



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

# Expert Interviews and Interview Techniques for Policy Analysis

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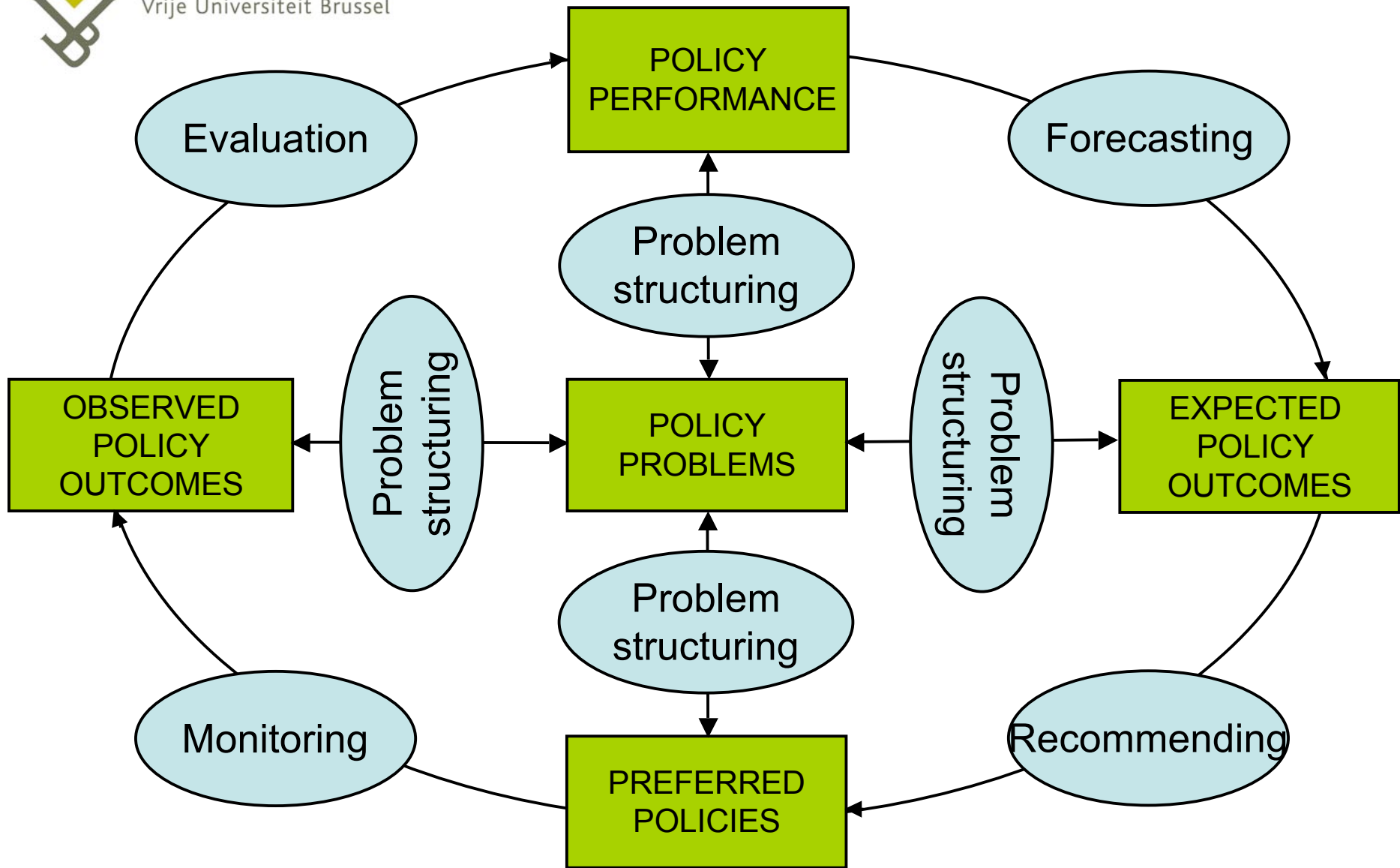
# Introduction

- Used expert interviews over last 15 years
  - Based on reading on
    - Qualitative research
    - Informant interviews
  - Experience but not systematized or methodologically grounded
- Methodological literature
  - Scarce, only few articles available
  - One book (Bogner, Littig, Menz)
- This presentation
  - Based on own experience
  - Systematized on the basis of literature on method
  - ‘Recognized’ much of my own experience



# Introduction

Project	Amount	Field	Main source	Other Methods
Media and Democracy Gabon	15	Political Analysis		Desk research (official, legal docs), literature study, content analysis
Development Cooperation in Higher Education	20	Policy Analysis Evaluation		Desk research (policy docs, project evaluations, etc) literature study, comparative analysis
Telecommunication Policy South Africa	35	Policy Analysis		Desk research (policy docs, project evaluations, etc), literature review, statistical evaluation
mCDN FP5 project	10	Business Strategy	X	Desk research, literature review
ITEA Mid term review	10 tel.	Project Evaluation	X	Desk research, project outcomes evaluation
eEurope Plus Indicators	15 tel.	Evaluation of indicators	X	Desk research
FP 5 IST Programme Evaluation	20	Project Evaluation		Desk research, project outcomes evaluation, survey
ePaper	5 (10)	Business Strategy	X	Literature review, Desk research





# Advantages of method

- Exploratory phase
  - Fast access to new or unknown field
  - Quick way to obtain specific information
  - Less time consuming than many other methods
- Experts
  - Have high insight in *aggregated* and/or *specific* knowledge
    - Processes, Group Behaviors, Strategies, etc.
    - Information difficult to explored by other methods
  - Often networked person
    - Easily leads to other interviews
  - Motivated persons
    - Often willing to cooperate and exchange
    - Problems of influencing less problematic



# Who is an expert?

- Expert according to Meuser & Nagel
  - Person who is responsible for the development, implementation or control of solutions/strategies/policies
  - Person who has privileged access to information about groups of persons or decision processes



# Who is an expert?

- Expert knowledge not neutral
  - Experts and counter experts
  - Experts are part of the societal debate
    - Have direct or indirect decisional power
  - Play a vital role in the definition of problems
  - Expert fields not neutral
    - Characterized by power relations
    - Processes of reproduction - 'conservative' towards renewal
- Important to keep in mind:
  - Selection of experts
  - Interviewing phase
  - Interpretation of interview texts

# Expert knowledge

- Three dimensions
  - Technical knowledge
    - Very specific knowledge in the field
    - Details on operations, laws, etc. influencing field
  - Process knowledge
    - Info on routines, specific interactions, processes
    - Expert has knowledge as she/he is directly involved
  - Explanatory knowledge
    - Subjective interpretations of relevance, rules, beliefs
    - Ideas and ideologies and their inconsistencies
    - Interviewee him/herself and his/her routines/thoughts focus of interview



# Methodological critique

- Knowledge obtained not neutral
  - Experts and counter experts
  - Interview setting influences information obtained
- Effects of interaction rather high
  - Procedures not rigorously standardized
  - Open non-structured dialog in which interviewer actively participates
  - Danger of anecdotal and illustrative ‘information’
  - Not inter-subjectively repeatable



# Methodological defense

## Bogner & Menz

- Argue for differentiation of expert interviews types
  - Explorative expert interviews - Technical knowledge
  - Systematizing expert interviews - Process knowledge
  - Theory generating expert interviews - Explanatory knowledge
- Argue for differentiation of interaction types
  - Interviewer as co-expert
  - Interviewer as expert outside of field
  - Interviewer as lay person
  - Interviewer as authority
  - Interviewer as confederate
  - Interviewer as possible critic
- Argue in favor of interpreting interaction effects as part of data production



# Interview types

## Explorative expert interview

- When used
  - Used as first orientation in new fields
  - Better structuring of problem
  - Used for preparing interview topic lists or surveys
- Interview preparation and practice
  - Can be very open and unstructured
  - Structure interviews on basis of basic topic list
  - No emphasis on comparability or aggregation of information
  - Topic lists can vary according to expertise interviewee



# Interview types

## Systematizing expert interview

- When used?
  - Focus on exclusivity of expert knowledge
    - When person has gained expertise in praxis
    - Based on expertise or exclusive position
  - Used for information which otherwise not accessible
  - Focus on comparability and aggregation
- Interview preparation and practice
  - Focus on systematic and full disclosure of information
  - Open more detailed topic list
    - However allow for interviewee to answer extensively
  - Different interviews follow same trajectory to be able to compare and aggregate data.



# Interview types

## Theory generating interview

- When used
  - Interviewee more than information source
  - Focus on subjective aspects of experts knowledge
  - Focus on motives, routines, implicit beliefs impacting on functioning of experts and systems
- Interview preparation and practice
  - Questions focus on motives, beliefs, routines of experts
  - Often related to the function of experts less on knowledge
  - Open questions
    - but often part of systematizing interviews
  - Different interviews follow same trajectory to be able to compare and aggregate data.



# Interaction types

## Interviewer as co-expert

- Dimension of typology
  - Knowledge level comparable
- Communication during interview
  - Symmetric, high level of interaction, many questions by expert
- Status of interviewer
  - Knowledge of terminology and field
- Style of questioning
  - Dialog, permanent questions, in depth questioning, intervening
- Advantages
  - High level of discussion and information generation
- Disadvantages
  - Remains within framework of field, technical details
- When used?
  - Explorative or systematizing
  - Facts and data oriented questions



# Interaction types

## Interviewer expert outside field

- Dimension of typology
  - Knowledge level of equal standing
- Communication during interview
  - Symmetric, high level of interaction, many questions by expert
- Status of interviewer
  - Knowledge of terminology and less of field
- Style of questioning
  - Dialog, permanent questions, in depth questioning, intervening
- Advantages
  - High level of discussion and information generation
  - High explanation of motives and orientation
- Disadvantages
  - Remains within framework of field, technical details
- When used?
  - Explorative or systematizing, facts and data oriented questions



# Interaction types

## Interviewer as lay person

- Dimension of typology
  - Low level of knowledge of the field
- Communication during interview
  - Asymmetric in favor of interviewee ⇨ monologue, paternalistic
- Status of interviewer
  - Low status of interviewer, low level of interest of interviewee
- Style of questioning
  - Broad questions which can generate longer answers
  - Naive subsequent questions
- Advantages
  - High level of confidence by interviewee ⇨ pressure to explain
- Disadvantages
  - Interviewer can not guide the interview
- When used?
  - Explorative interview, theory generating when focused on motives, norms,



# Interaction types

## Interviewer as authority

- Dimension of typology
  - Evaluator, higher field knowledge
- Communication during interview
  - Asymmetric in favor of interviewer ⇨ legitimation strategies by interviewee
- Status of interviewer
  - Institutional background, high expertise, power position
- Style of questioning
  - More authoritarian style of questioning
  - Frequent and critical subsequent questions
- Advantages
  - Expressive presentation of interviewee
- Disadvantages
  - Avoiding of certain topics, withholding information
- When used?
  - Not recommended but unavoidable when formally evaluating



# Interaction types

## Interviewer as confederate

- Dimension of typology
  - Same normative frame of thinking
- Communication during interview
  - Sharing of experiences, informal style of dialogue
- Status of interviewer
  - Personal relation, shared experiences
- Style of questioning
  - Informal style of questioning, Different types of questioning possible
- Advantages
  - High trust between partners
  - Access to confidential information ⇒ Agree on how to treat this type of info
- Disadvantages
  - Normative framework and assumptions not questioned
- When used?
  - Explorative, systematizing and theory generating



# Interaction types

## Interviewer as potential critic

- Dimension of typology
  - Different normative frame of thinking
- Communication during interview
  - Declining to answer, short answers, critical return questions
- Status of interviewer
  - Interviewers (or institutional) position known as 'critic'
- Style of questioning
  - Critical and biased questioning
  - No verbal and non-verbal confirmation by interviewer
- Advantages
  - Detailed explication of normative stance and assumptions
- Disadvantages
  - Disruption of dialogue
- When used?
  - Not recommended, can be interesting in theory generating interviews



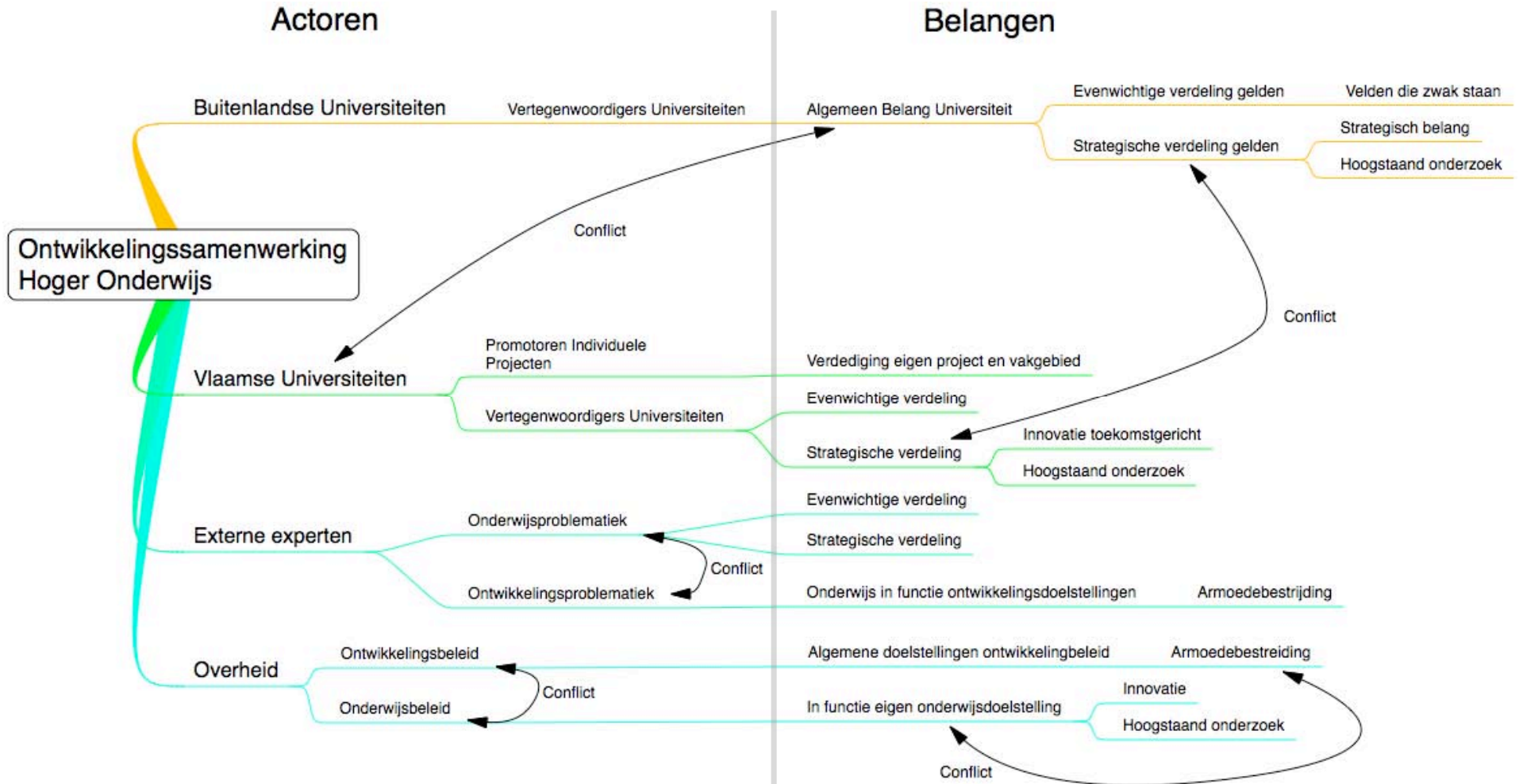
# How to Select interviewees

- Explorative and systematizing interviews
  - Different actors, points of views involved
  - Different aspects or fields impacting issues
  - Use interviews to snow bal selection
    - Ask for other experts and fields involved
    - Ask for experts with similar or deviant views
  - E.g. Business modeling
    - Interview different actors in value chain
  - E.g. Evaluation of FP 5
    - Interview project manager, financial officer, EU responsible for project, etc.
- Theory generating interviews
  - Interviewees in the same group
  - Sharing a common background or function
  - Makes generalizing about specific group possible
    - E.g telecom consultants as an epistemological group



# How to Select interviewees

## Development Cooperation in Higher Education





# How to Select the right interviewees

- Do not necessarily go for the top shots
  - Sometimes have a good overview
  - BUT may lack expert knowledge on issues of interest
  - Are over committed and thus less time to commit
  - Experts on lower level might have much more detailed knowledge
- How to find them
  - Snowballing
  - Specialized literature review
  - Specialized conference reviews
  - Directly call companies (although mostly less successfull)
  - Go through umbrella organisations



# How to Approach interviewees

- Are interviewees open to cooperate
  - Not uniform answer, but mostly positive
- Way you take up contact influences willingness
  - Approach actors only after first study of the field
  - Letter, eMail or Phone:
    - Explain what the goals, content and function of the research is
    - Convince by knowledge ⇨ detailed and well formulated mail
    - NOT: 'can we meet to talk', 'hi, I'm a first year student'
    - Explain own affiliation, client, background
    - In case of no response, ask again (phone)
    - Clearly fix timespan in advance e.g. 45 min - 1 hour



# How to Prepare interview

- Preparation
  - Become a quasi-expert
  - Only start after sound preparation
  - The younger you are, the better you have to prepare
    - Risk of sliding into lay person interview
    - Paternalistic non-disclosing attitude
- Interview guide or topic list
  - How to construct depends on type of interview
  - Basic open interview guide (main questions)
  - But also prepare some interjecting questions
- Interview questions
  - Systematizing interviews
    - Goal comparative analysis
    - Gathering empirical data
  - Theory generating interviews
    - Goal hypothesis falsification



# How to Conduct interview

- Before starting the interview
  - Start with outlining goal and set up of research
  - Explain scope of the interview
  - Explain processing of information
    - Aggregation per type of actor or sector
    - No individual citation or individual citation, etc.
  - Explain how you will handle confidential information
    - Send written interview, text or text excerpts with citations
- To Record or Not to Record
  - Ask whether interviewee agrees with recording
  - Explain why you are recording
    - E.g. Only for own recollection, No direct citations, etc.
  - If interviewee not confident, don't record
    - Will otherwise impact on information gathering



# How to Conduct interview

- Interacting during interview
  - Not important to stay 'neutral' as in qualitative interviews
  - Share some of your own knowledge, thoughts, insights
    - Will keep interviewee interested and balances positions
    - Methodologically not problematic
    - Expert is not easily influenced and is used to defend position
- Interaction depends on interaction type
  - As co-expert
    - Stimulate discussion, but leave enough room for open answers
    - Intervene when interviewee departs from subject
  - As critic
    - Intervene with more critical questions
  - Interview interaction types can be mixed
    - E.g. Start as co-expert and evolve towards critic
    - BUT never slip into conflicting positions
  - End with a 'cut the crap' section !!! STOP RECORDING !!!



# How to Transcribe

- General remarks
  - Discourse and how views are expressed not important
  - What is thematically similar or different is important
    - Generalization, systematization
    - Explaining differences
- Transcription
  - Write out spoken text or paraphrase
    - No need to take into account non-verbal communication, pitch of voice, etc. (Not a narrative interview)
  - Transcribe only relevant parts
    - Leave sidetracks out
    - Transcription and summarization of less well structured phrases
    - Respect the flow of text but identify different themes and thoughts in separate paragraphs
    - BUT represent the full meaning of interviews



# How to Label and ordering

- Labeling
  - Label each paragraph
    - Keywords, themes, issues, preformulated hypothesis
    - Multiple labels per paragraph
- Ordering
  - Sort paragraphs in separate document
  - According to themes
    - Clustering of themes and sub themes
  - According to actors
    - E.g value chain, different networks cable/telecom
  - Construction of table of contents



# How to Analyse

- At the level of themes
  - Write text looking for communalities, divergences, conflicting points of view
  - Which experts don't answer questions, don't hold opinions, etc.
  - Why?
- Over the themes
  - Generating insights between the themes
  - Identify relations
  - Build typologies and generalizations
- Integrate with literature and theory



# How to Process sensitive information

- Sensitive themes or sectors
  - Work in aggregated form
  - Use different interviews per type of actor
  - E.g. CDN in telecom: different interviews in different countries
  - Clearly indicate this BEFORE interview or brainstorm
- How to handle confidential information
  - Use for your own understanding
  - Use in aggregated form
    - (only if you do not disclose your sources)
  - State this in the methodological part



# How to End in beauty

- Feedback
    - Important and often forgotten
    - Send email or letter to thank afterwards
    - Send report or synthesis at the end
      - State this before the interview
      - Creates a win-win situation
      - Makes it possible to go back ...
- ... without having to blush



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