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QUALITATIVE
MIND

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Professional Training

Contents

The Importance of the Introduction

Imagine you walk into a meeting of strangers, and you are late.

How will you know how to behave?

When should you speak?

What are the rules by which the group works?

You will be socially anxious until you work all these things out.

The introduction given by the interviewer/moderator is a powerful communication that enables the moderator to:

- dissipate some respondent anxieties;
- start the forming process;
- establish norms and expectations for the group session. This allows the group to develop the required amount of creativity, seriousness, personal disclosure – whatever the subject matter requires.

 It also works against the forces that lead to *conformity and groupthink* and starts to equalise power structures in the group – while retaining a measure of control for the moderator to deal with possible disruption later.

The introduction is particularly powerful because at the start of the group process respondents are anxious and dependent on the moderator. The moderator's approach can make an impact more easily and set the tone for the rest of the group.

This applies particularly to groups but its very much the same for individuals in depth interviews. Especially since the respondent does not have a group in which to hide.

Respondents arrive at the venue with a load of 'emotional baggage' – their concerns of the day, as well as issues about how they will fit in with the group and deal with the unknown tasks they are about to face. Examples of typical respondent concerns include:

- Will I say the right things?
- What if I'm asked something I don't know?
- Will I make a fool of myself?
- What are they really trying to get at?
- Will I get someone into trouble?
- What if everyone else is cleverer than I am?
- Will I fit in?

The introduction is helpful for the moderator too; by having something straightforward to say, the moderator can allay some of his or her anxieties.

Examples of typical moderator concerns include:

- Will I look as if I haven't done it before?
- What if they are all awful? I can't control them
- What if they won't talk? Or one talks too much....
- Will they understand what I'm asking them?
- What if I dry up? What will the clients say?
- What if they don't like me? If they get angry?

Introductions move emotional baggage out of the way.

The power of a good introduction

The very first impression you create matters. Aim for warm and competent.
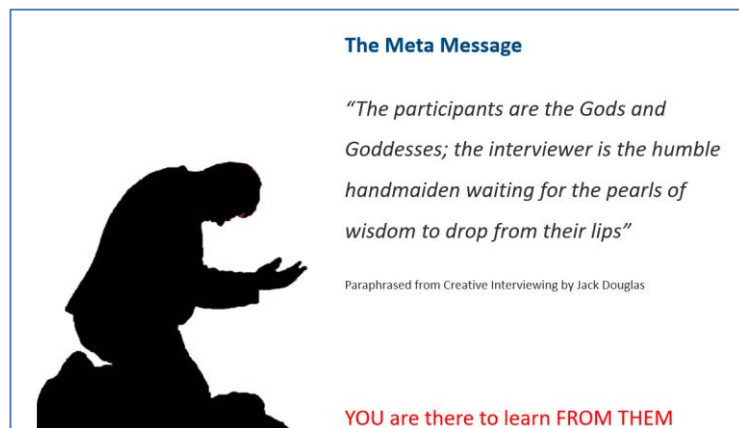
Be confident in what you say, smile, use humour (if appropriate)

And send a message that the respondent/s is/are the most important people in the room.

What do people subconsciously think when they meet someone new?

According to Fiske et al[1], the very first judgment is an evolutionarily based one: is this person a friend or foe? There are two dimensions:

1. Warmth – degree of friendliness indicating their intentions.
2. Competence – how able are they to enact those intentions?

The Meta Message

"The participants are the Gods and Goddesses; the interviewer is the humble handmaiden waiting for the pearls of wisdom to drop from their lips"

Paraphrased from Creative Interviewing by Jack Douglas

YOU are there to learn FROM THEM

At the start, there is always a power imbalance. The interviewer has knowledge power – knowing what will happen. The respondent does not, so they will listen very carefully. The introduction is more than just a warmup and exchange of information:

Write your introduction in bullet points so you can easily adapt it for different people. Remember that the way you say it almost as important as what you say.

- It's an explicit and implicit 'contract'. You agree to reward the respondent; they agree to give you information.
- The structure & form of the introduction reassures about content and expected behaviour. The way you deliver the introduction and the language you use indicates the degree of formality, the acceptability of jokes and other verbal behaviour.
- You can set up expectations of exercises and other tasks, so they do not come as a surprise.

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[1] Universal dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence Susan T. Fiske, Amy J.C. Cuddy and Peter Glick

- In a group, the introduction explicitly works against consensus: you emphasise you need their personal opinion
- It helps manage potentially difficult respondents. Give yourself permission to interrupt and move people on, if required.
- It gives respondents permission - to disagree, to be silly, to be creative – whatever you need. It sets the tone.
- It sets out obligations to your 'partners in enquiry' – you will keep to time, they don't have to answer, you will keep the information confidential and so on.

And the introduction can be used to repeat the assurances made at recruitment relevant to the <u>Code of Conduct</u> and <u>Data Protection</u>. Some of these are legal obligations and there can be serious repercussions if participants feel their data has been misused.

So, although the researcher's introduction is usually quick and routine, it is still a powerful psychological communication.

*Notice there is a difference between **anonymous** (no names are known by the research team) or **confidential** (names are known but will not be revealed)*

See the video:
https://www.youtube.com
/watch?v=iyEbuWLLiII

Psychology of a good introduction	What you actually say
Sound friendly, warm, and competent	**Welcome and thanks**
Respondents feel more comfortable as they know more	**Introduce yourself, company, explain purpose of research**
It's OK to criticise, you won't hurt anyone's feelings	**Independent researcher***
Feel protected, empowered	**Code of Conduct, anonymity, right to withdraw**
Reason for recording or viewing **	**Your information is very valuable to us, and the detail is useful**
Set expectations of free interaction	**'Chatting' (informal), doing exercises**
It's not a test, researcher is non-judgmental	**No right or wrong answers**
Not others' views or the company message	**Your own personal views matter**
You can relax. The researcher is expert in process management	**Interviewer's job is to ask questions, manage time, move on if necessary**
Set an appropriate tone for the subject	**Be serious / be creative / be collaborative – whatever you need**
Change norms of conversation	**Model the language to be used**
We will look after all your needs	**Housekeeping issues, refreshments, etc.**

*If you can't claim to be an independent researcher, then change the statement to show that you have no direct interest in what is being researched. You didn't design it; you are from a different team –

anything you can honestly say to show you won't be offended if they don't like it.

** According to the Code, clients who are observing must be presented as such. If that knowledge would adversely affect the interview, the respondent may be told at a later stage. If there is a chance the observer and participant may know each other (as in business-to-business research), the participant must be told before the interview and given a chance to withdraw.

If you are doing Business to Business research you may want to emphasise that you are interested in the personal views of the participant as well their role as a representative of the company.

If you are doing groups and suspect that there may be social pressure to agree on certain topics, you can be more explicit:
"I will not be surprised if you have a range of different opinions; its what makes life interesting. Please don't feel you have to agree with each other on all the topics we discuss."

After this introduction, some interviewers ask if there are any questions, then ask the respondent to give some information about themselves.

Respondent's Introductions

Once the interviewer has made his or her introduction, the process continues with the respondents introducing themselves.

The aim of this is to:

In online groups people can write things down on a notepad before they speak.

- get everybody speaking in the first few minutes;
- help people relax and feel comfortable by making it a simple task. Don't ask them to remember more than 3 things, and one of those should be their name!
- set the mood for the group e.g. ask everyone to say something nice that has happened recently;
- allow them to see that they have things in common so you can start the process of forming the group;
- find out some basic things about who is attending the group, household demographics, usership, etc.;

You may also want to give them a task that signals what they will be doing later on in the group e.g. choose a postcard of a place they would like to visit and say why, or reflect what their first day at school or work was like.

Five types of introduction just for starters.....

1. Round the circle, everyone speaks in turn.
2. Moderator picks on people to introduce themselves.
3. Paired introduction – respondents talk in pairs for a few minutes then introduce each other to the rest of the group.
4. Mood changer – if everyone arrives grumpy let them choose from a set of interesting pictures (relevant to the subject) and discuss what interests/pleases them about the pictures.
5. A warm-up game, like the Name Game, Pocket Piece, or Autographs – more often used for workshop style sessions.

Don't forget the value of **pre-tasking** – asking people to bring/show something relevant to the research. It can be straightforward e.g. the most interesting app on their phone, or more metaphorical e.g. an image that represents how they feel on a crowded train, or something that represents how soft they would like their skin to feel.

ALL of these ways of starting a group have benefits and drawbacks, and you should choose carefully depending on the type of group you want to design.

Warm-up   (Forming stage)

Continue with easy and inclusive questions until the members of the group relax and you get a sense the group has 'formed'.

Comment on the similarities between respondents while noting individual differences, e.g.

"It's interesting that nearly everybody here prefers to shop on a weekday evening, apart from a couple of you who have to work late hours."