



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Seminar 3 for Doctoral Students

Topic: Focus Groups

Dr Eleni Koutsogeorgou
30th July 2021

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



www.uwtsd.ac.uk

Seminar Structure

- Purpose of focus groups
- Strengths of focus groups
- Essential material for a focus group
- Organisation of a focus group
- Moderator's role
- Sample size and composition
- Potential challenges
- Data analysis from focus groups
- Online focus groups
- Activity.

Interviews or Focus groups?

- Compared to focus groups, group interviews are seldom used.
- Use focus groups instead of single interviews only when the research question provides a good reason.
- Saving time is not a likely benefit of working with groups - because of the more difficult organizational details and the work required to analyze group data, design and conduct fieldwork.

Introduction

- Focus groups are used especially in marketing and media research.
- It is an interactive aspect of data collection.
- The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group (Morgan 1988, p. 12).

Introduction

Morgan (1988, p. 11) sees focus groups as useful for:

- orienting oneself to a new field
- generating hypotheses based on informants' insights
- evaluating different research sites or study populations
- developing interview schedules and questionnaires
- getting participants' interpretations of results from earlier studies.

Strengths of focus groups

- Focus groups can be seen, and used as simulations of everyday discourses and conversations or as a quasi-naturalistic method for studying the generation of social representations or social knowledge in general (Lunt and Livingstone 1996).
- The general strengths of focus groups are:
 - 1) focus groups generate discussion, and so reveal both the meanings that people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate those meanings.
 - 2) focus groups generate diversity and difference, either within or between groups and so reveal what Bilfig (1987) has called the dilemmatic nature of everyday arguments (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, p. 96).

How do focus groups work?

- Let's watch this video:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TwgVQIZPsw>

Essential material for a focus group

- Aim and objectives of study – prepare list of questions/ topics to use as a guide for discussion based on the purpose of the research
- Informed consent forms - to be signed by all participants prior to each focus group
- Audio or video-recorder
- Do not forget the refreshments and any incentives (e.g. vouchers)!



Organisation of a focus group

- **Participants:** usually 5-10 people per focus group.
- **Location:** physical (e.g. workplace, university, etc.) or online environment (i.e. online focus groups).
- **Time:** mutually agreed time for all participants.
- **Moderator(s):** The moderator(s) facilitate the focus group discussion. When there are two moderators, one of them usually takes field notes and the other one coordinates the discussion.

Moderator's role

- The moderator's role is not to disturb the participants' own initiative but to create an open space for discussion and exchange of arguments.
- The moderators need to create a liberal climate, facilitating members to contribute openly both their experiences and opinions.
- However, it is important to clarify ground rules and stress that the focus group is a safe space for discussion – no judgement or prejudice should be allowed.
- At the same time, it is important that the participants do not drift into just chatting or presenting endless anecdotes with little reference to the issue of the focus group (and the study).

Sample size and composition

- The number of groups you should conduct depends on your research question and on the number of different population subgroups required (Morgan 1988, p. 42).
- It is generally suggested that it is more appropriate to work with strangers instead of groups of friends or people who know each other very well, because the level of things taken for granted, which remain implicit, tends to be higher in the latter (1988, p. 48).
- It is also suggested that you should begin with groups as heterogeneous as possible and then run a second set of groups that are more homogeneous (1988, p. 73).

Potential challenges

- Participants withdraw last-minute
- Some participants may be dominating the discussion, and others may be too shy to participate actively in discussion or do not have the chance
- Audio recorder has been placed far from some participants, so it will be difficult to hear their voices during transcription of the recording
- Participants may not be talking loudly or clearly enough or overlapping talk among them.

Analysis of data from focus groups

- The researcher can compare across participants of different groups and discern patterns/themes. Can use the contents of the discussions or systematic coding or content analyses as an analytic technique for focus group data. Think about the point of reference in the comparisons.
- Alternatively, the researcher can take the single group as a unit and compare it to the other groups they have done. Comparison then focuses on the topics mentioned, the variety of attitudes towards these topics among the members in the group, the stages the discussion ran through, and the results of the discussion in each group.

Online focus groups

- Online focus groups can be a fruitful way to use the communication on the internet for research purposes. Here as well, the anonymity for the participants is much greater and so may protect them from any detection of their person during the research and from the results.
- Again, for the researchers, this makes any form of (real-life) contextualization of the statements and the persons in their study much more difficult and leads to sampling problems if they want to construct homogeneous groups, for example.
- Compared to face-to-face focus groups, you can manage the issue of participant or group dynamics more easily in (especially asynchronous) online groups, but it can also become a problem.

Activity

- Role play: appoint a moderator and conduct a focus group during class with colleagues acting as participants.
- Aim of study:
Explore the factors for developing a successful app for online shopping: the users/customers' perspective.
- How would you start the focus group?
- What questions you would ask first?
- What challenges do you foresee?
- Share your thoughts.

References

- Barbour, R. (2007) *Doing Focus Groups*. London: SAGE.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (1996) "Rethinking the Focus Group in Media and Communications Research," *Journal of Communication*, 46: 79-98.
- Morgan, D.L. (1988) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE
- Morgan, D.L. and Krueger, R.A. (eds.) (1998) *The Focus Group Kit* (6 vols.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Puchta, C. and Potter, J. (2004) *Focus Group Practice*. London: SAGE.
- Stewart, D.M. and Shamdasani, P.N. (1990) *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Thank you

Any questions?

Dr Eleni Koutsogeorgou

e.koutsogeorgou@uwtsd.ac.uk