Assignment 4: Individual Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (300 points)

Objectives: After completing this assignment, you will know how to:

- Use interviews and related research methods (like focus groups or group interviews) to gain insights into complex thought processes and concepts of respondents;
- Assess the value of using interviews and related methods in combination with other instruments like indices or scales to gain a more complete understanding of a phenomenon (e.g., apply a mixed methods approach to research);
- Apply key principles of research methodology relating to validity, reliability and discriminatory power to the development of protocols for interviews and similar instruments; and
- Apply appropriate practices to enhance respondent participation and power in the interview process

Form partnerships of two people from your or another team for the Group Project (index). I think it is easiest for me to set up the partners. Less effort for all concerned. We will discuss this in class. Your task is to develop and conduct one cognitive test of the protocol for an individual semi-structured interview. You will use the same theoretical constructs and/or dimensions that you used for the index. You will create and cognitively test a semi-structured interview protocol. We will *skip expert review* in the interest of saving time and effort.

A strength of the interview is that it allows us to gain an in-depth understanding of the respondents' logic, ideas, and thought processes. One way to think about this is that people check boxes when they respond to the items in an index. An interview allows you to understand ***why*** they chose to check some boxes and not others. However, this in-depth understanding comes at the cost of breadth. ***Your interview should not take more than 45 minutes to complete; 30 minutes is better.*** You may not be able to include every topic you would like to cover in the index. You will have to prioritize. Draw on what you learned from testing the index to inform your decisions about the topics to include in the interview protocol. The point of the interview is to deepen and build upon the information that an instrument like the index provides, not replicate the same information. For example, if you found confusing patterns of responses for a variable in the index, use the interview to try to understand why these patterns emerged.

Documents to Submit

Submit the original and revised versions of the guide as Word documents. Use these titles.
PartnersLastNamesinAlphabeticalOrder_DraftGuide.
PartnersLastNamesinAlphabeticalOrder_RevisedGuide

Also submit your answers to the questions in this assignment. This should be a single spaced Word document. Use the title
PartnersLastNamesinAlphabeticalOrder_Questions

Interview protocol

The interview protocol must include four components:

1. The objectives for each topic included in the interview, usually associated with the constructs or dimensions of interest,

2. A questioning route, the specific items (questions) and space (including some boxes that the interviewer can use) for the interviewer to take notes,
3. Instructions that the interviewer can use to manage the interview process.

List the objectives for each topic you will include in the interview. The objective should clearly state what it is you want to know about or understand. You do not read this to the respondent. It is there to help you transition from topic to topic and to keep you focused on what you must get from the interview. Being able to glance at the objective when you feel the interview has started to go astray helps you get back on track.

For each objective and associated topic, make a list of ***potential questions*** that you will ask. Leave plenty of room for the interviewer to take notes. ***Include a wide range of types of questions*** so that you can steer and direct the conversation. ***Clearly indicate the nature of each question in the facilitator's guide (see Table 5.3 on pp. 84-85 in the Stewart et al reading). Follow-up question is NOT sufficient. Showing that you know how to put together different types of questions is critical to your performance on this assignment.*** Refer to the Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook reference **on e-reserve** (Stewart, D.W., Shamdasani, P.N. & Rook, D.W. 2007 *Focus groups. Theory and practice*. Sage Publications, London. Pp. 69-86). It's about focus groups, but these topics are just as true for good interviewers as for good focus group leaders. See in particular Table 5.3 on pp. 84-85. I do not believe you can succeed in this assignment without using most of these types of questions somewhere in your interview protocol. For example, if you want to understand how strongly people hold their ideas about a specific idea, you will need to use confirmatory questions. If you are trying to get people to think through a topic, you may need to have a number of questions that cover different components of a more complex idea or issue, with a final question that calls for an overall conclusion from the participant. On the contrary, if you are trying to get someone to think about a number of ideas, to get the greatest possible range of ideas, you may want to include follow-up questions or activities that are disconfirming. This helps the facilitator use the questions appropriately and helps me assess what you are trying to accomplish and assess your understanding of how to use the various types of questions.

Create a ***questioning route with associated activities.*** This is not just a list of questions, although it does contain all of the questions that you will ask (including alternative versions, alternative types of questions such as confirming questions you might use if you are not sure how confident the respondent is in his/her answer, etc.). Use **Krueger, Richard A**. & Casey, M.A. *Focus Groups*, Fifth Edition. Pp. 39-76, "Developing a Questioning Route." Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA. **This is on e-reserve, but there are two Krueger publications one about indices by Larry Krueger and this one about focus groups by Richard Krueger. Make sure you get the right one.** The Krueger reference has an excellent discussion about developing a questioning route. There is much more to this than just going through a list of topics. I have had experiences where I got some information about one topic, moved to another topic, and then returned with closure questions for the first topic. Getting the order right is one of the most difficult aspects of creating an interview protocol. The questioning route helps you get the order right. The questioning route includes activities that break the monotony of the "interrogation" that interviews can become if all you do is ask questions, get a response, ask another question, get another response. This bores people and it makes many people feel like they in an interrogation chamber. Your objective is to create an interactive experience in which you and the respondent work together to create new knowledge. Your grade on this assignment will reflect the creativity you incorporate into your interview process.

Write instructions for the interviewer, even when you are the interviewer. Interviews are hard to keep on track. The better your instructions to yourself, the better the interview. The guide should provide the interviewer with a "game plan" that includes planned interventions (like how to move from topic to topic and how much time to spend on each topic) as well as "back up plans" when the process slows or goes off track.

Cognitive test of protocol

After you have a draft protocol that each team will submit as the draft guide, ***each partner will conduct one cognitive test of the protocol.*** You can ask others in our class or other colleagues to serve as the cognitive testers. Remember that the cognitive test is not just a "walk through" the interview. You will make changes to your protocol and guide based on the information you get during these tests. The two of you need to meet and create a single set of changes. I do NOT want changes from each of you – make joint decisions. The guide with the changes incorporated is the revised guide that you will submit. Focus on the logic of the interview, the ease with which the person can answer questions, the flow of the questions. **The respondent does NOT need to answer the questions. You want to know how they think about answering the questions.**

Explanation and Justification of Procedures

You will find a list of questions below that you need to answer. The objective is for you to explain the steps that you took in developing the guides that you submit and justify your decisions. **This document is more important in your grade than the guide itself**. This is your opportunity to demonstrate that you understand the principles of developing research instruments in general, and a semi-structured interview in particular, and that you know how to use a mixed methods approach to enhance the depth and quality of research findings. You do NOT need to address the role of context in your decision-making since you already discussed that in the small group project. DO provide a thorough explanation and assessment of your decisions from the perspectives of improving reliability, validity and discriminatory power of your total "research project" – the index and the interview. Be explicit and specific about how each of these critical components of instrument design played into your decisions. Focus on explaining and justifying your decisions. Do not repeat generalities about instrument development. Address issues and decisions relevant to your study and the specific instrument (semi-structured interview). Use, cite and reference the research methods literature as you answer these questions. Make sure to include methodological literature specific to interviews. Number your responses.

1. Explain the procedures you used to develop the initial interview guide. Specifically explain how considerations of reliability, validity and discriminatory power influenced your decisions about the following:
   a. The objectives and associated topics to include, remembering that you are building on what your index would generate, not just repeating it
   b. The processes that you used to develop questions (where you got the ideas for the questions and why the different "mix" of types of questions for different topics)
   c. How you determined the questioning route

2. Explain the procedures you used for cognitive testing, how you conducted the tests, and why you selected the specific procedures. Justify your decisions.

3. Describe the changes you made to your interview protocol after cognitive testing. You do not need to explain every change because I have the protocol before and after cognitive testing. Rather, identify the general problems with your protocol and guide that emerged. Explain how the problems identified could negatively affect reliability, validity and discriminatory power for your total project (index plus interview). Then explain the nature of the changes that you made to address the problems. Explain your reasoning in terms of improving validity, reliability and discriminatory power. ***Make sure you explicitly discuss (A) reliability, (B) validity, and (C) discriminatory power as you answer this question.***

4. Discuss and summarize what you learned about developing interview guides and protocols in this assignment.

    a. What did you learn about the challenges of addressing reliability, validity and discriminatory power in interviews, focus groups, and other kinds of instruments that depend on open response answers from respondents?
    b. What did you learn that you think you will apply in your own research?

5. Discuss and summarize what you learned about the use of mixed methods.
    a. Compare and contrast the nature of the information that you would acquire from the index with the information you would get from a semi-structured interview in a research project.
    b. Explain how you would use information (data) from the interview ***combined with the information from the index*** to improve the reliability, validity and discriminatory power of your findings.
    c. What did you learn that you think you can apply in your own research in the future?

Assessment Criteria Interview / Mixed Methods	**Possible Points**	**Your Points**
Used APA style; followed all instructions Provided complete, specific answers to all questions ***in your own words*** Responses were specific to your instruments, not simply generic statements about the development of research instruments in general	20	
Creating the Guide Used the information gained in Assignment 1 to prioritize decisions about which constructs (or dimensions of constructs) and topics to cover Clearly stated achievable objectives for each topical area Topics and objectives were appropriate for an interview –difficult to explore in questions employing closed response formats, for example Was able to apply basic principles of question development (wording, not double barreled, etc.) in creating an interview protocol Applied the key concepts pertaining to reliability, validity, discriminatory power, and context in decisions about how to identify potential items	50	
Testing Used appropriate techniques for cognitive testing with interviews and justified the choices that were made and the approaches taken	50	

Was able to match weaknesses observed in the interview guide during cognitive testing with appropriate changes in the guide and protocol Could explain the decision-making process with regard to which problems to address and how to address them – drew on the specific strengths of interviews Demonstrated mastery of key concepts pertaining to reliability, validity, discriminatory power, and ***convergent validity***		
Lessons Learned about Interviews Demonstrated a robust grasp of the principles of developing interview guides and protocols Drew conclusions about how to improve the development of interview protocols in the future Was able to move beyond describing the steps taken in this exercise to discuss key lessons learned that you can ***apply to developing interviews for your own research***	60	
Lessons Learned about Mixed Methods Indicated how the combined information from the index and the interview would improve overall validity, reliability and discriminatory power in a study using these two methods (mixed methods) Demonstrated an understanding of the strengths of each of the two forms of data collection and was able to incorporate the strengths of both Indicated an ability to use mixed methods to address divergent and convergent validity of measurements Drew specific lessons about the use of mixed methods to guide your own research projects (did not just repeat generic ideas about the advantages)	60	
Research Methods Literature Consulted, cited and referenced the research methods literature in developing responses. Used materials that are relevant to developing interview protocols -- was not just a "shopping list" of general materials Used materials that build upon, extend, or contrast to the concepts that we have discussed in this class. Used materials other than Bryman and my "cheat sheets," such as other required readings, additional materials listed at the web site, materials that your colleagues share with the class, and materials that you find yourself. Explained how each reference was used specifically – e.g., what did you "get out of" the material that you applied to respond to the assignment	60	
Total	**300**	