

# FOCUS GROUPS

## When can the method be used?

Focus Groups are used in several phases of the development process – in the preliminary phase in order to gain contextual information about product use and opinions about existing products, in the idea generation phase, and when testing product or service concepts. A Focus Group can be used to choose one out of several concepts or to gather recommendations for further development. Focus Groups provide a quick overview of consumers' opinions about a subject and insights into the opinions and needs of the target group. Part of its value lies in the unexpected findings that can come from a free-flowing discussion in the group. When deeper and more individual information is needed, interviews should be used – see Interviews.

## How to use the method?

At least three Focus Group sessions should be conducted so that outcomes can be generalised to some extent. A Focus Group consists of 6-8 participants, a moderator and someone who is in charge of collecting the data. The moderator has a vital role, so experience in moderating is very helpful. Perform a pilot Focus Group, so that you can improve your list of topics. A Focus Group can be combined with making collages or sensitising tasks such as keeping a short diary – see Context Mapping. Online Focus Group sessions are possible as well. The end result depends on the goals of the sessions – for instance, insights into consumer needs within the product area, ideas for new products, or insights into consumer acceptance and perceived (dis)advantages of certain product/service concepts.

***A Focus Group is a group in which several topics concerning a specific product or issue are discussed. Focus Groups often consist of people from the target group of the product or service that is being developed.***

## Possible procedure

### STEP 1

Make a list of topics you want to address (topic guide), containing broad issues or specific questions.

### STEP 2

Test the topic guide in a pilot Focus Group. Make changes if necessary.

### STEP 3

Invite the respondents, people from your target group(s).

### STEP 4

Perform the Focus Groups. A session typically takes one and a half to two hours and is usually recorded for transcription and analysis.

### STEP 5

Analyse and report the findings by indicating the main opinions and the range in opinions for each topic/issue.

## Limitations of the method

- If participants do not have experience with the product they are confronted with, Focus Group sessions are less suitable.
- Group processes might influence the results. For example, a dominant person might push his or her opinion on the other participants. That is why the quality of the results depends on the quality of the moderator.

- A session has a small number of participants. If you want to know to what extent people share the same opinions, you should perform quantitative research, such as by using questionnaires.

## Tips & Concerns

- Start with general topics, for example product usage and experience, so that participants get into the right context before asking opinions or presenting new concepts.
- When testing one or more concepts with consumers, the presentation of these concepts is crucial.
- The concepts should be clear, so start by asking participants whether they have questions before asking about their reactions.
- Carefully plan how much time to allocate to each topic in order to avoid having to rush through the topics at the end of the session, which are often the most important ones.
- In your report, illustrate the findings with verbatim quotes from the participants – this makes the outcomes engaging.

**REFERENCES & FURTHER READING:** Bruseberga, A. and McDonagh-Philp, D., 2001. *Focus groups to support the industrial/product designer: a review based on current literature and designers' feedback*. Applied Ergonomics, 1 Augustus, 33(1), pp. 27-38. / Creusen, M.E.H., Hultink, E.J. and Eling, K., 2013. *Choice of consumer research methods in the front end of new product development*. International Journal of Market Research, January, 55(1), pp. 81-104. / Malhotra, N.K. and Birks, D.F., 2000. *Marketing Research: An Applied Approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Ltd.