Focus Group Data Gathering: Practical Applications of the Total Quality Framework Approach

Margaret R. Roller, MA
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QDET2
International Conference on Questionnaire
Design, Development, Evaluation and Testing

Overview

- ❖ 1 – Qualitative Research (QR) & Focus Groups
  - ▪ Unique characteristics of QR
  - ▪ Focus group discussions

- ❖ 2 – Total Quality Framework (TQF)
  - ▪ Rationale, why it is needed
  - ▪ Credibility (data gathering) component

- ❖ 3 – Applying the TQF to Focus Group Discussions
  - ▪ Guide development
  - ▪ Facilitation

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Reference

Roller & Lavrakas, 2015. New York: Guilford Press.
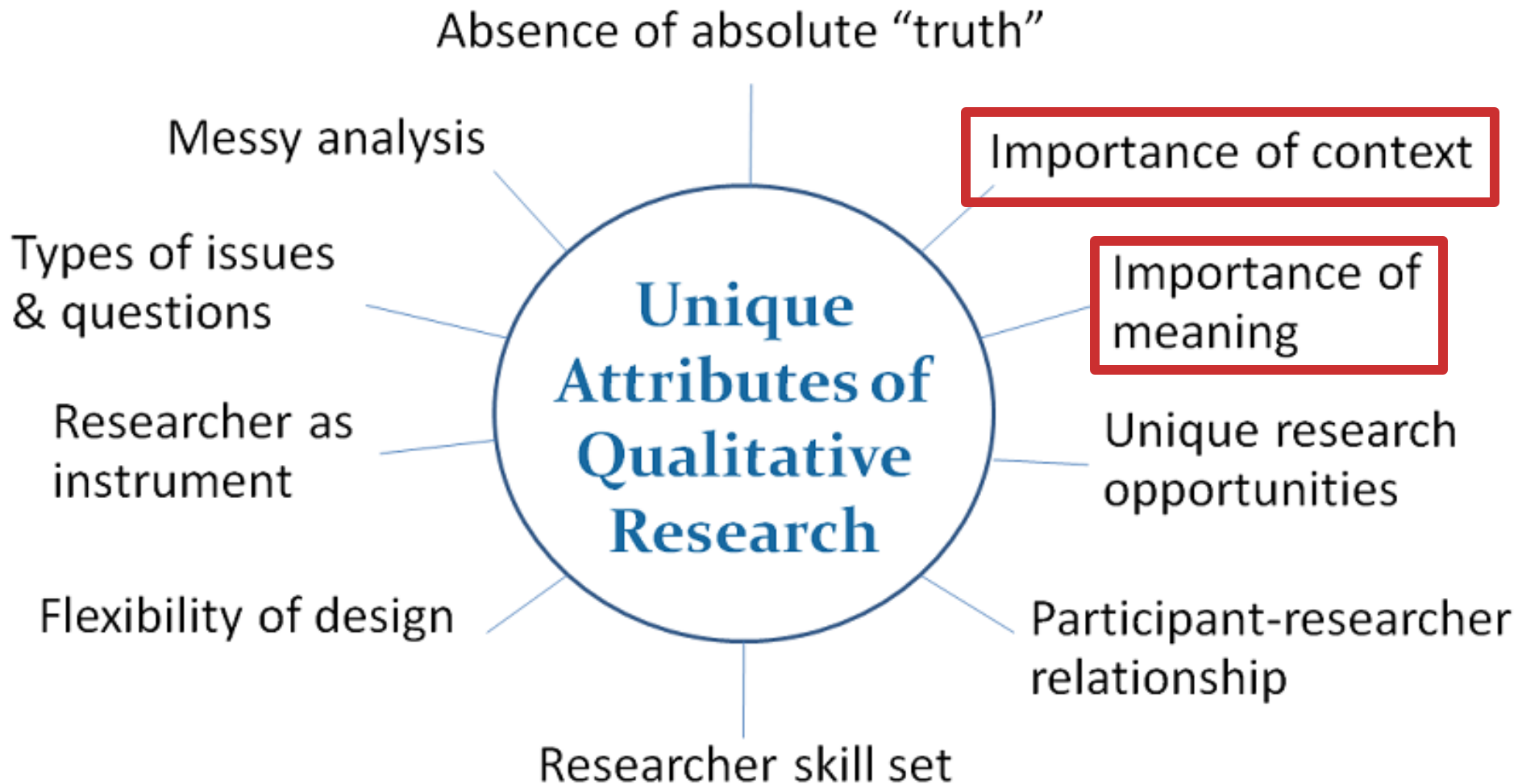
http://bit.ly/TQFbook

Qualitative Research & the Focus Group Method

Qualitative Research & the Focus Group Method

❖ Unlike quantitative, qualitative research (QR) embraces the idea that

- **Context & interconnections** are central to understanding human thought & behavior.

- A response to any single research question lies in a host of <u>related questions</u>.

- One facet of something <u>adds meaning</u> to another facet.

Qualitative Research & the Focus Group Method

Qualitative Research & the Focus Group Method

❖ **4 Types of Focus Groups**
- Full group (7-10 participants)
- Mini group (4-6 participants)
- Triads (3 participants)
- Dyads (2 participants)

❖ <u>Modes</u>
- Face-to-face
- Telephone
- Online

Qualitative Research & the Focus Group Method

Strengths	Limitations

➤ Participant **interaction**/group dynamics
  ▪ Stimulates <u>recall</u>
  ▪ <u>Spontaneous</u> ideas/thoughts
 	
➤ Allows moderator to hear people **"think out loud"**
  ▪ Hear how/if people <u>change their opinions</u>, the basis by which attitudes shift
 	
➤ Can foster a **supportive** environment where people *may* feel "safe" to reveal sensitive information
 	
➤ Efficient way to gather a **wide range** of attitudes & behavior
 	
➤ Presence of **observers**
	➤ Participant **interaction**/group dynamics
	  ▪ May <u>stifle</u> differing attitudes
	  ▪ May stifle highly personal input
	  ▪ May lead to <u>"group think"</u>
	  ▪ Can be difficult to <u>control</u>
	  ▪ Moderator <u>skills & rapport building</u> are crucial
	
	➤ **Ethical** considerations
	  ▪ <u>Confidentiality & anonymity</u>
	    > Participants' comments/revelations
	  ▪ Requires special effort to appease <u>concerns</u>
	    > Informed consent
	    > Extra time during introductions

Total Quality Framework & the Focus Group Method

TQF & the Focus Group Method

*"Brings **greater rigor to qualitative research without stifling** or squelching the creative approaches and interpretations that skilled qualitative researchers properly embrace, practice, and celebrate."*
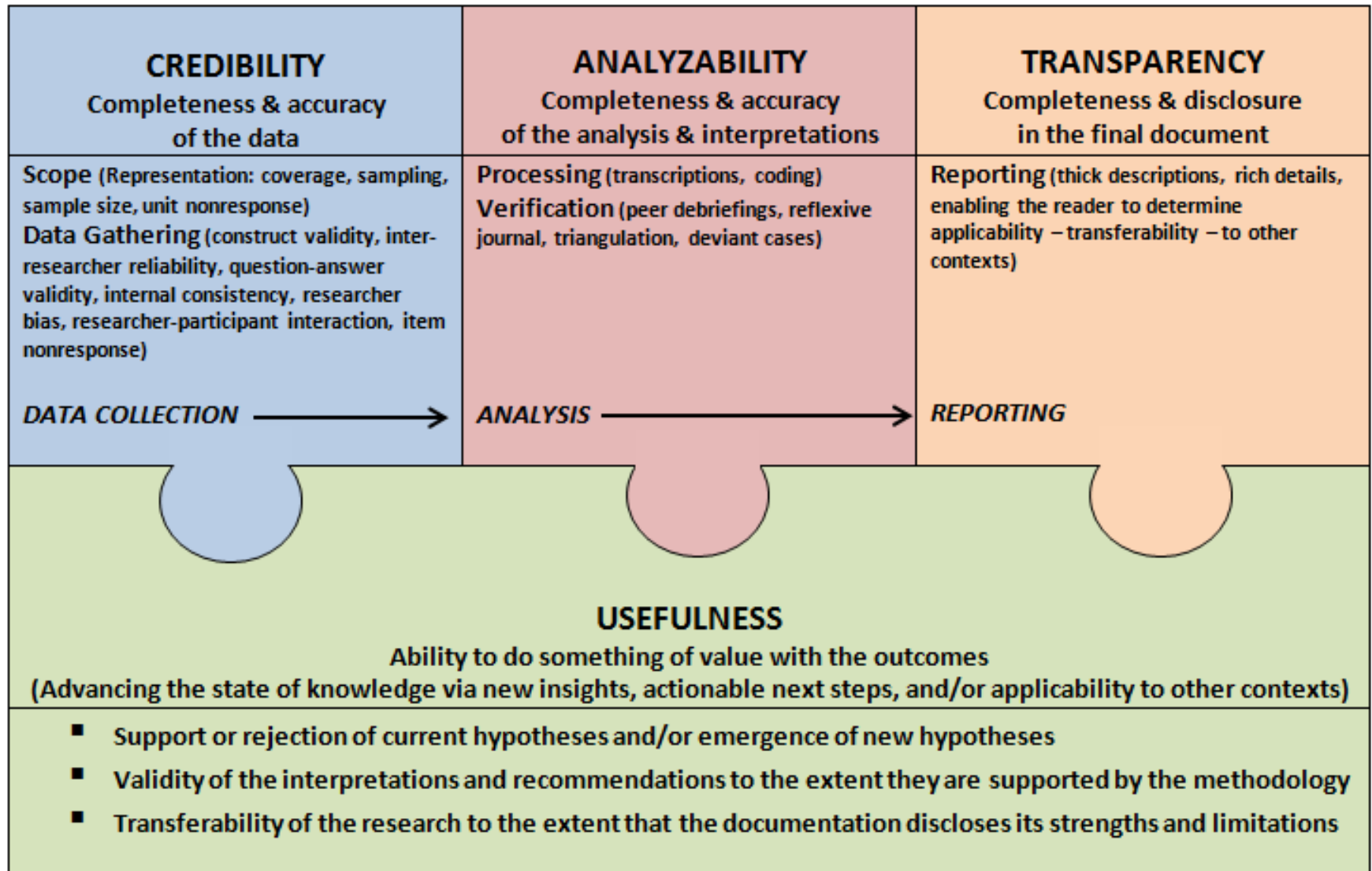
(Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 3)

❖ The Total Quality Framework (TQF) is an approach to **enhance the quality** of qualitative research (QR).

❖ The TQF offers a way to think about **best practices** *at each stage* of the research process.
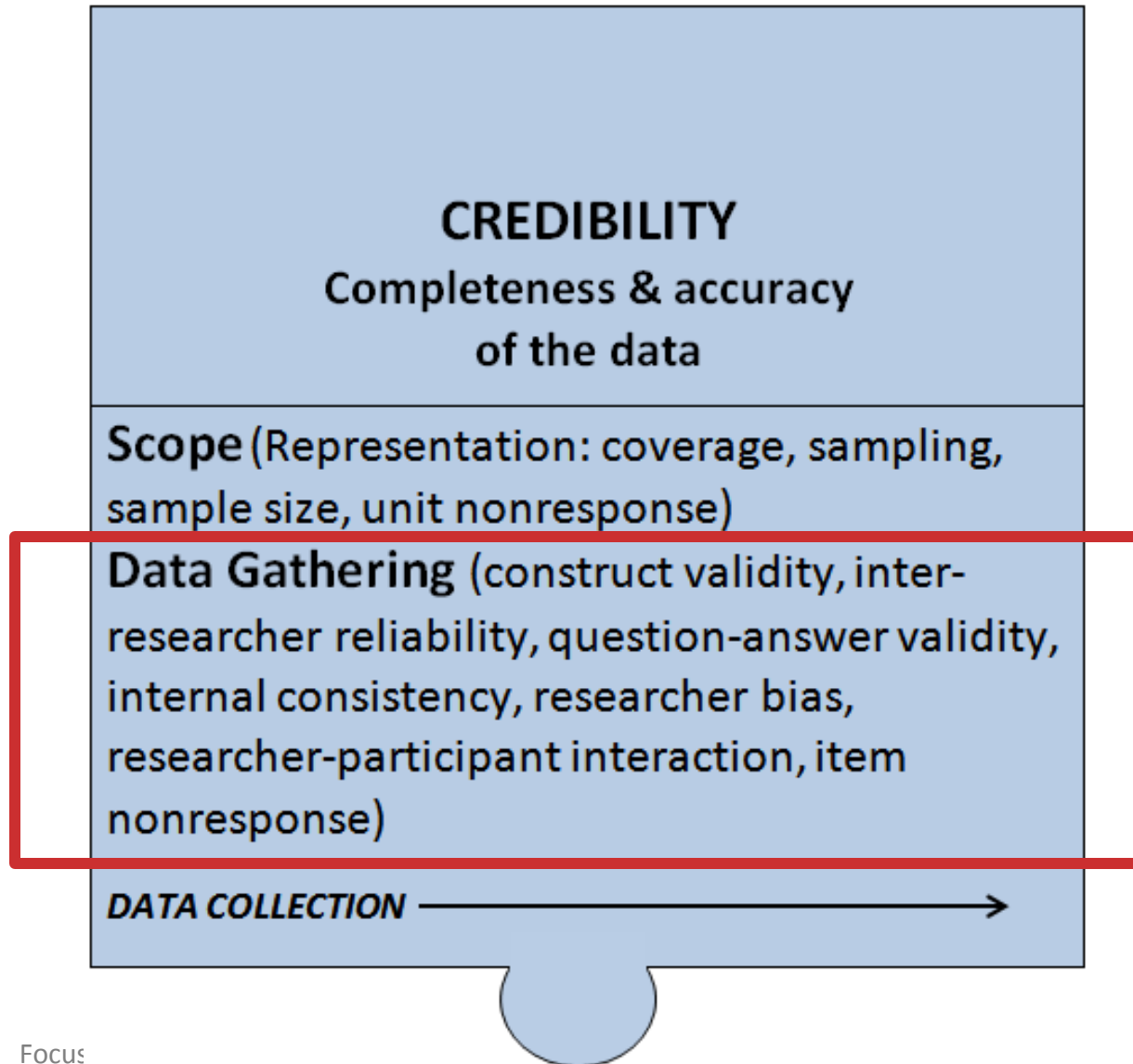
TQF & the Focus Group Method

❖ Grounded in the core belief that all QR must be:
  - Credible
  - Analyzable
  - Transparent
  - Useful

❖ TQF consists of **four inter-related components**, related to each aspect of the research process:
  - <u>Credibility</u> – Data collection
  - <u>Analyzability</u> – Analysis
  - <u>Transparency</u> – Reporting
  - <u>Usefulness</u> – Do something of value with the outcomes

TQF

CREDIBILITY Completeness & accuracy of the data	ANALYZABILITY Completeness & accuracy of the analysis & interpretations	TRANSPARENCY Completeness & disclosure in the final document
Scope (Representation: coverage, sampling, sample size, unit nonresponse) **Data Gathering** (construct validity, inter-researcher reliability, question-answer validity, internal consistency, researcher bias, researcher-participant interaction, item nonresponse) *DATA COLLECTION* →	**Processing** (transcriptions, coding) **Verification** (peer debriefings, reflexive journal, triangulation, deviant cases) *ANALYSIS* →	**Reporting** (thick descriptions, rich details, enabling the reader to determine applicability – transferability – to other contexts) *REPORTING*

USEFULNESS
Ability to do something of value with the outcomes
(Advancing the state of knowledge via new insights, actionable next steps, and/or applicability to other contexts)

- Support or rejection of current hypotheses and/or emergence of new hypotheses
- Validity of the interpretations and recommendations to the extent they are supported by the methodology
- Transferability of the research to the extent that the documentation discloses its strengths and limitations

CREDIBILITY
Completeness & accuracy
of the data

Scope (Representation: coverage, sampling, sample size, unit nonresponse)

Data Gathering (construct validity, inter-researcher reliability, question-answer validity, internal consistency, researcher bias, researcher-participant interaction, item nonresponse)

DATA COLLECTION ⟶

TQF-Credibility & the Focus Group Method

❖ Credibility – Data Gathering

- *Content/information* obtained

  - Moderator **guide**.

- *Researcher effects*

  - Moderator **bias**.

  - Moderator **inconsistency**.

- *Participant effects*

  - **Willingness/ability** to provide information.

  - Providing **contradictory** or **inaccurate** information.

TQF-Credibility & the Focus Group Method

❖ <u>Researcher effects</u>

- ▪ Moderator **bias**
  - • Moderators can negatively impact Credibility by
    - – Giving *selective attention* to participants.
    - – Asking **leading questions** or voicing his/her own opinion.
    - – His/her physical *appearance*

- ▪ Moderator **inconsistency**
  - • Inconsistency happens if group dynamics are not well-managed.
    - – Discussion **guide is not fully covered** in all groups.
    - – Moderator does not discriminate between **content in the guide that must be stated in the same manner** from content where exactness is not important.

❖ <u>Participant Effects</u>

- Social environment of the focus group may lead to **socially desirable responding** or an **unwillingness to comment**.

  - <u>Sensitive</u> topics, e.g., personal grooming habits.

  - Topics governed by <u>social norms</u>, e.g., church attendance, alcohol use, healthy eating.

- ***Building rapport*** is important to enabling participants to honestly engage in the discussion.

TQF-Credibility & the Focus Group Method

❖ Researcher & participant effects in focus group research are mitigated by careful development of the

- Moderator's **guide**

- Moderator's **skills & facilitation techniques**

Applying the TQF to the Focus Group Method
Guide Development

Guide Development

- ❖ A moderator's guide is an outline specifying the:
  - ▪ **Topics/issues** that need to be covered.
  - ▪ **Main questions** within each topic that need to be addressed.
  - ▪ Key follow-up **probing questions** within each topic that need to be considered.
  - ▪ **Overall flow** (organization) of the discussion.

- ❖ It is a *guide*, not a script.

- ❖ It has a **"funnel" design** – moving the discussion from the general to the specific.

Guide Development

❖ The moderator's guide is designed to mitigate:
- Moderator **bias**.
  - Not introducing the topic of interest too soon.

- Moderator **inconsistency**.
  - Specifying the areas of the content that must be handled in the same way for each group.
  - Keeping moderator on track & on time.

- **Participant effects**.
  - Beginning with broad (non-threatening) discussions to help build rapport & provide context for the moderator.
  - Reducing socially desirable responding by specifying question wording/techniques.

A Funnel Approach to Guide Development

Introductions — STAGE 1

General information related to the topic — STAGE 2

Awareness, attitudes &/or behavior related to particular issues — STAGE 3

Attitudes specific to the targeted objective & constructive suggestions for improvement — STAGE 4

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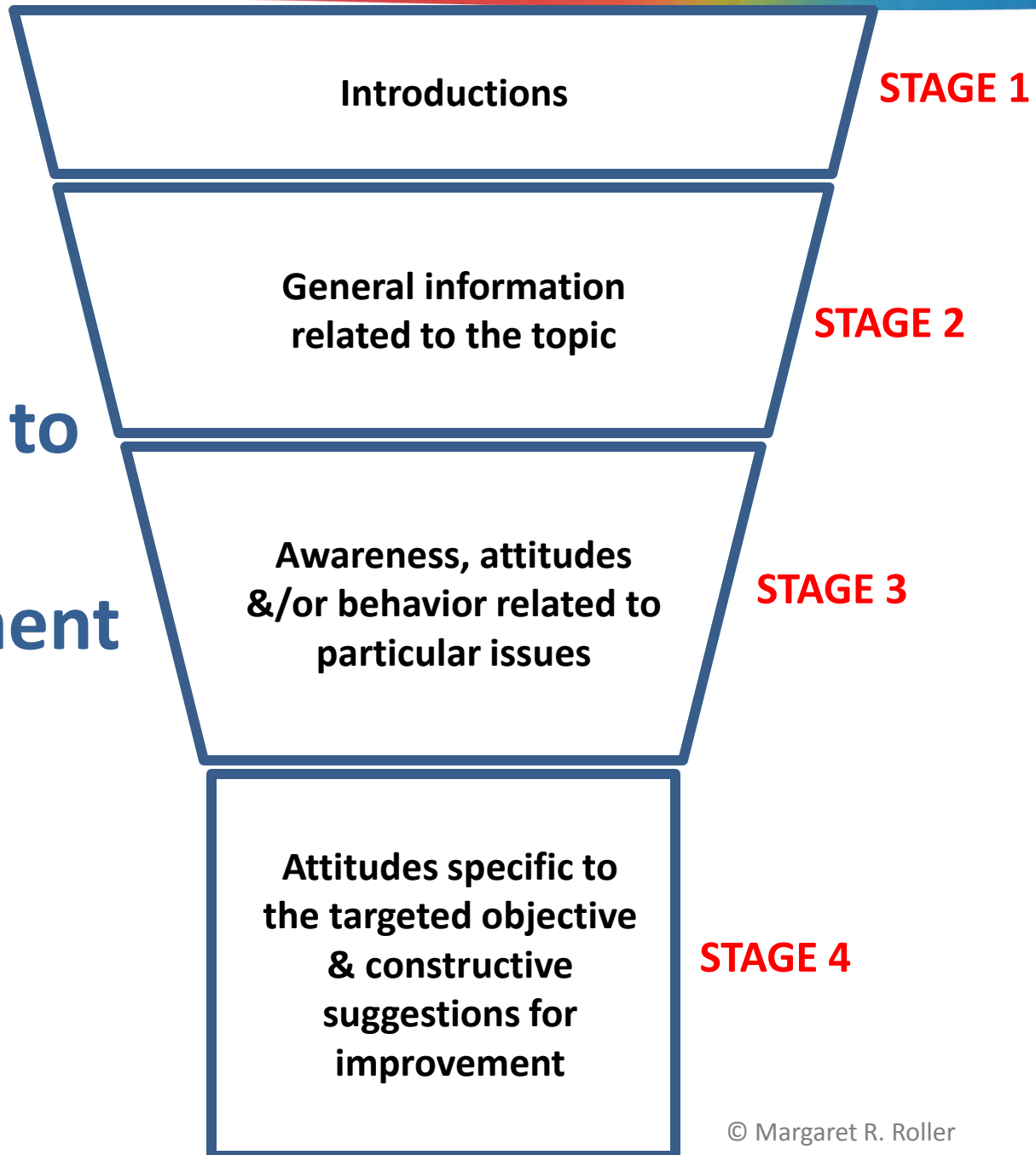
Example 1:

An employee study regarding the corporate goals & mission statement.

Objective: Examine awareness of & attitudes toward the corporate goals & mission among management & non-management employees in order to better align the company's strategic initiatives with employees' job experiences & work environment.

**Moderator's introduction
Participants' introductions**

STAGE 1

Employees discuss their current job & work environment, esp., related to work-related goals

STAGE 2

Awareness of & attitudes toward the Company's six specific goals

Awareness of the Company's mission statement

STAGE 3

Attitudes toward the mission statement, including its relevance to employees' work experiences & ways it needs to change

STAGE 4

Example 2:

A study among NY residents who frequent state parks & "scenic areas."

Objective: To better understand the public's awareness of & attitudes toward the overhead utility fixtures (e.g., cables, poles) found in NY state parks & "scenic areas," and their willingness to help pay for converting these cables to underground.

Moderator's introduction
Participants' introductions

STAGE 1

Participants discuss their expectations & experiences visiting NY parks & scenic areas

STAGE 2

Awareness of & attitudes toward overhead utility fixtures

Awareness of a proposed program to convert fixtures to underground

STAGE 3

Attitudes toward the proposed program, their willingness to help pay for it, & the relative importance of this issue

STAGE 4

Example 3:

Online discussions with experts in schizophrenia.

Objective: To help develop a research design that would be effective in assessing the impact of negative symptoms among schizophrenia patients & their caregivers in a real-world setting.

Moderator's introduction
Participants' introductions
STAGE 1

Participants discuss their experiences & priorities working with schizophrenia patients
STAGE 2

Relevant domains & variables associated with negative symptom burden

Current & past research on negative symptom burden
STAGE 3

Optimal research approaches to assess negative symptom burden
STAGE 4
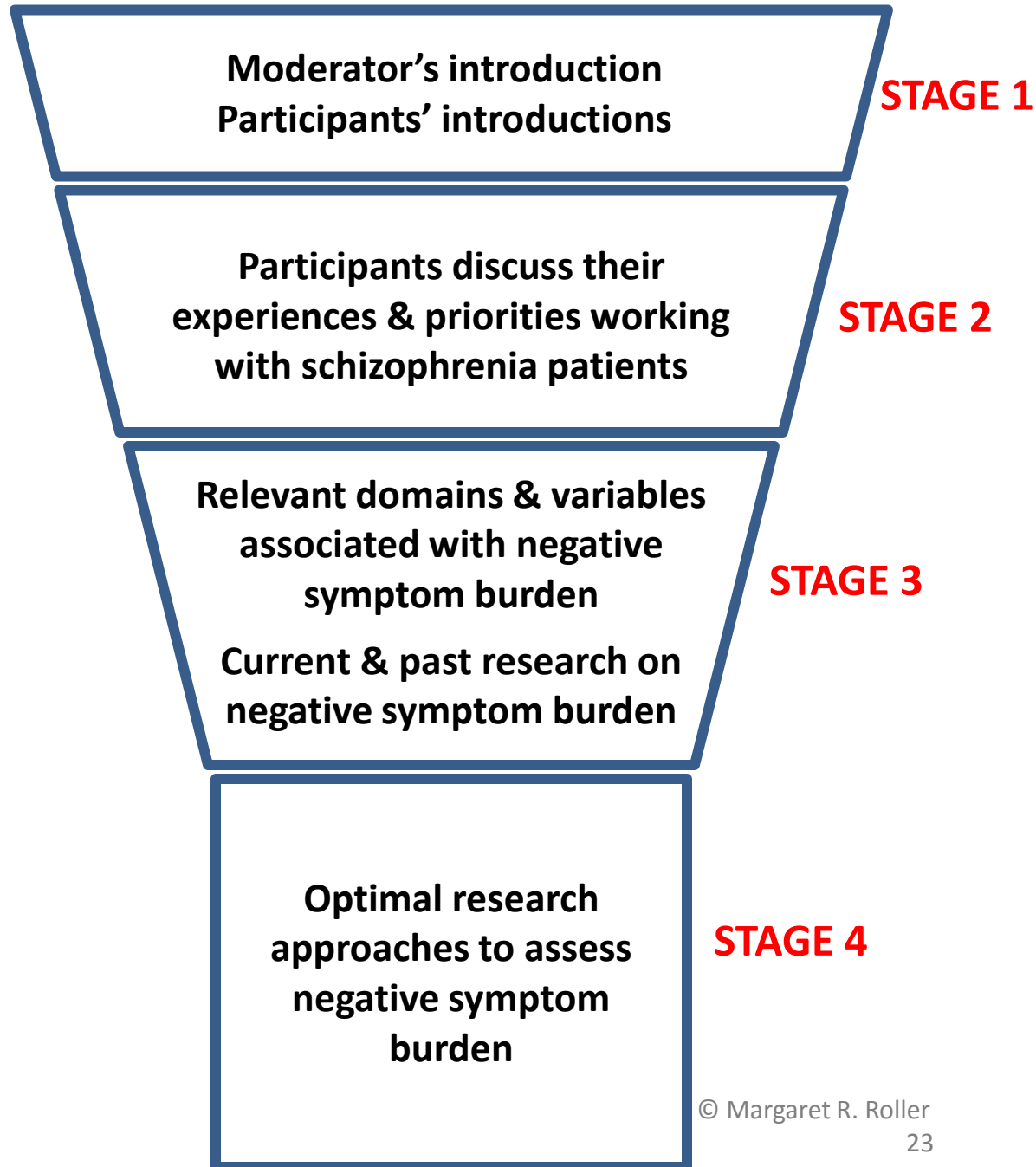
**A STUDY AMONG MANAGEMENT AND NON-MANAGEMENT
EMPLOYEES CONCERNING THE CORPORATE MISSION & GOALS
For XYZ Corporation**

Moderator's Guide

INTRODUCTION

The moderator introduces herself and explains that the general purpose of the discussion is to look at several broad aspects of employees' jobs as well as their attitudes toward the direction XYZ is taking as a corporation.

The moderator emphasizes that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to her questions and the employees are encouraged to respond candidly. It is further emphasized that all comments will remain anonymous and that no employees will be identified to his/her supervisor or to the sponsor of the research.

The moderator explains the use of the audio recorder, emphasizing that the purpose is to minimize note taking and allow her to listen to the discussion at a later date and write a short report. In no way will the recording be used to identify participating employees, and all comments will remain anonymous. The recording is solely for the moderator's use and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.

Employees are given the opportunity to ask for further clarifications as to purpose, use of audio recording, etc.

Moderator's Introductory Remarks

Welcome

Hi, my name is _____ and I work in _____ at _____. I am currently working on a project concerning _____ so that [OBEJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH]. I want to welcome you and thank you for taking time to participate in today's discussion. I am looking forward to your feedback and I think you will find it interesting.

Candid opinions

Let me emphasize that I am interested in your *candid* opinions about what we talk about today. You are the experts who have the answers to my questions. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers; I'm only interested in your honest input on the topics we discuss today.

Hear from everyone

I want to hear from all of you. Please do not hesitate to speak up, particularly if you do not agree with something being said. I suspect that many of you will have differing opinions on our topics today. It is important for me to hear these different points of view.

Anonymity

Your comments will remain anonymous. This is a promise I make to you, but it is also a promise you need to make with each other. It is important for us to be able to talk freely without worry that someone here will repeat our comments elsewhere.

Audio recording

With your permission, I would like to audio record this discussion. By recording the discussion I am able to free myself from taking notes and can listen to the discussion at a later date when I am able to take notes that will help me write a short report. I want to emphasize that the audio recording is solely for my use and will never be used to identify any one of you. [THE MODERATOR NEEDS TO BE PREPARED TO ABANDON THE IDEA OF AUDIO RECORDING IF PARTICIPANTS OBJECT.]

Questions or comments

Before we begin, do you have any questions or comments for me?

_____

Optional

[YOU MAY ADD ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING, AS APPROPRIATE OR DEEMED NECESSARY. PLEASE KEEP IN MIND, HOWEVER, THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO OVERWHELM PARTICIPANTS WITH INFORMATION.]

▶ If you haven't already done so, please turn off your cell phone or put it on vibrate.

▶ A few of my colleagues are viewing this discussion by way of [REMOTE MONITOR, ONE-WAY MIRROR, VIDEO STREAMING]. They are taking notes and are an important resource for me. After our discussion, they will share their notes with me which will be useful when I write a short report. Like all of us, they are sworn to confidentiality.

▶ I want to hear from everyone but I ask that we don't all talk at once. I want to hear everything that is said and I just can't do that if we talk at the same time.

▶ Feel free to excuse yourself for the restroom, which is located _____.

▶ I also want to introduce _____ who is here to assist me by taking notes of our discussion.

▶ This discussion will provide valuable input that will be used to make recommendations. At this point I cannot tell you when or if these recommendations will be acted upon.

Corporate Mission Example – *Stage 1*

A. PRE-DISCUSSION WARM-UP (Individual Response)

1. Job location, title, function

2. Years with XYZ Corporation

3. One-word description of your job

Corporate Mission Example – *Stage 2*

B. GOALS – As perceived in current job/work environment

1. When we went around the table, I heard SOME OR MANY of you **describe your job as WORDS USED IN A.3.** MODERATOR WRITES WORDS ON EASEL. What other job descriptions or words did I hear?

2. I am interested in understanding the goals or philosophy that you work by. Do any of these job descriptions or words you gave me **reflect particular goals or a philosophy you work by in your job? How so?**

3. Have these **goals or philosophy changed at your work location** over the years? How so? **In what way?** [AFTER EVERYONE HAS RESPONDED & AS APPROPRIATE…]

   a. **Is the work environment more competitive (i.e., between employees)?**
   b. **Do you (are you instructed to) treat customers differently?** [AS NEEDED IF NO RESPONSE] **For example, are you expected to spend more or less time with the customer? For what reason?**
   c. **Is the marketplace more competitive?**
   d. **Have financial considerations become the most important consideration?**
   e. **Something else?**

4. Based on your current work situation, what do you think is **the Company's primary goal**? Based on your experiences, **what is the one thing the Company seems to care about more than anything else?**

Corporate Mission Example – *Stage 3*

C. AWARENESS OF COMPANY GOALS

1. **Unaided**

    a. Are you **aware of the Company's goals** as defined by XYZ Corporation management? If so,
        - What are they? **What can you recall?**
        - **How** did you become aware of these goals?

                *Supervisor?
                *Other employee?
                *Company publication or communication? Which one?
                *Some other way?

    b. How, if at all, have they influenced your **work environment, how you complete your job, or other aspects of the work experience**? **[AS APPROPRIATE] Have these goals inspired you or redirected your work efforts in any way?**

2. **Aided**

    [MODERATOR READS THE SIX COMPANY GOALS TO THE EMPLOYEES & REPEATS AS NECESSARY]

Corporate Mission Example – *Stage 3*

D. ATTITUDES TOWARD COMPANY GOALS

1. **To what extent, if at all**, do you **agree** with these goals? **Are they "good" goals for the Company to have? What makes you say that?**

2. Are they the **same or different** than the goals established at your work location or for your work group? **If so, how is that? In what way are they different?**

MISSION STATEMENT

E. AWARENESS OF THE MISSION STATEMENT

1. **Unaided**

   a. XYZ Corporation has a mission statement that serves as the premise from which the goals we have been discussing were derived. Are you **aware** of this mission statement? If so,
      - What does the statement say, **what can you recall**?
      - **How** did you become aware of the mission statement?
           *Supervisor?
           *Other employee?
           *Company publication or communication? Which one?
           *Some other way?

2. **Aided**

   [MODERATOR READS THE MISSION STATEMENT TO THE EMPLOYEES & REPEATS AS NECESSARY]

Corporate Mission Example – *Stage 4*

F. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MISSION STATEMENT

1. How do you **interpret** this statement? **What does it mean (say) to you?**

   a. **[MODERATOR PROBES KEY WORDS, SUCH AS…]**
      "THE"
      "LEADER"
      "INDUSTRY"
      "INFORMATION"

2. Do you **agree** with this mission? In your opinion, **is this a "good" mission for the Company**? **How so?**

   a. What, if anything, are **positive aspects** of the statement? What are the **negative or least appealing aspects** of the statement?
   b. *Is* XYZ "the leader" in the "industry"? If not, **what company is the leader? What makes you say that? What are you thinking when you say that?**
   c. What would make this a "better" mission statement? **What would you suggest to improve on this statement? How does that make it "better"?**

3. Are the goals we discussed earlier adequately **reflected** in this mission? If not,

   a. What should the Company mission be to better connect to these goals?

4. Does this mission statement **inspire you**? **Would (has) it cause(d) you to redirect your efforts at work?** How so? **Can you give me an example?**

F. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MISSION STATEMENT (cont.)

5. Could the mission statement be more inspiring (help in directing your work efforts) if it was more visible or heavily **promoted**? Would that make a difference? **[AS APPROPRIATE] For example, would it make the mission more top-of-mind? In what way?**

6. Do you perceive this mission statement as being the **same or different** than the mission of your job location or work group? **How so?**

   a. **Is the Company mission and that of your work location comparable or do they compete?** If competitive…
      - **Which one has the greatest impact or influence in your work experience?**
      - **Which one is the most relevant to your job?**
      - **Is it a source of confusion? Are you unsure of the overall direction in your work environment?**

7. In your opinion, should the mission statement be **left** the way it is, **changed** slightly in any way, or entirely **scrapped** and redone to reflect a different focus?

8. How could the Company make you **more aware AND interested** in the mission statement? In your opinion, **how could the mission statement be effectively promoted?**

Corporate Mission Example – *Stage 4*

G. "IDEAL" MISSION STATEMENT

1. **[MODERATOR ASKS EMPLOYEES TO WRITE DOWN THEIR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION…]**

   a. If it were up to you (if you were given the responsibility) to develop a mission statement for XYZ Corporation based on your own work experiences as an employee of the Company, what would be your statement? **There are no "rules,"** you can develop a very idealistic mission statement if you like.

2. **[MODERATOR ASKS EACH EMPLOYEE TO DISCUSS HIS/HER MISSION STATEMENT, PROBING FOR CLARIFICATION & THE DEGREE TO WHICH IT IS THE SAME OR DIFFERENT THAN THE EXISTING COMPANY STATEMENT]**

WRAP-UP

[MODERATOR ASKS FOR FURTHER COMMENTS, THANKS EMPLOYEES FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION & DISMISSES THE GROUP]

Do you have questions about how to apply the funnel design in particular situations?

Applying the TQF to the Focus Group Method
Group Facilitation

Group Facilitation – Moderator Skills & Qualities

Four Key Moderator Skills

A focus group moderator must be:

- **Highly organized**

- **A leader**, who knows
  - When to move on in the discussion
  - Where to move on to in the discussion
  - How to manage participants & maintain the flow of discussion

- **Open-minded & flexible**, responsive to
  - Observers' requests
  - Unanticipated events
  - Logistical requirements of the discussion venue

- **Attentive**, with the ability to
  - Identify & incorporate new topics as they emerge

❖ **Highly organized**

- ■ <u>Well-prepared</u> going into the discussion.
  - • Participants confirmed.
  - • Facility/room set up & materials ready to go.
  - • Guide finalized & practiced/"internalized."

- ■ Ability to <u>manage time</u> during the discussion.
  - • Cover all topic areas within the allotted timeframe.
  - • Multitask – core objectives, time, group dynamics, new topics, observers.

❖ **A leader**

- Can <u>manage</u> the discussion *without being overbearing*.

- <u>Exhibits control</u> as necessary, knowing
  - How long to spend on a topic & *when* to move on.
  - *What* topic to move on to.
  - *How* to speak firmly yet respectfully to manage the flow of discussion.

❖ **Open-minded & flexible**

- **Objectivity**
  - Particularly important for highly-charged, polarizing topics.

- **Unanticipated events**
  - Not all participants show up for the discussion.
  - A participant gets very angry or upset & begins to cry.
  - The client makes last-minute changes to the guide.

- **Logistics**
  - The discussion room is not set up as requested.
  - You have forgotten certain materials (e.g., the moderator's guide, concept boards, etc.).

Group Facilitation – Moderator Skills & Qualities

❖ **Attentive**

- ▪ "Think on your feet"
  - • Remember the <u>thread</u> for each participant.
    - – Are the participant's comments consistent?
  - • Identify & assess the importance of <u>unanticipated topics</u> emerging from a single participant or group interaction.
    - – Is the topic relevant to the research objectives?
    - – Will this move the discussion in another direction?
    - – Is the direction of the discussion consistent with the research objectives or unimportant to the objectives?

❖ **Interpersonal qualities** are essential to mitigating participant effects by *building rapport & a trusting group environment*.

❖ **Rapport & a trusting environment** are the bedrock by which participants will share **candid thoughts**.

❖ A greater willingness to share candid thoughts **moves you closer to your objectives**, what you need to learn from the discussion.

❖ **Building rapport & a trusting group environment – _Before_ the discussion**

- Contact each participant a day or two prior to the discussion date.

- Greet participants when they arrive.

- Chat informally with participants (*not about the discussion topic*) & make name cards while waiting for others to arrive.

- Offer refreshments.

- ❖ **Building rapport & a trusting group environment – _During_ the discussion**
  - ▪ <u>Actively listen</u>
    - • People want to talk with someone _who cares about what they have to say_.
      - – <u>Show UPR</u> – **U**nconditional **P**ositive **R**egard – acceptance & support irrespective of what is said.
      - – Remember: The participant is the expert, you are not judging.
    - • <u>Verbal</u> listening
      - – "I see"; "go on, tell me more"; "aha"; "thanks"
    - • <u>Nonverbal</u> listening
      - – Eye contact
      - – Head nod
      - – Smiling

Group Facilitation – Moderator Skills & Qualities

❖ Building rapport & a trusting group environment – *During* the discussion (cont.)

- Demonstrate <u>genuine interest</u> in the discussion.
  - Actively interject follow-up questions.
  - Catch consistencies or inconsistencies.

- Pick up on participants' <u>nonverbal cues</u>.
  - Facial expressions, gestures, posture.

- Show <u>enthusiasm, energy, & use humor</u> (when appropriate).

- <u>Speak & dress appropriately</u>.

ALL IDEAS ARE GOOD IDEAS

BE CURIOUS

Group Facilitation − Techniques

❖ Your goal is to gain a **very clear understanding** of each participant's attitudes & behavior related to the topic *as well as* that of the group overall.

  ▪ Mitigate measurement error.

❖ **Verbal** questioning.
  ▪ Direct
  ▪ Indirect

❖ **Nonverbal** techniques.

Group Facilitation – Techniques

❖ **Verbal *direct* questioning**

- <u>What, when, how, where, who</u>…& *sometimes* why.

  - From the corporate mission example
    - – What does the mission statement say to you?
    - – How do you relate the mission statement to your job?

  - From the schizophrenia example
    - – Tell me about your work with schizophrenia patients?
    - – What are examples of credible work in this area?
    - – How would you describe the optimal approach to conducting research with schizophrenia patients and their caregivers?

Group Facilitation – Techniques

❖ **Verbal** *direct* questioning (cont.)
  ▪ What, when, how, where, who…& *sometimes* why.
  - The "why" question often asks for justification & *may* elicit responses that are too *rational*, not real &/or are too *simplistic*.
    – In what way?
    – How so?
    – Tell me about a time when you felt that way.
    – What are you thinking of when you say that?

  - IF you ask "why" be sure you have sufficient <u>time to explore the responses</u>.

Group Facilitation – Techniques

❖ **Verbal** *direct* questioning (cont.)

- Paraphrase
  - Important in confirming you have *heard correctly*.
  - Paraphrase *ONLY* after you have built good rapport & participants are comfortable telling you that *your interpretation is wrong*.

- Maintain objectivity, ask questions that do not bias.
  - Instead of: *There has been a lot of talk in the news about the increases in the Affordable Care Act premiums, what is your experience?*
  - Ask: *What has your experience been shopping for health insurance on the ACA exchange?*

Group Facilitation – Techniques

❖ **Verbal *indirect* questioning**

- <u>Enabling techniques</u>: Modify direct questions to make it easier for participants to express their opinions.

  - **Sentence completion**
    - "When I think of the quality of public education in my community, I think of _____."

  - **Word association**
    - What is the first word or words you think of when I say "learning disability"?

  - **Storytelling**
    - Tell me a story about the last time you visited an art museum.

❖ **Verbal** *indirect* questioning (cont.)

- **Projective techniques**: To explore less conscious, less rational or socially acceptable attitudes.
  - **Picture sort or collage**
    - Use online images & Pinterest to answer the question, "How do you feel when you are in a large social gathering with strangers?"
  - **Psychodrawing**
    - Draw a depiction of what it would be like to be without your mobile phone.
  - **Personification**
    - Imagine your car as a person & describe this person's lifestyle.

Group Facilitation – Techniques

❖ **Verbal** *indirect* questioning (cont.)

- ■ Projective techniques may be *of limited value*.
  - • <u>Short duration</u> of a group exercise does not allow sufficient time to explore personal meaning & context.
  - • Moderator is <u>typically not qualified</u> to make valid interpretations & link them to the research objectives.
    - – For example, the moderator is unable to sufficiently explore & analyze separate photo collages from 10 participants. What do they mean separately & collectively? Do they tap into an unconscious belief relevant to the objective? Do they tap into deep-seeded cultural biases or social awareness?
  - • Can result in a high-degree of <u>subjectivity</u> by the researcher.

Group Facilitation – Techniques

❖ **Nonverbal techniques**
- A way to stimulate responses & conversation.
- <u>Silence</u>, pause after a question, allow for silence.
- Make <u>eye contact</u>, actively listen.
- <u>Stand</u>, walk around the room/table.
- Use the <u>easel/white board</u> to write
  - Questions/topics from the guide prior to the discussion
  - Participants' comments
- Be "<u>approachable</u>"
  - Smile
  - Dress appropriately, wear open collar

❖ **Summary**

- Goal is to gain a <u>clear understanding</u> of each participant's & the group's attitudes/behavior.

- Verbal <u>direct</u> questioning
  - What, when, how, where, who…& *sometimes* why
  - Paraphrase
  - Objectivity

- Verbal <u>indirect</u> questioning
  - Enabling techniques
  - Projective techniques

- <u>Nonverbal</u> techniques

Group Facilitation − Special Situations

❖ There are many situations that can potentially **disrupt discussions & introduce error** due to moderator & participant effects.

- ▪ "Difficult" participants
- ▪ Group think
- ▪ Straying from the topic/skipping around the guide
- ▪ Side conversations

❖ **"Difficult" participants**

- **Dominator** – dominates the discussion preventing others from contributing.

  - Make it clear in the introduction that <u>it is important to hear from everyone</u>.

  - Let him/her speak before interjecting, *"Let's hear from someone else."* or *"Stephanie, what do you think of the new tuition fees at the university?"*

❖ "Difficult" participants (cont.)

- **Argumentative/hostile participant** – "an axe to grind."

  - Be sure participants <u>understand the purpose of the research & how the discussion will be conducted</u>.

  - Like the dominator, <u>let the participant vent</u> (to cut him/her off will only raise the anger) & listen respectfully.

  - Then, *"Jack, I hear you. Thank you for your comments. But we need to move on with today's discussion. Can you and I <u>talk afterwards</u> about your concerns?"*

  - There may also be an opportunity to use some aspect of the participant's comments to <u>start a new discussion</u> with the group – *"Jack, you make a good point…"*

Group Facilitation – Special Situations

❖ "Difficult" participants (cont.)

- **Shy participant** – quiet, doesn't make eye contact.
  - Make a special effort during introductions to <u>engage the participant</u> via active listening techniques.
  - May need to <u>"back off"</u> from the shy participant until sufficient rapport has been established.
  - When the time is "right," attempt to <u>engage</u> the participant – *"John, what has your experience been since adopting a gluten-free diet?"*
  - If the participant does not want to contribute to the discussion, <u>do not risk upsetting the participant</u>.

Group Facilitation – Special Situations

❖ **Group think**

- ▪ For whatever reason, participants appear to be in agreement on one or more topics.

- ▪ Look for <u>inconsistencies</u>.
  - Is someone contradicting earlier statements in order to agree with the group? If so, ask about it.

- ▪ <u>Paraphrase</u> what you think you are hearing & ask participants to clarify his/her basis for agreement.

- ▪ Play <u>devil's advocate</u> (last resort)
  - *"I have heard exactly the opposite from other people on this topic. Help me understand how this group thinks differently."*

❖ **Straying from the topic/skipping around the guide**

- Participants may bring up topic areas that are
  - *Relevant* to the research but before you want to discuss.
  - *Not relevant* to the research.

- When **relevant**, the moderator may
  - Say "hold that thought" to <u>discuss at a later time</u>, *or*
  - If it not too disruptive, <u>discuss the topic right then & there</u>.

- When **not relevant**, the moderator may say,
  - *"Thank you for bringing this up. This is not the subject of this particular discussion but it may be <u>something to consider for future discussions</u>."*

❖ **Side conversations**

■ A participant may begin a private conversation with the person sitting in the next seat while the rest of the group is carrying on with the discussion.

• Call for a "time out" to stop the group discussion. This will also stop the private conversation. Then ask what the two participants were chatting about, emphasizing that you are interested in hearing *all* comments.

What are examples from your own work in applying certain skills, techniques, &/or dealing with special situations?

Thank You!

Please feel free to contact me:

Margaret R. Roller
rmr@rollerresearch.com
804.693.3208
www.rollerresearch.com
www.researchdesignreview.com