

Qualitative Research Methods: Difficulties in Managing Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews

ZAHARIA Rodica Milena, ZAHARIA Razvan, POPESCU Alina Irina, GUNGOR Guven

Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ROMANIA), CCREI

Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ROMANIA)

Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ROMANIA), CCREI

Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ROMANIA)

E-mails: milena_zaharia@yahoo.com, razvan.zaharia@gmail.com, alina_i_popescu@yahoo.com, gungorguven@gmail.com

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Objectives

- to present difficulties encountered by researches in working with the most used qualitative research methods: focus groups and in-depth interviews
- to highlight personal experiences the authors come across in managing qualitative research
- to provide some solutions identified by the authors in working with these problems.



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Structure of the paper

- A brief literature review related to qualitative research virtues and limits
- Difficulties identified by the authors in managing qualitative research: evidences from their personal experiences
- Strategies identified by the authors “on the spot”
- Concluding remarks and recommendations for the researchers involved in collecting qualitative data.

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- Focus groups and in-depth interviews are largely used when the deepness of the research involves an immersion into beliefs, thoughts and certain behaviors.
- Both focus group and in-depth interviews are valued for their capacity to be a double source of information:
 - the richness and the complexity of information provided by the participants;
 - the interaction between participants represents a valuable source of data.
- There are limits of these methods:
 - the capacity to generate generalizable results;
 - Some qualitative data may be compromised by the researcher involvement in the research process,
 - the coding process of qualitative data,
 - language barriers.


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Difficulties identified by the authors in managing qualitative research: evidences from their personal experiences

➤ *Language differences*

➤ cross-cultural settings

- Different languages spoken by the participants
- The moderator is not the researcher
- Translation barriers
- Focus groups conducted in a foreign language (English) may induce competition among participants to demonstrate their language fluency or indifference from those with a lower proficiency in languages
 - Time consuming
 - Tensions among participants (some may lose their patience)
 - Risk to go away from the research objectives



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Investigating sensitive topics


- Emotional reaction from the participants
- Inhibition – crying, give up to go on with the discussion
- Radical attitude – anybody with a different opinion is a personal enemy
- Preaching of the general good (for example, in health issues)

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Strategies identified by the authors

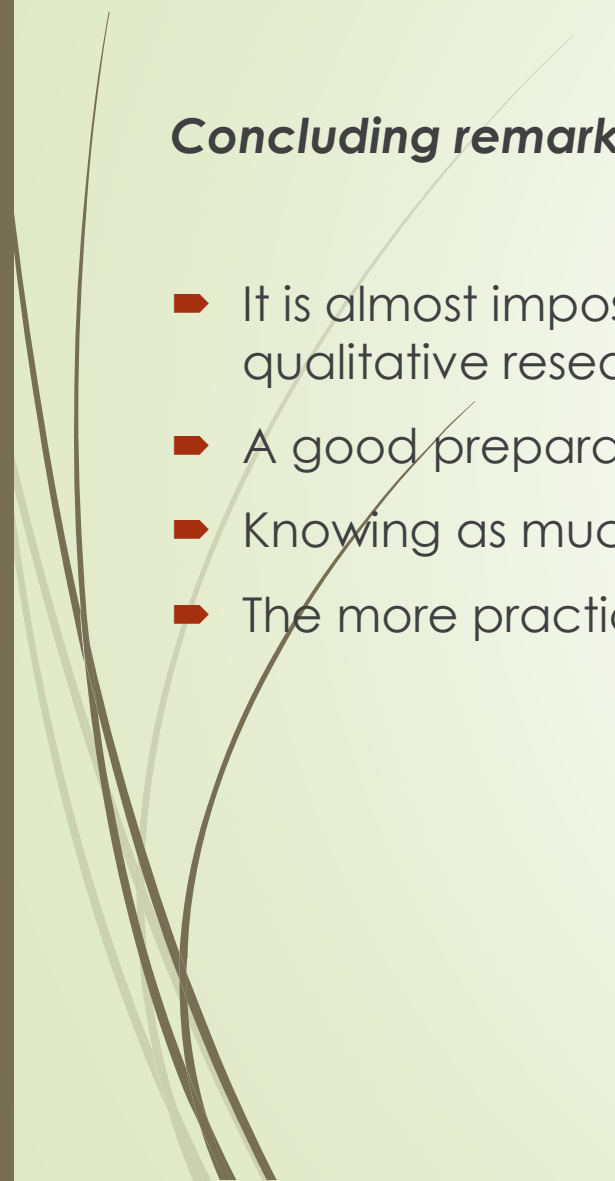
Language differences

- ✓ familiarise the moderator as much as possible with the research project
- ✓ Check the translation with a person that is aware with the research topic, also
- ✓ Discourage discussions that may lead to a topic outside the research objectives
- ✓ Invite those less participative to the discussion, to express their opinion
- ✓ Prepare the audience before the interview
 - pointing out the objectives of the research and underline the fact that is the individual opinion which is important, not to convince people about a certain behavior or idea
 - foreign languages proficiency is not for the interest of the researcher
 - time is a constrain, therefore each of the participants have to have in mind a reasonable limit of time for expressing their opinion
 - The researcher is interested in listening as many opinion as possible, from everybody
 - Everyone will be invited to speak
- ✓ Be prepare to give more time for the discussion



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Concluding remarks

- It is almost impossible to imagine all the difficulties you may encounter in conducting qualitative research
 - A good preparation of the interviews and focus groups is essential
 - Knowing as much as possible about your interviewed is an asset
 - The more practice you have, the more successful you will be
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Thank you very much!

You may address your questions to Rodica Milena Zaharia
milena_zaharia@yahoo.com

