



CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS WITH CORPORATE ELITES OF INTERNATIONAL FIRMS

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QUALITATIVE IB RESEARCH

- early contributions used mixed methods
- qualitative research beset by low status
- few skills required = naive listening
- recent calls for more qualitative research



A NEW BOOK FORTHCOMING BY EDWARD ELGAR

A HANDBOOK OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

- covers the entire process of qualitative IB research
 - teaching and learning qualitative interviewing techniques
 - case studies, interviews, ethnographic studies
 - collaborative research
 - conducting qualitative research outside the Triad
 - quality of qualitative research
 - writing up and publishing qualitative research
- additional chapters are sought



PURPOSE OF THE PRESENTATION

- to depict the dynamic relationship between the researcher and the elite interviewee
- to examine the specific skills required when interacting with corporate elites
- insight into one dimension of the organisational context of IB research

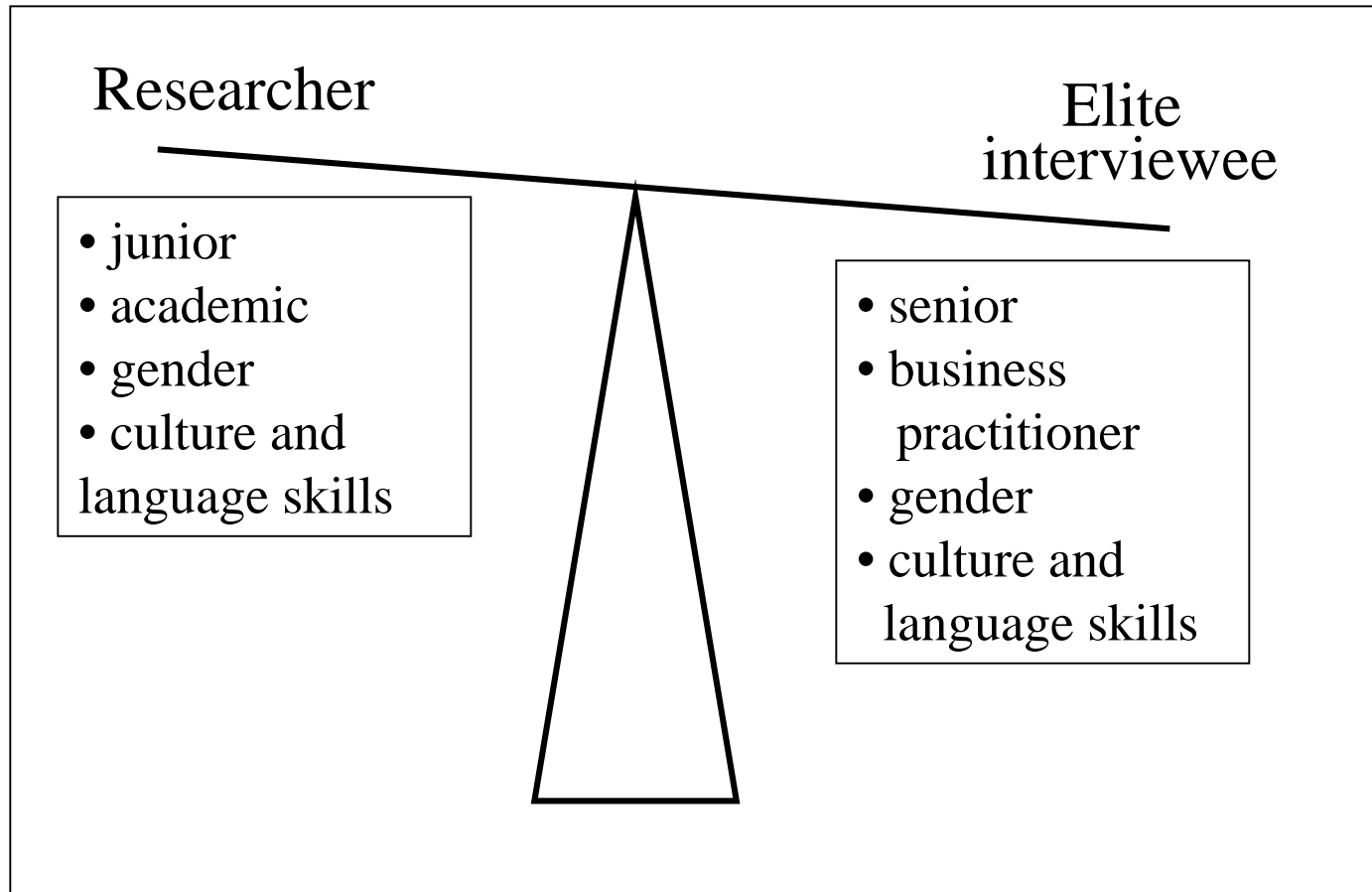


CORPORATE ELITES AS INFORMANTS

- a typical respondent in IB research
- definition of corporate elites
- focus on in-depth interviewing
- 4 IB projects in Finland and Australia
- 94 elite interviewees out of 248



THE INTERVIEW SITUATION BETWEEN THE RESEARCHER AND THE ELITE INTERVIEWEE





ACCESS TO CORPORATE ELITES

- access granted with limitations
- locating additional interviewees
 - cascading i.e. top-down process
 - snowballing
- professional gap



POWER OF CORPORATE ELITES

- interference in data collection and analysis
- seniority gap (in 86 interviews out of 94)
- gender gap (in 91 interviews out of 94)



OPENNESS OF CORPORATE ELITES

- method of access → openness
- using the interview situation for channelling information within the firm
- concerns of anonymity
- openness does not equal usefulness
- gender gap (40 interviews in Latin countries)
- culture gap (in 42 interviews out of 94)



FEEDBACK TO CORPORATE ELITES

- means of providing feedback
 - interview transcripts
 - executive summaries
 - seminar presentations
 - final draft of the report



POTENTIAL DANGERS OF ELITE INTERVIEWING

- selective and partial access
 - censorship of the interview guide
 - ‘hostage syndrome’
 - ambushing of interview
 - hostile feedback
 - becoming an unpaid consultant
- jeopardizing validity and reliability of findings



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSING CORPORATE ELITES

- use a mix of sampling methods
- stress academic neutrality, reliability and professional competence
- adopt a business-like approach
- present the pay-off of the project
- have the insight of an insider and the neutrality of an outsider



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BALANCING POWER OF ELITES

- treat the interview as an intellectual discussion distinct from a business meeting; create the space for dialogue and reflection
- be a sounding board for new ideas and a facilitator of elites' own thinking



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENCOURAGING OPENNESS OF CORPORATE ELITES

- balance the roles of a spy and a therapist
- use the position of a foreigner and benefit from the cultural gap
- maintain a critical stance by being an outsider
- avoid using interpreters when possible



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECEIVING FEEDBACK FROM CORPORATE ELITES

- manage with care the important relationship with corporate elites, especially
 - language barriers
 - internal power struggles
- send the final draft for factual verification; be open to possibility of obtaining additional data



CONCLUSIONS

- seeking to improve our knowledge of data collection processes with elite interviews
- value of non-elites acknowledged → incorporating elites only when the research question suggests so
- conducting successful in-depth interviews with corporate elites requires particular skills from the researcher