

Focus Group Assessment Considerations

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As with any method of assessment there are considerations. You will need to look at both the advantages and challenges before deciding if a focus group will meet your assessment needs. The overall advantage is that focus groups produce more in-depth, comprehensive information. You have the ability to use subjective information and participant observation to describe the context, or natural setting, of the variables under consideration, as well as the interactions of the different variables in the context. It seeks a wide understanding of the entire situation.

Advantages

- Understand perceptions, beliefs, or opinions of participants
- Direct and indirect method
- Members build off of each other's ideas
- Flexible and dynamic
- Relatively low cost
- Larger number of participants

When it comes to the disadvantages of focus groups are the very subjectivity the inquiry leading to difficulties in establishing the reliability and validity of the approaches and information. It is very difficult to prevent or detect researcher induced bias. Its scope is limited due to the in-depth, comprehensive data gathering approaches required.

Disadvantages

- Facilitation requires skill
- Not generalizable
- Time needed for training and analysis
- Lack of control over discussion
- Groups can influence individual responses
- Challenge to get people to attend

Additional questions to ask yourself:

- How will you develop questions and protocols?
- Who is the best facilitator of the interview or focus group? What level of objectivity does he/she need and what knowledge of the subject/situation?
- How will notes be taken? Do you have recording devices?
- What logistics do you need to consider as far as finding space, etc.?
- Do you need consent forms?

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