

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

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## Objectives

- ▶ to present difficulties encountered by researchers 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.

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

- ▶ 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!

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