THE INTERVIEW IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RESEARCH: PROBLEMS WE WOULD RATHER NOT TALK ABOUT[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Despite some appreciation that empirical research is complex, the reasons presented for undertaking it are commonly simple in the extreme. Empirical research is supposed to capture reality (Sciberras 1986). Empirical research, and particularly interviewing, is the 'going and seeing' which both balances and complements the 'sitting and thinking' (Emmet 1991, p.14). As Pettigrew (1985) has observed, it is naive to see empirical research as merely a technical exercise, a rational response to an obvious research problem. Empirical research is also a social process, a matter which is often neglected by those who teach research techniques (Hyman 1967). We take empirical research to be research based on observation, distinguished from theoretical research by the efforts of the researcher to gather information in and about the world he is studying. The interview is a subset of empirical research and entails talking - usually face-to-face - with those knowledgeable about what is being studied.

Just how essential to business research, and international business research in particular, is the interview? How much does it really contribute? Perhaps its importance lies not in the gathering of information, but in other functions altogether. We intend drawing heavily on personal experience and that of our colleagues. Italicised quotation throughout the paper comes from interviews with managers, an incestuously improper methodology in which the interview is recruited to study the interview. In particular, the paper wonders why the difficulties inherent in exploiting information from interviews have not been more widely acknowledged. It explores some of these difficulties, indicates why they might have been overlooked, and offers some suggestions about how they might be overcome.

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[1] Versions of this paper have been published as Macdonald and Hellgren (1998; 1999).

Those who interview are commonly keen to talk to the most senior people in the organisation, and are commonly triumphant when they succeed. In much of the international business research top managers represent key informants (Welch et al. 2002), and they are also commonly relied upon in for example several studies on cross-border mergers and acquisitions (**need a reference here**). Academics explain that the more senior the individual, the more that individual will know about the organisation. But this justification assumes that the organisational hierarchy is also an information hierarchy. It is not. Both experience and theory suggest that top management may not know most about what is going on in the organisation, that middle management is likely to be much better informed, and that junior managers may be most knowledgeable of all on specific matters (Johansson and Mattsson 1988; 1992).

> I'm Head of TV Sales, but I don't have a direct line management to the executives, and this is what is so wrong. This is what is killing this place over the last four years..... I'm an appendage on the side.

It may be that researchers prefer interviewing senior managers because their research is more concerned with the making of decisions than with the operations of the organisation. Or perhaps researchers are less interested in the acquisition of information than in the acquisition of an authority for their findings that would not be bestowed by more junior managers. It is not unknown for management researchers to measure the success of an interview not in terms of the information procured, but rather in terms of the organisational importance of the individual interviewed and the time he has spared.

It is always naive to assume that the value of information is unrelated to its source, but in business research value may also be related to the means by which information is acquired. While theoretical information gains in authority the more it has been used, the more second hand it is, just the opposite seems to hold for empirical information. Value attaches to empirical information not having been disclosed before, to its virginal status, which may be why business studies boasts so few publications that test theory by trying to replicate the empirical findings of others (Hubbard and Lindsay 1995). Just why should empirical information that is second hand be considered second rate? It may be that the information is less valued for its meaning than as proof that the researcher knows the organisation and therefore what he is talking about? Similarly, desire for credibility might be a partial explanation for the popularity of case studies in international business

studies. That they are often thin and meagre representations of reality suggests that the information they reveal about the organisation may be of secondary importance.

When business researchers are not explicit about how many manager they have interviewed, the cynic is tempted to imagine that very few managers have been disturbed (Kumar, Stern and Anderson 1993). In other cases, researchers are proud to claim that they have interviewed a great many managers.

> In excess of 359 recorded interviews, conducted at all levels of the firm and sector involved over a three-year period, indicate the scale and intensity of the research. (Pettigrew and Whipp 1991, p.36)

> We interviewed 236 managers in the nine companies, both at their corporate headquarters and in a number of national subsidiaries..... (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989, p.217)

These researchers tend to be less explicit about the problems of information overload, problems with which the senior managers they interview are likely to be all too familiar, and that may not have been discussed in interview. It cannot be the case that more information is always preferrable to less. Diminishing returns must set in somewhere.

Pettigrew (1990) suggests that it is reasonable for a full-time researcher to conduct about 50 in-depth interviews per 'case' and that four to six cases are appropriate over a three-year period. This means between 200 and 300 interviews for each researcher – one or two interviews a week – even in projects in which interviewing is but a small part of the methodology. But time spent interviewing is only the tip of the iceberg; the researcher must prepare to meet his manager, must journey to the interview, and must transcribe notes or tapes afterwards. An hour of interview requires about 10 hours of transcription. In short, one or two interviews can easily occupy the whole of a working week And if international communication and travel are involved, the time required obviously increases. Because interviewing is extremely resource-intensive for both the researcher and the organisation (Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret 1976), it is important to appreciate just when returns do begin to diminish. Yet this is not an obvious concern of business researchers: their attitude - perhaps derived from survey methodology - seems to be that the more interviews conducted the better the research (see, for example, Ghoshal and Westney 1991; Marcus 1988;

Simsons 1991). Recently one of us conducted about 15 interviews for our pilot cases of cross-border mergers and acquisitions. This relatively small number of interviews provided sufficient data for identifying patterns.

Despite extensive resort to interviews in business studies (and international business is no exception), researchers seem less than comfortable with the methodology (e.g. Miller and Friesen 1977). Perhaps this is because business journalists also interview and academics are anxious that their work be seen as more thoughtful and substantial. Academics seem to be much more comfortable relying on theory rather than on interview material to support their arguments. Information from interviews, it would seem, may decorate a paper, but serious scholars are not supposed to rely on such information to support serious argument. So, despite consensus that the interview can provide a wealth of first hand information about what is really going on in the organisation, there is precious little interest in using this information. This may be because there are constraints on the use of this information, constraints that, serious though they be, are seldom acknowledged. This chapter seeks to make good the deficiency.

Access to the Organisation

Interviewing requires access to the organisation being studied. Even where the organisation is not funding the research directly, it is contributing resources in terms of expensive management time, and access may not be granted lightly. In practice, the need for access may make the researcher more subject to organisational constraints than any direct funding. It is possible, of course, to talk to a few individuals within the organisation without official sanction: it is not feasible to interview large numbers of senior managers about the organisation without the organisation's formal approval. A research project with such an interviewing base must be a research project deemed important by organisational criteria. Failure to meet organisational, not academic, criteria means no access and no interviews.

> Academic researchers rarely seek or receive open access to organizations; hence, how can they discover what is really going on? Most of us do not even get a five-minute tour through the executive suite. Instead, we dip our rusty fishing hooks in backwater streams and hope to get a nibble. (Greiner 1985, p.251)

Yet, some management researchers do gain not only access, but access to the executive suite. How? Pettigrew describes the process as networking, insinuation into an organisation so that access to one individual leads on to access to another.

> ..... in Britain the game that's played is essentially a networking game. They allow access in a small node or corner of the network, and then you get tested out on that node. And if you are deemed acceptable on whatever criteria, then you pass on to the next part of the node and then the next part. (Pettigrew 1985, p.264)

When contrasting our own experiences from Sweden and Britain, access to British companies appears to be a much for formal, complex, and lengthy process than to Swedish organisations of the same size. In Britain, after having entered the organisation through the executive suite the researcher has to renegotiate access each organisational level lower down in the firm. On the contrary, in Sweden, once the access has been granted by the senior manager, the doors are opened at the other levels, too.

What, though, are the criteria by which acceptability is judged? It is conceivable (though only just) that managers may find outspoken academics with radical views delightfully refreshing and welcome them with open arms. However, the academic whose outlook on the world matches that of managers may be more acceptable (see Hultman and Klasson 1994). But there are of course cross-cultural differences to contend with as well. Based on our experiences, British managers tend to feel less comfortable when being confronted with a a very different view of reality than their Swedish counterparts. The access the interview demands guarantees that, both literally and metaphorically, interviewers and interviewees speak the same language.

Access is becoming increasingly difficult also due to globalisation of companies. For example, when the corporate headquarters of the Swedish Ericsson was transferred to London, the research team in Sweden that one of us was a member of, suddenly found itself in the periphery from the viewpoint of the core activities. When contacting the new corporate headquarters, our team of researchers had to overcome several layers of gatekeepers, as nobody had ever heard of our small, Swedish university up in Linköping. As Swedish firms, such as Ericsson, are being acquired or merged with foreign corporations such as the Japanese Sony, the traditionally open and friendly research climate in Sweden and the Nordic countries in general is likely to change. Cross-border mergers and acquisitions introduce several owners which may complicate the negotiation process

of access. Above all, however, we fear that such industrial restructuring may precipitate a restructuring of the Nordic research climate as well, creating a distance between the academic and the business world. Given that qualitative methods and interpretive analyses based on interviews and company material have tended to dominate Nordic research on mergers and acquisitions (Hellgren and Schriber 2003), we anticipate a change. There will be fewer longitudinal case studies, which require excellent access and trust, and far more survey-based research. Consequently, the famous 'Northern lights' drawing on empirical insights from qualitative research may not shine as brightly in the future (Hellgren and Schriber 2003).

The Hostage Syndrome

If the hostage, no matter how badly he is treated, begins to identify with his captors, it is hardly surprising that the researcher may identify with the organisation in which he is interviewing. The organisation's interests become the researcher's interests. Most academics have never been in anything but the most minor of management positions: interviewing puts them in direct contact with those responsible for decisions that affect thousands, with those who allocate vast resources, with those who are powerful in another world altogether and who exercise skills utterly different from their own. Moreover, unlike the academic, who has only title and reputation to parade his status, senior managers are surrounded by all the structure and trappings of power. Nearly always, these are the surroundings in which interviews take place, the surroundings in which objectivity can easily turn to deference, impartiality to common cause, disinterest to rapture and capture. It is interesting to speculate whether the information garnered from interviews, and the questions asked for that matter, would be very different were interviews conducted in universities or on neutral ground such as in a lobby of an overseas hotel? We might also speculate to what extent the cult of the chief executive as hero in the process of organisational change is inspired by researchers experiencing him holding court in full regalia (see Hellgren, Melin and Pettersson 1993). Would academic deference be quite as marked were chief executives interviewed digging the garden?

Just as the hostage, his fate in the hands of his captors, may identify with those who have very different interests, so the interviewer may surrender objectivity by aligning himself with the interests of senior managers in the organisation he is studying (Fletcher 2002). He must continue to please powerful people to retain access. Failure to please may be punished with expulsion. The more interviews the researcher completes, the greater his investment and the greater his desperation to please. We have already considered the relationship between the satisfaction of powerful people

in the organisation and gaining access to other powerful people, but on this same satisfaction also depend access to other organisations, and - to some, often considerable, extent - offers of consultancy work and appointments to advisory positions, prospects of further funding, and hopes of academic advancement. The academic may be putting at stake a great deal when he sets off interviewing (Nilan 2002). All these considerations are, of course, quite irrelevant to the immediate purpose of the interview, and would certainly be beyond the purview of any text on empirical research, but it is not inconceivable that they may influence the manner in which the interview is conducted. It is also possible that they may influence research findings.

> We have co-operated with you in the past in what we believe has been a constructive relationship but this latest paper is both inaccurate and wholly unacceptable and will undoubtedly destroy that relationship...... (letter from senior manager concerning a draft paper based on interview material, June 1993)

Clearly, there is a need to separate the various roles of the researcher as an academic or a consultant.

Academic versus Business World

Empirical research places the researcher within the environment of the organisation. Much can be learned simply by walking into a factory, without necessarily talking to anybody. Interviewing is much more intimate. The more involved the researcher becomes with the environment of the organisation he is studying, the more he risks being enveloped by it. Business culture is radically different from academic culture although traditionally – as already noted – the Nordic countries have been characterised by a close, almost symbiotic relationship with the business world. The former is hierarchical and tightly structured, especially in large organisations: the latter - at least traditionally - is just about the opposite and especially in research, where the findings of the famous may be challenged publicly by the unknown. For the academic researcher, peer review and membership of a community of scholars are important. Senior managers do not always appreciate this importance.

> They tell me you academics write two or three papers a year. How many thousand words is that? I must write that much in a week.

The researcher may find himself forced to defend his values, to preserve his culture, in a hostile environment. This can be difficult: it is hard to question closely a manager who is not accustomed to being questioned at all. For example, in our interviews with top managers on cross-border mergers and acquisitions, we found it difficult to go beyond the publicly legitimate view of the deal created by media. We were surprised to find how unanimous top managers were despite the fact that they represented different organisations in two different countries. We would argue that the public media creates an official view of the merger and the negotiation process which top managers are likely to accept. Obviously, it is much easier for the researcher simply to accept what is said, to accede to the culture of the organisation, to go native. It is easier still, and much more conducive to reaping the benefits that flow from the satisfaction of those interviewed, to ask the questions managers wish to answer, and to ask them in ways managers will find immediately acceptable. Thus, for example, a question on the role the manager has played in corporate success is much more acceptable than a question about his role in corporate failure (see Major and Zucker 1989). It matters not that there may be more to learn from failure than from success; international business studies produces a great many accounts of corporate success and remarkably few accounts of corporate failure.

> I'm now trying to re-establish myself here. It's amazing because if you are unsuccessful at something, people just forget all your successes in what you have done beforehand. I learnt a lot from that. Not a very nice experience..... Lesley used to work for me at one time, and now - see what I mean, how things change when you go to a disaster job.

Please, add a concluding sentence

Making Sense of Interview Data

Interviews yield so much, and such diverse, information that even simple aggregation presents problems. Contradictory information is often the rule rather than the exception (Myrdal 1970). Consider a single sentence from one senior manager, interspersed with comments (in bold) from other senior managers in the same organisation.

> ..... the non-executive directors recognised that there was the need for another leader to come and cause change to happen in (the company) ....

> **That's why he was brought in; he was brought in by the non-executive directors of (the company) to make a radical change, but this is definitely not for attribution.**
>
> .... and one of the great things that (the new CEO) has brought to (the company) is not only the creation of the mission statement ....
>
> **Our strategy mission statement here is motherhood.**
>
> .... but the rigidity with which we have applied it to our businesses since.
>
> **Does there have to be synergy? ..... I know that the main board have often thought of becoming a holding company. .... I mean that might bring into question then (the CEO's) quest for [the sort of] company that since I have known him he has started to say less about looking for. He has just expressed frustration that it didn't happen.**

The survey approach - where "77% of managers think that ....." - overcomes the problem of aggregating, but at the unacceptable cost of masking the variety and individuality of interpretation that interviews reveal. The same survey approach to interviewing seems to suggest that interviews will produce better information if they are as structured as possible, if interviewing is made to resemble a laboratory experiment. This seems to ignore two factors: that the interview demands a personal and individual relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and that interviewees resent being used as guinea pigs. Despite the ingenuity underlying recommended interviewing techniques (e.g., Brewer 2002), interviewing is not a scientific process, and trying to make it one is probably a mistake (Cawthorne 2001; *cf.* Partington 2000). Indeed, interviewing is probably the most irrefutable reminder of all that research in the social sciences is inevitably value-laden.

Managers often choose to confide in the interviewer, but then insist that their most interesting information not be used.

> I think at the present time it's the Minister that opposes it. As I understand (and I hope you fillet out this part), he is extremely paranoid about it

Sometimes matters about which managers feel most strongly, matters that may be important to academic argument, are expressed with an emotion that is difficult to capture in the prose of academic publication, and that is quite unsuitable for quotation.

> (The parent company) can go to bloody hell. They make zilch contribution here..... I look upon [the parent company] as a bank. It provides no more than finance.

> Managerially and in social terms, (the manager) was a buffoon. He's got no political savvy at all, and has behaved in a way which is frequently very insensitive to the rest of his colleagues.

> I have the impression that (the company) feels - quite rightly - that it has to manage change, it has to become much more cost effective. And the senior management - many of whom I know, we go back a long way - who are doing this are people who have never in their lives so much as run a corner shop.

> I'm fascinated by someone who is so incompetent, as far as I can see, in understanding any kind of management theory, and doesn't seem to have any insight into where this business is going, but can nevertheless manage to make money in private industry. If anything has convinced me that it must be a bloody pushover out there, it's watching (the manager) in action.

The challenges of trying to capture the nuances and subtleties of the original quotations are even more accentuated in international business research, where the language of the academic publication may differ from the languge used in the interview. One of us is supervising a Swedish doctoral thesis on mergers and acquisitions in China of a large Swedish corporation. The Swedish student speaks Chinese and is competent to conduct field interviews in Chinese. However, the student transcribes the interviews into Swedish to be able to communicate emerging themes to her supervisor and writes her thesis in English. The issue of translating quotations is very seldom problematised although some of the richness of the interview data is likely to be lost.

As has already been noted, interviewing is almost guaranteed to provide a mass of detail, but using this detail in the presentation of findings creates problems for the academic. Detail is messy; often confusing and contradictory – not characteristics that editors generally welcome in the papers they publish.

> It is a collection of thoughts and public statements made by executives in various firms...... I do not see a systematic thought emerging from this collection of

statements (which is considered as empirical evidence by the authors - I don't think that is a correct claim). (referee's comment on paper based on interviews)

I still have doubts about the included quotes. Can we learn anything from such anecdotes? How do we know that these quotes are representative or were merely selected to fit the points that the author wants to make? (referee's comment on paper based on interviews)

Similarly, business school students are taught about organisations through rendering the chaos and confusion of reality neat and ordered (Mangham 1990), and business studies – desperate to be science rather than art – searches for laws to explain the behaviour and characteristics of the organisation when both are inherently unruly (Numagami 1998). Consider the following sterile attempt to squeeze all irregularity from the study of organisation; there is clearly no role here for information from interviews.

Beckhard defines five phases in the organizational development process: diagnosis, strategy planning, education, consulting and training, and evaluation. In their more general model of the planned change process, Lippitt, Watson, and Westley also define five phases: development of a need for change, establishment of a change relationship, working toward change, generalization and stabilization of change, and achieving a terminal relationship. Lawrence and Lorsch see four stages: diagnosis, planning action, implementing action, and evaluation. Schein's approach to process consulting has seven stages: initial contact with the client, defining the relationship, selecting a setting and a method of work, data gathering and diagnosis, intervention, reducing involvement, and termination. In the consultation model presented below, we have incorporated the major points in these models .... (Kolb and Frohman 1970, p.52)

In practice, then, there are powerful pressures to deny the complexity of reality that interviews can reveal. It may be enough that the interviewer has been exposed to this reality without having to wallow in it. He may even perceive a public duty to protect his audience from similar exposure.

> It is from this mix of opinion and fact, of detailed descriptions and broad impressions, that we have developed our conclusions...... Our hundreds of pages of interview notes are full of stories, anecdotes and quotes. (Goold and Campbell 1987, p.7)

The interview is far from being the only means available to the empirical researcher of gaining information about the organisation. Much information may be in the public domain and may be obtained without the consent of the organisation's managers. For instance, there are the organisation's own publications, unpublished archives in public collections, articles in the media, academic publications directly concerned with the organisation (such as case studies), publications from other organisations (such as government departments and trade associations), and a whole host of peripheral publications (such as business and trade magazines). One of us has conducted research drawing solely on media texts on the merger between the Swedish Astra and the British Zeneca (Hellgren, Löwstedt, Puttonen, Tienari, Vaara and Werr 2002). It was a valid source of external data as in many instances company employees read about the merger or acquisition of their company in the newspapers rather than relying on an internal company information channel.

The researcher encounters major problems integrating information gained from interviews with this other information. Among these is the problem of reconciling the manager's view of reality with other views, particularly those from outside the organisation (see Chen, Farh and Macmillan 1993). Some managers value their own view of reality well above views from the world outside. Consequently, the researcher may be tempted to simplify these external views, to unify so that the focus of attention remains on the empirical information he has unearthed at such cost. Resources being finite, and interviews exceedingly resource consuming, there may be few to spare to treat external views as exhaustively as internal. So, the researcher may find himself prisoner of his own methodology, condemned to look inwards, deprived of the context external views of reality provide.

The problem becomes acute when the mixing of public information with that from interviews reveals more - often much more - than managers intend. For example, the use of public information may reveal the identity of a company promised anonymity by the researcher. With a huge investment in interviews, the researcher may prefer to sacrifice other information in preference to interview material. Consider the following information which, because it was given in confidence, severely restricted the use that could be made of public information about the event. In this case –

and this case is not at all uncommon – the interview severely retricted the information that could be revealed about the organisation.

> In a nutshell, there was a cabal, almost a secret society within (the subsidiary) of a few individuals - not that many. We were trying to collect debts, we were sending in the heavies, sending in the heavies to take back (property) in lieu of debt, all that type of thing. I'm not too sure whether money was actually being laundered. Certain of the individuals are going to be, and are being, prosecuted...... (The responsible director) did not know what was going on at all.

No study can rely on empirical information alone, no matter how rich the information. Empirical information must also be integrated with theory and this is often no easy task (see Flanders 1964, p.9), particularly with interview data. Empirical work is generally accepted as complementing theory, but how well do the two really fit? Does not a mite of the empirical sometimes merely decorate a muckle of the theoretical? Does not theory sometimes merely lend a spurious respectability to the interpretation of reality? How often are empirical findings presented which are at variance with the theory that accompanies them? Not often. Most practising managers are not familiar with the latest developments in management theory, or are acquainted only with the bowdlerisations of those who popularise management theory. Unless managers are unacceptably led by the interviewer, they cannot be expected to provide their information in a form that is compatible with theory. This, of course, is where the researcher's skill should come into play, but the skills required to extract information are not necessarily the skills required for integration. There may be evidence of this in the tendency of academic publications in business studies for empirical information to be presented quite separately from theoretical information. This makes starkly evident that empirical research has been performed while minimising the problems of integration.

Organisational Control of Research

Wherever the organisation being studied is also funding the investigation, doubt should be cast on the objectivity of the findings. Even where there is no direct funding and the organisation attaches no conditions to the nature of the findings or to the form and timing of their presentation, or the audience to which they will be released, there may still be an expectation that nothing will be said

of which the organisation would disapprove. Implicit expectation, because it is boundless, can be more inhibiting than explicit restriction.

All empirical research gives the organisation under investigation an influence over the results of the research. When an organisation completes a survey form or gives access to documents, it can obviously control its input to research. But there cannot be quite the same level of control over the information given by individuals in interview. Good research practice demands that those who are interviewed approve the use of their information in the context in which the researcher has placed it. The huge effort required to do this for a paper reliant on interviews may explain why the convention is not always observed in business or international business studies, and why so many papers in the field emphasise the theoretical (Ormerod 1996). Even complying with standard agreements to ensure that information published is accurate and not confidential can pose problems. Individual managers do not relish this responsibility and there is no obvious institutional office to accept it. That part of the organisation dealing with public relations may well be left to handle the task - with predictable results. From the perspective of Public Affairs, publication about the company should be publication that will make a favourable impression on the public.

> You asked various of my colleagues to comment on your draft..... Some confusion has arisen because it is our normal - and preferred - practice to have drafts of this kind sent to the Department of Public Affairs..... (letter to author from a Director of Public Affairs, July 1993)

> The first paragraph of page 20, which may be an accurate quotation, is not something we would wish to have included within a published document." (letter to author from a Human Resources Director, September 1993)

The latter observation seems quite unexceptional, but in this case the objection was to a quotation from a manager in another company altogether. Similarly, one Swedish company demanded not only that the answers its managers had given be changed in the draft paper it was sent, but also that the questions be altered (Melin and Strategier 1977). In order to avoid such situations, we often send companies the transcribed interview, a summary of the core points from an interview or a case report which contains largely raw data with little analysis and interpretation.

Good research practice is also to define precisely what control the organisation will have over results before the empirical work begins, but because neither side can know in advance precisely what results the research will produce, such agreements are redolent with a tacit 'no surprises' understanding, discouraging researchers from disclosing anything that might not have been expected. For example, when we did a study on Astra Zeneca, we were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and a formal research contract. This was probably due to the R&D intensity of the pharmaceutical industry in which Astra Zeneca operates but many such agreements tend to be oral ones. However, no matter how carefully framed, such agreements cannot be dynamic: much may change in the organisation during the years between the beginning of empirical work and academic publication. Managers, and their expectations of the research, may change several times over. Particularly catastrophic is the replacement of the manager who championed the research with another who realises that his predecessor will take whatever credit attaches to the research. To the successor goes only the blame. For example, we had agreed with the Swedish Ericsson to conduct a comprehensive interview study of the company. The merger with the Japanese Sony altered the situation completely and our access was considerably restricted to a very limited number of interviews due to changes at the senior management level.

The organisation may also insist on scrutinising output. Sometimes, the researcher may find this a helpful exercise: sometimes less helpful. The interview may open up the organisation for the inspection of the researcher, but - much more than any other form of empirical research - it condemns his findings to being laid bare for the dissection of the organisation. Objections to the revelation of even minor details can often preclude the use of more significant information, and can undermine major arguments. In consequence, the researcher has some considerable incentive to avoid detail - the very detail that the interview is supposed to reveal - or at least to avoid making any substantive use of it.

> The factual information given by (the author) about (the company) has no obvious errors. I have not had the chance to check the accuracy of the scores of references..... (The author) expresses a number of unsubstantiated and potentially damaging opinions..... (The author) liberally laces the document with quotations, many of which are injurious, many of which are unattributed. A continually damaging theme is thereby built, without enabling the reader to judge the reliability of that theme." (comment from senior manager on draft paper based on interview material, January 1991)

Because managers are not always familiar with academic culture, problems can arise in using information gained from interviews. Managers may not be sympathetic to the demands of academic rigour; for example, the requirement that what they say must be checked against information from other sources. There was a time when managers were less guarded than they are now over what they said to researchers and what researchers made of it. This was when virtually the only outlet for academic publication on such matters as cross-border mergers and acquisitions was academic journals, largely unread by managers themselves. But the same pressures that have forced academic research to become more obviously useful (and more empirical) have also encouraged academics to disseminate their findings more widely, especially through the media. What is said about the firm in the media concerns managers greatly. Much care is taken to cultivate media relations in order to discourage the appearance of information which may influence share price. The point is a small one, but it encapsulates nicely many of the problems of the interview as a means of acquiring information in international business studies. It is incontrovertible that the interview can provide invaluable information about the organisation, but the greater the attempts to exploit this wealth of information, the greater the problems that arise (Miles 1979). In practice, there is every incentive for researchers to claim for their research the benefits that interviews bestow, while avoiding the costs by actually making very little use of the information they can provide.

> We are told that over 400 people were interviewed to secure a variety of perspectives; few make their appearances in these pages and we learn little directly of what they had to say. (Mangham 1993, p.27)

Please, add a concluding sentence

Concluding Thoughts

Could you please, shorten this section and insert a paragraph or two which pick up the themes specific to international business, such as changes in the researcher-researched relationship being brought up by the globalisation of companies and the language issue in the international business context.

What, then, might be done to solve these seemingly intractable problems? We cannot share the apparent pessimism of the report of the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK into the

quality of management research, though it does address our concern that rigour may be seen as less important for research quality than relevance (see Carroll 1994).

> Research can and does contribute to today's problems, but it has a greater contribution to make: it should also contribute to tomorrow's problems. (Commission on Management Research 1994, p.27)

At several points we have hinted that a shortage of resources is a basic problem. Empirical research is extremely resource-intensive, and an extensive interviewing programme particularly so. This may mean that insufficient resources are available not so much for talking with managers, for that need is obvious, but to process their information, gather other information, to aggregate, integrate, and use the information acquired. The more interviews conducted, the more resources - not the fewer - are required for non-interview research. Miserly funding and thus further dependence on the largesse of the organisations being studied are not conducive to reputable research.

The dogma of the times is that academic research must be useful. It is hard to quarrel with this, but useful to whom? Little academic research can even aspire to be useful to everybody, and none can be equally useful. So, academic research is expected to find its market. For international business studies, this is seen to be managers themselves, those who make policy that will affect organisations, and others who study organisations. Of the three, managers themselves are reckoned by far the most important market, the reasoning being that their use of research not only satisfies one market, but also validates the research for other markets. Interviews play an important part in this crude legitimation process.

But is it really satisfactory to regard managers as the primary customers of research in business studies? Two assumptions would seem to be critical to the assumption. The first is that managers know what research will be of most use to them - in the long and medium term, as well as the short term. The second is that the research that is of most use to managers must be the research that is of most use to the economy and to society as a whole. Neither assumption is justified (DeNisi 1994). It is questionable whether managers have ever learnt much from academic publication, or ever will. Managers do not typically keep up with the latest academic literature, and it is naive to think that academic research has much to teach managers directly. That, in part, is the self-appointed task of management gurus, who - unlike academics - are often held in high esteem by managers. The popularity of their folksy analogies and simplistic prescriptions is an exemplar to those researchers

who value successful dissemination, and perhaps the rewards of dissemination, over successful research. The role of the academic is surely to understand and explain, not to prescribe, and certainly not to confuse (see Stewart 1996).

> The more modern thinking about empowerment as autonomy actually fits (this company) very, very well..... I mean you just can't manage that matrix other than at the local level. The principle by which we try to manage our business was the notion of global localisation. Or was it local globalisation?

> The key to successful management is the Three Cs, and the first of these is Change. What were the other two, Ian?

This does not mean that managers cannot learn from academic research, but perhaps they can learn most indirectly. Of all there is to know in the world, it seems likely that managers are most knowledgeable about their own organisations. They are comparatively ignorant of the world outside, a small part of which is occupied by the academic. A much larger part is explored by the academic - at least by the academic who does not spend all his time inside the organisation. A very much larger part still can be influenced by research findings, which, in turn, can influence the manager. It is disingenuous to insist that research on the organisation, research in the organisation, even research for the organisation, should have a direct impact on the organisation. Such insistence assumes that no research findings, and no impact of research findings, can reach the organisation from suppliers, competitors or customers, from government departments, from industry and trade associations, from business magazines, from the media, from consultants, or from the personal contacts and networks of individual managers (von Hippel 1988). It also assumes that academic research has nothing to offer the manager beyond lessons on how to manage, that there is no demand from managers for intellectual stimulation.

Why, then, does international business studies give credence to the notion that academic research is good academic research only if its product is primarily a private good? Perhaps the chief reason is that such research is easier - much easier - to evaluate. The customer can express his satisfaction, most tangibly by funding more such research. There is no equivalent means by which the economy or society can express approval of certain research and so encourage more. Thus it is that less and less research is performed as a public good, publicly funded; and more and more research is directed towards satisfying the immediate demands of specific customers. In some academic

disciplines, it is unclear just who the customer is. This is not the case in international business studies. The most obvious customer is the manager and his organisation. Consequently, there is every incentive for the researcher to undertake the sort of research which managers judge to be appropriate to their interests. Equally, there is every incentive to adopt a methodology which demonstrates how central to the research are the views of the organisation's managers. Empirical research in general, and the interview in particular, have thus become increasingly important components of research in international business studies. Academics in international business studies have been quick to seize the advantages offered by empirical research and by interviewing. Though they must surely have come to appreciate as much as we do the disadvantages, they have been reluctant to acknowledge them. As a means of acquiring information about what really goes on in the organisation, interviewing has no equal, but it poses problems for international business studies. Interviewing, perhaps appropriately enough, asks fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of research in international business studies, questions to which there are no ready answers, and which many in international business studies would prefer to leave unanswered.

Acknowledgements

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Interviewers will be keen to see the way you think while negotiating the price. If this is your fist job application, you can talk about any negotiations you did, for example in a retail store. How do you feel about selling a product you do not believe in? Do you think you can manage to do it? This is question of attitude. My advice: Say that you would never agree to sell a product you did not believe in. It's just against the business ethics—your ethics. Matthew has been working in international recruitment since 2008. He helps job seekers from all walks of life to pursue their career goals, and to prepare for their interviews. He is the founder of InterviewPenguin.com website. Informal interviews have advantages for both the interviewer and interviewee: Generally, applicants are more relaxed, so the interviewer is able to see more of the candidate's personality. This helps them to gauge whether or not you would be a good fit in the company. Make sure you have done your research. Find out everything you can about the company, the position and the industry in general, so that you can talk about them confidently. Bring your CV and business cards, keep the dress business casual and be prepared to talk, not only about yourself but about the company you are interviewing for and the current job market. Keep all of these ideas in mind and you should be prepared for whatever your interviewer throws at you. How strong is your CV/Resume? Get ready to answer situational problem solving interview questions like a PRO. Here's a thorough look at the best way to structure your answers. In my role as Business Development Manager at XYZ Inc., I was responsible for a team of five tasked with organizing all of our client events. As you may know, XYZ Inc. is a top provider of enterprise security software. Our client events are key to driving revenue. We host conferences and other events that feature expert speakers on key issues in the industry. These events help us to attract prospective new clients and also to retain our existing top clients. Big Interview will guide you through the process of becoming really good, really fast. Guaranteed. Give me Big Interview. Once you acquire the interviewer's name, do some research on LinkedIn and Twitter. This will help you learn about the interviewer's background, their position with the company, and even some common interests you both share. What are some important details you think job seekers should know prior to any interview? Browse Open Jobs. Available Jobs in Illinois. 3.9â˘…. Data Analyst. Winston & Strawn.