Conducting Focus Groups

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Notes

Please hold your questions until the end

Slides are available at http://www.srl.uic.edu/SEMINARS/semnotes.htm

Please raise your hand so that I can see that you are able to hear me
About the Survey Research Laboratory

SRL is a research and service unit established in 1964. It is a division of the University of Illinois at Chicago's College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs that provides survey research services to the faculty, staff, and students of the University of Illinois campuses; other academic institutions; local, state, and federal agencies; and others working in the public interest.

SRL has offices on the Chicago and Urbana-Champaign campuses of the university and can undertake complete survey projects from initial study design through data analysis. It also can conduct partial survey work and provide consultation on survey problems on a fee-for-service basis.

SRL has been doing focus groups since the 1980s.

The Focus Group Defined

Focus groups are in-depth qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people brought together to discuss a host of topics.

Discussion is interactive

Examples of topics
Why a Focus Group?

Concerned with *understanding* attitudes rather than *measuring* them

Interactive nature allows a discussion to address ‘how’ and ‘why’

Gain insight into experiences and motivations

Understand how people think about specific topics

Understand the terminology they use to do so

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Why a Focus Group?

Expense often less than surveys

Help designing survey questions

Allows you to be more flexible in exploring participants’ ideas and opinions

Understanding how to get cooperation from your target population
Caveat

Analysis is subjective, cannot generalize to the population (more for exploring, not representing)
When a Focus Group is Not the Best Method

If you need to generalize to the population
If you have primarily closed-ended questions that you need to test
If it is impossible to bring together members of your target population
If you need a private / anonymous setting

Planning

Have a clear “focus” for the group
Define and locate population dependent on the topic (Mixed, all women, all one ethnicity, etc.)
Hire moderator if needed
Develop discussion guide, consent form, recruiting and screening materials, decide on incentive type
IRB Submission

Your IRB submission should include:

- The IRB form
- IRB protocol document (a few paragraphs on the study protocol)
- Relevant appendices
- Any recruiting / screening materials (flyers, ads, phone screeners, e-mail confirmations, reminder call scripts)
- Consent form
- Background questionnaire

Developing Questions

- Start with (3) clear goals / objectives. The questions will flow from there.
- Focus groups can be frustrating if you’re asking survey questions; the emphasis should be on open-ended questions.
- Need reflection: how / why (not yes / no)
- You want people to “get on a soap box”!
- Funnel approach: begin with broad questions / topics and move to narrow and specific towards the end. Try to place more neutral questions before sensitive ones.
- Follow-ups and probes
Recruitment

Develop screening / scheduling questionnaire with key questions to screen out ineligible people (under 18 years old), etc.

Locate population through flyers, list, mailing, phone, online list-serves, Craigslist, ads in local newspapers if you are targeting areas

Set up unique e-mail address and / or voicemail for potential participants to contact you

E-mail, mail, or text a confirmation letter with map and contact information soon after scheduling

Scheduling

Usually schedule 12 to 15 for 8 to show up for group (you can adjust this ratio as you go)

Make reminder call 2 business days in advance of group (gives you time to possibly replace)

Inform participants up front if they can/cannot bring colleagues, family members, or children.

Tell them to come 15 minutes early and bring confirmation e-mail / letter (on their phone or printed).
Minimizing Bias

- Avoid grouping people who
  - know each other or
  - who are in a chain of command (supervisors and employees)

- Avoid “Professional Respondents” as much as possible

- When appropriate, matching moderators to participants by gender, race-ethnicity

Setting Up

Select dates and schedule facility
Arrange for taping equipment, internet access or conference call capabilities if needed
Order food/beverages and *have incentives ready*
Test audio equipment *twice*
Investigate parking options
Focus Group Facility

Online Focus Groups

Could be an option for a specific but geographically scattered target population

https://www.focusgroupit.com/
Ground Rules

- Latecomers
- First names only
- Respect opinions
- Each participant’s opinions are necessary
- Speaking one at a time
- Confidentiality
- Voluntary participation
- Neutral moderator
- Address moderator with questions

Drawing out Quiet Participants

Warm-ups
Memorize name tents; call by name
“Bob, what do you think about that?”
Eye contact
“Differences in opinion are OK”
However, not all participants need to answer every question.
Keeping One Person from Dominating

Explain at the beginning you may have to cut people short

Hand movements (“stop” position; use other hand to motion someone else)

Looking away; no eye contact

“It’s important to hear from everyone”

“I did hear your point”

“Thank you so much; I think I’ve heard you”.

Getting Participants Back on Topic

“Well, let me re-frame that.”

“OK, we’re having a great discussion here. I’m realizing our main purpose here is ... “

Validate the importance of the comments however.
Maintaining Control

Be firm about setting expectations in the beginning

Write them on the board; point and remind

Stop discussion and ask one person at a time for short responses (1 or 2 words)

“We’ll take a break” (5 minutes won’t hurt anything)

Asking Sensitive Questions

Trust in and rapport with the moderator is key

Stress confidentiality at beginning

Have people write answers down to be gathered anonymously later

Ask indirectly
  ◦ “Have you or someone you know ever ... ?”
  ◦ “Have you ever heard stories about how people ... ?”
Special Populations

Type of day (i.e. late mornings could be less volatile for drug users)
Allowing lots of response time
Remind / repeat questions
Gentle but firm reminders to stay on topic
Visual aids
  ◦ Writing questions on board and pointing to them
Teenagers
  ◦ Parental Consent
  ◦ Avoid selecting a group of friends
  ◦ Keep it shorter, provide breaks, provide plenty of refreshments

Analysis

Debriefing: Meet afterwards to discuss observations
Summary report by each observer / moderator
Basic demographic questionnaires
Documenting nonverbal behaviors
  ◦ Video-tape and behavior code from videos
  ◦ Have observer whose sole job is to tally nonverbal behaviors
Analysis, continued

Transcriptions
- Identify common themes, patterns
- Deviations from these patterns
- Interesting stories

Software programs for qualitative data:
QDA Minor:
The second is MAX QDA:
http://www.maxqda.com/

Cost $$$
- Moderator fees ($500 - $1,000 per group)
- Incentives ($25-$75 average)
- Transportation/Parking for participants
- Facility cost (equipment)
- Child care?
- Food costs (~$100)
- Meeting times (include planning, IRB, developing materials)
- Recruitment (staff time, phone, mail, advertising )
- Report writing
- Transcriptions ($200-$400 per 2-hour group)
References

For more, see ....


Questions?

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*Please look for an evaluation of this webinar soon!*