The Interview Design Process*

Summary
It is usually difficult to quickly gather high quality information from a group in a conference or workshop setting and at the same time ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate by voicing opinions and by listening carefully to others. The Interview Design provides a process in which everyone participates in asking questions, answering questions, and analyzing responses. The interaction is lively. People know each other in a way more meaningful than simple introductions.

Purpose
1. To generate and analyze data from a large group of participants on a number of questions quickly.
2. To balance and increase participant involvement in (1) collecting information, (2) analyzing data, and (3) reporting conclusions.

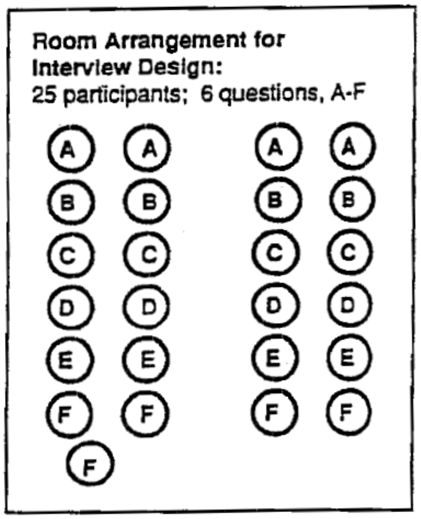
Time Required
Generally, the process can be completed in 1½ to 2 hours. The time is dependent on the size of the group and the number of questions used. Although interview time does not increase significantly with the size of the group, more time is required for analysis with larger work groups.

Group Size
Interview Design has been used effectively with groups ranging in size from 10 to 500 members.

Room Arrangements
Ideally, two seating arrangements are required for each group member – one for Step 1, the interview, and one for Step 2, the analysis. For the interview, chairs should be arranged in lines facing one another. The length of the lines should match the number of questions to be posed. The number of lines will depend upon the number of participants. The process is greatly facilitated if the room is arranged prior to the session (see diagram). For the analysis, chairs should be arranged around tables (one for each question) to accommodate the size of each analysis group.

** The Interview Design Process was introduced to us by Oralie McAfee, a colleague from Colorado Northern State University, presently in private consulting from Evergreen, Colorado. She, in turn, learned of it from the Wharton School, Management and Behavioral Science Center.*

Materials Needed
Each participant will need a pen or pencil, a copy of the appropriate question, and a surface upon which to write (e.g., a conference folder of pad of paper). Facilitators should distribute the questions on the appropriate chairs (see diagram) before the process begins. During analysis, each group needs easel paper and markers.



The Interview Design Process: Rationale

The Interview Design is a powerful way for a group to generate and analyze information on a limited number of key questions. It encourages interaction, warms up a group, and provides rich data. Furthermore, the participants identify the information as *their* information because they participate in the asking, answering, analyzing, and reporting of the information. Therefore, it serves as an excellent process for gathering data about needs, problem identification, or problem-solving strategies.

Interview Design promotes the following:

1. **Active involvement**: All participants must be actively involved in answering and asking questions. No one can simply sit back and listen.

2. **Participant equality**: All answers are recorded anonymously so each person's opinions are given equal consideration regardless of his or her role or position in the organization. This has a "leveling" effect and, consequently, it is very effective with mixed groups (professional-lay, provider-consumer, adult-juvenile, etc.).

3. **Candor**: When people talk in pairs, they tend to be more open and honest. In larger groups, they become overly concerned about what others think and are less willing to express ideas that are not well thought out or substantiated.

4. **Informality**: Participants have the opportunity to meet and talk privately with their colleagues, some of whom they may not know. The process helps people get to know one another around a substantive exchange, rather than just names and positions.

5. **Objectivity**: The design promotes objectivity as it casts participants into the role of social scientist intent on gathering data. Specifically, interviewers are instructed not to argue or give their own opinions; they ask questions only for clarification. Likewise, the spokespersons reporting group summaries are not supposed to let their personal opinions influence their report.

6. **Involvement in analysis**: Instead of outside experts analyzing data, participants experience the difficulty of consolidating the data to a few key points. Participants learn about diversity and similarity of viewpoints in the large group.

7. **Excitement and energy**: When everyone begins talking at once in pairs, the level of excitement and energy builds. As the interview phase progresses, the noise level increases.

Description of the Process

Preparation: Develop the Questions
The questions must be developed beforehand, after the specific content is identified. Good interview design questions require careful crafting and revisions. It is helpful to ask respondents for a specific number of ideas; also it is important to direct them to organize their response into useful categories.

1. What are your major expectations for this three-day experience? Name four or five specific outcomes you'd like to occur for you and your school.

2. What are three or four things that schools can do to make the biggest difference for students who are at-risk?

3. Based on your experiences, what do you think are the top four characteristics of effective staff development?

4. Research reports that: "Students ask less than five percent of the questions in both elementary and secondary classrooms." Why do students initiate so few questions? Offer three or four hypotheses.

5. Reflect on your experiences last year as a facilitator. What were the most rewarding aspects of your involvement?

6. Think back to when you were a new school board member. What were the four most important informational needs you encountered as a new school board member?

Questions can cover substantive ideas, workshop goals, needs identification, or change issues. Each of the questions should be of similar complexity so that they each can be answered in the 2½ to 4 minutes allotted.

Prepare 4-10 questions, depending on the number of participants and the time available for this activity. It is always helpful to have a few more questions than you plan to use, in case the number of participants changes. (See the chart below for numbers of participants and numbers of questions.)

Type each question at the top of an Interview Sheet with directions to the interviewer that read as follows:

Directions: Using the question below, interview the person across from you. Record the responses in the space under the question and on the back of the page. You will have 3 minutes to conduct each interview. You will be interviewing several people. Record each individual's response even if it is the same as someone else's. Record each respondent's ideas, not your interpretation. Reread the question to a given respondent as needed.

Duplicate as many sets of questions as there will be interview lines.

Prepare for the Interview Process
As described earlier, chairs are arranged in rows (multiples of 2) so that people face one another in pairs. The interviews are conducted in these rows, which should be prearranged according to the numbers of questions and people.

The most difficult aspect of Interview Design is arranging the interview lines. For groups divisible by 2, 4, 6, or 8, it is simple, as illustrated below:

Group Size	Possible Configurations	# of Questions
10	2 lines of 5	5
16	4 lines of 4, 2 lines of	4 or 8
20	2 lines of 10, 4 lines of 5	10 or 5
24	4 lines of 6, or 6 lines of 4	6 or 4
28	4 lines of 7	7
30	6 lines of 5	5
32	4 lines of 8, 8 lines of 4	8 or 4
36	4 lines of 9, 6 lines of 6	9 or 6

There are several options if the group size does not conveniently match the number of questions.

a. Have an extra question in one set of rows. This pair will have only two members in their analysis group.

b. Pull a chair up at the end of the nonmoving lines. (See diagram that appears two pages before this page.) Now two people work as a team to ask and answer questions. This works especially well to incorporate latecomers.

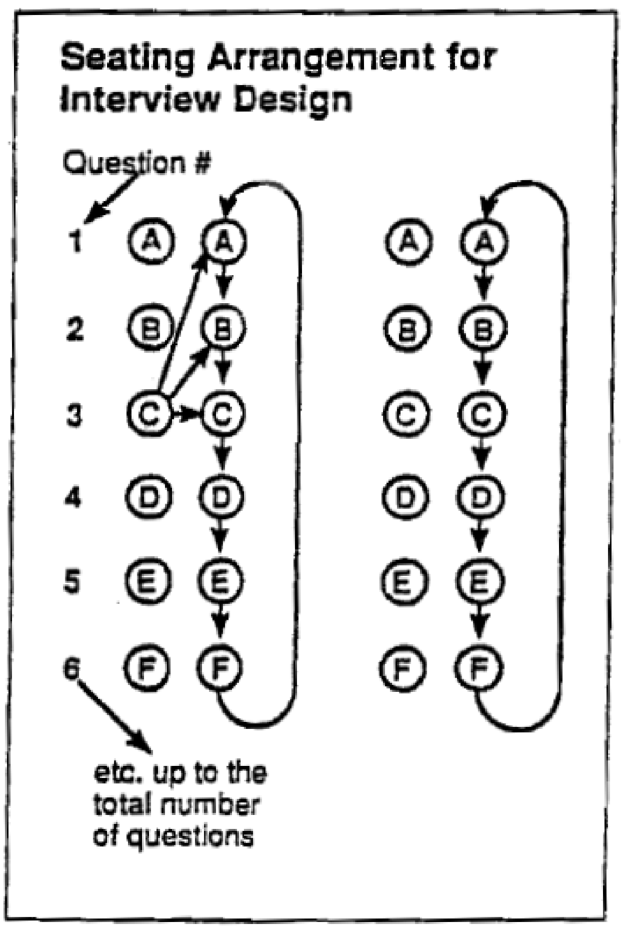
c. Use different questions in the rows. For example, suppose there were seven questions (none of which could be deleted without hurting the data collection) and 40 participants. Set up 4 sets of rows, 5 chairs long. In one set of rows, use questions 1-5; in another set, use questions 2-6; in a third, use 3-7; and in a fourth, use 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7. One analysis group will have 8 members; some will have 6 members; all will have at least 4.

The arranging of interview lines is difficult to describe, and it is best to simply try it and develop different ways of handling various groups. Diagram the possible arrangements prior to the workshop.

It is worth nothing that it is important to have the full group there on time. Sometimes it is useful to begin with some other short activity – such as workshop goal-setting – to wait until all are there. It is a powerful beginning because once under way, people cannon duck out without leaving a visible gap in the interview chain.

To conserve time and eliminate confusion, distribute the questions after the chairs are arranged but before the participants move into the chairs. Be sure to remind people to leave the questions in the chair in which they are found – and not to move the papers.

Step 1: The Interview
After people have moved into their chairs, allow some time for them to read the directions and their assigned question. Reiterate the instructions at the top of each question, stressing that their role – while interviewing – is to listen for comprehension. They should record everything that is said to them and not ask question except for clarification. Remind them to record everything that is said even if it is a duplication of something said earlier.



People are now ready to begin interviewing. The diagram and following description give an idea of the progression of the interview process.

1. Select one row and ask them to begin by posing their question to the person facing. (Remember, they are to carefully record the responses.) After 3-5 minutes, call time. It is now time for the respondents to become interviewers. Notice that in the first set, the interviewer and respondent have the same question. This allows each to get comfortable with their question and with the interview process. Allow somewhat more time during this first round of interviewing.

2. After both people facing each other have asked and answered the questions, it is time to move. Designate one of the rows the "movers" and the facing row the

"sitters." (It is helpful if the movers have plenty of space to move; sitters can easily have their backs against the wall, but the movers need room to get in and out of chairs.) In the movers' row, everyone should move one seat to the left, and the person at the far left of the movers' row should walk around to the other end of the row. (See diagram.)

3. Continue with steps 1 and 2 until either everyone has responded to all the questions, people seem tired, or time is finished for this segment of the Interview Design.

Step 2: Analyze the Data
After the interviewing, all those individuals who were asking the same question assemble and compare their responses. Without overly emphasizing their own views, they should try to identify the major themes. If the question asks for 3 or 4 ideas, they should strive to identify the top 6 rather than listing all responses. This keeps the reports brief. The worksheets can be collected for further analysis by workshop staff for those ideas that are insightful but were not mentioned by enough others. After the analysis, each group should write its question on the top of a flip chart and the responses below. This phase takes from 10-20 minutes, depending on the size of the groups.

An alternate method of summarizing data follows:

Ask people to move one last time – to meet back with their original questioning partner. As a pair, they should review the responses they obtained and prepare a summary. They should strive to capture the responses given most frequently.

After 5-10 minutes, ask these pairs to meet with other pairs in the room who had the same question. As a group, they should compare the summaries prepared by each pair and make a consolidated list of frequent responses. Again, in the interest of time, the facilitator may want to limit the number they will report out to the entire group.

Each question-analysis group should summarize their responses on a flip chart or overhead transparency.

Step 3: Report Results
Each group should report briefly, perhaps 2-3 minutes. Questions can be held until the end or taken after each report as long as the discussion does not get out of hand. The charts can be typed up and distributed as a quick record of the key points. The sheets can be used throughout the rest of the workshop as background data.