

# Research Design: Exploratory Research

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# Exploratory Research

- The discovery of ideas and insights. Exploratory research usually results when someone says, "We're not meeting our objectives. What's wrong?" Exploratory research will be used to find the most likely explanations regarding some observed problem. This type of research is often used for:
  - Formulating a problems for more precise investigation
  - Discovering new ideas
  - Developing hypotheses
  - Establishing priorities for further research
  - Screening of alternatives
  - Increasing the analyst's familiarity with the problem area
  - Clarifying concepts

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# Types of Exploratory Research

- Case studies
- Literature search
- Pilot studies
- Experience interviews
- In-Depth Interviews
- Focus Groups

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## An Exploratory Research Tool: Projective Techniques

- Projective techniques are unstructured and indirect forms of questioning that encourage respondents to project their underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, or feelings regarding the issues of concern.

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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Association Techniques

- **Word Association:** Subjects are read a list of words or phrases and asked to respond with the first thing that comes to mind in order to look for hidden meanings and associations

Word	Ms. M	Ms. C
washday	everyday	ironing
fresh	and sweet	clean
pure	air	soiled
scrub	don't; husband does	clean
filth	this neighborhood	dirt
bubbles	bath	soap and water
family	squabbles	children
towels	dirty	wash

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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Completion techniques

- **Sentence completion:** Respondents given incomplete sentences and asked to complete in their own words in the hopes that hidden thoughts/feelings will be revealed

If Wal-Mart were a car it would be a \_\_\_\_\_

Wal-Mart shoppers are \_\_\_\_\_

If I asked my friend to go shopping at Wal-Mart, they would say \_\_\_\_\_

Compared to Target, Wal-Mart is \_\_\_\_\_

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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Completion techniques

- **Story completion:** Respondents are provided a scenario and asked to complete it.

It has been a very long day. Between classes and meetings, I did not have time to take a break at all. It is now 5:30 and I have just arrived home at my apartment. I just realized that I haven't eaten all day and am starving. I found a package of Chicken & Mushroom flavored Ramen Noodles and decide to heat it up in the microwave. The noodles are ready to go. As I sit down at the kitchen table and pick up a fork to eat what is in front of me.....

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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Construction Techniques

- **Cartoon (or balloon) Tests:** Subjects are given a cartoon drawing (typically presented in a vague manner) and asked to suggest the dialogue in an attempt to identify a person's latent feelings about what is being portrayed.



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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Construction Techniques

- **Picture Tests:** Subjects are given a picture and instructed to describe their reactions by writing a short narrative story about the picture.



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# Types of Projective Techniques

## ■ Construction Techniques

- **Thematic Apperception Tests (TAT):** Subjects are presented with a series of pictures and asked to provide a description of or a story about the pictures.



- A twist on the TAT:
  - Ask subjects to draw cartoons and write about the subject of interest
  - Example: Roach Killer ...

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**The Mind of a Roach Killer**

The McCann-Erickson ad agency asked women to draw and describe how they felt about roaches. The agency concluded from the drawings that the women identified the roaches with men who had abandoned them and thus enjoyed watching the roach-killers squirm and die. That's why, the agency figured, that women prefer spray roach killers to products that don't allow the user to see the roach die.

**"ONE NIGHT"** I just couldn't take the horror of those huge roaches crawling on the dark. They are always crawling when you can't see them. I had to do something. I thought wouldn't it be wonderful if when I switched on the light the roaches would stretch up and die like mosquitoes in sunlight. Oh I did, but they just all scattered. But I was ready with my spray as it was in a split sec. I got under it. Yes, sometimes tomorrow night when night time falls.

**"I TIPTOEED** quietly into the kitchen perhaps he wasn't asleep, I assumed. He sprang up in the light. I hoped he'd be alone when the light went on. Perhaps he'd be sitting on the table I thought. You think that's impossible? Nothing is impossible with that guy. He might not even be alone. He'll even when the light goes on I thought. But what's worse is for him to whip out of sight. No, it would be better to confront him before he takes control and... (under a companion)"

**"A MAN LIKES** a few more you could for him, as long as there is food he will stay."

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# Types of Projective Techniques

## ■ Expressive Techniques

- **Role Playing:** Subject is asked to act out someone else's behavior in a specified setting.

A customer is trying to return an item and does not have a receipt. The customer insists on a cash refund but store policy clearly states that all returns must be accompanied by a receipt. The store manager is only permitted to allow store credit in these circumstances. The customer is irate. What would you do if you were the store manager in this situation?

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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Expressive Techniques

- **Third-Person Technique:** Subject is asked to verbalize how a third person (such as a neighbor or friend) would react to a specific question.

#### What Will the Neighbors Say?

A study was performed for a commercial airline to understand why some people do not fly. When the respondents were asked, "Are you afraid to fly?" very few people said yes. The major reasons given for not flying were cost, inconvenience, and delays caused by bad weather. However, it was suspected that the answers were heavily influenced by the need to give socially desirable responses. Therefore, a follow-up study was done. In the second study, the respondents were asked, "Do you think your neighbor is afraid to fly?" The answers indicated that most of the neighbors who traveled by some other means of transportation were afraid to fly.

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## Types of Projective Techniques

### ■ Another twist - Shopping Lists -- Ask respondents about the type of person who would buy a particular group of products

- An example: Instant Coffee in the 50s. Two women are depicted with having identical shopping lists with the exception that 1 had instant coffee on her list and the other had regular brew coffee. Can you guess how the woman who purchased the instant coffee was viewed as compared to the one who bought the coffee that had to be percolated?

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## Projective Techniques

### ■ Advantages

- They help probe consumer motivations by enabling a subject to project their own psychological material in a non-threatening way
- May stimulate greater creativity
- Greater elicitation of responses

### ■ Disadvantages

- Subjectivity/Interpretation bias
- Rely on analytical expertise/background of researcher (need highly trained interviewers)
- Unusual behavior may not be reflective of a person's normal personality or motivations
- the psychological material uncovered may or may not be related to the topic or to the person

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## In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

- Depth interviews, also known as Individual Depth Interviews (IDIs) or One-on-Ones, is an unstructured, direct personal interview in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings on a topic.
- **General Characteristics**
  - Individual Interviews
  - Intended to provide depth of understanding to uncover motivations, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, etc.
  - Typically 30 minutes to 1 hour in length
  - Unstructured format dependent on response
  - Probing is critical

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## IDIs

- **Traditional**
- **Symbolic Analysis**
  - The symbolic meaning of an object is analyzed by comparing them to their opposites. The logical opposites of a product that are investigated are: non-usage of the product, attributes of an imaginary "non-product," and opposite types of products.

"What would it be like if you could no longer use airplanes?"

↓

"Without planes, I would have to rely on letters and long distance calls."

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Airlines sell to the managers face-to-face communication.

Advertising theme: The airline will do the same thing for a manager as Federal Express does for a package.

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## IDIs

- **Hidden Issue Questioning:** the focus is not on socially shared values but rather on "sore spots"; not on general lifestyles but on deeply felt personal concerns.
- fantasies, work lives, and social lives
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- historic, elite, "masculine-camaraderie," competitive activities
- Advertising theme: communicate aggressiveness, high status, and competitive heritage of the airline.

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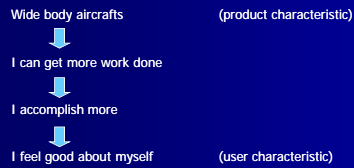
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## IDIs

- Laddering: the line of questioning proceeds from product characteristics to user characteristics. This technique allows the researcher to tap into the consumer's network of meanings.



Advertising theme: You will feel good about yourself when flying our airline. "You're The Boss."

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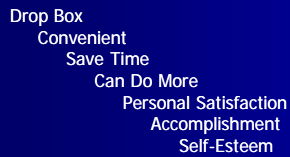
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## Another Laddering Example

- Here is a typical chain or ladder obtained from a secretary discussing why she would prefer to use an overnight package delivery service that has drop boxes available:



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## IDI's

### ■ Advantages

- Increased depth
- Fewer inhibitions
- Eliminates peer pressure
- Specific competitive situations

### ■ Disadvantages

- Cost
- Time
- Less client involvement
- Interviewer errors
- Lack of generalizability

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## Focus Groups

### ■ General Characteristics

- Multiple Respondents
- Group Interaction
- Group Moderation/Facilitation
- Discussion Guide Rather than a Questionnaire
- Homogeneous group composition of prescreened respondents
- Group Size of 6 to 12 participants
- Typically 1 to 2 hours in length

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## Uses of Focus Groups

- To generate hypotheses that can be further tested quantitatively
- To generate information helpful in structuring questionnaires
- To provide overall background information on a product category
- To get impressions on new product concepts for which there is little information available
- To stimulate new ideas about older products
- To generate ideas for new creative concepts
- To interpret previously obtained quantitative results

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## Types of Focus Groups

<http://www.marketingpower.com/webcast347.php>

- Traditional group
- Dual-moderator group: two moderators (traditional or dueling moderators)
- Two-way group: one focus group watches another focus group and discusses what is learned (e.g. a focus group of physicians viewed a focus group of arthritis patients discussing the treatment they desired)
- Client-participant group: one or more client representatives participate in the discussion
- Respondent-moderator group: moderator asks selected participants to play the role of moderator temporarily to improve group dynamics
- Mini group
- Videoconference group
- Telesession/telephone group
- Online group

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## Focus Group Advantages

- **Synergism:** The combined effect of the group will produce a wider range of information, insight, and ideas than if the participants had been interviewed separately.
- **Snowballing:** A bandwagon effect often operates in a group interview situation - a comment by one individual often triggers a chain of responses from others.
- **Stimulation:** Usually after a brief introductory period the respondents get "turned on" in that they want to express their ideas and expose their feelings.
- **Security:** The participants can usually find comfort in the group in that their feelings are not greatly different from the other participants.
- **Spontaneity:** Since individuals aren't required to answer any given question in a group interview, their responses can be more spontaneous and less conventional, and should provide a more accurate picture of their position on some issues.
- **Serendipity:** It is more often the case in a group rather than individual interview that some idea will "drop out of the blue."
- **Specialization:** The group interview allows the use of a more highly trained interviewer since a number of individuals are being "interviewed" simultaneously.
- **Scientific scrutiny:** The group interview allows several observers to witness the session and it can be recorded for later playback and analysis.
- **Structure:** The group interview affords more flexibility than the individual interview with regard to the topics covered and depth with which they are treated.
- **Speed:** Since a number of individuals are being interviewed at the same time, the group interview speeds up the data collection and analysis process.

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## Focus Group Disadvantages

- **Misuse:** Focus groups can be misused and abused by considering the results as conclusive rather than exploratory.
- **Misjudge:** Focus group results can be more easily misjudged than the results of other data collection techniques. Focus groups are particularly susceptible to client and researcher biases.
- **Moderation:** Focus groups are difficult to moderate. Moderators with all of the desirable skills are rare. The quality of the results depends heavily on the skills of the moderator.
- **Messy:** The unstructured nature of the responses makes coding, analysis and interpretation difficult. Focus group data tend to be messy.
- **Misinterpretation:** Focus group results are not necessarily representative of the general population and are not statistically projectable. Consequently, focus group results should not be the sole basis for decision making.
- **Money:** Focus groups can be expensive on a per participant basis.

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## The Focus Group Process

- **Defining the Parameters – the Planning Phase**
  - How many groups?
  - How many participants per group?
  - Where will/should the groups be held?
  - What should be the composition of each group (screening requirements)?
  - What stimuli (if any) should be used to elicit responses?
  - What incentives should be offered?

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## The Focus Group Process

- Conducting the Focus Groups
  - The moderator is key
  - The moderator's guide that outlines the topics, questions and prompts must be developed
  - The session itself
    - Warm-Up
    - Main Topics
    - Close
    - Behind the Mirror
    - Issues During the Group

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## The Moderator's Role

- To "elicit" inputs
- To work with the "assembled group"
- To "achieve the objectives of the client"
- To keep the session "on track"
- To handle situations where participants are only giving "yes" "no" responses
- To change directions when the subject is "dead"
- To wrap-up effectively

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## Moderator Qualifications

- **Kindness with firmness:** In order to elicit the necessary interaction, the moderator must combine a disciplined detachment with an empathic understanding.
- **Permissiveness:** While an atmosphere of permissiveness is desirable, the moderator must be at all times alert to indications that the group atmosphere of cordiality is disintegrating.
- **Involvement:** Since a principal reason for the group interview is to expose feelings and to obtain reactions indicative of deeper feelings, the moderator must encourage and stimulate intensive personal involvement.
- **Incomplete Understanding:** A most useful skill of the moderator is his or her ability to convey a lack of complete understanding of the information being presented.
- **Encouragement:** Although the dynamics of the group situation facilitate the participation of all members in the interaction, there may be individuals who resist contributing.
- **Flexibility:** The moderator should be equipped, prior to the session, with a topic outline of the subject matter to be covered. By committing the topics to memory before the interview, the moderator may use the outline only as a reminder of content areas omitted or covered incompletely.
- **Sensitivity:** The moderator must be able to identify, as the group interview progresses, the information level on which it is being conducted, and determine if it is appropriate for the subject under discussion. Sensitive areas will frequently produce superficial rather than depth responses. Indication of depth are provided when participants begin to indicate how they feel about the subject, rather than what they think about it.

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## Moderator Problems

- Leading rather than guiding
- Being too knowledgeable
- Trying to be a comedian/becoming the focus of the group
- Being a poor listener
- Being too rigid with the moderator guide
- Not relating well to the people in the group
- Being too naive about the subject of the focus group
- Focusing on individuals rather than the group
- Alienating a group member

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## The Moderator's Guide

- Importance of the Moderator's Guide
  - Allows moderator & client to agree on the content of the focus groups
  - Specifies what data will be collected
  - Provides an outline of the report
- Length & Content
  - Typically 3-5 pages
  - Outline of introductory remarks
  - Outline of questions and probes

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## Issues During the Groups

- Facility Problems
  - Noise
  - Audio/Video recording
- Content Problems
  - Confusing concept
  - Dead subject
  - Lively subject
- Participant Problems
  - Talkative participant
  - Opinionated member
  - Silent member
  - Improperly screened participant
- Problems with Group Dynamics
  - Perceived experts
  - Having only one participant with a specific point of view
  - Offering negative as well as positive feedback

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## The Focus Group Process

### ■ Analyzing and Reporting the Results

- The debriefing session
- Transcripts
- Review of video recordings
- Analyzing the patterns
- Writing the report

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## Final Thoughts: Focus Groups

- Focus groups can be one valuable part of a research program when used correctly
- Focus groups are often used inappropriately
- Focus groups should not be used to make major decisions but only as one step in the process
- Focus groups are not an inexpensive way to answer research questions
- Clients must prepare for focus groups to obtain valuable results
- The moderator is the most important element in gathering good useful data
- There is no substitute for client attendance at focus group sessions
- Focus groups with children require different moderator skills
- The demand for focus groups is increasing and the quality of focus groups is improving

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