

Empirical Research Methods

Moderating a focus group

What is a Focus Group?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCAPz14yjd4>

Useful overview of
focus groups – worth
watching!



Focus Groups...

- Small number of participants
- Meet one or more occasions
- Explore attitudes / perceptions / feelings / ideas about particular topic
- Emphasis placed on group interaction
- Facilitating group is a skilled task
- Researcher needs to facilitate group, observe process, and take notes (where necessary)
- Responses normally recorded and transcribed

Focus Groups...

- “Research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Plummer-D’Amato, 2008)
- “Widely used in research and can be used on their own or in association with other methodologies” (Stewart et al, 2007)
- Group facilitator uses group dynamics and interactions as a means to gather data on a specific issue
- Essence of focus groups – form of group interview that aims to create an understanding of social dynamic and interaction between participants, through the collection of verbal and observational data

Preparing the Environment

- Venue
- Equipment
- Role of researcher
- Relaxed / comfortable environment that facilitates discussion and data collection
- Safe place in which all participants are aware of the process and what is expected of them



Environment and Conduct

- Room – adequate size - not too small or too large
- Temperature – not too hot or too cold
- Lighting – adequate / consider special requirements
- Do not disturb – notice on door
- Noise – away from distracting / excessive sounds
- Seating – comfortable / can see each other
- Telephone – unplugged / switched off (vibration)
- Recording – good quality equipment
- Names – group not to use each others names in the group or when you transcribe data / when use data for presentation (maintain anonymity / use codes or pseudonyms)
- Notes – inform participants might take notes (as reminder of details) n



Focus Group Process



- Overall objective – collect data relevant to study
- Pay attention to content/context of discussions
- Consider questions wish to ask – depends on research question / purpose of study / type of data required
- Develop interview guide as road map (e.g., semi-structured questionnaire with open ended questions)
- Consider – introduction / warm-up / clarification of terms / easy and non-threatening questions / more difficult questions / wrap-up / member check (ok and anything want to clarify) / closing statements

Criteria for conducting focus groups

(Merton et al, 1990)

1. Interview should address maximum range of issues relevant to topic (both issues already know about and those not anticipated)
2. Discussion should provide data specific to topic and give detailed accounts of participants' experiences
3. Discussion should promote interaction that leads to in-depth exploration – aim is to promote discussion that is rich, rather than vague or general
4. Moderator should take note of personal context outlined by participants – context important – personal factors that influence how individual describes experience – often people unaware of own perspective until interact with others, so point of focus group is to create environment that brings together a variety of perspectives

Participation and Group Dynamics

- Interaction between participants – key aspect
- Researcher - ensure give each member of group opportunity to contribute
- Facilitate group so members feel comfortable talking to each other
- May not always agree
- Strangers usually preferable (talk more openly)

Respect
Non-judgemental
Good will

Reflective Listening and Focus Groups

(4 types of response)

Response	Action	Meaning
Clarifying	Moderator asks speakers to clarify what said	Response shows the moderator does not understand what speaker means
Paraphrasing	Moderator restates essence of speakers response	Response means making sure moderator understands what speaker intended to communicate
Reflecting feelings	Moderator mirrors feelings they think were expressed	The feelings are important – not content of speakers response
Summarising	Summarising main points, feelings or both expressed by speaker	Important for playing back points the speaker is attempting to make because not all people communicate logically

(Fern, 2001)

Role and Qualities of Moderator



- Welcome participants – provide overview / explain purpose / outline ground rules (e.g., one person to speak at a time) / ask general warm-up question to start process
- Uses interview guide to navigate group through process
- Guide participants' attention towards topic of interest (can change order of questions as necessary)
- Good listener - respond to verbal / non-verbal cues

Role and Qualities of Moderator cont...

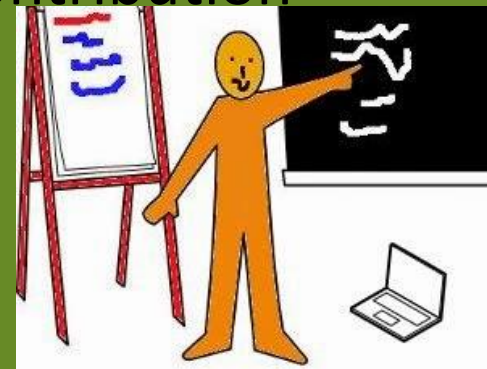
- Encourage participants to say more where necessary
- Be aware

Different ways of being / quieter or more talkative

Own body language / eye contact / questioning

- Pleasant disposition towards participants
- Give prior notice of ending
- Ask if anything missed before concluding
- Thank participants for time and
- Debrief

contribution



What Makes a Good Focus Group?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XA2Eo1ggkjc>



Plan ahead



Additional areas to
consider

Barbour, R. 2005. *Making sense of focus groups*.
Medical Education 39; 742-750.

Doody, O., Slevin, E., & Taggart, L. 2013. *Preparing for and conducting focus groups in nursing research: part 2*. British Journal of Nursing Vol 22, No 3.

Mintz, R., 2010. *Information Sheet R14: Introduction to conducting qualitative research*. UK: BACP