish to experiment with something other than the method you have been using. On the other hand, if your current method works well for you, stick with it.

THIS CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

Whenever you receive information, you are not merely a passive recipient. On the contrary, you are very active in sorting out, arranging, organizing, and interpreting what you hear. For this reason, people operate as communication filters; that is, they keep some things out and let other things in. In this chapter eight aspects of your filtering have been identified and discussed:

- purposes
- motivations
- perceptions
- thinking patterns
- language expertise
- bias
- attitudes
- memory

Obviously, there are other factors that influence your communication behavior, but these are ones that have the greatest impact. In discussing each of these factors, we have found it impossible to apply them in all the different ways that they can be applied to the various types of interviews. Instead, we have made you aware of them so that you can be aware of how they influence you.

Finally, these eight factors play a major role in your interpreting and measuring information. They explain what you do with information when you receive it. Therefore, they need to be taken into account as you plan your strategies and control your specific interviews. Then you will be in a better position to judge your own filtering behaviors and modify, or com-

pensate for, them whenever necessary. When you control an interview, perhaps the most basic rule to remember is to analyze your own communication behavior and to control yourself.

PROJECTS

1. There are a great many pictures that have been used to demonstrate how people perceive the same picture in different ways. Make a collection of them. Then discuss with others the validity of the points that they make.
2. Identify your own chief motivations. Review the discussion of motivation in this chapter and discuss how you might fit into either of these analyses. Recall some incidents that have demonstrated this motivation in you.
3. To what extent is the notion of *filtering* a useful communication concept? Is it inevitable? If so, why should people be concerned with it?
4. Have several ten-minute conversations with someone in which you explore different ways of taking notes. Find out which one works best for you. How did each one affect the interaction with the other person?
5. Look at a transcript of an interview and try to identify all the examples that you can in which filtering is taking place between the interviewer and the interviewee.
6. Collect several actual examples of bypassing. Try to determine why it happened. What could have been done to circumvent it?
7. "Bias" is a very abstract word that has many evaluative connotations. Frequently, someone will say that you are biased just because they disagree with your conclusion. Do an in-depth study of this concept, trying first to list other people's definitions and then to mold your own.

Chapter 3 Planning Strategies

PART I

An interviewer can be a strategist, that is, make skillful plans before the interaction that will maximize the chances of achieving the desired results. This is not meant to imply that an interviewer can or should anticipate everything that is going to happen in an interview, try to be Machiavellian, or play the role of an amateur psychologist. It does stress, however, that careful planning sets the interviewer on a definite course and makes her or him more aware of options. The interviewer then becomes a better master of the situation.

In general, there are six broad areas of strategy that can be used in most interviews. The first three are covered in detail in this chapter, and the last three are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

1. State your purpose(s) as explicitly as possible.
2. Prepare an agenda.
3. Identify the best approach to raising questions and formulate some tentative questions.
4. Structure the interview.
5. Plan the physical setting.
6. Anticipate problems.

STATING YOUR PURPOSE

Have you ever been so troubled by something that you just needed to talk to a certain person about it? You did not know exactly what you wanted to accomplish, but you felt something would be accomplished. Well, that is the way a lot of people have approached interviewing. It is not something they planned; it is something they just did. Frequently, they felt indefinite or uneasy about what really had been accomplished.

Before you start an interview, it is wise to set some definite objectives. Ask yourself what your purpose is. What do you want to be the results of the interview in terms of (1) the content and (2) the relationship with the other person?

Often there is a need to set several objectives and to refine them because the way they are stated can influence the way you behave. For example, we have used the same role playing situation with hundreds of practicing managers who must deal with a given problem with a subordinate. Many of them will define their purposes in terms of counseling the employee; others will define it in terms of discipline. The important point to be stressed is that both groups behave quite differently toward the subordinate and that the content of the interviews differ drastically between the two groups. The way the problem was defined dictated the kinds of solutions the managers had. This example reinforces the importance of deciding exactly what you are trying to accomplish.

Furthermore, you should not let general labels inhibit you. Sometimes terms like "selection," "information getting," "sales," "counseling," and "appraisal" actually get in the way. There is a tendency to feel that once you have identified your general purpose, everything else will fall in line. This is not necessarily true. There can be many specific purposes associated with each of them, and these need to be identified as concretely as possible. If you are going to review someone's performance, for example, it may be helpful for you to balance negative with positive comments. Unless you identify this as a purpose, you may forget to do it.

PREPARING AN AGENDA

The specific task-related purpose usually demands that each interview explore certain specific content areas. These areas will form your agenda for the interview. The exactness with which an agenda can be prepared will vary greatly from interview to interview, but it is very important that you think about the kinds of information that must be exchanged in order to meet your purposes.

In some cases, preparing an agenda may involve a lot of background research. The manager who is going to talk with a subordinate about absenteeism may profit from a little research about absenteeism. She or

he could talk with other supervisors, read some professional literature, and also review her or his own hunches as to why people are absent. Experience has shown that just asking someone "Why have you been absent?" may not get reliable information. The manager who has done some homework is in a much better position, because the manager knows several reasons why people tend to be absent and can probe every one if necessary. Similarly, the professional journalist will be so thoroughly grounded in a topic that she or he often will know as much about it as the person being interviewed. In other words, well-prepared agendas can yield excellent interviews.

At the same time, however, agendas need not be set in concrete. They can be modified. A common practice is to identify certain topics to be covered but have no preference as to order. We have done this with focused groups and attitude surveys. Nonetheless, you ought to assess the priority for each type of topic so that you can make certain that the ones you have given the highest priority will certainly be covered.

RAISING QUESTIONS

Questions are basic to most interviews, whether you are conducting a survey, selecting an employee, evaluating a worker, making a sale, or collecting information for a newspaper story. Consequently, the ability to use questions effectively is a key communication skill you should cultivate constantly.

There is a great difference between (1) merely asking questions and (2) making questions work for you effectively. Anybody can ask questions; it is an easy activity. Unfortunately, the problem with many questions is that they often elicit answers that cannot be used because the questioning techniques are not very refined. The following discussion highlights some of the subtle considerations that can make a real difference in the way questions are asked. Basically, the criteria for evaluating questioning techniques are three: (1) How does it affect the respondent emotionally and psychologically? (2) How does it affect your relationship? (3) Does it give you the kind of response for which you are looking?

1. *Decide on the response you want; then frame the question.* Some people often put the cart before the horse. They frame a question that they like and do not consider the kind of response it might bring. Remember that the primary reason for asking a question is to get a response that is usable to you in some way. This thought should underlie all other decisions you will make concerning asking questions.

2. *Plan preliminary questions to cover the entire range of your agenda.* To many interviewers this seems obvious. For example, such careful planning is standard operating procedure for any survey research. Planning also can be useful in preparation for any interview, and it ac-

completes two things: (a) the individual interview is likely to be better, and (b) planning elevates questioning techniques to such a conscious level that the interviewer becomes more aware of what he or she is doing.

We have already focused on the necessity of identifying purposes and planning an agenda. This guideline is just another way of saying that the questions need to be such that all agenda items are covered. It would be useful to make a list of topics on the left and write out the questions pertinent to each topic on the right.

Planned Topic

1. Background

Question

1. What were the greatest influences on you as you grew up?

3. ~~Refine the wording of each question.~~ The way a question is phrased has a tremendous impact upon the way an interviewee answers. Your techniques can be improved by keeping the following points in mind.

a. The words must be understandable to the interviewee. Most interviewers would never intentionally ask a question that the interviewee does not understand; nevertheless, sometimes they do so unintentionally with negative results. What happens when certain words in the question are not clear? Generally, two kinds of problems are created. There is a *communication* problem, because a person cannot really answer a question that has not been understood. Many people will not ask what a word means because it suggests ignorance on their part. Lack of clarity also creates a *motivational* problem. A person tends to avoid risky situations, and there is a risk of exposing his or her lack of understanding. Consequently, many people in this situation will try to change the subject, leave the interview physically if they can, or bluff their way through. None of these alternatives gives the interviewer what is wanted most—valid information.

Knowing the potential problems should stimulate you to make the effort necessary for making your questions understandable. Some methods that can be effective are the following:

1. Tailor the question to the individual's vocabulary and depth of understanding.
2. Pretest the question on other people to see what kinds of interpretations they give.
3. Set the climate so that the person will not be defensive and will feel free to ask clarifying questions.

For example, suppose you were interviewing a manager about her interviewing behaviors in her exit interviews. (Experience has taught us that some managers think of dismissal interviews as exit interviews.) If you want to avoid the possibility that she may talk about a dismissal

interview, you might ask, "Would you describe how you personally conduct exit interviews? By exit interview, I'm referring to the final interview you have with employees who have decided to leave the organization voluntarily." Make it a practice to define key terms.

b. Be sensitive to the possibility that you might inadvertently load a question in favor of a particular response by using highly evaluative words. Students often raise the following question with their professors: "Am I going to miss anything important by being absent tomorrow?" There are certainly better ways of asking this question so that a teacher will think that what he or she is presenting on any given day will be important. Similarly, the researcher would be tilting the scale if he or she asked someone how they felt about foreigners taking over so many American banks. "Taking over" is not a neutral concept. In the same way a manager would not be wise in asking a subordinate, "How is the department reacting to the radical new demands by the union?" or "What have been the employees' reactions to the burdensome increase in social security taxes?" since the inadvertent use of the word "radical" or "burdensome" is likely to influence the answers.

c. When consistency or tabulation is important, you should ask each interviewee the same questions in the same way. In other words, be careful about paraphrasing. It might be a good communication strategy to adapt to the receiver most of the time, but here is an exception. Whenever you begin to paraphrase or change the words, the actual content of the question may be changed. Therefore, different interviewees would not be answering identical questions. It is not often that such rigor must be used, but it will be important anytime that answers are to be tabulated or compared.

d. The wording of the question also dictates the subjectivity of response that you are going to get. There are three questions listed below that at first glance may appear to be asking for the same information. See if you can pick out the subtle differences.

1. What does your co-worker do that upsets you?
2. What is it about your co-worker that you do not like?
3. What causes the friction between you and your co-worker?

We are not asking you to suggest which of these questions is best but to point out two areas of difference. First, there is a difference in how much of the relationship is included. Questions 1 and 2 seem to point to the co-worker as the cause of the problem, whereas Question 3 includes both "you and your co-worker" in the problem. Second, there is a subtle difference in the kind of information requested in Questions 1 and 2. Question 1 is asking for concrete, verifiable behaviors. If the respondent says, "She's the most offensive person I've ever known," he has not answered the question because he has not related how the co-worker

actually behaves. On the other hand, Question 2 leaves room for feelings as well as facts in the answer. Whereas Question 1 seems to ask for objective information, Questions 2 and 3 allow the interviewee to answer in either subjective or objective terms. This distinction is an important one to keep in mind as you evaluate whether or not interviewees have actually answered the questions they have been asked.

4. ~~Determine the scope and the depth of response that you need.~~ This is done primarily by selecting between open and closed questions. Because this is the most important decision you will make about your questions, we shall dwell at length on the nature and implications of them.

Open questions ask for broad or general information; they put few restrictions on how the interviewee might answer. The following are some examples of open questions.

Tell me about yourself.

What were your most memorable experiences on your first job?

How do you feel about the neutron bomb?

How would you evaluate the local newspaper?

What kind of working relationship did you have with your co-workers?

What kinds of differences, if any, has moving around a lot made in your life?

In what ways do you think we could curb inflation?

How have you been able to use the information from the supervisory training last year?

What is your reaction to this commercial (or article or statement)?

Such open questions have a great value in many circumstances.

a. ~~They help you discover the interviewee's priorities.~~ You might assume, for example, that whatever the interviewee begins to say in response to "Tell me about yourself" will reflect what the interviewee feels is most important or significant about herself, or himself.

b. ~~They help you discover the interviewee's frame of reference.~~ In answer to the question, "How would you evaluate the local newspaper?" the interviewee is likely to talk about parts of the newspaper in comparison to similar parts of other newspapers with which he or she is familiar. The interviewee will also identify certain criteria used in the evaluation. Therefore, this answer may reveal his or her frame of reference in terms of parts of the newspaper, other newspaper experiences, and criteria used in judgment.

c. ~~They often give recognition to the interviewee and satisfy a communication need by letting the individual talk through his or her ideas while you listen.~~ Most people react well to someone who shows an interest in what they have to say. There are few things more frustrating than not being allowed to complete a story you want to tell.

d. ~~They tend to be easy to answer and pose little ego threat.~~ Furthermore, there is little risk of the interviewee being wrong because there are usually no right or wrong answers. When you ask "What is your reaction to this commercial?" the interviewee may ultimately disagree with you, but there is no rightness or wrongness in such opinions.

e. ~~By definition open questions give the interviewee the freedom to structure an answer as he or she wishes.~~ Therefore, with an open question you do not structure the answer in terms of your own vocabulary or idea of the chronology of events. This has the distinct advantage of permitting the interviewee to volunteer information about which you might never think of asking.

f. ~~They encourage catharsis.~~ The interviewee can only get things "off his (or her) chest" if the interviewee is allowed to talk about them, at length if necessary. If you determine that catharsis is productive—and it may not always be—then open questions will facilitate it.

g. ~~They reveal the interviewee's emotional state as well as the facts present in the answer.~~ For example, in selection interviews the specific experiences a person has had may often be less important than the perspective the person has about those experiences.

h. ~~They reveal how articulate a person is and how well the person is able to think out loud or how much the person has thought about the topic.~~ In selection interviews, for example, it may be very important to make this assessment.

i. ~~They reveal the depth of a person's knowledge and perhaps how certain the person is about this knowledge.~~ Anyone can be against inflation, for example, but if a person begins to support ways of curbing it, he or she will automatically reveal his or her level of knowledge about economics.

Open questions also have some distinct limitations.

a. ~~They consume a lot of your time and energy.~~ In some cases, you may feel that the time is warranted; in others, you may feel it is wasted. For example, a journalist who knows exactly what information she or he needs may feel that long answers lack merit.

b. ~~They may make it more difficult to control the interview.~~ Some interviewers are reluctant to cut off an interviewee even when there is a digression, because they feel that the break might inhibit the interviewee later.

c. ~~Recording and tabulating answers is more difficult.~~ This is particularly true if the answers are long, rambling, or sometimes seem to be contradictory. For example, suppose we ask a person the question, "How do you feel about the neutron bomb?" Person A answers, "I try not to think about it because it is too terrible. Anything that kills people without destroying property puts the emphasis on the wrong side. Nevertheless, if the defenses in Europe need to be strengthened, as the reports indi-

cate, I suspect that we'll develop it. It's a tough problem." How would you code this answer? Does it support its use strategically? Is person A against it altogether? You would not know yet. To code this answer you would have to obtain more information and get person A to make some choices because the answer as it stands has not given a clear decision.

d. Open questions make it difficult to verify results when more than one interviewer is used. Different interviewers may interpret the answers with somewhat different emphasis.

e. Interviewees often are uncertain as to how much detail is wanted. Consequently, they feel inhibited about covering much territory.

Closed questions, in contrast to open questions, are very specific and frequently restrict the options available to the interviewee. There are three types of closed questions that can be identified. The most extreme form of a closed question is the *multiple-choice question* so often used on academic tests, public-opinion surveys, and application forms. In this type of question, all the alternatives are listed, and the interviewee simply checks one. Several examples follow.

How much do you earn a year? Of which party are you a member?

_____ \$5,000	_____ Republican
_____ \$5,000-10,000	_____ Democrat
_____ \$10,001-20,000	_____ Independent
_____ \$20,001-30,000	_____ American
_____ \$30,000 +	_____ Prohibition
	_____ Socialist
	_____ Other

How satisfied are you in your job?

Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Dissatisfied

If you voted "no" on the recent bond issue for X, which of the following influenced your vote?

_____ X is not a high priority with me.
 _____ I did not like the specific proposal.
 _____ I was influenced by the newspaper reports.
 _____ There has got to be a stop somewhere.
 _____ I do not trust the people associated with X.
 _____ Other _____

Second, there are many closed questions that can be categorized as *bipolar*; that is, two options are built into the question itself. The most common form of this type of question is the Yes-No option. Examples are given below.

Did you vote in the last election?

Did you take the medicine just as prescribed?

Did you find the training helpful in your job?

Did you report this to your supervisor?

Are you applying for other jobs?

Do you mind working weekends?

Another common form of bipolar question that is often misused is illustrated by the following examples. It is misused when it does not represent all the options.

Do you agree or disagree with President Carter's energy proposals?

Do you favor or oppose passing the bond issues?

Would you rather work alone or in a group?

Do you experience more pain here or there?

The third type of question is one in which the interviewer searches for a specific answer and may not be aware of all the options, yet only one answer is correct.

Where did you go to college?

How old are you?

How long have you been in this job?

When did you have your prescription changed?

How often do you listen to a radio news broadcast?

When did the conflict first begin?

Closed questions have particular merit under the following conditions: (1) when you want to save time and energy (and money), (2) when you want to maximize your control over the interview, (3) when you know exactly what information you want, (4) when classification and tabulation of results is more important than the amount or the depth of information, (5) when you are dealing with a crew of interviewers who need training, (6) when you are trying to help a person reconstruct an event, (7) when the interviewee is shy and reluctant to talk, (8) when you have many questions that must be asked in a few minutes, and (9) when the answer does not require an explanation.

On the other hand, closed questions also have limitations. First, the amount of information that can be obtained is limited. For example, you cannot ascertain how much information the interviewee has or how strongly he or she feels about it, or what the interviewee's frame of reference for the answer is. Second, closed questions sometimes thwart an interviewee's need to explain or to talk about the answers. Therefore, the interview may not be a satisfying communication experience. Sometimes witnesses in court, for example, are extremely frustrated because they are asked to answer "yes" or "no" when they would like to supply a lot of information to help interpret the answer. Third, falsification is easy. It is sometimes possible to check out some answers by asking additional questions, but it may be impossible to check out others. For example, if

someone asks you whether you agree or disagree with the president's energy proposals, you need not even know what those proposals are in order to give an answer. You can merely agree or disagree with the president.

Now that we have given a brief overview of both open and closed questions, we must reemphasize that whichever form you use should depend upon the kind of information that you desire. Neither form is inherently preferable to the other. In fact, they can often be quite complementary. The following example from a job performance review illustrates this point:

INTERVIEWER: Have you found the supervisory training seminar to be useful to you in your job? (closed)

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I have. In a lot of ways.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways? (open)

INTERVIEWEE: Well, it made me think about some things I'd never thought about. For example, I'd never given much consideration to giving positive feedback to my subordinates. Now I make a special effort to recognize their achievements.

INTERVIEWER: Has this changed the way in which they respond to you? (closed)

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I think the whole atmosphere is more congenial now.

INTERVIEWER: Since you said that the training has been helpful in a lot of ways, can you tell me about some of the other ways? (open)

This example demonstrates that it is not always necessary to make a choice between open or closed questions. The best policy may be to have them work together.

5. *Determine whether the information can be obtained best through direct or indirect questions.* By far most of the questions that are asked in an interview tend to be rather direct. All of the illustrations used in the section on open and closed questions are quite direct. They ask the respondent exactly what the interviewer wants to know. With the direct question, we assume that the interviewee is both capable and willing to answer the question, and this assumption is probably correct most of the time. The direct approach, therefore, needs no greater justification and support. Indirect questions will be used less frequently, but under certain circumstances they may be very helpful. The following discussion illustrates three ways of developing indirect approaches.

a. You can permit the interviewee to camouflage a response. Suppose you were a member of a team auditing communications in a university and you want to ask the faculty, "How do you evaluate the dean as a communicator?" Many people will volunteer an answer. In some cases, however, faculty members may feel their security to be threatened. After

all, they may not be certain that the dean will not hear of their response. If any nervousness is detected, you may choose to ask, "How would most people here evaluate the dean as a communicator?" The assumption is that individuals will still tend to answer the question in line with their personal feelings, but now they can answer the question with less fear because it is couched in terms of "most people." Many interviewers ask an indirect question in order to initiate the discussion and then try to turn the focus on the interviewee's direct response later.

b. Sometimes the information can be obtained indirectly through a test. A bank recruiter, for example, hires a lot of tellers, and one of the criteria useful in making selection decisions is how closely the applicant pays attention to detail. The rationale is that a teller needs to pay very close attention to exact numbers and decimal places. If she were to ask candidates directly, "How good are you at paying attention to detail?" most of the answers probably would be positive. The recruiter knows that people can tell how they *feel* about doing detail work, but they may not always know how well they *do* it. Consequently, the recruiter has a series of pictures that she asks the applicants to describe. Their responses demonstrate how much detail they notice. Such an indirect approach is used by counselors, psychologists, market analysts, advertisers, and focus groups, as well as recruiters.

c. How a person talks about a topic may be an indirect gauge of what the person actually thinks or feels. In Chapter 5 we will note that recruiters are interested in a person's level of confidence, enthusiasm, and oral communication skills. An analysis of actual transcripts shows that recruiters seldom ask, "How enthusiastic are you?" or "How much leadership ability do you have?" If they did, again the answers would be positive because the interviewees want jobs and there is a certain social acceptability associated with each of these traits. Rather, recruiters ask the interviewees to talk about themselves and their experiences. The answers actually demonstrate a level of confidence, enthusiasm, and communication skills. In such instances, this is a very useful but indirect means of assessing important characteristics.

In conclusion, we suggest that it might be useful for you to select some indirect means of obtaining the following information. For practice, change the direct form to an indirect form.

1. How do you feel about your boss? (attitude survey)
2. How honest are you? (selection)
3. Why do you feel this way? (counseling)
4. What can be done about X? (public opinion survey)
5. What hinders you most in your job? (performance review)

6. *Use a variety of questions.* It is amazing how frequently interviewers develop an apparent preference for one particular kind of question and

learn to depend on it almost exclusively. For example, some recruiters develop a bad habit of asking closed questions. While they may be appropriate for a telephone survey, this pattern is not useful at all for a selection interview.

It has been demonstrated already that open and closed questions can be used well to supplement one another. Varying the types of questions can help you obtain information of different types and also make for a more interesting and more fulfilling communication experience.

In building variety there is a particular type of question that is often underused. It is the hypothetical situation question. They are immensely useful because the answers to them usually are less abstract and deal with a very specific situation. They are the closest thing to actual job behavior that can be observed in an interview. An airline, for example, asks the following hypothetical situation question in selecting ticket agents: "Suppose that it is Christmas eve and the airport is packed with people. You've been working feverishly for five hours and there is still a line at your counter. All of a sudden, a woman with a small child runs up to the front of the line yelling loudly that she is about to miss her plane." In a job performance review, a boss wants to discover his subordinate's own supervisory orientation so he asks the following question: "Suppose you asked one of your subordinates to prepare a report for a particular meeting. A week later, just before the meeting, this subordinate rushes in and tells you that she just hasn't had time to finish the report and isn't prepared. How would you react?" Hypothetical questions are also frequently used in surveys to people so they can make choices: "If you could afford any car that you want, which one would you buy?" The Harris and Gallup polls periodically ask people to say how they would vote today if the current president were running for reelection against a prominent member of the opposite party. It is a way of testing public sentiment.

There is no guarantee that how people say they would respond in these situations is the way they would actually respond. Nevertheless, occasional use of hypothetical questions can enrich both the information you can obtain and make the interview a more pleasant experience.

7. ~~Keep the questions relevant to the purpose of the interview.~~ In the final analysis, purpose needs to guide what you do as an interviewer. Even the initial question "How are you today?" may not be as irrelevant as it might appear. To the physician or the counselor it would be central to the purpose of the interview, but in any other kind of interview it fulfills a purpose of building rapport or helping to establish a relationship.

In the personnel situation, we are in the process of dealing with the problem of relevance. We are moving toward addressing questions specifically related to job requirements. Legal guidelines help in getting interviewers to focus on the relevance of the questions asked. But aside from the legal aspect, it is merely good practice to tailor the questions to the purpose. If it accomplishes nothing else, it saves time and effort.

Relevancy, however, is not always an easy matter to decide. For example, a group of observers thought the question "What work does your father do?" was irrelevant in a selection interview. Maybe what the father actually does was irrelevant, but the observers failed to see how the interviewer was using it. The candidate had already admitted that he had had no work experience and was having difficulty talking about himself. When the interviewer asked this question, the candidate became more articulate because there was something concrete about which he could talk. So the question contributed something to the interview process. Furthermore, the man's answer led to some interesting follow-up questions regarding work related travel experiences that the interviewer probably would not have anticipated if the question had not been asked. This example shows how an apparently irrelevant question can be useful to the interviewing process. Not all are so valuable. In fact, there are many instances in which the irrelevancy of the question causes embarrassment or hinders the interview. For example, a nurse criticized the following practice among some medical professionals. Specifically, she described the embarrassment of a shy young man when he was asked about his sexual habits. There was no apparent connection between this question and the hernia problem he was having, and the result was some needless embarrassment.

Perhaps the most useful point to be made here is that too many interviewers develop a pat set of questions often borrowed from a list that they have seen somewhere. They grow comfortable asking them because they have asked them before and also lose sight of how they actually relate to their purposes.

COMMON PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ASKING QUESTIONS

The previous guidelines can be of immense help in framing good questions. Nevertheless, one of the best ways of overcoming certain problems is to focus directly on those problems. We have found it useful to call attention to the following pitfalls that commonly occur in all kinds of interviews.

Double-barreled Questions

The double-barreled question creates a common problem. In essence, it occurs when the interviewer asks two or more questions before the interviewee has had a chance to answer the first question. The following examples were taken from actual transcripts.

Example A

Tell me why you want to work for our bank and what you know about our bank.

In this case, neither question was answered fully, because the interviewee tried to handle both at once. Furthermore, the interviewer did not seem to know where to go with the two answers. She finally focused on one part of the question and never returned to the other.

Example B

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a nurse?

The interviewer lumped the disadvantages with the advantages, and it seemed that the respondent was interested primarily in giving one of each in order to answer this question satisfactorily. These two areas would need to be completely separated in order to get a full discussion.

Example C

When did you first notice this feeling of depression? Was it before or after you took this new job? And what have you been doing to control it?

Taken separately, there is nothing wrong with any of the three questions. In fact, they may even follow well in this sequence. However, it would not be wise to ask the three together. Frequently, an interviewee will be confused or overlook one of them. Occasionally, the interviewee will see the problem and ask, "Which of these do you want me to answer first?"

Two-in-one Questions

Occasionally, an interviewer will connect two things in one question so that it will appear to be one question rather than actually two.

Example

How can we make our employees happier so they will be productive?

In the United States it is commonly assumed that there is a relationship between worker satisfaction and productivity, but our studies have not borne this out. For example, there are many workers who are very happy but who are not very productive. Consequently, the interviewer in this case is making an unwarranted assumption about the relationship between satisfaction and productivity.

Example

We're taking a neighborhood poll. How do you feel about the recent defeat of the bond issue and the failure to make Cleveland a more progressive city?

In this case, there is a strong value orientation connected with the bond issue. The interviewer apparently assumes that the bond issue was necessary for progress. Others may not agree. Therefore, this question, too, blends two questions together that might well be handled separately.

Bipolar Questions

Bipolar questions limit the interviewee to one of two choices. There are many occasions when it is entirely appropriate. However, it is misused when (1) there are in actuality more than two choices available, so the middle ground is neglected and (2) it reduces the answer to an oversimplification.

Example

Do you approve or disapprove of the new teacher contract?

If the purpose of this question is to make the interviewee give a general reaction, this question may do just that. However, it is useful to keep in mind that there are degrees of approval, and some people would like some aspects of the contract but dislike other aspects of it. Furthermore, there may be some who would be undecided or have no opinion yet. This closed question would not present them with these options. Consequently, you must be careful about using polarized alternatives such as agree or disagree, approve or disapprove, and yes or no. A good rule to keep in mind is to give interviewees as many options as possible. For example, "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" is not a good question, because it leaves out many options that thousands of people have taken, such as the Prohibition, the Socialist, and the American parties. Furthermore, many have selected to remain independent of any party affiliation.

Leading Questions

A question becomes a leading question when it is phrased so that it is easier or more tempting for the interviewee to answer it in one way rather than another. Frequently, they include explicit or implicit references to the answer that the interviewer expects.

Of all the problems that we have discussed, this one is perhaps the most universal. While we expect that competent interviewers avoid using them, Stephan Richardson and his colleagues have found that "trained interviewers do in fact make considerable use of leading questions, despite the proscription in the interviewing literature. . . ."¹ Many writers urge interviewers to avoid leading questions altogether, but we do not take this position. We recognize that they are not very useful in securing valid, reliable data in any information getting interview, but there are many times when an interviewer chooses deliberately to use leading questions in order to produce stress, to sell a product, or to get reinforcement for an idea. Consequently, leading questions become a serious

¹Stephan Richardson, et al., *Interviewing* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1965), p. 184.

problem only when this interviewer does not know that he or she is in fact leading the interviewee to distort responses.

It is not always easy to take a question out of the context of the interview and identify it as leading or nonleading. Vocal inflection and what has gone on in the interview prior to it certainly can shape the interpretation. Nevertheless, the following are several methods by which respondents can be led.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE EXPECTED ANSWER

It is easy to give the interviewee an idea of what the appropriate response should be. Consider the recruiter who urged, "This job calls for a lot of travel. You don't mind traveling, do you?" Of course, the interviewee does not, if she or he wants the job. A subtler form of asking this question would be: "How do you feel about traveling in your job?"

A similar example occurs when questions are phrased in such a way that an answer would contradict the interviewer. For example, a boss might say, "Didn't you think that Mary's latest commercial was about the best we've had?" It would be difficult to disagree with this type of question, even among friends, and the chance that a subordinate would feel comfortable contradicting a boss with a "no" is very slim. After all, the boss has indicated that reinforcement is wanted, not a truthful opinion.

PRIOR STATEMENTS

Often the verbal comments made just before a question is asked can influence the way an interviewee answers.

Example

The president has recently come out in favor of deregulation of natural gas. Do you favor or oppose eliminating these controls and possibly increasing inflation?

Not only is this question a double-barreled question with loaded words such as "inflation" thrown in, but the initial comment runs a risk of leading the interviewee. Some people may know nothing about the gas market but have strong feelings about the president. Therefore, they may choose to answer on the basis of their sympathy—or lack of it—for the president.

EMOTIONALLY LOADED WORDS

The journalist who asks, "Would you favor or oppose the sending of our surplus wheat to feed the starving people of _____?" is likely to get a higher percentage of respondents who favor this idea than the pollster who asks it in a far more neutral form.

ASSOCIATING A RESPONSE WITH A DESIRABLE GOAL

Sometimes the questioner is looking for a way to make it difficult for a respondent to say "no" to a particular question. The association can occur

implicitly, as in "You do want to get the most for your money, don't you?" or "Surely you would not want your child to suffer in school because she does not have this set of reference books." The important point of this discussion is that questions can, in fact, sell the interviewee on a given response. This is an extraordinary kind of control for an interviewer to have. In some cases an interviewer may want to exercise this kind of control skillfully. In many cases, however, interviewers hope to get honest opinions; in such cases they need to avoid any possibility of directing the interviewee's responses.

THIS CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

This chapter discussed three of the six strategies that can be planned for an interview: the purpose, the agenda, and the preliminary questions. Basically, we have attempted to reinforce the idea that most interviewers could do more planning than they do. Furthermore, it has been suggested that planning is often related to effectiveness. While planning in terms of purpose and agenda is fairly obvious, the influence of the phrasing of questions has not always been that obvious to people. Therefore, it is particularly useful for you to spend more time experimenting with asking a question in different ways. You also might have someone else ask you a question in different ways in order to see how your own response is affected.

PROJECTS

1. Make a list of questions that you have heard in an interview or have seen in a transcript that should have been revised. Then revise them.
2. Observe several different kinds of interviews on television, such as an interview by Johnny Carson, a news interview by Barbara Walters, and an interview in some commercials. Pay particular attention to the questioning techniques. Were there ways in which they were loaded or leading?
3. How can questioning techniques affect the relationship between two individuals?
4. What is your own preference between open and closed questions? Why?
5. Take a question and practice changing it from an open question to a closed question. Then practice making it direct and indirect. The easier this is for you, the more flexibility you will have in an interview.
6. Think of times when you have been an interviewee. Compile a list of things about your interviewer's questions that you liked. Then make a list of the things that you did not like.
7. To what extent is it fair for you as an interviewer to manipulate an interviewee through subtle phrasing of questions?