



FOCUS GROUPS

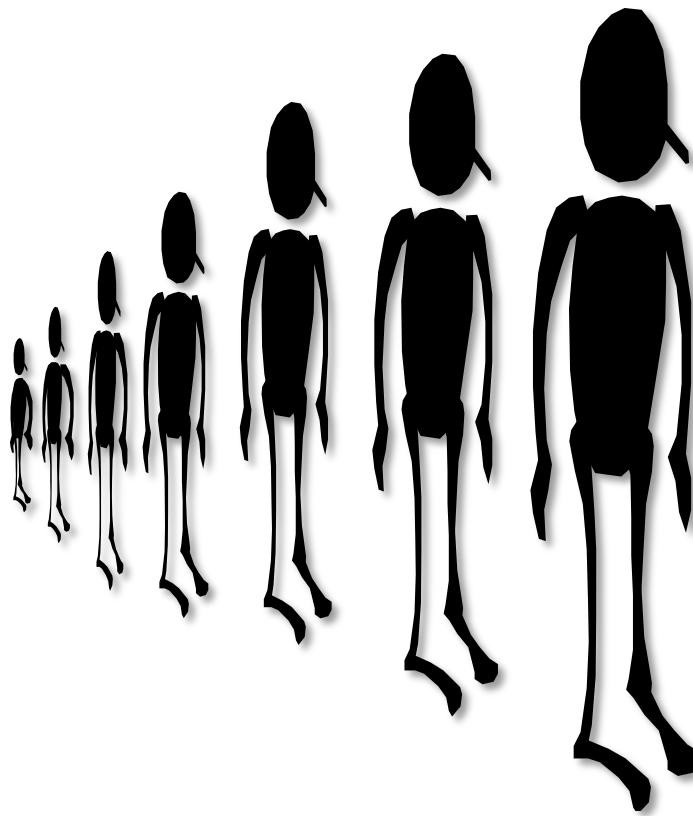
ScWk 242 – Session 4 Slides

When to Use Focus Groups?

Definition: Focus groups are a small group of a selected population that are asked open-ended questions in a discussion type atmosphere to generate data. They should:

- *Involve a carefully planned discussion*
- *Attempt to obtain perceptions of a defined interest area*
- *Be carried out in a permissive, non-threatening environment*

A Focus Group Is . . .



Who

- Usually has approximately seven to ten people in them
- With common characteristics relating to the discussion topic

How

- Conducted by a trained interviewer (moderator, facilitator).

Limitations of Focus Groups

- Risk of biases introduced by the moderator(s)
- Domineering and/or passive participants
- Usually does not provide depth of information compared to other methods, such as key informant interviews

Moderator's Role

- Stays relaxed and sets tone
- Introduces and guides the discussion
- Actively and carefully listens
- Does NOT participate, or share views, or engage in the discussion
- Does NOT editorialize comments
- Promotes everyone's participation
- Is non-judgmental and respectful

Additional Moderator Roles

- Is familiar enough with the questions that she can ask them in a conversational manner
- Gives an appreciative welcome and close that acknowledges the participants for giving their time and ideas
- If possible, the moderator should have a connection to the group

Notetaker's Role

- **Tests and places the audio recording equipment**

Note: it helps to talk to participants beforehand to gauge and quiet the speakers

- **Comes prepared with pens and paper**

- **Sits in the room during the entire discussion where they can see & hear the participants**

Note: do not sit by the facilitator

- **Sketches participant seating arrangement**

Note: use identifiers other than names

Additional Notetaker Roles

- Tries to be aware of correct recording during the focus group session
- Serves as the timekeeper
- Does not join in conversation - avoids nodding or reaction
- Identifies themes, follow-up questions, body language, confusion, nonverbal communication (especially when no one is speaking), facial expressions, gestures, signs of agreement, disagreement, frustration, concern, etc.

More Notetaker Roles

- After the discussion, the notetaker checks notes for legibility and gaps
- The notetaker and moderator should meet soon after the focus group to review the experience
- You should try to be a “fly on the wall” during the discussion and simply observe
- If no one knows you are there, you are doing a good job!

Getting Started

- Set up the room according to number of people
- Introduction points to write on flip chart

Helpful Tips:

- *Your comments are confidential. We are taking notes, but not names. Please be respectful of others and the opinions given.*
- *Please speak up so we all can hear you.*
- *Everyone gets a chance to talk.*
- *There are no wrong answers; all comments are important.*
- *Please let me know if you have any questions*

Additional Start-Up Suggestions

- Moderator introduces herself/himself, the notetaker, and the study
- Thanks everyone for coming today
- Reviews the group's purpose and goals
- Explains how the meeting will proceed, and how members can contribute
- Sets the tone by asking an opening question (such as, "tell us a little bit about yourself")

During the Discussion:

- Be aware of voice recorder function and fidelity, making sure that soft-spoken individuals speak loud enough, and minimizing any noise that might interfere with the recording
- Use “Moderator Probes” when needed for clarification
- Facilitate the discussion so that everyone is included
- Remind yourself not to share own views on a participant’s remarks (including “That’s a good point”) as this response may bias the response of the other participants
- Be aware of how you’re sitting. Make sure that you face everyone in the group and do not start to lean towards one part of the group that seems more animated and engaged.
- Don’t be afraid of silence. Give participants the chance to think about their answers.

Use of Moderator Probes

- ***Be aware of recording:*** better to use non-verbal prodding while someone is talking.
- ***Be neutral:*** don't react for or against anyone's statement
- ***Body language:*** nodding head, continued eye contact
- ***Vocalizations:*** "uh, huh..."; "yes...oh, okay..."
- ***Reflecting back:*** "what I understood you to say was..."; "Let me see if I understood you correctly..."
- ***Clarification:*** "I'm not sure I understand... can you tell me more..."; "Can you tell me more about why you think it is important"
- ***Substitution:*** "How often do you..."
- ***Other examples:*** "Is there anything else..."; "Could you explain that to me... I want to be sure I understand..."
- ***Timing:*** Listen for natural breaks in the conversation or repetition before you move on to the next question.

Closing Steps

- When all questions have been asked, ask if anyone has any other comments to make
- Summarize key points based on focus group discussion
- Have we missed anything?
- Audio taping ends
- Tell the group about next steps that will occur and what they can expect to happen
- Thank the group for coming
- Give incentives for participation (if applicable)

Focus Group Analysis Tips

When analyzing focus group data, consider...

- Words
- Context
- Internal consistency
- Frequency or extensiveness of comments
- Intensity of the comments
- Specificity of responses
- Find the biggest ideas generated

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