

Focus group exercise

Our aim is to have as many students as possible facilitate a focus group. If you are one of those students who may not get a turn as a facilitator, please try to ensure that you do get a turn as an observer.

Facilitating a focus group requires a discussion guide, similar to the interview schedule we have developed previously. However, a discussion guide for a focus group on a particular subject may look different to an interview schedule in terms of its content. This is because your task as a facilitator is to facilitate a conversation among a group of people rather than to get one person talking. It is quite likely, for example, that you will need fewer questions and prompts for a given length of time.

1. You should have at least one idea for some possible research for the BAM201 assessment. You may use this as the basis for developing a discussion guide or a focus group.
2. Or you might like to use one of the following:
 - a. attitudes to supermarket shopping (eg you might ask do supermarkets do a good job?)
 - b. buying on impulse
 - c. understanding of fair trade
 - d. shoplifting
 - e. money management
 - f. a topic of your own choice
3. Everyone should have a discussion guide. Work in groups of seven to ten. One of the group should facilitate a focus group discussion using their discussion guide. From the remaining group members you should have at least one observer and no more than six focus group participants. Aim to run the focus group for at least ten minutes (but not more than twenty).
4. Discuss how the focus group went.
 - a. First let the facilitator comment.
 - b. Then let the observer(s) comment.
 - c. Then have a quick general discussion

You could use the six thinking hats to structure your de-brief, or you could use some of Tom Bourner's questions for reflective thinking (see overleaf).

5. Then let another student take the role of facilitator and repeat. Continue running focus groups with different facilitators so that as many students as possible get a turn.

Good luck with the exercise. Take it seriously and you will learn and enjoy doing it.

Questions for reflective thinking

Tom Bourner has written that:

"it is as possible to review an experience unreflectively as it is to read a book uncritically... What distinguishes reflective thinking about an experience from unreflective thinking is the process of interrogating the experiencing with searching questions."

He offers the following questions as tools for reflective thinking.

1. What happened that most surprised you?
2. What patterns can you recognise in your experience?
3. What was the most fulfilling part of it? And the least fulfilling part of it? What does that suggest to you about your values?
4. What happened that contradicted your prior beliefs? What happened that confirmed your prior beliefs?
5. How do you feel about that experience now compared with how you felt about it at the time?
6. What does the experience suggest to you about your strengths?
7. What does the experience suggest to you about your weaknesses and opportunities for development?
8. How else could you view that experience?
9. What did you learn from that experience about how you react?
10. What other options did you have at the time?
11. Is there anything about the experience that was familiar to you?
12. What might you do differently as a result of that experience and your reflections on it? What actions do your reflections lead you to?

Reference:

Bourner, T. (2003) "Assessing reflective learning" *Education and Training* Vol 45 No. 5 pp267-272