Qualitative Research Design:

Selected Articles from *Research Design Review* Published in 2012

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Research Design Review – www.researchdesignreview.com – is an online blog that was first published in November 2009. RDR currently includes over 65 posts concerning quantitative and qualitative research design issues. This paper presents a selection of 10 articles that were published in 2012 devoted to qualitative research design. The goal of this collection, as well as all of the qualitative articles in RDR, is to instill greater awareness of the factors that impact the outcomes of our qualitative research and foster the idea that research designs built around quality standards lead to more credible, analyzable, transparent, and, ultimately, more useful qualitative research.

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Casting a Light Into the Inner Workings of Qualitative Research

December 17, 2012

Research Design Review has discussed the idea of transparency on several occasions. Last month's post, titled "Designing Qualitative Research to Produce Outcomes You Can Use," briefly mentioned the contribution transparency makes to the ultimate usefulness of a qualitative research study emphasizing that full disclosure of the study's details "empowers the reader of the research to make his or her own judgments as to the integrity of the research (Is it good research?) as well as its usefulness in furthering new ideas, next steps, and new applications." The goal of transparency is to provide an audit trail in the final research document that allows the reader to duplicate the research (if that were possible), derive similar conclusions from the data as presented, or apply the research in other contexts. Transparency is important.

Transparency in the final document goes way beyond a simple account of the number and time frame when interviews, groups, or observations were conducted and a rundown of participants' characteristics. In order for clients and other users of the research to ascertain the reliability, validity, and transferability of the outcomes, the researcher's final deliverables need to include details concerning the:

- Researcher's justification and assumptions prior to the fieldwork concerning the sample population, data collection techniques, and expected outcomes;
- Sampling, esp. the determination of the appropriate number of events (interviews, groups, observations) to conduct, the sampling frame and process of participant selection, and the efforts that were made to select a representative sample of the target population, including possible biases or weaknesses in the data due to the lack of representation;
- Decisions that were made while the research was in the field that modified the original research objectives or design elements (e.g., reasons for switching from face-to-face to online mode because of unexpected costs and time delays) and how these decisions may have impacted outcomes;
- Researcher's reflexive journal (a diary of in-the-field feelings, hunches, insights), including a critical account of his/her attitudes and behavior during the research event that may have biased the outcomes;
- Transcription and coding processes; and,
- Steps that were taken to verify the outcomes, such as detailed accounts of peer debriefings, triangulation efforts (e.g., inter-interviewer reliability, "member checking"), and analysis of negative or deviant cases.

Without transparency in our qualitative research designs, how are the buyers and users of our research to know what they are getting? How are they to know if what is being shown as the outcomes is actually worthy of attention, actually true to the research objectives, to the people participating in the research, and to the researcher's conclusions and recommended next steps? By casting a light into the inner workings of our research – from conceptualization to completion – we allow others to see how the pieces of the design connect with each other, including the dips and turns the research took to eventually produce a functioning final result. This is transparency.

Designing Qualitative Research to Produce Outcomes You Can Use

November 29, 2012

A November 2011 post in *Research Design Review* briefly discussed the "Four Components of the Quality Framework for Qualitative Research Design" – Credibility, Transparency, Usefulness, and Analyzability. Of the four, Usefulness is clearly the most important for two obvious reasons. First,

all research – qualitative and quantitative and across all modes – is designed to be used. Our research efforts are meaningless if they don't produce outcomes that actually advance the researcher and the research end-user towards a desired goal and spurs action (to actually *do* something). Whether it is the discovery of new concepts to explore further, a roadmap for next steps, or insights on how to apply the research to similar contexts, any research design worth its weight is utilitarian by nature.

Second, usefulness in qualitative research is important because it is central to the other three framework components. Research that is designed to give useful – *implementable* – results is also one that integrates design features that maximize: the completeness and accuracy of the data (Credibility), the completeness and accuracy of the analysis (Analyzability), as well as the completeness and fullness of disclosure in the final research documents (Transparency). By exploiting Credibility, Analyzability, and Transparency in our qualitative designs, we have fulfilled our promise of providing research that motivates new thinking and lays the groundwork for steps forward.

The relationship between Usefulness and the other components of qualitative design can be considered in association with the three broad phases of research – fieldwork, analysis, and reporting.

Research Phase	Quality Framework Component
Fieldwork ↓	Credibility – Completeness & accuracy of the data ↓
Analysis ↓	Analyzability – Completeness & accuracy of the analysis ↓
Reporting ↓	Transparency – Completeness & full disclosure in the final documents ↓
Final Outcome	Usefulness

Credibility is concerned with the fieldwork or data collection phase when the completeness and accuracy of the interview responses, focus group discussions, or participant observations rely on both the scope of the qualitative research (representativeness of the sample and sample size) as well as the trustworthiness of the measurement (e.g., Were the research questions actually relevant to the objectives? Did the interviewer or moderator verify that the participants understood the questions as intended? What was the role of the researcher and how did the interviewer, moderator, or observer bias the responses?).

The Analyzability of a qualitative research design has to do with the completeness or comprehensiveness of the analysis procedures (e.g., the verification of outcomes via peer debriefings, triangulation, and a review of deviant cases) and the accuracy of data processing, specifically the transcriptions and coding of text responses.

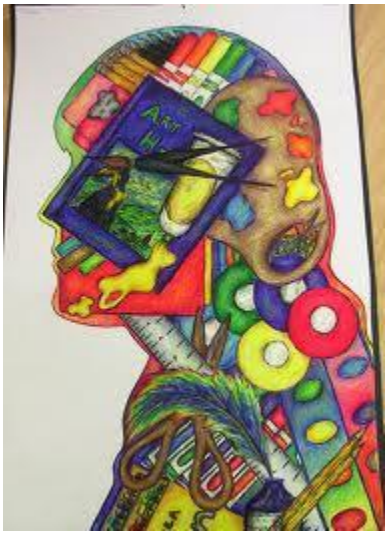
Transparency – or providing in the final document, what some call, "thick description" of every detail related to the data collection and analysis – is critical to the reporting phase of qualitative research design because it empowers the reader of the research to make his or her own judgments as to the integrity of the research (Is it good research?) as well as its usefulness in furthering new ideas, next steps, and new applications.

Our qualitative research should strive to be nothing if not useful. And our research is not useful unless the scope and measurement of our data is credible, our analysis is comprehensive and accurate, and our final research report offers a transparent view of what we hoped to do in the research, how we did it, why we did it that way, and how verification and textual processing procedures shaped our final analysis. In this way, our qualitative research designs ultimately produce the most important outcome of all – information we can actually do something with.

Interviewer Bias & Reflexivity in Qualitative Research

November 14, 2012

Research design of any sort has to grapple with the pesky issue of bias or the potential distortion of research outcomes due to unintended influences from the researcher as well as research participants. This is a particularly critical issue in qualitative research where interviewers (and moderators) take extraordinary efforts to establish strong relationships with their interviewees (and group participants) in order to delve deeply into the subject matter. The importance of considering the implications from undo prejudices in qualitative research was discussed in the April 2011 *Research Design Review* post, "Visual Cues & Bias in Qualitative Research," which emphasized that "there is clearly much more effort that needs to be made on this issue." Reflexivity and, specifically, the reflexive journal is one such effort that addresses the distortions or preconceptions researchers' unwittingly introduce in their qualitative designs.



Reflexivity is an important concept because it is directed at the greatest underlying threat to the accuracy of our qualitative research outcomes – that is, the social interaction component of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, or, what Steinar Kvale calls, "the asymmetrical power relations of the research interviewer and the interviewed subject" (see "Dialogue as Oppression and Interview Research," 2002). The act of reflection enables the interviewer to thoughtfully consider this asymmetrical relationship and speculate on the ways the interviewer-interviewee interaction may have been exacerbated by presumptions arising from obvious sources, such as certain demographics (e.g., age, gender, and race), or more subtle cues such as socio-economic status, cultural background, or political orientation. Linda Finlay, in her 2002 article, identifies five ways to go about reflexivity – introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction – and discusses utilizing these techniques in order to understand the interviewer's role in the interview context and how to use this knowledge to "enhance the trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability of their research." An awareness of misperceptions through reflexivity enables the interviewer to design specific questions for the interviewee that help inform and clarify the interviewer's understanding of the outcomes.

It is for this reason that a reflexive journal, where the interviewer logs the details of how he or she may have influenced the results of each interview, should be part of a qualitative research design. This journal or diary sensitizes the interviewer to his or her prejudices and subjectivities, while more fully informing the researcher on the impact of these influences on the credibility of the research outcomes. The reflexive journal not only serves as a key contributor to the final analyses but also enriches the overall study design by providing a documented first-hand account of interviewer bias and the preconceptions that may have negatively influenced the findings. In this manner, the reader of the final research report can assess any concerns about objectivity and interpretations of outcomes.

Reflexivity and the reflexive journal is just one way that our qualitative research designs can address the bias that most assuredly permeates the socially-dependent nature of qualitative research. Introspective reflexivity – along with peer debriefing and triangulation – add considerably to the credibility and usefulness of our qualitative research.

Managing Ghosts & the Case for Triangulation in Qualitative Research

October 14, 2012

The most recent issue of the American Psychological Association's *Monitor on Psychology* includes an interview with developmental psychologist, Jerome Kagan. In this interview he talks about psychology's research "ghosts," referring to the dubious generalizations psychologist's make from their often-limited research. Kagan's primary point is that "it's absolutely necessary to gather more than one source of data, no matter what you're studying," and that these multiple sources of data should come from verbal and behavioral as well as physiological measures. Only by combining these various perspectives on an issue or situation – that is, utilizing data taken in different contexts and by way of alternative methods and modes – can the researcher come to a legitimate conclusion.

This is not unlike triangulation, esp., in the social and health sciences, which is used to gauge the trustworthiness of research outcomes. Triangulation is the technique of examining a specific research topic by comparing data obtained from: two or more methods, two or more segments of the sample population, and/or two or more investigators. In this way, the researcher is looking for patterns of convergence and divergence in the data. Triangulation is a particularly important design feature in qualitative research – where measures of validity and reliability can be elusive – because it furthers the researcher's ability to gain a comprehensive view of the research question and come closer to a plausible interpretation of final results.

Where is this multifaceted process in the commercial world of qualitative marketing research? Academics talk about the importance of including some form of triangulation in research design yet there is not a lot of evidence that this occurs in marketing research. While there are an increasing number of ways to gather qualitative feedback – particularly via social media and mobile – that provide researchers with convenient sources of data, there needs to be more discussion on case studies that have utilized multiple data sources and methods to find reliable themes in the outcomes. Importantly, it is further hoped that marketing researchers use this contrast-and-compare approach to scrutinize the research issue from both traditional (e.g., face-to-face group discussions, in-depth interviews, in-home ethnography) and new (e.g., online based, smartphone) information-gathering strategies.

The triangulation concept is just one way that marketing researchers can begin to bring rigor to their research designs and manage the "ghosts" of groundless assumptions and misguided interpretations.

Consider the Email Interview

September 30, 2012

The idea of conducting qualitative research interviews by way of asynchronous email messaging seems almost quaint by marketing research standards. The non-stop evolution of online platforms, that are increasingly loaded with snazzy features that equip the researcher with many of the advantages to face-to-face interviews (e.g., presenting storyboards or new product ideas, and interactivity between interviewer and interviewee), has made a Web-based solution an important mode option in qualitative research.

The email interview, however, has been taken up by qualitative researchers in other disciplines – most notably, social work, health sciences, and education – with great success. For example, Judith McCoyd and Toba Kerson report on a study that was 'serendipitously' conducted primarily by way of email (although face-to-face and telephone were other mode possibilities). These researchers found that not only did participants in the study – women who had terminated pregnancy after diagnosis of a fetal anomaly – prefer the email mode (they actually *requested* to be interviewed via email) but they were prone to give the researchers long, emotional yet thoughtful responses to interview questions. McCoyd and Kerson state that email responses were typically 3-8 pages longer than what they obtained from similar face-to-face interviews and 6-12 pages longer than a comparable telephone interview. The sensitivity of the subject matter and the sense of privacy afforded by the communication channel contributed to an outpouring of rich details relevant to the research objectives. Cheryl Tatano Beck in nursing, Kaye Stacey and Jill Vincent who researched professors of mathematics, and others have reported similar results.

Marketing researchers may feel far afield from the alternative world of research professionals in sociology, medicine, and education but there are clearly lessons here of import to all qualitative researchers. While many marketing researchers may not work on the kinds of issues faced by other social scientists, they are certainly capable (and obligated) to learn design best practices where they find it. In others' use of email interviewing we learn that, among a list of varied advantages to the email mode, there are three key benefits that rise to the top:

- **Email empowers the interviewee to tell a story**. In a private environment with unlimited freedom to relate their narrative – and where emotions can be expressed freely and the interviewee can cry or laugh or burn with rage without the social pressure of face-to-face contact – the participant is emboldened to share and give details.
- **Email gives the interviewee the opportunity to reflect and edit**. The ability to read and re-read responses to interview questions *before* they are given to the researcher is important to gaining the thoughtful feedback qualitative researchers are after. Mobile research may be great at tapping into in-the-moment behavior but qualitative research is more about understanding how people think. The opportunity email provides for reflection and consideration, in order to get at that thinking, is an important advantage to the mode.

- **Email enables the interviewer to reflect on responses and modify questioning as needed**. The email method not only benefits the interviewee but the interviewer gains the ability to 'custom fit' the interview questions based on an interviewee's response. And, importantly, the interviewer can take useful time to carefully consider the response(s) and calculate the most appropriate follow up.

I hope to read more from marketing researchers in the future about their use of email interviewing, and to learn their best practices for this Internet-based qualitative research design.

Designing a Quality In-depth Interview Study: How Many Interviews Are Enough?

September 12, 2012

Here is a topic you don't read much about, particularly in the marketing research community: What is the optimal number of in-depth interviews to complete in an IDI study? The appropriate number of interviews to conduct for a face-to-face IDI study needs to be considered at two key moments of time in the research process – the initial research design phase and the phase of field execution. At the initial design stage, the number of IDIs is dictated by four considerations: 1) the breadth, depth, and nature of the research topic or issue; 2) the hetero- or homogeneity of the population of interest; 3) the level of analysis and interpretation required to meet research objectives; and 4) practical parameters such as the availability and access to interviewees, travel and other logistics associated with conducting face-to-face interviews, as well as the budget or financial resources. These four factors present the researcher with the difficult task of balancing the specific realities of the research components while estimating the optimal number of interviews to conduct. Although the number of required interviews tends to move in direct step with the level of diversity and complexity in the research design, there is little guidance in sample size for the researcher at the planning stage.

The other key moment in time when the researcher considers the adequacy of the sample size is during the field phase when interviews are actually being conducted. This has been the most widely discussed point in time by many researchers because it is then, when in the field, that the optimal number of interviews is determined. Specifically, researchers utilizing grounded theory rely on the notion of "saturation" or the point in time when responses no longer reveal 'fresh insights'. On this basis, the researcher deems that a sufficient number of interviews have been conducted when no new themes or stark variations in interviewees' responses are coming to light. There are few guidelines for determining number of interviews by way of saturation, and some have questioned its value given the lack of transparency.

Another, more quality approach to the question of how many face-to-face IDIs to conduct considers the design-phase as well as results in the field but goes further. It is not good enough to simply evaluate interview completions in the field based on the point of saturation. While it is important to determine the degree to which interviews are or are not reaping new meaningful information (see the fourth question, below), there are many other quality concerns that need to be resolved. To assess the number of face-to-face IDIs at the field stage, the researcher needs to more broadly review the quality of the interview completions based on the answers to these eight questions:

- Did every IDI cover every question or issue important to the research?
- Did all interviewees provide clear, unambiguous answers to key questions or issues?
- Does the data answer the research objective?
- To what extent are new ideas, themes, or information emerging from these interviews?
- Can the researcher identify the sources of variations and contradictions in the data?
- Does the data confirm or deny what is already known about the subject matter?
- Does the data tell a story? Does it make sense and does it describe the phenomenon or other subject of the study?
- Are new, unexplored segments or avenues for further research emerging from the data?

From there, the researcher can determine whether additional interviews are justified.

Insights vs. Metrics: Finding Meaning in Online Qualitative Research

June 28, 2012

The use of projective techniques in qualitative marketing research has become an accepted as well as expected practice in the industry. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews (whether face-to-face or online) are particularly suitable for activities that go beyond the question-response format. There are any number of reasons for using projective techniques but they essentially boil down to something similar to the statement from AQR: "What these techniques have in common is that they enable participants to say more about the research subject than they can say spontaneously, accessing thoughts, feelings or meanings which are not immediately available." Or, something along the lines of tearing down walls as from Applied Marketing Research: "Projective techniques are important in breaking through the wall of rationalizations consumers use on a daily basis to justify the purchase or likes/dislikes of products or brands."

Projective techniques come in a variety of flavors. In addition to those listed on the AQR site – collage, personification, bubble drawing, role playing, etc. – there is also guided imagery, picture sorts, sentence completion, tarot cards, and more. The types of projective techniques used by researchers has grown over the years (and continues to grow), primarily because many researchers believe (although, I am not one of them) that there is no limit to what is acceptable as a projective technique, and online resources such as Pinterest have broadened the projective possibilities.

Researchers have promoted and defended their use of projective techniques based on the ability to tap into the less-public portion of people's minds and thereby gain a 'truer' picture of the 'real' attitudes and emotions that drive behavior. By 'digging deep', researchers offer their clients rich results with new insights that might otherwise be left undiscovered. Although this blog has discussed the limitations and inappropriate uses of projective techniques, there is no question that the proper projectives in the hands of skilled qualitative researchers can move the research measurably closer to understanding how people think.

In the continuing fast-paced evolution of online qualitative research, let's hope that the value of offline qualitative skills such as projective techniques are not being ignored or overshadowed by the increasingly-loud buzz of social media metrics. While these metrics are potentially useful in tracking stated attitudes and behavior, they do little in helping us understand what lurks behind individual patterns of thinking. Michael Wolfe's recent blog post describes BBDO's "proprietary approach for 'scoring' textual [online] conversations" and how that is used to create the "Service Engagement Index" which has been used to link service and consumer demand (in this case, hotel

bookings). Netbase utilizes their "high-precision natural language processing engine" to parse and analyze social media content to, among other things, "uncover unmet needs" and ultimately derive their "Brand Passion Index." Ray Poynter at Vision Critical recently discussed "How to Use Google Insights as a Research Tool," outlining how Google Insights gives social media researchers a new, free tool to assess Google searches by key word, time period, and geographic location. These are just a small few of the initiatives underway that tap into the social media metric mania.

All of this tracking has the potential to provide marketers with some idea of what some portion of their target audience is saying or doing at a particular moment in time – insight with a small 'i'. But let's not confuse that with the ever-present need to understand how people think – Insight with a big 'I'. It is encouraging to see useful online qualitative research tools – such as Pinterest, Webcam research (such as that from FocusVision), mobile device technology, and others – that enable researchers to continue to build on their offline skills that dig behind the obvious and attempt to reveal how people truly think. The future is promising for more to come.

Differences Between Idea Generation & Focus Group Discussions

June 11, 2012

There are some who argue that idea generation among consumers is a frustrating task. After all, who knows a particular product category more than the manufacturer, its advertising agency, and other groups committed to the survival of the product (and the product line)? And it doesn't help that facilitators of all kinds are guilty of asking consumers to be experts where they are not and to assume greater role playing in marketing decisions than is justified. Asking consumers to step outside of their worlds – to pretend to be someone (something) else – may seem foolhardy.

Consumer ideation, however, can be a useful approach, particularly when it is constructed with two key ingredients: 1) people who are product-involved; and 2) individuals who can provide fresh, new insights. Finding consumers who are product-involved is not difficult, but not all consumers are "creative" thinkers who can produce new perspectives or have the ability to look at something inside out and make sense of it, or take the familiar and make it strange. This takes a very special recruiting effort, which is one of the many differences between idea generation and focus group research.

Idea generation sessions or workshops are not focus group research discussions. Here are a few key ways in which consumer ideation – defined as a balance between loosely-structured brainstorming and the more structured, solution-oriented Synectic method – is differentiated from traditional focus group research:

- **Research objectives.** Focus groups are attempting to understand underlying beliefs and motivations for consumer behavior, compared to consumer ideation where the goal is to make the familiar strange and generate as many ideas or solutions as possible without asking consumers to justify or defend.
- **Preliminary groundwork.** Focus groups are often conducted to explore product-related questions that are being asked for the first time without necessarily the support of prior knowledge. In contrast, ideation sessions are more productive if they are conducted only after preliminary research has indicated real opportunities.
- **Sampling & Recruitment.** Focus group research design should strive to include an honest representation of the target audience. This means a fair distribution of demographics, geography, product-usage level, and other considerations. The primary interest in idea generation recruitment is often (but not always) to find consumers who have shown (via their attitudes and behavior) a particularly high level of involvement in the product and/or category, and proven their ability to think "creatively" by way of responses to carefully-crafted screening questions.

- **Session length.** Focus group discussions are, typically, 90-120 minutes in length, compared to ideation sessions which can run half a day or longer.
- **Facilitation.** A focus group moderator is generally intent on controlling the content of the discussion in order to successfully cover all topics on a predetermined discussion outline. The role of the facilitator in an ideation session, however, is to control the process – by keeping participants fresh, keeping a productive flow of ideas – not the content. In idea generation, the content can not be predetermined, the content belongs to the participants.
- **Psychological environment.** All facilitators attempt to create a "safe" environment for their participants. The leader of an idea generation session places a particularly heavy emphasis on this aspect by loosing the structure, the usual social or cultural norms, and by having participants build on others' comments while making participants feel safe from "attack."

Five Factors in the Recruiting Process Adds to the Quality Scheme for Qualitative Research

May 27, 2012

A *Research Design Review* post in February 2011 talked about the "13 Factors Impacting the Quality of Qualitative Research." This post laments the lack of "tested dimensions we can use to compare one qualitative study from another" and endorses a quality-framework approach rooted in the idea that the usefulness of our qualitative research rests with key design components. This post goes on to delineate 13 factors across three domains of the research process: the environment, the dynamics, and the interviewer/moderator.

These 13 factors represented a first start towards thinking about qualitative research design within a quality framework. This thinking will evolve over time, with additions and subtractions made as warranted. One such needed adjustment is in the critical yet missing area of participant recruitment. This omission was rightly pointed out in a recent comment to the blog by Andrea Lombardi, a qualitative research consultant in Milan. As Andrea states, "…recruitment quality [is a] main factor for a good quality FG/IDI…" In appreciation of the important role that the recruiting process plays in the ultimate utility and effectiveness of our qualitative research, here is an amended – what is now 18-factor – classification scheme incorporating five factors specific to the recruiting process:

18 Factors Impacting the Quality of Qualitative Research

The Recruiting Process

Potential variability associated with the:

- Group composition (e.g., level of demographic and product-use diversity)
- Sample frame & sampling
- Design of screener questions & interview questionnaire overall
- Recruitment interviewer (e.g., professionalism as well as gender, ethnicity, personality aspects)
- Recruiting-process standards (e.g., call-back and confirmation protocols)

The Environment

Potential variability associated with the:

- Particular venue/setting (incl., face-to-face and online)
- Presence of observers/interviewers as well as other participants (e.g., groups vs. IDIs)
- Audio & video recording

The Dynamics

Potential variability associated with:

- Professional participants ("cheaters")
- Participants' cultural/social/economic/gender/age diversity
- Cognitive processes/constructs
- Geographic/regional differences
- Dominators, group vs. individual think

The Interviewer/Moderator

Potential variability associated with the:

- Personal/personality aspects of the interviewer/moderator
- "Best" techniques utilized for specific topics, type of participants, venue
- Question formatting
- Question sequencing
- Use of projective techniques (e.g., what to use when, impact on the discussion overall, analytical schemes)

Focus Group Research: Thinking About Reasons May Hamper New Insights

March 18, 2012

A focus group discussion is nothing if not a venue for researchers to probe more deeply on any given issue. Focus groups by definition target a particular topic and envelop group participants with variations of the "why" question – "Why do you say that?" "What makes you say that?" "Explain your reason for choosing Brand A over Brand B" – as well as any number of projective techniques that shine light on unconscious, less-than-rational motives and perceptions. Moderators spend considerable time devising ways to get at the underlying reasons for people's behavior and attitudes; and, indeed, these in-depth techniques make qualitative research an invaluable companion to quantitative methods.

Or do they? Do all of our "why" questions and projective exercises actually elicit attitudes and opinions that are truly valuable in that they are reliable and honest? This is an important question because, just as moderators search for the best approach in gaining new insights, they also want to feel confident in their findings. This sense of reliability is a main ingredient to good research.

So, are our focus group designs – with all the built-in probes and tactics – producing good research? The issue here is the trustworthiness of the results and whether what we learn from one focus group study is not too far afield from what we would learn if we were to rewind the calendar and conduct the study again. Researchers are obligated to examine this issue and the certainty by which they can say that the attitudes expressed (or otherwise revealed) in their focus group research are dependable and the implications for future behavior are real.

Wouldn't it be a shock if our "why" questions and projective techniques were in fact *degrading* the reliability of our focus group research? Some experimentation has shown that asking people to explain or give reasons for their attitudes and behavior essentially alters their response. Timothy Wilson and Sara Hodge, for example, in "Attitudes as Temporary Constructions" discuss various studies that all point to the same basic conclusion: introspection or asking research participants to analyze their reasons changes their attitudes, and can even lead to less-than-optimal decision-making behavior (i.e., people allow their reasoning to guide them to decisions they would not make otherwise and that ultimately turn out to be unsatisfactory choices).

Wilson and his colleagues, in their 1989 paper, isolated the effect of introspection and attitude change to people who were relatively unfamiliar with or less knowledgeable about the topic in question. So, for instance, people who were not too familiar with a political candidate were more

apt to change their attitudes toward the candidate compared to people with more knowledge of the individual. It has been suggested that, in analyzing their reasons, less knowledgeable people are forced to consider any number of factors outside their original sphere of belief, making the newly-formed attitude fleeting and subject to further change.

These are just a couple of examples of the work that has been done exploring attitude strength and its association with "thinking too much." It is important to anyone who designs focus group research because it tells us that: 1) asking group participants to justify their attitudes and behavior (via the "why" question or projectives), in and of itself, can alter their thoughts; and, 2) the reasoning process – particularly among less knowledgeable participants (possibly non-customers, non-users) – invites a host of atypical considerations for any one individual that can fluctuate from moment to moment. All of which speaks to the trustworthiness of our research findings.

If the purpose of research is to understand how people think then how do we do that without trespassing into the zone of "thinking too much" and affecting the very attitudes we are after? Focus group research designs can address this in various ways. For instance: 1) the moderator can build in more active listening skills that focus on picking up inter- and intra-participant attitudinal inconsistencies; 2) the moderator can carefully select projective techniques and shy from those that force participants to think deeply about something they know little about; and, 3) focus group discussions can be targeted towards people who have knowledge of the topic (e.g., customers, users) and therefore more likely to harbor a stable opinion. These are just a few of the many design considerations that researchers can incorporate into their focus group studies to maximize honest reasoning from participants to produce reliable, *insightful* outcomes.