

Getting the Critical Facts Using Focus Groups

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The Role of Research

Quantitative:

- Numbers
- Predictability
- Patterns
- Correlation

Qualitative

- Variety
- Possibilities
- Trends before they happen
- Understanding



Why Focus Groups?

- Protection from narrow thinking
- Provides Breadth of Thinking
- Provides Depth of Thinking
- When the numbers give facts but not emotions
- When Persuasion is a goal



Examples

- Web Choice and Colleges
- Brand issues
- Referendum issues
- Surprising strengths
- Surprising weaknesses

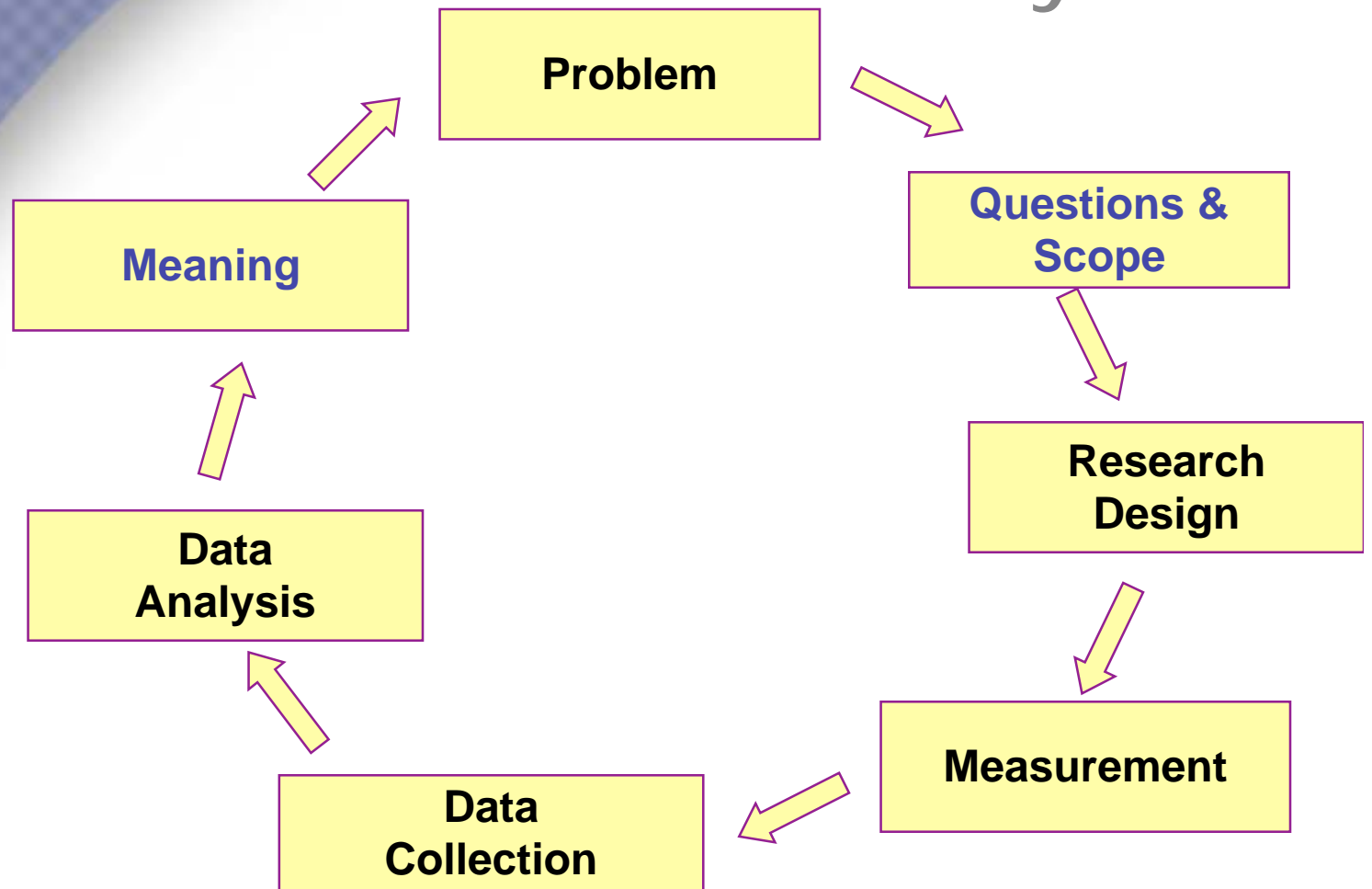


Research

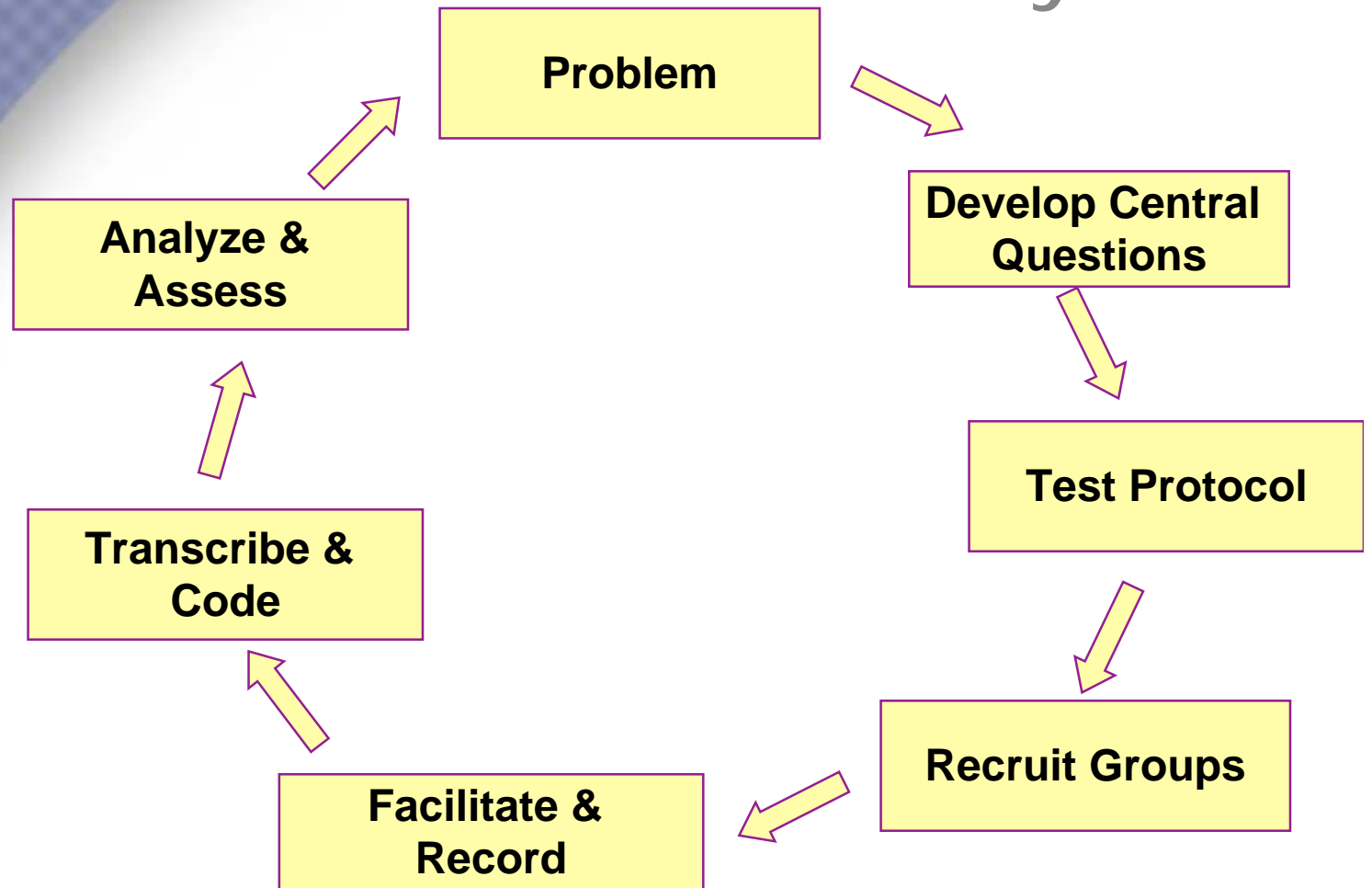
- Quantitative
 - Descriptive
 - Predictive
- Qualitative
 - Meaning
 - Process



Multimethod Research Cycle



Qualitative Research Cycle



(1) Identify Problems

- What is going on under the surface
- What is not know within the organization
- What doesn't make sense
- What don't we understand
- What will surprise and hurt us
- What are people thinking BEFORE and AFTER they act





(2) Create Central Questions

- Create Open ended questions that invite a response + an example
 - “What do you think about....”
 - “Describe for me....”
 - “What are your feelings on the topic of...”
- Develop sub - questions that Probe
 - “What makes you say that?”
 - “When did it change (or begin?)”
 - “Can you give me an example”

Question Goal #1

- Seek Elaboration
 - **Discourages elaboration:** "Did you register for the program to increase your knowledge in the field?"
 - **Encourages elaboration:** "How did you get interested in this program?"



Question Goal #2

- Avoid Bias
 - **Biased:** "This semester you were introduced to state-of-the-art technology through the FAST Tex Program. What is your opinion of the program?"
 - **Better:** "How do you feel about the FAST Tex program?"



Question Goal #3

- Avoid Double-Barreled
 - **Double-barreled:** "How did using Blackboard and the Classroom Performance System help you learn the material in this course?"
 - **Better:** "How did using Blackboard help you learn the material in this course?" "How did using the Classroom Performance System help you learn the material in this course?"



(3) Test Protocol

- The flow of questions and the timing
- Use a group of peripheral individuals with similar demographics
- Look for “showstoppers”
- Look for “duh”
- Look for time and flow



(4) Recruit Groups

- PEOPLE
 - General Rules: 20 to 10
 - When to Feed, Pay, and Give Freebies
 - Time: Old / Young / Working
 - Who Recruits?
- LOCATION
 - Internal Groups - On Campus
 - External Groups - Access and Bias



(5) Facilitate & Record

- Facilitating is Chemistry
 - Explain who your organization is and the purpose of the study
 - Invite people to a "discussion" or to "share their views" rather than to a "focus group,"
 - Stress the value of the study, the importance of their opinions, and how you will use the information.



The Facilitator

- Knowledgeable
- Enthusiastic
- Structuring
- Clear
- Approachable
- Gentle
- Sensitive
- Open and flexible
- Steering (But not Biased)
- Remembering and integrating



The Setting

- Around a Table
- Light Snack
- Audio Record (with Permission)
- Video Record (rarely)
- Notepads and Pens
- Match the setting to the topic
 - Conference = Business
 - Living room = Personal



(6) Transcribe & Code

- Verbatim
- Chunk
- Coding Categories
 - By Question
 - By Content
 - By Time
- Consistent Coding/Coders
- Software Coding (Nudist, etc.)



(7) Analyze & Assess

- Content Analysis: Categories & Themes
- Examining the narrative
- Frequency and Vehemence
- Cross-group consistency
- Long lasting stories
- Loudness of Voices
- Emotional Involvement



What Focus Groups Give You

- New Directions
- New Solutions
- Deeper Understanding
- Issues in Context
- Emotional Content



What Focus Groups Don't Give You

- How Serious
- How Widely held
- How deeply held
- Predictability



When to Use it

- Branding
- Referenda
- Enrollment Issues
- Open New Program
- Close Old Program
- Development



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