The Decision-Oriented Interview (DOI) as a Marketing Instrument for Obtaining Information about Brands

Karl Westhoff[1], Axel Schmidt[2]

ABSTRACT

The aim of our article is not to report an empirical study but to present a toolkit which can help to collect valid information about brands. The Decision-Oriented Interview, hereafter, DOI presents empirically proven behavior regularities in interviews as a collection of checklists. The DOI has shown its usefulness in different fields of interviewing e.g. as a selection interview, in forensic assessment or a method for oral examinations. The DOI collection of explicit rules for interview design, execution and summary is described as a toolkit for collecting information relevant in marketing. The purchase decisions are presented as a basis for describing brand-differentiating situations. The use of the rules collected in the DOI checklists has clear advantages over the conventional approach in which success depends on the experience of individual project managers.

1.0 THE DECISION-ORIENTED INTERVIEW (DOI) AS A PART OF THE DECISION-ORIENTED ASSESSMENT

In situations, where decisions about brands have to be made, one can utilize psychology as a scientific field in order to make these decisions in the most satisfying way. This means that one does not regret not having taken all details into account. The decision-oriented assessment (DOA) is a system of scientific-based norms which tries to optimize the process of generating and translating information on a psychological basis (Decision Aiding). All decisions which have to be made within the assessment process can be supported by that. (Westhoff and Kluck, 1991) have been the first to depict this assessment approach; in 2012, they also published the corresponding book in English, and in 2014, they released the current, 6th edition. Within the course of the DOA, all phases of the assessment process are facilitated by checklists – a procedure that has resulted in optimal decisions in the aerospace

---

[1] Prof. Dr. Karl Westhoff, Department of Psychology, Dresden Technical University, Germany, Email: mail@karl-westhoff.de
[2] Axel Schmidt, Batten & Company, Düsseldorf, Germany, Email: mail@karl-westhoff.de

industry for many decades, and has also been used in medicine for the past 15 years. Up until now, these checklists are a crucial differentiating feature of psychological assessment. The DOA approach can be utilized not only for assessing human behavior; it also enables the analysis of certain situations and organizations. Observing other's behavior can be regarded as the central method for generating decision-relevant information – either in its direct form or in its indirect one, an interview.

The DOI collection of rules for interviewing has been shown to be complete by experienced interview practitioners (Kici & Westhoff, 2000). Students' interview competence can be markedly improved by use of DOI rules (Kici & Westhoff, 2004). Furthermore the use of DOI rules results in objective (r ≤ 0.90) and content valid oral examinations (Westhoff, Hagemeister, & Eckert, 2002, Hagemeister & Westhoff, 2010). The decision-oriented interview (DOI) can be seen as a toolkit (Westhoff, 2009) with different, useful instruments that can be incorporated to generate much decision-relevant information by means of a meeting or an interview. If one wants to examine, for example, what is happening in brand-differentiating situations, one can follow the DOI guidelines. These rules apply for interviews with both individuals as well as a group of people (so-called panels). Using the example of DOI, it is intended to illustrate how the theoretically and empirically based guidelines combined together within the form of checklists can be used virtually to generate benefits.

2.0   ANALYSIS OF BRAND-DIFFERENTIATING SITUATIONS USING DOI

If a corporation wants to determine how certain target audiences perceive a brand, it is confronted with a series of different methods that can be used to observe other's behavior. The most commonly utilized instrument is the interview, which can appear in many diverse forms. Having the aim of assembling much decision-relevant information, it is most important to identify which unique situations or groups of situations are brand-differentiating. This corresponds to the critical incidents technique introduced by (Flanagan, 1954) (Koch, Strobel, Kici, & Westhoff, 2009). While a brand can be perceived in many different scenarios, only a couple of them are relevant for its perception. A communication method for a product or a service may be well-known by many individuals without being brand-differentiating in any respect. Brand-differentiating is only those items that are part of the inner brand concept – namely what the potential customers expect as a benefit.

In the first survey, respondents have to indicate what initially comes to their mind when thinking about a certain brand, all associations, and every situation in which they came into contact with the brand. Afterwards, the group of interviewees can review their own or external group results and assess how brand-differentiating they might be. Only the situations that turn out to be important or very important for experiencing the brand value, will be brand-differentiating and will be investigated further in the in-depth interviews. This in-depth interview can be conducted with individuals or in a group format. Thereby, it is crucial to explain the core idea of the decision-oriented interview (DOI) at first.

3.0   THE CORE IDEA OF DOI

In the DOI the interviewer always lets the interviewee describe their concrete behavior and experience in a specific situation, such that "I can imagine it as though I were watching a movie". The interviewer describes the critical incident to the interviewee and asks them to describe in detail what then happened in this performance-differentiating situation. The interviewee should not only describe their behavior but also what they thought at the time, how they felt and whether there were any physical consequences. All this information is helpful when one wants to predict how a candidate would behave in a comparable brand-differentiating situation.

In learning psychology the pleasant consequences of a specific behavior are called reinforcement because the individual tends to want to experience the situation again. Possibly unpleasant consequences are called punishment because the individual then tries to avoid such a situation in the future. In an in-depth interview most interviewees will usually report this information spontaneously or

after a slight nudge from the interviewer. This learning psychological information is also of crucial significance if one wants to understand, predict or influence behavior in performance-differentiating situations. The saying "after the match is before the match" is valid not only in soccer. It is therefore to be recommended that the interviewee not only describes what happened in a specific situation but also how the situation arose and how it developed afterwards. This pre- and post-event history of each brand-differentiating situation experienced also contains information that is helpful for understanding, predicting or influencing behavior.

Four aspects of behavior in the course of the event and how to ask about them:
1. Feelings (How do you feel?)
2. Thoughts (What came to your mind?)
3. Actions (What did you do?)
4. Bodily changes (Did it affect you physically? If so, how?)

Reinforcement and punishment:
- We ask about reinforcement (= pleasant result) with: *What did you find good about X?*
- We ask about punishment (= unpleasant result) with: *What did you find not so good about X?*

Possible questions concerning pre- and post-event history are:
- What was the situation before X?
- What was the situation after X?

Systematic Combination of event features (which can be used for the prediction of individual behavior in similar future situations)

Table 1: Brand-differentiating situation X and the corresponding occasion

Course of the event	*before*	*during*	*after*
Feelings (F)	F	F	F
Thoughts (T)	T	T	T
Actions (A)	A	A	A
Bodily changes (B)	B	B	B
Reinforcements (R)	R	R	R
Punishment (P)	P	P	P

4.0 THE DOI AS A MARKETING INSTRUMENT

The decision-oriented interview (DOI) can be used as a method for generating new insights about the brand. There is a variety of brand-differentiating situations which need to structure first in order to proceed in a goal-oriented way. The following section will demonstrate which model can be used for this purpose and also which questions are appropriate to be asked. These questions are only examples and therefore formulated very generally.

4.01 THE PURCHASE DECISIONS AS A BASIS FOR DESCRIBING BRAND-DIFFERENTIATING SITUATIONS

Brand-differentiating situations that are intended to be analyzed using the DOA can be allocated to the individual phases of the well-known purchasing decision process (Figure 1).

Depending on the industry and on decision structures, consumers will begin the purchasing decision process at the brand awareness point and proceed on until they achieve true brand loyalty. In order to place a brand in the relevant part of the target audience, two conditions have to be fulfilled: (1) The brand is familiar and (2) has an appealing image. A brand can only achieve a high market share if it is able to translate the consumers' acceptance into actual purchases and to retain the consumers as customers in the long-run.

Figure 1: The purchasing decision process

	Brand Awareness	Image	Importance	Purchase	Loyalty
Critical questions of DOI	How **well-know**n is the brand? What **knowledge** exists about the brand?	Is the **perception of the brand** positive?	Why is the brand **being considered**?	Why is the brand **indeed being purchased**?	Why is the **brand being purchased repeatedly**?
Typical topics of DOI	• Unsupported (Top of Mind) brand awareness • Supported brand awareness • Knowledge about the brand	• Image and perception of the brand • Appearance of critical performance and benefit offerings	• Product offering • Price level • Variety of supply	• Availability • Delivery terms • Tactical price-settings • Presentation at POS • Method of payment	• Affirmation of expected value • Support / service • Incentives, appraisals • Processes after the initial purchase

To be able to achieve this goal, the customer should be accompanied, preferably goal-oriented and individually, (dependent on the product and the industry) throughout the purchasing decision process. The DOA is an advantageous method for comprehending what the customer feels and thinks about the brand during the different phases. Moreover, one will then be more likely to understand certain actions and changes (compare chapter 3 "The Core Idea of the Decision-Oriented Interview).

4.02   EXAMPLES USING THE DOI IN BRAND-DIFFERENTIATING SITUATIONS

A consumer is asked to describe a situation in which he or she has heard about the brand for the very first time or when he or she has learned more about it (Phase 1, Brand Awareness). The following questions can be meaningful and advantageous for this brand-differentiating situation:
- "How was your reaction towards the new information about the brand / corporation?"
- "What did you think about the newly revealed study (e.g. When the interviewee had mentioned this circumstance before) about the organization when it had been published?"
- "How did you feel at that moment?"

Phase 2 (Image) is closely related to phase 1 (Brand Awareness) as consumers usually make up their minds if and when they receive new information about the corporation and if it is familiar to them. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on the brand's perception and its personality which are ideally only supposed to be discussed in detail with competent brand experts. Additionally, purchase triggers and barriers can be identified. The following set of questions enable the discussion of such brand-differentiating situations addressing the topics mentioned above:
- "Please tell us something about the last time you came into contact with brand X. What was the situation like?"
- "What came into your mind?"
- "If the brand were a human being, how would you describe him or her?"
- If you compare the brand with A, B, and C (the core competitors), how does the brand X differ from them? What characteristics do they have in common?
- "After the situations described, what were you thoughts?"
- "Has the situation described changed something concerning your perception of brand X? If so, please share some insights with us."

In the phases 3 and 4, the focal point rests upon the actual product and service. Thereby it is important to analyze what the interviewee likes or dislikes about the actual product (or service) and what factors have convinced him or her to actually make a purchase. Discussion topics shall deal with the following subjects: the product offering and the price level (Image) or its availability, delivery terms, and presentation of the product at the POS (Purchase). Possible questions could be:

- "When you saw product X in the store, what did you like about it? What did you not like about it?"
- "What else came into your mind when you saw the product?"
- "What are your thoughts about the price level of product X?"
- "When you have stood in front of product X in the store, what came into your mind?"

Phase 4 (Purchase):
- "What did you think about the presentation of product X?"
- "What did you think about the discount offering?"
- "What was your reaction? Did you actually buy the product?"
- "What method of payment did you use to buy the product?"
- "What did you like about the payment possibilities? What did you maybe not like about it?"

Phase 5 (Loyalty) deals with the affirmation of the expected benefit or, to state it differently, how satisfied the customer was with the product/service. Important elements determining the possibility of repeated purchase are support/service and incentives/appreciation of the customer. The DOA is able to evaluate in depth the experience of customers that have already bought the product or service. Similar to the previously depicted situations, this interview focuses also on the interviewee's behavior in the situations described (i.e. while using the product for the first time):

- "When you first used the product, what did you experience? What were your thoughts? What were your feelings in this situation? What did you like or maybe dislike?"
- "Have you been contacted after your purchase? If so: How did you feel about this? What did you like about the contact approach? What did you not like about the way you have been contacted?"
- "What did you like about the product?"
- "What did you not fancy about the product?"
- "Did you recommend the product to anyone? If so: Which factors determined your recommendation?"
- "Did you not recommend a product to anyone? If so: What triggered this decision?"

The previously outlined examples indicate how brand-differentiating situations can be analyzed by the means of utilizing the DOA and how new insights can be gained. Therefore, one can say that the DOA enables an appraisal to be made of the current brand performance, personality, and purchasing decision triggers or inhibitors. These results can be used as a basis for the formulation of future marketing strategies.

5.0   THE EXECUTION OF THE DOI

5.01   QUESTIONS IN A DOI

The DOI method is consistently oriented to behavior that can be observed externally or by the candidates themselves. Such observations of behavior offer a more verifiable basis for proficiency assessment of behaviors in brand-differentiating than abstract descriptions of behavior and characterizations of persons using unclarified and unstandardized terms. It is easier for candidates to describe the behavior if the frame of reference of the interview questions is clear. For this reason, when a new topic is introduced in the DOI, the interviewer briefly explains its purpose in the interview.

Candidates can answer questions more easily if they are only asked about one topic at a time. If the

interviewer violates this "single idea" rule (Cannell & Kahn, 1968) and addresses more than one issue in a question, candidates cannot be expected to know which part of the question they should answer first, or they may forget to answer one part of the question. In both cases, the interviewer will then have to ask the question again in the correct way, or important information may be missed. In a DOI, the candidate is supposed to portray observed behavior and experiences. The interviewer's questions and elicitations should serve to guide this portrayal and the interviewer should only interrupt as necessary to keep the candidate's response on course. In general, short and precise formulations serve this purpose best.

Many interviewers are inclined to encourage the candidate to get to the point quickly. This often leads to formulations of questions that are by their very nature suggestive, although most interviewers are completely unaware of this fact. In the DOI, leading questions are clearly defined as follows:
Questions in the interview are leading if at least one of the following conditions is fulfilled:
1. Information stated in the question makes it obvious what the desired answer is.
2. The question already contains an evaluation of the behavior being asked about.
3. Something is assumed as given that cannot be assumed as given because it could also be (or have been) different.
4. Possible answers are not listed completely.
5. If all possible answers are presented, or in the case of "yes/no"-questions, one of the possible answers is more obvious to the candidate.
6. The question contains filler words that hint at the desired answer, e.g. "surely", "perhaps", etc.

The danger of asking leading questions is often underestimated, since the suggestion may be so subtle that the interviewer does not even notice it. But the candidate will certainly react to it. If the whole series of leading questions is used, this can distort the whole interview. The only way to avoid such serious mistakes in interviewer behavior is to have appropriate training and to use meticulously formulated interview guides.

5.1.1 EFFICIENT QUESTIONS
Another characteristic of efficient questions in Decision-Oriented Interviews is that they help the candidate to recall details of past behavior in specific situations. One way to do this is to formulate the question in such a way that it reactivates the context of a specific behavior. This requires the interviewer either to know from experience how specific events are encoded, or to direct the questions in order to encourage the candidate to recall the context in which the specific event took place. Emotionally loaded words and phrases in interview questions may be experienced by the candidate as highly appropriate, but also as highly inappropriate. Since this cannot be anticipated when designing the interview guide, we strive to avoid the use of such words or phrases in questions as far as possible when we plan a DOI. But this does not mean that feelings are not taken into account. On the contrary, by remaining open-minded during the interview to the feelings experienced by the candidate, the interviewer can record them more precisely and react to them more appropriately.

Interviewers may occasionally find certain questions required by the goals of the proficiency assessment to be personally embarrassing, and as a result may avoid such questions or formulate them inaccurately, even though they are aware of the internal "censor's scissors" that are at work here. But we simply have to overcome the fears which underlie this problem if we want to conduct effective proficiency assessments. Careful preparation of the interview (i.e. design of the interview guide) is absolutely essential for this, as is systematic training and regular supervision by colleagues to ensure interviewer competence.

5.1.2 INEFFICIENT QUESTIONS
Questions that start with "why" or "what are the reasons" are attempting to elicit someone's "motivation" for behaving in a certain way. Such questions don't address behavior and experience; they ask candidates to express causal attributions. But causal attributions are not reports of observed

behavior. They provide no information whatsoever on the conditions which govern the behavior in particular situations, only on the explanations thought up at a later point in time for the behavior in question. And yet causal attributions of this kind are frequently misinterpreted, even by interviewers themselves, as the motivational conditions for a particular behavior. If causal attributions do happen to be relevant to the assessment process, the DOI interviewer will of course ask how the candidate would explain certain behavior. Such subjective explanations may indeed be relevant for prediction of behavior, as people generally consider their causal attributions to be correct and behave accordingly. But the real conditions for a particular behavior may be completely different to those expressed in causal attributions.

In addition, questions like "why" or "what are the reasons" also suggest that the interviewer only wants to hear "rational" reasons as answers. This is evident in many observed interviews. But such questions usually inhibit candidates when they are describing a sequence of events in which feelings play an important or predominant role. They then feel obliged to give a kind of "rational" account. It is much easier for candidates if the interviewer asks them to describe a particular sequence of events, i.e. to describe what they did, thought and felt. Then they can feel free to describe everything that comes to mind, even things which were "irrational". Such portrayals will also contain a fair share of thoughts that may well be "rational" in the everyday sense of the word. Descriptions of internal and external processes thus yield more useful information about motivation than do answers to questions about reasons. In addition, one knows from everyday experience that asking for rational reasons for behavior is often used as a strategy to reproach someone, or in an argument. For example, people tend to ask questions about reasons for behavior when they want to criticize someone's behavior. If one knows that the other person acted emotionally or from habit, such questions can be used to corner that person into giving "rational" reasons for their behavior. When they do, one can then respond critically by explaining that, actually, all the rational explanations they have given are false.

Many psychologists describe a specific situation in their questions and then want to hear how candidates would react in that situation. But such questions require candidates to know and accurately assess all the important conditions of the situation described. Candidates must also know themselves well enough to be able to tell how they would react to these conditions. This is only likely to be the case when someone has already experienced the situation described, or a very similar situation. So it always makes more sense to elicit a direct description from the candidates of the situation actually experienced. If candidates are asked about presumed behavior in a situation unknown to them, i.e. about hypothetical behavior, they will always be over challenged, both intellectually and emotionally. How can we expect someone, working under time pressure, to adequately imagine all the important situational conditions and to decide within seconds how they would behave, when in reality the situation would have lasted for hours, days or even longer?

5.1.3   OPENNESS OF A QUESTION

Open questions do not prescribe the way the candidate is supposed to answer them. Closed questions indicate exactly how they are to be answered. The prescribed answers are always short, in extreme cases consisting of a single word like "yes" or "no". Open questions are not imprecise or vague. On the contrary, they can be formulated so that candidates know exactly what they are supposed to talk about. Only the way they give their descriptions are not prescribed by the question. Candidates prefer open questions because they can talk the way they want to. Each section of a Decision-Oriented Interview is usually about the candidate's behavior in a specific situation. DOI interviewers always get candidates to report or describe this behavior by using open questions or elicitations. If a particular aspect of the past event being described is of further interest, interviewers will use a further open question which refers exclusively to that aspect. Even if they still require a more detailed description after this, i.e. details about an aspect of a particular aspect, they will continue to use only open questions. In principle, all the questions in a DOI are open questions, with some justified exceptions such as filter questions. Filter questions are used to find out whether a candidate has been able to gather any experience in brand-differentiating situations. If this is not the case, then a part of the interview guide is skipped.

5.1.4   DIRECTNESS OF A QUESTION

The easier it is for candidates to recognize the details a question is asking about, the more direct the question is. The more indirect the question, the less explicitly it states which aspects in a particular area of behavior are of interest. Candidates are then required to report everything they feel is worth reporting. How direct a question is depends on how present the particular behavior is in the candidate's mind. Confronted with direct questions, candidates may not be able to remember many details, or may only remember them poorly. Conversely, if candidates are asked to describe a certain event or development via indirect questions, they may be able to report details which might not occur to them if a direct question is posed. Candidates have difficulty in talking freely about certain things when the topics relate to behavior which is disapproved of socially, or to emotionally stressful events, or to situations which are problematic from a motivational point of view. In such cases, indirect questions are often the only way to get into the topic. Last but not least, how direct a question is depends on the aims of the interview being planned. Informative answers to certain indirect questions, e.g. about "embarrassing" topics, can only be expected once candidates have discovered, in the course of a longer interview, that they can indeed speak openly and confidentially.

5.1.5   FORMULATING HIGHLY EFFICIENT QUESTIONS

The questions formulated in a DOI interview guide are optimally efficient if they make it as easy as possible for candidates to report details of behavior and experiences. If this is the case, candidates rightly feel that they can say whatever comes into their heads. Candidates have to be able to talk without having to think about whether they are formulating their answers appropriately. They have to be able to talk as freely as if they were trying to describe something in vivid detail to an interested friend. In the literature on interviews it is often proposed that the level of language in the interview should be adapted to the respective interviewee. But this is not compatible with efficient design of the interview guide, which must "fit" equally well to all the candidates. We propose that the observation of the following rules for formulating questions will ensure that the interview guide contains optimally efficient questions with respect to the level of language.

A question should be formulated as concisely and to the point as possible. This may present a problem to the academic world as a short and precise enunciation is only practiced rarely and seldom expected. Academic enunciation is characterized by the usage of the passive voice and many nouns. However, questions are easier to understand if they are formulated using the active voice and incorporate as few nouns as possible. Nouns, like adjectives, are also abstract concepts. We need to think about what is meant by them. Questions are easier to understand if we describe the behavior we are interested in using verbs, and ultimately just provide starting points for the candidate to continue talking. If a question contains more than two substantives, we should ask ourselves whether we really need a third or the fourth one.

The danger of misunderstandings is particularly present when uncommon words are used in questions. We prefer using this label of the frequency of the usage of certain terms because our language is characterized by so many so-called uncommon words which many of us are not even able to identify as such. However, randomly used original German terms can lead to misunderstandings. The use of technical terms in questions, regardless of which specialized field they come from, may pose a problem for many interviewees. Well-educated candidates in particular may be reluctant to ask for clarification if they don't understand a technical term, as they want to avoid betraying "ignorance" in the proficiency assessment context.

In certain stages of the interview, the interviewer must first find out whether discussion of a specific topic makes any sense with this particular candidate. We use filter questions at the start of such stages. If a candidate has some experience of the topic (if yes), the interviewer proceeds the interview stage as planned. If a candidate has no experience of the topic (if no), the interviewer skips forward to a predefined point in the interview guide and continues with the next stage. Example: "Do you have children?" If yes: Ask subsequent questions about the children. If not: Continue with the next stage of the interview guide. Questions should not contain any evaluation of the behavior being dealt with, as

such evaluations may have a wide range of effects, all of them unproductive. Besides, these evaluations are superfluous and only make the questions unnecessarily long. Sticking to the facts in the formulation of interview questions also means that, when the questions are asked, the interviewer is not talking up or down to the candidate. If questions contain nuances of ingratiation or arrogance on the part of the interviewer, or refer to other persons, including the candidate, pejoratively or complimentarily, this may distract the candidate. Such questions also carry information that is not essential for comprehension, and lengthen the questions unnecessarily.

5.02   INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE DOI

5.2.1   FUNCTIONS OF AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

An interview guide for a Decision-Oriented Interview is a complete, specifically formulated plan for the execution of the interview. It is not a questionnaire. An interview guide is the most important aid for a professionally executed Decision-Oriented Interview. Below, we will illustrate how an interview guide serves its individual purposes. Carrying out a good Decision-Oriented Interview is such a complex task that it cannot be completely and satisfactorily accomplished, even by experts, unless an interview guide is used. Most novice interviewers consider formulation of an interview guide to be a redundant activity, at first. But once they have experienced how hopelessly lost they can soon find themselves in unplanned and unprepared interviews, they realize how essential it is to formulate the interview guide right down to the last detail.

In the interview guide, we write down precise formulations not only of all the questions, but also of everything else the interviewer will have to talk about in the interview. This includes, for example, lead-ins, lead-overs and summaries. Novices often think that writing out such precise formulations in the guide is rather redundant. But, in practice interviews, they quickly realize that on-the-fly formulations under interview conditions are far less efficient than the economic and accurate formulations they can develop during the planning stage, where they can take all the time they need. Interview guides for a DOI as an in-depth interview are very often mistaken for questionnaires, since it is assumed that they are used for rigid questioning. The exact opposite is the case! However, it does require considerable practice to be able to design an interview guide so that it serves exactly as the flexible tool it is supposed to be.

5.2.2   FEATURES OF AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

The overruling aim of every Decision-Oriented Interview is to get an answer to the question agreed on in the assignment. We always formulate the interview guide for a DOI according to this overruling aim. This means that we will only collect information that serves to determine fulfillment of the specifically formulated requirements, and thus to answer a client's question. When we plan Decision-Oriented Interviews for various clients' questions, there are no questions that we will always ask as a matter of routine. A schematic interview guide that is not specifically tailored to the particular client's question is incompatible with the requirement-based principle of the Decision-Oriented Interview method. Each interview guide will only contain specifically formulated questions that are justified with respect to the particular requirements and the particular client's question.

The entire planning and execution of the DOI is oriented to the cost-benefit ratio. We only use questions that we expect to yield useful information for the decisions that need to be made. This excludes any sections of an interview that have little or nothing of value to offer in terms of answering the client's question. It is essential that the interviewer strictly upholds this policy while conducting the interview. An interview guide is a tool, and must therefore be as easy to use as possible. To ensure this, it is advisable to formulate it in long form with all the necessary details. This includes deciding on the length of the individual interview sections. The interviewer, of course, should always know exactly which section of the plan they are in at any given moment during the interview. But it is also useful if the interviewee, too, can easily see how the interview is structured.

We write out the long form of the interview guide as clearly as possible and highlight all the important points. It is essential that we design this long form of the interview guide with organized visual highlighting so that the basic structure is easy for the eye to follow. In an interview, we use the visually optimized interview guide to maintaining an overview. This ensures that we have no problems finding the right words in particularly difficult sections of the interview. However, this does not mean that we read the questions out word for word, but we must always communicate the essential core of each question correctly. The main symptoms of a poorly planned interview and a lack of discipline in its execution are a high proportion of interviewer talking time and inappropriately formulated questions.

5.2.3   GENERAL STRUCTURE OF AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

The aim of the initial greetings and introductions part of the interview is always to allow the two parties to get to know each other a little and to adjust to each other. It is crucial for the rest of the interview that the interviewer refers to or asks about the current situation of the interviewee. Since the two parties must first break the ice through "everyday conversation", this may well involve discussing things which do not have anything to do with the client's question. Starting with the client's question, we then describe the aims of the interview and the procedure. It is essential that the interviewee understands how important the interview is for answering the client's question. This will increase the interviewee's willingness to cooperate. It is also motivating if we provide an overview of the topics to be discussed, say how long the interview will last, and point out that it will be possible to take breaks.

Many interviewers, but usually not the interviewees, have great reservations about making audio or even video recording of their interviews. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, recordings of our own voices always sound different to how we experience them, and most people find this "other" voice unpleasant. Secondly, on playback interviewers hear and, in the case of video recordings, see all their errors in brutal clarity. In contrast, interviewees generally have no objections to audio or video recordings, especially if we back the suggestion up by explaining the advantages. However, if they do refuse their consent, we dictate as much of the information as possible onto a recording medium directly after the interview, using an interview guide as a structural and mnemonic aid. We also make use of our handwritten notes. Video recordings of interviews can provide additional information about the non-verbal behavior accompanying the interview (gestures, facial expressions, motor activity), all of which may also be useful for proficiency assessment. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that interviewers with little grounding in psychology generally tend to completely overestimate the significance of non-verbal information. This may lead to them drawing untenable conclusions from the observed paralinguistic behavior. The decisive information for a Decision-Oriented Interview is always to be found in the verbal descriptions of behavior given by the interviewee. In any case, the type of recording we choose must also conform to cost-benefit considerations.

It goes without saying that we must always secure the consent of the interviewee prior to making an audio or video recording. Recording someone without their consent is not permissible. Clandestine recording would not only be against the law but would also violate the basic principle of "partnership" with the interviewee. However, in general we can expect interviewees to give their consent willingly since, from their point of view, a recording of the interview is the only real guarantee that all their answers will be objectively documented. Only in this way will interviewees be in a position to object to what they feel are distorted or even false evaluations by the interviewer. At the beginning of each section, we give a brief and precise explanation to the interviewees of the aims of this section of the interview. This will increase their readiness to cooperate. With a summary of the main points at the end of each section, we give the interviewees feedback on how we have understood what they said. This also gives them an opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings or to provide additional information.

A standard feature of the Decision-Oriented Interview is that we first get the interviewees to describe what they feel the client's question is about, and then proceed with selected brand-differentiating situations. There is nothing arbitrary about the sequence of interview topics. Certain topics can only be dealt with satisfactorily at a later stage in the interview, while there are other topics that the interviewees will be keen to talk about as soon as possible. Interviewees take it as a sign of genuine

interest in them as a person if they are allowed to state how they see things. This also aids memory recall. We can always come back later to these initial statements, which reassures the interviewees that we really are listening to them and correctly remembering what they said. This promotes a positive attitude of interviewee to interviewer, and provides a strong motivation to continue giving descriptions of specific behavior. The final section of the Decision-Oriented Interview may involve the use of indirect questions designed to elicit useful information for a range of purposes, for example asking the interviewees to describe a typical or ideal day or weekend. At the beginning of the interview, such questions might easily meet with a lack of understanding or even mistrust.

The conclusion of the DOI is the logical place to give the interviewees one more opportunity to add anything they feel is missing, to get their feedback on the interview, and for the interviewer to explain the next stages of the proficiency assessment process. It may be helpful to tell the interviewees how they can contact the interviewer if they need to, for example if they later think of something important that has not yet been mentioned. Finally, the interviewer may want to initiate a conversation about an emotionally neutral topic, if this seems necessary in order to be able to wind down and leave the interviewee in a good state of mind.

5.2.4 DETAILED STRUCTURE OF THE DOI GUIDELINE

When formulating the detailed structure of the interview guide, simple, clear and precise language must be used in all cases. Many interviewers and interviewees with an academic background have particular difficulties here, especially in the context of a brand assessment. A simple register of language without sophisticated grammar and vocabulary, and without technical terms, may be considered by interviewees as revealing their lack of proficiency, and by interviewers as a lack of professionalism. But in fact most misunderstandings in interviews arise from the use of inappropriately abstract terms instead of specific and clear descriptions. In interviews, it is essential that all necessary explanations are short, appropriate and easy for the interviewee to follow. This underlines once more how extremely useful it is if all explanations that may be required are considered before the interview, when there is no time pressure, and written down as part of the interview guide.

A number of explanations will be necessary at the beginning of a Decision-Oriented Interview. These explanations should not be prepared in the form of a short lecture, but should be planned so that we can communicate them in a dialog with the interviewee, i.e. through questions and answers. Like other parts of the Decision-Oriented Interview, this procedure requires special practice. The sequence of the questions in a particular interview section is not arbitrary. It will depend primarily on the aim of the interview. In addition, however, we must also take a number of psychological factors into account to ensure that interviewees are able to report the desired information in a usable form. It is only the description of specific individual behavior that provides the information we require for a useful proficiency assessment. For this reason, we always ask the interviewees to describe the behavior so that we can visualize it in detail "like watching a movie". Most interviewees are able to do this easily after a few minutes.

5.2.5 AN EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW GUIDE AS AN EXAMPLE

The following excerpt from an interview guide shows possible questions for a brand-differentiating situation. This is a recurrent part of information collection that has to be supplemented by questions specific to the situation. As well as the part concerned with information collection, the introduction and the conclusion all belong to a complete interview guide for a DOI. The example section of a DOI starts with a filter question. This can be dropped if the interviewer is certain that the interviewee is familiar with the brand-differentiating situation. The actual question is an invitation to describe situation 1 and all that happened in such a way that the interviewer can imagine it as though he were watching a movie. The possible subsequent supplementary questions are only put if, in the interviewee's description, certain information is missing or incomplete. Questions that are absolutely specific to the concrete situation are to be added to the Decision-Oriented Interview Guide (DIG), as are the introduction and conclusion by the interviewer.

Have you already experienced brand-differentiating situation 1 before?

If no: Proceed to brand-differentiating situation 2

If yes: Please describe situation 1 and what happened in such a detailed and precise form that I can imagine the whole situation as if I were watching a movie

- • How did you feel? How did it affect you?
- • What were you thinking at that time?
- • What did you do?
- • Did it have any physical consequences for you? If so, which?
- • What did you find positive in situation 1?
- • What did you find not so positive in situation 1?
- • What was it like before situation 1 arose? / How did situation 1 come about?
- • What was it like after situation 1? / How did things develop after situation 1?

6.0   ADVANTAGES OF THE DOI & CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the conventional approach a project manager takes over the planning, preparation and evaluation of interviews that either they or co-opted interviewers are to carry out. In the most favorable case the manager presents the interviewers with a complete interview guide and has developed a category system for the evaluation. Through the training course for the interviewers the manager ensures that they all understand the interview guide and use it in the same way. In this the manager has to rely entirely on his own expertise and that of his team. A feedback from the literature on interviews is difficult and time-consuming because there one finds many sources that make recommendations of questionable validity. There is no provision for an evaluation of the procedure, in whatever form. There is no estimate of costs and benefits. The project manager and the interviewers make unsystematic conclusions in which they often cannot establish how this came about. So there is no systematic improvement in the procedures for the project in the organization involved.

An organization using the rules of DOI and the supplementary rules of Decision-Oriented Assessment (DOA) can re-examine the rules, one by one, that have been summarized in helpful checklists. This begins, for example, with a checklist to clarify the task; this alone embraces 23 points. Every step in the planning of the interview guide is supported by checklists. The project manager can thus be certain that nothing of importance has been forgotten and that the formulation of questions does not contravene basic principles of behavior. The latter, for example, is always then the case when the interviewee should not only report on their behavior and how they experienced the situation, but also give "reasons" for their behavior. All questions that require "reasoning" from the interviewee harbor a high risk of errors of reason that lead to invalid interview results. The DOI rules also guide the evaluation of the interview as well as its oral and written summary. A concluding evaluation of the project makes cost/benefits analysis possible, and can also lead to a systematic improvement to the procedures used in the project that can then be implemented in the next project. This situation is comparable to the question whether intuitive expert judgment is better than mechanical decision making in psychological assessment. Since the first meta-analyses of (Meehl, 1954) and (Sawyer, 1966) there is growing evidence for the fact that rule-based procedures are markedly better than intuition-based ones (Grove et al. 2000). However, our heads are still needed (Kleinmuntz, 1990).

REFERENCES

Cannell, C. F., Kahn, R. L. (1968). Interviewing. In G. Lindzey, E. Aronson (eds.), *The handbook of social psychology*. Vol. II, 2nd ed. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Flanagan, J.C. (1954). The Critical Incident Technique. *Psychological Bulletin, 51,* 327-358.

Grove, W. M., Zald, D. H., Lebow, B. S., Snitz, B. E. & Nelson, C. (2000). Clinical versus Mechanical Prediction: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Assessment, 12*, 19-30.

Hagemeister, C. & Westhoff, K. (2010). On objectivity and validity of oral examinations in psychology – A replication. *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling, 52 (3)*, 247-260.

Kici, G. & Westhoff, K. (2000). Anforderungen an psychologisch-diagnostische Interviews in der Praxis [Standards of Interviews in psychological assessment]. Report Psychologie, 25, 428-436.

Kici, G. & Westhoff, K. (2004). Evaluation of Requirements for the Assessment and Construction of Interview Guides in Psychological Assessment. European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 20 (2), 83-98.

Kleinmuntz, B. (1990). Why we still use our heads instead of formulas: Toward an integrative Approach. *Psychological Bulletin, 107*, 296-310.

Koch, A., Strobel, A., Kici, G. & Westhoff, K. (2009). Quality of the Critical Incident Technique in practice: Interrater reliability and users' acceptance under real conditions. Psychology Science Quarterly, 51, 3 – 15.

Meehl, P.E. (1954). *Clinical versus statistical prediction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sawyer, J. (1966). Measurement and prediction, clinical and statistical. *Psychological Bulletin, 66*, 178-200.

Westhoff, K. (2014). The Decision-Oriented Interview (DOI) as an in-depth selection interview. Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling, 56 (2), 137-153.

Westhoff K. (Ed.) (2013). *The Decision-Oriented Interview (DOI) as a Selection Interview.* Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers. eBook: www.ciando.com.

Westhoff, K. (Hrsg.) (2009). Das Entscheidungsorientierte Gespräch (EOG) als Eignungsinterview [*The Decision-Oriented Interview (DOI) as a Selection Interview]*. Lengerich: Pabst.

Westhoff, K., Hagemeister, C. & Eckert, H. (2002). On the Objectivity of Oral Examinations in Psychology. Zeitschrift für Differentielle und Diagnostische Psychologie, 23, 149-157.

Westhoff, K., Kluck, M.-L. (1991). *Psychologische Gutachten schreiben und beurteilen [How to Write and Evaluate Psychological Reports]*. Berlin: Springer.

Westhoff, K., Kluck, M.-L. (2012). *How to Write and Evaluate Psychological Reports*. Pabst: Lengerich. eBook: www.ciando.com.

Westhoff, K., Kluck, M.-L. (2014). *Psychologische Gutachten schreiben und beurteilen. 6., vollständig überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage [How to Write and Evaluate Psychological Reports. Completely revised and enlarged edition]* Heidelberg: Springer Also as eBook: www. amazon.de.