EDUCATORS' GUIDE TO COLLECTING AND USING DATA:

CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

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Conducting Focus Group Research

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Why Do Research?

Your daily lives as educators are filled with choices and opportunities. Most of the time you understand what the probable outcome of each choice will be; hence, the consequences of making the wrong choice are fairly low. So you go with your best judgment and move on. Sometimes, though, things are less clear, and the value of making the right decision is substantial. It is at these times that you often need to gather data to help make a good decision. To put it another way, you conduct research.

Types of Research: Sometimes the information you seek already exists. In those cases, the task is to find it and figure out what it suggests for your situation. This is called *secondary research*. Many times, however, the information you seek does not already exist and needs to be created. This is called *primary research.*

There are two broad categories of primary research:

- Quantitative research
- Qualitative research

Quantitative research, typically surveys or other forms of collecting objective data, is used when you need to gain a reliable and accurate measurement of something such as performance, attendance, participation, demographics, opinions, plans, etc. Quantitative research is all about measurement: How many do this? How many plan that? How many have a particular opinion? Are things growing or shrinking? Are scores increasing or decreasing?

Qualitative research, by contrast, is for exploration and insight. This method almost always revolves around talking with people, either one-on-one or in groups. Qualitative research is best used when you want to identify the range of views on a subject, when you want understand the human story that lies behind the opinions, or when you want to understand "why."

Qualitative research is often conducted together with quantitative research. Sometimes it occurs prior to quantitative research in order to identify the issues to quantify and the way to pose questions in a survey. Sometimes it is conducted after quantitative research in order to add depth to what was learned in a survey. Qualitative research can also be used alone when you want insights but do not need precision.

Research

Research

When to Use Qualitative Techniques

Use qualitative techniques when the subject you are exploring cannot be reduced to simple short answers. Use qualitative techniques:

- when your objective is exploratory, and
- when your objective is in-depth understanding

For example, if you want to know how teachers have implemented a new program and how things have gone, you need to have an interactive conversation to gain the level of understanding you desire. You want to be able to probe, follow up, ask “Why?”, and pursue a line of questions that you had not anticipated when you were planning the research. You want to ask, “How did you feel about that?” and watch the facial expressions that accompany the words.

The two most common forms of qualitative research are focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

- A *focus group* is a moderated group discussion among representatives of a group of people (eight to ten is a good size) whose views are desired.
- *One-on-one interviews* are personal interviews where just the interviewer and respondent are present.

Use focus groups when the interaction among various participants will help draw out the variety of existing views, when the comments of one person will trigger thoughts (often conflicting) in another participant, or when the juxtaposition of perspectives facilitates gaining insight. Since typically you interview eight to ten individuals in a single session, focus groups are also more efficient than one-on-one interviews.

One-on-one interviews are more useful when you need each individual’s full story, when the amount of information needed from each individual is too great to be accommodated in the 1½ to 2 hours allotted to a typical focus group, or when the discussion is of a sensitive nature that would not be appropriate in a group setting.

Designing a Focus Group Research Project

Step 1: Documenting research objectives. The first step in designing any kind of research is to determine what you need to know. The most common mistake made in research is when people skip this step and then find, once the research is done, they have not solved their problem. The best and simplest way to determine what you need to know is to take the following steps:

A. Write down, in detail, the **issue or problem** that you need to address. This is like a mission or background statement. Often times, doing this step surfaces differences in opinion among project team members. This is a good time to resolve those differences.
B. Prepare a list of the **decisions you need to make** related to the issue in Step A (e.g., you need to decide if the program should be continued or what you need to do to strengthen the program.) If the objective of the research is not to support a decision, write down what you hope to accomplish. Be extremely thorough in this step. If you leave something out, once the research is done, it is too late. Be disciplined in this step to make sure each of the decisions you list links directly back to the issue or problem you need to address.
C. Prepare a list of the **information and insights you need to get from the research in order to support the decisions you need to make** (or to accomplish your objectives). Check your list by asking yourself, "If the research produced this information, would that (combined with other inputs) be sufficient to support the decision?" If the answer is "no," then the information objective list is not yet complete. Be very selective here. It is easy to load up the list with "nice to know" information that does not link back to decisions in Step B. If the information does not directly support a decision to be made, it probably is not needed and should be dropped from the list.

The list of information objectives prepared in Step C becomes your guidelines for proceeding with the research. You have a direct link from the information you will collect (Step C) to the decision you need to make (Step B) and the problem you need to address (Step A). This tells you that your research will be actionable.

A. When Step 1 is completed, you will have a clearly documented statement of the research issues, the objectives, and the information that is needed to satisfy those objectives.

Step 2: Selecting the right methodology. The second step in designing a focus group project is to confirm that the focus group is an appropriate methodology. The answer to each of the following questions should be "yes."

- Are you more interested in gaining broad insight or exploration and less interested in measurement?
- Is there a large enough population of people whose opinion you want in a sufficiently small geographic area to enable you to form one or more focus groups?
- Is the subject of the research appropriate for group discussion?
- Is the amount of information you need from each individual consistent with the time available in a focus group? (After introductions and subtracting the amount of time a moderator takes to ask questions, each participant may get as little as ten minutes of talk time in a focus group.)

If the answer to any of the questions is "no," then a focus group will not be appropriate.

B. When Step 2 is completed, you will decide to use focus group methodology or another way of collecting information.

Step 3: Designing the research. Focus groups are most effective when the members of a session are similar to each other (homogeneous) on key characteristics. For example, if the program you want to study has been implemented in K-5, it is likely that the needs and experiences of kindergarten teachers will be very different from those experienced by fifth grade teachers. Putting people from both groups in the same focus group generates weak dynamics. Similarly, putting together teachers and administrators, teachers and students, or teachers and parents does not work well either. The best focus groups are populated by people who share the same perspective. In the focus group session, you explore for differences within that common perspective. Sometimes you even hold separate focus groups among people you know who like a program and people you know who dislike a program. Mixing them up and watching the differences emerge is also appropriate, as long as the participants are similar on the basic characteristics (e.g., all teachers involved in the program).

Focus groups are discussions among a small number of people. Whenever you select a small number of people from a larger population, it is always possible to get a group that is not representative of the range of opinions. For this reason, whenever possible, always conduct a minimum of two focus groups among each of the key groups.

There also may be constituency issues that need to be addressed in order to gain credibility. It may be necessary to include various schools, districts, parent groups, business people, community-based organizations, or other constituents in a study in order to earn credibility and gain buy-in of the various sponsoring or interested constituencies. Sometimes it is methodologically important to do so. Other times it is needed for reasons of inclusion or support. Regardless of which one it is, it is a design consideration that needs to be taken into account.

When Step 3 is accomplished, you will have a description of the type of participants to invite and the number of focus groups to conduct.

Step 4: Two activities are typically carried out simultaneously in Step 4:

- Planning and logistics
- Preparing the discussion guide

Planning and logistics: In Step 3, you decided the types of people to invite. Now you need to decide when and where to hold the sessions and recruit participants.

Selecting and recruiting participants does not need to be as rigorously random as with quantitative research. Still, you want to recruit as random and representative a group of people as possible. Ideally, selection and recruiting is done randomly from lists. Actually, it is often not that easy. Be careful, however, not to delegate the selection of participants to someone with a point of view who might load the group with people who share a common opinion. Rather than hand-selecting “advocates” or people with strongly held positions, it is better to select a more or less random sample of the target group. Recruiting can be done on the phone or via e-mail messages.

The ideal focus group size is between eight to ten participants. You typically recruit 12, assuming some people will cancel at the last minute or not show up.

Be sure to confirm all recruited participants and send them the following information which they need in writing.

- The topic and purpose of the study;
- The location of the focus group session (directions if appropriate);
- The date and time, including when the session will conclude; and
- Information about travel compensation, if appropriate.

Emphasize that the meeting will start promptly at the time specified, and people should arrive five minutes ahead of time. Reconfirm all participant participation one to two days before their session.

Facilities: You will need to select a facility that is appropriate for conducting focus groups. Key features are:

- A room large enough to hold 12 people comfortably;
- Appropriate furniture (conference table);
- A quiet undisturbed environment; and
- A convenient location.

Conference table arrangements are best for focus groups. You want a single table (or smaller tables pushed together) at which there is ample room, and everyone can see each other. Square or rectangular arrangements work well. If necessary, people can sit in a circle without a table. The ability to close doors to seal out outside noise is also important.

Length: A focus group session usually lasts one to two hours, depending on the amount of material needed to be covered. Two hours is usually the maximum you can hold people's attention.

Time line: Typically you want to allocate two weeks for recruiting, that is, start recruiting two weeks before the focus groups are scheduled.

Preparing the discussion guide: The role of a moderator (discussed in detail below) is to facilitate the discussion among the participants on topics of interest to the researchers. The discussion guide is an outline the moderator uses to guide the discussion. Typically a discussion guide has three main sections:

A. Introductions;
B. Warm up and general conversation; and
C. Discussing the details.

A. Introductions: There are two parts of the introduction section: the moderator introducing him/herself and providing information on the discussion to come and participant introductions.

The exhibit on the following page is a script of a typical introduction.

Moderator’s introduction:

Introduce yourself (name, role) and thank participants for coming.

- ”As you know, you've all been invited here to participate in a discussion about . . . (be general). This is a form of research we call a focus group. Is there anyone here who has never been in a focus group?”
- Give quick overview regardless.

Key points:

Group discussion.
Looking for all opinions, expect diversity, differences of opinion.
Not looking for consensus or seeking a majority.

Your job: to let me know what you think. All opinions are equally valid. Speak only for yourself and from your own experience. Best not to speak for the group.

My job: I have a list of issues we need to cover. My job is to keep us on task and on time. To be sure everyone has their fair share of air time. Works best when I'm not the center of attention. I'll start things off. Then you talk among yourselves.

- Assure confidentiality.
- Explain about audio taping (to help in preparing a report).
- Tell them the length of the session. Plans for break or no break, location of restrooms, any necessary fire or evacuation procedures.
- Restate the purpose and value of the session.
- Ask for and answer any questions.

Participant introductions:

Ask participants to introduce themselves by providing the basic information you will need to understand who they are in the context of the research (e.g., Mary, fifth grade teacher, Adams Elementary school, been teaching ten years, three at Adams. This is my first year with the program). If you can arrange for an easel in the room, it is useful to write the list of information you want on the easel beforehand.

B. **Warm up and general discussion:** The flow of the second and third sections goes from general to specific. A typical scenario in the second section is: *As you know, each of you in this room [is a teacher who taught the new curriculum, is a principal at a school where you are piloting Program Y]. Tell me what it was like to [teach the new curriculum, introduce the new program].* The purpose of this section is to get the energy flowing, to get people engaged in the discussion and to get a high level, yet personal understanding of the range of experiences regarding the subject you are studying.

C. **Discussing the details:** The third section is where you get to the details. Use the list of information objectives you prepared earlier as the basis for this section. Organize the issues into a logical order, thinking about how the discussion will flow most naturally. Then, using short phrases or sentences, write down the questions you will ask that will elicit the discussion you want. Sometimes you will literally ask a question: *"What was it like? What did you like best about …? How did you approach …?"* When possible, you will suggest a discussion: *"Tell me about the students' reaction to…."* Questions almost always should be open; that is, questions that elicit a story, an explanation, or a point of view. Yes or no questions or ones that elicit a short answer do not produce insights which is what focus groups do best.

In addition to straightforward discussion, there are a number of tools and techniques that a moderator can employ to stimulate participation and insights. A useful tool for getting discussion flowing is group brainstorming with the moderator posting ideas on an easel.

Some tools are useful to prevent "group think":

- Assigning participants the task of writing down as many ideas as they can in a few minutes, and then debriefing participants with an open discussion

Some tools stimulate creativity:

- Collage building
- Projective techniques such as, "if this program were a vehicle, what kind of vehicle would it be. Explain why?"

Sometimes it is useful to use handouts or other displays (e.g., a list of the features of a new program) if you need participants to be well informed for a discussion.

Timing: It is always a challenge to fit the discussion to the time you have available. Once you have the discussion guide drafted, estimate how long each section will take. If it looks like it will run too long, you will have to pare it down. There are two ways to pare down a discussion guide: drop questions that have a lower priority or shorten the amount of time you allow discussion on each subject. It is useful to write in the margin of the guide target start and finish times for each section to help the moderator manage time well.

The physical guide: The moderator will use the guide in the course of the focus group session; therefore, it must be easy and efficient to use. Some people write out each question or instruction verbatim. Others write phrases, key words, or short sentences as reminders, and then ask the questions in their own words. In contrast to surveys in which each question must be asked identically to each respondent, the moderator has more leeway in a focus group, just as long as the point gets across. You should share the moderators guide with others on your team for feedback, since it specifies exactly what will be discussed and makes clear what will not be discussed. Do not distribute the guide to focus group participants.

Focus Groups

Conducting the Focus Group

Managing logistics

Arranging the room: If the room it is not already set up conference-style, you will need to rearrange the furniture. Always arrive at a new facility with enough time to adjust furniture if necessary. Set up the moderator's seat where it will be easiest to have eye contact with all the participants, usually at the long end of a rectangular table or in the middle of a side of a square table. Put materials (papers, coat) at that position before participants enter the room so others will not take your seat. Do what you can to make the room a quiet, comfortable place to have a discussion.

It is useful to have name cards for participants and the moderator. They quickly help put people on a first name basis which greatly enhances group dynamics. It is best to not include last names to enhance the feeling of confidentiality.

Directing people to the location: Often, participants will not be familiar with the facilities where the focus group will be held. Make it easy for participants to find the location of the focus group session by placing signs and notifying receptionists as appropriate.

When focus groups are scheduled consecutively, there should be a designated area where participants for the next group can wait. It is best for there to be a greeter to welcome participants as they arrive, answer questions, and provide instructions if needed. Snacks and beverages in the waiting area are appreciated. If there is a waiting area, bring people into the focus group room several minutes before you want to start to allow them to settle in.

Beginning the session

As the moderator, you are the host. You should greet people, introduce yourself, make small talk, and generally create a friendly, informal, welcoming environment. Once the small talk is finished, and you have enough people in attendance, it is time to start the focus group by re-introducing yourself and thanking participants for coming. Then launch into the discussion guide. Or, you may want to wait up to five minutes for latecomers, but assuming you have a full agenda and out of respect for those people who arrived on time, it is best to start promptly. Latecomers can join as they arrive. (In commercial focus groups, latecomers are often paid their incentive and sent home).

Becoming an Effective Moderator

Effective moderators are not all the same, nor do they all moderate in the same ways. There are a number of attributes, however, that are common to the best ones. Effective moderators have:

- A genuine interest in people, their experiences, and what they think and feel;
- appreciation for the differences in people;
- The ability to suspend one's own views, feelings, and beliefs and search for the truth as viewed by the participants;
- Good listening skills including the ability to recognize what is not being said;
- An inquisitive mind, wanting to understand, to know why;
- Good observation skills (body language, facial expressions);
- The ability to ask questions and express oneself clearly;
- Self confidence
  - ❖ Feeling comfortable in a leadership position
  - ❖ Feeling comfortable with a group of strangers; and
- Flexibility and ability to quickly deal with the unexpected.

Suggestions for effective focus group moderation

Introductions are usually are done in order around the table. Afterward, discussion is random with whoever wants to speak doing so. During participant introductions, make eye contact with and thank each participant when they are done. A little small talk and interaction during these introductions helps establish rapport and informality.

During participant introductions, an aid for the moderator is to draw a participant map on a sheet of paper with names and key information.

Practice asking questions. The words will come out more smoothly if it is not the first time you say them. Be prepared to ask questions in different ways if the first way is not working. It is best not to read directly from the moderator's guide (unless it is a formal statement that needs to be presented the same way each time). Make the session feel conversational.

Know what you want to learn. Don't just ask questions. It may take several times asking a question and a lot of probing to get what you need. Having the objectives clearly in your mind gives you the flexibility to innovate and change approaches as unexpected problems and opportunities arise.

Listen! Be careful not to get caught up in asking questions, planning for your next question, or taking notes. Your job is to actively listen and respond to what you hear.

Stay out of the way. The objective of a focus group is to learn what the participants have to say. You want to maximize participants' air time. If you subtract your introduction time and the time you need to ask questions, each participant is already down to about ten minutes of talk time in a two hour session.

Spend enough time framing questions so participants understand the context and intent of the question. Be sure framing is objective and neutral.

Assume you do not know the answer to what you are asking. That way, you will be open to hearing the unexpected.

Watch for all forms of communication by speakers and by others (e.g., words, body language, tone, facial expressions).

Ask people to translate observed nonverbal ["Josh, I noticed that you smiled/looked at Max when Jeff said xxx. Was that a smile? What were you thinking?"]

People are different. Some talk a lot, some are quiet. Some are interesting. Some are tedious. Respect all styles. Encourage the quiet ones to participate by asking directed questions and using lots of eye contact. Do not overdo it. It is often easier for quiet ones to compare or contrast with others who have already spoken, rather than asking them to go first. Often the quiet ones are good at reflecting once everything else is said. Sometimes they simply have nothing much to say.

It is very dangerous to cut people off. You can shut them down and possibly lose the whole group. Wait for them to take a breath and quickly grab the floor, often asking others to comment on the same subject ... "Lisa, what is your experience on this issue?"

An even bigger challenge is the self-described "expert" or "spokesperson." People often will defer to the expert, resulting in much of the group shutting down. If this situation occurs, say to the expert, "I'd like to ask a special favor of you. Because of your special knowledge on this subject, I'd like to save your comments for last. I definitely want to hear what you have to say, but let's use your knowledge to help sum things up. Would you do that for me?" They will usually comply, but may require a reminder.

When there is a "spokesperson" in a group, rather than speaking directly to that person, say to the whole group, "It is important in this type of research that each individual speaks only for him or her self. That way we get all the possible views that are out there. So when each of you offers a comment, please make the comment from your own personal experience and opinion and allow others to do the same."

The most common problem is a quiet, disinterested, or tired group. Antidotes are: the moderator's enthusiasm and energy, directing questions to individuals ("Sally, tell me about your first day with the new students"), and facilitating interaction among the participants ("Juan, what do you think about what Lewis just said?"). Doing some type of activity also helps raise the energy level.

Some people will tune out, check out, even go to sleep. When this happens, leave them alone. On a rare occasion, people will be belligerent or come in drunk. If they are disruptive to the group, you should politely ask them to meet with you outside of the focus group room, and while there, firmly dismiss them.

Be an active listener, probing to get deeper, to find out why, to clarify ambiguities. Do not be satisfied with surface answers. You want more than answers; you want understanding. Be active in exploring inconsistencies; not to resolve them, but to understand them. Surface answers include: It is more convenient [find out what convenience means to them]. I like that better [What is better about it?] I'd never do that [Why not?] We tried that and we didn't like it. [Describe what you tried and what you didn't like about it?]

The kinds of responses that should be probed or followed up include:

- Those that are very interesting and that you want to understand more deeply;
- Those that are ambiguous, and you are not sure whether they mean this or that;
- When an individual contradicted him/herself. They are not wrong for doing that, but it begs for deeper understanding;
- When logic would have taken you in a different direction (I thought it was useful. It was well designed. The price was right. I didn't buy it . . . Probe: Gee, after hearing you talk about it, I was sure that you'd buy it. Tell me about the reasons you didn't buy it.)

Let silence work for you. Be patient for a good 15 or 20 seconds to see what emerges. Do not be too anxious to fill in dead spots (unless you've just asked a question and they have no clue what you are asking).

Watch out for leading questions such as those that imply a preferred response. "Don't you think that . . .? " "As you know, most experts in the field agree that . . . " It is okay to play devil's advocate if you want to probe the alternative of what appears to be a bandwagon position. It is also okay to introduce a concept that you think is relevant but has not been raised by the group. Your purpose is not to sell it, but to determine whether it is not relevant (as would be implied by it not being mentioned) or whether it is relevant but just got missed.

Try to ask mostly open-ended questions. Closed questions are those that can be satisfied with a short definitive answer (i.e., yes/no, never/sometimes/often). Open questions require a story.

> Tell me about your experience with . . . How did you feel when . . .? What were the students' reactions when . . .?

Closed questions are unavoidable, but they are not what focus groups are designed to do. If overused, they turn a focus group into eight one-on-one interviews.

If you are not absolutely clear about a person's point, it is often useful to restate their position in your own words and ask them whether you have it right. In addition, if a conclusion seems to be emerging from the discussion, it is okay to sum it up in your own words and ask participants if you have it right. "From everything I've heard, it seems like the real reason you are upset about the change in policy isn't because of ABC, but rather because of XYZ. Do I have it right?" The participants will either confirm your analysis or will set you straight. Either way, this technique improves the quality and reliability of your analysis when it comes time to write your report.

In-session note-taking: The most important thing is paying attention to what participants are saying and what you need to do next. If you can do that and take notes too, great. If not, do not take notes. Rely on a tape recording. (If you use a tape, be sure to inform the participants and assure confidentiality.)

Avoid having observers in the room. They can be distracting. Strongly avoid observers who have a supervisory or evaluative relationship with the participants. The argument to use in these cases is to tell the requesting observer that their presence will reduce participants' willingness to be fully candid and, as a result, weaken the research and the quality of the information. Since the requesting observer will typically be "customer" of the findings, they will not want to be the cause of weakening the research. They will usually comply with your request. If observers must be present, they have to remain silent. It is common to invite observers to join in and ask questions after the moderator has finished.

A moderator should appear competent, but not be positioned as an expert in the field. Participants do not feel comfortable with or see the value in explaining things to an expert. (What's the point? They already know this better than I do!)

If a participant asks the moderator what his or her opinion is on the topic of discussion, the moderator should politely refrain from answering. Inserting your own opinion can have a profound effect on the ensuing discussion. Your job is to find out what the participants think. In order to do that well, you need to be completely objective and suspend your own opinions. If you reveal your personal opinions, you run the risk of planting the seed in some people's minds that you are not truly objective. In a contentious or politicized environment, that can undermine the credibility of the research conclusions.

Stay on task, be efficient, maintain control. You are in charge. Do not let people ramble. Do not let the subject get off track. Once the information is in, move on.

Stay objective and independent. It can be useful to praise good focus group behavior, but not participants' programs or views. Otherwise you are judging and giving participants cues for what the moderator deems "good."

Be careful not to consult during focus group. You are the moderator. You are there to learn from participants. If you change your role to consultant, the relationship changes.

Analysis

How to Analyze Focus Group Results

Once the focus groups have been completed, it is time to figure out what you learned. You begin the analysis process by revisiting the research objectives, the decisions you need to make and the information you decided you needed. Using this information, you build an outline of your report, specifying the “chapters” to be written and the information that will go into each chapter. Enter the analysis process with a clear idea of the issues you need to address and the type of information you have to work with.

The data you collected comes in four possible forms.

- Audio or video tapes of the focus groups that you can watch or listen to;
- Transcripts of the focus groups;
- Notes you may have taken during the focus groups; and
- Recollections and insights from the sessions.

Once the outline is prepared, the process of analysis begins with reviewing the tapes, transcripts and/or notes, and organizing the ideas into common areas. For example, write down together all the likes and dislikes mentioned about a program, or write down all the comments about reasons for participation. It is by looking at lists like these that you gain some insights. If you conducted focus groups with several populations such as teachers and administrators, make different lists so you can determine if the likes, dislikes, and reasons are different. That would be a useful finding. Once these lists are complete you are ready to start the analysis. For each section of your outline, review the aggregated data, figure out what it all means, and begin to write the story.

There are two dangers to watch out for while analyzing focus group results.

- The first is preconceived notions or agendas that may creep into your analysis. Since the data you have to work with are much ‘softer’ than survey results, your personal views can insidiously sneak into your thinking. The antidote for this is to surface, in advance, your personal views, and constantly ask yourself during the analysis if your conclusions are slanted by your personal views. A simpler solution is to have the results analyzed by someone with no preconceived notions.

- The second danger is letting recollections from the focus groups lead your analysis. Many focus groups have individuals who are particularly articulate, and some things learned in focus groups may resonate with you more than others. They may not, however, be as important as you think they are. It is quite common for conclusions that come from a thorough review of the data to differ substantially from your recollections and instant analyses.

Since focus groups are discussions, you often get terrific quotes that illustrate a point, or competing quotes that demonstrate differences. Quotes bring a report to life and build credibility in the conclusions. You are showing that a point is not simply the analyzer’s conclusion; someone actually said this. Sometimes including several quotes that all make the same point is a useful way to reinforce the prevalence of a position.

Remember that this is not quantitative research. While you can draw some conclusions about which views are dominant and which are infrequent if you do enough focus groups, your primary objective in focus group research is to identify the range of views and gain insights into them. Avoid giving counts of participants with a particular view.

The mistake often made by inexperienced analysts is to treat all information equally and report out everything that was learned. This makes for boring reading and is not a useful tool for helping people make decisions. A function of analysis is to sift through all the data and decide what is important. Focus the analysis on what matters, the information and insights that will help readers learn what is important and support the decisions they need to make.

For reports that will be read outside the study team, it is useful to follow a simple report outline.

- *Cover page.*
- *Table of Contents.*
- *Executive Summary*, a brief summary of each section of the report that someone can quickly read and understand the objectives, methodology, findings and conclusions.
- *Introduction*, including a discussion of the background, objectives, and methodology employed in the research.
- *Findings,* this is the main body of the report.
- *Conclusions or recommendations,* if appropriate.
- *Appendix,* any important documents, such as the moderator's guide, that would be useful in understanding the findings or methodology.

Focus group research can help you to make better decisions and to stay in touch with people's perspectives on a variety of issues. When done well, it is an enjoyable experience for the participants and the moderator. Use this guide to help you plan, conduct, and analyze focus group information. With practice you will see how valuable this methodology can be.

Notes

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