

INTERVIEWING RELUCTANT RESPONDENTS: STRIKES, HENCHMEN AND GAELIC GAMES

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Abstract

This paper deals with interviewing reluctant respondents. The analysis is used to construct a process oriented model of respondent rapport and empathy. By assessing respondent rapport in a reflective way the paper contributes to the sociology of knowledge generation and the construction of respondent reality of complex social phenomena. Using the authors' reflective experiences of a particular interview episode the stages of rapport building in the researcher-respondent relationship are assessed, providing guidance and lessons for future researchers. The limitations of the approach are considered and suggestions for future research are made.

KEYWORDS: Qualitative interviews; narrative analysis; respondent reluctance; respondent rapport; industrial relations

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1. INTRODUCTION

Qualitative organisational research incorporates many methods, none of which are easily reduced to a simple formula or a prescribed set of instruments (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). Qualitative research methods are shaped by ontological and theoretical perspectives: anthropology, economics, sociology or postmodernism, to name a few. If there is a purpose to qualitative research it is about linking events and meanings during the construction of a social reality, as experienced by organisational members (Van Maanen, 1998:xxi). To achieve such a goal is acknowledged to be extremely challenging (Gephart, 2004:460). Some of the more typical organisational research methods include single or multiple case studies. Ethnographic and observational forms of data collection and analysis are commonly deployed in the case study, as are different types of interviewing (unstructured, semi-structured and/or closed interviews).

An understating of the nature and objectives for interviewing is important. At its core is the construction of talk between interviewer and respondent (Kvale, 1996). However the way talk is interpreted varies between positivist, emotional, post-modern and constructionist types of interview (Silverman, 2006). This epistemological variability raises a number of issues concerning respondent engagement and rapport building. At one extreme the interview seeks to record respondent details and behaviors in positivist terms; akin to what Van Maanen (1988) calls realistic tales from the field. At the other extreme the qualitative interview is both iterative and constructionist in which respondents are viewed as active subjects rather than passive objects; what Van Maanen (1988) describes as the more complex interview interaction that charts impressionistic tales. The latter perspective resonates with the association between the qualitative interview and ethnography: the combination of the ethnographer's 'lived experience' with the interviewer's 'verbal and observational' interpretations of social reality (Warren, 2001). Thus the type and nature of qualitative interviewing is quite diverse: difficult, uneven and at times problematic (Bourne & Jenkins, 2005; Silverman, 2006).

This paper focuses on a key incident that was encountered during a large scale research project that used interviews. In the incident, an important interview that started with interviewee disengagement was later transformed, through rapport building, into a successful interview with high levels of rapport. The interview in

question was turned-around from one of almost complete disengagement by interviewees, to one characterized with rich and insightful data coupled with respondent empathy. This involved the researchers being sensitive to subtle cues and adjusting to evolving circumstances by providing prompts and exploiting opportunities to help develop rapport. The research method used is an ex-post facto narrative analysis of the interview incident. The ex post design can be problematic and a six-step procedure was used to analyse the data in a systematic and rigorous way. This is action-based research by reflecting on 'real experiences from the field'. In this way the data can be used to inform theory and provide guidance for future researchers who may encounter reluctant respondents.

The paper is structured in six sections. Following this introduction, section 2 considers the importance of rapport in relation to different qualitative interview types. It identifies several gaps in our understanding of the processes of rapport, and considers the utility of adopting a narrative perspective to illustrate unanticipated respondent reluctance and even distrust. Section 3 explains the research method along with a description of the case study organisation and the interview context. Section 4 provides a narrative analysis of the interview episode. It shows how a two-person research team encountered reluctant interviewees and the tactical responses used to overcome the adverse situation. In section 5 the interview narrative is further scrutinized to develop a process orientated model of rapport. Finally, section 6 concludes by noting the limitations within this paper and suggesting possible areas of future research.

2. THE SOCIOLOGY OF RAPPORT AND QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

The extant literature provides important insights concerning the epistemological importance of rapport in social scientific inquiry, particularly the political and power-centered dynamics surrounding rapport-building. Take, for instance, the shop floor workers in the ethnographic studies by Roy (1958), Beynon (1973) or Buroway (1979). These studies reflect what Giddens (1979) alludes to as the sociological problem of melting structure and agency which has to be organized and analysed by authors of qualitative research. It is shown, for instance, that while workers occupy a subordinate position within a complex hierarchy, the 'hidden nature' of what workers do in their daily job stands in stark contrast to the structural rigidities of a bureaucratic corporation. Social exchange

theory predicts that interpersonal attraction can help establish bonds of identity between subjects (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994). Wilkinson, Dundon & Grugulis (2007) illustrate the importance of identity when utilising informal and unstructured conversations to help strengthen dialogue with owner-managers of small-to-medium sized enterprises. Demographic features such as occupation, age and gender have also been shown to help cement intergroup interaction and social cohesion between researcher and respondent (Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992; Barker, 1993). Without such a contextual and deep understanding of social identification and its relevance to respondent reality, theoretical insights can all too often be limited in qualitative research papers that pay scant attention to the processes shaping the researcher-respondent relationship (Van Maanen, 1998; Gephart, 2004).

Respondent rapport has been defined in a variety of ways. Some authors view rapport as 'frank and open discussion' (Goudy & Potter, 1975), while others see it as a degree of acceptance or cooperation on the part of the interviewee to a research project (Blohm, 2007). Lavin & Maynard (2001) argue that the concept of rapport is difficult to measure and as such propose a normative interpretation based on the attitudes and behaviors displayed in the interview itself. For Fontana & Frey (2000), such behavioural attitudes ought to connect and engage with the language and culture of the respondents in a way that helps to gain a level of trust. Silverman (2006:110) suggests this is about being able to see the world from the respondents' viewpoint. Thus respondent rapport is recognized as a particularly important element in both standardized and less structured interviewing (Fowler & Mangione, 1990). Following these broad interpretations, rapport is defined as 'involving the exchange of meaningful dialogue and demonstrable behaviors so as to shed light on the social world of those who live and experience the phenomenon being studied'.

The literature also alludes to the broader and more general significance of respondent rapport for the qualitative interview. In some areas this includes practical advice and guidance for the researcher and ethnographer (Kvale, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). When embarking on a qualitative interview the researcher needs to be aware of the situation and culture in which the respondent is located, with advice to be polite, display courtesy and facilitate talk without judgement or critical opinion in order to establish trust (Silverman, 2006). Some of the positive outcomes from such actions include a richness of data that can 'rehumanize research' (Gephart,

2004:455). For example, in Brewer's (1993) research with the Northern Ireland police force, rapport was improved through personal self-deprecation by 'appearing' to condone vulgar banter that facilitated a greater degree of insider status with the police officers being studied. In another example, Mandell (1988) minimized the cognitive dissonance between herself and pre-school children by sitting in a sand-box with respondents. Children who were distrustful came to view Mandell as being closer to a child-like figure rather than an adult. The literature is equally illustrative of the potential adverse outcomes of rapport diminution. Adler & Adler (2001) illustrate how an interview that commenced on the premise of high trust and rapport with a respondent who was the associate of a known drug dealer quickly deteriorated. When sensitive questions were asked, answers were avoided and the assumed bond of identity between researcher and respondent was found waning. Equally significant can be a relationship between interviewee and interviewer that is too close and personal (Warren, 2001). For example, over-rapport can run the risk of the interviewees providing information that is thought to be expected or wanted by the researcher. In such situations the respondent may provide information that is assumed the interviewer wants to hear (Silverman, 2006).

Despite these insights there remain several gaps in our knowledge about the processes of rapport-building. Arguably, there is a need for a more rounded and detailed understanding of the processes involved in propagating interviewer-interviewee rapport within the interview itself. Given there are alternative epistemological traditions as well as fundamentally different types of interviews, it is unclear how rapport and respondent affinity can be understood more clearly across and between research traditions. For example, the three different interview perspectives of positivism, emotionalist and constructionist (Silverman, 2006:118-20) depict a number of implications concerning respondent rapport. It may be posited that rapport-building would be of minimal strategic importance in a positivist paradigm where emphasis is placed on the factual accumulation of knowledge with validity and reliability considered paramount. In contrast, an emotionalist approach to qualitative interviewing would seek to elicit authentic experiences of reality according to respondents. As Silverman (2006:123) notes: "The key here is to obtain rapport with respondents and to avoid manipulating them". In this interview type, researchers may relate their own experiences of the phenomenon under investigation as a tool to elicit rapport and build trust. Both positivists and emotionalists seek to capture from

interviewees different aspects of a social reality: the former 'facts' and the latter 'emotions'. What both have in common is an underlying view that respondents are 'objects' of the research process, and accordingly ascribe alternative reasoning and degrees of importance to the role of respondent rapport.

A third interview type, constructionism, attempts to view respondents as 'subjects' who share their meanings and interpretations of social reality not only through words and text (what they say), but also how a discourse is communicated during the interview (Ellis & Berger, 2001). This has direct implications for the process of rapport-building in the interview itself. Constructionist interviews are concerned with a different interpretation of reality from positivist and emotionalist approaches. The goal is not just thick description of 'what' interviewees describe, but more importantly 'how' they talk and the spatial location of their reality (Czarniawska, 2001). Silverman (2006) further suggests that if there are skills involved in a successful interview, then these are shared by both the researcher and interviewee. This raises implications concerning respondent-researcher identity when too close a relationship can result in over-rapport that detracts from data retrieval.

In addition to the implications for respondent rapport that arise from different interview approaches, other ambiguities concern the finer nuances of the process of rapport-building and information disclosure. For example, the very act of seeking to establish respondent rapport presents the researcher with a dilemma that is often underdeveloped in mainstream texts (Kvale, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Bell, 2007). On the one hand the researcher is eager for the interviewee to convey information and extrapolate meaning and understanding about the problem under investigation, whether for fact-finding or humanistic meanings of reality. Practical advice would suggest that the interviewee ought to be put at ease and reassured about their role and confidentiality. However, in many situations respondents may be unable or unwilling to reveal the type and depth of data required, either because they don't know the detail of the information sought, or the data required is deemed to be too sensitive to reveal to an outside party. Thus disclosure from certain organisational members may be difficult, even when there is the existence of solid rapport. For example, in organisational research concerned with the business world it may be that respondents cannot disclose information because it is commercially sensitive, and no matter how much rapport is developed, such information is simply out of bounds

to the interviewer. In itself such situational twists and turns elucidate the origins of evidence and/or its non disclosure by respondents (Gephart, 2004).

An additional concern is that the qualitative interview and ethnographic research paradigm are far from neutral. The selection of research methods determines the way talk is interpreted and the meanings of reality that have a link to historical and socio-political influences (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). The choice of methods poses challenges for the qualitative researcher seeking to explain respondent meanings and constructions of a social world. Sociological research in particular is concerned with providing valid and robust insights about a given phenomenon. Constructionist or emotional perspectives, as noted above, are less concerned with theoretical replication than with the methodology of knowledge interpretation according to the experiences of those who live the phenomenon (Shah & Corley, 2006). As Brown & Wright (1994:163) argue, this is what Sidney & Beatrice Webb (1932) referred to as ‘discovering abstruse out-of-the-way facts’: a central objective of which can be found at the heart of many of the seminal workplace relations texts (Roy, 1952; Gouldner, 1955; Beynon, 1973). Among others, Van Maanen (1988) illustrates how very diverse stories, or ‘tales from the field’, can stress alternative meanings that have further implications for the processual understanding of rapport within the interview.

Realistic tales are distant and factual interpretations of attitudes and behaviors in which the (positivist) researcher often appears removed from events. Here rapport is little more than a stage to acquire, triangulate and validate factual details of a given phenomenon or pre-supposed related variable. Personalized narratives tend to take the form of first-person story-telling akin to the humanism of the emotional interview paradigm. The researcher often articulates some crisis or barrier that the research had to overcome or seeks to convey personalized experiences to construct a deeper interactional interview, adding a level of richness and analysis over and above fact-finding. Rapport here is especially important for the interviewee to connect with the interviewer and the research agenda. Finally, Van Maanen (1988) describes impressionistic tales from the field. These tend to create a fusion of researcher and respondent dialogue in ways that extrapolate complex interactions of social reality, not only through talk but also observation. Similarly, Silverman (2006:86) argues that ‘treating

what is seen as data' can be highly informative and the observation of an environment may help build rapport during interview conversations: "unfortunately, we have all become a little reluctant to use our eyes as well as our ears" (Silverman, 2006: 87).

It is not that any one interview type is superior to another in terms of knowledge generation. The point is the researcher may encounter influences such as voice, tone, body language and a physical context that point to different interpretations of knowledge that relate to competing perspectives about the importance of rapport as a central feature of the qualitative interview (Kvale, 1996). In summary, then, respondent rapport is considered crucially important to all types of qualitative interviewing, although various approaches point towards alternative implications for rapport-building. While there exists a rich bounty of sociological analysis that provides insights into rapport and researcher-interviewee interaction concerning social reality and knowledge generation, there exist gaps in our understanding about the stages and processes of respondent rapport within the interview itself.

3. RESEARCH METHOD AND THE CASE STUDY ORGANISATION

This paper explores a key incident during an interview where the reluctance of respondents was transformed into strong rapport that elicited meaningful and insightful data. The interview was part of a much larger research project, explained below. An ex post facto research procedure was used to tease out the possible motives as to why the respondents were reluctant and to examine in greater detail the processes of rapport building during the interview itself. In this section of the paper the focal company and interview incident is briefly described, before explaining the ex post facto research design.

The Case Study Company

The research project from which the narrative is taken was concerned with public policy in the area of employee information and consultation. The interview is from a case study that was part of a much larger research project that included 15 organisations in total (for details see Dundon, Curran, Maloney & Ryan, 2006). The project was multi-disciplinary and involved interviewing multiple role holders at different levels to explore complex social processes at the enterprise level. The research was concerned with the factors influencing change management as

a result of European employment regulations (e.g. the 2002 European Directive for Employee Information and Consultation and its subsequent transposition into Irish legislation in 2006). Thus the questions asked and the methodology used was determined by a changing regulatory environment for employee voice that was occurring in Ireland (and Europe) at the time.

It has been argued that the meanings and interpretations of complex social relationships can never be fully understood until the research has commenced at the organisational level (Gouldner, 1955). Several criteria were used to select suitable case studies for the original research project, including coverage of organizations from different sectors of economic activity, variation in company size, union and non-union plants, and single and multi-site operations. The case study organisation is Waterford Wedgwood Crystal, based in the Republic of Ireland. The organisation commenced as a craft business under name Wedgwood China in England in 1759, and the Waterford Crystal brand started in 1783 in Ireland. The interviewees were the on-site union officials of a well-known trade union, the (then) Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (AT&GWU).

Waterford Crystal and its workforce have experienced significant change and re-organisation throughout its history, with the most recent episode in 2009 resulting in workers occupying the plant in opposition to proposed job cuts and the appointment of a receiver to run the business. Conflictual labor relations have been enduring feature of the plant with major redundancies, wage freezes and changes to work practices introduced during the 1980s and 1990s. The consequences of these changes culminated in a bitter and protracted 14 week strike in 1990, during which time the on-site union convenor (e.g. the principal interviewee for this research) was sacked by management for public speeches that intimated threats to the company owner, Sir Anthony O'Reilly. After a public apology by the union convenor on a local radio programme, the dismissal was revoked as part of the return to work agreement. By way of illustration, the situation was explained (following the establishment of rapport and open dialogue) by the senior of the two union convenors:

“They sacked ‘J’ (union convenor) half way through strike. We had a public rally in the town, and ‘J’ decided to go with his own speech – which said O’Reilly and his henchmen are no longer safe on the street of Waterford

They sacked him for inciting violence against the owner They then refused to meet us because we kept him on the negotiating committee What were we to do? We couldn't call the workforce out in support cos we we're all already on strike! He got his job back after a half-baked apology on the radio and because it looked like the company refused to meet the negotiating committee who'd been elected by the workforce"

[fieldnote transcripts]

The AT&GWU has a tradition as a militant rather than moderate union. It is perhaps the only union in Ireland that publicly opposes the Irish government's partnership [1] approach to industrial relations, believing vehemently that the concept of partnership is a euphemism for managerial control and the exercise of power over workers. The union is also suspicious of employment regulations that emanate from a supra-national body such as the European Commission, believing instead in free collective bargaining rather than what it would term a form of collusion with state institutions that do no more than support and prop-up a capitalist system for employer-dominated interests.

The preceding backdrop is more than a summary description of the selection of a case study. It provides a contextualized canvas about the environment and sensitivity to issues that are likely to shape respondent interpretations of reality and the meanings ascribed to the core issues under investigation. It is also worth noting at this point that the above description of the organisation and its contextual legacy was only possible from the gathering of adequate information from respondents, which was far from evident during the opening of the interview. The revelation and extracted quote about the sacking of a senior union convener and his reinstatement is all the product of high level engagement that occurred post-rapport.

The Ex Post Facto Research Design

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000:206) define *ex post* research as a method in which a researcher examines the effects of an event retrospectively to establish causation or illuminate meaning. It is a research procedure that is more common in areas when data are more difficult to manipulate; for example, establishing the causes of a road accident or research concerning people's health when variables and events cannot be easily controlled (Cohen,

Manion & Morrison, 2000). There are limitations with such an ex post approach for examining respondent rapport. Research about qualitative interview methods is not constrained by the same sort of legal or ethical issues as road accidents or health. It is arguable that the variables and experiences can be repeated under different conditions without harm to others.

To minimize these limitations a structured and systematic ex post procedure was followed. The first step was to define the problem. It was decided that the severity of the experience of respondent reluctance was genuine and sufficiently significant to warrant retrospective examination. Further, given that respondent reluctance was unanticipated and experienced, the problem displayed a higher degree of 'realness' than might be the case with other experimental-type methods. The next step was to decide whether an understating of the problem could advance knowledge about the theory and/or practice of qualitative research interviewing. Through reflection and retrospective assessment, it became evident there were lessons other qualitative interviewers could learn from the event and its subsequent analysis. A third step was to consider a sufficiently robust diagnostic approach that offered the capacity to evaluate the data. The diagnostic instrument selected was a retrospective narrative analysis of the interview episode. A subsequent step was to then undertake a review of the theoretical literature to provide a rationale for the themes and issues to be addressed (see section 2 above). A fifth step in our ex post procedure was to assess whether the form of data were of sufficient quality and depth to facilitate categorizations and thematic manipulation. This included scrutinizing detailed interview transcripts, researcher field notes and an ethnographic experienced encounter. Finally, the data were analysed and examined several times over. In summary, the ex post research method involved a six step procedure to help minimize the limitations noted above. Taken together, the steps used to construct and analyse the data into discrete and manipulative categorizations enabled the development of process-oriented model of respondent rapport, which is reported later in Section 5 of the paper.

In addition to the structural procedure for *ex post* research, there are also a number of practical lessons and epistemological advantages of assessing a 'lived experience'. To begin with, qualitative research methods are by nature highly variable and do not always follow a straightforward linear pattern. As Van Maanen (1998:xi)

argues, qualitative research makes room for and indeed insists on uncovering and explaining the unanticipated. Reflecting on qualitative research data helps create a stronger iterative process in which research questions and objectives are revisited in order to reshape and integrate data with theory and analysis (Gephart, 2004:460). By analysing the interview episode (respondent reluctance) and seeking to integrate the data with a narrative approach, the paper provides the scope and opportunity to develop what Van Maanen (1998:xxiii) terms the 'personal voice of a situated author' rather than the 'omniscient voice of science'. In summary, narrating from a retrospective event can inform knowledge and understanding and it can suggest practical guidance to those researchers faced with similar circumstances at some point in the future. Above all, it fits with the call for 'nonhegemonic approaches' to what constitutes organisational research (Amis & Silk, 2008).

The use of narrative and reflective analysis is not new and there exists a rich pedigree in the field of qualitative research (Becker & Geer, 1969; Van Maanen, 1988; Ellis & Berger, 2001; Czarniawska, 2001). It illustrates the significance of the researcher becoming immersed in the respondents' world through talk and observation in order to understand a rich, complicated and varied phenomenon (Linstead, 1994; Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Silverman, 2007). Narratives are also found in some of the seminal organisational workplace studies: a tradition that also fits with Mintzberg's (1979) call for 'rich description' as a prerequisite for theory building, postulating a number of analytical advantage points. First, narrative analysis assumes a degree of symbolic realism that people create their own world and reality. As such, a narrative perspective provides the scope and space to evaluate subjective constructions of reality through the authors' literacy judgement. Related to this is that narrative analysis captures competing interpretations of reality that is well suited to complex social world phenomenon, such as the wage-effort exchange between capital and labor. Czarniawska (2001) makes the point here that the creation and interpretation of a subjective reality can be liberating to some but limiting to others. Thus narrative approaches have the capacity to incorporate power-centered bias, variability of meanings and interpretations to capture respondent experiences.

A third advantage is that in the domain of organisational and workplace relations, narrative analysis can be multidimensional and multi-theoretical. In Van Maanen's vernacular, narrative approaches can occupy 'tales *of*

the field' as well as 'tales *from* the field' (Czarniawska, 2001). The 'of' can be interpreted as research written as a storyline whereas the 'from' is research that collects organisational stories, not only offering insights about the respondents interpretations of reality but also providing useful communication tools that bring concepts to life that can aide teaching and learning. Fourth, narrative research approaches have become broader in accentuating the processes underpinning and shaping the construction and meaning of reality through storytelling. This is not just about *what* is said but also *how* it is said: drawing on the interview as a journey that encapsulates both respondent and researcher experiences that mediates the construction and subsequent interpretation of a reality. Finally, a narrative framework for knowledge generation and dissemination allows researchers the opportunity to communicate evidence and theory through more innovative and creative tools that merge the subjective and objective forms of data collection and analysis. Moreover, interviews about employment and the commercial world can be sensitive and controversial. Such research is rarely objective or bias-free in the sense of natural science: it is shaped and influenced by prior assumptions, socialisation and socio-political events affecting the respondent and researcher (McAdam, Leonard, Henderson & Hazlett, 2008).

4. THE INTERVIEW NARRATIVE

The interview narrative in this section of the paper describes the encountered interview episode of respondent reluctance. It identifies six phases, from an opening phase, wherein the researchers encountered reluctant interviewees, through the use of diversionary response tactics to engage with the respondents to establish early bonds to develop trust and rapport. The six phases are integrated into more discrete stages of a process model of respondent rapport in section 5.

Phase I: Opening the Interview

As with many organisational research projects, obtaining agreement and permission from management is crucial to gain access. It was management that agreed to participate in the research study reported here and the trade union's involvement came at their insistence. Thus it was the company management who introduced us to a disgruntled, stony-faced duo of union convenors on a bleak mid-November morning. Worse still, the interview

commenced in what was clearly a foreign environment: the HR Manager's plush office. The atmosphere was cold and the reason obvious: we were 'identified' with management rather than as independent researchers.

As soon as the HR Manager departed, we (the researchers) were left in little doubt that the interviewees felt that these two unwelcome academics had been imposed on them at the behest of management. The uncomfortable atmosphere in the room signaled to us that the interview about to commence would likely be neither of long duration nor provide the anecdotes and illustrations required to get to the grips with complex social processes surrounding union-management consultation. We briefly introduced ourselves and the objectives of research project. Despite our attempt to initiate and progress to the more substantive parts of the interview schedule, it was apparent at this point that the respondents were just 'going through the motions', of complying with managements' request to partake in the research. For example, questions and subsequent probes designed to facilitate open-ended responses were met with succinct affirmations or negations. Interviewees occasionally looked at each other and offered (to themselves) gestures of frustration: shrugged-shoulders in response to our requests for illustrations; raised eye-brows of disapproval and the periodic sigh of disdain at our presence. Any information furnished provided neither insight nor the elaborated extrapolations about union-management consultation that we sought. These sorts of verbal and non-verbal clues can be signals for researchers in the future who may encounter reluctant respondents. We return to this point later in the paper when considering a range of possible tactics and guidelines to help overcome reluctant interviewees. What was immediately apparent to us is that the unfavorable situation needed to be retrieved to afford any possibility to elicit the quality of data we required for our research project. The minutes passed by interminably and we both felt this awkward situation could not continue. The choice was stark: change tack or depart empty-handed.

Phase II: Finding a 'Switch'

At this stage of the interview we were in desperate need of a diversion and the conversation was diverted away from the structured interview schedule of questions. "In the absence of decent Guinness around here, is there any water" asked the Irish researcher. This rather blunt language was purposeful as it facilitated a brief discussion around what constitutes 'decent' Guinness². As water was being dispensed from the HR Manager's own

personal dispenser in his office, the second (non-Irish) researcher invoked a further diversion, suggesting that “such important matters as ‘decent’ Guinness might be best resolved over a coffee, not water”. The coffee option was agreeable to the union representatives. More importantly, this necessitated a trip to the factory canteen, and as such a much bigger diversion than was hoped for ensued as the interview was relocated to a more neutral venue.

As we sipped the hot coffee a minor, but interesting turn of events occurred. The second researcher, a native of Liverpool, had a notable scouse³ accent. This elicited a mild sense of curiosity on the part of the union convenors: “what brought you from Liverpool to Ireland?” The question paved the way for dialogue to continue, albeit unrelated to the aims of the research project. This diversion of ‘off-topic’ talk helped facilitate the flow of dialogue on a more natural plane. The interviewees commented that their union’s general secretary, based in London, was also from Liverpool. This brief interaction signaled the first semblance of a softening in the interviewees’ position. The relationship atmosphere was noticeably less frosty. As we did not know how much time the interviewees had available we took a gamble that time spent ‘off-topic’ on relationship building was necessary, and we hoped for subsequent pay-off if we could eventually get back ‘on-topic’. This is of course a risk and one that can only be assessed by the contextual situation and flow of discourse during an interview episode.

Phase III: Developing Early Bonds

The more neutral canteen location and attendant social banter offered a reprieve from the respondents’ suspicion of our motives and their general disengagement from the research project. A more fluid conversation surfaced in the less thorny environment. Conscious of the significance of the improved atmosphere, we realized that it was crucial to be able to further bond in the hope that eventually a level of rapport would develop that could be more conducive to the achievement of the research objectives. The transformation from a reluctant to more supportive atmosphere needed to be decisive. At this point it is worth noting that prior to the case study visit, publically available information had been collected on the AT&GWU at Waterford Crystal. Thus we were to some degree

familiar with the union, its broad policy objectives and the company's position concerning things like social partnership and its link to employee voice and union participation.

Over coffee, we divided our attention between the individual convenors. The Liverpoolian chatted with the more senior union convenor on the general business environment and difficult conditions facing Waterford Crystal. The Irish researcher spoke with the second union official⁴, who was known to be a strong critic of the government's partnership approach to employee participation. The conversation remained 'off-topic' and steered towards general social conversation. The Irish interviewer's knowledge of recent Gaelic sporting events that had occurred the day before the interview offered the common ground to open-up dialogue in new and more engaging ways that helped develop confidence and a social bond of identity between researcher and respondent.

The local Gaelic hurling⁵ team had lost an important game to its neighbors, and supporters of both teams worked side-by-side in the plant. The Irish researcher commenced the discourse with a simple open question: "So what went wrong yesterday?". The tenor of the question meant that no further elaboration was required. "Not up to it", replied the Marxist union official. "It must be tough losing to them", replied the Irish researcher. "Yes. It's bad in here today. It's been going on all morning. I'm bloody sick of all the slagging⁶", said the union convenor. The dialogue opened up a new opportunity to show empathy: "Ye had your chances though. The rest of us were for ye. They're an arrogant shower" suggested the Irish interviewer, implying the neighboring team won only after a hard and proud display of sporting prowess by the union convenor's preferred team. The conversation paved the way for further non-threatening dialogue: "So where are you from?" asked the union convenor to the Irish researcher. As he explained his background, where he was born and his father's long-held distaste of the team that had won and caused the militant union official such discomfort, the first semblance of a bond was beginning to emerge. Tactically, this stage helped create a bond and some resemblance of credibility for ourselves as independent researchers.

Phase IV: Getting Back On-Topic

In the canteen the conversation stayed off the topic of the research and moved from Gaelic games to what life was like in Galway⁷. The union convenors were still curious about how a Liverpoolian came to work in an Irish university. The conversation eventually turned to how the Liverpoolian had once been a union steward and had previous dealings with union officials of several unions in Britain. The scouse researcher's personal journey from union rep to university lecturer was related. Mutual acquaintances in the labor movement and common linkages to the political left were identified and exchanged. Existent researchers' sympathies with worker concerns and empathy for union organising were swiftly and firmly established.

The nature of the conversation was now much more natural and fluid, and this signaled an important development in the interview. We now had the potential to retrieve the situation and were no longer perceived as being identified with management or on the side of the company. A reconciliation of interests and a degree of respondent identification with the research agenda was evident. Our status had appeared to shift from that of a 'perceived outsider' to one of 'qualified insider' for the purpose of the interview. Immediately we took the opportunity to repeat our research objectives and provide some further elaboration as to our motives in conducting the research. At this point, we indicated the need to proceed to the substantive topic of the research. The difference, however, was we resumed not in the canteen over coffee nor the HR Manager's office with its personal water dispenser: at the invitation of the convenors we entered into the confines of the union's own office elsewhere in the plant. We had established a sufficient degree of empathy and trust that the interview could proceed along the lines as originally hoped. We had, however, lost a lot of agenda time in reconciling the situation and by developing empathy. The alternative was worse: incomplete data and shallow insight.

Phase V: Capitalizing on Benevolent Relations

The interview recommenced on a much more engaged, interactive plane. Gone were the curt, uninformative answers and sighs of disapproval or frustration from the respondents. Instead were fully fleshed out stories, relevant and often amusing anecdotes and elaborations of the union convenors' concerns for the company's

future and rich illustrations of the affection for their craft and locality. Their disillusionment with, as they saw it, management inadequacies and the detail of how ‘information and consultation’ worked in practice emerged trenchantly. One particularly interesting revelation was the union’s acute sensitivity to the competitive market environment faced by the company. The non-militant union convenor explained their role in calling management to account:

“We don’t want to be the financial controller of the company [and] management can’t be held responsible for economic downturns or war. But if competitors are up then we have the data so management is held responsible”. [fieldnote transcripts]

Both respondents were in broad agreement with one another when they further elaborated on the need for the company to be competitive and responsive to global market pressures. Yet they felt that there was a clear boundary beyond which the union and the workforce could not cooperate and support managerial decisions that would ultimately have a detrimental impact on workers. The more militant union convenor added:

“If people give out that a strike or disagreements will shut the place down, then shut it down. You have to stop somewhere, they can’t take it all” [fieldnote transcripts]

The interview was uncovering what Webb & Webb (1932) describe as the ‘abstruse’: the deeper social dynamics and micro-politics associated with power relations between capital and labor through a more engaging discourse than we had encountered hitherto. The conversations were more fluid, detailed and anecdotal. This now facilitated the collection of data that enabled a meaningful level of knowledge generation and interpretation about the substantive aspects of the research agenda.

Equally important, data was conveyed during the interview that painted an entirely different picture of the respondents themselves: certainly a more amusing character emerged than would have been gleaned from the opening stages of the interview. The convenors’ understanding of and sensitivity to the commercial and global

market pressures faced by Waterford Crystal were articulate. Alongside this they conveyed a deep-rooted passion for their craft, their union members and a qualified respect for management and a strong loyalty to the brand of Waterford Crystal. A short example illustrates the significance of the data now emerging. The Marxist convenor talked about the craft of glass-blowing and the making of well-known commissioned crystalware; for example, winners' trophies for the tennis masters series and worldwide professional golf association tournaments. The militant union rep revealed a loyalty to his craft and a commitment to his company unsurpassed elsewhere in the 15 case studies associated with the research project. Waterford Crystal was commissioned to design and make a gigantic crystal ball to mark the beginning of the new millennium in New York's Times Square. The militant union convenor recalled how he and his family continued with their New Year's Eve celebrations until 5am on the morning of New Year's Day⁸. The reason for the late night was their desire to view the televised pictures of the millennium celebrations as they occurred in New York; their fingers-crossed that all went well with the precious crystal ball crafted by union members at the Waterford plant. He proudly explained that he was quite emotional viewing what the workers of Waterford Crystal had made and its public display on a world stage.

The example serves to illustrate how the direction of an interview can affect the depth of information and the meanings of a social reality. The precise detail about the New York millennium ball was to large extent peripheral to the questions designed for the research project about regulating for employee participation. Yet it also captured a social complexity: a Marxist union ideologue who also interpreted a countervailing understanding about pragmatic business issues and the desire for future company success. Moreover, the level of rapport that had been established meant there was a new dynamic to the interview. Significantly, there was a level of trust between interviewer and interviewee which uncovered important stories that added a deeper and richer explanatory power to our understanding of how these interviewees constructed meaning and interpreted their social reality. The richness of the data that had been elicited in the time spent forging a higher level of trust more than made-up for the time sacrificed in relationship development.

Phase VI: Adding value post-interview

A final surprising twist in the story occurred as the interview came to a close. The interview had by now evolved from little more than blunt and unelaborated answers, to one which lasted for about 4 hours, was enjoyable, highly informative and peppered with fascinating anecdotes and stories about the company, the union and its workforce. We were extremely pleased with the depth of information collected. However, and unbeknown to us at this time, data collection didn't end as the formal interview closed. As we were winding-up the interview and thanking the union respondents for their time, we were offered an unsolicited tour of the plant by the two union convenors. This is where the most surprising revelation occurred, and the story that now follows relates an interesting detour while we were escorted around the factory.

Waterford Crystal, as a long-established craft business, has become an official tourist attraction in Ireland. The union convenors took us across the factory and we joined a group of (mostly American) holidaymakers who were midway through an official tour of the facility. The company's history and its products were being explained, with photos and replicas of the more famous items and sporting trophies made by Waterford Crystal. Upon arrival the tour guides (full-time company employees) gave a small nod of recognition to the union convenors. Our presence was acknowledged but nothing was said: we were in safe and trusted hands and the official guides left us and the union reps to our devices as we mingled with fee-paying tourists.

An important element of the tour incorporated an observation deck overlooking a team of about eight workers who were blowing glass and crafting crystal wares by hand. The union convenors, being well-known in the company, were allowed to usher us towards the front as the guide was explaining the jobs being performed and products being crafted. These workers were evidently highly skilled and worked in hot and sweaty conditions. The job involved a delicate task with molten glass from a furnace, balanced on the end of a long tube. With intricate hand and mouth coordination, the workers would blow an individual item of glass, similar in shape and size to a large round fish bowl. This involved the molten glass being blown and twisted into shape. When the glass is of a particular shape and size in the blowing process, the worker would dip it into a coolant, from which

was then crafted a piece of crystalware by other workers in an adjoining team. The scene conjured-up images of how the hand-crafted millennium ball that descended on Time Square in New York was made; exhibiting the immense skill on display.

In ushering us towards the front of the tour group we had a privileged position to view the crafting process, although that was not entirely the motive of our hosts, the union convenors. They facilitated this premium viewing position because they also knew what was coming next in the company's official tour. The Marxist union rep surreptitiously requested the Irish researcher to drop back into the gaggle of tourists. As the guide called for a volunteer the Liverpoolian researcher was stranded out in front of the group of tourists. With a knowing nod and smile from the union convenor to the company tour guide, the scouser was seconded to perform the same glass blowing tasks that had just been observed. With the molten glass in flames, loaded on the long tube and now in full view of encouraging American tourists, there was little point in any objection. The best that could be hoped for was that the Liverpoolian researcher might be able to display some semblance of competence alongside the artisan instructing him how to blow glass. He failed. The skilled craft worker, with what seemed to be minimal effort, demonstrated how to blow the glass while simultaneously spinning the tube to ensure maximum leverage. Within a few seconds he produced a crystal bowl that was perfectly curved and approximate 15 inches in diameter. He dipped it in the coolant and cut it from the tube ready for the next stage. In contrast, the Liverpoolian blew with all the wind he could muster, expunging his lung capacity several times over, and only managed to produce a misshapen glass bubble the size of a golf ball. Instead of skillfully dipping the red hot flame of glass into the coolant, it fell to the ground with a tiny splat. Nonetheless, the American tourists cheered.

As the company's tour guides gathered everyone and moved to another part of the factory to continue with the Waterford Crystal tour, we were taken by the union convenors through an exit to the side. It was explained that we were about to enter a part of the plant that is 'out of sight' from the official tour. Amazingly, here was a scene far removed from the hand-craft production techniques we had only minutes before been witnessing and trying to mimic alongside tourists on their vacation. There were a number of assembly lines which were spewing

out mass produced crystal pieces that had been designed on computers. The image and brand of hand-made crystalware was shown to be something of an illusion: it was exclusive to commissioned pieces such as those for major sporting trophies. For the bulk of products, the only human involvement in the process were the hands of packaging workers that removed the finished pieces from the conveyor belt and carefully placed them in boxes for shipping. The underlying message was instructive. Their beloved craft is under threat. The power of the artisan is accordingly in decline as technological manufacturing did not require the skill of the craftsman and production capacity easily transferrable to cheaper locations. Employees had little or no 'voice' in this decision and the illustrative detour served to indicate a form of pseudo-participation that advanced significantly the purpose of the research project.

We now believed we had obtained full disclosure; over-and-above what could have been hoped for or expected. The turnaround from respondent reluctance at the beginning of the interview to developed rapport giving rise to rich, meaningful data collection and information retrieval was complete. On top of all that, we left the plant with an unexpected gift-wrapped piece of crystal, courtesy of the union convenors, which remain to this day displayed in the researchers' offices.

Table 1: Process Model of Overcoming Respondent Reluctance

<i>Stages</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>Consequences</i>	<i>Tactical Responses</i>	<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>
Retrieval	Initial respondent reluctance or unwillingness to engage. Respondent aversion to the project and/or researcher intrusion	Inadequate data collection. Poor insights obtained.	Active listening to identify specific concerns. Subtle support indicators, such as smiles and nods.	Unable to overcome respondent reluctance. Lost time on non-research relevant conversation.
		Incomplete understanding of respondents' interpretation of reality.	Create a diversion, such as off-topic conversation.	Use own examples to establish credibility and Independence.
Respect	Emergence of curiosity in research agenda.	Factual data elicited.	Emphasize potential specific benefits of the research to interviewees.	Factual but not rich data.
	Respondent realisation of importance and benefits of the research.	Descriptive and informative data obtained.	Recount similar stories / share anxieties with respondents to action commonality and mutuality.	
		Better understanding of respondents' reality.	Limited contextual insight of reality.	

Reconciliation	Commonality of interest identified.	Good contextual data elicited. of research.	More detailed follow-up questions to return to aims.	Time spent on establishing bond rather than data collection.
	Bond established between researcher and respondent.	Deeper story telling that uncovers respondents interpretation of phenomenon/ reality.	Adopt probing behaviors to elicit deeper illustrations and stories.	Over-rapport overshadows true meaning of reality/ phenomenon.
	Fluid and extensive Conversation. Relaxed atmosphere	Clearer understanding of respondents' construction of reality.		
Reinforcement	Post-interview researcher gratitude.	Further anecdotes and asides.	Enquire about other data sources (e.g. reports, factory tours, demonstrations).	Lack of gratitude for respondent input
	Desire for leads from respondents.	Unexpected outcomes can improve quality of data collected.	Exchange contact details to signal embedded relationship.	Diminished reputation.
			Ask about further dialogue; for example to seek clarity when transcribing field notes etc.	Missed future opportunity.

5. TOWARDS A PROCESS MODEL OF DEVELOPING RAPPORT

An analysis of the interview narrative is used in this section to develop a process model of rapport with reluctant respondents. The model collapses the phases of the interview narrative into four exclusive stages of rapport development to overcome respondent reluctance during a qualitative interview. It also identifies a number of distinct behaviors and tactical response strategies that researchers can utilize during each stage of an interview to deal with reluctant interviewees. Recognizing the uneven and dynamic nature of qualitative interview types considered in earlier sections of the paper, potential pitfalls at each stage of the process are also outlined. Table 1 summarizes the stages with situational consequences, tactical response actions and potential pitfalls associated with the transition from one stage of the model to the next.

In stage I, Retrieval, the qualitative interviewer is discommoded from the outset of the interview due to the reluctance of the interviewees to adequately engage in the research process. Respondents may be taciturn, exhibit non-verbal cues and display a set of behaviors that indicate a strong aversion to the project and refrain from entering into a discourse with the researcher. The consequence of such a situation is inadequate data with an absence of the sort of anecdotal storytelling required for insightful explanations of how respondents react to and construct meanings about their social world.

The interviewer must now attempt to retrieve the adverse situation and several tactical response options may be considered. The interviewer must be empathetic to the interviewees' fears and concerns, the sensitivities of the situation, and the uncomfortable position the interviewees find themselves in. One response is to actively listen to the interviewees' fears or concerns and to try and engender a more conducive atmosphere for the interview. Distinct behaviors include providing specific reassurances of the legitimacy of the research and the guarantee of confidentiality. The researcher can exhibit appreciation of the respondents' predicament in a sensitive situation with non-verbal cues such as nods and smiles. It is important to be non-confrontational and try to be 'on-their-side' or at the very least neutral and independent. It is also useful to employ non-emotive, non-threatening language and probe with gentle questions. The researcher may, if appropriate, utilize humor, irony or even self-deprecation to alleviate any tension in the situation. The researcher seeks to establish some initial credibility and

engender a modicum of interest on the part of the respondent. At this stage the researcher should be highly sensitive to any opportunity to 'sell' the research agenda.

Occasionally, a diversion of some form, be it topic or location, can be a useful response action. The researcher may need to relinquish time by going 'off-topic' by promoting conversation of less sensitive matters such as third parties, other similar situations or researcher experiences in other organizations (while maintaining the required level of confidentiality). The nature of the diversion can be almost anything as long as its context helps embed a commonality between the researcher and interviewee. Prior research on the respondents and researcher preparedness can assist in the identification of possible diversion opportunities leading to more positive engagement. However, there are potential pitfalls at every stage of the rapport building process and during the retrieval stage it may be necessary to sacrifice time to nurture relations; for example, through active listening and engaging tactics. The stage is complete when the researchers have surfaced shared interests that establish commonality between interviewer and interviewee.

In stage II, Respect, the researcher, having managed to redeem the unfavorable situation, must now cement any initial credibility and engender project empathy as respondents display signs of curiosity and interest in the research, no matter how minimal. The aim is to minimize differences and forge commonality in the quest for factual data. Tactical response options include explaining any specific benefits of the research for the respondent and ensuring the researchers' agenda is appreciated. For example, the interviewee can recap similar stories and share specific anxieties that may be relevant to the respondent. At this stage early factual and contextual data is collected and the seeds of storytelling can emerge. Nevertheless, there is a potential pitfall in that time spent on establishing credibility and early bonds can limit the deeper illustrations and meanings of the respondents' social world. In other words, the richness of the data is not yet realized and therefore progress to the next stage is crucial. The respect stage is complete when the researcher is confident that the research motives and agenda are accepted by the respondents and that the situation makes the respondent feel comfortable to open-up and engage in appropriate discourse. This is evident when factual data is elicited from a previously wary respondent.

In stage III, Reconciliation, the researcher seeks to capitalize on extant bonds of commonality and empathy that has been established to some degree at this point in the process. What is likely to be encountered when moving into the reconciliation stage is an atmosphere that is more relaxed with an appreciation of the need for explanation by the respondent more obvious. Tactical response options include returning to specific research agenda issues. Specific behavioral actions on the part of the researcher can include diligent probing of sensitive topics and delving deeper into underlying motives. The active listening traits of the earlier stage are now bolstered with direction and focus to adhere to the research agenda.

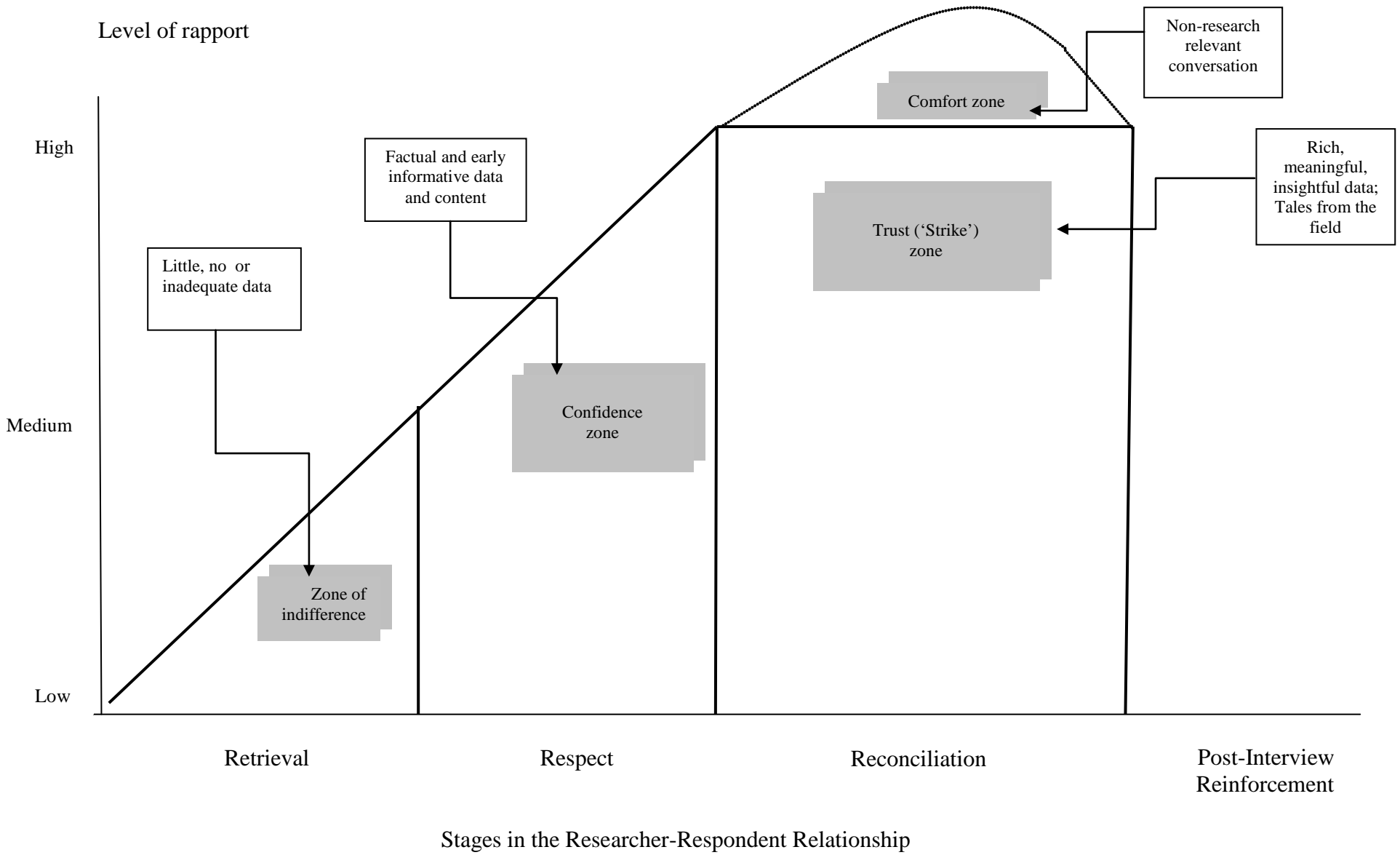
Satisfactory progress in the processes towards a reconciliation in the researcher-respondent relationship can be evidenced by the quality of data that emerges, its richness characterized by deeper illustrations and stories of social phenomena. Respondent examples commence and tales are fleshed-out that offer meaningful insights into the construction of the respondents' social world. The interviewee trusts the researcher to a greater extent and shows a deeper appreciation of the initial research goals and objectives. In short, rapport is complete. However, potential pitfalls exist and include the possibility of over-rapport, leading to non-research related tales. Over-familiarity may result in the interviewee providing information that is thought the researcher wants to hear.

The data in this paper however indicates that the stages of the process do not end abruptly with establishment of rapport. There is a post-interview stage, Reinforcement, that encompasses a number of important behavioral interactions. The context is that when the formal interview is complete there remain further opportunities for information and anecdotes to inform the research. For example, researchers may find it beneficial to follow-up on the previous stage of frank and open discourse with requests for supplementary data, such as company reports, factory tours or organizational charts. Tactical behaviors to facilitate reinforcement are the expression of gratitude for the data proffered and the acknowledgement of the importance of the interviewees' knowledge. The researcher must not switch off but rather remain sensitive to leads and signals of further data opportunities that can have a 'snowball' effect when one interviewee facilitates access to other potential respondents, and so on.

The process model outlined above charts a staged approach to help turnaround an interview episode characterized by respondent reluctance, to a situation that can result in rich and meaningful data insights. Figure 1 illustrates how an improved researcher-respondent relationship corresponds to the enhancement of the quality of data collected. It identifies various zones of interaction in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. In the zone of 'indifference', low levels of rapport furnish little or no useful data as disinterest is exhibited by respondents. As the adverse situation facing the researcher is retrieved the relationship enters the zone of 'confidence', wherein credibility is established and factual data is elicited. As empathy is engendered, the zone of confidence helps cement a commonality of interest between interviewer and interviewee. In the optimal 'strike-zone' trust has evolved to a high level in the researcher-respondent relationship and rich storytelling pertains. Awareness of and sensitivity to these stages can help researchers in a qualitative interview aim for the 'strike zone', wherein extensive and deep rapport elicits rich anecdotes and stories. However, a cautionary note is to beware of over-rapport that is sub-optimal and leads to a 'comfort zone' which can result in voluminous irrelevant data being divulged.

The achievement of a lower-order level of relationship facilitates a move to the next higher-order level of relations. That is, once indifference is retrieved then the relationship moves to a zone of confidence wherein the relationship is one of respect. Once confidence is established then the researchers seek reconciliation of the research agenda with the aim of attaining a more optimal level of rapport in the 'strike' zone, with requisite trust forged.

Figure 1: Zones of Interaction



6. CONCLUSION

In most organizational research situations, respondents who agree to be interviewed tend also to be willing to engage in the research process and openly divulge information. However, despite the willingness of most interviewees to talk openly about their experiences, researchers occasionally encounter respondents who are reluctant to disclose required information. Generally, the reluctance relates either to those who are unwilling to be interviewed at all and access is denied, or concerns those who agree to be interviewed but are then reluctant to disclose information during the course of the interview itself. This paper was concerned with the latter phenomenon of ‘in-interview’ reluctance. Reluctant respondents range from those with moderately sensitive information to those with highly confidential or secretive information. In the latter case, unless the researcher unearths a ‘whistleblower’, disclosure is unlikely, no matter what level of rapport exists. In the former case of a sensitive research scenario, such as was the case in this paper, the respondents are commonly on the defensive. They may wish to guard or protect themselves and their colleagues. There may be vested interests or issues that are too important and sensitive to reveal to a researcher. They may be naturally wary or even mildly paranoid over the motives of the research and the researchers. This may create divisions where the respondents are ‘insiders’ and the researchers are seen as ‘outsiders’. When the disclosure of sensitive information is sought, or when the situation itself is tense, our experience illustrates that the better the relationship that can be developed with the reluctant respondent the greater the disclosure. This paper offers a structured and staged process model towards achieving data disclosure when confronted with reluctant respondents.

This paper narrated a tale where access was secured from management for a ‘one-time’ interview with union representatives of the organization. It tells the story of how the researchers, when faced with reluctant respondents, who were suspicious of the motives of the researchers that had been imposed on them, sought to build confidence in the research agenda, their intentions as researchers and develop rapport with the interviewees to elicit required data. In the interview episode examined in this article the researchers were able to exploit identified commonalities: a curiosity about a ‘scouse’ accent, the

happenstance of a recent prominent sporting (hurling) event, and the legacy of combative industrial relations at the case organization all helped reinforce a social bond between interviewer and respondent. The practical lessons from this are that such commonalities are more than luck and researchers encountering difficult-to-interview respondents can search for and identify commonalities that are unique and appropriate to the respondents' world and interview context. From this, important lessons were picked out from the experience about how rapport building, empathy and an appreciation of the changing dynamics of an interview can affect the depth of data retrieval. In attempting to advance knowledge this paper used a narrative analysis taken from one interview episode that encountered reluctant respondents. A six step procedure was used to analyze the interview narrative, from which a process model of respondent rapport was developed that helps address a number of gaps in our understanding of qualitative research interviewing. Subsequent implications for ethnographic and observational research methods were then considered. It is hoped that the tactics, potential pitfalls and practical guidelines can be used, tested and refined by future organizational researchers.

As with all social scientific research studies there are limitations to both the detail of the research instruments used and to the substance of the methodological approach. In this paper one particular limitation is the ex post facto approach of the study. While this is one drawback, there are also advantages, such as the opportunity to engage in a deeper iterative process between findings and analysis and the scope for reflection about a 'lived experience' that provides lessons for future researchers. The limitations were also minimized to some degree by following a systematic procedure, as explained in section 4 earlier.

The findings and conclusions also provide opportunities for future research concerning the stages and processes of overcoming respondent reluctance. One suggestion is that future research could pre-design research instruments to test the process oriented model outlined in the article in more quantifiable and measurable terms. A further suggestion would be the collection of researcher experiences from across a

wider range of qualitative discipline-based subjects, collecting and categorizing the experiences of respondent reluctance to further illustrate, refine and amend the stages described in the paper.

Social science research involves making assumptions about the form and nature of a given reality or phenomenon. In research concerned with the sociology of work and employment, these ontological assumptions demonstrate above all else that the social world is complex and political. The way researchers make sense of such complexity is an attempt to describe and evaluate the meanings and perceptions of a given phenomenon and reality. Sensitive organizational processes and interactions provide good reason for respondents to be wary of being interviewed. However, important organizational processes will remain uncovered unless skilled, perceptive researchers develop and exhibit behaviors that put respondents at ease and build their confidence and trust. Generally, when such rapport is established fuller disclosure ensues as the respondents share their experiences, provide insights, convey their hopes and fears and furnish useful data.

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Endnotes

¹ Partnership in Ireland represents a corporatist industrial relations system, in which the principal partners (government, unions and employers) negotiate national (country-wide) pay agreements, including adjustments to social welfare taxation, typically for a 3 period.

² Irish locals tend to be very protective of the reputation of the quality of Guinness served in their locale.

³ 'Scouse' is a person from Liverpool with a distinctive dialect unique to the city region

⁴ From prior research about the union it was discovered that he is the more militant ideologue: a Marxist.

⁵ Indigenous Irish field game.

⁶ Colloquial term meaning to poke fun.

⁷ The city in which the researchers' university is based.

⁸ Ireland is 5 hours ahead of New York