

Group Interview:

Ten Texts on Group Interviews

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Introduction:

In the field of group interviewing it is possible to distinguish between two traditions: On one hand, the German "group discussion"; and on the other hand, the Anglosaxon focus group interview".

Group Discussion (Gruppendiskussionsverfahren):

Group Discussion Research originated with Mangold (1960 & 1973) & Pollock's (1955) studies in opinions and attitudes from the 1950's at The Frankfurt Institute of Social Science. This method of group discussion was based on a criticism of the prevalent methods of interviewing. The central idea is: The interactive stimulation that is found in the movement of a discussion is the common ground of the dialogue. This argument is supported by the higher proximity of reality in the situation of a discussion and the spontaneity of the expression (Flick et al. 1991:186).

Focus Group Interview:

The first studies of Focus Group Interviews were done by Robert Merton and Patricia Kendalls in their analysis of propoganda and their research in communication during 1940's and 1950's. Characteristic of this interview method is a focus on a defined topic. It can be a film, a newspaper article, or a social situation. In a relatively open-ended interview the researcher tries to generate information from the reactions and interpretations of the group. The use of the Focus Group Interview can specially be found in the area of marketing and advertising research.

Group Discussion:

Dreher, M. & Dreher, E. (1982). Gruppendiskussion. In: G. L. Huber & H. Mandl (Eds.). Verbal Daten: Eine Einföhrung in die Grundfagen und Methoden der Erhebung und Auswertung. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag (pp. 141-164).

The authors present the method of group discussion as an instrument of research and analysis in the study of the strategies of the individual: how the subject plans, constructs, and legitimatizes its practice and reality.

The article focuses on the concept of discussion. The argumentation, interchange, reasoning, and estimation of a discussion create clarification of a topic. The authors argue that it is the same procedure that the subject "uses" in its interpretation of reality.

Flick, U. et al. (1990). Handbuch Qualitative Socialforschung. München: Psychologie Verlags Union.

This is an interdisciplinary handbook in qualitative research of more than 500 pages. The handbook is a most comprehensive presentation

of qualitative research in the social sciences, and it covers both the German and the Anglosaxon language domains.

It has two chapters on the history and the theoretical development of Group Interview. One of these chapters (Dreher & Dreher, kap. 6.1.3., s. 186-188) details the German Group Discussion - and the other (Horf, C., kap. 6.1.1., s. 178-179) details the Anglosaxon Focus Group Interviewing (Fokusiertes Interview).

The last section of the book contains samples of various applications of group interviewing: Analyses of working conditions, organizational research and diagnosis, and youth studies.

Krüger, H. (1983). Gruppendiskussionen: Überlegungen zur Rekonstruktion sozialer Wirklichkeit aus der Sicht der Betroffenen. Soziale Welt, 34, 90-109.

In this article the author debates the legitimation of the group discussion method. Within the method of group discussion, he argues that it is possible to capture the comparative experience of the participants and their shared interests. The subject can be analysis of group members' life worlds. As a method the Group Discussion continues to be unspecific and often subordinated, he concludes.

Lamnek, S. (1988/1989). Qualitative Sozialforschung. Band 1: Methodologie (1988). Band 2: Methoden und Techniken (1989). München: Psychologie Verlags Union.

In two volumes the author makes a complete summary of the field of qualitative social research. Volume 1 focuses on the theoretical (methodological) basis of qualitative research. In volume 2, methods, techniques, and practical uses of the qualitative research are presented.

Volume 2 contains a thorough chapter on group discussion that goes through topics such as the history of group discussion, definition of the concept, demarcation from other adjoining methods, the idea of group discussion, and the technical basis of the method.

The book is comprehensible and designed for use as an American textbook.

Peukert, R. & Behnken (1984). Gesprächshermeneutik. Gruppendiskussion als Methode zur Rekonstruktion der Lebenswelt von Lehrlingen, Volume 1-4. Frankfurt: Extrabuch.

The four volumes are the result of a five years' research where the group discussion method was used to reconstruct the life world of apprentices. Volumes 1 & 4 covers the theoretical aspects of group discussion. Volumes 2 & 3 mainly contain an evaluation of the method of research on the life world of apprentices.

The reader is introduced to the method of dialogic hermeneutic (Gesprächshermeneutik). The method is used to reconstruct and interpret the spoken language that arises from the practice and interactive structures of a group. The text of the dialogue is split up into single acts of dialogue. The analysis of the dialogue is compared with the analysis of the conversation, analysis of the narrative and analysis of the speech.

Focus Group Interview:

Advertising Research Foundation (1985). Focus Groups: Issues and Approaches. New York: Author.

This short document of 30 pages reviews many of the practical problems encountered in conducting and evaluating focus group studies: Important areas of sample size and composition, recruiting, conducting the interviews, and analyzing and reporting the results.

This guide emphasizes the practical aspect, and it shows how some common and very bothersome problems can be handled or avoided.

Goldman, A. E. & McDonald; S. S. (1987). *The Group Depth Interview: Principles and Practices*. Englewood Cliffs, New YJersey: Prentice-Hall.
Greenbaum, T. L. (1987). *The Practical Handbook and Guide to Focus Group Research*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

As the title implies this book is a practical guide and handbook to focus group research. It gives a brief research overview and an introduction to the Focus Group Interview.

The main part of this book focuses on the specific procedures of Focus Group Research: preparing for the focus group session; group composition; estimating the cost elements; ethics of focus group research; and focus groups with children.

Krueger, Richard A. (1988). *Focus Groups: A Practical guide for Applied Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

This is a practical guide that incorporates research from both social sciences and marketing research. The author gives advice on conducting focus group interviews, with clear descriptions of the technical aspects of successful focus groups and many common-sense suggestions for application. Particular attention is placed on the uses of focus group interviewing for non-profit organizations.

An overview highlights distinctions between the focus group procedure and other seemingly similar research procedures, Krueger introduces the concepts of planning, questionning, moderating, and analyzing focus group interviews. He includes examples of focus group questions, letters of invitation, screening questionnaires, and analysis tips as well as actual focus group reports.

The book includes an extensive list of references.

Morgan, David L. (1988). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research: Qualitative Research Methods Vol. 16*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

This volume describes a variety of applications for Focus Groups Research in the social sciences, pointing out its potential as a self-contained means of collecting data and as a supplement to other research methods, both qualitative and quantitative.

The author compares the focus group to more common qualitative techniques - such as individual interviewing and participant observation - stressing the advantages and weaknesses of each. He presents a thorough treatment of practical issues of planning and running a focus group and suggests ways that research can be designed around the technique. The volume concludes with a look at the potential contributions of focus groups in qualitative research.