

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
ISSUES AND TECHNIQUES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Advantages and Disadvantages

This article has a number of objectives, however these do not include listing the advantages and disadvantages of the range of marketing research approaches commonly referred to as qualitative techniques.

Like all research techniques, qualitative techniques have both strengths and weaknesses, and these can usually be found listed in any article or textbook that discusses these techniques (e.g., see Aaker and Day (1); Bellenger et al, (5)).

The strengths and weaknesses associated with this group of techniques are determined by how consistent the technique is with the objectives of the research. Thus, it is almost meaningless to embark upon a listing of strengths and weaknesses outside the context of research objectives.

It follows then, that a good rule for researchers is to be suspicious of claims that any research technique is suitable for all problems. When used appropriately, qualitative techniques can prove very effective in achieving some research objectives. But like all research techniques, they are only suitable for the problems they are capable of solving.

1.2 Information for Buyers

In part, this article aims to assist Buyers of marketing research by providing them with a check list of issues that deserve consideration when making research buying decisions.

There is little doubt that there are a number of questions Buyers should ask themselves prior to deciding on using a qualitative approach to achieve their research objectives (most importantly; Is this the most appropriate technique given my research objectives?).

In addition, there are a series of questions that Buyers should ask their Supplier prior to using a particular qualitative approach. In particular, these apply to some of the logistical issues relating to qualitative techniques that will be addressed later.

1.3 A Checklist for Moderators and Interviewers

In part, this article aims to provide researchers with a checklist of issues they might consider prior to using qualitative techniques.

Clearly other researchers will disagree with some of the points raised in this article, however hopefully the article will provide some guidelines that will prove of use to other researchers.

1.4 Information for Aspiring Qualitative Researchers

A question that is often asked in marketing research is: “Where do I find out how to run Group Discussions”?

Unfortunately I (and I suspect others) find it difficult to refer aspiring qualitative researchers to any one source of information that really explains how to develop the skills and techniques required in order to be an effective qualitative researcher.

This is in part due to the fact that most qualitative researchers acquired their skills by working with and learning from an already skilled qualitative researcher. And some clearly learnt by being “thrown in the water”.

Not many qualitative researchers seem to have acquired their skills and knowledge from any formalised training such as might be obtained in some post graduate Psychology courses.

While this article does not attempt to provide a formal course in conducting qualitative research, it does attempt to provide some basic information that aspiring qualitative researchers might find useful in developing their skills.

1.5 Structure of the Article

This paper has five major sections.

-] The first section deals with a description of what a specific type of qualitative research - Group discussions - are (and what they are not).
-] The second section briefly discusses depth interviews.
-] In the third section some logistical and organisational issues relating to qualitative research are discussed.

-] The fourth section discusses specific qualitative interviewing techniques, some new developments and suggests some additional sources of information and training.
-] The final section briefly discusses analysing and reporting on qualitative data, especially group discussions.

2. WHAT IS A GROUP DISCUSSION?

A consideration of Group Discussions provides a useful way to think about qualitative research.

Definitions of Groups Discussions vary from the very simple to the reasonably complex.

In essence though, most definitions include a number of prerequisites in order for the particular data collection procedure to be called a Group Discussion:

-] Typical definitions usually refer to a “group of people”; and often suggest some specific number of people is most appropriate (e.g. 8 to 10 people).
-] Usually the definition includes some reference to the group “interacting” together.
-] The definition usually describes the process occurring as “open-ended”, “unstructured” or “non-directive”.
-] Most definitions refer to a “Moderator” who, in some way, leads the group.

Evidence that has been collected on Group Discussions suggests that not all the above are really prerequisites.

For example, Fern (18) provides evidence that for some Group Discussion applications the presence of a Moderator may not be necessary or effective in achieving the research objectives. In addition, both Fern (18) and de Almeida (16) suggest that, for some applications group memberships as small as four might be most appropriate.

In addition, it could well be argued that, depending on the research objectives, the degree of structure imposed on the group might need to vary. In some applications (like understanding the “language” of a particular group of consumers) very little structure might be required. However in other research applications (like obtaining comments on some specific aspects of a new packaging approach) a high level of structure might be required.

Because of the wide range of research objectives that Group Discussions can be designed to solve, the definition needs to be broad one. Probably the only essential aspect for such a definition is that it makes mention of the following points:

-] A group of people is involved (which could range in size from 3 or 4 people to perhaps 10 or 12 people). I would personally feel very uncomfortable with a group as large as 10 or 12, but perhaps there are applications for groups of this size.
- I have conducted Group Discussions with only four people and they have worked very effectively; but the topic and the research objectives dictated such an approach.
- The important point is: the size of the group depends on the research objectives, and as a consequence, the research design. The number of people in the group depends on how many people are required to obtain the type of interaction that is required by the research design.
-] Group members should interact.
- A major objective of Group Discussions is to observe a group of people interacting together. Thus, for most applications, the Group Discussion should be a discussion between group members, and not a question and answer session between the Moderator and individual members of the group.
-] On most occasions the group should have a Moderator, but not always. Fern (18) provides evidence that, when the research objective is to generate ideas, groups function more effectively without Moderators. However Discussion Groups should always have some means of recording what has gone on. There is no doubt at all that neither observers nor Moderators are capable of remembering everything that went on in a group discussion.
- Much of what they remember will be determined by what they consciously or unconsciously want to remember.
- The type of recording device will be discussed later; the point is that some type of recording device is crucial.

2.1 Issues Associated With a Definition

There are a number of other issues that are somewhat related to a definition of Group Discussions.

2.1.1 Representativeness

Most writers on Group Discussions point out that Group Discussions do not provide representative data.

Not only is the group of people involved usually not representative of the larger population being investigated, but the opinions, attitudes and knowledge generated by the group may not be representative of the opinions, attitudes and knowledge of the larger population.

Thus, one must question research where Group Discussions are used to generate the issues that are to be tested in later quantitative research.

There is nothing wrong with testing the issues generated by Group Discussions; the problem is in accepting that these issues are the only relevant ones for the population.

In discussing representativeness, some writers argue that the group itself should be seen as the unit of the sample, not the individuals making up the group. Thus four group discussions should be viewed as “four individuals, irrespective of the number of persons who have participated in the discussions.” (de Almeida, 16).

2.1.2 Cost

Some proponents of Group Discussions argue that Group Discussions are cheaper than other forms of research, such as survey research. This is not the case.

In 2003 in Australia the charge for one Group Discussion was probably around \$5,000,. Using these figures it is clear that Group Discussion charges, on a per respondent basis, is much more expensive than survey research data.

Of course, some would argue that the cost comparison should be made on some other basis; for example, the results of Group Discussions are received quickly (not as quickly as telephone interviews, and not quickly at all if the data is properly analysed), or the quality of the data is somehow better (do they refer to validity, reliability or what?).

There is little doubt that Group Discussions are a valuable means of obtaining data; but not because they are cheap.

2.1.3 Timing

Many definitions of Group Discussions suggest that the group should last from one to two hours, and most Group Discussions probably do last this length of time.

However many qualitative researchers argue that for some research problems it might be appropriate to conduct the groups over either longer periods of time, or to meet with the same group of people on more than one occasion.

Given that Group Discussions probably developed from Psychological techniques such as Encounter Groups and other group therapy procedures, extended contact with respondents could prove useful.

In these approaches Psychologists accept that it is necessary to spend considerable lengths of time in order to really understand people. If we marketing researchers are trying to achieve similar goals, then there are certainly some research situations that require more time to be spent with the group.

2.2 So What Is An Acceptable Definition?

Rather than attempt to define what a group discussion is, it is probably more useful to define the suite of qualitative techniques of which group discussions are simply one type.

First, a definition that clearly has some problems:

“There are several reasons for using qualitative research. ... People may be unwilling or unable to answer certain questions. People are unwilling to give truthful answers to questions that invade their privacy, embarrass them, or have a negative impact on their ego or status ... Second, people may be unable to provide accurate answers to questions that tap their subconscious ... values, emotional drives, and motivations residing at the subconscious level are disguised from the outer world by rationalisation and other ego defences ...”

Malhotra et al, “Marketing Research”.

As will be seen later as this document unfolds, a key problem with this definition is that it implies that qualitative research can access issues that are not accessible to the respondent. In effect the definition implies the qualitative researcher can go places that neither Psychologists nor Psychiatrists can confidently address.

A later section of this paper (a discussion of projective techniques), this issue is discussed in more detail. But the key point here is that qualitative research does not allow researchers (and marketers) to access information respondents do not know about themselves.

Following are a number of definitions of qualitative research which all contribute to a better understanding of these techniques.

1. Robert Walker (49): *“These techniques (such as group discussions) are traditionally termed ‘qualitative’ for they are generally intended more to determine what things exist than to determine how many such things there are. Because qualitative techniques are not concerned with measurement they tend to be less structured than quantitative ones and can therefore be made more responsive to the needs of respondents and to the nature of the subject matter.”*

This definition provides a useful starting point for an understanding of qualitative techniques in that it suggests that qualitative techniques are concerned with the identification of the existence of things rather than estimating their frequency.

However the definition has a flaw in that it implies qualitative techniques are not concerned with measurement when indeed measurement should be a prime concern of any research. To some extent the following definition by Goldman overcomes this problem.

2. Alfred Goldman (21): *“Unlike quantitative research, which concerns itself with counting things to arrive at statistically projectable data, qualitative research addresses the nature or structure of attitudes and motivations rather than their frequency or distribution ... the underlying goal is always the same: to explore in depth the feelings and beliefs people hold, and to learn how these feelings shape overt behaviour.”*

This definition is a more satisfactory one in that it addresses the issue of qualitative research being concerned with addressing the structure of attitudes and motives.

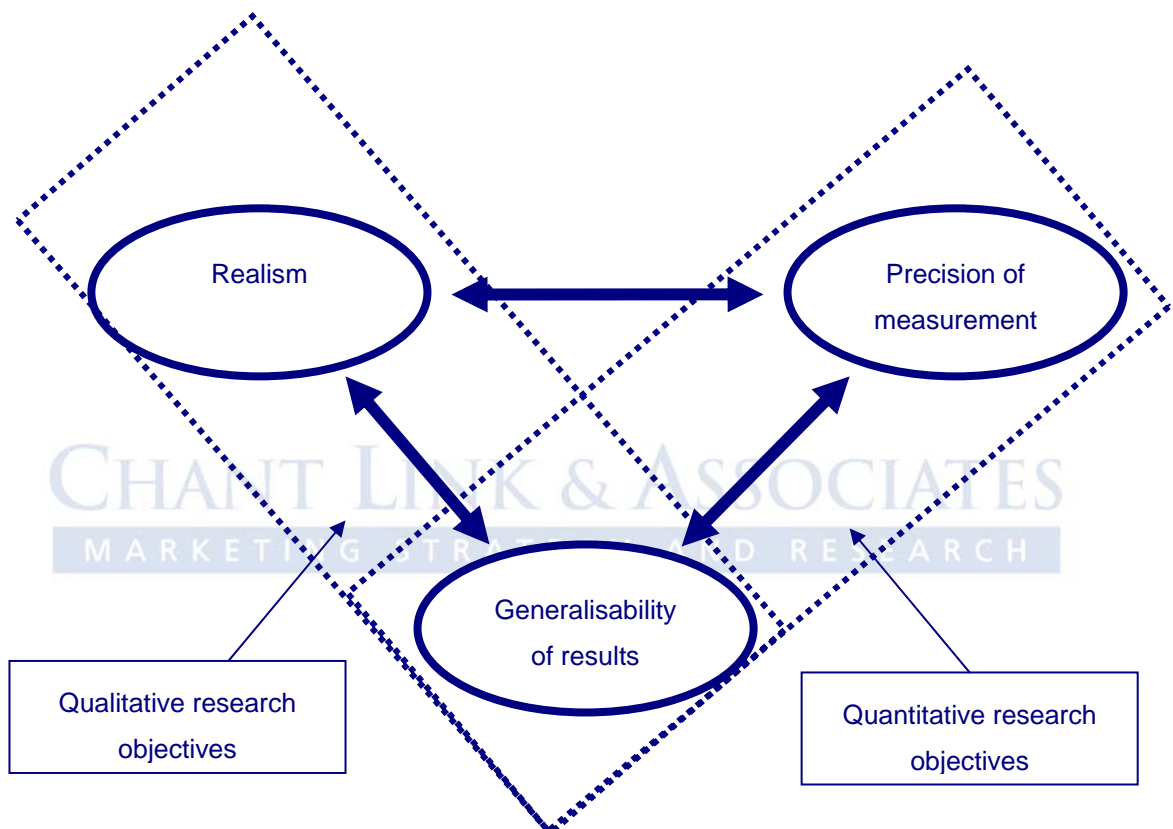
Thus it argues for an exploration of the relationship between variables.

3. David Aaker (1): *“Qualitative methods are less structured and more intensive than standardized questionnaire based interviews. There is a longer, more flexible relationship with the respondent so that the resulting data have more depth and richness of context - which also means a greater potential for new insights and perspectives.”*

This definition adds a further enhancement in that it suggests qualitative techniques are able to examine issues and relationships in greater depth than quantitative techniques.

4. Vallaster and Koll (48): An article by Vallaster and Koll (48) goes a long way to providing a very useful definition of qualitative versus quantitative research. Here Vallaster and Koll make use of the “magic triangle” approach. An adaptation of this is illustrated in the following exhibit.

Exhibit 1: The “Magic Triangle”; Three Key Objectives of Research



The fundamental concept here is that research, in general, aims to address three key objectives:

1. Realism,
2. Generalisability of results and,
3. Precision of measurement,

... and all three of these objectives interact together.

Qualitative research is more concerned with the first two of these objectives whereas quantitative research is more concerned with the latter two of these objectives.

This point leads to some fundamental issues for qualitative research, the main one being, are the approaches currently being used by qualitative researchers likely to deliver in terms of the first objective – the search for Realism?

Thus we arrive at a final definition of qualitative research.

Qualitative research is concerned with the search for realism. As such, qualitative research is concerned with gaining an understanding of the variables (and their inter-relationships) that contribute to the processes that form the basis of peoples' decision making and behaviour. To this end, qualitative research is concerned with the identification, description and explanation of relationships between these variables and processes rather than attempting to estimate their frequency.

3. DEPTH INTERVIEWS

3.1 What is a Depth Interview?

The term “depth interview” is somewhat misused in the research industry.

For many people a “depth interview” refers to an interview that is driven by a structured questionnaire which contains a significant number of open ended questions and where there is consistent use of the instructions; “PROBE” and “PROBE FURTHER”.

Typically “depth interviews” as described above, are conducted by more senior interviewers from field interview teams. The outputs from these interviews are converted to quantitative codes and analysed by computer; usually to produce cross-tabulations.

As the preceding description implies, real depth interviews are more than this. The characteristics of a real depth interview include the following:

-] **Minimal Obvious Structure:** Depth interviews should allow the respondent (or more accurately, the participant) to follow their own directions. This is not to say that the interviewer does not have the opportunity to direct the interview or explore various issues. It simply means that the interviewer needs to realise that valid information will not be obtained unless the interviewee feels comfortable to talk about the issues in which they are interested.
-] **Usually Concerned With Decision Processes:** Usually depth interviews are concerned with not only gaining an understanding of *what* interviewees are thinking about an issue, but *how* they got to that position. That is, the depth interview is concerned with gaining an understanding of how the interviewee arrived at their position or the decision process they went through.
-] **Depth Interviews Involve Helping the Interviewee:** Usually depth interviews involve assisting the interviewee to think through their decision processes. Often it is the case with depth interviews that the interviewee has not previously considered the issues that the interviewer is interested in. Thus, it is often a major task of the interviewer to set up an environment that allows and assists the interviewee to explore the issues at hand.

] ***A High Quality Interviewer is Required:*** Depth interviews will not work unless the interviewer possesses considerable skill and experience in conducting depth interviews. The interviewer, as will be illustrated later, needs to gain the confidence of the interviewee. And this means that the interviewer needs to be trained in issues such as developing empathy, understanding the structure of questions, non-verbal cues, and so on.

] ***The Interviewer is the Key, Not the Questionnaire:*** One of the best explanations of the difference between depth interviews and other types of interviews is provided by Taylor and Bogdan (44) where they comment that, in depth interviews;

“... the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool.”
(Taylor and Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, p77)

In effect they are pointing out that, in a good depth interview, it is the interviewer's skill in encouraging the interviewee to talk, to assist them to explore their decision processes and feelings, and to interpret their responses that dictates whether the interview will be effective; not whether the discussion guide was a good one.

A way of thinking about depth interviews that is very consistent with the information discussed in section 5 of this paper is that depth interviews are, in effect, conversations where the interviewer is concerned with ensuring the interviewee believes they have permission to speak, and where the interviewer speaks significantly less than the interviewee.

3.2 Selecting Between Depth Interviews and Group Discussions

It has been my belief for some time now that group discussions are often overused and that depth interviews are underused. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that researchers should only use groups in preference to depth interviews when they can clearly justify the loss of the degrees of freedom associated with the use of groups. While groups are undoubtedly a very powerful way of acquiring qualitative information, they are not necessarily the fundamental and only way of collecting qualitative information. Indeed on some occasions groups will clearly generate the wrong information.

As Fern¹ pointed out as long ago as 1982 (and as psychologists had pointed out prior to Fern), if the researcher is attempting to generate ideas, individuals are superior to groups.

Researchers need to ask themselves; are we interested in group decision processes or is the information that is required for this project fundamentally individually oriented?

I suspect there are a number of reasons for the overuse of groups, and these include:

-] **Habit:** Often researchers just assume groups are the best way to go when qualitative research techniques are required; indeed I suspect groups become a habit.
-] **Cost and Convenience:** Groups are clearly selected on some occasions because they are perceived to be cheaper, or even worse, more convenient than depth interviews. However I would argue that, if the correct analysis procedure is used, it may well be the case that groups are a more expensive way of collecting data (especially if the data is viewed as representing groups rather than individuals).
-] **Observation:** Groups are sometimes selected because observation by the client is considered more important than selecting the correct research technique.

McQuarrie and McIntyre (33) suggest a number of rules for selecting between groups and depth interviews. These are:

-] **Diversity of Consumer Ideas:** When the researcher is seeking a diversity of consumer ideas, individual interviews are more effective than groups (e.g. the idea generation stage of the new product development process).
-] **Existence of Ideas:** But when we are trying to determine whether various ideas exist in the community, group discussions are more appropriate. And this particularly applies when we are examining particular market segments.

In this situation, individual interviews can be dangerous because they can lead us to conclude that various idiosyncratic ideas are representative of the segment when they are not.

¹ Fern, E. F., (1982), "The use of focus groups for idea generation; the effects of group size, acquaintanceship and moderator on response quantity and quality", *Journal of Marketing Research*, 19, (February), 1-13

] **Polarization:** Groups tend to exaggerate whatever pre-existing tendencies characterise the majority of people in the group. That is groups tend to make both riskier and more conservative decisions than the individual group members might. This means that minority ideas tend to be suppressed.

Of course this can protect the researcher from being distracted by idiosyncratic ideas. But, when used with the unification dynamic identified by Bales² it is a very powerful technique for gaining an understanding of segmentation possibilities. The polarization phenomenon can be used to observe two coalitions within a group dispute the merits of their positions relative to one another.

As McQuarrie and McIntyre point out; *“Here is a case where groups do not simply possess an advantage over individual interviews, but actually exhibit a feature which cannot be duplicated in one-on-one interviews.”*

There are also other rules for choosing between groups and depth interviews that are not discussed by McQuarrie and McIntyre. Some of the rules I have developed include:

] **Group Versus Individual Processes:** When the researcher is interested in CH decision processes, it is clearly the case that some decision processes are primarily individually based and others are group based (e.g. Cardiologists making a decision about which drug they will select for the treatment of angina versus teenage girls examining why they watch “Sex in the City”).

] **Level of Involvement:** In situations where the information the researcher requires is associated with low involvement decision making on the part of consumers (e.g. purchasing rice), it may well be the case that, because the consumer has not thought at length about the decision making process that a group will help raise issues the individual may not have thought of.

However when the issue is a high involvement one for the consumer it may well be the case that information can be more effectively obtained from individuals.

² Bales, R. F. and Stephen, P. C., (1979), *SYMLOG: A system for the multiple level observation of groups*, New York, Free Press

4. LOGISTICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

Evaluating data arising from qualitative research involves consideration of a number of issues that, at first glance, may seem extraneous to the qualitative research technique itself.

For example, let us suppose you are evaluating the results of two group discussions which were examining women's reactions to a brochure designed to reduce the incidence of child abuse.

Would you be interested in knowing that one of the groups contained women who knew each other well, while the other group consisted of women who were strangers to one another?

Or if you were evaluating the results of two Group Discussions on Doctors' attitudes toward a new drug, would you be interested in knowing which group consisted of Doctors who had been paid to attend and which group contained Doctors who attended at no cost?

There are a number of issues of this type that warrant careful attention in evaluating qualitative research results, and which should be determined at the design phase of the research. In the following discussion, Group Discussions are used as the subject matter because they are one of the most frequently used qualitative techniques. But most of the points made could apply equally well to other qualitative techniques.

] **Affinity versus Non-Affinity-Groups:** An issue that generates controversy among researchers is whether group discussion participants should or should not know one another (affinity versus non-affinity groups). Nelson and Frontczak (34) conducted an interesting study from which they concluded:

"... focus groups can be composed of either friends, couples or strangers with relatively little impact on idea quality or quantity ..."

However their study used as its criterion of success of the research process the quality and quantity of ideas generated.

Realism: Clearly this is not always the objective of qualitative research, and therefore their results cannot be generalised to all qualitative research. As an aside I would argue that the real criterion for affinity versus non-affinity should be one of realism.

If you are using qualitative techniques because you believe that you require outputs from a real group, then surely you should do all you can to ensure that the group is as close as possible to being 'real'; and on many occasions this will mean smaller groups where the members know one another.

Some researchers strenuously argue that all groups should consist of respondents that are unknown to one another, whereas other researchers argue that it is unrealistic to place a group of people together who do not know one another and expect true to life interactions. Still other researchers choose to moderate affinity groups rather than non-affinity groups on economic grounds; because it is easier to recruit such groups.

There is no one solution to the dilemma of affinity versus non-affinity groups. For some situations affinity groups are most appropriate, other situations require non-affinity groups, and probably for still other situations it does not matter.

A good researcher will examine the research problem, and make a decision on this issue that is consistent with the research objectives.

The only thing we can be consistently sure of on this matter is, like other research techniques, any researcher who always uses the one approach on all occasions is likely to be incorrect some of the time.

] **Location:** Where the group is conducted is closely related to the preceding issue.

If the group is designed to consist of an affinity group of married females with full time household duties, it would be unwise to conduct the group in a board room located in an office block in the city.

A good rule is: if you require "real life" responses, try and make all aspects of the stimuli (including the location) real to life. If it is an affinity group, almost certainly the location should be a "home ground" location.

Even in the case of a non-affinity group, the location should be as consistent as possible with where such a group of people might meet and talk. Some group Moderators argue that once group members become involved in the discussion, the location is of little consequence.

Thus, these Moderators tend to use some form of central location for the Group Discussion.

While such an approach has the advantages of cost reduction and, probably, better recording facilities, its other advantages are limited.

-] **Group Homogeneity:** If groups are to interact, then almost certainly they need to be homogeneous. The question is, homogeneous according to what variable(s)?

Once again, the answer rests with the research design. The researcher should be able to answer this question with reference to the research objectives. Goldman (20) provides a neat (if not detailed) solution to this problem in suggesting that the criterion for homogeneity is sharing a common interest.

Almost certainly, the answer is not to construct the groups of numerous sub groups of respondents in order to provide a “cross section” of the population in the one group. It is necessary to ensure all the groups used in the research cover a cross section of the population to be examined. But this means more groups that are each homogeneous, rather than groups consisting of many sub-groups.

Thus, if the researcher wishes to look at attitudes to a particular TV program, it might be appropriate to include males and females in the one group; but not because the researcher requires information on how males and how females react to the program. Both groups would be included because the research design does not require any discrimination between males and females.

-] **Previous Group Experience:** A major problem facing all researchers using Group Discussion techniques is the degree of group experience possessed by group members.

Most groups are recruited through a recruitment agency, and because most of these agencies rely on some data base of possible group members, even the most conscientious of agencies cannot avoid recruiting group members who have recently attended other Group Discussions.

The simple issue is that group members who frequently attend groups are probably different to group members who have not attended other groups.

If the researcher aims to obtain “real life” data, they would be wise to attempt to exclude group members who have attended other groups.

However, like many other research issues, there is a cost/benefit trade off here that the researcher and client must make.

-] **Repeat Attendance and Acquaintanceship:** As Hayward and Rose (24) point out in “We’ll meet again ... Repeat Attendance at Group Discussions - Does It Matter?”, “Recognising respondents at group discussions can be an alarming and embarrassing experience for both moderators and observers alike”

However they point out that (as did Bruce Smith, Max Sutherland and Suzy Dickerson in a past MRS conference paper³) repeat attendance is not necessarily the problem that it may appear.

In summary Hayward and Rose's research suggests:

- ❑ It is acceptable for groups to be comprised of a mix of "virgin" attendees and experienced attendees.
- ❑ It is unnecessary to have more than two "virgin" respondents per group.
- ❑ Checks on the frequency of attendance should be maintained; there should be a minimum six month interval between attendance of groups and a maximum three years usage of respondents (i.e. six attendances before a compulsory break of perhaps five years).
- ❑ Respondents should never attend more than one group on the same subject.

] **Payment:** A similar problem applies to paying people who attend group discussions.

Almost certainly, people who only attend group discussions for payment are different to people who either will not attend, or people who will attend without payment. Probably the ideal situation is where people attend because they are interested in the topic, and do not require any form of payment (such is often the case with the farming community).

However these cases are rare.

An argument that favours recruiting affinity groups (such as those recruited via charitable groups) is that these people attend the group for motives other than purely financial ones. It is also possible to recruit people by providing rewards that are indirectly financial (e.g. providing meals at restaurants, free movies, gifts, etc.), however it is debatable whether the long term effect is any different to supplying money.

] **Previous Knowledge of Subject:** Like some of the other issues discussed here, previous knowledge of the topic to be discussed could be a biasing factor. However on other occasions such knowledge may be a necessary prerequisite for group membership.

³ Smith, B., Sutherland, M. and Dickerson, S., (1987), "The group discussion experience", Paper from the MRS Conference, Melbourne

Thus, once again this is an issue that should be determined by the research design.

-] **Recording:** As has been previously mentioned, it is crucial that Group Discussions be recorded.

The evidence in the literature is overwhelming that interviewers in general are not good at remembering what has occurred in an interview.

When a number of Group Discussions are involved the difficulties for the interviewer (or Moderator) are even greater.

A number of recording options exist including: handwritten notes taken either by the moderator or by an associate while the discussion is in progress, tape recordings, video recordings, or some combination of these procedures.

At the very least, tape recordings should be made of the discussion. Notes taken during the discussion suffer similar problems to relying on memory; not everything is recorded and what is recorded is determined by the recorder.

Some researchers argue that video recordings make respondents too self conscious, and others argue that the video is not particularly useful unless it is able to “track” individual group members, thus making it too obtrusive. The decision to use a video recording is probably best left to the researcher and client. However from an analysis point of view, I have reservations concerning its usefulness.

-] **Observations:** This topic was well covered by Barry Elliot in the 1989 Australian Market Research conference when he reported on the article by Robson and Wardle⁴ (10).

While I have more doubts than Barry about the quality of the Robson and Wardle paper, I agree very strongly with its sentiments.

It seems to me that qualitative researchers may well be allowing the requirements of clients and other observers to outweigh one of the most important advantages of group discussions as compared to other research techniques; reality. Or to present an argument that is a little more controversial; are researchers allowing entertaining their clients to become more important than the validity of the data they are collecting?

⁴ Elliot, B., (1989), “Through a glass darkly: debasing qualitative research”, Papers from the MRS Conference, Sydney, 1989.

There is little doubt that group discussion participants behave differently depending on the environment in which they are interviewed. I find it hard to accept that a group of blue collar females will behave “naturally” if they are interviewed in an up-market research facility, especially one that uses one-way mirrors or video equipment.

If you find this hard to accept, next time you run a group, take a little time to have an “off the record” discussion with the participants prior to the group and ask them to compare their experiences between in home discussion and market research (or advertising agency) office environments.

There are definitely occasions where the client will gain value from observing groups. But if the value of observations is so high, it would be preferable for the observers to sit in the group in a home rather than force the participants into an unreal environment.

Essentially, there are four ways a Group Discussion can be observed; sit in on the group, observe through a one way screen, observe on video while the group is being conducted, observe on a video recording after the groups have been run.

In many senses, observing the group by means other than sitting in on the group is self defeating in that it is difficult to obtain a “feel” for what is happening without being in the group. However, the final decision about the observation method is best left to the moderator and the client.

Whichever method is selected, it is wise for the moderator to insist that the observer attend more than one group (and preferably three or four) in order to avoid obtaining a biased perception of the groups’ reactions.

-] **Number of Moderators/Interpretation Responsibilities:** On some occasions more than one moderator is used for different groups in the one research project. Sometimes this is because it is impossible for a single person to conduct all the groups because of logistical or timing problems, and on some occasions better value can be derived by more than one person working on the project (e.g. younger moderators for younger respondents, female moderators for female respondents, etc.).

While a single moderator has some advantages from the perspective of research consistency, more than one moderator can add value, especially if the moderators work well together in debriefing workshops.

Prince and Davies (37) suggest the use of moderator teams in order to overcome single moderator potential bias.

They argue that training, personality and orientation inevitably varies amongst moderators and thus the combination of these issues may lead to moderator bias.

As a solution Prince and Davies argue for several moderators in succession be used during the group. The concept involves moderators with varying skill bases and other characteristics (e.g. male versus female, Psychology training versus Marketing training) moderating various parts of the discussion that is consistent with the moderator's specific characteristics and training. The concept further involves the moderators observing one another and sharing insights during moderator change-overs.

They argue that this type of approach delivers a range of benefits including:

1. Overcoming moderator "preference" for group participants (that is, bias toward or against some group participants),
2. Ensuring that all issues of relevance are covered during the group,
3. Allowing for ideas to be generated during the group process that enable moderators to more effectively address specific problems and issues arising during the group (e.g. strategies for dealing with particular topics),
4. Allowing for the "new" moderator to identify "inhibited" respondents (while observing the previous moderator) and then to address these inhibitions,
5. Overcoming problems associated with selective reporting of data (the argument being that multiple moderators enables a broader perspective of the data),
6. "Provide legitimacy for the client to act on focus group results" due to "greater weight can be allocated to them in comparison to those associated with a single moderator" (p213).

However as the authors acknowledge, SMT incurs greater costs to the client.

I would argue the approach would almost certainly demand more time from the perspective of group participants, greater logistical demands on the research process, and perhaps most importantly, remove the ability of the moderator to pursue a more unstructured approach. A further potential problem with this approach concerns determining what particular mix of moderators is most appropriate for which groups of respondents (and possibly sourcing those moderators).

As the above discussion illustrates, in order to successfully achieve a project's research objectives, it is necessary to consider a large number of issues prior to actually conducting any qualitative research.

Group Discussions (or for that matter, any other research technique) are unlikely to achieve the objectives of a research project unless they are related to the research objectives via a well thought through research design.

Given a detailed enough research design, most of the above issues will have automatic solutions.

5. QUALITATIVE TECHNIQUES

This chapter is divided into two major sections.

-] The first section discusses skills interviewers require in order to be effective, and suggests that these skills are also necessary in order to be an effective moderator of Group Discussions.
-] The second section discusses some specific techniques that can be used in qualitative interviewing along with some comments about some of the newer qualitative approaches.

5.1 Some Necessary Core Skills

It is self evident that an effective qualitative researcher needs to be a skilled interviewer.

By “interviewer” it is not meant that the aspiring qualitative researcher should be skilled in administering structured questionnaires in a person to person setting. “Interviewer” in the context used here means a person who possesses skills similar to those of a skilled Counsellor or, in a marketing research context, a skilled “depth” interviewer.

Essentially there are two ways of acquiring skill as an interviewer.

One of these ways involves being born with “talent” as an interviewer (or Counsellor). While such people are probably rare, there seems to be evidence that they exist (e.g. see Truax and Carkhuff, (46)). However even these people probably need to further develop their skills by training.

The more usual method of acquiring interviewing skill is to acquire either formal or informal training in this area.

Formal training is available in some post graduate Psychology courses, and perhaps some undergraduate courses. Less formal training is available from some fringe psychological or counselling organisations.

However this article will not address these formal types of training, and instead will concentrate on the less formal approaches.

5.1.1 A Model of Interviewing Skills

Probably the most important attribute of any effective interviewer is that they base their interviewing approach on some formal or informal model of interviewing.

Many such models exist, especially in the psychological literature (e.g. see Bergin and Garfield (7); or Corsini (15)). Unfortunately few models of this type appear to exist outside Psychology.

While clinically oriented, psychological models of interviewing may not, at first glance, seem appropriate for marketing research, but given the objectives of most qualitative research in marketing research are associated with encouraging people to reveal their real thoughts and feelings about a range of issues, it is hard to identify any more appropriate model.

The model selected for this discussion is that of Truax and Carkhuff (46). A brief description of the model will be given here, not to serve as the definitive account of the model, but to encourage readers to explore this model (or other models) further.

After a major survey of the psychological literature, and after conducting carefully designed research in the area of interviewing skill, Truax and Carkhuff concluded that effective interviewers tended to possess minimum levels of three “central therapeutic ingredients” (Truax and Carkhuff). They further concluded that it is possible to increase the effectiveness of counsellors by identifying the level of each of these three “therapeutic ingredients” possessed by individual counsellors, and then training them to improve their skills where necessary.

The three core ingredients for counselling success are:

-] **Accurate Empathy:** Accurate empathic understanding involves the ability to perceive and communicate accurately and with sensitivity both the feelings and experiences of another person and their meaning and significance (Bergin and Garfield, 7).
-] **Genuineness (or Self Congruence):** Truax and Carkhuff describe this dimension as a state where the interviewer is “freely and deeply himself...it does not mean (he) must overtly express his feelings but only that he does not deny them.” Thus the interviewer’s response must be sincere rather than phony; it must express his real feelings rather than defensiveness.

And, of course, for the interviewer to be skilled in genuineness, it is crucial for the interviewer to possess a clear understanding of his/her own emotional state.

] **Non-possessive Warmth:** This dimension overlaps with the communication of accurate empathy and genuineness. It refers to the interviewer behaving in such a way so that the interviewee is free to be himself even if this means the interviewee is being defensive or is disliking or rejecting the interviewer.

The interviewer accepts the interviewee's experience as part of that person, without imposing conditions.

Truax and Carkhuff also suggested a fourth dimension which they call "Concreteness". Other researchers have called this dimension "confrontation" or "immediacy". By "Concreteness" Truax and Carkhuff refer to the interviewer confronting the interviewee with any discrepancy between the interviewee and the interviewer's experiencing of the interviewee. It seems unlikely that this dimension can be effectively used in most qualitative market research applications because it requires a much closer relationship, built over time, than generally occurs in market research. Thus using "concreteness" could well run the risk of alienating respondents.

It should be noted that all of the above definitions are brief. Serious interviewers are advised to consult the references as the concepts involved warrant detailed explanations and further examples.

One of the attractive features of this model is that, not only does it describe the dimensions of effective interviewing, but it suggests methods of measuring the levels of these dimensions in individual interviewers. It then provides descriptions of methods to increase the level of these dimensions in individual interviewers.

A more in depth exploration of these measuring and training techniques are outside the scope of this article. Interested readers should consult Truax and Carkhuff .

As a final point here, the reader should not conclude that the Truax and Carkhuff model is necessarily the right one for all interviewers. It is up to the individual interviewer to select an interviewing model, and then to obtain sufficient training and practice with the model's features. However whichever model is selected, the selection, understanding and proficiency with the model are essential for success as an interviewer.

5.1.2 Questioning Techniques

In addition to being familiar and at ease with some model of interviewing, it is necessary for interviewers to have other specific information at their disposal.

An important additional piece of information is a classification of questions. That is, the interviewer must have a clear understanding of the various types of questions and the types of behaviour (and information) they are likely to elicit from interviewees.

Many interviewers do not realise the effect question structure can have on an interview. For example, it is frequently the case that the interviewer, especially the inexperienced interviewer, asks a series of 'closed' questions and wonders why the interviewee hardly participates in the interview. This type of situation frequently occurs when the interviewer needs to ask a series of questions that provokes anxiety responses on the part of both the interviewer and the interviewee. In these situations interviewers will frequently use closed questions similar to the following: "Do you agree that? (Yes/No)", "Do you like (Yes/No)", etc.).

There are undoubtedly many approaches to classifying questions. However for the purpose of this article a two dimensional classification of questions is used as an illustration (which was developed by W.L.Morton of Cullen Morton Pty. Ltd.). It involves classifying questions by structure, rather than by content, based on two dimensions: the degree of "openness" of the question and the degree to which the question is "leading".

A brief summary of this approach is shown on the following page.

By using different types of questions, and most importantly, by understanding how these questions work and what types of answers are most likely to occur, it is possible to encourage the interviewee to proceed in the directions required by the objectives of the research.

However, in order for the interviewer to become proficient in these questioning techniques practice is necessary.

As was the case for the model of interviewing, it is not argued here that the preceding classification of questions is necessarily the best or the only one worth considering. Instead it is argued that it is necessary for interviewers to be familiar with some classification of questions; otherwise they are not likely to be capable of eliciting the type of behaviour they require from interviewees.

Exhibit 2: Summary of Question Types

Question Type	Description	Important Use(s)
Direct (and closed)	Seeks to obtain information without influencing the answer given. e.g. Do you like ice-cream?	Obtain information; but limits responses of respondent
Leading	Attempts to obtain agreement to the whole content of the question (assumes all the answer e.g. You like ice cream, don't you?	Persuade, check understanding
Assume part of the answer	Makes one assumption in the content of the question and asks a question about one part of the assumption. e.g. How much do you like ice cream?	Persuade to accept assumption and answer the question
Non-directive	Reflects previous contribution without bias or makes a neutral signal e.g. So you're saying.....?	Let the answer decide the next topic
Open	Encourages interviewee to talk, and allows any length of answer. e.g. Why did you come here today?	Encourage talking
Closed	Seeks to obtain specific information and encourages short answer. e.g. Did you eat any ice cream?	Obtain specific information
Probe	Seeks to obtain more details/rationale for answer e.g. can you tell me more about that?.	Obtain detailed answer

5.1.3 Silence

Probably one of the most powerful techniques for almost any interviewing situation is silence.

A colleague once commented that “interviewers should ask a question and then shut-up!” and the same colleague claimed that in most interviews, interviewers should speak less than 10% of the time.

Both of these comments are important for interviewers to remember. Remaining silent can be one of the most powerful prompts to encourage an interviewee to talk, probably because silence on the part of the interviewer places social pressure on the interviewee to continue talking.

In any case, we are usually interested in what the interviewee has to say, rather than what the interviewer has to say.

Unfortunately many interviewers find it difficult to maintain silence in an interview, as they experience many of the same feelings of anxiety as the interviewee. A good technique that can assist interviewers to learn to remain silent after asking a question is to count to 20 (or 40 or 60...) under their breath.

If you have not tried silence as an interviewing technique, try it in your next conversation (interview) and observe the power it has, especially with respect to extending the interviewee’s reply.

It is also worth noting that there is probably a connection between interviewers failing to use silence effectively and interviewers not possessing skills of the type previously mentioned in the interviewing model. When interviewers become anxious they tend to compensate by talking a lot. However if they are sufficiently aware of their own emotional state, they are more likely to be able to cope effectively with these feelings of anxiety.

Thus it is of crucial importance for all qualitative researchers to develop skills that enable them to clearly understand their own emotional state while they are conducting qualitative interviews; whether that be depth interviews or group discussions.

Of course other “minimal encouragers to talk” such as nods, grunts, repeating the last few of the interviewee’s words, and so on can also be very effective as a non-directive questioning technique.

5.2 Preliminary Summary

The preceding discussion illustrates some of the more important core attributes interviewers must possess before they are likely to prove effective in any interviewing situation; and in particular in an interviewing situation as complex as a Group Discussion.

Interviewers need the following:

-] **Interviewing Model:** Have at their disposal a model of effective interviewing with which they are familiar and practiced.

In addition they need to be skilled at recognising their own emotional state throughout the qualitative interview.

-] **Model of Questioning:** Possess a clear understanding of how and why various types of questions work. In addition they need to have sufficient training in making the questioning techniques work that they feel comfortable with them.

-] **Minimal Encouragers:** Be skilled in the use of all “minimal encouragers to talk”, and in particular feel comfortable with and skilled in using silence.

Of course interviewers also require other skills, many of which are implied by the interviewing model previously discussed.

For example;

-] **Listening:** They must be skilled at listening to interviewees (not just what was said, but how it was said; the emotional content of the statement and the grammatical structure of the statement).
-] **Observing:** They must be skilled at observing the physical behaviour of interviewees, including those who are not actually speaking at the time (for example, by observing indications of disagreement with the current speaker, it is possible to identify who should be next invited to talk).
-] **Vocabulary:** They must possess a broad enough vocabulary to effectively communicate to the interviewee they have been understood, and so on.

] **Permission to Speak:** They must recognise that a major role of the interviewer is to give respondents permission to speak (by rewarding them when they do speak though listening and reflecting contributions), and that they should avoid retracting respondents' permission to speak (e.g. by reacting negatively, by cutting the respondent off, by appearing not to listen, etc.).

Most of these points are discussed in greater detail in the previous references, however readers might be interested in following up the issue of listening in references associated with "Psycholinguistics", such as Bandler and Grinder's The Structure of Magic (4).

Training and Feedback is Critical: It should be noted that the three core attributes required by interviewers mentioned above are all dependant on two crucial issues; training and feedback.

In order to develop skills in the use of an interviewing model, a classification of questions, and the use of minimal encouragers to talk the prospective interviewer needs to receive training in the technique or concept, then needs to practice using the technique or concept, and, finally, needs to receive feedback on their performance by an experienced observer and critic.

In essence, training, practice, and perhaps most importantly, feedback are the prime requisites for eventual skill as an interviewer.

5.3 Some Additional Key Requirements

The preceding techniques are core to effective qualitative research. But there are also some additional requirements of an effective qualitative researcher including some key areas of understanding and some important specific skills. These are discussed in the following sections.

5.3.1 Group Data Versus Individual Data

Prior to collecting data from any Group Discussion, the group moderator (and the client) should realise that the data to be collected, in the case of group discussions, is from a group and not from individual respondents.

All the information arising from the Group Discussion is affected by group dynamics.

For example, while the total group may agree about a particular issue, it may well be the case that all of the group except one would not have originally thought of the issue. Thus would it be appropriate to treat the information as though it had originated from all group members?

Attempting to treat Group Discussion data as if it reflects individual opinions, beliefs and attitudes is inappropriate. In any case, if data on individuals was required, some other data collection approach should have been selected.

5.3.2 Hypotheses and Models

The first activity the qualitative researcher should engage in (after discussing the research problem and objectives with the client) is to develop a set of hypotheses about:

-] What are the issues (variables) that are important to the research question.
-] What are the relationships between these variables.

In identifying the above variables and relationships the moderator is constructing a hypothetical model that will help determine the general approach that is required by the research objectives. For example, the model may assist in determining how directive the researcher should be in applying the particular technique.

Formulating such a model also will assist in determining some of the specific techniques that might prove useful in the qualitative intervention. For example, should the researcher use any projective techniques, should the researcher use case study methods, or should the researcher confront interviewees with “real” stimuli, etc.?

5.3.3 Discussion Outline

Once a hypothetical model has been developed, the researcher should then prepare an outline of the issues to be addressed in the research approach.

The outline is not a detailed set of questions that are to be asked in a particular order or in a particular way. It is simply a guide to help the researcher think about, and cover, major points of interest. Thus it is critical for moderators to avoid allowing the guide to drive the discussion. If respondents begin addressing an issue that has relevance to the research objectives, but was not listed in the guide, the issue should receive priority over the guide.

The danger in preparing an outline that consists of a long list of detailed questions is that the qualitative interview will develop into a group of interviews where the researcher's objective becomes one of covering all the questions listed, and not one of encouraging the interviewee(s) to interact on general issues.

Often the researcher will discover, after one or two interviews or groups, that the outline is inappropriate, and requires considerable revision; that is, the researcher's hypothesised model was incorrect.

However, it is worth noting that the model hypothesised for the research problem, will, among other things, suggest how directive the discussion should be. If the approach required is a relatively directive one, then the topic outline may well need to be more detailed than would be the case if the model required a non-directive approach.

5.3.4 Group Discussions; Arranging the Group Members

It is possible to influence the degree to which members participate by seating them in various positions in relation to the researcher. For example, members with direct eye contact with the researcher tend to talk more, especially with the researcher. Of course the researcher usually does not know who they should place in various positions prior to the group commencing.

There are two major implications here for researchers:

- 1] First, researchers should not hesitate to relocate themselves in a group, nor should they hesitate to relocate various group members. Providing the researcher has effectively applied the core interviewing skills (accurate empathy, genuineness, and non-possessive warmth) she or he should be capable of getting the group to readily accept such moves.

Sometimes a change of location by the researcher can result in very noticeable changes to the way in which the group is interacting. Location change is probably an underused technique in Group Discussions.

-] Second, the researcher should be continually aware of how people in key locations are operating within the group (people immediately to left of the researcher if he or she is left handed, then immediately to the right are less likely to participate and those in eye contact with the researcher are more likely to participate).

Dealing with difficult participants: Trainee researchers are sometimes advised that they should “control” dominant or difficult group participants (for example to prevent them “talking too much” or “influencing” other group members).

Prior to accepting this advice moderators should consider whether “dominant” individuals are a natural component of any real group. In most “natural” groups dominant members exist, and if the researcher is pursuing reality, then maybe the moderator should accept that some dominance in groups is a natural occurrence and should be managed rather than controlled.

However if it is decided that it is necessary to limit the contribution of one or more group members, a number of approaches are possible.

-] One approach is to change the location of the dominant individual in relation to the researcher; for example the researcher can move location so that the dominant individual is on their immediate left.
-] Another approach involves avoiding eye contact with the dominant individual.
-] A third approach involves giving the dominant individual direct instructions (e.g. “I’d be interested in hearing what someone else has to say about that”).

Probably the most satisfactory solution involves a combination of all the above approaches.

5.3.5 Establishing Rapport & Giving Permission to Speak

The first interviewing task confronting the researcher is to establish rapport. This is a crucial aspect of all qualitative interviewing.

The researcher needs to gain the confidence of the interviewee(s), assist them to feel comfortable and at ease (except for special occasions when there is value in having a group that is experiencing some stress), and to explain why they are at the discussion, what will happen and what the ground rules are.

Probably the easiest way to establish rapport is to explain the basic ground rules (“I’m interested in you people talking among yourselves; this is a group discussion, so if you want to comment on what someone else has said, don’t feel you have to get my permission”), and then to use open ended questions designed to encourage people to talk; not necessarily about the topic you are interested in.

Often there is value in encouraging all respondents to say a few words about themselves. Providing the moderator responds to the comments on an individual basis, a number of benefits can accrue from this approach:

-] **Introductions:** It allows group members to discover who they are dealing with in the group;
-] **Top Line Information:** It allows the moderator to obtain top line information about the respondents (and can also assist the moderator to practice remembering respondent’s names);
-] **Reinforcing Permission to Speak:** It gives the moderator the opportunity to reinforce that he/she wants to listen to group members, and thus reinforce they have permission to speak.

The latter point is of critical importance in groups (and indeed in depth interviews). Moderators and interviewers should realise that the manner in which they behave in the early stages of a group or interview toward the interviewees can have a dramatic effect on the interviewees’ later behaviour. If the interviewee believes the interviewer is genuinely listening to them, and more importantly, is interested in what they are saying in the early stages of the encounter, the chances are the interviewee will continue talking later in the interview.

However if the interviewer signals to the interviewee or group participants that they should not continue talking early in the interview, there is a high probability that the interviewee will learn to restrict their talking.

Avoid labels: Many (probably most) group discussions use labels for group participants’ names. While this offers some convenience to moderators, I would argue that this approach has the serious weakness of undermining the reality of the group. It is a relatively simple technique for moderators to learn to remember group participants’ names, and all professional moderators should learn this technique (the technique involves the moderator using each respondents’ name during the preliminary introduction period for the group).

5.4 General Techniques

Once the Group Discussion or other qualitative approach begins, there are a wide range of techniques that are available for the researcher to use. However underlying all these techniques are the basic interviewing skills discussed previously.

Researchers need to exercise skill in demonstrating Accurate Empathy, Non-possessive Warmth, and Genuineness. They need to be skilled in using the various types of questions, and they need to be skilled in using “minimal encouragers to talk” such as silence.

Some of the specific skills required and some of the newer approaches being used in qualitative research are discussed in the following sections.

5.4.1 Listening, Observing and Planning

All qualitative interviewing techniques demand that the researcher listens very carefully to what interviewees are saying, and, in the case of groups, observes very carefully what group members are doing (both those that are currently talking and those that are not talking)

This, in part, is why it is so important for the group researcher to be very practiced in his skills; so that the researcher does not continually have to worry about he will say things or what he will say. Instead he can concentrate on the process and the interactions that are occurring in the group.

It is important to observe who is talking, what is being said, how it is being said, the underlying meaning of what is being said, what effects this appears to be having on other people, and so on. By storing information of this type the researcher is able encourage interaction in the group, perhaps by encouraging participation from group members who appeared to be non-verbally disagreeing with the last speaker.

One of the researcher’s main objectives in a Group Discussion is to encourage all members to participate in the discussion. This does not mean that every group member should talk for an equal amount of time; it means that those members who have something to say should be given the opportunity to do so.

Group members who are not contributing need to be encouraged to do so, especially if the researcher has noticed non-verbal cues that suggest the person has something to say (e.g. the person shows signs of either agreeing or disagreeing with another person’s contribution).

Similarly, group members who contribute a great deal may need to be controlled to some extent. However some care needs to be taken in suppressing contributions, as the dominant group member may represent an opinion leader for the group.

If the researcher is interested in group interactions, the influence of an opinion leader is a legitimate aspect of the Group Discussion.

Basically the researcher needs to be sufficiently observant to determine the effect dominant individuals (or sub-groups) are having on the rest of the group. Is the dominant individual an accepted expert or opinion leader, or is the group simply putting up with the person that person is very assertive and confident?

5.4.2 Obtaining and Controlling Contributions

Obtaining contributions from any interviewee depends, to a large extent, on the researcher demonstrating that he/she is genuinely interested in what the person has to say. Providing the researcher genuinely listens to a contributor, the chances are increased that contributor will feel increasingly confident that the researcher will value their contribution on subsequent occasions.

Some specific techniques that assist in encouraging contributions are as follows:

] *Incomplete Understanding:* A very effective way of encouraging initial or additional contributions from interviewees is for the researcher to genuinely indicate that they lack understanding on some aspects of a particular topic. Basically the researcher requests that the interviewee, or in the case of groups, either the group or a specific group member elaborate on some issue.

On some occasions this can be achieved by the researcher using “minimal encouragers to talk” during a contribution by an interviewee (e.g. by the researcher nodding his head in such a way as to encourage the contributor to keep talking, or by inserting various non-committal phrases in a questioning tone). On other occasions it is necessary to overtly admit a lack of knowledge or understanding, and request a further explanation.

It is also possible to encourage the interviewee or the group to “educate” the researcher on some specific topic. For example the researcher might encourage the group (which consists of DIY painters) to explain some of the issues involved in house painting to someone who is an inexperienced house painter.

The crucial issue for this technique is that the researcher must be genuine in his interest. If the interviewee or the group detects superficiality on the part of the researcher, the effectiveness of this qualitative approach will diminish.

-] **Recognising Emotions Associated with a Contribution:** A very effective technique that encourages initial or further contributions is for the researcher to indicate to the interviewee or to group members that the interviewer recognises the emotions associated with a comment (e.g. “You seemed to be angry when you were commenting about that commercial”, or “Peter’s comments seemed to make you smile”, etc.).

This technique requires the researcher to be skilled in using empathy. Its application will often result in much more in-depth and useful data from the interviewee or the group.

-] **Reflecting Contributions:** A very powerful technique for almost all interview situations, including Group Discussions, is that of reflecting the interviewee’s comments back to them. This is one of the basic techniques used to demonstrate accurate empathy in counselling environments.

Essentially, the group moderator attempts to repeat the last contributor’s comments. However, for the technique to be successful it is necessary to do more than simply repeat the contributor’s words. The researcher must try to reflect back the meaning of the contribution and its significance to the contributor. Ideally the researcher should make some attempt to paraphrase the contribution, perhaps trying to assist the group member to more clearly express themselves.

This technique has a number of important outcomes:

- It enables the researcher to check that the contribution has been correctly understood.
- It demonstrates to the group that the researcher is “with” them.
- It encourages the group member (and other group members) to reflect on, expand and explain their contribution.
- It sometimes provides support to the more reticent or shy members of the group.
- In effect it rewards people for participating.

5.4.3 Forced Choice Techniques

A group of techniques exist that are useful for generating discussion, and especially for gaining some commitment from respondents. These techniques can be loosely labelled “forced choice” techniques.

In summary this involves encouraging respondents to select a position from a set of three or four positions, and then to justify their selection.

For example, when discussing attitudes to purchasing Australian made products, respondents could be confronted with three positions: I always seek out Australian made products; Quality and/or price are much more important than where the product comes from; I rarely pay any attention to the origin of the product. The moderator then encourages respondents to commit to one (only) of the positions. The sub-group that has committed to each position then briefly discusses amongst themselves why they prefer that position, and then each sub-group reports back to the total group the reasons for their position.

This technique has a number of advantages including:

-] It encourages involvement from all members of the group - less confident or shy people are more likely to contribute to a small sub group, than a larger group;
-] It encourages interaction between group members (which clearly should be a major objective of group discussions);
-] It encourages group members to think through their views about various issues;
-] It often serves as an effective means of generating interest and activity in groups. That is, the change of technique ‘energises’ group participants.

5.4.4 Projective Techniques

Like many Psychologists who are also Market Researchers (see Terry Coutts’ article in *Research News*⁵), I become very worried by the usage of projective techniques in marketing research.

⁵ Coutts, T., (1989), “Beware the New Qualitative”, *Research News*, September, MRS

While there are researchers who encourage the use of these techniques (e.g. see Cooper (14) and Gordon and Langmaid (23), many Psychologists including practising clinical Psychologists either reject the use of these techniques or at least exercise caution about their usage.

] **Are They New?:** Some Market Researchers claim that a whole suite of techniques exist, including projective techniques, that are new. Indeed Peter Cooper refers to these techniques as the “New Qualitative Techniques” or “NQT” (2).

Without addressing this point in any great detail, it should be noted that most of these techniques have been used (and rejected) by Psychologists and other members of the helping professions a considerable number of years ago. In particular, a “new” discovery of the “new” segment of qualitative researchers is Transactional Analysis (TA). I cannot help but point out that this technique was popular among west coast (USA) psychologists in the late 1970s, but so was Peter Paul and Mary.

] **Usage by Psychologists:** In order to support this paper I contacted six well known Melbourne Clinical Psychologists, all of whom possess PhDs, and asked their opinion of the use of projective techniques in clinical psychology.

Here is a sample of their comments:

“I don’t use them ... they lack validity. Recently trained Psychologists won’t use them, but older ones might ... ones with a psycho-analytic bent.”

“Those who are Freudian or neo-Freudian use them ... I sometimes use them, but not often. Purists would argue that you should not use them unless you are highly trained in their use and analysis.”

“I only use them in a limited sense ... I have specific training in their use and interpretation.”

This ring-around, in addition to my past experience in clinical Psychology, suggests that there is not a high level of use of projective techniques in Clinical Psychology, and that this is partially because many Psychologists have reservations about the validity of these techniques.

But, for the moment, let us assume that projective techniques are valid; are there any other problems with the use of these techniques?

-] **Interpretation:** One of the biggest problems with projective techniques is how to interpret them - although I suspect that on some occasions in market research the real issue is *whether they are interpreted at all!*

In 1965 a survey was conducted of Psychologists and Psychiatrists who have attributed meaning to projective responses to colour⁶. The results of the survey showed that the Psychologists and Psychiatrists disagreed strongly on the meaning of the various responses to colour. For example Red was interpreted to mean from “vital force” to “impulsive effect” to “anger” to “emotional responsiveness”. Interpretations of Blue ranged from “quiet” to “emotional apathy” to “well controlled emotions” to “cheerful moods”.

Now if trained Psychologists and Psychiatrists are that variable in their interpretations of something as simple as colour, what hope is there for untrained Market Researchers? And if the argument is that “my Market Researcher is a Psychologist”, remember that unless post graduate qualified, the chances are low that your market researcher has received any more training in projective techniques than you have.

It is worth considering who should interpret the output of the projective technique. Should it be the moderator, a specially trained person, or the group participants? The answer is of course; it depends on your philosophical stance with respect to projective techniques. But I would strongly argue that the interpretation should be by the group participants.

-] **Groups or Individuals?:** But let us keep supposing that projective techniques are valid and that there is a way to interpret them. The next problem concerns the environment in which they are used .

All the projective techniques I have received training in in my Psychology courses were specifically designed for individual counselling situations - not group situations. And in any case, when these techniques are used, they are usually only used when the counsellor has worked with the client for some considerable time in order to develop a relationship where the projective technique will prove useful. In effect when using various psychological techniques you need to train the respondent (or patient). For example, if you wish to use imagery techniques you need to train the patient in the use of these techniques.

⁶ Murstein, B. I., (1965), *Handbook of Projective Techniques*, Basic Books, USA

Thus using projective techniques in a group situation, and even worse, a group situation where the participants do not really know one another and where they do not have a close relationship with the moderator, is questionable to say the least.

-] **Appropriateness for Low Involvement Issues:** But let's continue with the assumption that these techniques are valid.

Projective techniques were originally designed to examine "our subconscious desires, wishes and feelings" (3). But how relevant are techniques with this objective to issues that have only a low association with consumers' self images?

I can accept that projective techniques might well prove useful in a situation where a patient simply is unable to address some issues he or she has repressed; but attitudes to low involvement consumer goods? Maybe the issues concerned are of high involvement to the Product Manager, but are they to the consumer?

-] **A Quantitative Use of a Qualitative Technique?:** One of the most ironic features of some usage of projective techniques in qualitative Market Research, is that they sometimes appear to me to be used as a surrogate for quantitative measuring devices. That is, the researcher collects all the cartoons or piles of photographs or drawings or clay models, and proceeds to analyse them individually after the group has finished. Why not use questionnaires in groups ... or why use groups?

-] **A Selling Technique?:** It sometimes appears to me that projective approaches are used as a selling technique by the researcher. They are addressing a basic need that appears to have existed among clients for a long time.

-] **How do I get inside the head of my customers?** As someone who has worked as a Psychologist in a number of industries (e.g. Executive Selection), I am very much aware that many clients like the idea of prospective employees being given a broad range of Psychological tests - even when there is considerable evidence that the tests lack both validity and reliability. Thus if you are prepared to claim you have a test that will get inside the heads of the job applicants, you have a greater chance of gaining the contract.

I wonder whether, on some occasions the same applies to projective techniques.

But We All Use Them: I guess by now you all feel that I have thoroughly committed myself to reject the use of projective techniques.

Not a chance.

The problem is that any researcher or counsellor cannot help but use projective techniques. As soon as you pose a hypothetical question to a respondent you almost certainly are using projective techniques.

Consider the following:

If you simply ask someone to tell you why they drink a particular brand of soft drink they will often ascribe their motives to taste. But if you ask them to describe the type of people who would usually drink that brand (because you need to define a customer group them for a future survey) you are likely to obtain a very different response.

So don't get me wrong. Projective techniques are useful, and they are probably unavoidable. But they should not be misused.

This means:

1. Do not use projective techniques for the sake of using them (do not use any technique for the sake of using the technique).
2. Do not use overly complex projective techniques unless you really have to. There's a quantitative analogy here; why use a multivariate technique when cross-tabulations will give you a more valid result?
3. Decide ahead of time whether you intend to use projective techniques as a stimulus to get people exploring issues, or whether you think the technique will provide you with insights into the psychological make-up of the participants not available through other techniques. If the latter is the case, be careful.
4. Decide who will interpret the outputs of the projective technique; you or the group. I would strongly suggest the latter alternative.

5.4.5 Laddering

A further useful technique that can be used in groups (and indeed in depth interviews) is "laddering". This technique is well described by Burton and Patterson (8).

"Consumer laddering seeks to establish a means-end motivational chain through systematic and repetitive 'pressing' and probing of consumers. It is often employed to establish linkages between tangible benefits and consumer value systems but can also, when applied both vertically downwards and horizontally, be used to explore and brainstorm product demands.

The starting point of laddering is to generate all the key benefits that are important in choosing between two products. The base benefits can then in turn be laddered.

Vertically, establishing the next order benefit from that attribute, then the next and so on until an intangible life value is reached via simple repetitive questioning – ‘Why is that important to you?’ or variations. This is useful in establishing the more emotional and social factors that make up commonly demanded attributes. For example, we might learn that consumers want ABS brakes on cars because they are safer – protects my life – I live longer – care for my family longer and better, etc. Laddering can then be vertically downwards to establish what other product attributes would satisfy such consumer values.

Horizontally, seeking to establish benefits and attributes with near or related characteristics to the original and so on. Management effectively brainstorms product properties, again via simple probes – ‘What else could have achieved that?’, ‘What is the ideal?’, ‘What gives it that quality?’, etc. This will generate a large volume of overt or latent physical wants in a given broad area. For example, we might learn that ‘whiteness’ in laundry relates to brightness, cleanliness, scrubbing, effort, bleach, damage, etc. Again this gives new angles on how to deliver performance.” (Burton and Patterson, “Integration of Consumer and Management in NDP”, Journal of the Market Research Society, Vol 41, No1, January 1999, p66-67)

5.4.6 Narrative theory & dimensional analysis

Shankar & Goulding (39) have produced a particularly interesting paper that all qualitative researchers should read. While the thrust of the article deals with the use of narrative theory and a version of grounded theory (Dimensional Analysis) in qualitative research, the authors argue strongly for the qualitative researcher to be more explicit regarding their methods of interpretation. They argue:

1. Researchers need to acknowledge (to the client) how their “pre-understandings” (or theoretical platforms) affect the interpretation process, and
2. The researcher should engage in argument and counter-argument with the client until both the client and the practitioner agree on interpretations.

Of course the implication of their argument is that too many researchers tend to play the “guru” without justifying their interpretation basis to their client.

Narrative analysis: This is a technique that has been applied in other areas. Narrative analysis is based on the notion that “consumption experiences and other marketing related phenomena can be interpreted narratively”. The concept involves treating data from consumers (via depth interviews or groups) as stories (“or more precisely, as a chapter in the ongoing story of the participant(s)”). The analysis approach is based on the notion that narratives have five key features:

1. The establishment of a valued end point,
2. A selection of events relevant to the goal state,
3. The ordering of these events,
4. The establishment of causal sequences and,
5. Demarcation signs (i.e. recognisable beginnings, middles and ends).

By understanding these characteristics of the narrative the authors argue that it is possible to gain insights into consumer behaviour. As Vallaster and Koll (48) comment (21), “Personal narratives or ‘story telling’ as it is often termed, make people create order and construct texts in a particular context. By examining how the informant’s story is put together, personal narrative allow us to see how respondents impose order on the flow of experience in order to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The research method enables the narrators to speak in terms that seem natural and provide insight to the questions of why the story was told that way.”

There is little doubt that, by either encouraging respondents to “tell a story” about their consumption related experience, or by treating interview or other data as a “story”, value may be gained by the researcher in understanding consumer behaviour.

Dimensional analysis: Dimensional analysis (or “natural analysis”) is an extension of narrative analysis in which the story provided by the consumer is assigned “dimensions” (or influencing factors) by the researcher as a result of questioning of the consumer. An example provided to explain this process by the authors involves shopping behaviour. It is pointed out that “shopping involves motivations that instigate actions. Conditions may be influenced by a range of factors such as mood, emotion, disposable income or even compulsion.

Specific contexts may include retail environments while consequences may range from satisfaction levels to falling into debt. Within each of these there may be range of influencing factors (dimensions) which contribute to the experience. However there will usually be a small number of dominant motivations driving the behaviour which allows the researcher to take a “perspective” as to the main theme of the story.”

The authors use this concept as the basis of a strong argument for including quotations in reporting as a means of better illustrating the underlying dimensions. In addition they suggest using techniques such as sentence completion and thematic apperception tests as one means of collecting this type of data in group environments.

Like narrative analysis, dimensional analysis appears to provide an additional useful tool for potential use by qualitative researchers.

5.4.7 Participatory Group Analysis

Participatory Group Observation: Vallaster and Koll (48) use “Participatory Group Observation” as a means of addressing three components of group decision making:

1. Cognitive variables,
2. Affective variables and,
3. Communications-oriented variables.

The important point here for market researchers is that Vallaster and Koll suggest different qualitative techniques for these three decision making components. A good summary of their approach is provided in the next exhibit.

Not only do Vallaster and Koll suggest that different approaches are more appropriate given different research objectives (e.g. assessing cognitive versus affective issues), but they introduce an old but excellent approach for analysis of observational material (Bales Interaction Styles – see footnote on following page). Vallaster and Koll also provide sound arguments for using these techniques for differing research objectives.

As will be seen later I tend to believe that projective techniques are often used inappropriately and far too frequently in marketing research. Nonetheless Vallaster and Koll take quite an innovative approach to using projective techniques (asking respondents to bring pictures or paintings from newspapers etc to the groups reflecting various issues for discussion during the group).

Convergent validity: The article implies the value of convergent validity in qualitative research. That is, collecting data from a number of sources (e.g. different qualitative techniques), using a range of researchers and looking for evidence pointing in the same direction.

Vallentine and Gordon (47) refer to this technique as “bricolage” (“A pieced together, close-knit set of practices that provides solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. It is a contraction that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods and techniques are added to the puzzle.”), although as the preceding quote implies Vallentine and Gordon use the term in a more complex fashion.

All in all, Vallaster and Koll’s article provides some very insightful and thought provoking ideas for researchers to consider in applying qualitative techniques.

Exhibit 3: Data Collection Methods and Techniques

Information to be researched	Data collection method	Source of information	Analysis
Cognitive level: Similarly on content and process knowledge of group members	Personal narrative	Individual	Text analysis
	In depth interview	Individual	Text analysis
	Archival analysis	Organisational material	Text analysis
Affective level: Affective “atmosphere” within the group	Personal narratives	Individual	Text analysis
	Observation	Groups	Bales interaction styles ⁷
	Projective techniques	Individuals	Interpretation
	In depth interview	Individuals	Text analysis
Communications patterns: As triggers for events on a cognitive and affective level and as a central vehicle for the development of a shared meaning	Observations	Groups	Bales interaction styles
	In depth interview	Individual	Text analysis
	Archival analysis	Organisational material	Text analysis

5.4.8 Researcher Anxiety

The anxiety that is often experienced by researchers is an issue that deserves comment. Frequently this anxiety is reflected in a tendency of the researcher to talk. He or she asks many questions, they avoid the hard questions (like asking Frank why he disagrees with Bernard), they tend to answer their own questions and feel panicked at this first signs of silence (“What will I do? What can I say? Don’t they like me?”).

⁷ See Wilson, G. L. (1996), “Groups in Context; Leadership and Participation in Small Groups”, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Researchers should remember that it is natural for groups and single interviewees to lapse into silence from time to time, and more importantly, usually the interviewee(s) will experience anxiety over the silence; generally someone will make some comment (hopefully, not necessarily the researcher).

In addition researchers should realise that it is not necessary for questions to be asked in a precise and specific fashion. Sometimes a rather stumbling question (that emphasises genuineness) will elicit a detailed, concerned and involved response.

Researchers should also take advantage of being able to “confess” that they are not sure what question to ask after the last contribution; encourage the interviewee or the group to think of an appropriate question.

Providing the researcher has established a good relationship with the interviewee(s), most interviewees will eventually try to be helpful, sometimes to the extent of being too helpful.

5.4.9 Asking Questions (Revisited)

As was discussed in an earlier section, the way questions are asked in any interviewing situation can have a dramatic effect on the outcomes of a question.

Consequently it is very important that the qualitative researcher has given careful attention to developing and practising various questioning techniques.

Asking an interviewee “Are you angry?” is unlikely to have the same effect as asking “Why are you so angry?”. According to the previously given classification of questions, the former question is a direct and closed question (giving the respondent the chance to simply say “yes” or “no”, and in this case, more likely “no”).

The latter question is an open and an “assume part of the answer” question. Usually this type of question will elicit a reasonably more detailed response, and the respondent will find it more difficult to claim they are not angry (if they really are).

With greater experience in interviewing in general, and moderating groups in particular, the perceptive researcher will develop his own types of questions that can then be used automatically in various situations.

5.4.10 Case Studies

The use of case studies is a qualitative research technique that could probably be classified with the earlier discussed projective techniques.

In the case study approach researchers usually describe a consumer or a consumption related situation. The degree of complexity of the situation described varies with the researcher (and the research objectives).

Once the situation has been described to the interviewee(s), participants are asked to either comment on the situation described or to add information to the situation (e.g. “Describe the type of people that would do this?” or “How would you feel in this type of situation?”). The researcher can then question for underlying motives associated with responses.

However this technique suffers the same problems of all projective techniques; how do you interpret the results, and how do you assess the validity of your interpretation?

5.4.11 Being a Chameleon

It is impossible for researchers to completely blend in with interviewees (apart from perhaps moderating a group of researchers where the unifying behaviour might well be competitiveness).

Nonetheless it is important for researchers to try and be like their interviewees within reason.

Moderators' language should be reasonably consistent with that of the interviewees, their dress should be of a similar style (e.g. if the group is likely to be dressed in business clothes, the researcher should probably not wear casual clothes), and most importantly, the researcher should be genuinely interested in the views, interests, opinions and experiences of the group.

It is unwise for a researcher to present themselves as someone who is radically different from the group.

5.4.12 Who is the Hero?

Many group moderators do not enter the group room until all respondents are present. And in many cases moderators (and group facility managers) hold the group participants in a waiting area until all the participants have arrived – or until the moderator and their clients are ready.

While the moderator's motives here may be influenced by the client (often the moderator spends the time with clients discussing the project), I would argue that it can have a detrimental effect on the group outcomes.

When the moderator arrives after all other group members have arrived the moderator is effectively signalling they are different to other group members – in effect it is a means of signalling who holds the power.

While it may well be advantageous for some moderators to clearly signal to the group that it is the moderator who holds the power, the moderator must realise that this behaviour serves to establish a “them and us” relationship.

If the moderator really wants to establish a relationship of trust and rapport with group members it is essential for the moderator to present in the room as group participants arrive (and engage in conversation with the participants during this preliminary period).

5.4.13 Other Techniques

This paper does not cover all qualitative techniques. For example a currently popular approach uses “ethnographic “ techniques. These and other techniques are not, as yet, covered in this paper, but excellent summaries can be obtained from sources such as Wendy Gordon’s excellent summary of techniques (22).

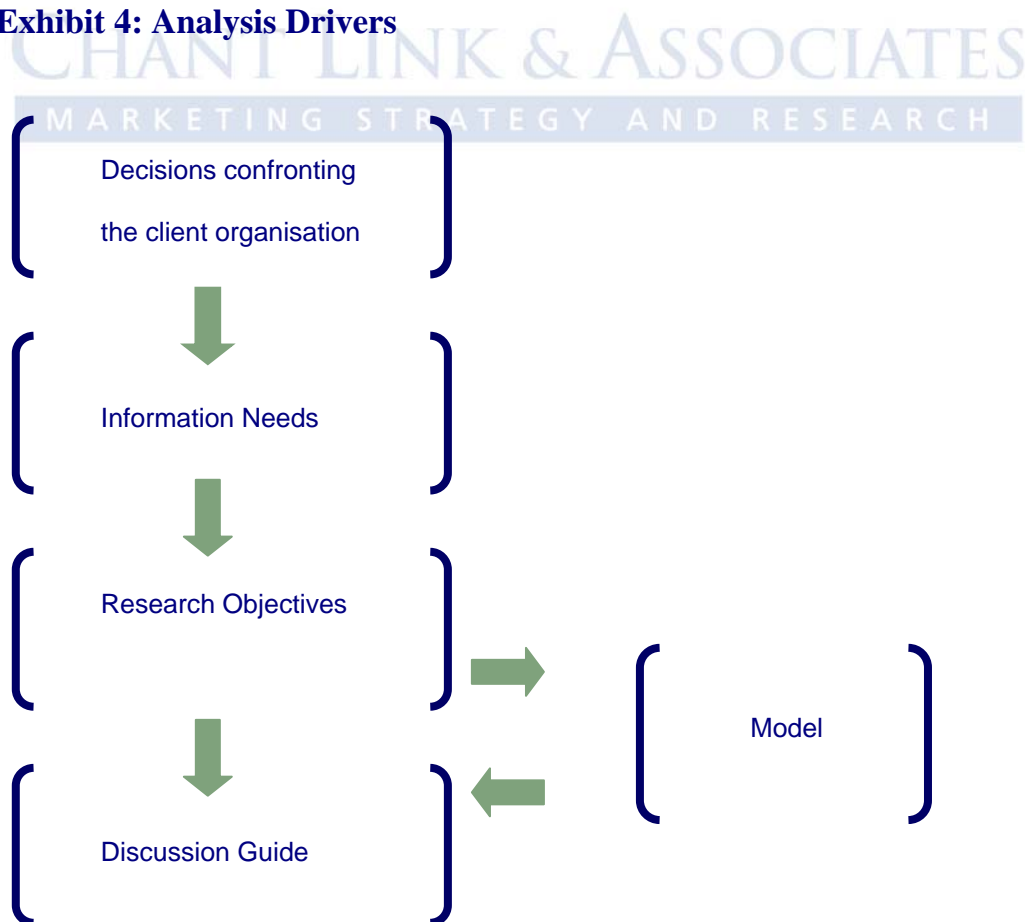
6. ANALYSING GROUP DISCUSSION DATA

6.1 Analysis Drivers

As is the case with all research, three major factors drive all approaches to analysis: the decisions confronting the organisation that originally drove the need for research; the consequent information required to make these decisions; and the research objectives arising from these informational needs.

These three variables eventually determine the model underlying the research and thus the discussion guide required. In turn these four factors (management decisions, research objectives, research model and discussion guide) drive the manner in which the research outputs should be analysed. The relationship between these variables is illustrated below.

Exhibit 4: Analysis Drivers



6.1.1 Specific Analysis Approaches

The following illustrates a series of rules of thumb associated with analysing qualitative data:

-] Analysis commences during the group session itself;
 - Moderators should not be bound by the discussion guide; the moderator should be prepared to go where the group leads them, and be prepared to experiment;
 - Because different groups will elicit different approaches by the moderator, it is critical for the moderator to record the output of the group (e.g. by transcribing tapes) immediately after the group.

-] Who does the analysis?;
 - Ideally the analysis should be conducted by whoever ran the groups;

There appears to be a current trend in the USA where qualitative research is commissioned so that only the data is delivered. The client (in the USA) then examines the transcripts (and video and/or audio tapes) and does their own analysis and reporting. Clearly this is a very risky way to analyse group discussions;
 - If more than one moderator is used in the project, debrief workshops are required (and ideally discussion should occur between moderators as the groups progress).

-] ***Listening versus reading versus memory;*** This probably depends on the individual moderator's preferences and style, however:
 - Memory should not be trusted because:
 - Moderators do not hear or note everything during the group;
 - Moderators forget some of the information they do hear;
 - Moderators assign emphasis to things that do not warrant that emphasis;
 - Moderators tend to remember the things they agree with and the most recent things they heard;
 - When moderating a number of groups, the chances are high the moderator will confuse groups;

- It is strongly suggested that notes be taken immediately after completing each group.

Reading transcripts is better than relying memory, but it has weaknesses:

- The research will be relying on a non-trained typist who does not understand the research objectives to record the information that is required;
 - Groups are about interactions between participants. Thus the question must be asked; can a typist do justice to this type of information?
- Video tapes are satisfactory, but in the long run, they offer few benefits over audio tapes for the following reasons:
 - Resolution is sometimes poor;
 - Speed of fast forward/rewind is poor;
 - Videos are difficult to use in conjunction with a word processor. While they allow the researcher to observe non verbal cues, invariably not all respondent's face the camera, thus an element of bias can be introduced;
 - Listening is by far the superior method of revisiting the data; for many moderators it helps relive the experience. Often it is useful to use a transcription in conjunction with the tape to make annotations.

] **Functional issues; categorising the data;** This is an issue that also depends on the moderator, however some rules of thumb are:

- Listen to the groups in the order they were structured (to identify any differences) e.g. heavy users followed by light users;
- Take notes using a set of pre-prepared headings that are either based on the discussion guide or the model being used (but be prepared to add extra headings), e.g.
 - General attitudes to annual reports related to shareholder type
 - Unsophisticated shareholders
 - Sophisticated shareholders
 - Reaction to obtaining shares
 - Perception of investment potential
 - Differences between client companies and other investments groups
 - Importance of being perceived as blue chip

- Difference between shareholder group
- Positives/negatives regarding client company
- General expectations of annual reports and shareholder sophistication
- Reactions to other annual reports
- General requirements for annual reports

] **Interpretive issues;** Care must be taken with interpreting group participants' responses because the researcher must be more capable of interpreting the response than the group participant. Many psychologists would argue that, even with a long term and intensive relationship with their patient, the patient is usually more capable of interpreting their responses than the therapist. Almost certainly a similar conclusion can be drawn about market researchers.

□ **Deciding what it means;** However there are certainly some situations where the researcher does need to interpret responses. For example, this can be important because some respondents:

- Sometimes are not verbally skilled;
- Sometimes are ambivalent or self contradictory;
- Sometimes haven't thought through their rationales for doing or thinking things (why do they purchase that brand of rice?);
- Sometimes don't want to admit to some issues in front of others ("I don't care if its not Australian made");
- Sometimes are subjected to group pressure;
- Are in an artificial situation (how often do people really attend to TV commercials?)

□ In order to deal with these issues it is necessary for moderators to:

- Build up a picture of each group member;
- Try and view remarks within the total context in which they are made;
- Note both consistencies and inconsistencies;
- Listen to tone of voice/emotional content;
- Assess the effects of other group members;
- Just listen hard - make intelligent judgements about what has been said.

- **Assessing implications;** Moderators also need to decide how respondents might react in the future given the moderator thinks they know what respondents mean; e.g. Everyone says they like the commercial, everyone says they understand the main messages, but will “real” people attend to the commercial sufficiently to be influenced in the same way as this group?

6.1.2 Reporting

Reporting on qualitative research should not be substantially different to reporting on other types of research. In effect the report should cover the usual sections;

-] Executive summary
-] Introduction
-] Research Objectives
-] Research Approach (including sample)
-] Results
-] Conclusions and Recommendations

Using quotes; One of the main differences between qualitative reports and other reports involves the use of quotes. Typically qualitative reports include a series of quotes, and the amount of quotes varies substantially; some reports consists almost entirely of quotes whereas others have almost no quotes.

A number of rules of thumb can assist researchers to decide how many and which quotes to use:

-] **Consider the research objectives;** If the research requires the report to provide the client with an understanding of customers’ language, then it may well be useful to use many quotes;
-] **Avoid “Outlier” quotes;** Often it is tempting to use a particularly interesting or exciting quote. Care should be taken with these types of quotes if they represent only one member of the group, and thus do not represent the overall view of the group.
-] **Avoid quotes simply repeating the researcher’s comments;** Some qualitative reports provide quotes that appear repetitive or do not add further to the report, for example;

“Most respondents claimed they prefer to purchase Australian made products: *‘My preference is to always purchase Australian made’*”

Quotes should generally be included to add richness to the report; to assist the client to gain a more in depth understanding of how respondents think and talk about issues.

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