

Focus group

Science



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INTRODUCTION Focus group is a qualitative technique used mostly in marketing research and also other areas of research. This technique is used to collect primary data. This document consists of information about focus group. The main objective of this assignment was to investigate how focus groups techniques are used to collect primary data about the phenomenon at hand in the real world. The research method used was Google Scholar for academic journals.

The campus library database was also used for more academic journals and textbooks from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) different libraries. The main problem experienced in the completion of this document was that most textbooks about this studied topic were outdated in the author's campus. Hence, different campuses of NMMU were visited and the right textbooks were found. This document presents a review of the literature on focus groups. It continues with an empirical study on organisational corruption in secondary schools.

Also included, is the reference list of all cited sources as well as an annexure.

2 FOCUS GROUPS In the collection of primary data there are two research methods that can be of use, quantitative and qualitative methods, which can both be subdivided into idiosyncratic primary data collection methods. Because the main focus of this document is on focus groups, therefore only qualitative techniques will be mentioned which are in-depth interviews, projective techniques and focus groups. Seymour (2004: 04) defines focus groups (F.

G) as “ group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its

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interactions as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue”. This technique has been utilised in many fields to collect primary data as mentioned above and its characteristics are discussed in the following section.

2. 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUPS

When F. G are considered to be used in a certain research study then there are characteristics which have to be taken into account, which are: group size, group composition, physical setting, moderator, recording tools and length of group discussion. Below it is a detailed review on each of the above mentioned characteristics of F. G.

2. 1. 1 Group size

When determining to embark on F. G one has to think about the size (number) of that certain F. G. Despite the confusion that can be created by different sources stating a different number of possible group sizes. The research of F. G can be undertaken with a group of 4- 12 people (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig 2007: 351). Large F. G group size can jeopardise the discussion as it may be difficult to handle the discussion, even so the group size depends on the complexity of the research study.

2. 1. 2 Group composition

After the group size had been decided then the group composition must be considered as well. All participants taking part in a F. G must be homogeneous in the interest of the studied phenomenon (Malhotra & Birks 2006: 160). Participants with similar characteristics, which the study is about, make the discussion easier and nicely flowing.

2. 1. 3 Physical setting

When choosing the venue to carry out a F. G it is imperative that the chosen venue must also meet the aspects of the phenomenon at hand and of the participants.

Daymon and Holloway (2002: 194) state that “ choosing the right environment for traditional focus groups plays a vital role as it can

attract freely expressed opinions from the participants”. 2. 1. 4 Moderator In the success of F. G moderators play a vital role. It is of crucial role that moderators in F. G keep the environment safe so participants can freely express their opinions and most importantly must use probe questions; such requires a great experience from the moderator (Hague, P. , Hague, N. & Morgan 2004: 53).

Therefore, the moderator ought to possess skills such as creating chemistry with the participants, keep the flow of the discussion and analysing the data collected. 2. 1. 5 Recording tools No person can be able to cram exactly a discussion of over 20 minutes by his head; some points will certainly be missed. Wiid & Diggines (2009: 90) express that “ sessions should preferably be recorded (both visual and audio) so that the researcher can review the sessions later in order to gain further insights”.

These tools therefore, assist to keep the already realised needed data and the data that the moderator was unaware of during the discussion. 2. 1. 6 Length of group discussion When planning F. G it is essential to plan the duration precisely as it may play an impact on the data collected. However, just like group sizes, length of F. G depends on the complexity of the issue at hand. The more complex of the issue is the more the duration of the discussion is required, but if so then breaks must be taken in between to let the participants to enliven and produce successful F. G (Malhotra & Birks 2006: 161).

While on the hand, Seymour (2004: 05) being unambiguous reveals that “ most focus groups encompass 90 minutes to three hours of discussion”. With the above discussed characteristics of F. G considered, then one has to

scrutinise the advantages and disadvantages of F. G. The following section discusses the advantages and disadvantages of F. G. 2. 2 ADVANTAGES F. G has its own advantages which can attract this technique to be used. These advantages are discussed individually beneath. Cost- because discussions are done simultaneously then it reduces the cost (Wiid & Diggines 2009: 91).

Speed- because a number of individuals are being interviewed at the same time, data collection and analysis proceeds speedily (Gerber-Nel, Nel & Kotze 2003: 104). Synergy- a discussion with a number of participants can also be of help by generating more information than one-on-one interviews (University of Toronto [UT] 2002: 02). Snowball- Malhotra & Birks (2006: 162) state that “ a bandwagon effect often operates in a group discussion in that one person’s comment triggers a chain reaction from the other respondents”.

In elaboration, a comment from one of the participants may reveal an idea to some other participant(s). Scientific scrutiny- because the moderator is also in the venue of discussion with participants, it also gives the moderator the opportunity to also observe (Malhotra & Birks 2006: 162). However, disadvantages investigated by the author are more than the mentioned above but the above mentioned are those anticipated as most important. 2. 3 DISADVANTAGES Focus groups have advantages which can jeopardise the collected data or the data collection process itself.

These advantages are explained below. Misjudgement- Gerber-Nel et al (2003: 104) utter that “ results are misinterpreted due to bias”. Non representative sample- because of the small number of participants in total as compared to quantitative, therefore participants in F. G cannot represent

any population (Wiid & Diggines 2009: 91). Inconclusive results- the results of F. G only retort to ' what' but not ' why' which can sometimes make the narrow and create a need for a quantitative research study (Gerber-Nel et al 2003: 104).

Difficulty in analysing- this method mostly consists of words which make it more difficult to analyse (Grudens-Schuck, Allen & Larson 2004:119).

2. 4 WHEN TO USE FOCUS GROUPS With the above discussed sections it is also vital for one to know when to utilise F. G. Focus groups are mostly used to discover behaviour, perceptions, attitudes and processes (Hague et al 2004: 50). These traits that F. G are used to discover which responds to the question of ' when to use focus groups? ', which in respond will be, F.

G can be used in; stand alone method, supplementary to a survey and as a part of multi method design (Daymon & Hollower 2002: 188). The following section will discuss the use of F. G in the study of organisational corruption in secondary schools in Turkey and the information provided is based on annexure A. 3 FOCUS GROUP STUDY ON ORGANISATIONAL CORRUPTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANKARA In Turkey after it was seen that the level of corruption in secondary schools is high, it was then seen important that a study on this problem should be undertaken.

The moderator and his assistant decided to use F. G study to identify the perceptions of teachers in Ankara (a city in Turkey). The group sizes of the study were eight and nine respectively, which in total consisted of 17 participants (12 males and 5 females). These participants were chosen due to homogeneous attributes meeting the studied problem, because this study is about secondary schools therefore the participants were critically recruited

due to their profession of teaching. Thereafter, the moderator and his assistant held the F. G in a cosmopolitan city of Turkey known by the name Ankara.

Apaydin & Balci (2011: 821) state that in the study “ audio and video recordings were taken informed consent”. Which helped to later on even realise information shared which the researchers were not aware of. The duration of each focus group was 90 minutes, which the researchers felt the time it was the right time, for each group discussion. The fact that F. G were held made it less costly for this study than any other possible study because a large number of people participated in this study at a time which also made it quite quicker.

Some points in this study were raised up by addition or revealing of another idea by some other participant’s comment. On the other hand, the researchers also saw that because at first the participants were suppose to represent secondary schools of Turkey as a nation then later converted to the cosmopolitan city Ankara but still the researchers saw that the number of total participants is quite diminutive to represent such large population. On the findings of this study it was seen of importance that further study should be carried out on different groups so the findings can be generalised.

CONCLUSION This study has been a great study which can be improvised in a way. Such way is that the researchers must carry on with the focus groups and compare findings, if even after several discussions same findings are gathered then it would be a point where the findings can be generalised for the secondary schools in Ankara. **REFERENCE LIST** Apaydin, C. & Balci, A.

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Seymour, A. 2004. Focus groups. An Important Tool for Strategic Planning: 1-32. Tong, A. , Sainsbury, P. & Craig, J. 2007. International journal for quality in healthcare. Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ): a 32-item Checklist for Interviews and Focus Groups, 19(6): 349-357. University of Toronto. 2002. The health communication unit. Using Focus Groups, 02: 1-59. Wiid, J. & Diggines, C. 2009. Marketing research. Cape Town: Juta. ANNEXURE A: ORGANIZATIONAL CORRUPTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A FOCUS GROUP STUDY