

Near East University

MARKETING RESEARCH

MARK 401

Qualitative research: focus group discussions,  
in-depth interviewing and projective techniques

## **SESSION 6**

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Source: Malhotra and Birks, et al. Chp 6

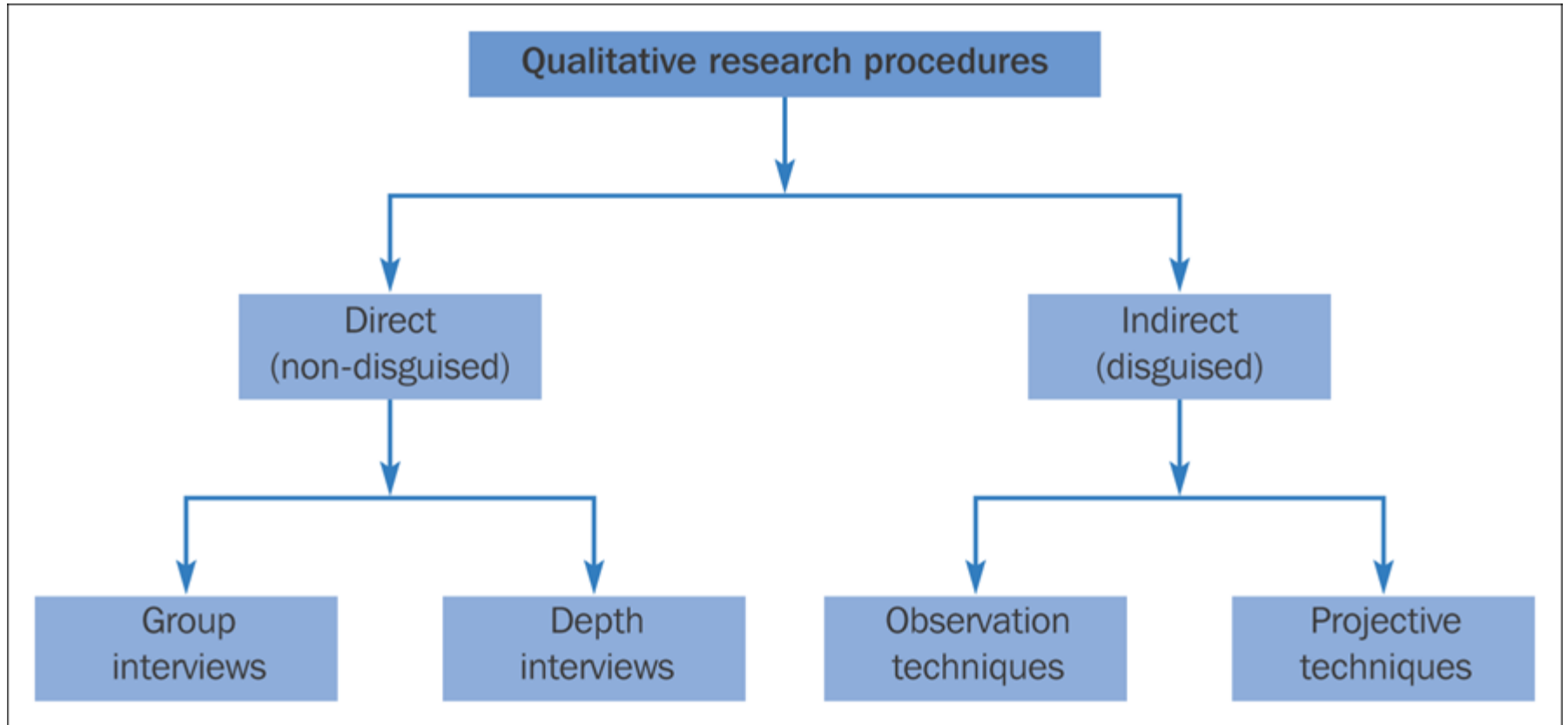
Dr. Eric Shiu lecture notes

# Qualitative research: focus group discussions, in-depth interviewing and projective techniques

The best moderators of focus groups are those that create a spirit of spontaneity and a passion for the issues under discussion.

# Chapter outline

1. Classifying qualitative research techniques
2. Focus group discussions
3. Planning and conducting focus groups
4. Other variations of focus groups
5. Other types of qualitative group discussions
6. Misconceptions about focus groups
7. In-depth interviews
8. Comparisons between qualitative techniques

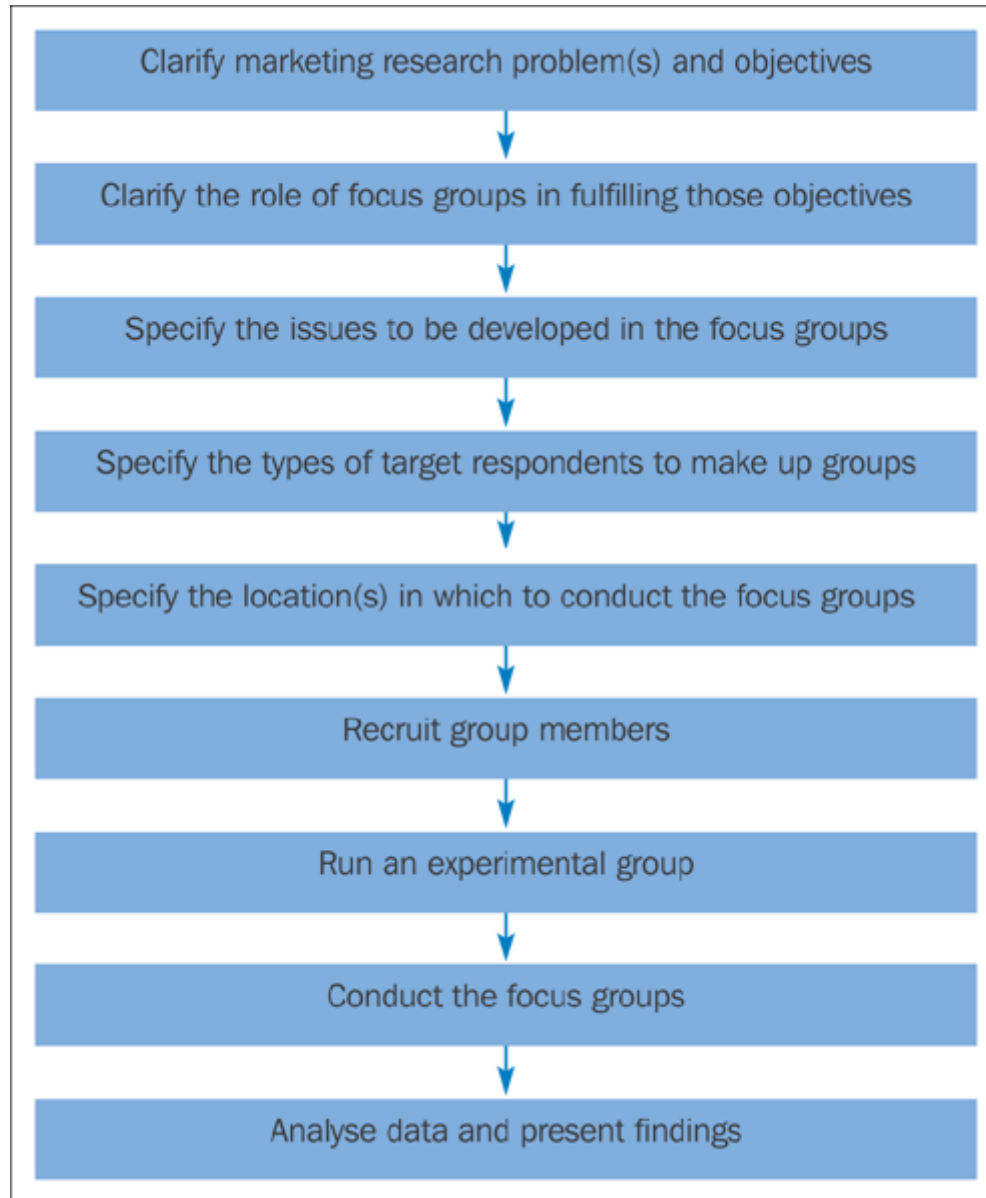
**Figure 7.1** A classification of qualitative research procedures

**Table 7.1** Characteristics of focus groups

<i>Key benefit</i>	Group members 'feed' off each other and creatively reveal ideas that the researcher may not have thought of or dared to tackle
<i>Key drawback</i>	Group members may feel intimidated or shy and may not reveal anything
<i>Group size</i>	6–10
<i>Group composition</i>	Homogeneous, participants pre-screened
<i>Physical setting</i>	Relaxed, informal atmosphere
<i>Stimulating discussion</i>	Use of storyboards, mood boards, products, brochures
<i>Time duration</i>	1.5 to 6 hours
<i>Recording</i>	Use of audiocassettes, videotapes and notes from observations
<i>Moderator</i>	Observational, interpersonal and communication skills

# Qualities needed in the focus group moderator

- Kindness with firmness
- Permissiveness
- Involvement
- Incomplete understanding
- Encouragement
- Flexibility
- Sensitivity
- Observation

**Figure 7.2** Procedure for planning and conducting focus groups

# How many focus groups should be conducted?

Factors to consider:

- The extent to which comparisons are sought.
- The different types of participant to be targeted and how well they mix together.
- The geographic spread of participants.
- The paradigm that underpins the choice of a focus group.
- The time and budget available.



# Mood board

Is a collage created in a focus group setting. Focus group respondents are asked to snip words and pictures from magazines that they see representing the values a particular brand is perceived to have.

In some circumstances, collages can also be made up from audio and videotapes.

# The mood board has two main functions

- *Reference point.* The moderator can use it to reflect upon the discussion, in which case issues can emerge that were not so apparent in the heat of a discussion.
- *Enabling device.* Can get participants to loosen up and talk more freely. The focus group is not to get participants to talk rationally but to display what 'feels right' to them. It can help to express feelings they may not be able to put into words, or enable those words to have more clarity.

# Probing the individual

- Would you explain further?
- Can you give me an example of what you mean?
- Would you say more?
- Is there anything else?
- Please describe what you mean?
- I don't understand.
- Tell me more about that.
- How does that work?

# Probing the whole group

- Who else has something?
- What about the rest of you?
- I see people nodding their heads; tell me about it.
- We want to hear all the different points of view.  
Who else has something that might be a bit different?

# Advantages of focus groups

- Synergy
- Snowballing
- Stimulation
- Security
- Spontaneity
- Serendipity
- Specialisation
- Scientific scrutiny
- Structure
- Speed

# Disadvantages of focus groups

- Misjudgement
- Moderation
- Messiness
- Misrepresentation
- Meeting

# Misconceptions of focus groups

- *Economical – they are low-cost and quick.*
- *Experts – they require professional moderators.*
- *Easily upset – they do not work for sensitive topics.*
- *Endorsement – they must be validated by other research methods.*
- *Exposure – they reveal how consumers will behave.*

# Key benefits of running online focus groups include

- More potential participants can be recruited through the internet, and the growing ease of conducting discussions online.
- Participants can be made to feel that they have the ability to contribute; confidence can be quickly built up.
- Conflicts in face-to-face focus groups from participants taking a dislike to other participants can be avoided.
- A great breadth of information may be collected, through the types and the geographic spread of participants.
- The practical difficulties of getting individuals together at the same time in the same location can be overcome.
- The nature of a discussion location that is 'comfortable' to the participant overcome by each participant setting the conditions that they feel comfortable in.



# Facets of 'in-depth'

- Everyday events
- Context
- Multi-faceted
- Interviewer reflections

# The in-depth interview

An unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single respondent is questioned and probed by an experienced interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic.

The emphasis should be upon a full interaction to understand the meaning of the participant's experiences and life worlds.

# The interviewer should

- Develop an empathy with the respondent.
- Ensure respondent is relaxed and comfortable.
- Be personable to encourage and motivate.
- Note issues that interest respondent.
- Not be happy to accept 'yes' or 'no' answers.
- Note where probing is necessary.

# Advantages and challenges of in-depth interviews

## Advantages:

- depth of insight
- attribute responses
- no social pressure
- easier to arrange

## Challenges:

- lack of structure
- length of interview, combined with high costs
- analysis and interpretation of data

# The in-depth interview helps to overcome

- *Hectic schedules.*
- *Heterogeneity.*
- *Live context.*
- *Interviewer reflection.*

# Laddering

A technique for conducting in-depth interviews in which a line of questioning proceeds from product characteristics to user characteristics

It is made up of a linking or ladder of elements that represent the link between products and the consumer's perception process. It enables an understanding of how consumers translate product attributes, through personal meanings associated with them

# Laddering questions

- The interview revolves around three basic questions based on the A – C – V chain. The questions posed would be:
- *Values*: How important is this for you? (e.g. health)
- *Consequences*: What does this difference mean? (e.g. not fattening)
- *Attributes*: What is different about these alternatives? (e.g. low calories)

# Applications of in-depth interviews:

- Professionals
- Children
- Detailed probing
- Confidential, sensitive, embarrassing topics
- Avoiding strong social norms
- Complicated behaviour
- Competitors
- Sensory experiences



**Table 8.1a** A comparison of focus groups, depth interviews, projective techniques and qualitative observation

Criteria	Focus groups	In-depth interviews	Projective techniques	Ethnographic techniques
Degree of structure	Can vary from highly to loosely structured	Can vary from highly to loosely structured	Tends to be loosely structured	Loosely structured, though can have a framework to guide observation
Probing of individual participants	Low	High	Medium	None when used in isolation and in a covert manner
Moderator bias	Medium	Relatively high	Low to high	None when used in isolation and in a covert manner
Uncovering subconscious information	Low	Medium to high	High	High

**Table 8.1b** A comparison of focus groups, depth interviews, projective techniques and qualitative observation

Criteria	Focus groups	In-depth interviews	Projective techniques	Ethnographic techniques
Discovering innovative information	High	Medium	Low	Medium
Obtaining sensitive information	Low	Medium	High	High
Involving unusual behaviour or questioning	No	To a limited extent	Yes	Perhaps on the part of the observer