A Step-By-Step Guide to Focus Group Research for Non-Governmental Organizations

How to Engage Your Stakeholders in Designing, Monitoring and Evaluating Your Programs

Jordan Civil Society Program 2012

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Introduction

About the Stakeholder Feedback Project

The Manual "How to Engage Your Stakeholders in Designing, Monitoring and Evaluating Your Programs" is a result of one of the Jordan Civil Society Program's technical assistance resources for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This manual was developed as an outcome of the first Stakeholder Feedback Project (SFP) workshop which aimed to support NGOs in integrating qualitative research into their programming at the design, implementation and evaluation stages. Due to the overwhelming response from participants, the Jordan Civil Society Program has offered this course annually between 2009 and 2012, reaching over more than 55 of civil society representatives from 30 NGOs throughout the Kingdom. In addition, an abbreviated version of this course has been adapted for delivery to civil society organizations in Lebanon.

About this Manual

During the first Stakeholder Feedback Project (SFP) workshop, participants identified that such a publication would support their efforts by providing them with the step-by-step guidance required to implement this research methodology, particularly for first time researchers. The Jordan Civil Society Program responded to this request by supporting the development of this practical tool which aims to empower both first-time researchers and experienced civil society personnel to conduct high quality focus group research that produces solid actionable data as well as interesting and insightful information about the research topic. The step-by-step manual follows the natural flow of focus group research, and includes examples and exercises from the civil society sector in Jordan and Lebanon that enable trainees to absorb the theory of qualitative research as well as to practice the various steps of a given research project. Users are encouraged to use this manual both as a toolkit for delivering trainings on this qualitative research methodology as well as a guide for the implementation of focus groups from start to finish.

Acknowledgments

The Jordan Civil Society Program extends its special thanks to the contributors of this Manual:

- Zeina El-Helou, Researcher, Public Policy Consultant
  The author of this manual, Zeina El-Helou is recognized as a leader in qualitative research in the Middle East, having worked extensively on democracy and governance programs in Lebanon and Jordan since 2006. The Jordan Civil Society Program thanks Zeina for her generosity in sharing her personal and professional research experience within the pages of this manual as well as throughout the SFP workshops.

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Chapter One

Introduction to Qualitative Research

In this Chapter you will learn

* What is qualitative research?
* Types of qualitative research
* Difference between qualitative and quantitative research

Glossary

Qualitative Research: qualitative research is a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and subject matters. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior.

Quantitative Research: quantitative research is the systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships. The objective of quantitative research is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories and/or hypotheses pertaining to natural phenomena.

Introduction

Research is a human activity aiming to understand issues, trends, opinions, phenomena, etc. through undertaking a series of activities, including observations, experiments, review of previous studies, systematic interviewing of people and communities, etc. Research is scientific if it complies with certain norms, mainly rigor, accuracy, and systemic methods. Public opinion research is a field of inquiry that aims at understanding what people think about various issues of common concern. Public opinion research is done through quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, each pertaining to different objectives that eventually generate different types of information.

1. What is Qualitative Research?

* Qualitative research is the type of research that looks into issues of human behavior, relations and perceptions to understand social patterns and trends
* It investigates the WHY and HOW of human behavior not only what, where and when
* Qualitative method could be described as follows:
    - In-depth interviewing of individuals and small groups
    - Systematic observation of the behavior
    - Analysis of documentary data
* Qualitative research is used to gain insights into people's attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture and lifestyles.
* Qualitative research is a type of scientific research that consists of an investigation that:
    - Seeks answers to pre-defined research questions
    - Systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to inform the research topic
    - Collects evidence
    - Produces findings that were not determined in advance
    - Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study
* Qualitative research understands a given research problem or topic from the perspective of the local population it involves.
* Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations.
* Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena.
* Qualitative research aims to help us understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are
* Qualitative research is concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about:
    - Why people behave the way they do?
    - How opinions and attitudes are formed?
    - How people are affected by the events that go on around them?
    - How and why cultures have developed in the way they have?

2. What Can We Learn from Qualitative Research?

* The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the "human" side of an issue – that is the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals.
* Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent.
* Qualitative research can help us interpret and better understand the complex reality of a given situation as well as the implication and explanation of quantitative data.

3. Main Qualitative Research Methods

There are four most common qualitative research methods; each method is particularly suitable for obtaining a specific type of data.

* Key Informant Method is designed to obtain information, over time, from a community resident who is in a position to know the community well, its services, and its people. The key informant method is an excellent way to recover information about past events or ways of life that is no longer observable. The value of the method is the type of data that can be elicited as a result of the communication and trust that develops between the two; the researcher and the informant. This method is particularly useful to obtain a deeper knowledge of minority viewpoints, or of silent majority opinions, and involving citizens in public problem-solving.

* Focus Groups: are a planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interests in a good environment. Each group is conducted with 6 to 10 people and is led by a skilled moderator that uses a discussion guide with open-ended questions.

Advantages of Focus Groups (FGs):

- FG captures a wider range of responses than interviews.
- The discussion group format can challenge and thus moderate extreme or unrepresentative view points.
- FGs provide language and context, explaining how participants communicate about certain topics.

* In-depth Interviews: are optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored.

Advantages of In-depth interviews:

- Explore sense of trust and explore thoughts into a deeper level than focus groups.
- Allow more flexibility in location, time, and range.
- Avoid interpersonal group dynamics that influence responses through group pressure.

* Delphi Method: is a systematic and interactive forecasting method which relies on opinions of independent experts in order to establish a judgment based on a merging of the information collectively available to the experts. Experts are asked to provide answers to a structured questionnaire, as well as reasons for their answers. Answers are then summarized (insignificant differences are neglected) and shared anonymously with all experts for another round of questions and answers. In each round, experts are given the opportunity to revise what they previously said, until consensus is achieved.

Advantages of Delphi Method:

- People comments are anonymous, which helps people avoid defending their original position.
- Delphi method allows people to be gradually swayed by the majority but without undue direct social pressure. Being able to see what others have said or scored and then rethinking your own position can act as a very effective influence to the end result.

4. What Forms do Qualitative Data Take?

The types of data these four methods generate are:

- Field notes.
- Audio/Video recordings.
- Transcripts.

5. What is Quantitative Research?

* Quantitative research is the systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships.
* Quantitative research mainly deals with numbers, statistics and mathematical models.
* Quantitative research asks close-ended questions, such as "do you think A or B?" or questions with a multiple choices.

Quantitative research can be used when:

* You want to know "how many" and/or "how often"
* You want to profile a target audience by determining what proportion of the audience has certain behaviors, behavioral intentions, attitudes, and knowledge related to a given topic, and whether specific determinants predict behaviors at a statistically significant level.
* You want to assess the proportion of your target audience within a communit.
* You want to assess the proportion of a target audience that practices a behavior.
* You want to assess the proportion of a target audience that recalls a message.

Generally, quantitative research involves:

* Surveying a large group of people (usually several hundred), and
* Using a structured questionnaire that contains predominantly closed-ended, or forced-choice, questions.

To design and conduct a quantitative survey, you should consider getting input from a survey expert. Together you will need to consider issues related to designing an appropriate sample, using valid and reliable measures, and conducting a pretest before the survey study is launched. Most surveys are custom studies designed to answer a specific set of research questions. Surveys can be conducted face-to-face, by mail or telephone, or by using a computer. They can be self-administered or administered by an interviewer.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods differ primarily in:

- Analytical objectives
- Types of questions posed
- Types of data collection instruments used
- Forms of data produced
- The degree of flexibility built into study design

6. What is the Most Important Difference between Quantitative and Qualitative Methods?

The key difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is their flexibility. Generally, quantitative methods are fairly inflexible. With quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires, for example, researchers ask all participants identical questions in the same order. The response categories from which participants may choose are "closed-ended" or fixed.

The advantage of this inflexibility is that it allows for meaningful comparison of responses across participants and study sites. However, it requires a systematic understanding of the important questions to ask, the best way to ask them, and the range of possible responses.

Qualitative methods allow spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participants. In addition, with qualitative methods, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is often less formal than in quantitative research. Participants have the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is typically the case with quantitative methods. In turn, researchers have the opportunity to respond immediately to what participants say by tailoring subsequent questions to information the participant has provided.

Quantitative research is used to measure how many people feel, think or act in a particular way; regardless of possible reasons leading them to take that particular position, what counts is the opinion itself that would eventually be qualified and counted with opinions or against opinions of other respondents. In qualitative research, the opinion or position does not count in itself, but rather the motives, emotions and aspirations that contributed to forming that opinion.

Qualitative methods mostly ask "open-ended" questions that are not necessarily worded in exactly the same way with each participant. With open-ended questions, participants are free to respond in their own words, and these responses tend to be more complex than simply "yes" or "no", "black" or "white", etc. In a typical qualitative research, researchers are not satisfied with black or white, but rather seek why is it black, what makes you feel positive about white, etc.

7. What are the Advantages of Qualitative Methods for Exploratory Research?

One advantage of qualitative methods in exploratory research is the use of open-ended questions and probing that give participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do.

Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are:

- Meaningful and culturally salient to the participant.
- Unanticipated by the researcher.
- Rich and explanatory in nature.

Another advantage of qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses – that is, to ask why or how. The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use "probes" to encourage them to elaborate on their answers.

WARNING!

Don't fall into the trap which many beginners - and sometimes experienced- researchers do in thinking that quantitative research is 'better' than qualitative research. Neither is better than the other – they are just different and both have their strengths and weaknesses. What you will find, however, is that the purpose of your research would probably lean you towards one rather than the other. Make sure to ask the right questions as to find which type of research would eventually give the results that you need.

After each session discussion guide can be amended in case both the moderator and the client felt the need too, but we shall not forget that some questions that serve the key objective of the study are essential in order to gather the data that is needed for the needs assessment. However, if you should have to revise a question or two in order to be enhancing the cultural sensitivity or responsiveness of the guide, please make sure this is done in collaboration with the client.

Summing up

* Qualitative research seeks out the 'why', and the "how" of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information.

* Qualitative research does not rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative research.

* Qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviors and experiences through methods such as interviews or focus groups. It attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants. As it is the attitudes, behaviors and experiences that are important, fewer people take part in the research, but the contact with these people tends to last a lot longer. Under the umbrella of qualitative research there are many different methodologies: in-depth interviews, Delphi method, key informant method, and focus groups, which is the most popular.

* Quantitative research generates statistics through the use of large-scale survey research, using methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews. If a market researcher has stopped you on the streets, or you have filled in a questionnaire which has arrived through the post, this falls under the umbrella of quantitative research. This type of research reaches many more people, but the contact with those people is much quicker than it is in qualitative research.

Chapter Two

The Focus Group Methodology

In this Chapter you will learn

* The nature of focus groups as a powerful information-gathering tool
* Definition of focus groups and how they differ from other types of groups
* Appropriate use of focus groups
* The flow of focus group research

Introduction

The focus group methodology can be considered as an advanced research tool that is widely used to tackle sensitive issues; it reveals a "truer" and more nuanced sense of public opinion trends and patterns on issues of great consequence, but often low salience. It unveils the feelings and emotions behind people's attitudes and behaviors towards specific issues. It reveals, through observing the verbal as well as non-verbal responses of participants, a clearer understanding of people's public and intimate behaviors.

What You Have to Have in Mind…

- Be familiar with the focus group methodology.
- Know what exactly you want to know; in other terms, what is the purpose of your study so you can figure out which is the adequate research method that would make you achieve your objectives.

1. The Focus Groups

1.1 Definition

A focus group consists of bringing together people having homogeneous backgrounds into a focused discussion. A focus group session typically involves six to ten participants in an open discussion led by a moderator.

Having said that, the focus group methodology is more than just getting people together. A focus group is a special type of grouping in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. Its purpose is to listen and gather information in a permissive environment created by the moderator. He/she shall be guided by a discussion guide that constitutes the outline of the major questions that will be asked in the group. It allows the group to present issues from different perspectives while providing the structure to direct the flow of the discussion.

1.2 When to Use Focus Groups

- When group interaction around certain research questions is desired
- When "how" and "why" questions are more important than "whether" and "how much"
- When you seek contextual responses rather than "yes" or "no"
- When you want to know how people feel/behave about certain issues and why they feel/behave the way they do
- When you want qualitative rather than quantitative data
- When you are working with groups that may be resistant to paper and pencil methods
- When immediate feedback on questions is needed
- When complexity of behaviors and motivations is of interest
- When the range and intensity of opinions is important
- When research is conducted on sensitive and difficult topics or in tense situations
- When you want to know how something affected or would affect a person, a group or a community; this something can be a product, a project, a program, a TV show, etc..

1.3 When Not to Use Focus Groups

- When you need statistical data, yes or no answers or ratings
- When free expression of participants cannot be ensured
- When confidentiality is critical and cannot be protected
- When participants have problems with social aspects of group participation
- When you want to count supporters, voters, users, etc.

1.4 Examples of Using and Not Using Focus Group Methodology

A focus group consists of bringing together people having homogeneous backgrounds into a focused discussion. A focus group session typically involves six to ten participants in an open discussion led by a moderator.

Having said that, the focus group methodology is more than just getting people together. A focus group is a special type of grouping in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. Its purpose is to listen and gather information in a permissive environment created by the moderator. He/she shall be guided by a discussion guide that constitutes the outline of the major questions that will be asked in the group. It allows the group to present issues from different perspectives while providing the structure to direct the flow of the discussion.

Yes to FGs

- Pilot test products or ideas.
- Definition of topics, language or questionnaire for ulterior surveys.
- Perceptions about a potential product by consumers.
- Reasons of a specific behavior.
- Identification of issues important to target group.

No to FGs

- Statistically valid quantification.
- Answers to closed-ended questions.
- Valid measures and guidance before major spending decisions: campaign, new product, major policy overhaul, etc.
- Popularity, approval rates and other tracking studies.
- To educate people and/or bring them to consensus.

1.5 Appropriate Use of Focus Groups

* Decision Making
  Focus groups provide the needed information to make a decision, and could save money, time and energy in terms of making the right decisions at the right time.
* Product or Program Development: Profit and nonprofit sectors
  Focus groups are a very powerful tool in terms of program evaluation. Focus groups findings can be very insightful and helpful for developing programs and products.
* Planning and Goal Setting
  Focus groups are useful for setting plans through the direct observation of citizens that allows decision makers to build and plan their strategies.
* Needs Assessment
  Focus group research can be very insightful and informative of how targeted people behave and what their needs are.
* Quality Control
  Focus groups are also used to monitor projects. They allow direct feedback from beneficiaries in terms of expressing their perceptions and opinions that help improve the quality of a project or product.
* Policy Making and Testing
  Focus group methodology has also proven to be a very powerful tool when testing new policies and laws in order to implement them.
* Social Research Tool
  Focus groups provide insights about people's thoughts and opinions. In that sense, governmental and non- governmental organizations dealing with social development can use focus groups as a tool for any social research.

2. Characteristics of Focus Groups

* As compared to other research techniques, focus groups offer the opportunity to interact with respondents, thus allowing for greater elaboration of views and values.
* The focus group methodology also provides observational methods and analysis that yield richer and more complex data than other forms of data collection. The observation method provides new insights or opens up new leads, which can shift perspective quickly and explore new areas of inquiry.
* This method also allows for the description of the complexity of behavior, including the kinds and intensity of the actions of people, the emotions that are involved, what is said, and how different members of the group influence each other.
* Focus group methodology provides a comfortable and permissive environment for participants; studies are carried out with less community attention or disturbance, people are granted with confidentiality of names and faces that usually encourage people to speak up their minds in real life.
* Focus groups are bound by confidentiality towards the focus groups participants and clients (the end users of the study). Therefore, only first names of participants are made public to the client and participants are not allowed to know the client's identity.

3. Advantages vs. Limitations

3.1 Advantage

* Focus Groups produce a lot of information far more quickly and at less cost than individual interviews.
* Focus Groups are excellent for obtaining information from illiterate communities.
* If the focus group is used to explore relatively simple issues, people who do not have extensive experience in traditional research methods can easily manage it.
* Because the questioning is so flexible, it means that you may discover attitudes and opinions that might not be revealed in a survey questionnaire.
* The researcher can be present at the session; which allows follow-up of responses if required.
* Focus Groups are usually well accepted by the community as they make use of the group discussion; which is a form of communication found naturally in most communities.
* And, focus groups are good fun!

3.2 Limitations

* Results from focus groups cannot usually be used to make statements about the wider community; in other terms, they can indicate a range of views and opinions, but not their distribution.
* Participants often agree with responses from fellow group members (for many different reasons) and so caution is required when interpreting the results.
* The moderator who is not well trained can easily force the participants into answering questions in a certain way.
* Focus groups have limited value in exploring complex beliefs of individuals, and as a result, in-depth interviews could sometimes be a more appropriate method for this purpose.
* Focus groups can paint a picture of what is socially acceptable in a community rather than what is really occurring or believed, although this problem can be limited by careful participant selection and good moderating skills.

Focus Groups

Exercise 1: Here are some cases.
Help researchers decide what kind of research methodology they need.

1. A politician wants public opinion research to help decide whether to run for office or not.
2. A public health provider wants to increase the number of new mothers that use a support program.
3. A government has difficulty implementing its policy agenda and cooperating with Parliament.
4. Tracking study for product in relation to previous focus groups.
5. A company is considering launching a new product.
6. A politician wants public opinion research to help him or her decide whether to oppose an incumbent from his/her own party in the primaries.
7. A major telecommunications company is launching a lobby campaign about newly proposed government regulations.
8. A videogame company wants to know about consumer satisfaction and increase sales among frequent videogame players.

Solution:

1. Survey
2. Focus groups with mothers who know about the program and those who do not know.
3. Focus groups with the members of the parliament.
4. Survey
5. Focus groups and survey.
6. Focus groups and survey.
7. Survey.
8. Focus groups with people who bought videogames and with frequent video game players.

Summing up

* Focus group methodology is a very powerful tool in qualitative research.
* It is a great generator of information.
* It answers the “why” lying behind people’s behaviors, perceptions and opinions.
* It involves people who have common characteristics in a focused discussion led by a skilled moderator providing qualitative data.

Chapter Three

Thinking about Research Design

In this Chapter you will learn

* Design a focus group project
* Define the research purpose
* Write key objectives & key questions
* Choose recruitment profile
* Plan a focus group research
* Write a proposal

Glossary

Client	The end user of the study.
Preliminary questions	Questions asked at very early stages before the research design. Preliminary questions; refer to the first questions that the researchers ask in order to identify the research purpose.
Research purpose	A paragraph summing up the clients' goal; his/her questions and concerns as well as the desired outcomes of the research.
Key Objectives	A set of 4-5 objectives that explain the research purpose in details.
Key Questions	A set of 6-8 questions designed to trigger answers and findings with regard to the research purpose.
Recruitment profile	Is the group of characteristics that vary between demographic, geographic, socio-economic, educational and political affiliation of people to be selected as participants in focus group sessions.
Sampling	A subset of units selected from a larger set of the same units.
Information-rich-participants	A small category of the large population that could provide you with the information you need to achieve the goal of the research.
Design/Research Design	Refers to the identification of information-rich participants that will inform the study and the particular aspect chosen for it; the design shall include the recruitment profile, the rationale for the choice of specific features, as well as the number of focus groups and the timeline of execution.
Judgmental Sample	A sample in which selections are made based on pre-determined criteria.
Random Sample	A sample in which each unit in the population has an equal chance of being selected.
Convenience sample	A sample in which selections are based on the convenience to the evaluator (e.g., on easy geographic or organizational access).
Stratified Random Sample	Sometimes we want to make sure specific groups are included that might otherwise be missed by using a simple random sample; those groups are usually a small proportion of the population. In this case, we would divide the population into strata based on some meaningful characteristic.

Introduction

It is true that focus groups are one of the most important qualitative research tools. It is also true that the amount of data resulting from a focus group session is enormous which can be very critical in achieving the goals of the study; these findings can easily deviate the research from its track, they can even be misleading in terms of analysis.

In that sense, setting the design for a research is a very critical phase. At this stage, the research team has to be involved in brainstorming sessions to identify the scope of the research and its main purpose before engaging at later stages in writing key objectives and key questions. Thus, every single detail concerning the topic of interest counts.

What You Have to Have in Mind…

- Leave out all pre-conceived ideas about what could be the answers.
- Do not form your questions based on answers you have in your mind.
- Approach focus groups with an informed, yet open mind.
- *CURIOUS!*

1. Developing the Research Objectives

Once the decision is made that focus groups are the right method to achieve the goals of the study, you will need to go back to examine closely the preliminary question(s) you would like to have answers for.

The research team is the main player at this stage. A qualified research team will be able to define the main objectives of the study and will be responsible for keeping the research on the right track.

At this stage, meetings should be conducted with the client, more specifically with the group of people who will be designing their work based on the final results.

At the beginning the client may have different ideas and questions that are not necessarily related or that can expand the research in an uncontrollable way or even worse, cannot be answered in focus groups. The research team will help the client to narrow down their scope of interest and identify the main objectives of the study in order to draw the headlines that the research should be looking at.

To help you go through this critical phase, there are some questions that could be answered at this stage i.e. why the information is needed? What is the background of the proposed study? What prompted the client to consider the study? Who is interested in the study results? What might those individuals do with the study results?

Types of preliminary questions

1. What is the exact topic of interest?
2. What led up to the decision to this study?
3. What is the purpose of the study?
4. What kind of info do you want?
5. What types of information are of particular importance?
6. Who will use this information?
7. What do you want to do with this information?
8. How will the information be used?
9. Where we can get this information from?
10. Who can provide the information we require?

In this phase the pattern of questioning leads to a better picture of the information needed and keeps the study on track.

1.1 The Research Purpose, the Key Objectives, and Key Questions

As mentioned before, meetings between clients and researchers are meant to define the research purpose; it will shape the main aim of the study and identify desired outcomes.

Once the purpose is defined, it is time to go deeper and more specific in the topic. This is the best timing to set the key objectives of the study, which are typically a set of 4-5 points that would lead the researchers in their journey of information hunting. Formulated in the present tense, key objectives describe the nature of the research activity needed (assess, understand, explore, measure, evaluate) and identify the angle of a given topic that the study would look at.

Examples of Key Objectives…

- *Understand what makes people participate / or not in civil society activities.*
- *Evaluate the impact of a program X on the awareness of people and adoption of preventive health care measures.*
- *Identify people's top priority in public policy issues.*

As for the key questions, they come out of the key objectives; these are typically 6-8 main questions that will be expanded and elaborated in the discussion guide. Researchers further fine tune the key objectives and provide more precision as to which perspective of the angle is most important to the client.

The key objectives and key questions are essential for every focus group project; they will be used throughout the focus groups to orient the study, develop the discussion guide and analyze the data.

Key objectives and key questions are subject to many discussions between the research team and the client in order to set the final version.

Example

The Research Purpose

Focus group research shall be conducted in order to better understand citizens' perceptions and expectations of civil society. The results will elicit information that can be put to use directly in informing civil society about the needs and expectations of local communities throughout the Kingdom.

Key Objectives

1. Understand the perceptions and expectations of Jordanian people about civil society.
2. Understand the citizens' opinions on the performance of civil society through the evaluation of its impact on their lives.
3. Understand the motivations that push citizens to participate and engage in the civil society and levels of interaction between them.

Key Questions

1. How do citizens understand "civil society" as a concept?
2. How do people assess the performance of CSOs and what do they expect from them?
3. What are the obstacles that influence the work of CSOs from the perspective of citizens?
4. What range of relations exists between citizens and CSOs?
5. What makes citizens benefit from CSOs projects or volunteer with them?
6. What would make citizens boycott CSOs?

Exercise 2: Writing a Research Design

A funder is willing to fund a development project in region A. The NGO doesn't know what kind of projects better suits this region. Therefore this NGO wants to conduct a focus group research in order to assess and understand people's needs and expectations.

- Please help the NGO develop the research purpose for this study.
- Please develop key objectives and key questions.

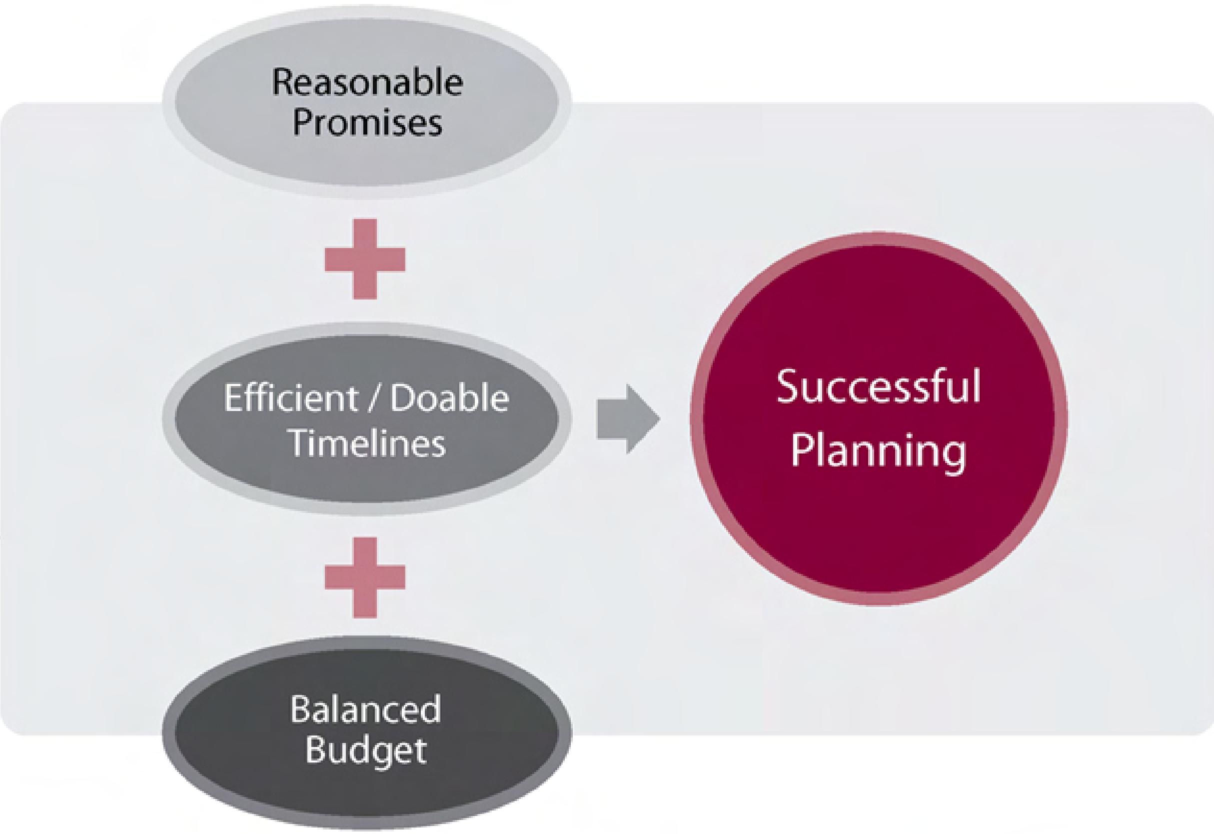
2. Planning the Research

Planning is crucial to make sure that everyone in the team is at the same page with regards to the purpose and key objectives of the study. It is also important to balance between what might be interesting to do and what can be done with the resources available.

Once the key objectives and the key questions of the study are determined, a research plan is required. Planning at this point will be very useful later on when you are designing the discussion guide and conducting the focus groups.

A successful planning has to meet the client's expectations and satisfy all his/her needs. In many cases, clients' needs and expectations do not necessarily match; it is the researchers' task to bring them to an agreement point where the client would end up getting the info he/she needs with the process he/she expects.

Planning consists of giving reasonable promises; researchers and clients should be aware of their capacities for no illusory promises shall be given. In that sense, they should agree upon an efficient timeline but also a doable one and combine it with a balanced budget.



An efficient timeline is the one that allocates the right time for every phase of the research while at the same time meets the pre-set deadlines. It is highly recommended to allocate the time needed for the recruitment; a two-week period is a typical timing for a sound recruitment process that is the basis of a series of focus group research, although it can be expanded or shortened according to the complexity/simplicity of the profile. As for the focus group sessions, their timeline is linked to their number and diversity (geographical location, waiting for a particular event to take place, etc). The deliverables and notably the final report typically needs two weeks to be finalized.

Having said this, a typical timeline for a FG research is 4-6 weeks. It varies based on factors of which many could be external.

It is crucial though to be transparent with the client about how long their research would take and inform them, as you're going along, of any unexpected delays.

3. Desk Research

As mentioned before, *preliminary questions* drive the project design, but a review of the pertinent literature, reliance on relevant theory and past experience also shape the design of a new project. Thus, and before you set the design that you will be working on, it is crucial to find out the information that is already available.

> **A Better Way of Planning**
>
> A one man show is not recommended in planning a focus group project.
> A researcher should not impose his/her ideas on clients neither on colleagues. Ideas should be suggested and discussed by the client and the research team as well as other stakeholders as relevant, each in his/her area of interest.

4. Setting the Research Design

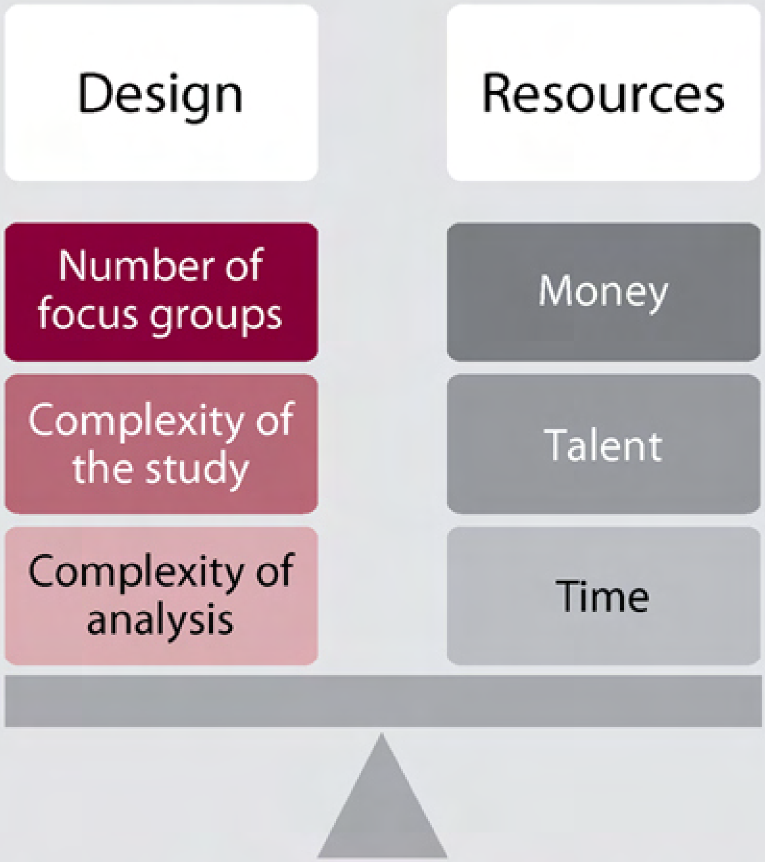
4.1 Patterns of Designs

Focus group designs are usually chosen according to the topic and the intended results. According to Richard A. Kreuger and Mary Anne Casey, there are many designs as follows:

* Single category design: It is the traditional way for conducting focus groups. In this kind of designs the number of focus groups is left undetermined until the information start to be repeated. This stage is known as "saturation of information".

* Multiple category design: It consists of conducting groups with several audiences, either sequentially or simultaneously. This allows a two ways of comparison from one group to another within the same category and from one category to another.
Example: two focus groups are conducted with youth males and females and old males and females so we can compare and contrast differences by gender in each category (males and females in youth groups – males and females in older groups) and by categories (youth and old).

When planning your focus group research, you have to balance the design with the resources available. It will be very interesting and tempting to conduct a high number of focus groups, especially when considering the information and findings that will result. However, you have to take into consideration the amount of money and time allocated to this research as well as the talent and the capacities of the dedicated staff. In fact, it is recommended to review your human potentials, financial resources and time constraints before embarking on any focus group research. The more the number of focus groups is, and the wider the profile looks like, the more complicated the analysis of the data will be, which require more money and definitely more time.



Tip

It is highly recommended for beginners not to exceed the number of 4-6 focus groups per project, to avoid the pressure of time constraints and analysis complexity

4.2 The Recruitment Profile

When planning the research design, and after having identified the key objectives of the research, you will have to think about your information-rich participants. The choice of the profile is very much related to the purpose of the study and varies accordingly; the study and the situation will dictate methods of selection.

Defining a recruitment profile is considered as one of the most critical parts of any focus group research. Participants should be chosen because they share characteristics of special interest to the client or researchers. Many variables should be taken into consideration when setting the profile of the participants; geographic location, age, gender, income, citizen participation characteristics, family size, employment status, etc.

There are two types of criteria:

- Objective Criteria: Age, gender, education, race, religion; all the elements that identify a person, and that are inalterable.

- Subjective/Constructed Criteria: Political affiliation, behavioral choices. Elements where people make choices- whether conscious or unconscious- with regards to a given product, idea, party, organization, social behavior, etc… i.e.: use/do not use the product X, go/do not go to place Y, support/ do not support ideas 1,2,3.

In most of the cases, the recruitment profile combines these two categories of criteria according to the requirements of the study. Sometimes, the recruitment profile would target changing patterns of objective criteria; in such cases the criteria becomes subjective as it becomes the issue in itself e.g. individuals who converted to a religion other than theirs in the context of a study on religion.

The most common (and simplest) method for selecting participants for focus groups is called "purposive" or "convenience" sampling. This means that you select the members of the community who you think will provide you with the best of information.

4.3 Types of Recruitment Sampling

Random sample: a sample in which each unit in the population has an equal chance of being selected.

Judgmental sample: a sample in which selections are made based on pre-determined criteria.

Convenience sample: a sample in which selections are based on the convenience to the evaluator (e.g., easy geographical or organizational access).

Stratified random sample: a mix between random and judgmental sample, whereby researchers identify set of criteria that are important for the study, then recruit participants randomly from among those who fit the pre-determined profile.

The table below is an example of using different variables.

Table 1: Main Variables for Setting Recruitment Profiles of Focus Group Researches

Age	It is required to have a maximum gap of 10-15 years within the same focus group (20-30) (40- 55) 60+ and above etc.
Gender	Males or females or mixed if the subject permits i.e. if the topic is about productive health we cannot combine males and females in the same group.
Socio-economic level	Social class based on national figures.
Religion	Christians, Muslims, sub groups as relevant.
Location	Rural, urban, central, north, south, etc.
Level of education	Primary, secondary, university, illiterate, etc.

Other variables could include race, country of origin, tribal origins; and other variables related to the context where the studies are conducted.

Selecting divisions is a critical part of the research process and depends on a careful review of previous research on the topic. The reason is very simple: if the divisions you select are irrelevant to the research questions, you will lose important analytical power when it comes to the interpretation of findings. To that end, when setting the recruitment profile it will be helpful to have advisory groups such as; employees and clients sharing their ideas and opinions to set a good profile.

Profile divisions are also determined through familiarity with previous research findings, basic research design principles, experience and logic.

Tip

- *If you do not understand the community well enough to know your information-rich participants do not hesitate to ask local actors (Municipalities, CBOs)*

- *Sometimes hard choices must be made among the key variables because of funding and time limitations. In that case you should select among the ones that you think are the most informative.*

4.4 Structuring Groups

When creating the recruitment profile, there are different levels of divisions. The big image can be drawn out of parameters directly related to the purpose of the study and varies accordingly. Direct parameters are very often objective criteria while indirect parameters can be associated to subjective criteria.

If you want to compare and contrast how certain types of people talk about issues, you have to separate them into different groups. This separation is very critical in order to have the adequate information. You should take into consideration many factors when structuring the groups.

Here are some hints about how to structure your groups:

- Doers and Non-Doers: A a way to gather different perspectives towards the topic of interest you should select people identified as "doers" meaning that they are directly related to the issue. On the other hand it is recommended to have the perspective of people identified as "non-doers", meaning they are not related/indirectly related to the issue. This will give you a broader picture of the situation as seen from different perspectives.

Example: An organization is conducting an impact evaluation for one of its projects. The project targeted youth and its main goal was "youth civic education". In this case the design shall target the young people who participated in this project to assess its impact on them as well as youth who did not participate in the project in order to compare the results from different perspectives.

- The same can be applied for Experts and non Experts – presenting different levels of expertise or power related to the issue.

Example: A new curriculum is being used in schools. A good research design would target the professors and experts in the educational sector. On the other hand the students should be targeted also as non-experts, for they are recipients of this curriculum. Parents could also be considered in this context as non-experts.

In some projects a variety of groups can be combined in order to deliver the best of information, i.e. general public, both doers and non-doers, other sessions can be conducted with experts in the domain.

Example: A study is aiming to test a law concerning women rights. In this case the design shall include the general public (women) as a main target, as well as other parties considered as stakeholders, i.e. local NGOs that worked on the law, men, etc. Experts such as lawyers could also be surveyed; and finally, interviews can be conducted with legislators, women leaders, etc.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

When thinking about focus groups, you have to think about creating a permissive environment where people are comfortable and can easily express their feelings and opinions about the topic.

YOU HAVE TO ASSURE MAXIMUM HOMOGENEITY AMONGST PARTICIPANTS IN EACH GROUP

☑ Be careful not to combine people with different levels of expertise in the same group i.e. supervisors and employees, teachers and students, etc. this would create a hierarchy syndrome and prevent people from talking freely.

☑ Be careful not to gather people with different social classes in the same groups, as some people might feel intimidated.

☑ Be careful about the gender sensitivity that might be a serious obstacle for people to speak up their minds. The subject of the research is very important in this case; the more the topic is personal and sensitive the more people are reluctant to talk.

Tip *Always write up the recruitment profile in a printed table and share it with your client, colleagues and research team.*

4.5 The Design Rationale

The Rationale is the logical thinking that leads to the setting of a design. The parameters are quite similar for different projects (age, region, confession, sex, etc.); however, it is the way they are linked that produces the desired information.

It is very important when showing the design to the client to combine it with the design rationale that will serve as an explanation and clarification for the logic lying behind the design.

Example

The Research Purpose

Focus groups aim at assessing and understanding people's conceptualizations, perceptions, apprehensions and expectations with regards to administrative decentralization.

Key Objectives

1. Assess how Lebanese citizens perceive administrative decentralization, and understand their fears and expectations.
2. Understand the needs of Lebanese citizens and expectations from administrative decentralization regarding:
    a. The form: regional, sectarian.
    b. Level: town, governorate.
    c. Form of representation and electoral system.
    d. Degree of independence, with particular focus on financial independence.
3. Understand the administrative division that Lebanese citizens prefer and the reasons for this preference.
4. Understand how Lebanese citizens perceive the impact of decentralization on their daily lives taking into consideration the place of birth and living (while focusing on the demographic differences from a sectarian and regional perspective and how this affects the understanding of decentralization).
5. Understand the influence that administrative decentralization would have on electoral behavior of citizens in various regions.

Design Rationale

Recruitment Profile

#	Focus Group	Governorate	Region	Confession	Age	Gender	Education	Special Feature	Rationale
1	General Public	Beirut	Ras Beirut	Sunnis	25 - 39	Females	University	Beirut as the place of origin	Reveals how people who will not "use" decentralization perceive it
2	General Public	Beirut	Eastern Beirut	Mixed Christians	18 - 24	Mixed	University	Beirut is not the place of origin	Informs the research on how the people who live outside their places of origin perceive the impact of decentralization on their lives
3	General Public	North	Tripoli	Sunnis	25 - 39	Females	High School	Tripoli is not the place of origin	Informs the research on how the people who live outside their places of origin perceive decentralization
4	General Public	North	Akkar	Sunnis	18 - 24	Mixed	High School	Rural area/ place of origin	Reveals the perceptions of youth living in rural remote areas, having the same confession as the majority, about decentralization and its impact on their lives

Recruitment Profile

#	Focus Group	Governorate	Region	Confession	Age	Gender	Education	Special Feature	Rationale
5	General Public	South	Saida	Shiites	25 - 39	Males	University	City/ place of origin/ majority of Sunnis	Informs the research on the perceptions of people living as a minority in a city, not far from Beirut, yet it is their place of origin, about the impact of decentralization on their lives
6	General Public	South	Jezzine	Maronites	18 - 24	Mixed	High school/ university	Central place of origin/ majority in Jezzine/ minority in the South	Reveals the perceptions of youth in rural areas living as a majority in a district and as a minority in the larger environment, about decentralization and its impact on their lives
7	General Public	Bekaa	Hermel	Shiites	25 - 39	Males	High school/ intermediate	Remote area/ place of origin/ majority of Shiites	Reveals the perceptions of people living in a very remote area about decentralization and its impact on their lives
8	General Public	Bekaa	Baalback	Mixed Christians	18 - 24	Mixed	High school/ university	Central city/ place of origin / Mixture/ Majority of Shiites	Reveals the perceptions of youth living as a minority in a central city far from the capital about decentralization

#	Focus Group	Governorate	Region	Confession	Age	Gender	Education	Special Feature	Rationale
9	General Public	Nabatieh	Nabatieh	Shiites	18- 24	Mixed	High school/ university	Central city/ place of origin/ Majority confession	Reveals the perceptions of youth living as a majority in a central city far from the capital about decentralization
10	General Public	Nabatieh	Hasbaya	Druze	25– 39	Males	High school/ university	Remote rural/ place of origin/ district majority/ governorate minority	Reveals the perceptions of people in rural areas living as a majority in a district and as a minority in the larger environment, about decentralization and its impact on their lives
11	General Public	Mount Lebanon	Aley	Druze	25 - 39	Females	High school/ intermediate	Central city/ place of origin/ district majority/ mixed governorate	Reveals the perceptions of people in a central city, close to the capital, living as a majority in a district and as a minority in a mixed environment, about decentralization
12	General Public	Mount Lebanon	Metn - Keserwan	Maronites	18 - 24	Mixed	High school/ university	Central city/ place of origin/ district majority/ mixed governorate	Reveals the perceptions of people in a central city, close to the capital, living as a majority in a district and as part of a mixed environment, about decentralization

5. The Number of Focus Groups

The number of focus groups is usually related to the budget of the study and the time constraints. Doing focus groups is expensive in terms of participants' transportation, venue, researchers in case of outsourcing, etc. this is considered a serious obstacle when setting the number of focus groups to be conducted. The timeline is the other issue that should be taken into account; every phase of the method necessitates a certain time to be implemented. As a result, the number of groups shall be set based on the timeline of the study agreed upon with the client.

Clients may want to conduct a big number of groups, as they like to get the maximal amount of information. They very often tend to overpass the budget of the study and cross the timeline. Researchers should advise on the selection of groups in a way to have the needed information while respecting the budget and timeline.

! Defining the number of groups is critical in terms of saturation. Saturation is a term to describe the situation when you have already heard the range of ideas and you stop getting any new information.

6. Developing a Research Proposal

At this stage, several meetings would have been conducted to point out the most important steps in a life cycle of a focus group research; objectives are set, the number of focus groups is determined and the recruitment profile is defined. Now it is time to write down all the ideas and opinions in a clear way for everyone to be able to understand.

The research proposal comes to sum up all the meetings and brainstorming sessions that have been held. It has to be organized in a logical manner where the client's needs are explicitly satisfied.

A proposal shall include:

- The research purpose, identified earlier with the client.
- Type of information needed, this includes the key objectives and key questions of the research; which will rule the whole process.
- The design, it is recommended for the client to see a well-organized design along with adequate rationales. It could also be helpful to create different scenarios respecting the timeline and the budget of the project. The final decision will be taken by the researchers and the client according to his/her preferences and needs.
- Deliverables, represent how you will present/state the outcomes of your study. Try to know beforehand how your client would prefer it to be, and diversify your presentation tools: reports, memo, power point presentation, etc.
- Timeline, includes dates, steps, people responsible, people assisting, comments.
- Budget, you might need to breakdown your expenses instead of calculating a lump sum. People like to see how much they are paying for each component. Others would only need a lump sum; especially if you're doing an internal research.

Research Design

- *Forces researchers to think in a logical manner and to clarify their ideas.*
- *Allows decision makers to provide feedback.*
- *Ensures that adequate resources and time are available to obtain needed information.*
- *Can be circulated and discussed more readily than thoughts.*

Exercise

Please correct the mistakes in this text as relevant. Please provide an alternative design that best fits the focus group methodology.

An organization decides to conduct focus groups to assess the situation of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the country, mainly regions where CSA is perpetrated, approximate number of children victims, and identification and referral systems in place. The focus groups will be also used to raise the awareness of parents and educators on the importance of children protection and identification of CSA indicators.

To that end, 15 focus groups were conducted in various regions of the country with around 40 to 50 participants in each group. Groups included separately parents, educators and social workers, children (8-12 years old), youth (13 – 18 years old) and young adults (19-25 years old), both males and females. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with 5 selected international NGOs specialized in the topic.

Key Objectives were as follows:

1. What is CSA? Perceptions towards CSA
2. Number of children sexually abused annually. How many times? By whom?
3. Regions where CSA is mostly perpetrated
4. What is the identification and referral system that exists in the country?

Exercise

Summing up

* The planning process begins by identifying the purpose of the study.
* Identify information-rich target audiences and decide on the number of focus groups to be conducted.
* Idealistic designs are easy, but the challenge is to develop a design that could be in balance with the resources available.
* Key objectives and key questions are essential for a successful and methodic research, they lead researcher throughout the focus group process, to look for information needed and avoid falling in the trap of interesting-to-know but information-out-of-subject.
* Feedback from colleagues, researchers, clients and target audience helps you identify problems before they occur.

Chapter Four

Developing the Discussion Guide

In this Chapter you will learn

* How to design a discussion guide?
* How to use the discussion guide?
* What type of questions to use and types of questions to avoid?

Glossary

Discussion guide	Is a series of questions moderator uses in a focus group to obtain responses; these questions shall be formulated based on the key objectives and key questions of the study.
Moderator	Is the one who facilitates the discussions among focus group participants by using a discussion guide.
Debrief	Is the first discussion of findings between the moderator and the researchers and observers after each session. The feedback of the moderator is the first reaction to the session that helps the observers review/confirm the data that they have collected.
Probes	Or follow up questions that the moderator adds to the guide or during the session in order to understand and/or generate deeper and clearer responses.

Introduction

What You Have to Have in Mind…

- Leave out all pre-conceived ideas about what could be the answers.
- Do not form your questions based on answers you have in your mind.

1. What is a Discussion Guide?

* The discussion guide – also called the moderator's guide – is basically a set of questions that the moderator uses during the focus groups. These questions shall be formulated based on the key objectives and key questions of the study.
* The discussion guide is an outline, prepared in advance for a specific profile of participants that covers the topics and issues to be explored.
* The discussion guide is designed with the overall research questions in mind and is constructed to ensure that topics covered in the focus group relate to the research objectives.
* The discussion guide is a concrete tool for the moderator and for the observers to solidify the research objectives and to make sure that both the observers and the moderator are on the same track.
* The guide usually has an easy beginning; starts with ice-breakers and then moves from general to specific questions.
* The questions in the discussion guide shall have a minimum number of 10 questions to a maximum of 15 questions; each question shall answer a key objective and shall serve a key question. One question can serve more than one objective. Similarly, one objective can be reached through several questions.

Tip *Always test the discussion guide with your colleagues in order to check the formulation, the content, and the meaning of the questions.*

2. Divisions of a Discussion Guide

* Introduction: Every discussion guide shall start with an introduction, where the moderator starts by greeting participants, introduces himself/herself, presents the general topic of the session, and asks the participants to introduce themselves. The introduction provides general information and then moves the participants to the introductory questions.

* Introductory questions, also called warm-up questions; the discussion guide usually starts with one or two introductory questions that set the tone of the session and get participants to overcome their apprehension. Introductory questions are not yet about the topic to be covered but rather serve as a general introduction, about general issues, aspirations, and concerns that people spontaneously express at the beginning of the conversation.

* Transition: Transition questions are questions that move the session from the general introductory context to the topic of interest to be researched. They are important because they set the tone for the rest of the session, and make people understand the specific issues that they will be talking about throughout the session.

* In-depth questions: The in-depth questions are usually located in the middle of the discussion guide where participants are asked to express their opinions towards most important issues of the research topic. The core purpose of the research shall be answered at this stage.

* Closure: Closing questions are the last one or two question(s) that create an opportunity for participants to clarify positions they made earlier in the discussion. The moderator usually thanks the participants and permits for any comments on the session.

Things to Remember…

If you are moderating

- Make sure you are well informed about the topic you will be discussing with your participants.
- Don't try to guess the responses, discussion shall be open-minded.
- Keep an eye on your time.
- Make sure you know exactly what you are looking for; you are the king/queen of the session (not the star) and your colleagues are counting on you to get them the information you need.
- When probing, make sure you probe in the right direction; don't probe on every single detail, probe only on relevant ideas, also called "gems" in focus group jargon.
- Never assume a reason behind a position or opinion. Ask even if things seem obvious, even if you feel awkward asking about something obvious that might not be.
- Don't forget to listen to your colleagues; don't ignore their requests.

If you are observing

- Don't over interfere with the moderator; if you feel he/she is losing it, call him/her out and try to re-put things on track. If it does not work, just replace him/her.
- Don't criticize him/her in front of participants and clients, and never have an argument with him/ her at this stage, you will all lose it.
- Allow the moderator enough time to ask; he/she knows. The session is flowing. Give him/her some space. If there are questions he/she did not address, try to let him/her know before the end of the session.
- Take notes. Good notes are multicolored and well marked. Never forget to specify the date and timing of the session, the profile of people, the topic discussed, and the page numbering.

3. Types of Questions in Focus Groups' Discussion Guides

* Open-Ended: When writing any discussion guide for focus groups, it is important that the questions be open ended without any allusion as to what the answers might be. However, sometimes closed-ended questions can be used to generate personal positions allowing participants to provide more in-depth motivations, choices and concerns over one issue. What matters in such cases is perusing the why rather than sticking on yes / no or with / against answers.

* Non leading: Participants of focus groups have to be able to freely express their thoughts and opinions on issues in brief discussions and reach conclusions without bias.

* Probes: or follow up questions, are very important in the discussion guide and in moderators' mind. In almost every question in the guide, we add some probes that further explain participants' answers. Probing questions reveal more in-depth information by clarifying earlier responses or pending on statements made by participants. A good moderator is the one that probes for more answers when needed even if probes are not written in the guide.

* Short and simple: We usually use short questions to get long answers and keep participants on the track. Also always make sure your language is clear, simple, and easily understandable by everybody. Don't use "expert words", unless you're sure your participants are all experts (in this case you are probably doing a special focus group for experts).

* Non-Judgmental: It is important to use non-judgmental language when formulating questions of discussion guide, in order to preserve the open environment and to make participants feel at ease expressing their opinions especially about sensitive issues.

* General to specific: In every discussion guide, questions shall always start broad and then move to specific; which means a dual shift from less personal to more personal.

4. Questions to Avoid

* Closed Ended: like yes or no questions, as these types of questions can limit the conversation and elicit ambiguous responses. Closed ended questions can be used only if we want to generate personal positions and we make sure we probe, asking participants the why behind the position expressed, whatever it is. Example: Do you support implementing this project in your region?; replace with: how would you feel about implementing this project in your region?

* Double barreled: Such as questions that ask two or more questions at the same time. This would make participants confused about which question to answer first, thus lose concentration. Example: How do you feel about the voting requirement and what are you going to do about the women quota and lowering voting age?

* Leading: Leading questions already have the answers embedded in the question, therefore the personal expectation of the moderator will be involved in the discussion which can change the whole conversation and affect the focus groups results. Example: to what extent do you consider that violence against children is immoral and inhuman? In this case, even the use of the word "violence" can be leading; replace with: what do you think of various means used to discipline children? and probe until you get a position about violence against children, to what extent is it socially acceptable, what is the limit beyond which beating is considered violence, etc., depending on your key objectives.

It is OK...

The discussion guide can be amended in case both the moderator and the client feel the need to, but we shall not forget that some questions that serve the key objectives of the study are essential in order to gather the data that is needed. If you have to revise a question or two in order to enhance the cultural sensitivity or responsiveness of the guide, please make sure this is done in collaboration with those who requested your research and in accordance with your key objectives and key questions.

Checklist of a Sound Discussion Guide

- ☑ Are the questions related to the key objectives? Do they answer the key objectives and key questions of the research?
- ☑ What type of language does the topic and target audience require? Are you using "expert" words?
- ☑ Is the language informal and simple?
- ☑ Are questions short and understandable?
- ☑ What information do the questions ask for?
- ☑ How broad or narrow are the questions?
- ☑ How are they related to what you need to know?
- ☑ How answerable are they?
- ☑ How are participants likely to feel about the questions?
- ☑ Are the questions too sensitive?
- ☑ Is the context of the questions clear?

Tip

To make sure that you will obtain what you want from the conversation; try to do a simulation test for the discussion guide with your colleagues before using it with participants. You might notice that some questions are unclear, some others repetitive or generate perspectives you don't need. Testing is key for a sound discussion guide.

Don't forget to define tentative time for each question and to put an estimated time for the session. Usually, a focus group session lasts for 60 minutes and should never exceed 120 minutes. In general, if you have a discussion guide of more than 15 questions, this probably means that you are over asking. In that case, you should revisit your key objectives and key questions, make sure you prioritize the information you need, and review your discussion guide accordingly.

Exercise 4: Writing a Discussion Guide

Write a discussion guide that provide direct answer to the following key objectives and key questions:

Key Objectives:

1. Understanding perceptions of people towards social issues and where they stand on their priority list.

2. Assess contribution of TV shows addressing social issues in raising awareness of people and getting them to hold public discussions about social problems.

3. Measure the motivation that could result from these programs to urge governments and officials to address social problems.

4. Explore receptiveness of people to social problems in neighboring countries and whether an added value exists from looking at social issues from a regional perspective.

Key Questions:

1. How do people perceive social issues in general? And do they give them priority in their discussions?

2. How did people perceive the Arab House show? What emotions, thoughts, and desires did the program stir inside of them?

3. How can the airing of the show mobilize people to hold public discussions about social problems and undertake official demands from local government?

4. What added value did the regional coverage of the show bring to the people's perceptions towards social problems in neighboring countries?

5. What do people expect from local TV Stations? What are their priorities perceptions and needs?

Back to the exercise on CSA, please correct the following DG:

1. In your opinion, what is CSA?
2. Have you/your children ever been sexually abused? How many times? By whom?
3. For educators: have you ever sexually abused a child? Why?
4. To what extent would you consider CSA as an immoral, unethical and inhumane act?
5. In which regions is CSA mostly perpetrated?
6. How many children are sexually abused annually?
7. What is the identification and referral system that exists in the country?
8. Now we would like to share some information with you: CSA is …
9. Do you have any question about CSA? We would be glad to provide you with more information about the topic.

Summing up

* The discussion guide is a series of questions the moderator uses in a focus group to obtain responses.
* The discussion guide questions shall be formulated based on the key objectives and key questions of the study.
* Questions shall start general then move to specific.
* FG questions shall be open-ended, neutral, non-judgmental and should not exceed 15 questions.

Chapter Five

Recruiting Participants

In this Chapter you will learn

* What are focus groups' recruitment requirements?
* Writing screeners and quality control
* Selecting participants

Glossary

Tally sheet	Is the sheet that the recruiter uses in order to gather information about the participants that will attend the focus group.
Screeners	Is a step-by-step questionnaire that guides the recruiter in selecting potential participants based on the profile needed.
Re-screener	Is a second questionnaire used by the moderator prior to the focus group in order to double check whether participants fit the profile needed or not.
Incentives	Are small amounts of money or gifts or any other remuneration provided by the focus group organizers to focus group participants to encourage them to participate in the focus groups.

Introduction

Now that you have prepared everything for your study, and you have decided who will be your information-rich participants, it is time to start recruiting people that fit the profile you have set up.
Recruiting participants is one of the most important steps in any focus group project: it is all about sampling and very much relies on the research design and the identification of information about each participant.

There are basics for recruitment, also known as international recruitment standards that you have to respect while inviting people to your focus group. This chapter will help you get through this phase successfully.

1. What is Recruitment?

There is no one method that professional focus group research centers solely adopt.

Recruitment is a flexible innovative creative process that varies with the variety of people that are asked to participate in a given focus group. For example, if you want to know the quality services provided in a dispensary, your information-rich participants will be users of this dispensary. As a result, your recruitment method will be either spending a day (or more as relevant) at the dispensary and inviting visitors to the focus groups, or alternatively get attendance sheets from administrative staff at the dispensary and contact people to ask them to attend focus groups. Respectively, these two options are referred to as Field Recruitment and Phone Recruitment. In the latter, recourse is made to what is referred to as "available database".

Field recruitment: is the action recruiters undertake to recruit people through direct contact in a given area, based on pre-set criteria.

Phone Recruitment: is the action recruiters undertake to recruit people using pre-established lists of people's names and contacts. These lists can be general, such as national phone registry (white and yellow pages) and voters' lists, or specific; such as lists of clients of a given company, users of a given product, and beneficiaries of a specific project. In this case, recruitment is done using available database.

Getting People to Attend FG

- Before recruitment: prepare good description of the study, why it's important, and why the presence of this particular person is particularly important.
- Present the topic as significant.
- Personalize invitations.
- Offer incentives.
- Take into account seasonal time demands of particular audiences.
- Build on existing and organizational relationships.

Tip

Remember: YOU need the participants, not the other way around. Therefore you should be very flexible especially when setting the time and date of the FG session.

2. Recruitment Tools (Samples included as annexes at the end of this chapter)

2.1 The Screener

* Recruiters use screeners to interview potential participants for focus groups.
* The screener is a step-by-step questionnaire that guides the recruiter in the field or over the phone.
* The screener helps the recruiter to find target population segments; it screens in potential participants that fit the desired profiles and screen out those who do not fit the profile.
* Screeners help you identify from a larger segment of the population a smaller group that would eventually form your focus group.

2.2 The Re-Screener

* The re-screener is the second tool for selecting participants for FG.
* The moderator uses the re-screening questions in order to control "the quality of people" getting to the FG.

2.3 The Main Use of the Re-Screener: Quality Control

* To correct mistakes in data collection during the recruitment.
* To make sure you get a good mix. In case of over recruitment, you screen out participants who are too similar to others.
* Final revision of participant list with the client will allow identifying people who should not be a part of the focus groups example: if the client is a company you might not want a former employee to be part of a focus group with the general public, therefore you should be screening him/her out.
* To ensure participants are the ones you recruited!
* To reveal a participant who may have lied.
* To allow the moderator to informally interact with participants, so he/she can identify problematic ones and exclude them if needed.

2.4 The Tally Sheet

It is the sheet that the recruiter uses in order to gather information, at a glance, about the participants that will attend the focus group.

Recruitment Basics

- Allow time: Allow time for the recruitment to take place. The more specific is the profile needed the more time should be allowed for the recruiter to do his/her work.

- Avoid familiarity: The recruiter shall always remember the international standards of recruitment which require that focus group participants are not familiar with each other, as familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure. Also avoid participants who have already participated in several focus groups.

- Recruit more participants than needed: The normal number of focus group participants is between 7 - 10 participants, but the recruiter should invite more participants than needed. For example, if we want 8 participants to attend we should recruit around 15 participants because many of them just do not show up at the last minute.

- Track and remind participants: All participants shall be tracked in one central location, and the recruiter shall re-confirm their participation within 24 hours of the group, and provide transportation when needed. This helps ensure that participants attend.

3. What Do We Do When…

* People do not show up: Don't panic, it just happens, even with the most competent recruiters. Re-schedule your group and allow enough time for recruitment.
* You have non-matching people: Don't do it. Non matching people waste your time and can seriously hinder your research. Politely but firmly, apologize from participants and be very clear about why the session won't take place.
* You have less than 6 participants: If you have 4 or 5 participants, you can do your focus group and allow more time for your probes and in-depth follow up questions. If it is your first focus group, you might think of redoing another one with the same profile or at least another mini group with 5 other participants. If you have already conducted half of your scheduled groups, you might be able to tell whether you would need another one to complete your findings or the information you got from this group is enough. If you have less than 4 participants, that will depend on your judgment whether to do it or not. Our advice is just do it; you can always re-do it if it is not enough. Information from people is always insightful and might point out many issues that you have not thought of before. Don't waste the opportunity to listen to what people have to say, especially that they are already there, you have probably got ready for the whole process, so there is no waste in doing it anyway. Alternatively, reschedule your session and have a serious talk with your recruiters. Identify the mistakes and address them.
* We have people coming late: If some participants appear half an hour late, it is preferable that they do not participate in the focus session because they would have missed a great deal of the questions. Whereas if some appear 5 or 10 minutes late, it is ok, they can participate. However, it is up to the moderator to decide whether to let them in or just leave them out.

For the moderator to be able to decide here are few elements to consider:

- ☑ If you have already asked 2 or more key questions, then is it probably too late,
- ☑ If you are still in the introductory questions, then the new comers can easily be part of the session,
- ☑ If the person presents features in your profile that you are missing in the group, then you probably want to keep him/her even if he is 40 minute late. You might want to spend another 20 minutes with him /her at the end of the session.

To sum up, accepting or rejecting late arrivals is your call as a moderator and/or researcher. Do keep in mind though that the decision is the result of many factors so balance it in your mind before making it.

Checklist for Sound Recruitment

Important things to think about when defining the target profiles and regions for a focus group research:

- ☑ Composition and homogeneity of each group: Dynamics of comfort and openness together with seriousness and depth.
- ☑ Set meeting date, time, location.
- ☑ Make personal contact with potential participants.
- ☑ Make a reminder phone contact.
- ☑ Offer Incentives (Financial or Not).

Tip

In case of over recruitment, the moderator selects the most appropriate participants to attend the focus group and apologizes from the others.

4. Recruitment Insights

International standards for focus group recruitment require that participants do not know each other previously, and that participants are homogenous, yet diverse at the same time, within criteria identified. For example, in a focus group with youth aged 25 – 35, participants should not be aged between 25 and 27 only, but there should be people aged 27, 29, 30, 33, 35, etc. However, these rules are not always achievable, particularly the familiarity issue, especially in certain contexts.

4.1 About the Familiarity Issue

It is sometimes very difficult to convene a focus group session with people who do not know each other. This is particularly the case in rural regions, or in specific contexts of common features (beneficiaries of the same project). Therefore, it is important to balance international standards and reality. Common sense and judgment is key in such cases. Here are some hints to help you get through this.

In rural context, try to get people who do not belong to the same family, are not neighbors and do not have daily contact. In the case of beneficiaries of the same project, such as a dispensary for example, try to have people who were not visiting on the same day. In your judgment call, always keep in mind the topic and purpose of the research, as these shall always be your ultimate guide in what can be done with minimal effect versus what cannot be done because of major effects on the results.

* *Example: If you are doing a focus group research on reproductive health in a rural region, you will not accept to have a women and her sister-in-law.*

4.2 About the Homogeneity Issue

When doing a focus group, one of the key elements of its success is to create an open, permissive, and comfortable environment to make people feel at ease, thus freely express their opinions. Keep in mind that some research topics can be very sensitive, so if people feel embarrassed, then you're probably wasting your time as they will not speak up their minds. One of the main characteristics of human behavior is to tell personal things to people we don't know, and whom we would never meet again. Of course, this very much depends on the topic of the conversation. Sometimes, people whom we barely know are those in front of which we would never say anything because we fear their reaction and how our opinion would affect the way they look at us. In all cases, homogeneity does not mean people from the same family, but rather people who do not know each other but share the same characteristics, whether objective or subjective. Homogeneity is also very much related to the recruitment profile. For example, in a focus group about elections, you could have people from different socio-economic backgrounds yet from the same region to talk about a specific candidate in this region. However, you cannot have a millionaire and a low-income employee to talk about expenditure trends and patterns. Again, it is all about judgment in relation to the topic of the research.

* *Example: If you are doing a focus group in a company, don't mix up managers and employees. Also, do not put together employees from the same department. If it is a small-size company, then you could think of doing one-on-one interviews instead.*

4.3 About the Incentives

Professional focus group centers usually give certain amounts of money (between 15 to 50 dollars according to the profile of people, topic of research and circumstances). However, NGOs and civil society organizations doing their own focus group researches may not afford to pay focus group participants, not only for financial reasons, but also because they do not want to set precedents for upcoming activities, as people may not necessarily differentiate between a focus group and an awareness session for example. You might want to think of creative ways to compensate people for their time and energy, yet without compromising your future activities. This could be through in-kind gifts or services, such as baby-sitting for women, professional assistance for farmers, books or magazines for youth, etc.

Exercise: Developing Screeners

Develop three screeners for the following focus group research project:

Topic: Women in politics
Objective: Collect data on perception of women in politics for upcoming elections.
Information-rich participants: men and women, youth and middle age, average education, voters, average socio-economic status, rural, metropolitan and central rural contexts.

Tip

When recruiting your participants, don't tell them what the exact topic of the research is; you may mention the general issue to avoid participants who do their own research thus influence negatively on the findings. For example, if you are working on alternative crops, you may simply say that you will be discussing issues related to agriculture in general.

Again with the exercise on CSA, what do you think of this recruitment plan?

1. The organization recruited 40-50 children in each focus group conducted with children, both males and females.
2. In the adult focus groups, parents and educators were mixed in the same group.
3. To conduct these focus groups, the organization had recourse to another organization that provides a lot of awareness raising on child rights. This organization recruited all participants.
4. Screeners were used right before the focus groups to enter participant data into the organization database.

5. Sample Materials

5.1 Screener Sample

Profile Needed: Males, 35 – 45 years old, uneducated, lower income, voted in last elections, residing in Irbid, voting in Irbid.

Recruiter Name:
Recruitment date:
Place of Recruitment:

Name of the interviewed person	
Tel	
Availability	
Address	

Good morning,

My name is ...., I work in ...., and we work on public affairs issues that concern all the citizens.

Our center/organization regularly organizes focus groups that involve 8 to 10 persons. We are currently working on a subject of common interest to you as a citizen (KEEP IT AS BROAD AS POSSIBLE, YET HONEST). Your opinion is of great importance to us.

Can you please spare me a few minutes of your time. We have a few questions for you so we can identify which session you fit in.

1. Gender (do not ask it; just click it):

Woman	Stop the questionnaire
Man	Continue the questionnaire

2. Age; could you please tell me which age bracket are you in?

Less than 35	Stop
35-45	Continue
46 +	Stop

3. Educational Background:

Illiterate	Continue the questionnaire
Primary	Continue the questionnaire
Secondary	Stop the questionnaire
University	Stop the questionnaire

4. Please tell me which bracket your average monthly income belongs to.

Less than 500 USD	Continue
500-1000 JD	Stop
1001-2000 JD	Stop
2001-4000 JD	Stop
More than 4000 JD	Stop

5. Did you vote in the last municipal elections?

Yes	Continue the questionnaire
No	Stop the questionnaire

6. Where are you from?

Irbid	Continue
Other	Stop

7. Where do you live?

Irbid	Continue
Other	Stop

Thank you for your time, your name and your identity will remain confidential. You will be offered (…) for your participation.

In case you would like to participate, what time suits you the best?

5.2 Re-Screener Sample

Profile Needed: Males, 35 – 45 years old, Irbid as place of origin and residence, uneducated, lower income, voted in last elections.

Topic:

Date:

Time:

Name of Participant:

Gender:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

Place of Residence:

Work:

Did you vote in the last elections?

Could you please tell me the names of 3 candidates who were running in your districts?

Have you ever participated in a focus group?

The session duration will be around 90 minutes. We would like to have you for the whole duration.

Moderator's Name:

Moderator's Signature:

Re-Screener Sample

5.3 Tally Sheet Sample

Recruitment Profile: Women – Central Badia – 18-25 years
Focus Group: Friday 13/6/08- 4:30 pm

Name	Gender	Phone	Age	Region	Comments

Tally Sheet Sample

Summing up

* The recruiter's role is to bring participants to the focus group.
* The recruiter shall be friendly with the participants and flexible with their time.
* The recruiter shall abide by the screeners to avoid wrong selection.
* The international standards of recruitment are no familiarity of participants, and homogeneity of participants in the group.
* Recruitment is about practicality, creativity, flexibility and innovation.
* The non-judgmental environment, which is an essential element for conducting focus groups, starts in the recruitment.

Chapter Six

Moderating Focus Groups

In this Chapter you will learn

* What is the moderator's role?
* What are the moderator's Ground Rules?
* What are the principles of good moderation?
* What to do in difficult situations?
* How to tell whether a group is working effectively or not?

Glossary

Follow up questions	Questions that the moderator uses for verification, to collect additional information, or to better understand a given response or a certain opinion.
Re-screening	The re-screening is a second questionnaire to gain more information on the participants. The moderator does it right before the session starts.

1. The Moderator's Role

* The moderator role is to facilitate the focus group discussion.
* The moderator plays a crucial role in the success of a focus group. He/she guides the discussion along specific paths, directs the conversation to allow perceptions, beliefs and attitudes to emerge.
* The moderator actively listens without expressing his or her own opinion; he/she creates a space for participants to exchange ideas.
* The moderator keeps participants focused, engaged, attentive and interested; uses prompts, and probes to stimulate discussion.
* The moderator uses the discussion guide effectively to ensure all topics are covered and makes sure everyone participates freely and comfortably.
* The moderator must have good listening skills, good observation skills and good communication skills.

2. The Moderator and the Re-Screening

The re-screening is the first informal interaction between the moderator and the participants; the re-screening is always done before the FG session and serves the following purposes:

* To correct mistakes in data collection during the recruitment.
* To ensure a good mix of participants. In case of over recruitment, moderator screens out participants who are too similar to others.
* To ensure participants are the ones you need for your study.
* To allow the moderator to informally interact with participants so he/she can identify problematic ones and exclude them. Also, the seating arrangement will reflect personality of participants according to the moderator's selection. It is thus common to ask shy participants to sit in front of the moderator so the latter can keep an eye contact with them which is known to push reluctant people to speak up their minds. On the contrary, participants identified as talkative can be seated next to the moderator, so he/she can keep control over them and easily avoid the eye contact.

3. The Moderator's Ground Rules

In every focus group session, the moderator shall be aware of setting ground rules during the session, from starting with greeting the participants at the beginning of the session until thanking them at the end.

Ground rules are mainly about building the first rapport, when participants are seeking comfortable, open and judgment-free environment.

Rapport is important to the moderation process, because it can dramatically influence the willingness of participants to answer questions. The purpose of focus groups is to gain information about the topic(s) of interest from the perspective of participants. Rapport is key to achieve this.

4. Balance Rapport and Professionalism

At the beginning of each session, it is highly recommended that the moderator present him/herself as a researcher rather than a friend. The moderator needs to let participants know that he is part of a team that is conducting research for community work purposes. This formality communicates to participants that their participation is important and contributes to the community. If the moderator is too casual participants may not see him/her as someone who is prepared to take what they have to say seriously. At the same time, if he/she is too serious and formal, they might feel intimidated and reluctant from freely expressing their opinions. Balance is key in moderating focus groups.

One of the main roles of moderators is to achieve a balance between building a rapport with participants and conveying an appropriate level of professionalism. The moderator's role during focus groups is not that of a good conversationalist or a friend who provides feedback, but a professional who carefully listens and understands what people are saying.

Starting the Session

The moderator shall start each session by greeting and welcoming participants, introducing him/herself as a researcher and introducing briefly the topic that will be discussed. Sometimes, the identity of the client is confidential thus the moderator is not allowed to disclose whom the research is being conducted for.

This introduction can be helpful:

Welcome to (the name of the institution) today we are going to talk about issues that are important to us in our village/neighborhood/situation. We want to know what you think about these issues. There is no right and wrong answers to the questions that we are going to ask; you don't have to worry about that. You can say anything you like, what is important for us is your personal point of view.

All we ask is that only one person speaks at a time so that we can all hear what you are saying. Everything that you say will be kept confidential. No comments will be publicly attributed to anyone. The discussion is being recorded so that we think more carefully about what you say after the session is over. But we are all bound by the confidentiality rules. My name is (…), I work as a researcher in (name of the institution) and would like to know your name, hobbies, work, etc.

If you know – through the re-screening – that there are differences in the backgrounds of people even within your recruitment profile, try not to make people talk about these differences to avoid intimidation. For example, if you are doing a focus group about a political issue with university students, and it happened that you've got a student in political science for example while others are studying other disciplines, try not to encourage participants to talk about their studies because other students might feel less informed than – supposedly – the political science student. Ask them about their hobbies, the last movie they have watched, etc. Remember the idea is not to have people introduce themselves, but rather to break the ice and speak first about something that they feel comfortable speaking about.

5. Principles of Good Moderation

* Listen Carefully to Participants:

Active listening allows probing effectively and at appropriate points during the focus group. Active listening involves not only hearing what someone is saying, but also noticing body posture and facial gestures (i.e. any changes in nonverbal behavior) that might provide indications as to the appropriate or necessary ways to engage participants.

* Show Participants You Are Listening

Show participants that you are listening to what they are saying. Signs that you are paying attention may include leaning forward slightly, looking directly at participants while they are speaking, or nodding at appropriate times. Such behaviors not only indicate that the moderator is more engaged, but also help maintain the engagement of the participants themselves. Looking away or frequently checking your watch will most likely make participants feel that you are not listening. If participants suspect that you are not listening to them with great care, they may take their role of sharing expert knowledge less seriously and, therefore, may not elaborate or provide much detail in their answers.

* Remain neutral

While showing participants that you are actively listening and interested in what they are sharing, you will also want to remain as neutral and impartial as possible, even if you have a strong opinion about something. Use phrases such as "Thank you. That is helpful." Comments such as "I can't believe it!" or "You really think that?!" are not appropriate remarks for a moderator to make, because they infer your opinion and impose judgment on the participant, which will shut down discussion and make other participants become very cautious about the opinions they would voice out.

* Don't be afraid of silence; Silence encourages elaboration

Allowing silence at times encourages elaboration by participants because it gives them a chance to think about what they want to say. More often than not, participants will fill the silence with more information. However, it is important to strike a balance between keeping the conversation moving (so that you use your time well) and allowing participants adequate time to share and process what has been shared.

* The participant is the expert

Using probes to clarify what the participant has said reinforces the fact that the respondent has expert knowledge, based on their direct experiences with the topic that the researcher wants to understand. Good probes let the participants know that the moderator is listening to their answers. This also helps to establish the rapport that is so important to the focus group process.

* Avoid asking leading questions

It is important to avoid asking questions that are leading, meaning that they reflect moderator opinions or assumptions about a topic.

An example of a leading question is "Don't you prefer…" This presents to the participants that the moderator has an opinion, not that he is there to learn from them as an unbiased listener. This type of questioning may lead the participants to answer questions according to what they think the moderator expects to hear, rather than how they really feel.

* Avoid making assumptions

The opinions of the participants should not be assumed by the interviewer. To help ensure that the moderator is not assuming, he should use probes in order to clarify the participants' answers.

* Keep your eye on the time

The moderator's time management is crucial during the session since individuals love to talk about their experiences and may have a tendency to go on and on about them. The moderator's job is to structure the session in such a way that elicits a complete response to questions, while respecting the focus group time management.

* Deep knowledge, deep modesty

The moderator has to be well informed about the topic that focus groups are exploring. However, he/she has to keep low profile and never act as the expert or the key informant on the subject, as this would eventually intimidate participants and refrain them from talking, mainly because they fear saying something wrong, in front of someone who "knows".

Always remember: that focus group is about what people know, think, feel, etc… Your knowledge serves to help you understand all of this.

* Keep the focus group moving

It is also the moderator's job to politely move the focus group forward when what the participant is sharing is less useful, given the research questions. Sometimes, it is possible to do this by listening to something that is relevant to another question or set of questions. Other times, the moderator may want to acknowledge that the time together is waning and that there are some other aspects of their work and experience that he/she wants to be sure he/she has time to learn about and explore, and, for this reason, he/she is going to move on.

* Make an efficient use of the discussion guide

A well-developed discussion guide will remind the moderator to do a time check periodically to make sure that the focus group is progressing appropriately. Another strategy is to listen to relevant information to questions that you have not yet asked so that you can skip these later. If you do run out of time before you have covered all the questions in the discussion guide, be sure to use your remaining time asking and exploring only the most important questions left.

The more familiar the moderator is with the discussion guide, the easier it will be for him/her to prioritize particular questions in order to cover the needed info.

* Play devil's advocate

A good moderator plays devil's advocate when he/she can, however, devil's advocate means arguing against a cause or position, not as a committed opponent to the participant, playing devil's advocate is used to understand deep roots of a participant's position.

* Show Empathy

Although neutrality and impartiality are key for successfully moderating focus group discussions, it is sometimes important that the moderator shows empathy towards specific situations, especially when topics are highly emotional or humanitarian and compassionate, such as moderating a focus group with women victims of domestic violence.

Of course showing empathy does not mean engaging in lamentations with participants, but rather showing respect and care sometimes in non-verbal communication that makes participants feel more comfortable speaking out their grievances and opinions.

* Don't Push for Consensus

The objective of a focus group is to generate as much ideas as possible. So whenever you have disagreements over an issue within your group, this means your focus group is very rich, and you have to make sure to keep it going this way. If you feel people are tending to agree, try to push them to disagree, such as saying anyone has another opinion, do you think other people think differently, etc.

* Probe, probe and… probe!

A good moderator is the one that probes frequently, and always clarifies questions. Probing is an important part of focus groups and has two main purposes: to help clarify what a participant has said and to help get more detailed information on topics of interest. Probes allow participants to provide more than just a one-sentence answer to the questions.
Example of probes: What exactly do you mean by this word? What else? Please give us an example of… Does anyone feel differently about this issue? Help me understand what you are saying, why is this important to you?

Tip *Don't forget to take off your watch and put it in front of you so you can manage your time while moderating your focus group session.*

6. Difficult Situations

Difficult situations may arise during focus groups. The following are some examples of common situations that can occur and what you as a moderator can do in each of these situations.

6.1 Managing Difficult Situations

a. What do you do if no one responds to a question?

In this kind of situation, it is helpful to try to understand why people aren't responding. There are few hints:

* Did you ask a question that was difficult for the participants to understand?
If you think this might be the case, you might try asking the question in a different way. Always remember types of focus group questions when improvising questions.

* Are people tired of talking about the topic and/or do they have no more to say about a topic?
In this case, it may be important to simply state, "Is there anything else that you would like to share? [Pause] If not, we can move on to our next question."

* Are people feeling uncomfortable about talking?
If no one responds to a question, and you aren't sure exactly what the problem is, it's okay sometimes to just wait it out. Be quiet for a moment and allow people time to think. Often, someone will speak up, either to answer the question or to ask a question that allows you to have a better understanding of the silence.

b. What do you do if the group begins to talk about topics that are not relevant to the research?
When this happens; just say: "Thank you for that interesting idea. Perhaps we can discuss it in a separate session; I would like to move on to another item."

c. What do you do if people are having side conversations?
If side conversations occur during a focus group, you might respectfully remind people of the ground rules and ask that people finish their conversations and rejoin the larger group discussion taking place.

d. What do you do if you ask a question and participants say that they do not feel comfortable answering it?
If this happens, say "thank you" and that you acknowledge and appreciate their honesty. Then, ask them if it would be okay to move on to the next question in the discussion guide. Try to ask another question that would get the same information. If it still does not work, revise your discussion guide and/or try to find out from other groups why these people did not want to answer your question.

e. What do you do if people begin leaving?
You can try to mitigate this problem in advance by letting people know how long the focus group will take and emphasize that it is important for individuals to stay for the entire discussion. You may also ask the group at the beginning of the meeting if anyone has to leave early so you manage your time accordingly.

6.2 Types of Challenging Participants

In almost every focus group, the moderator faces at least one challenging participant. The expertise of the moderator shows the most in the way he/she deals with the following types of challenging participants:

* The dominant talker:
is the one who dominates the discussion and doesn't want to listen to other participants; in this case you should manage him/her by trying to keep his/her turn of speaking to the end.

* The rambler:
is the one who talks about the same subject, repeats the same story and does not let anyone talk. In this case, you can manage him/her by letting other participants speak first.

* The expert:
is the one who presents himself as an expert in the subject, and let everyone feel that he/she knows better than them; in this case you should encourage other points of view, and let others speak first.

* The shy:
is the one who doesn't talk; in this case you should encourage him to speak and give him/her more attention throughout the session.

Tip

Sometimes, participants wait until the end of the focus group to share things with the moderator that they did not mention during the focus group. The moderator should always pay attention to these issues because it could clarify behaviors and help in analyzing the data later on.

Checklist of Good Moderation

- ☑ Become very familiar with the key objectives and key questions of the study
- ☑ Become very familiar with the discussion guide.
- ☑ Arrive at the focus group location an hour before the session time to organize the room and materials.
- ☑ Be nice to participants during re-screening.
- ☑ Welcome focus group participants, invite them to get something to eat.
- ☑ Explain, in a general and brief way, the purpose of the focus group.
- ☑ Introduce yourself, the note taker and other observer (if you are in the same room with them). If not, you may want to tell the participants that your colleagues are observing in the other room so they don't bother you.
- ☑ Remind participants of the duration of the focus group, emphasizing the importance of their participation during the entire discussion.
- ☑ At the end of the focus group, thank participants and ask for any comments.
- ☑ Allow yourself one minute at the end of the group to quickly check whether you have covered all the questions in the discussion guide.

Exercise 6: Developing a Discussion Guide

Try to do simulation moderation on the previously written discussion guide. Some participants (assigned by the trainer) will behave like various types of challenging participants. The moderator will find solutions to address various situations on the spot. Moderators will be changed every 5-7 minutes.

Please indicate whether the following is a good or bad moderation practice.

1. The moderator puts nametags for participants to be able to recognize each participant and call him/her by name.
2. The moderator says: "it is good to have such events in your community, I would strongly encourage you to participate in these awareness sessions; I am sure you will benefit a lot from them."
3. The moderator is able to make a shy participant express his/her opinion, but the latter does that at the end of the session, separately.
4. The moderator interrupts a participant using these words: "please shut up, we do not want to hear about that."
5. In a focus group conducted with men about domestic violence, one participant says that beating wives is a right that should not be considered as a human right violation. The moderator opens his eyes wide, and says: "Oh my God, does anyone agree?"
6. When another participant says "this is unacceptable", the moderator says "we have to respect each other's opinion, please".
7. The moderator skips the last wrap up question because he / she is running out of time.
8. When asked about the other persons sitting in the room, the moderator elapses the question and does not provide any answer.

Summing up

* The moderator's role is to facilitate the discussion in a focus group.

* Moderation is about good moderation skills, deep knowledge about the subject discussed, and impartiality.

* The moderator shall be friendly with the participants and build rapport with them, while keeping a professional relation.

* Re-screening is very important; it should be done by the moderator right before the focus group session starts.

* Good listening is key to conduct focus groups that will result in the collection of useful information. Being a good listener means being an "interested" listener.

* Focus groups are always an interesting experience; have fun and enjoy it!

Chapter Seven
Analyzing Data

In this Chapter you will learn

* Useful tips for observing focus groups
* Tools for data collection
* Tools for a systematic screening of data
* Some strategies for organizing data
* Basic principles of Analysis

Glossary

Data	Information resulting from focus group sessions.
Analysis	The process, by which focus group data is filtered, organized and prioritized according to the research objectives.
Observation	Main tool for data collection in a focus group methodology. It consists of a number of tasks, mainly note-taking and co-moderation.
Debrief	Post-focus group meeting that involves the research team, the moderator and the client(s).
Theme	Is an implicit idea or topic that a group of ideas have in common.
FG notes	Notes taken by the research team during the course of focus group; they include researchers' observation of participants according to the research purpose. They are the basis of Data Analysis.
Verbatim Quotes	Are exact wording(s) from the focus groups. They are key in a focus group report because they provide clients with very accurate and direct information from within the groups. Also, they are important to prove the analysis done by the researchers.

Introduction

Managing the data produced by focus groups may be the most challenging part of this type of qualitative research. Good data and excellent research design may lie fallow if not analyzed correctly and communicated clearly to the client.

This section looks at what you do with all the information you collect. The analysis of information can be done in many different ways depending on what you want to do with the information.

Analysis is an ongoing process that begins as soon as you begin the project, and continues until you write the final report. It is not recommended to leave the analysis to later stages, as you will discover gaps in your results and it will be too late to correct any problems you have discovered at this point.

What You Have to Have in Mind…

- What you are looking for, not what you want to get.
- Beware of personal biases and preexisting opinions about the topic.
- Never forget: you are the voice of each participant; your voice does not count.
- Listen to what is NOT being said.
- Think qualitative and leave the numbers out.
- Watching and listening to focus groups gives another perspective to reality and a new way of looking at things.
- Enjoy, enjoy, and enjoy… you are blessed you are getting to know how people think, feel, behave, and why they think, feel, and behave this way…

1. Observing Focus Groups

Your focus groups are now taking place. Observing is the main characteristic of focus group methodology. Whether through a one-way-mirror (in fully equipped centers) or simply by sitting in the same room where the session is taking place, focus groups provide the chance to observe participants' reactions, both verbal and non-verbal, towards the issue of interest.

REMEMBER

An observer listens to what is not being said as well as to what is being said;

- Verbal responses: what people say such as words, statements, opinions, etc.
- Non-verbal messages: which include facial expressions, body postures, tone of voice, etc., which say a lot about the person's position, beside his/her words.

Observing focus groups requires a total understanding of the methodology and process.

A good observer should:

* Be familiar with the focus groups methodology.
* Work as effectively as possible with the moderator; minimal time is spent communicating the maximum amount of information.
* Review the goals of the sessions beforehand to ensure that all the observers are on the same page with regards to the objectives and the desired output.

Observation consists of a number of tasks as follows, regardless of whether the focus group is being recorded or not.

* *Co-Moderation,* which is the interference of researchers in a focus group whenever they need additional information on a specific point in the discussion.

* *Note taking* is the first contact with the raw information resulting from a focus group session. It helps filtering and organizing the information according to the key objectives of the study. Your notes will be very helpful when writing your report; you will be able to find very easily verbatim quotes for specific groups.

* *Debrief,* that is key for analysis; it allows the moderator to provide immediate feedback on the session. It provides tips for the discussion guide to become more friendly and adaptable to the flow of discussion. It is also helpful to start thinking about analysis of your data, and identification of topics/perspectives to be further discussed.

Tip

Always write the profile of the group on your notes. You might eventually forget who said what, and this is crucial for focus group analysis.

1.1 Co-Moderation

When focus groups are taking place, the observer(s) has the most critical role. The main challenge in focus groups is to keep the research and the discussion on the right track. Thus, the observer is responsible for having the information identified by the research purpose and the key objectives. To that end, the observer's tasks are the following:

* Act as a "back-up" moderator. In other terms, he/she helps the moderator in meeting the objectives of the study and keeping the discussion on track.
* He/she should point out:
    a. Any major questions that have not been asked.
    b. Any area that could be followed up and was not.
    c. Any perspective that was not very well addressed and explored.
    d. Anything he/she think may help.

1.2 Note Taking

Note taking, as mentioned earlier, is the first contact between the researcher and the information produced by focus groups, referred to as raw information. Taking good notes is the first step of the analysis, for it sets up the identification of patterns, which is the basis of analysis. Not everything should or can be analyzed. In that sense, note taking is also a skill that consists of filtering, ordering and prioritizing information according to the goals of the study. Note grids are typically used, as they make it easier for note takers to visualize their notes and compare between groups at a glance. A sample note grid is provided at the end of this chapter.

1.2.1. Styles of note-taking

There are many note-taking styles; some observers take detailed notes that capture nearly everything that is said, while others prefer to make note of only those comments that reflect new leanings. Styles of note-taking include:

- Detailed: Enriching for the report, important for quoting (verbatim validating the findings).
- Thematic: According to the key objectives and the key questions.
- Structured: Based on a template table.

1.2.2. Tips for good note-taking

While taking notes, there are some things to look for in focus group discussions:

- Listen to what is not being said as well as what is being said.
- Be alert to nuances of meaning and the language respondents use to present their ideas.
- Do not expect a consensus within or across groups. Divergent thinking can lead to some of the most important findings.
- Do not really care about the position; always try to understand what motives lay behind this or that position. Remember, one position might have very contradictory reasons.

Things to Remember…

- Try to avoid "selective listening", in other terms, pay more attention to those points that support an already established or preconceived point of view. It is very tempting to place more weight on those findings that support existing hypotheses. However, always remember, you are the voice of the participants.
- Focus group participants will frequently state information that you know is incorrect. But even misinformation can be a tremendous source of insight into how people think, how they process the information they know, and how they choose to convert it, with what terms, and in what context. You might however want to point out these mistakes to the moderator, so he/she knows how to help get into what you want.
- Don't guess answers, don't assume explanations. Don't let anything distract you; keep your concentration at its most.
- Do not record a quote that could take on a different meaning if read away from the context in which it was said.
- Try not to draw any conclusions while listening to the group discussion. Jumping into conclusions can lead to loss of objectivity throughout the remainder of the focus groups, especially if you are only observing one of the groups or one of a series of sessions.
- Don't miss out focus groups. Always attend all focus groups for a given research.
- Keep your mind open to what people have to say. That is why you are here!

Tip

Use colors when taking notes. You might have some side observations, a preliminary theme to extract, an aspect to explore, or ideas for another research. Using different colors will prevent confusion when you consult your notes after a certain time.

DO

- Get information as much as possible; try to summarise each participant's response. However, beware of intersting "non-needed" information. Don't worry, you will always have the chance to know them from another FG research.
- Include direct quotes where interesting statements are made.
- Include observations of the non-verbal messages in the notes for later analysis.

DO NOT

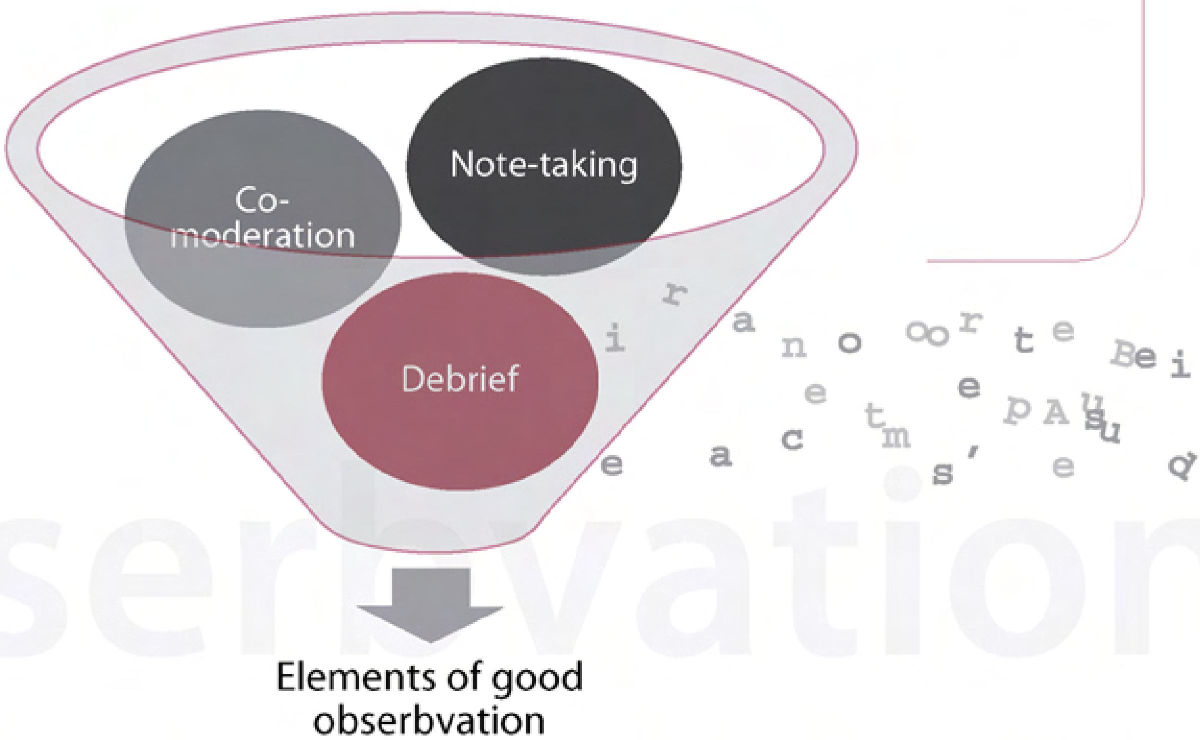
- Include your personal bias or preexisting opinions.
- Include quantitaive data; leave the numbers OUT.
- Miss any of the sessions. Nothing beats being present in the FG: its environment must be sensed and felt.

1.3 The Debrief

Researchers (analysts and moderators) should coordinate their efforts at all stages of the process for the research to achieve its objectives.

The debrief is a very important phase in the life cycle of a focus group research project for it:

* Collects first impressions of researchers (observers and moderators) about the focus group.
* Is a good exercise for the moderator to provide objective conclusions based on the interpretation of the findings.
* Gives you the opportunity to review the discussion guide and; adjust it to be more responsive to the objectives and to the flow of the discussion.
* Is crucial for the analysis: it allows you to analyze each focus group and compare results of consecutive sessions along the project.
* Is essential in organizing findings and structuring the final report.
* Ensures that right and relevant information is being collected.
* Identifies additional points that still need to be explored.
* Provides immediate and direct feedback about demographic differences based on your recruitment profile.



2. What is Analysis?

It is known that focus groups are a huge generator of information. Data analysis consists of examining and categorizing the information in a way that addresses the initial purpose of the study. Analysis is based on the research purpose as well as the key objectives and the key questions of the study.

To pave the way for your analysis, ask yourself the following during the focus groups:

- What are respondents saying?
- What did you learn?
- What's new?
- What's surprising?
- What is confirmed?
- What's the big take away?

A good analysis should be:

* Systematic: follows procedures cited in a sound strategy understood and implemented by the members of the research team. It is deliberate and planned – and not by any means capricious, arbitrary or spontaneous.
* Verifiable: another researcher would reach similar conclusions using the data. Verify by constituting a trail of evidence: field notes, tapes, oral summaries (post-group briefings), etc…
* Collaborative: incorporates feedback from others. In other terms, collaborative analysis that presents inputs from different persons yield important ideas and avoid personal biases and interests.
* Prompt: analysis' worst enemy is delay. Unlike quantitative research, data collection and analysis start at the same time in a qualitative research. Continuing analysis improves data collection.

Tip

Prioritize key questions, filter superfluous info and order data so the client can understand.

Don't always expect new information. In many cases, focus groups just confirm what we already know, but they help us understand it differently.
Look at focus group research as the hidden part of an iceberg. What we already know is that there is an iceberg in that place. Focus groups are used to help us understand what made up this iceberg, and how deep it is, so we can find ways to remove it, melt it down, or simply prevent the constitution of another one at the same place.

A quote that perfectly suits focus groups…
"The task, is not to contemplate what no one has yet contemplated, but to think like no one has meditated what everyone has before him" , Schopenhauer

3. Patterns of Data Collection

After focus groups are completed, it is time to prepare data for analysis. This involves compiling information from videotapes, audiotapes, and focus group notes into one comprehensive format that is the basis for the analysis. There are many ways for data collection that include tape-based analysis, note-based analysis, and memory-based analysis.

* Transcript-based analysis: Tapes are transcribed and then the analyst uses the transcript along with the focus groups' notes.
* Tape-based analysis: An abridged transcript is prepared from listening to the tapes; this transcript contains comments related to the topic at hand as well as the moderator's summary comments.
* Note-based analysis: Relies primarily on notes taken by the research team, debriefing sessions, and summary comments. As mentioned earlier, note grids are typically used to that end.
* Memory-based analysis: The last option, memory-based analysis, requires a high level of expertise and is not recommended in the majority of cases.

Method	*Pros*	*Cons*
Transcript-based analysis	• Detailed transcription to what people said.	• Time consuming; it requires time to transcribe the tapes. • Do not reflect the non-verbal responses of the participants.
Tape-based analysis	• Double check your findings.	• Late analysis
Note-based analysis	• Done by the research team, highly familiar with research objectives. • Provide the needed information according to the Key Objectives (KO). • Collaborative process.	• The filtration of the information is left at the discretion of the researcher (skills, biases, etc…)
Memory-based analysis	• No Pros. • Not recommended.	• Requires a high level of expertise. • Risks to miss some information.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis process consists of a series of steps. The main aim here is to reach a point where you can describe how focus group participants reacted to the research purpose.

The most common way in analysis is coding. Not all studies require in-depth coding; in some cases it may be enough to identify key issues when collecting the data. In any case, focus groups analysis should follow the following sequence:

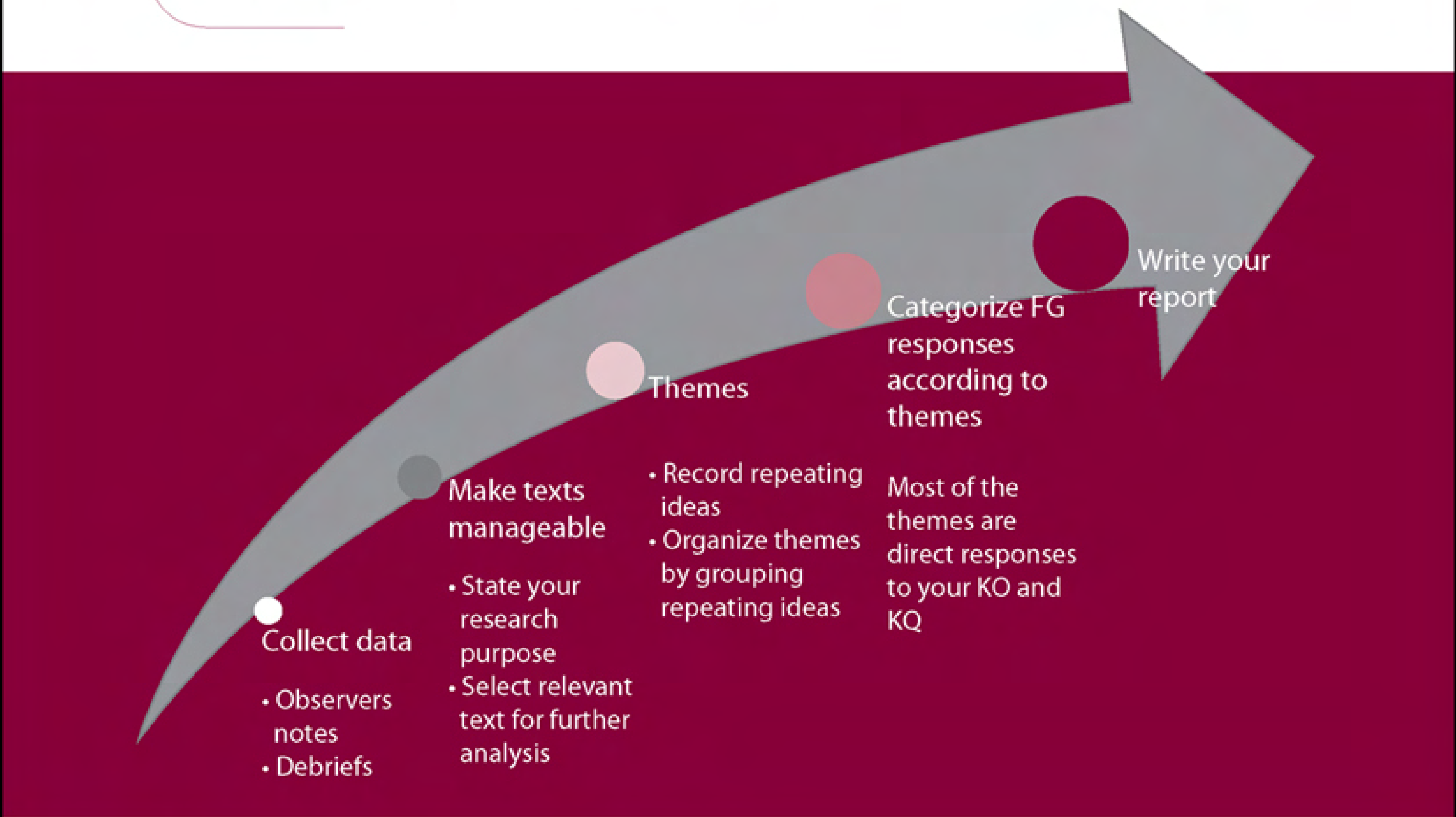
Step 1: Collect the data generated from the focus groups (observers' note, transcripts, debriefs, etc.)

Step 2: Make the text manageable: After you collect your data and start reading it, you will find yourself in a sea of information. At this stage, you are working on the level of the text itself; it is the filtration process in which you choose what parts of the data you will include into your analysis and which parts you will discard. Of course, your main driver is the research purpose that you have to use in order to discern which information to keep v/s which information to discard.

Step 3: Organizing data into themes
Repeating ideas: When reading the data of relevant texts, you will notice that different participants are often expressing similar ideas. You will start by looking for repeating ideas in the same group and then you combine them from all other groups.
Themes: At this stage you have to organize the repeating ideas into larger groups that express common themes. Your themes are simply responses to your key objectives and key questions.

Step 4: Narrative presentation of themes
The final step is to present your findings with people's own words. It uses your themes (abstract ideas) to organize people's subjective experiences into a coherent story. It consists of using people's own stories to make your findings vivid and real.

Step 5: Writing the Report
This is where you start writing the findings organized by themes, where you present the main idea in response to your key objectives. This will be elaborated in Chapter 8.



The coding process is not a linear movement, although the steps are presented sequentially. Along the process you will find yourself going back and forth between steps; as you become more and more familiar with the data, you will find for example that a repeating idea that you originally coded reflecting a theme makes more sense under a different theme. Or, that two themes can be collapsed into one more comprehensive theme.

If you find it difficult to sort your data in themes, simply refer to your key objectives. You will realize that your themes are direct responses to most of them. In case you have additional information that you find relevant, either put them aside under a separate heading, or try to integrate them under your themes. If you have missing information for one of your key objectives and you are sure that you explored this particular aspect in your focus group research, this probably means that your hypothesis was wrong, and this is a theme by itself.

Data collection check list

- ☑ Record every session in some way in order to preserve the authenticity of the data.
- ☑ Use a back-up recorder with a different pitch and tonality to help capture what people say. Take notes during the sessions. This is considered as the most reliable back-up focus group documentation when technology fails you.
- ☑ Debrief each group with clients and co-researchers.
- ☑ Tape or write down your own general impression after each debriefing session.
- ☑ Keep the tapes copies at least one year after the final report and then destroy them to preserve participants' anonymity over the long term.
- ☑ Keep a secure log of participants' names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses in case the client wishes to revisit the same people in years to come.

Upon the client request or your own needs, one more item could be added to the checklist

☑ Have all tapes transcribed to provide a working electronic version of the data and facilitate checking questionable passages.

Sample Note Grid

	Females youth 25-35	Males youth 25-35	Females aged 36-50	Males aged 36-50
Current situation in Lebanon				
Main problems that _the country is facing				
Country political system				
Current MP's				
Do they represent you?				
Prioritize feeling of representation based on five criteria: gender, region, confession, family, thoughts.				
Role of an MP				
Performance of MPs - How do you know that?				
Choice of candidates? Three factors that are crucial for choosing candidates				
Expectations from a candidate in return of vote				
Monitoring of MP performance				
Priorities: top five policy issues				
Reflection of priorities on electoral choices				
If priorities are not addressed from elected officials				
Opinion of Parliament monitoring				
Chances to hold MPs accountable in this country?				
What can you do personally in this regard?				
Future of the country with regards to what was said in this session				

Summing up

* Focus group analysis is a deliberate, purposeful process. It is a continuing process, systematic and verifiable.

* Analysis is hurt by delay; it is a collaborative process that requires a prompt and systematic method.

* Transcripts, audio-tapes and notes are used as the basis of focus group analysis.

Chapter Eight

Reporting and Presenting Focus Groups Results

In this Chapter you will learn

* Write a precise and honest report free of preconceived notions.
* The relationship between the key objectives, the discussion guide and the report structure.
* The availability of options in report writing.

Glossary

Findings	Information resulting from focus groups, responses to the research purpose, key objectives and key questions.
Demographic Insights	The results of comparing groups with regards to the demographic dimension (age, sex, education,…) and/or parameters based on your research design.
Report Skeleton	It is the preliminary form of a report after the analysis and the brainstorming sessions. It includes the main findings as well as researchers' first remarks that need to be elaborated later on to form the final report.

Introduction

You have reached the final stage of a focus group research process, when you have to prepare and present the findings.

How you present the results of your focus groups depends on your audience, your purpose, and the nature of information available. When addressing these factors, you probably need several reporting formats, such as written reports and more interactive communications such as oral presentations.

Although the analysis phase is critical and essential as it inquires high level of skills and competences, yet the way of presenting the FG findings is what makes all the difference. In fact, one of the most exciting aspects of focus group research is the possibility that your findings and recommendations may have a direct impact on programs, policies and systems. In that sense, the most welcome reports are those that help clients communicate to others, make policy or program decisions or forward recommendations up the line. That means creating a new structure highlighting the most significant findings, considering succinct quotes, and triggering out insightful themes.

Good writing skills, clear organization and inclusion of carefully selected direct quotes from participants will make the report are exciting and enjoyable to readers.

1. Characteristics of Reporting Focus Groups' Results

Reporting and presenting results is the final phase in the lifecycle of any focus group research. By then, data would have been collected and gathered in a sound and clear manner based on the purpose of the research, key objectives and end-users; in other terms, who will use these findings and how.

One of the main characteristics of a focus group research is that it relies upon WORDS; it is the power of qualitative research in looking behind simple words, which participants use when describing their feelings towards a specific issue, and transforming them into actionable thoughts. To that end, the main emphasis in a FG session is on the language which participants use, as this is a very significant element that would allow researchers to identify aspirations, emotions and priorities of participants.

There are two important aspects to the results of a focus group: intensity and frequency. Intensity refers to how strongly the opinions or beliefs are felt or articulated; frequency refers to how often they are expressed in the group.

A report based on focus groups will feature patterns formed by words, called themes or perspectives.

Focus Group report should not present major findings with frequencies or statistics because 'counting' leads readers to believe that percentages or frequencies are true for a much wider population, which is not the case. Focus groups are not representative, but rather typical. In other terms, researchers undertaking a FG research are sure that opinions expressed by FG participants do exist in the larger population, but do not draw conclusive statements as to what extent these opinions are reflective of the largest number of the population.

2. Presenting the Findings

Writing and presenting your findings might seem quite easy when your analysis is done; however many factors should be taken into consideration in this process:

* Get an early start

Planning for reporting should be initiated at early stages in the design of the research. When designing the project, you should think of the kind of information to present in your final report. This will enlighten you throughout the design, and create the logical reasoning to be displayed in the final report. Developers should be clear about actual purpose and use of data and how it should be reported and disseminated.

* Know your audience

Know who your audience is, particularly stakeholders, and anticipate what they are most interested in knowing. Whether you are doing an oral or a written presentation; your audience determines how much background and information to provide.

* Brainstorming sessions

Focus group research relies certainly on teamwork. Brainstorming sessions are interactive meetings amongst the team of researchers, after the completion of all the focus groups, enabling them to discuss the subject of interest. They share ideas, express their views, and build consensus at different points. Present preliminary results, highlight key findings, and use feedback from your colleagues to interpret findings and determine how they might be used. These sessions could include clients, experts and other stakeholders as relevant, provided that their feedback can reveal what additional information is needed and guide the design of the final report.

The end-result of brainstorming sessions would be the skeleton of the report, which is a structure highlighting main findings and major themes to be developed later on in the final report and presentation of findings.

* Determine the content of the report

Special attention should be given to the information that should be included in the report. The organization of information should be clear enough for the end users to benefit from. Very few of them would be able to make productive use of undigested information. It is also very frustrating for them to have to wade through voluminous data tables to get the specific pieces of information they seek.

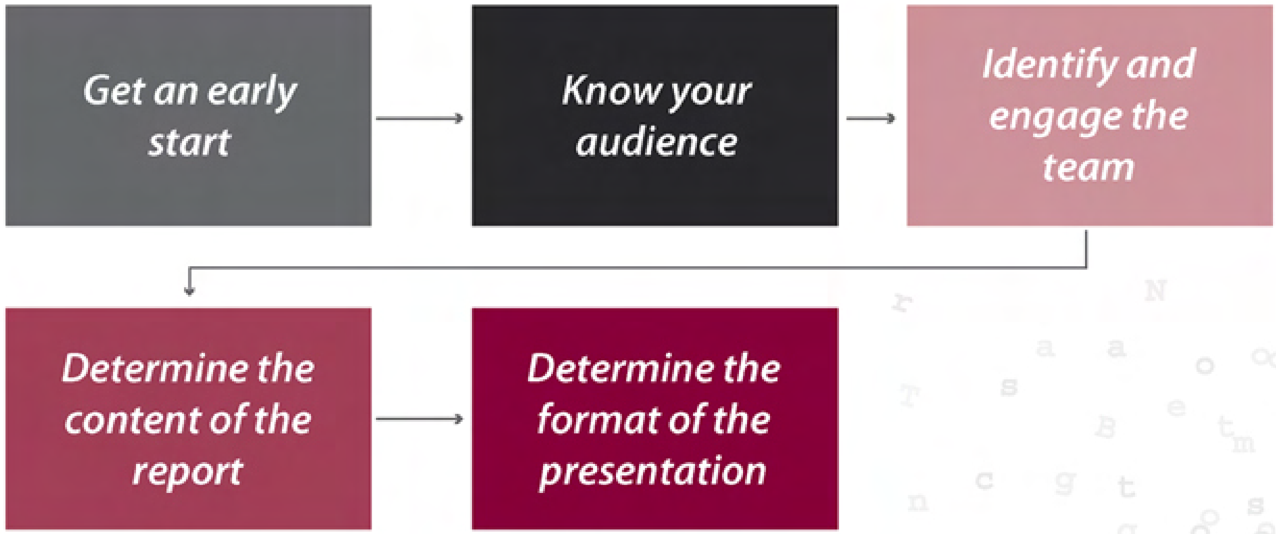
Divisions in a report should be driven by several considerations:

- The use of the report (program design, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, etc.)
- The major policy concerns that need to be addressed
- The relevant comparisons that should be featured

* Determine the format of the presentation

The task here is to design formats for data presentation that help make your point efficient; always remember the following:

- Different formats are appropriate for different types of data.
- Different audiences will require varying levels of details in your presentation. For example there are audiences that are interested in highly summarized information, may prefer tables, concise paragraphs and bullet points. Whereas for those clients who are interested in item level analysis, tabular presentations may be a much more efficient way of presenting the data.
- Audiences will vary in the amount of experience they have in interpreting qualitative data. Presentations should be tailored to the audience's level of expertise.



3. The language of a FG report

When presenting focus group results, it is very important to stick to the qualitative jargon. For example don't use numbers to state the number of participants supporting an idea, rather use "some participants", "the majority", etc.

Focus groups are not scientifically representative. The participants of the focus group sessions do not represent a scientific sample of the population; therefore, it is impossible to generalize their perceptions and attitudes to the population. Unless a survey is conducted, no quantitative data should be present in a focus group report. Furthermore, the findings should emphasize on "participants" and not "citizens".

Appropriate Language **includes:**

- "Participants feel that ...."
- "Among the participants, there seemed to be consensus ...."
- "Youth across FGs considered ...."

Inappropriate Language- **unless focus groups are accompanied by a survey- includes:**

- "Thirty percent of focus group participants felt ...."
- "Women in X region perceive ...."
- "Citizens of X country are ...."

4. Types of Presentations

4.1 Oral Presentations

One way of presenting focus group research findings is the verbal presentation, which typically takes 30 to 60 minutes, and focus on a limited number of topics. Visuals like PowerPoint slides are typically used. There are two situations where verbal presentations could be used: i) presenting primary findings to the client, which briefly covers the research purpose and the preliminary analysis. It is typically used as a way of buying time; it provides the client with some nuances and findings and grants the researcher the required time to elaborate on the written report; ii) presenting the outcomes of the research project to a larger public, which will require a full coverage of objectives, methods, findings and recommendations.

A good verbal presentation

- Make sure the presentation is easy to understand, especially when presenting to individuals whose time is limited.
- Communicate just one main point per slide and avoid excessive text.
- Include any detailed tables in handouts.
- Practice your presentation and identify places to involve your audience.
- Avoid reading text off slides.

4.2 Written Reports

The written report should be the tangible output of every focus group research. It is a detailed report that includes a summary of the focus group findings as well as an in-depth analysis of the sessions directly related to the objectives of the study, the variables and parameters of the design.

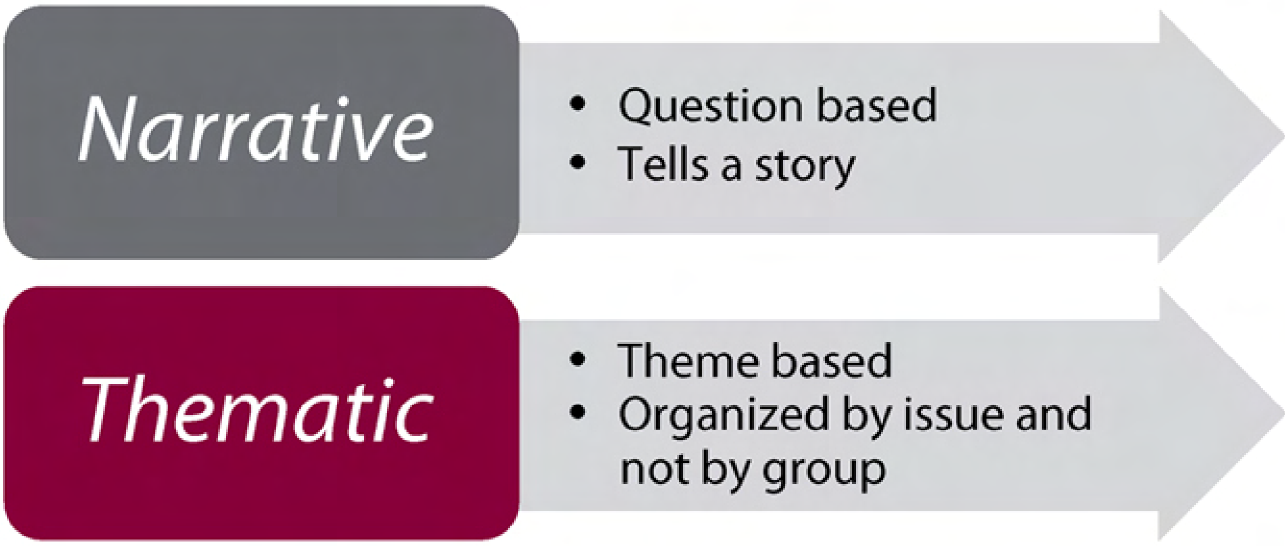
There are different types of focus group reports from which we can distinguish:

Narrative reports: They allow the researcher to provide a rich description, contextual understanding, and detailed explanation of people and places under observation.

Narrative reports typically use the order of questions in the discussion guide as the main basis; they present the information as answers to these questions in a narrative way that refers each idea to the focus group where it arose.

This type is used when you (as a researcher) wish to understand a phenomenon rather than to formulate a logical or scientific explanation. Typical uses of narrative are community needs assessments and project evaluation.

Analytical reports (Thematic): Based on themes, their main focus is on investigations into events, organizations, situations, issues and processes. Their purpose is often to provide the reader with information that can be used to make decisions and take further actions.



5. Write Your Report

The final report should provide the reader with a clear explanation of the research, the context, the methodology, the objectives and the main findings.

* Your report should be positive; therefore when presenting your findings and conclusions, present positive results first.
* Do not structure the report in a way that answers all of the focus group questions or areas included in the guide. Avoid that approach because this lessens the report's analytical flair and insight.
* Discuss only questions relevant to your conclusions and recommendations and don't report tentative findings.
* Make writing style active, succinct, and concrete. Always report findings and not a "sense" of things; remember the focus groups provide concrete materials, words, ideas to report and analyze. Make your report is up to it.

When writing a report you may also take into consideration the following factors:

* Accuracy:

focus group findings are people's perceptions and opinions spoken in their own WORDS. It is crucial to be accurate when reporting these findings; i)by analyzing them as expressed by participants; and ii) by associating them with verifications from focus group sessions, i.e. verbatim quotes.

* Visual Appeal:
  - Executive summary: it is a two-page summary, concentrating on findings and recommendations. A good executive summary has a magnet effect that catches the reader to continue the report looking for in-depth explanation. In many cases, an executive summary is also usable as a stand-alone document.
  - Graphs, charts, tables: To summarize key results and conceptual relationships, present findings in a table, concept map, graph, or diagram. Cross-tabulation tables can illustrate discrepancy between actual and potential/ inspirational issues. When using charts and tables, beware not to fall in the trap of quantification of qualitative findings.

* Demographic characteristics: Focus groups are about feelings and emotions lying behind opinions and perceptions and engendering behaviors. Behind each focus group design, there is an underlying assumption that various groups have different perceptions towards the same issue. In that sense, shedding the light on the demographic dimension is essential.

When writing your report, it is crucial to support your findings with the demographic insights that emerge in different groups. You should identify agreements and dissenting views and discuss similarities and differences by groups and by individuals within the same group, when relevant.

* Recommendations

Develop practical and action-oriented recommendations linked to study objectives.
Recommendations for incremental change or adjustments to current practices are more likely to be adopted than those that call for a major overhaul one.

Tip

Develop your report in a way to trigger off new studies and researches. For example, after discussing the findings from focus groups, you might collaborate with the client to develop a new study based on your findings and recommendations.

6. Typical Structure of a Focus Group Report

The Background: this section describes any information which is needed to provide the reader with an understanding of the background of the study.
(This section is optional in case of the publication of the report by the Client)

The Focus Group Methodology: this section provides the reader with a briefing about the methodology and the techniques of focus groups. It contains a presentation of the focus group methodology as well as its relevance and its added value to the topic of interest. It also includes a step-by-step description of every phase in a focus group project.

The Design and the Objectives of the Study: this section presents the design of the study. It provides extensive information about the number of focus group sessions as well as a detailed explanation of the recruitment profile and the rationale behind it.
This section also includes the Key Objectives and the Key Questions of the study, because they reflect the main goal of the study.

The Executive Summary: it presents a brief synopsis of the report. You may have a different classification of information in the executive summary than in the report, especially if you choose to present the recommendations first in the summary, before getting to the detailed explanation of the findings in the report.

The Qualitative Findings: as mentioned before, focus group findings will be presented by themes.

Beneath each theme heading is:

- A summary of the theme.
- Sub-theme(s).
- Key finding(s): highlight the outstanding findings related to this theme.
- Demographic insights: represent a comparison between focus groups.
- Verbatim Quotes: quotes from participants are presented under each theme. Many quotes can be also incorporated in the text wherever applicable.
- Graphics and diagrams are included wherever applicable throughout the qualitative findings.

Observations across Focus Groups: This section will present significant findings (if any) that appear throughout the sessions that are outside the key objectives. They provide insights indirectly relevant to the topic of interest.

Implications and ideas/Opportunities for Action: The implications and ideas can be listed under each theme and then organized in a table in the appendices.
They can also be presented as opportunities for action with a separate section that follows the qualitative findings.

The Appendices:

- Discussion guides used in the focus group sessions: the questions to be addressed in the focus groups shall be represented by the discussion guide(s) used throughout the study.
- Other documents as relevant.

Please indicate whether these statements are adequate for a focus group report or not. Please correct mistakes as relevant.

1. 30% of the participants considered that violence is unacceptable and that it should be penalized.

2. It is worth noting that only one participant was able to provide a definition of public policy, saying…

3. Focus groups showed that Egypt is a country where little freedom of expression exists.

4. The dynamic of this one instance was that a participant was told by another that…, the key insight from this specific interaction is that …

5. While female participants aged 25-35 considered that domestic violence is not to be considered as a crime, males from the same age surprisingly said that violence against women is an "act that belongs to the past and that it should not be used anymore".

Summing up

* Attend the focus groups and take notes.
* Be familiar with the discussion guide, key objectives and participant profiles.
* Use an appropriate reporting style that the client finds helpful and meets expectations.
* Offering transparent analysis (e.g. grounded in example).
* Avoid using jargon or the passive voice and check that long sentences are clear.
* Write and distribute the report in a timely manner.
* Use Multiple Reporting Strategies: Charts, graphs, visual and audio materials, oral presentations and written reports.
* Dazzle with Focus Group Ideas, Not with Fancy Words.

Glossary

Analysis
التحليل

The process by which focus group data is filtered, organized and prioritized according to the research objectives.

العملية التي يتم من خلالها تصفية المعطيات, وتنظيمها وترتيب أولوياتها بحسب اهداف البحث.

Client
مستخدم الدراسة

The end user of the study.

المستخدم النهائي للدراسة.

Convenience sample
عينة ملائمة

A sample in which selections are based on the convenience to the evaluator (e.g., on easy geographic or organizational access).

عينة يكون الاختيار فيها مبني على ما يلائم المُقَيِّم (مثلاً, سهولة الوصول الجغرافي او التنظيمي).

Debrief
التلخيص الأولي

Is the first discussion of findings between the moderator and the researchers and observers after each session. The feedback of the moderator is the first reaction of the session that helps the observers make sure of the data that they have collected.

هو النقاش الأول بين المحاور والباحثين والمراقبين. يتمكن المحاور من خلاله إبداء أول ردود فعله على الجلسة ومطابقتها مع المواصفات المطلوبة, الأمر الذي يساعد المراقبين في التأكد من المعطيات التي جمعوها.

Demographic Insights
خصائص ديمغرافية

The results of comparing groups with regards to the demographic dimension (age, sex, education…) and/or parameters based on your research design.

نتائج تتحصل من مقارنة البعد السكاني للمجموعات (العمر , الجنس, التعليم...) ومعايير أخرى بناء على تصميم البحث.

Discussion Guide
دليل النقاش

Is a series of questions moderators use in a focus group to obtain responses that meet the key objectives; these questions shall be formulated based on the key objectives and key questions of the study.

مجموعة من الأسئلة يستخدمها مدير جلسة مجموعة التركيز للحصول على أجوبة. يجب صياغة هذه الأسئلة بناء على الأهداف والأسئلة الأساسية للدراسة.

FG Notes
ملاحظات مجموعة التركيز

Notes taken by the research team during the course of focus group; they include researcher's observation of participants according to the research purpose. They are the basis of Data Analysis.

ملاحظات يدونها فريق البحث خلال جلسة مجموعة التركيز وتتضمن الملاحظات تعليق على مساهمات المشاركين حسب هدف البحث. والملاحظات هي أساس تحليل المعطيات.

Findings
النتائج

Information resulting from focus groups, responses to the research purpose, key objectives and key questions.

معلومات تتحصل من مجموعات التركيز والردود على غايات البحث وأهدافه الرئيسية وأسئلته الأساسية.

Incentives
الحوافز

Are small amount of money or gifts or any other remuneration provided by the focus group organizers to focus group participants to encourage them to participate in the focus groups.

مبلغ من المال أو هدية أو أي نوع من المكافآت يقدمها منظموا مجموعة التركيز للمشاركين في جلسات مجموعة التركيز لتشجيعهم على المشاركة فيها.

Information-rich Participants
مشاركون أغنياء بالمعلومات

A small category of the large population that could provide you with the information you need to achieve the goal of the research.

فئة صغيرة من السكان يمكنها تزويد الباحثين بالمعلومات التي يحتاجونها لتحقيق الغاية البحثية.

Judgmental Sample
عينة مشروطة

A sample in which selections are made based on pre-determined criteria.

عينة يكون فيها الإختيار محكوم بمواصفات محددة سلفاً.

Key Objectives
الأهداف الرئيسية

A set of 4-5 objectives that explain the research purpose in more specific and detailed way.

مجموعة من ٤-٥ أهداف تشرح غاية البحث بطريقة أكثر تحديداً وتفصيلاً.

Key Questions
الأسئلة الأساسية

A set of 6-8 questions designed to trigger answers and findings with regard to the research purpose.

مجموعة من ٦-٨ أسئلة مصممة لإستدراج أجوبة ومعطيات تخص هدف البحث.

Moderator
المحاور

Is the one that facilitates the discussions among focus group participants by using a discussion guide.

هو الذي يسهل النقاش بين المشاركين في مجموعة التركيز بحسب دليل نقاش يستخدمه.

Observation
المراقبة

Main tool for data collection in a focus group methodology. It consists of a number of tasks, mainly note-taking and co-moderation.

الأداة الأساسية لجمع المعلومات من خلال منهجية مجموعة التركيز. وهي عبارة عن عدد من المهمات. أهمها تدوين الملاحظات والمشاركة في ادارة الجلسة.

Probes
أسئلة المتابعة

Or follow up questions that the moderator adds to the guide or during the session in order to understand and/ or generate deeper and clearer responses.

هي اسئلة يطرحها المحاور بهدف التحقق وجمع معلومات اضافية أو لتوضيح رد أو رأي معين.

Preliminary Questions
الأسئلة التمهيدية

Questions asked at very early stages before the research design. They are preliminary questions; mean the first questions that the researchers ask in order to identify the research purpose.

اسئلة تطرح في المراحل الأولى قبل تصميم الدراسة. إنها أسئلة تمهيدية. ما يعني الأسئلة الأولى التي يطرحها الباحثون بهدف تحديد غايات البحث.

Qualitative Research
البحث النوعي

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and subject matters. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior.

مجال في البحث يجمع بين مختلف حقول المعرفة ومسائل البحث. ويهدف البحث النوعي إلى جمع الفهم المعمق للتصرفات البشرية والأسباب التي تحكم تلك السلوكيات.

Quantitative Research
البحث الكمي

Quantitative research is the systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships. The objective of quantitative research is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories and/or hypotheses pertaining to natural phenomena.

هو التحقيق العلمي المنهجي للصفات والظواهر والعلاقات التي تربطها. ويهدف البحث الكمي إلى تطوير واستخدام نماذج الرياضيات والنظريات والفرضيات المتعلقة بالظواهر الطبيعية.

Random Sample
عينة عشوائية

A sample in which each unit in the population has an equal chance of being selected.

عينة تكون فرص الدخول فيها متساوية أمام كل فرد في كل المجموعات السكانية.

Recruitment Profile
ملف الاستقطاب

Is the group of characteristics that vary between demographic, geographic, socio-economic, educational and political affiliation of people to be selected as participants in focus group sessions.

خصائص المجموعة. وتتراوح بين الخصائص السكانية والجغرافية والاقتصادية الاجتماعية والتوجهات الثقافية والسياسية للناس الذين سيتم اختيارهم كمشتركين في جلسات مجموعة التركيز.

Report Skeleton
هيكل التقرير

It is the first template of a report after the analysis and the brainstorming sessions. It includes the main findings as well as researchers' first remarks that need to be elaborated later on to form the final report.

النموذج الأول للتقرير بعد جلسات التحليل والعصف الذهني. يحتوي النتائج الأساسية والملاحظات الأولى للباحثين التي يجب التوسع فيها لاحقاً لتشكل التقرير النهائي.

Re-screener
استمارة اعادة الفرز

Is a second questionnaire used by the moderator prior to the focus group in order to double check whether participants fit the profile needed, or not.

هي استمارة ثانية يستخدمها المحاور قبل بدء الجلسة بهدف التحقق مجدداً إن كان المشاركون مطابقين للمواصفات المطلوبة.

Research Design
تصميم البحث

Also referred as profile of participants, is a set of criteria defined for the recruitment of focus groups participants like: age, gender, educational level, religion, voters/non voters, resident of certain areas (Urban/rural), marital status, civil society activists / non-activists, etc…

يسمى أيضاً مواصفات المشاركين أو ملف الاستقطاب. وهو عبارة عن مجموعة معايير محددة لاستقطاب المشاركين مثل: العمر، والجنس، والمستوى العلمي، والدين، ناخِبين/غير ناخبين، سكان مناطق معينة، (مدن/أرياف)، الوضع العائلي، ناشطون/غير ناشطين، الخ...

Research Purpose
الغاية البحثية

A paragraph resuming the clients' goal; his/her questions and concerns as well as the desired outcomes of the research.

مقطع يستعيد أهداف الزبون، وأسئلته وهمومه وكذلك النتيجة المرجوة من البحث وكيفية استخدامه بعد إتمامه.

Sample Design
تصميم العينات

A subset of population selected from a larger set of the same population.

مجموعة صغيرة من السكان مختارة من ضمن مجموعة أكبر من السكان أنفسهم.

Sampling
التعيين

The method of sample selection.

طريقة اختيار العينات التي تلي تحديد المشاركين الأغنياء بالمعلومات.

Screener
استمارة الاستقطاب

Is a step by step questionnaire that guides the recruiter in selecting potential participants based on the needed profile.

استمارة توجه المستقطب خطوة تلو الاخرى في اختيار مشاركين محتملين بناء على المواصفات المطلوبة.

Stratified Random Sample
العينة العشوائية المتراصفة

Sometimes we want to make sure specific groups are included that might otherwise be missed by using a simple random sample; those groups are usually a small proportion of the population. In this case, we would divide the population into strata based on some meaningful characteristic.

أي أن يتم تصنيف المشاركين الأغنياء بالمعلومات في المرحلة الأولى ضمن مجموعات متجانسة ويتم استقطاب أشخاص من ضمن كل مجموعة على حدة.

Tally Sheet
اللائحة

Is the sheet that the recruiter uses in order to gather information about the participants that will attend the focus group.

هي الورقة التي يستخدمها المستقطب لجمع المعلومات عن المشاركين الذين سيحضرون مجموعة التركيز.

Theme
الموضوع

Is an implicit idea or topic that a group of ideas have in common. Very commonly used to report on FG findings.

مجموعة أفكار ذات طابع مشترك تنطوي تحت فكرة أو عنوان عام؛ وهي الطريقة الأكثر اعتماداً في كتابة تقارير حول نتائج مجموعات التركيز.

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