WHAT IS A FOCUS GROUP?
A focus group, or focus group interview, is a qualitative research tool often used in social research, business and marketing. Focus groups are "small group discussions, addressing a specific topic, which usually involve 6-12 participants, either matched or varied on specific characteristics of interest to the researcher". (Fern, 1982; Morgan & Spanish, 1984).

Focus groups require skilled facilitators or moderators to guide the discussion and maintain the focus. They are found to be most effective for learning about opinions and attitudes, pilot testing materials for assessments and generating recommendations.

ADVANTAGES:
▪ Relatively easy to assemble, inexpensive and flexible in terms of format, types of questions and desired outcomes
▪ Good for groups with lower literacy levels (e.g. young children, English as a second language)
▪ Open recording allows participants to confirm their contributions
▪ Provide rich data through direct interaction between researcher and participants,
▪ Spontaneous, participants not required to answer every question; able to build on one another's responses;
▪ Help people build new connections

LIMITATIONS:
▪ Findings may not represent the views of larger segments of the population
▪ Requires good facilitation skills, including ability to handle various roles people may play ("expert", "quiet", "outsider", "friend", "hostile", etc.);
▪ Tough rich, data may be difficult to analyze because it is unstructured
▪ Possible conformance, censoring, conflict avoidance, or other unintended outcomes of the group process need to be addressed as part of the data analysis (Carey, 1995)

HOW TO:
▪ Choose a room with few distractions; if possible, limit the size of the group to 8 or less participants; nametags are helpful;
▪ Pre test your questions; have only a few questions (maximum 4-5); start from more general toward specific questions;
▪ Questions may vary in their level of structure; from “what is your perspective on .....” to “what would you say are the two most useful.....”;
▪ Most important points need to be addressed early;
▪ Keep the discussion to less than 2 hours;
▪ Use flip charts to make recording process as open/visible as possible;
▪ Consider having tape recording or another researcher taking detailed process notes – (if you want to capture comments verbatim);
▪ May use different discussion methods (Nominal, Delphi, role playing, story telling, drawing/visualizing, brainstorming). Nominal Group Method combines discussion and consensus-based decision making where participants both generate and evaluate their ideas after deciding on criteria. Delphi method is used for developing forecasts and is based on collective opinion of a group of people who are knowledgeable about a subject (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).
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REFERENCES:


SOURCES:


Centre for Research and Education in Human Services:

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