



# **Conducting Focus Groups Discussions: Principles**

# What is a focus group?

- A focus group is a small group discussion guided by a trained leader, used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic, and then guide future action.
- Focus groups are group interviews

# How are focus groups different from regular “groups”?

- They are focused on a specific topic
- They have a trained facilitator/moderator
- Members of the group are encouraged to talk openly about their opinions and respond to other members

# When should you use a focus group?

- When considering introducing a new program or service
- When the main concern is depth or shading of opinion
- When you want to ask questions that can't easily be asked or answered in a written survey

# When should you use a focus group?

- When there is a gap between people
- When investigating complex behaviour and motivations
- When you want to understand diversity
- when you need a friendly respectful research method

# Focus Groups

## What can they be used for?

	<b>Academic Research</b>	<b>Product Marketing</b>	<b>Evaluation Research</b>	<b>Quality Improvement</b>
<b>Problem Identification</b>	Generating Research Questions	Generating New Product Ideas	Needs Assessment	Identifying Opportunities
<b>Planning</b>	Research Design	Developing New Products	Program Development	Planning Interventions
<b>Implementation</b>	Data Collection	Monitoring Customer Response	Process Evaluation	Implementing Interventions
<b>Assessment</b>	Data Analysis	Refining Product or Marketing	Outcome Evaluation	Assessment Redesign

# Focus Groups

What can they be used for?

Avoid Focus Groups:

- When they imply commitments you cannot keep
- If the participants are not comfortable with each other
- When the topic is not appropriate for the participants
- When a project requires statistical data



# How to Conduct a Focus Group:

## Before the meeting:

- Recheck your goals
- Consider other methods
- Find a good leader
- Find a recorder
- Decide who should be invited
- Decide about incentives



# Focus Groups

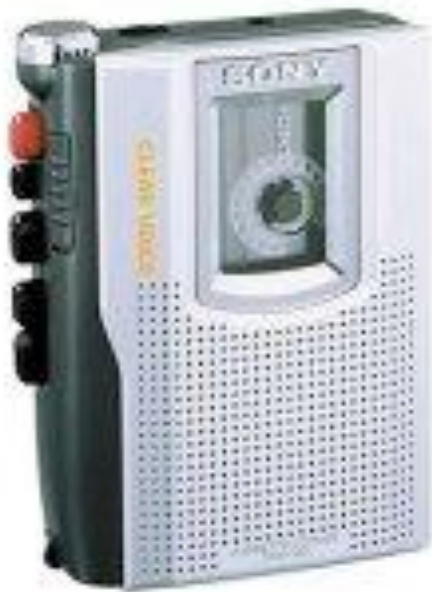
## Planning them

### Preparation

- Select participants / interviewees / sample
- Contact prospective participants and explain the **purpose** and **conduct** of the interview / research verbally and in writing.
- Explain the participants ethical rights verbally and in writing.
- Allow time and opportunity for prospective participants to ask for clarification.
- Obtain verbal and written consent from participants.
- Prepare interview schedule (if appropriate).
- Get to know your technical equipment.

# Focus Groups

## Planning them



# Focus Groups

## Planning them

### Resources Required

- Skilled Moderators
- Sufficient time
- An appropriate room and a “do not disturb sign”
- A good quality recording device and microphone
- Sufficient media if appropriate, e.g. tapes, disks
- A reliable power supply, e.g., spare batteries
- “Food and drink”
- Spare information sheets / consent forms
- Interview schedule

# Focus Groups

## Planning them

### The Interview Setting

**QUESTION:** What is an **appropriate** room / setting?

- One that is the **appropriate** size.
- One that has **appropriate** seating.
- One that has **appropriate** work surfaces.
- One that is heated / ventilated **appropriately**.
- One that has **refreshments** available.
- One that is exclusively yours for the **required** time.

# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

**QUESTION:** How many participants should take part?

- Conventionally the literature suggests 8 – 10 participants
- It is possible to have larger groups but there are implications for the level of structure required, i.e.,
- The greater the No. the more structure is required, e.g moderators / facilitators.
- One solution is to run multiple concurrent groups

# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

**QUESTION:** How long should a Focus Group be?

- It depends on the motivation of the participants.
- It depends on available time.
- It depends on the complexity of the issue being explored.
- It depends on how well the interview is going.

# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

### The Guiding Principles of Moderating

- Be interested in the participants
- Show positive regard
- Be a moderator not a participant
- Be ready to hear unpleasant views
- You can't moderate all groups
- Use your unique talents

# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

### Before the Focus Group

- Prepare yourself mentally
- Assemble the equipment
- Arrange the room
- Use a checklist



# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

### During the Focus Group

<p>Register the Participants</p> <p>Make small talk</p> <p>Introduce the Focus Group</p> <p>Ask questions</p> <p>Anticipate the flow</p> <p>Control your reactions</p>	<p>Be comfortable with the pause</p> <p>Probe as needed</p> <p>Listen</p> <p>Summarise the Discussion</p> <p>Get people to leave</p> <p>Debrief with assistant moderator</p>
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### Sensitivity

# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

### Being Creative

- Vary the focus, e.g., images, propositions, scenarios
- Vary the procedure e.g., use activities to punctuate discussion

# Focus Groups

## Conducting them

### Recording and Note taking

- Electronic recording
- Field notes
- Analytical notes
- Who does what?

# Focus Groups

## Analysing their outcomes

Focus Groups are almost always qualitative in nature therefore interviews are usually:

- Transcribed
- Coded
- Thematically interpreted

# Focus Groups

## Using the findings

- Findings are not usually Generalisable
- Findings are Transferable
- Findings re-inforce / confirm
- Findings illuminate / clarify
- Findings suggest new possibilities



# How to Conduct a Focus Group:

Before the meeting:

- Decide on the meeting particulars.
- Prepare your questions.
- Recruit your members.
- Review the arrangements.

# How to Conduct a Focus Group:

When the group meets:

- Thank people for coming.
- Review the group's purpose and goals.
- Explain how the meeting will proceed and how members can contribute.
- Set the tone by asking an opening question and making sure all opinions on that question are heard.

# How to Conduct a Focus Group:

When the group meets:

- Ask further questions in the same general manner.
- When all your questions have been asked, ask if anyone has any other comments to make.
- Tell the group about any next steps that will occur and what they can expect to happen now.
- Thank the group for coming!



# How to Conduct a Focus Group:

After the meeting meets:

- Make a transcript or written summary of the meeting.
- Examine the data for patterns, themes, new questions, and conclusions.
- Share the results with the group.
- Use the results.