Semi-structured interviews can be used to understand whether our work is having an influence by conducting periodic interviews with key stakeholders. Interviews can be conducted in person, by telephone or Skype.

**What is a semi-structured interview?**

A semi-structured interview is an informally guided process where only some questions are pre-determined and new questions are developed from discussion. A loose interview guide is used to ensure that the same topics are covered with each respondent. The exact wording of questions is not necessarily predetermined. These kinds of interviews are used to understand someone’s impressions or experiences.

**Materials needed**

- Materials to record notes – pen/paper
- Digital recorder if possible
- Interview questions

**Time**

30 – 60 minutes

**Tips for conducting interviews in a face-to-face manner**

1. Give people time and space to take things at their own pace
2. Some people will take longer to think about their answers – allow for silence
3. Ask probing questions

Semi-structured interviews should be relaxed and like a normal conversation. However, they do differ from conversation in one important way – when you ask the question, you need to wait for a response! Do not repeat it, or tell them what you think the answer is. Also it is important to try not to lead or bias the interview, but you may need to probe. Here are some possible probes:

- Tell me more.
- Why do you feel that way?
- Why was that important to you?
- How did that affect you?
- Can you explain what you mean by that?
- What was your contribution?
- What do you think was really making it work?
- How has it changed you?

Remember, this is an interview, not a dialogue or discussion. Let the interviewee tell his/her story; please don’t tell yours or give your opinion about their experiences.
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Be genuinely curious about their experiences, thoughts and feelings. Try to avoid being separated from them by a large table. Make eye contact, if that’s culturally appropriate. Allow your facial expression and verbal reinforcement to reflect your genuine interest. If you are curious and want some more information, by all means ask for it!

Close by summarising what most inspired you

Because these interviews are grounded in relationship, honour the relationship by sharing your experience. Tell people what you learned from them – how their stories have changed the way you see things. Your interviewee has trusted you with his or her stories, hopes and opinions. Honour that trust by trusting them in return.

Use the interview guide as more of a checklist than a structured interview. The idea of a semi-structured interview is that you let people describe things in their own terms, and you make sure all the questions are covered. If they answer a question that is later in your list, you need not repeat it or stick to the order suggested.

Ethical conduct

Attention must be paid to the ethics of conducting interviews from individuals. When an interview is conducted, the person collecting the information needs to explain how the interview will be used and you must check that the interviewee is happy for their ‘story’ to be used in that way. You should assure them that the information they give is confidential, that is, their ‘name’ won’t be attached to the information and made public unless they ask for this to happen. Whatever is collected in an interview process is confidential. You must not discuss what you heard to any other informants or outsiders. The only people you may discuss the findings with are the team themselves.

Semi-structured interviews can be conducted as a face-to-face interview or over the phone or video conference,

Example semi-structured interview templates

Regardless of the reason for conducting the interview, there is some standard information that is useful to gather from all informants.

About the participant:

Name:

Institution:

Position/role:

How and why was this person selected as an informant? And for which project/projects?

Sex: M/F: __________________________

Semi-structure interview questions

Choose about 6 to 7 questions you want to cover. Start broadly with questions about the person and their involvement and gradually make the questions more specific. They should all be open questions.

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