



HELPING HANDS

**Using Qualitative Research
to Support Quantitative
Studies**

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**PAPOR Annual Conference, San Francisco
December 6-7, 2018**

Background



Trained and experienced in quantitative methodology



First request for focus groups 1987



No background in qualitative methods



Plus something is really wrong with this



Where are the pie charts and bar graphs?



Sacramento Regional Transit District – major client



Guess it's time to learn something new!

Qualitative Research Basics

- Qualitative research facilitates an in-depth understanding of **why** people do what they do or say what they say
- Most popular qualitative research strategy is the focus group
- Small group discussions, customarily with about ten participants and a moderator
- Typical project has three groups





Qualitative Research Basics



In-depth consideration of a single topic or closely related topics



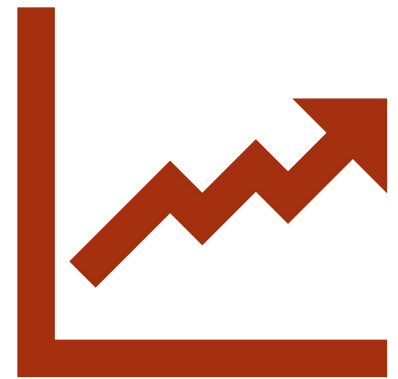
Emphasis on interaction and group dynamics



Smaller groups have become popular for individual depth, but limit benefits from interaction


Using Qualitative Research to Support Quantitative Research

- ▶ Variety of ways to combine the two methods to improve understanding and results
- ▶ Focus today on using former to support latter
- ▶ Two particularly beneficial strategies
- ▶ At the beginning: Using qualitative studies to facilitate survey design
- ▶ At the end: Using qualitative studies to understand survey results





Facilitating Quantitative Design




Designers
are not
deeply
familiar
with the
subject
area

Designers
are not
members
of the
target
audience


What
issues are
important
to the
audience

What
context
the
audience
uses for
the issues

What
language
the
audience
employs



Understanding Quantitative Results



Results are a major surprise
to the sponsor



Why did they say that??



Qualitative research helps
us understand the answers
to “why” questions

CASE STUDIES

Two in the
Public Domain

Two Not Public and
Not Named



Association
of
American
Publishers

Survey of Parents About Standardized Testing

- Target audience parents of school-age children
- Attitudes toward information relative to their children's progress in school
- Ultimate interest in understanding attitudes toward standardized tests and use of the results
- Association includes test publishers

Association of American Publishers

No members of the target audience among those planning the study

No sense of how parents view the various forms of information they receive

No clear ideas about the content or design of the survey questions

No knowledge of the language parents use to describe the information

Association of American Publishers

Focus groups designed to explore:

- How parents understand the measurement of their children's progress
- What issues are of concern to them
- The context in which they consider these issues
- The language they use in discussing the issues



Association of American Publishers



Discovered three important questions that would otherwise never have been asked



A major professional "Aha" moment



Learned about the context in which parents think about the issue



Identified specific words and phrases with which respondents would most likely relate

Government
Operations
Agency

State of
California

“First-Ever Statewide Employee Engagement Survey”

- Numerous “model” questions from a variety of sources
- Experts in employee engagement on the planning team
- Dozens of questions winnowed down from hundreds
- Hesitant agreement that survey needed to be short and straightforward

Government Operations Agency State of California



Three focus groups with employees at various levels

Managers

Rank and file

Entry-level rank and file



Cognitive pretesting



Exploration of issues and concerns



Consensus on the most important questions



Changes to content, wording, and formatting



Elite California Municipality

- Affluent community in southern California
- Those conducting surveys of citizens expected and generally obtained positive ratings of municipal services
- One survey showed dissatisfaction with the Police Department
- Result was both totally unexpected and troubling

Elite California Municipality

1

Held focus groups with people who had expressed negative views of public safety services

2

Explored a variety of services and issues

3

Asked directly about police services

4

Identified a single police officer who had treated a significant number and wide variety of people in ways they perceived as being inappropriate

5

Provided City Manager with actionable information



Large Municipal Utility

- Resident-owned electric utility
- Long-standing relationship
- Multi-study exploration of services provided to low-income residents
- Most recent survey indicated that a substantial proportion of those who are eligible for a rate discount program based on income do not believe they are



Large Municipal Utility



Extensive exploration of relationships in the data did not yield helpful answers

Example: Hypothesis that older people have more pride and are thus more likely to say they do not require assistance

Next step would be to assemble focus groups of cross-sections of those eligible but feeling no need in order to find out “Why?”

Would hopefully lead to the best selection from numerous possible strategies for including these customers in the program



Thank
You!



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QUESTIONS. ANSWERS. RESULTS.