

OPTIMIZING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



Because qualitative research allows you to understand how to most effectively target your consumers for optimal business results, it is the key to unlocking reasons behind consumers' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

With the cost of research today you always want to ensure that you are getting the maximum information from your qualitative research. Qualitative research lends itself to a rich insight into the lives and minds of consumers. There are three easy things you can do today to ensure that the research is prepared and executed flawlessly for the best information and most powerful takeaways. They are:

- 1 Getting on the same page with your team and moderator,
- 2 Preparing your back room listening team,
- 3 Debriefing.



GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

The first step towards optimizing qualitative research is getting everyone on the same page before the research even takes place. This begins with setting very clear objectives. The moderator uses these objectives to prepare a discussion guide which will elicit the information needed.

Once a discussion guide draft is prepared, all participants involved should review it in enough time for any required changes to be incorporated. This ensures that the moderator

has enough time to review and rehearse the guide in advance. A prepared moderator produces effective research.

All parties should plan to meet at least one hour before the first group to review any stimulus and the final guide, and to address any last minute questions.

Furthermore, at least thirty minutes should be scheduled between each group so that the guide can be nuanced, insights can be recorded, and the moderator and listening team can take bio breaks. Sufficient breaks between groups give the research a calmer and more relaxed pace; the listening team and moderator are able to think clearly, and the information is more easily drawn out and absorbed.

By getting on the same page before groups begin, the discussion guide, listening team, and moderator are best prepared to meet the research objectives.



PREPARING THE BACK ROOM FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

As moderators, we are often surprised when members of the listening team request a follow-up question that has already been answered within the context of the group. With internet availability, emails, food, drinks, and peers, a back room can quite easily turn a learning opportunity into a social event. To that end, a powerful and effective listening team can and should be created so all members involved fully benefit from the discussion during the group.

Preparation is key.

The moderator or person in charge of the research should lead the team in a quick brainstorming session to chart what needs to happen in the back room in order for all to hear what the consumers are saying. Listed below are some items that should always be on that list.

Name the point person.


This is usually the person in charge of the research or someone else connected to the project. It is this person's responsibility to act as the listening team's captain and is responsible for funneling and passing questions to the moderator and providing control in the backroom. This person becomes increasingly important as the listening team becomes larger because a moderator cannot field questions from a large number of people at the same time.

No conversation.

Conversation in the room can make it difficult for others to listen to the discussion and turns team members into talkers rather than listeners. If conversation is necessary, listening team members can move to another room.

No bashing the consumer!

Every consumer has something to offer to the discussion. Bashing consumers can cause the listening team to discount that consumer and the nuggets of insights that person can provide.



No laptop use except for note taking

Internet and email can tempt a listening team member away from the discussion; if the listening team spends time reviewing emails or surfing the internet instead of listening, they are bound to miss key insights.

The guidelines should be displayed in the backroom to remind the listening team of the expected behaviors and to prepare those who join after the groups have begun. The point person should direct late arrivals to review the plan before joining the listening team.

By discussing the listening guidelines ahead of time, team members commit to behavior that is required to help them become better listeners. This process also provides an easy fix for problems that arise when listening team members engage in activities that hinder listening; the point person simply directs those individuals to the guidelines to keep them on track.

By preparing the backroom before the groups begin, the listening team can and will become a vital part to understanding your consumer.



COMPLETELY DEBRIEFING FOR NEXT STEPS

After a long day of research, the listening team and moderator are usually tired and ready to pack up and go home; however, the last critical step to optimizing your qualitative research still lies ahead: the debrief.

Debriefing is essential, and all listening team members should attend. During the debrief, the moderator leads the team through the different areas of the focus group discussion, and team members are able to share their insights and learnings. During this time, team members gain alignment with one another. They connect and build their insights and learnings into the day's key takeaways.

This debrief step is important because it lends more credibility and depth to the learnings which are then incorporated into the report summary. An aligned listening team makes the final report much richer and more actionable.

When time and travel prevent group debriefing, there's an easy way to capture key learnings and insights from each session. Simply hang chart pad pages, labeled with specific areas of discussion, around the backroom and make sure each listener is armed with post-its and pens in order to capture their learnings. At the end of each group or interview, the listening team members should place their insights onto the appropriate chart.

By getting on the same page before the research begins, preparing the back room for effective listening, and completely debriefing the groups, you'll get the most of your qualitative research experience.