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Collecting Group Data: Nominal Group Technique

The nominal group technique (NGT) is a widely used small group process technique whose purpose is to produce a large number of ideas in a relatively short period of time.

It encourages contributions from everyone by allowing for equal participation among group members. A question is posed to the group. Individually and silently, each participant writes down his/her ideas. In round robin fashion, each member supplies an idea until all ideas are shared. Generally, six to 10 people participate. "Nominal" means that the participants form a group in name only. For most of the session, they do not interact as they would in other group processes.

The nominal group technique is used:

- To generate many, creative ideas
- To ensure everyone is heard
- When there is concern that some people may not be vocal
- To build consensus
- When there is controversy or conflict

Preparation and Supplies

Formulate discussion question. Ensure that wording prevents misunderstanding and is objective.

Supplies needed include:

- Flip chart for each table
- Masking tape
- 3x5 cards for each participant
- Work tables
- Felt pens

Group is divided into small work groups of five to nine members, each with a leader. A flip chart and markers are needed at each table. Position the flip chart so that all can see the ideas.

Procedure

1. *Introduction*: Briefly welcome participants, clarify the purpose of the group exercise and explain the procedure to be followed and how results are to be used.

2. *Present question*: Present verbally the question that is written on the flip chart – clarify as needed.

3. *Silent generation of ideas*: Each participant silently thinks of and writes down (on 3x5 card) as many ideas as possible. Allow five to 10 minutes.

4. *Record ideas*: In turn, each participant reads aloud one idea and it is recorded on the flip chart for all to see.

   - Continue until all ideas are depleted.
   - Discourage discussion, not even questions for clarification.
   - Encourage "hitchhiking," i.e., expanding upon another's statement. Ideas do not have to be from the participant's written list.
   - Participant may pass a turn and then add an idea at a subsequent turn.
   - Discourage combining ideas from individuals unless they are exactly the same.

5. *Group discussion*: After all ideas are recorded, the person who suggested the idea is given the opportunity to explain it further.

   - Duplicates may be combined.
   - Wording may be changed if the originator agrees.
   - Ideas are deleted only by unanimous agreement.
   - Restrict discussion to clarify meaning; the value or merit of ideas is not discussed.

The nominal group technique often concludes with a prioritization process. However, generating ideas alone is valuable and is useful in a situational analysis process.

References:

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