

Qualities and Role of a Moderator

What makes a good moderator

Business, consultancy and organisational skills

- Understanding the business issue, the objectives and how best to use the research – how to adapt it to the client's needs
- Working with, and guiding clients and users of the research
- Where relevant, an understanding of (consumer) psychology, group dynamics and marketing theory
- Organising the people and processes effectively so the research can go well

Personal qualities and skills

- Empathy and warmth, so as to be able to establish rapport with participants and clients
- Sensitivity to body language and emotional signals
- Creative eliciting skills – and sensitive probing
- Strong listening skills
- Non-judgmental, managing own biases
- Flexibility to adapt to the iterative nature of projects and learning gained
- Not letting your own ego get in the way – and never allowing your own view to surface
- A sense of humour
- Stamina and patience

Knowledge about research

- Understanding how to set up groups and explore topics
- Knowledge of eliciting skills and how to build relationships
- Managing group dynamics, difficult situations and respondents
- Using techniques to help elicit deeper and more relevant information

Analytic and communication skills (for the analysis and reporting phase.) Also being able to tolerate some disorder and 'not knowing' during the fieldwork to avoid jumping to conclusions.

Before the research, you need to organise or check:

- Your understanding of the research objectives – do your homework and be prepared to question and challenge. New angles may appear during the research; you will have to judge if they are relevant
- The scope of the research (so you know what to include or exclude)
- Be clear about the hypotheses you have about the research issue to avoid confirmation bias

Recruiting

- The best sample to tell you what you need (purposive sampling)
- An effective screening process
- Practicalities of venues, spaces, food, incentives and timing
- Any pre-tasks, information about confidentiality, Code of Conduct issues, etc.

What mood and types of relationship you will need to foster

- How will you relate to the different respondent groups?
- Do you need to acknowledge and manage any prejudices or expectations about them?
- What problems and reactions can you anticipate and prepare for?
- What will be the appropriate mood for the research? Serious? Light and entertaining?
- What warm up exercises and interview techniques can you use to manage the mood and the interactions?

Topic Guide

- The clients are satisfied with it
- If they are viewing - do they understand that you need flexibility to manage the process?
- That you have designed a topic guide that helps manage group energy, equalise contributions?
- That the respondents will not be stretched outside their capabilities or competence.
- That you have enough time, space and materials for any projective techniques
- That you have effective stimulus material
- You have aimed to compensate for the lack of context that is a drawback of groups

You can build an atmosphere of trust through your explanation and introduction

- You have set things up so participants are clear about your role, their role and that of the client
- You are there to listen to and value their views
- They are there to contribute in an honest and open manner.

During the research, you are simultaneously:

- Listening
- Thinking (about how what the respondent has said or not said fits with the research objectives, or the ideas you have developed)
- Pulling out potential hypotheses to probe further
- Deciding whether to follow-up, clarify, move on
- Formulating the next question
- Watching the body language
- Taking account of the dynamics of the interview and deciding how to intervene if needed
- Managing the time you have.

Listening

- Actively and attentively – to the music as well as the words (the sub-text)
- In a non-judgmental, empathetic and respectful way – and showing you have heard by summarising well.

Building rapport (and a shared sense of understanding)

- Using their language – avoiding marketing or other jargon
- Giving respondents your full attention and showing you respect them
- Showing that you are interested in understanding his or her perspective
- ‘Mirroring’ or ‘matching’ respondent’s verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

Observing

- Need to be aware of and sensitive to respondents’ body language:
- To interpret what they are saying correctly and pick up on any inconsistencies

Managing yourself

 Think about your role in the interview process, ask:

- What assumptions am I making about the respondents?
- What assumptions am I making about the topic?
- How prepared are you to hear a view different from your own
- How prepared are you to hear something shocking?
- Examine your own feelings, views, prejudices

Managing respondents

- Noticing their levels of energy and patterns of response
- Being proactive in encouraging quiet ones and discouraging dominants
- Addressing times when the group process is stuck or negative
- Using snowballing for key questions for more synergy and serendipity

And of course using a full range of eliciting skills to help delve below the surface attitudes, social desirability posturing and group roles that you will encounter.