



IAEA

60 Years

Atoms for Peace and Development

Focus Groups



Purpose of focus groups

- Focus groups provide a means for real-time observation of human interactions within a carefully planned setting as well as capturing useful information.
- The location of a focus group is selected to ensure that participants are not distracted by noise, human traffic or other forms of interference.
- Normally scheduled for two hours, focus groups involve free-flow conversation between participants, with as little interference as possible by the facilitators, in order to allow as natural an observation as possible

Purpose of focus groups

- The purpose of focus groups is to develop a broad and deep understanding rather than a quantitative summary
- A highly effective method for “listening” to others’ views and gain insight into group dynamics
- Used to draw out attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that is not feasible using other methods

Purpose of Focus Groups

- These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via interaction in a focus group setting
 - Compared to individual interviews which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context.
 - A focus group enables the facilitator to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time.

Purpose of Focus Groups

- Observational methods tend to depend on waiting for things to happen
- Focus groups are not natural but organised events where the facilitator initiates observable interactions
- Particularly useful when:
 - there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals,
 - when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and
 - when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic

Use of Focus Groups

- Focus groups can be used to explore particular topics
- or can be structured around a case study to prompt discussion, e.g.
 - an event from nuclear or other industry
 - recent history of the regulatory body including critical decisions
 - reactions of the public to policy, and
 - difficult interactions with licensees.

Planning Focus Groups



- To ensure that the focus groups capture representative information it is important to conduct at least three types:
 - Groups consisting of senior leaders/managers;
 - Those involving front-line staff from different functions;
 - Focus groups involving staff from different organizational levels, including managers and senior managers.
- These different focus groups will help to reveal power dynamics, prevailing stories, interaction patterns, and other aspects of the culture from across the organization.

Planning Focus Groups

- Ideally around 7 – 10 delegates
- Good cross-section of the organisation
 - Job, Grade, Age, Department, etc.
- Invitation to attend
 - Agenda, times, places, etc.
 - REASON for Attendance!
 - Confidentiality: what you talk about in the room stays there



Planning the Focus Groups

- Plan for 1 ½ to 2 hours a session
- Conference room or other suitable room
- Adequate airflow and lighting, no disturbances/distractions
- Chairs in a circle (NO TABLES!)
- Name cards or badges
- One or two facilitators
- Record the session for subsequent analysis

Focus Group Basics

- Keep focused!
- Maintain momentum
- Use ‘open-ended’ questions –
 - Who, What, Why, When and How
 - Avoid ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ questions

Example SCSA Focus Group Agenda

Introduction

Warm Up

What does safety mean to you in the context of your work?

Discuss Themes

a) Safety concerns

If you have a concern about safety, what do you do?

If you made a mistake which could affect safety while working, what would you do?

Are suggestions for safety improvements acted on?

b) Procedures

How useful are your work guidelines?

Do people always follow procedures/guidelines?

Closing

Is there anything else you want to tell us – things that work or could be improved?

Opening a Focus Group

- Start only when everyone has arrived
- Welcome
- Introduce self (and colleague)
- Review the Agenda
- Explain the purpose
- Explain the method
- Set the ground rules
- Assure confidentiality
- Start the discussion – and let them lead !
- Wrap up and ask for feedback

Running a Focus Group

- Make the delegates feel comfortable
- Keep the conversation flowing
- Don't allow individuals to dominate
- Ask '*why*' questions to explore the reasons behind people's feelings and views
- Push for authenticity if need be
- Know when to move on

Questions

- Open questions to prompt discussion
- Not too many – 5 or 6 key questions
- Follow the rules of natural conversation and **DON'T**
 - Lead the conversation/discussion
 - Ignore contributions
 - Re-phrase contributions
 - Dismiss contributions out-of-hand

Analysis of Results

- Write up a summary
- Participant characteristics
- Descriptive phrases, quotes or words used by delegates
- Views held by those with common characteristics
- Categorize statements by themes - give examples
- Non-attributable

Analysis of Results

- Give consideration to :
 - Words used and the context
 - Responses and their specificity – give these more weight than vague responses
 - Cross-cutting trends and ideas which may emerge

Summary

- Focus groups are organized ways to observe people in interaction
- People from different departments and levels
- Capture interactions, what is said and not said, stories, non-verbal communication
- Qualitative not Quantitative
- Use a few questions - minimize interference
- Helpful to have two facilitators to ask questions and take notes



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Thank you!

