London School of Economics and Political Science

Methodology Institute

Papers in Social Research Methods

Qualitative Series no 1

THE NARRATIVE INTERVIEW

Comments on a technique for qualitative data collection

Martin Bauer

October 1996

Contents:

1   Context

The Narrative Interview (henceforth referred to as NI) envisages a setting which encourages and stimulates interviewees to tell a story about some significant event in the informants' life. The technique derives its label from the Latin word "narrare" (= to report, to tell a story).

A systematic account of this interview technique has been suggested in an unpublished manuscript by F Schuetze (1977) at the University of Bielefeld. Its basic idea is to reconstruct social events from the perspective of informants as direct as possible. In the NI the interviewee is called the `informant'.

To date, this particular systematic of the technique has never been accessible in English, albeit writings about narratives abound in different versions. Most writings about 'narratives' have an analytic focus, stressing the structural characteristics and philosophical significance of narratives (Kolher Riesman, 1993; Barthes, 1993; Mitchell, 1990; Johnson&Mandler, 1980; Kintsch W & VanDijk, 1978; Propp, 1928). The strength of Schuetze's suggestion is a systematic proposal for setting a context and how to eliciting narratives for the purposes of social research[1].

Schuetze's manuscript of 1977 remained unpublished; it spread widely as grey literature and became the focus of a veritable method community in Germany during the 1980s. The original idea developed out of a research project on power structures in local communities. It caught my own attention when I was searching for an adequate qualitative methods to study resistance to change in organisational processes. To date, I used narrative interviews to reconstruct informants' perspective in two studies of the deployment of computing and information technology in corporate contexts (Bauer, 1986 and 1993). Positive experiences encourage me to recommend the technique to my colleagues and to make Schuetze's systematization available in English language with few elaborations.

2   Conceptual issues

The narrative interview is classified among the qualitative research methods (Lamnek, 1989; Flick et al, 1991), to be considered a form of unstructured, in-depth interview with specific features.

Beyond the question-answer scheme

Conceptually the idea of narrative interviewing is motivated by a critique of the question-response-schema of most interviews. In the question-response mode the interviewer is imposing structures in a threefold sense: (a) by selecting the theme and the topics, (b) by ordering the questions and (c) by wording the questions in his or her language. Such data reveals more about the interviewer's own relevance structures than about the issues under investigating. One could say: who asks the questions controls the situation.

To elicit a less imposed and therefore more valid account of the informant's perspective the

---

[1]   Parts of this text are based on a earlier paper (Bauer, 1987)

influence of the interviewer should be minimal, and the setting should be arranged to achieve this minimizing of interviewer influence. The NI goes further than any other method down in avoiding restructuring in the interview; it is the most consequent attempt to go beyond the questions-response-type interview. The NI uses a specific type of everyday communicative interaction, namely story telling and listening, to reach this objective. The rules of engagement restrict the interviewer to avoid restructuring of events/problems as far as possible.

To avoid restructuring, the question-response-schema is in favour of the narration schema. It is postulated that the **perspective of the interviewee** is best revealed in stories where the informant is using his or her own **spontaneous language** in the narration of events. However, it would be naive to claim, that the narration is without structure. A narrative is formally structured; narration follows a **self-generating schema**. Whoever tells a good story complies to basic rules of story telling.

The technique is sensitive to two basic elements of interviewing (sensu Farr, 1982): first it contrasts different perspectives either between interviewer and informant or between different informants. Second, the technique takes serious that language is the medium of exchange and that this medium is not neutral but constitutes a particular 'world view'. Hence, care needs to be taken not to prescribe the language to be used in the interview.

Story telling: a universal competence

Story telling is an elementary form of communication of human experiences with some useful features. It realises a universal competence to tell about social events independent of stratified language performance. Members of social groups or subcultures tell stories with words and meanings specific for a certain social group. The lexicon of a social group constitutes its perspective of the world. It is assumed that narrations preserve a particular perspective in a more genuine form.

Story telling is a competence that is relatively independent of education and language competence; while the latter is unequally distributed in any population, the competence to tell stories is not or less so (Schuetze, 1977). An event can be rendered either in general terms or indexical. Indexical means that reference is made to concrete events in place and time. Narrations are rich in indexical statements, because a) they refer to personal experience, and b) because of the tendency to be detailed with a focus on events and actions. The structure of a narration is similar to the structure of orientation for action: a context is given; the events are sequential and end at a particular point; the narration includes a kind of evaluation of the outcome (Lamnek, 1989, 70). Situation, goal-setting, planning, and evaluation of outcomes are constituents of human goal-directed actions. The narration reconstruct that action and its context in the most adequate way: it reveals place, time, motivation and the actor's symbolic system of orientations (Schuetze, 1977, 1).

Narrative: a self-generating schema

'Once upon a time there was....'

Story telling seems to follow universal rules which guide the process of story production which Schuetze (1977) calls the **'inherent demands of narration'** [Zugzwaenge des Erzaehlens] and other have called **story schema** or **narrative convention** that can be modelled as **story grammar** (Johnson&Mandler, 1980; Kintsch&vanDijk, 1978). A schema is an automized production process that is activated by a familiar situation. These features of story telling will generate a flow of narration from underlying rules/structures once the informant has started. The flow of narration is relatively independent of the interviewer whose role is confined to that of an attentive listener. Story telling follows a **self-generating schema** with three main characteristics.

*   Detailed texture [Detaillierung]: to give detail information, to account plausibly for the transition from one event to another. The narrator gives details of events in order to make the transition from one event to another. The narrator tends to give as much details as is necessary to make that transition taking into account the listener: the story has to be plausible, otherwise it is no story. The less the listener knows, the more details will be given. Story telling is close to events. It will account for time, place, motives, points of orientation, plans, strategies and abilities.

*   Relevance fixation [Relevanzfestlegung]: the story teller reports those features of the event which are relevant according to his perspective of the world. The account of events is selective. It unfolds around thematic centres which reflect what the narrator takes as relevant. The themes present the relevance structure.

*   Closing of the Gestalt [Gestaltschliessung]: an event mentioned in an interview has to be reported completely in the narration. A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The end can be the present, when the actual events are not terminated yet. This threefold structure of a closure makes the story flow, once it is started.

The NI as an interview technique consists of a number of rules on how to activate the story schema and to elicit narrations from the informant, and once he started how to keep the process of narration going by using the self-generating schema of narration. The account develops out of factual events, anticipated interest of the audience and formal manipulations within the setting. I formulated and ordered these rules based on the paper of Schuetze (1977).

3   The Narrative interview technique

The narrative interview is conducted over four phases (see table 1). It starts with the initiation, move through the narration and the questioning phase, and ends with the small talk. Specific rules apply for each phase. Table 1 summarizes the basic concept of the NI and its rules of procedure.

Table 1: Basic Concepts of the NI

Beyond the question-answer-schema
 	
- Universal competence of narration
- Self-generating schema of narration
        detailed texture
        closing of the Gestalt
        relevance fixation	

Phases	Rules
0 Preparation	exploring the field formulating exmanent questions
1 Initialisation	formulate initial topic for narration use visual aids
2 Main narration	no interruptions; only non-verbal encouragement to continue telling the story
3 Questioning phase	only question: What happened then? no opinion and attitude question no arguing on contradictions exmanent into immanent questions
4 Small talk	stop recording memory protocol immediately afterwards

Phase 0   Preparing the interview

Primarily, the researcher needs to familiarize him or herself with the field. This may mean making preliminary enquiries, reading of documents, noticing rumours and informal accounts of event. Based on these preliminary inquires together with his or her interests the researcher draws up a list of so-called 'exmanent' questions. Exmanent issues reflect the interest of the researcher and are his or her formulations and language. From this we distinguish 'immanent' issues. These are themes, topics and accounts of events that appear during the narration of the informant. Exmanent and immanent issues may not at all, partially or totally overlap. The crucial points of the exercise is to **translates exmanent questions into immanent ones** by anchoring exmanent

issues in the narration and by applying nothing but the interviewee's own language (Schuetze, 1977). In the course of the interview the exmanent questions will focus the attention of the interviewer; he or she will note overlapping issues as they come up, and make notes of the language used for further questions at the appropriate time. The preparation of the NI requires time; a preliminary understanding of the main event is necessary (a) to show the gaps the NI is to fill; (b) to come to a standard formulation of the **initial central topic** which is relevant to the informants and the researchers interests.

The narrative interview is conducted in four phases as follows. For each a number of rules are suggested as summaries in table 1. The function of these rules is less slavish adherence, but guidance and orientation for the interviewer in order to avoid the pitfalls of the qeustion-response scheme of interviewing. According to Schuetze these rules lead to a non-threatening formulation of the topic and preserves the informant's confidence and willingness to tell a story about the significant events.

Phase 1   Presenting the initial central topic

The context of the investigation is explained in broad terms to the informant. He or she must be asked permission to record the interview on tape. Afterwards, the procedure of the NI is briefly explained to the informant: first uninterrupted story telling, later one the question phase.

Formulating the initial central topic

In the preparation for the NI an initial central topic of narration has been identified. In setting the initial topic the interviewer intervenes with his or her interests which is reminiscent of the question-answer schema.

Using visual aids

To support the informant one may use visual aids to present the initial topic. For example a time line schematically representing the beginning and the end of the event in question. By marking no more than the beginning and the end, the narrator faces the task of segmenting the time in between.

The interviewer presents the topic of the NI in a manner that the story telling is generated. He presents the **initial central topic** [zentrale Anfangsthemenstellung]. Experience seems to have shown that in order to elicit a sustainable story several rules should be used as a guideline for formulating the initial central topic:

Rule 1.1   The initial topic needs to be experiential to the interviewee. This ensures his or her interest and is likely to lead to a detail account;

Rule 1.2   The initial topic must not be a merely personal matter, but a matter of social or communal significance;

Rule 1.3   The informant should be vividly interested in the topic which concerns own experience. This interest is not to be explicitly referred to.

Rule 1.4   The topic must be broad enough to incorporate all the events of interest. It may be leading in the sense that the informant is inclined to develop a long string of past events which led to the event/problem of under study.

Rule 1.5   Avoid indexical formulations, ie do not refer explicitly to dates, named persons or places.

Phase 2:   Main narration (Haupterzaehlung)

When the narration starts, it must not be interrupted until there is a 'coda', which means the interviewee pauses and signals the end of the story. The interviewer abstains from any comment other than non-verbal signals of attentive listening, i.e. an occasional nodding, and encouragement to continue the narration. The interviewer may take notes for questions later.

Rule 2.1   Restrict yourself to active listening and non-verbal or paralinguistic feedback (Hm.., yes..). Do not interrupt the narration by any question. While listening develop in your mind or on paper the questions for next phase of the interview.

Rule 2.2   If the informant is marking the end of the story, probe for anything else he or she may want to add 'is that all your can tell me...?'

Phase 3   Questioning phase

After the narration has come to a 'natural' end the interviewer opens the questioning phase. This is the moment when the attentive listening bears fruits, and exmanent questions of the interviewer are translated into immanent questions to complete the gaps in the story. The questioning phase starts after the interviewer has sufficiently probed the end of the main narrative. Here three basic rules apply:

Rule 3.1   Ask only questions concerning events like 'what happened before/after/then ...?'. Do not directly ask for opinions, attitudes or causes (no why-questions).

Rule 3.2   Ask only immanent questions and use only in the words which the informant has used. Questions only relate to events mentioned in the story. The interviewer translates his exmanent questions into immanent questions.

Rule 3.3   Do not point to contradictions in the story of the informant to avoid a climate of cross-examination.

The question phase is meant to elicit new and additional material beyond the self-generating schema of the story. The interviewer asks for further 'concrete texture' and 'closing of the Gestalt' within the rules.

2 and 3

Phases 3 and 4 are to be recorded for verbatim transcription with the consent of the informants.

Phase 4   Small talk

At the end of the interview, the tape recorder is switched off, the most interesting discussion often comes up. Talking in a relaxed mood after the 'show' often throws light on the more formal accounts given during the narration. This contextual information proves in many cases to be very important for the interpretation of the data. This additional information can be crucial for a contextual interpretation of the informants' accounts.

Not to miss out this important information, it is advisable to have a notebook or a prepared form to summarize the contents of the small talk in a memory protocol immediately after the interview. If one organizes a series of NIs it is advisable to plan for time between each interview to write up the small talk and other impressions.

4   Analysing narrative interviews

Schuetze (1977) does not elaborate on how to analyse the NI. His only suggestion is to separate in the transcript 'indexical' from 'generalized' statements. Indexical statements have a concrete reference to 'who did what when, where and why'; generalized statements do point beyond the mere events towards 'life wisdom' or other forms of generalisations. Qualitative and quantitative techniques can be used to analyze narrative interviews (Muehlfeld et.al, 1981; Bauer, 1991 and 1993).

Transcription

The first step in data reduction is transcribing the recorded interviews to a level of detail which is required for the research. It depends on the aim of the study how far transcription involves elements beyond the mere word used. For example paralinguistic features such as voice tone or pauses can be transcribed to study the rendering of stories not only by content but also by rhetorical form; this could amount to a very time consuming task. For mere word-by-word transcription one hour of interview will result in 5-6 hours of transcription. Transcribing, boring as it is, is useful to get a grip on the material, and the monotonous process of transcribing opens up a flow of ideas interpreting the text. It is strongly recommended that researchers do at least some transcriptions themselves as it is actually the first step of analysis. It the transcript is given to somebody else, often in a commercial contract, care needs to be taken to ensure the quality of the transcription. Commercial transcription for marketing purposes is often well the below the quality that is needed where the use of particular language is an issue for analysis.

Thematic analysis: constructing a coding frame

A stepwise procedure of qualitative text reduction is recommended (e.g. Mayring, 1983). Text units are progressively reduced in 2-3 rounds of serial paraphrasing. First, whole junks or paragraphs are paraphrased into summary sentences. These sentences are further paraphrased into a few key words. Both reductions operate with generalisation and condensation of meaning. Practically the text is arranged in three columns; the first column contains the transcript, the second, the first reduction, and the third column only contains key words.

Out of paraphrasing a category system may developed with which the all texts may ultimately be coded if so required. First, categories are developed for each NI, which are later collated into a coherent overall category system for all NIs in the project. A final category system can only be stabilized through iterating revisions. The final products constitutes an interpretation of the interviews fusing relevance structures of the informants and of the interviewer [Fusion of horizons in hermeneutics].

Data reduction as described may lead to quantitative information. Once the text is coded [tagged], the data can in principle be used as frequencies which tell what people said, and who said different things how often. Statistical analysis for categorical data can then be applied. Cluster analysis may provide types narrative contents. Quantitative results can extensively illustrated by citations from the original narrations. Narrative perspectives of the event/problem under study can be described and classified qualitatively and quantitatively. Analysing the content is only one approach, another approach may want to classify formal elements of the story.

Structuralist analysis

A structuralist analysis of narratives focuses on formal elements. The analysis operates with a combinatorial system with two dimensions which constitutes the repertoire of possible stories of which any given story is a selection and particular arrangement of elements. In the **paradigmatic** dimensions we order all the possible elements that appear in the stories: events, protagonists, bystanders, situations, beginnings, endings, crises, moral conclusions; in the **syntagmatic** dimension these particular elements are arranged in a sequence that can be compared across the narratives and related to context variables. Any particular corpus of narratives will be mapped onto this two-dimensional structure.

5   Strength and weaknesses of narrative interview

Researchers using the narrative interview have pointed to two major problems: (a) the uncontrollable expectations of the informants which put a doubt over the strong claims of the NI of being non-directive and (b) the often unrealistic role and rule requirements of its procedures.

Uncontrollable expectations in the interview

The interviewer tries to get a complete narration of events out of every interview from a certain perspective. He therefore poses as if he knew nothing or little about the event and will be interested in everything. Any narrator will make **hypotheses** about what the interviewer wants to hear and what he probably already knows. Informant will assumes that the interviewer already knows one or the other thing, hence he will not talk about it but take it for granted. It is a problem how to play naive over a series of interviews, in particular where the informant knows that he is not the first in the series, so that the informant does not take too much for granted what one would like to hear in the story.

Any informant will make hypotheses about what the interviewee wants to hear. The interviewer must thus be sensitive to the fact that the story s/he gets is likely **strategic communication**, i.e. a purposeful account either to please the interviewer, or to make a particular point within a complex political context that may be at stake. It may be difficult if not impossible to obtain a narrative from a politician that is not strategic communication. The informant might try to defend him or herself in a conflict, or might put him or herself in a positive light with regards to the events.

The interpretation of the NI must take into account such possible circumstances which are unavoidable in the very situation of the interview. The narration in a NI is a function of the whole situation in the very Lewinian sense: the narration has to be interpreted in the light of the situation of the study, the assumed strategy of the narrator and the expectations which the informant attributes to the interviewer from whatever the interviewer says. Independent of what the interviewer says, the informant may always suspect a hidden agenda. Or even the informant may belief the account of the interviewer, but may then transform the interview into an arena to get his point across for other purposes wider than the research agenda.

The texture of the narrative will depend on the extend of pre-knowledge which the informant attributes to the interviewer. To play ignorant may be an **unrealistic role requirements** on the interviewer. Each interview requires that the interviewer presents himself ignorant, while her actual knowledge is increasing from interview to interview. The credibility of that attitude reaches its limits. The interviewer's informedness cannot always be hidden.

Under these circumstances, Witzel (1982) is sceptical about the claim that the informant's relevance structures is revealed by narration. Any conversation is guided by **expectations of expectations**. Even in cases where the interviewer abstains from framing questions and answers, the active interviewee will tell her story either to please, to frustrate, or to use the interviewer for purposes beyond the control of the interviewer. In all cases the informant's relevance structures may remain hidden. The narration reflects the interpretation of the interview situation. Strategic story telling cannot be ruled out.

One could argue, that methodologically these problems can be avoided by surprising the interviewee, who is not given time to prepare a statement beforehand. The story needs to be generated ad hoc with uncertainty about the situation. Furthermore, the interviewer may have to

take into account context information around the interview and come to a judgement on possible agendas of the narrator of the story. Again contextual interpretation is necessary to judge the validity of the claim that relevance structures are being revealed. This is not possible by sticking to the text only.

Unrealistic rules

The rules of the NI are formulated to guide the interviewer. They are set up to preserve the informant's willingness to tell about some controversial events and problems under study. The main question is whether these rules are as helpful as they are well intended. Again, Witzel (1982) doubts that the prescribed format of the 'initial topic' is in fact suitable for every informant. The interviewer presents himself as if he knew nothing about the topic under study. Informants might perceive this attitude as a 'trick' which interferes with their cooperation.

The rules of the technique were developed in a specific field study. They cope with the problem of interaction in a specific study and might not work in other circumstances. However, this is an empirical problem which can only be studied by applying the NI in different circumstances.

The way the interviewer initiates the interview codetermines the quality of the narration. This puts too much focus on the beginning of the interview. The narration is likely to be an outcome of the way the interviewer comport him or herself. The initiation phase is difficult to standardize and relies totally on the social skills of the interviewer. This sensitivity of the method to the beginning may be a cause of stress for the interviewer might make it difficult to apply the NI in a research project with several interviewers (Hopf, 1978).

The rules of the narrative interview define an ideal-typical procedure which may rarely be accomplished. They serve as a standard of aspiration. In practice the NI often requires a **compromise** between narrative and questioning. The narrative reveals the diverse perspectives of the respondents on events, standard questions however are required to make comparisons across many interviews on the same issue (Muehlfeld et.al, 1981). Furthermore, an interview may go through several sequences of narration and subsequent questioning. The iteration of narration and questioning may occasionally blur the boundaries to the semi-structured interview. Rather than a new form of interview, we have an semi-structured interview enriched by narratives (Hermann, 1991), and the question arises whether the multiplication of labels for procedures has any purpose beyond its own sake.

Differential indication of the narrative interview

The narrative interview is used to investigate 'hot' issues. Hot issues are social problems which are potentially embarrassing for the respondent, of a intense personal nature with a social relevance, or events that may have negative implications for the respondent if revealed (Schuetze, 1977 and 1983; Hermanns, 1991, 183; Muehlefeld et.al., 1981).

The narration reveals knowledge which is not accessible to the interviewee himself at the time of the interview. What is needed are **abstraction and theorizing** beyond the propositional statements of the interview. This involves interpretation through the fusion of the horizons between informant and interviewee. The 'beyond the text' is a constructive analysis.

In my own studies (Bauer, 1993) using the narrative interview I could show that 'resistance to change' is a hot issue in many organisational projects. It is often associated with negative attributes. People do not like to be seen 'resistant'. If somebody is asked whether he or she is resisting change, she is likely to deny it. Social desirability leads to underestimations of the intensity of resistance when measured by a survey. The NI provides a more sensitive approach. Together with the positive experience of an earlier study (Bauer, 1986) this is the rationale for the choice of the narrative interview technique for the present study.

There may be an inherent dilemma in using the NI. The better people are informed about events the richer narratives are likely to be, which is desirable; however, better informed people are likely to have a higher stake in the events and hence communicate strategically and disguise their 'true' relevance structures. I suspect, the NI is unsuitable to interview politicians without the backup of much context information to put the story into perspective. Table 2 is an attempt to come to a preliminary specification of the usefulness of the NI in comparison to the in-depth interviews in general.

Table 2: Comparing the narrative interview and the in-depth interview

Criteria	Narrative	In-depth interview
Questions	- only immanent questions in language sensitive contexts - leads to incomplete sets of answers with regard to a schedule	- complete set of answers for each interview
Topics	- Events - Perspectives on events - what happened, who did what when and where?	- experience - Introspective accounts
Contexts	- sensitive public issues, hot issues - contested events - conflict situations - unsuitable for interview with politicians!!	- private issues

6   Assessing the 'quality' of the narrative interviews

To my knowledge, methodological studies on the narrative interview do not exist. My own studies allow to make a few observations on the preconditions for a good narrative interview. I have used NIs in my own research on two commercial software projects (Bauer, 1991 and 1993). In the Swiss bank (Bauer, 1993) I conducted NIs with total duration of over 60 hours with software developers [task force members] and local software users at different locations. I envisaged to obtain a story from various perspectives on the planning, design and implementation of a decentralized computer system for in a Swiss bank. Interviews were conducted at the work place during working hours, and in local banks before or after opening hours. All interviews are tape recorded and transcribed verbatim with the consent of the informants. Interviews are conducted in French and Swiss dialect, and translated into high German for transcription purposes. One hour interview meant on average six hours transcriptions.

An example of the initial core topic

Preparations and initial explorations of the computer project and theoretical issues of the research project led to the following list of exmanent questions:

> Which are the main events of the project ? What are the problems encountered ? Hardware, software, orgware? What are the solutions? Is there resistance identified ? who identified resistance ? How is resistance identified? Who is resistant ? how is it explained? what are the incidents? what are the effects ?

To support people's memory I used a visual aid which showed a time line from
1983 to 1991 indicating for each year two key events. All 34 interviews were informed about the official objective of the study, but the exmanent questions: 'evaluating the central data processing service of the bank from the users' point of view'. I asked participants to tell me the story of the computer project as they have experienced from the beginning. The nature of the problem was not defined more precisely.

When does the narrative work?

The extent to which a narrative is successful varies. The length of the narration in relation to the whole narrative interview is a quality indicator. A good story needs time to be told. It seems only logical that a **minimal duration** is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a good story.

In my studies with a standard procedure narratives of quite different length were elicited. I developed a set of indicators for the different phases of the NI and their relative length of the narrative, to allow for some speculations about the variation in that length of the narrative. Table 3 shows the value for each indicator for 34 interviews.

The length of the narrative interview [narration phase + questions = totnarr] correlates highly with the variety of content, i.e. the number of different passages coded in the thematic content

analysis (totnarr with codes: r=.90, for only 25 of the 34 interviews). Codes indicates the number of text passages coded in the content analysis. The longer the narrative interview the more information can be coded. The overall interview included a traditional question-response interviews added at the end, the evaluation interview. The time of the total interview [narrative interview + evaluation interview = Dur] varied between 30 minutes and 3.5 hours. The length of the narrative interview [narration phase + questions = totnarr] varies between 1 min and 100 min. The average narrative interview [narrat] lasted 28 minutes.

The effective length of the uninterrupted narration [Narr = totnarr - question phase] is between 1 and 60 minutes with an average of 12 minutes. In 9 interviews it was not possible to elicit a proper narrative (narr=0). In 11 interviews I managed to elicit a moderate narration (narr<7) with an average of 11 Minutes, or 5% of the total interview duration. In 14 interviews a good narrative (narr>=8) was elicited on average 60 minutes. In two cases the no narrative interview was taken. In 7 cases the interviewee did not start telling a story without me asking concrete questions.

Several ratios are defined from these base durations. The narrative phase takes between 1% and 50% of the whole interview time [Nt = Narr divided by Dur] with average of 11% of time. The narrative phase takes between 25% and 67% of the narrative interview [Narrat = Narr divided by Narrat]. The NI with narration phase and questions takes on average round 30% of the total interview time [Tt = totnarr divided by Dur] ranging from 4% to 75%.

Why these differences in the length of NIs and its phases ?

The narrations of the task force at the bank are longer than those of the users in local banks in absolute [totnarr] and in relative terms [narrat]. The details of the software project were more salient and richer for the task force than it is for the local users in the bank branches. Local users, remote from the core events may have difficulty to report their experience in a story as only few events reach their attention. Most users had only vague ideas about how the bank was conducting the politics of the project. Most users have a low stake in the project anyway. It may have been a mistake to use the same initiation for all interviews.

Using these absolute and relative indexes on the duration of the NI and its elements may a useful in studying systematically the contextual variables that decides on a successful NI at least with respect to necessary but not sufficient criterion 'duration'. Table 3 shows that the evaluative interview (1 - Tt) was in most case longer than the narrative interview [totnarr], between 25% and 100% of the interview time. Most software users found it easier to answer a concrete question about the computer project and their practice. The project history had no salience beyond casual information from the newsletters and rumours. The history of the project is experientially poor for local users; not so for the members of the central task force who had lots of interesting details to render. Hence, **salience and direct involvement** in events are necessary conditions for a successful narrative interview.

Table 3: The duration of the narrative interviews

Bank	Narr	Nt	Tt	Narrat	Totnarr	Codes	Dur
Failures:							
Hottwil	.	.	.	.	.	66	120
Auditors	.	.	.	.	.	81	30
LaCdF	.	.	.02	.	1	27	60
Bettmer	.	.	.06	.	5	21	90
Filisur	.	.	.06	.	10	52	180
Tiefencast	.	.	.06	.	10	52	180
Hauptwil	.	.	.09	.	8	35	120
Rueschegg	.	.	.10	.	9	47	90
Erschmatt	.	.	.12	.	11	55	90
Moderate:							
Preles	1	.01	.04	.25	4	41	90
Villnach	2	.02	.08	.29	7	28	90
Spluegen	2	.02	.09	.25	8	53	90
LesHauts	3	.03	.07	.43	7	67	105
Ausserberg	4	.04	.06	.67	6	46	105
Waltensb	4	.03	.08	.40	10	56	120
Mervelier	4	.04	.12	.36	11	63	90
Ennenda	4	.04	.17	.27	15	54	90
Cumbel	5	.03	.09	.36	14	123	150
Br	6	.17	.71	.24	25	82	35
mk	6	.13	.67	.20	30	112	45
Good interview:							
Bitsch	8	.04	.05	.80	10	39	210
Gorgier	8	.09	.12	.73	11	90	90
Weisstann	8	.07	.17	.40	20	132	120
Schoehnh	9	.08	.10	.75	12	62	120
Ae	9	.15	.67	.23	40	133	60
Ap	10	.13	.53	.25	40	211	75
Isental	15	.10	.18	.56	27	145	150
Grub	15	.20	.21	.94	16	96	75
AS	16	.15	76	.20	80	453	105
AR	22	.24	.89	.28	80	246	90
MO	27	.23	.75	.30	90	479	120
SJ	30	.17	.44	.38	80	385	180
PH	31	.26	.83	.31	100	500	120
KS	60	.50	.75	.67	90	451	120
Sum (min)	309	--	--	--	887	--	3575
Average	12	.11	.33	.42	28	26	105

Narr: uninterrupted narrative phase in minutes

Nt: narrative phase / duration (ratio)

Tt: total narrative interview / duration (ratio)

Totnarr: duration of narrative interviews in minutes

Narrat: narr / totnarr (ratio)

Dur: narrative + evaluative interview in minutes

Codes: number of different codes for each interview

Abrevations with two letters are members of the task force, others are local banks

Source: Bauer (1993)

6   Literature

Barthes R (1993) Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives. in: A Barthes reader, London, Vintage, 251-295

Bauer M (1987) The narrative interview - outline and comments on a technique of qualitative data collection, manuscript, LSE, Department of Social Psychology

Bauer M (1993) Resistance to change - a monitor of new technology, Systems Practice, 4, 3, 181-196

Bauer M (1993) Resistance to change: a functional analysis of responses to technical change in a Swiss bank, PhD manuscript, LSE

Flick U (1995) Qualitative Forschung, Hamburg, Rororo, 116-123.

Farr, R.M. (1982). Interviewing: The social psychology of the inter-view. In F. Fransella (ed), Psychology for Occupational Therapists. London: Macmillan, 151-170.

Hermanns H (1991)   Narratives interview, in: Flick U et al. (eds) Handbuch Qualitative Socialforschung, Muenchen, Psychologie Verlags Union, 182-185.

Kintch, W and T A vanDijk (1978) Toward a model of text comprehension and production, Psychological Review, 85, 363-394

Kolher Riesman C (1993) Narrative analysis. Qualitative Research Series, 30, Newbury Park, Sage

Lamnek S (1989) Qualitative Sozialforschung, Band 2, Muenchen, PVU, 70-74.

Josselson R & A Lieblich (1993) the narrative study of life, London, Sage

Johnson N S and J M Mandler (1980) A tale of two structures: underlying and surface forms of stories, Peotics, 9, 51-86

Mitchell W J T (1980) On narrative, Chicago, Chicago University Press

Mayring, Ph. (1983). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. Basel: Beltz.

Muehlfeld et al (1981) Auswertungsprobleme offener Interviews, Soziale Welt, 5, 325-352.

Propp V (1928) Morphology of folktales, Austin, AUP, [1968, 2nd edition]

Schuetze, F. (1977).   Die Technik des narrativen interviews in Interaktionsfeldstudien - dargestellt an einem Projekt zur Erforschung von kommunalen Machtstrukturen. Unpublished

manuscript, University of Bielefeld, Department of Sociology, August.

Schuetze F (1983) Narrative Repraesentation kollektiver Schicksalsbetroffenheit, in: Laemmert E (ed) Erzaehlforschung, Stuttgart, J B Metzler, 568-590.

Witzel, A. (1982). Verfahren der qualitativen Sozialforschung. Campus: Frankfurt. (Critical remarks on the narrative interview, pp.47-50).

\pub\narrat1.txt

6100 words

LSE Methodology Institute

Discussion Papers - Qualitative Series

Editorial

The LSE Methodology Institute's Discussion Papers are an opportunity for visitors to the school, members of staff and invited speakers to the Institute' seminars to put forward an argument on qualitative methodology. The paper may be at an early stage inviting a swift first round of reviews. The papers are internally reviewed before they are accepted and then distributed within and outside the LSE for further discussions with the authors.

In this series we encourage contributions that propose **ideal-typical** descriptions of particular procedures for qualitative data collection and/or analysis, be these text, image or sound based. In an ideal world 'typifying' comprises a discussion of

* the underlying concepts,
* the strength and weaknesses of the method,
* its comparison to similar approaches,
* a discussion of good and bad use of the approach through using criteria such as reliability, transparency or others.
* one or two examplary results obtained with the method.
* around 5000 words of length

Martin Bauer

London, October 1996

List of papers in the series

no 1   The Narrative Interview: Comments on a technique of qualitative data collection
(Martin Bauer, LSE, October 1996)

no 2   Determining the Central Nucleus of Social Representations
(Celso Pereira de Sa, Rio de Janeiro, November 1996)

no 3   Word Associations in Questionnaires: A practical guide to design and analysis
(Wolfgang Wagner, University of Linz, Austria, February 1997)

no 4   Computer-Assisted Analysis of Qualitative Data (Udo Kelle, University of Bremen,
Germany, August 1997)

no 5   The episodic interview (Uwe Flick, Hannover, November 1997)

no 6   Types of Category in the Analysis of Content (Bradley Franks, LSE, February 1999)

no 7   Counter-Transference in Social Research: Georges Devereux and Beyond (Alain
Giami, INSERM, Paris, June 2001)

no 8   Nomothesis, Ideographia and Bemetology
(Gerhard Fassnacht, University of Bern, Switzerland, June 2004)

no 9 Empirical Phenomenology: An Approach for Qualitative Research
(Patrick Aspers, Dept. of Sociology, Stockholm University, November 2004)