

## Roles of the FGD Team Members:

### An Overview

### RÔLES DES MEMBRES DE GROUPE DE DISCUSSION:

#### UN APERÇU

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**Abstract:** The most familiar form of group interview is called focus group discussion (FGD). The use of FGD is widespread. This method derives from market research strategies but now come into common use in social science research area. The FGD can in the best of circumstances, bring out a lot of general information if it is perfectly performed. It is much needed to understand the roles of all members of the team in the field. This article is an attempt to discuss and analyze the roles of FGD team members.

**Key word:** FGD; research method; team work; responsibility; quality information.

**Résumé:** La forme la plus courante de l'entrevue de groupe est appelée le groupe de discussion. L'utilisation de groupe de discussion est très répandue. Cette méthode est dérivée des stratégies de recherches de marché, mais maintenant elle est de l'usage commun dans le domaine de recherches des sciences sociales. Dans le meilleur des cas, le groupe de discussion peut faire ressortir beaucoup d'information générale si elle est parfaitement réalisée. Il est indispensable de comprendre les rôles de tous les membres du groupe sur le terrain. Cet article est une tentative de discuter et d'analyser les rôles des membres de groupe de discussion.

**Mots-clés:** groupe de discussion; méthode de recherches; travail en équipe; responsabilité; information de qualité

### INTRODUCTION

Focus group discussion (FGD) method derives from market research strategies in which theories of social psychology and communication were applied and rarer incorporated into social sciences research methods. Focus group discussions have become a popular method of obtaining information regarding numerous topics. This methodology has been perfected to get small group reactions and ideas about specific products (Pelto, 2002). But in recent decades FGD have come into common use in social science research area. The main features of FGD methodology are as follows:

1<sup>st</sup>. Groups of five to eight persons are invited to participate at a fixed time and place. Ideally those individuals should be strangers to one another, and they should be homogeneous in background- similar age, marital status, socio-economic level, and religious affiliation.

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2<sup>nd</sup>. The research group prepares a set of questions, carefully designed to explore the topical area of interest. The questions are designed to develop lively discussion among the participants.

3<sup>rd</sup>. The moderator must be skilled in drawing out the people into discussions and debate about the main areas of information. Ideally the participants become involved in discussion of the topic in such a manner that the moderator does not need keep asking questions, but simply steers the discussion to the selected topics.

4<sup>th</sup>. At least one person other than the moderator takes thorough notes of the contents and style of the discussion.

5<sup>th</sup>. Tape recording is used to get a full transcript of the discussions, provided the participants agree to the use of the tape recorder.

Normally the researchers arrange for separate FGDs from the various sectors of the local population- males and females, older and younger people, married and unmarried, and other subgroups. In actual practice, there is no hard-and-fast guideline for how many, but it is common to have at least 5 to 10 group discussions, in those studies where the methodology has been carefully used. (Pelto, 2002)

The FGD can in the best of circumstances, bring out a lot of general information if it is perfectly performed. It is much needed to understand the roles of all members of the team in the field. There is no alternative but clear understanding to the success of focus group sessions. Not only that success of FGD session depends on the team's confident and sure about what it is doing. If the participants feel that the team is not competent or allow any confusion to reign over the session, not only will the participants feel uneasy but the quality of the information you collect may be reduced. It is also important to understand the roles and needs of your team members and to be understanding when problems arise.

This article is an attempt to discuss and analyze the roles of FGD team members. A more detailed description of the specific responsibilities of the moderator, the observer and the translator as follows.

## **SINGLE LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUPS**

### **2.1 Moderator or Facilitator**

Success of a FGD session mostly depends on the competency, intelligence, quick reflection of a moderator so he is the prime figure or leader. It is a very demanding job, but with practice and a little confidence, it can be performed well. The moderator stimulates the group discussion and keeps it on course, as necessary. S/he should not take a position on anything, but should listen. Every response is considered valid. The moderator is in control of the session and is responsible for the direction that the focus group takes. The moderator should control the discussion to an appropriate level. Too much control and the discussion is stifled, too little and leaders will emerge from the participant group. The moderator should avoid getting drawn into discussing issues her or himself. There is no attempt to support or criticize any response, resolve any issue, address any individual problem or concern or reach any conclusion. Both concrete information and opinions are relevant (Sherraden, 2001). The moderator should not be concerned if the group is silent at any point. It may be the first time that participants have thought about the issue you are discussing.

He or she will use all the useful techniques to help the participants feel comfortable and to encourage a lively and natural group discussion. The moderator will be provided with a checklist or question-line to provide the direction for asking questions to collect the information according to the needs. First thump role of the moderator is to follow the objectives of the study and must be familiar with all the objectives of the study, otherwise it will be hard to conceptualize or generalize the responses of participants by the planning team. As an example a participant gave an answer to a question that was not expected by the team, it may prove to be very important to the main objectives, but if the moderator is not familiar with the purpose of the study he or she may brush over the answer and miss the opportunity to explore something relevant.

### **2.2 Observer**

Still there is a debate either observer essential or not in a FGD session. The deny group of observer stated that facilitator and assistant could do the job of observer so need not engage extra man in this regard which

might be financially helpful. But this group has to know that observer is an essential and important part in FGD session, he has several functions to do. The main task is to observe the session and to take notes. How many notes will be taken depend on how the session is being recorded. So it's not easy to a moderator to conduct session simultaneously to take notes.

In addition to noting responses, the observer is also looking at any nonverbal sign or body language that the group demonstrates which helps to identify the notion of session and how the group feels about the topic under discussion as well as gives some indication of how many people hold the same idea. Sometimes people may nod their head in agreement or shake their head in disagreement without actually saying anything. Observing these signs can add a lot to the written notes of the responses.

The observer also acts as a "back-up" moderator (Edmunds,1999). He or she can quietly pass notes to the moderator to point out any major question not asked, any area that could be followed up, or anything they think may help.

The observer is also responsible for any equipment that is being used, such as tape recorders or cameras.

A range of materials including tape recorders, if appropriate, and pictures to introduce topics for discussion, can be used. Recording the discussion on tape has the advantage of being able to play it back and pick up salient points after the discussion is over. The disadvantage is that transcribing from tape takes a long time - it can take up to five hours to transcribe an hour's tape recording of a focus group discussion plus another couple of hours to listen to the tape again and check the transcription for accuracy. Even then important points may be missed if the tape recording is not accompanied by detailed notes on who the participants were, the order in which they spoke, and the non-verbal language which accompanied what was said. If the discussion took place in a language not understood by the investigator(s), translation can mean added time and financial costs.

### **2.3 Assistants**

If staff and finance permits, it can be useful to have focus group assistants. He or she is used to help the moderator and observer run a smooth focus group. They are particularly useful in keeping down crowds during sessions, minding the children of participants, preparing any refreshments, and generally helping to host the session. They need not have any training or understanding of the project/ program.

## **CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS IN A SECOND LANGUAGE**

Sometimes local dialect or language create problem for the team member or researcher to take final control over the discussion then translators are required to assist in the session. It should be noted that direct translations of each response to the moderator by interrupting the discussion is not desirable. For this reason, where translation is required, it is necessary to have a four-member team. For this, it is necessary to have two moderators' likely translating moderators and controlling moderator, an observer and a translator.

### **3.1 Moderator Translator**

This role is one where a translator is trained to be the session moderator, but is directed to some degree by a controlling moderator. As like single language FGD the moderator translator will conduct the session with the help of the prepared question guide or checklist. They will deliver or only ask those questions which previously discussed by the team or those that are included on the question guide. He had to always check with the controlling moderator first to reach in a concrete decision about the responses of respondents. They will need to be very familiar with the study objectives, and although they are directed by the controlling moderator, they should have the skills to conduct the session alone. The only difference is that the controlling moderator will have the final say about what direction the discussion will take.

### **3.2 Controlling Moderator**

Controlling Moderator hold the supreme power of FGD session, he or she will decide what should to be dropped or cut down from the checklist or question guide. He or she should allow the moderator translator a reasonable amount of freedom and space in leading the discussion. He or she should can interrupt the

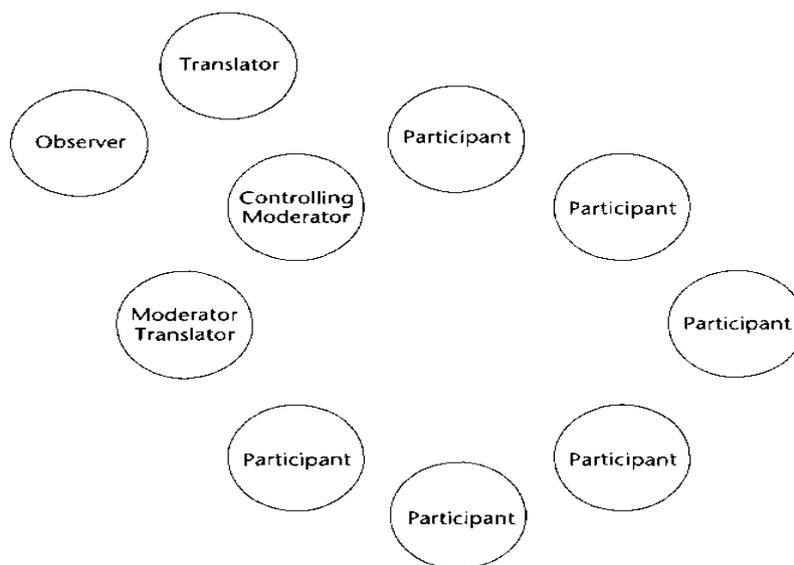
discussion in a certain limit, too frequently, then it will disrupt the flow of the session. The principle duty of controlling moderator to simply listen and observe, and interrupt only when a new line of questioning that has not previously been discussed by the team is necessary.

### 3.3 Translator

Probably the trickiest and demanding one among the team member is translator. Translation can mean added time and financial costs. But entire session he or she had to keep in touch with the both the controlling moderator and the observer (see below) by the providing with a summary translation of each response by each participant. It is not possible to provide a full and direct translation for such a long period. It is also necessary to translate what the assistant moderator is saying in order to aid in the overall understanding of the session.

### 3.4 Observer

Listen and take notes is the prime concern for him or her. The role of the observer for translator-assisted sessions is essentially the same as that in the single language sessions. He or she also will be noting responses as they are translated by the translator, which will be debriefed after the focus group discussion is over. This debriefs checks help to gain quality information. The notes are also important to the development of future question guides for further focus groups. For these reasons it is extremely important that the translation is as accurate as possible.



**Figure 1: Box -Seating arrangements for translator-assisted focus groups (Dawson et al. 1993)**

The diagram demonstrates the seating allocations of the Moderator Translator, Controlling Moderator, Translator and Observer, as well as participants.

## GETTING FOCUSED

For participants, the focus-group session should feel free-flowing and relatively unstructured, but in reality, the moderator must follow a preplanned script of specific issues and set goals for the type of information to be gathered. During the group session, the moderator has the difficult job of keeping the discussion on track without inhibiting the flow of ideas and comments. The moderator also must ensure that all group members contribute to the discussion and must avoid letting one participant's opinions dominate. After the session, data analysis can be as simple as having the moderator write a short report summing up the prevailing mood in the group, illustrated with a few colorful quotes. There can be also do more detailed analyses, but the unstructured nature of the groups make this difficult and time-consuming.

## CONCLUSION

The use of FGD is so widespread but it seems that more than half of studies using FGDs involve serious problems (Pelto, 2002). Such as information obtained cannot stand on its own, i.e., it needs to be complemented by survey data, to show the distribution of opinions and beliefs uncovered, presents difficulties in information management and review, particularly if tape-recorders are used, if more than one language is in use, translation can mean added time and financial costs. But if the FGD team members are highly skilled and has a clear theoretical framework in mind any problem could be overcome.

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