Assessment@Dartmouth

Introduction to Focus Groups

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Session Outcomes

- Articulate the characteristics of a focus group
- Articulate the skills needed to moderate and record a focus group
- Ask useful focus group questions
- Take useful notes
- Analyze data collected from a focus group

Source


Assessment Topic

- Think about an assessment topic or question that a focus group may be appropriate for.
Characteristics

- Participants
  - Carefully selected
  - 5-10 people
  - 6-8 preferred

- Time
  - 1.5 - 2 hours
  - Need enough time to establish rapport

- Environment
  - Comfortable and open
  - Circular seating
  - Recorded
    - Notes
    - Tape

- Moderator
  - Skillful in group facilitation
  - Uses pre-determined focused questions
  - Establishes permissive environment and rapport with participants
Characteristics

- Recorder
  - Handles logistics
  - Takes notes

Characteristics

- Analysis and Reporting
  - Systematic analysis
  - Verifiable procedures
  - Appropriate reporting

Moderator Responsibilities

- Be mentally prepared
- Use purposeful small talk
- Make smooth and snappy introduction
- Use pauses and probes
- Control reactions to participants

Moderator Responsibilities

- Use subtle group control
- Use appropriate conclusion
- Debrief with recorder
- Perform analysis and write report
Recorder Responsibilities
- Help with equipment and refreshments
- Arrange the room
- Welcome participants
- Sit in designated location
- Take notes

Recorder Responsibilities
- Operate recording equipment if used
- Remain quiet during discussion
- Ask questions if invited
- Give an oral summary at end
- Debrief with moderator
- Give feedback on analysis and report

Asking Questions
- Use open-ended questions
- Avoid dichotomous questions
- Use “think back” questions
- Use questions that get participants involved
  - reflections, examples, rating scales
- Focus the questions
  - general to specific
  - funnel

Asking Questions
- Types of questions
  - Opening questions
  - Introductory questions
  - Transition questions
  - Key questions
  - Ending questions
Ending Questions

- All things considered question
  - Reflect upon entire discussion and offer opinion or main point
  - “If you had two minutes with President Wright, what would you want to tell him about today’s topic?”
- Summary question
  - After moderator offers a summary, “Is this a good summary?”
- Final question
  - “Have we missed anything?”

Strategies for Questions

- Choose among alternatives
- Make a list
- Fill in a blank
- Rate with a blank card
- Projection

Strategies for Questions

- Fantasy and daydreams
- Draw a picture
- Develop a campaign
- Role playing
- Questions that foster ownership
  - “What can you do…”

Note Taking

- Recorder’s responsibility
- Clear and consistent
- Field notes need to include a lot of information
  - Quotes
  - Key points and themes
  - Possible follow-up questions
  - Non-verbals
Practice Questions

- Let’s take a few moments to practice writing questions.

Analysis Types

- Memory based
- Note based
- Tape based
- Transcript based

Systematic Analysis

- While in group
  - Draw a seating diagram and number participants
  - Confirm your notes with a summary
- Immediately after group
  - Debrief
  - Clean up notes
- Soon after the focus group - a day or two
  - Transcribe tapes
  - Prepare preliminary report
  - Triangulate report with others

Systematic Analysis

- A few days later
  - Compare and contrast multiple focus groups
  - Look for emerging themes
  - Construct typologies
  - Describe findings and include illustrative quotes
**Systematic Analysis**
- Finally,
  - Decide on the format of the report
  - Use quotes
  - Report question by question or theme by theme
  - Triangulate with other assessors
  - Revise and finalize the report
  - Present findings

**Focus Group Sampling**
- List
- On location
- Nominations
- Snowball
- Random telephone screening
- Ads in papers and bulletin boards

**Analysis Tips**
- Word use and meaning
- Context of comments
- Internal consistency
- Frequency (comments) and extensiveness (folks)
- Intensity of verbals and non-verbals
- Specificity
- Big ideas

**Incentives**
- Cash
- Food
- Gifts
- Invitation
- Opportunity to share opinions
- Involvement in an important assessment project
- Opportunity to meet new folks
Conclusion

- Final questions or comments?

Resources

  - Focus group guidebook
  - Planning focus groups
  - Developing questions for focus groups
  - Moderating focus groups
  - Involving community members in focus groups
  - Analyzing and reporting focus group results.

- [http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html)