

Classic Assessment I: Focus Groups & Interviews

Although the standard Likert-type surveys are often used seem like the go-to assessment tool, they are not always the best tool for the job. Asking students to respond to open-ended questions empowers them to determine what is important and from their perspective.

Session attendees will learn how to:

- identify features of qualitative methods.
- run focus groups and interviews effectively.
- analyze narrative feedback (written or oral) with content analysis methods.

Qualitative Design Features

- Prioritizes participants' perspectives and their understanding of those perspectives in a given context.
- Data are words, stories, and narratives.
- Uses inductive logic to build patterns, categories, and themes from the data.
- Data and analyses provide a holistic, complex picture with a rich description of the phenomenon.

Use Qualitative Methods to

- explore participants' individual experiences.
- explore how participants create meaning from their environment.
- explore areas not yet thoroughly researched.
- discover relevant variables to include in future surveys.
- understand a holistic perspective of a understudied or local phenomenon.

Types of Qualitative Methods

- **Narrative:** Priorities participants' stories
- **Phenomenology:** Seeks to understand the essence of a common experience or concept.
- **Grounded Theory:** Seeks to develop theory from observations (inductive analyses).
- **Ethnography:** The study of cultures in a specific or common context.
- **Case Studies:** Prioritizes in-depth descriptions of an individuals experience with a particular case or situation.

Narrative Data Gathering

➤ Interviews

- One-on-One

- Time-consuming

- Good for sensitive topics

➤ Focus Groups

- 5-10ish people

- Faster than interviews

- Thoughts generated with group interaction

Sampling

- Recruit those who have the information or experiences relevant to the given study.
- Diversify your sample relative to the program or concept under investigation.
- Sample size is based on importance, time, and saturation.
- If responses can be short, questionnaires may be an option.

Focus Group Considerations

- Encourage participation and ‘piggybacking’
- For high stakes studies, organize a practice round
- Select questioners that will limit response bias
- Use on-site note-takers
- Establish trust and rapport with your participants
- Prepare an Focus Group Protocol (script)
- Note and categorize common and important responses that reflect the phenomena of interest.

Probing Questions

- Don't simply ask "why?"
- As for attributes, characteristics, and influences
 - How did you decide x?
 - What was your thought process that lead you to decide x?
 - Can you describe or show me an example?

Inductive Steps

Content Analysis

- Organize raw data by question — e.g., a page full of responses to a single question.
- Review responses — note common terms and concepts.
- Group common terms/concepts and describe the category. Should be mutually exclusive.
- Create an ‘other’ category.
- Category totals are important, but the emerging meaning/understanding of the concepts is the end goal.

Sample Response

I learned a lot living in the residence halls this year. With a roommate, we figured out how to give and take. We took turns choosing what to watch on TV and set ground rules for guests. I also learned to take care of my self. My dad wasn't going to do my laundry or buy food. One of the most important things I learned was to stand up for myself. Before college I didn't express my opinion. This year I learned to speak up or else I wouldn't get what I wanted or needed.

I learned a lot living in the residence halls this year. With a roommate, we figured out how to give and take [*Compromise*]. We took turns choosing what to watch on TV and set ground rules for guests. I also learned to take care of my self [*Independence*]. My dad wasn't going to do why laundry or buy food. One of the most important things i learned was to stand up for myself [*Assertiveness*]. Before college I didn't express my opinion. This year I learned to speak up or else I wouldn't get what I wanted or needed.

Deductive Steps Content Analysis

- Select a guiding theory (e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy, Chickering's Vectors, VALUE rubrics) and define categories.
- Organize raw data by question — e.g., a page full of responses to a single question.
- Unitize and place responses in the predefined categories.
- Create an 'other' category.
- Report category count totals

The TQA

A Three Question Assessment

- What ideas did this presentation generate for you?
- Did you learn something today that might help you perform your job better.? Please describe.
- What could be changed about this presentation to make it more helpful or effective?

References

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