

Overcoming Focus Group Dependency

Nigeria MEMS

Brown Bag Forum #2

With the Support of the dRPC, MEMS Partner

Abuja, Nigeria

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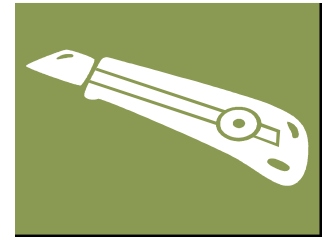


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Definition: Focus Group addiction:

- The uncontrollable urge to conduct focus group discussions (FGD) for every research project and/ or evaluation.
- The compulsion to hold FGDs whenever more than 4 people gather in one place



FGD pop Quiz: True or False

1. An FGD is a quick way to obtain a lot of information about a particular topic.
2. Practically anyone can lead an FGD.
3. Sampling is not necessary when planning FGDs.
4. FGDs compliment surveys and other quantitative methods but cannot stand alone.
5. FGDs should only be used in conjunction with other methods.
6. In the field its easy to find experienced FGDs Facilitators
7. The primary purpose of FGDs is for mining really good and colorful' sound bites for publications and reports.
8. Even though FGDs are considered low tech the data obtained can be just as rigorous, valid as reliable as survey data.
9. FGD guides are relatively easy to develop in comparison to surveys.
10. Conducting FGDs is fun.



Source of FGDs addiction: Myths and misconceptions

- Popularity
 - Everybody's doing it
 - Provides colorful quotes
 - Relatively quick
- Easy to do
 - Anybody can lead an FGD
 - Everybody knows how to write an FGD guide
 - No complicated analysis procedures
 - what sampling?
- No numbers!
 - FGD procedures much less complicated than survey research
 - Not as much concern for rigor. Validity and reliability
 - Low expectations: provides backdrop for more 'scientific' methods
- Universal Qualitative research method
 - Well known among people unfamiliar with qualitative research methods
 - Easy to find 'experienced' FGD facilitators
 - Relatively cheap
 - Low tech- 'soft science'
 - Fun to do!



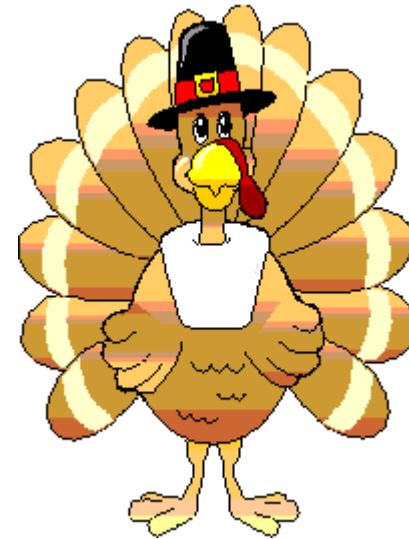
The Cure:”

**MEMS12 step program
to conquer FGD Addiction**

Going ‘cold turkey’ is not necessary
Because The FGD is an important method
in the Qualitative toolkit

Step 1: Know when to use FGDs

- Identifying and defining problems in project implementation;
- Identifying project strengths, weaknesses and recommendations;
- Interpreting quantitative finding;
- Developing and refining survey instruments;
- Obtaining perceptions of project outcomes and impacts;
- Generating new ideas.





Step 2: Use FGDs in conjunction with other methods (both qualitative and quantitative)

- FGDs and survey are complimentary
 - Are used to develop survey questions
 - Can help increase survey validity and reliability (are questions appropriate, clear, naive?)
 - Can provide the whys and hows whereas surveys answer the whats

- FGDs and in depth interviews
 - FGDs provide broad understandings, group norms and share perspectives, while in depth interviews elicit personal, individual perspectives

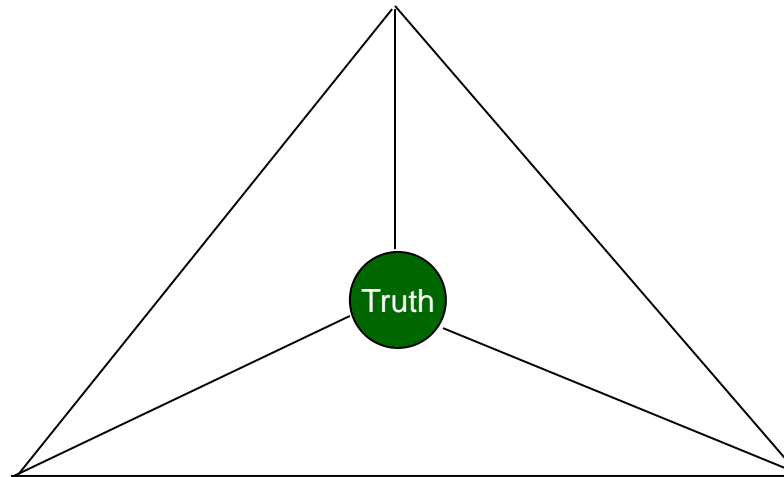
 - FGDs are appropriate for gleaning information derived from group interaction, whereas in- depth interviews are better suited for discussing sensitive information

Triangulation:

In-depth interviews
Individual
Experiences and
Views, personal

Definition; The
combining of
Several methods to
examine the same
phenomenon

Key information Interviews;
Expert view, in-depth
knowledge



Triangulation improves
validity and reliability ...
and presents more than
one version of the "truth"

FGDs shared
perspectives norms,
broad understandings

Step three: Use the same methodological rigor with FGDs as other techniques



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- Sampling:
- Principle of factorial design
- Participant selection



Step four: Find and/ or train good facilitators and note takers

Don't take for granted that field staff are experienced or properly trained to conduct FGDs.
Practice ahead of time!

Step five: Follow the proper format:

FGDs should

- Consist of between 6-10 participants (min. 4, max, 15)
- FGDs usually last from 1-2 hours
- Be held in a neutral location
- Be relatively homogenous. Participants should be comfortable with each other
- Be guided by a facilitator who asks the questions and tries to help the group have a natural and free conversation with each other
- Encourage people to talk with each other rather than answer questions directly to the moderator
- Focus on only a few questions to allow participants to actively engage the topics

Step six know how to conduct an FGD:

Before the session

- Pre-arrange the site and list of participants
- Arrive at site early to arrange seating and equipment, and review FGD guide and roles
- Arrange for refreshments



During the session

- Greet participants as they arrive
- Announce purpose and format of FGD (why have they been asked to participate; what information will be used for, etc.)
- Explain the rules
- Conduct the session
- Close the session (ask for questions and comment, and thank them for their contribution)

Step six, cont.:

After the session:

- Immediately debrief in the field
- Expand and verify notes with FGD Team (facilitator and note-takers)
- Complete written session notes and submit to Team Leader





Step seven: know The Rules; participants

Participants should be

- Informed of the purpose of FGD and topics to be covered
- Assured they do not have to answer any question if they choose not to do so
- Encouraged to speak freely
- Reminded to be respectful of the views and opinions of other participants
- Asked to give everyone a chance to express themselves
- Informed that information shared during the FGD should be kept confidential
- Asked not name specific people
- Requested to follow the guidance of the FGD facilitator



Step eight: Know The Rules; Facilitators

The facilitator should:

- Build trust
- Listen!
- Avoid putting words in participants' mouth
- Ask probing questions if responses are unclear
- Make sure everyone has a chance to give their perspectives
- Remain neutral
- Assure participants that there are no right or wrong answer, and all views are valid
- Gently guide the group to stay on topic
- Encourage participants to discuss with each other rather than with the facilitator

Step nine:



Know how to take effective notes

- Two team members should take notes at each FGD
- Write down as much as possible: try to capture direct quotes
- Note takers do not take part in the discussion
- If possible, record non-verbal responses
- one note-taker also serves as timekeeper





Step ten: Consider how the FGD data will be analyzed

- Data reduction
 - Amount of data to analyze
 - Systematic approach to analysis
 - Software
- Data interpretation and integration

Step eleven: Follow my advice

- Conducting an FGD is like riding a horse:



If the reins are too tight, the horse will either stop or throw you off.

Too loose and the horse will take control and run away



Just right and it will take you wherever you want to go.



Step 12 Have Fun!!!!!!





Fun Exercise!

You are the FGD facilitator. How would you diagnose and treat the following FGD condition

- The groups isn't saying anything. Responses are short, 1-2 words.
- One participants is dominating the discussion by talking on and interrupting others.
- An argument breaks out between two participants
- Group responses are vague and unclear
- Participants appear uncomfortable and seem hesitant to speak. Some won't look at you
- The group continues to veer off topic.