

Attributes of Interviews

Interviews are a means to collect needs assessment data through one or more conversations between two or more people. Interviews can be conducted either face to face or via technology (telephone, video conference, or on-line via the web). Interviews may involve an interviewer and a single interviewee or multiple interviewees at the same time (group interviews)

Advantages of interviews as a tool for assessing needs

1. Interviews are inexpensive to conduct; the only resource investments are the interviewers' time, the interview plan, and the analyst.
2. A variety of perspectives can be obtained; because the conversation is open-ended (compared to a questionnaire) it is permissible to probe for understanding during an interview.
3. Interviews can lead to understanding and rapport with the stakeholders, better than through questionnaires. Be open to what they have to say.
4. Can generate both breadth and depth of information about a topic; probing further when an interesting point is made allows you to vary your approach and explore ideas you had not considered.
5. Interviewer can clarify questions for the respondent and can watch participants (body language) to determine if they understood what you were asking.
6. Interviewer can ask for clarification from the interviewee if there is an answer that is not quite clear.
7. Interviewer can receive additional information in the form of nonverbal clues; Watch the interviewee's body language for understanding, interest, restlessness, etc. Tailor your interview appropriately to gain the most information possible while maintaining rapport.

Limitations of using interviews as an assessment tool are:

1. Bias due to data collector's interest; have other reviewers look at your questions before the interview and edit out as much bias as possible.
2. Partial picture of training needs due to the typically small number; interview as many as possible in the time frame.
3. Time intensive; interviews with several people can be productive as long as the interviewer keeps the group on task.
4. Data can be difficult to organize and quantify from open-ended interviews; planning up front can help; interviewer should assist in data analysis to correctly categorize answers.
5. Self-reporting of participants may bias data; interviewees might be hesitant to reveal any shortcomings, even if training could help them.
6. Discussion can wander from purpose of interview; interviewer's primary goal is to keep the respondent on task.
7. Unskilled interviewers can make clients feel self-conscious; try to be comfortable, relaxed and well organized.