The Nuts & Bolts of Conducting Successful Focus Group Meetings

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SESSION OUTLINE

What
- Defining it

Features
- Six key elements

Doing
- The process
WHAT's a FOCUS GROUP?
WHAT’s a FOCUS GROUP?

1. A carefully planned discussion designed to get input on key topics in a non-threatening environment

2. A comfortable and enjoyable discussion by participants as they share their ideas and perceptions

3. A setting in which participants influence each other as they respond to ideas/comments in the discussion
SIX FEATURES OF A FOCUS GROUP
SIX FEATURES of a FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

- People
- Conducted with a series of groups
- They have key characteristics
- Discussion is focused
- Produce data
- Data are qualitative
PROCESS of CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
THREE PHASES to the PROCESS

Planning the study

Conducting interviews

Analyzing and reporting
PLANNING the STUDY

1. Determine the purpose
2. When to use and not use focus groups
3. Determine who to study
4. Listen to your target audience
5. Select the location for your focus group
6. Develop a plan and estimate resources needed
CONDUCTING the INTERVIEWS

Participants → Questions → Moderating Skills
PARTICIPANTS

- Recommend at least THREE focus group sessions
- Invite 25% more people than what you want as a final number
- Contact potential participants by telephone (or in person) about 10-14 days before the focus group session; if professionals, do so 1-2 months in advance
- Send a personalized invitation just after the phone or in-person invitation about a week before the session
- Phone each person the day before the focus group to remind them of the session and inquire about their intent to attend
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

12

Spark

Perceptions

Typical number of questions

Responses spark ideas from participants

Help unlock perceptions of participants
At your table, determine which questions fall into which categories.
TYPE OF QUESTIONS

- Opening
- Introductory
- Transition
- Key
- Ending
OPENING QUESTION

• This is the round robin question that everyone answers at the beginning of the focus group

• It is designed to be answered quickly by each participant (10-20 seconds) and to identify characteristics that the participants have in common

• It is preferable for these questions to be factual as rather than attitudinal or opinion-based questions
INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

• They introduce the general topic of discussion

• Gives participants an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and their connection with the overall topic

• They are usually not critical to the central purpose for your focus group meeting

• But, they help foster conversation and interaction among participants
TRANSITION QUESTIONS

• They help move the conversation into the key questions that you want to explore

• The questions serve as the logical link between the introductory questions and the key questions

• During these transition questions, the participants are becoming aware of how others view the topic
KEY QUESTIONS

• These questions are the primary drivers of the study

• About 2 - 5 questions in all

• They are the first questions you tend to develop when planning a focus group since they deal with the central purpose of the session

• So, it requires careful attention by your team that is capturing the information being shared.
ENDING QUESTIONS

- They bring closure to the discussion.
- Enables participants to reflect back on previous comments.
- Helps assess the accuracy of the information gathered by the moderator and the scribe(s).
- Can be of three types . . .
### THREE TYPES of ENDING QUESTIONS

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<th>All things considered question</th>
<th>Summary question</th>
<th>Final question</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Used to have the participants state their final position on critical areas of concern. Often asked in a round-robin or vote-casting/prioritizing manner.</td>
<td>Asked after the moderator has given a short oral summary (2-3 min.) of the key questions/big ideas that emerged from the discussion. After the summary, the participants are asked: “Is this an adequate summary?”</td>
<td>Following the summary question, the moderator gives a short overview of the purpose of the study. Following the overview, the moderator asks the final question: “Have we missed anything?”</td>
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MODERATING SKILLS

Welcome

Overview of the Topic

Ground Rules

The First Question

Live Demonstration by Melinda Grismer & CD Colleagues
MODERATING SKILLS: KEY POINTS

The Session:

• Anticipate the flow of the discussion

• Give license to expressing differing points of view

• Learn to use two key techniques -- the pause (5 seconds) and the probe (“please explain further” or “can you give me an example?”)

What to Avoid:

• As moderator, try to restrict head nodding since it tends to be interpreted as a signal of agreement

• Avoid short verbal responses such as “Correct”, “That’s good,” or, “Excellent” since they imply judgments about the quality of the comment.

• Acceptable responses include “OK”, “Alright”, “Uh huh.” Use “value neutral” gestures and comments.
ANALYZING RESULTS: THE CONTINUUM

- Memory-Based: least time intensive, least rigorous
- Note-Based
- Tape-Based: most time intensive, most rigorous
- Transcript-Based

We will provide you with a handout covering analysis & writing techniques.
TIME FOR QUESTIONS