Focusing in Focus Groups

IMPACT
SUMMER INSTITUTE

EVALUATING TOGETHER:
Expanding Thinking and Strengthening Practice

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OCIC
Ontario Council for
International Cooperation

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1. Orient ourselves to Focus Group Discussion
2. Understand when to use (or not use) Focus Group
3. Learn how to conduct Focus Group
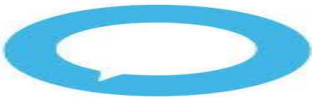4. Explore how to analyze data from Focus Group

- Introduce yourself
- Your experience with Focus Group
- 1-2 expectations from the workshop on sticky notes

What are the key differences between quantitative and qualitative research/ evaluation?
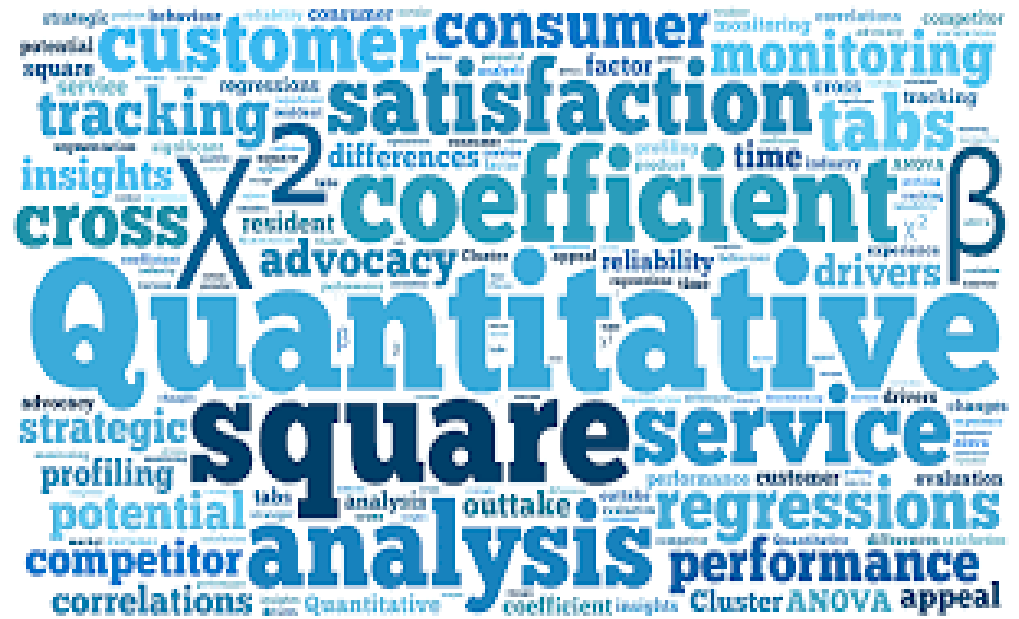
Two Paradigms..

Domains	QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
Aspiration	Single reality	Multiple realities
Inquiry approach	Hypothetical-deductive inquiry	Naturalistic inquiry
Researcher/ Evaluator Stance	Objective, independent, detached and value-free	Engaged, subjectivity, acknowledged, value laden, reflexivity
Conceptual approach	Close ended	Open ended
Data	Numbers/numerical values	Textual
Design	Rigid	Flexible

A **focus group** is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a non-threatening environment

Group interviews, discussions: ASKING QUESTIONS TO A GROUP OF PEOPLE IN A FORMAL OR INFORMAL SETTING.

HOW? Asking questions and listening to groups in formal & informal settings.
Can do group tasks like a social map or historical timeline (PRA/RCA)
Can be an informal group discussion e.g. having a conversation with women after the church service.
Can be a community meeting with formal discussions on specific topics e.g. identification of orphans & vulnerable children in the village

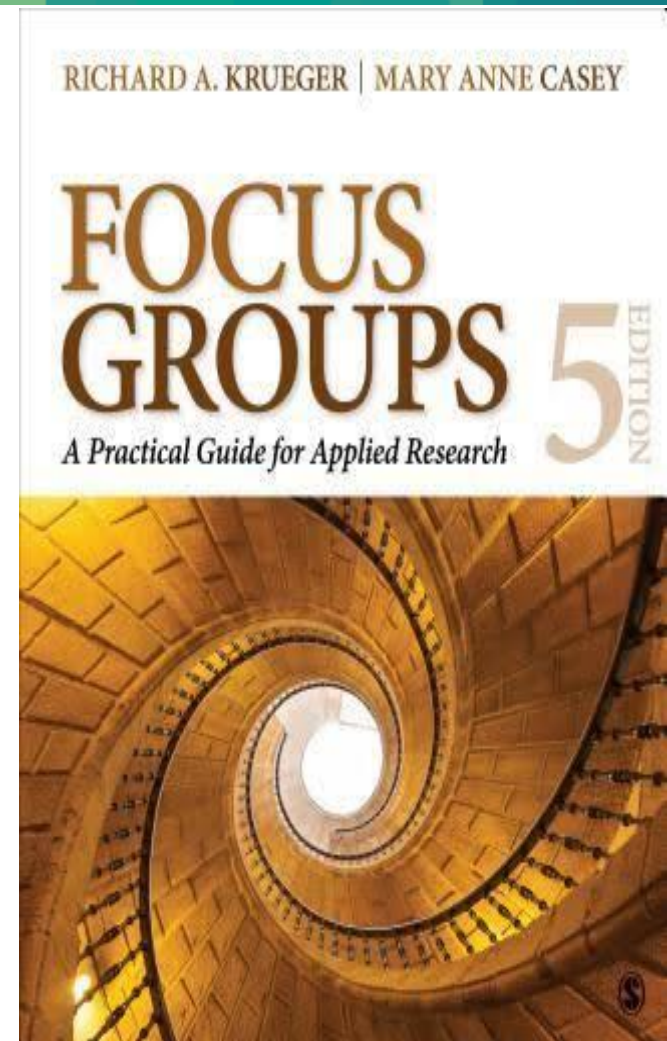THE DATA? Qualitative (very good to learn about attitudes!)

BE CAREFUL THAT SOME PEOPLE DO NOT DOMINATE THE DISCUSSION!!

Maybe schedule some individual interviews with some of the more quiet participants: something you would have picked up by your **observation.**

Illustration: Erika Joubert, 2004

Focus Groups are used to ..

- obtain a range of opinions

- uncover factors that influence opinions, behaviours or motivation

- understand differences in perspectives among groups

- generate ideas to emerge from the group

- design a large-scale quantitative study or to shed light on quantitative data

RICHARD A. KRUEGER | MARY ANNE CASEY

FOCUS GROUPS 5 EDITION

A Practical Guide for Applied Research

Focus Groups are NOT used when..

- language barriers are insurmountable
- the evaluator has little control over the group
- trust cannot be established
- free expression cannot be ensured
- confidentiality is critical
- the purpose is to collect statistical data

Source: Adapted from Billson (2004)

Advantages & disadvantages of Focus Group
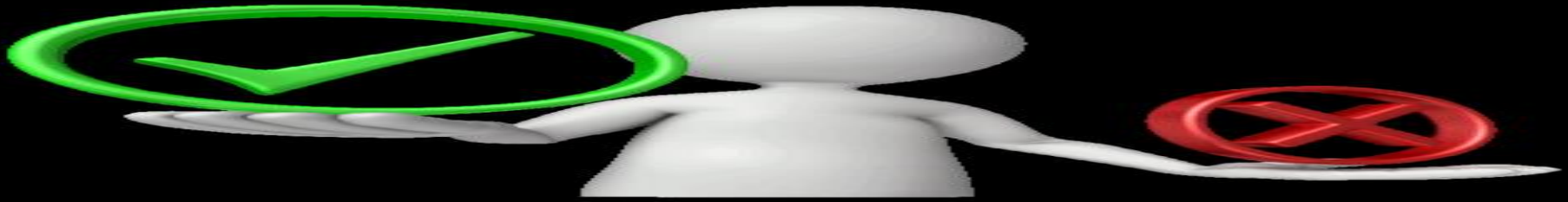
Quick and easy to conduct	Analysis is time consuming
Allows flexibility to make changes in process and questions	Can be influenced by moderator or dominant participants
Explore different perspectives	Participants may not share information in front of others
More engaging	Participants may not be representative

Source: Morra Imas & Rist, 2009

Conduct Focus Group Discussion?

Planning of Focus Group

- Decide when
- Determine where
- Decide who to invite
  - "sampling is not a matter of numbers or convenience, but is strategically focused to collect the most appropriate "rich" data"
- Decide the purpose
- Determine the budget
- Write the protocol or interview schedule
- Select a facilitator and note taker
- Record (if participants agree)
- Obtain informed consent

Source: Steinberg, 2011

What to do during Focus Group?

- **Make a smooth & snappy introduction**
  - Welcome
  - Overview of topic (purpose, why you're selected, what happened to your responses)
  - Ground rules (no wrong/ right answers, one at a time, moderator role, confidentiality, your rights)
- **Use pauses and probes**
  - 5 second pause
  - Probe:
    - "Would you explain further?"
    - "Would you give an example?"
    - "I don't understand."

- **Control reactions to participants**
  - Verbal and nonverbal
  - Head nodding

- **Use subtle group control**
  - Experts
  - Dominant talkers
  - Shy participants
  - Ramblers

- **Use appropriate conclusion**
  Three Step Conclusion
  - Summarize with confirmation
  - Review purpose and ask if anything has been missed
  - Thanks and dismissal

Three Type of Questions
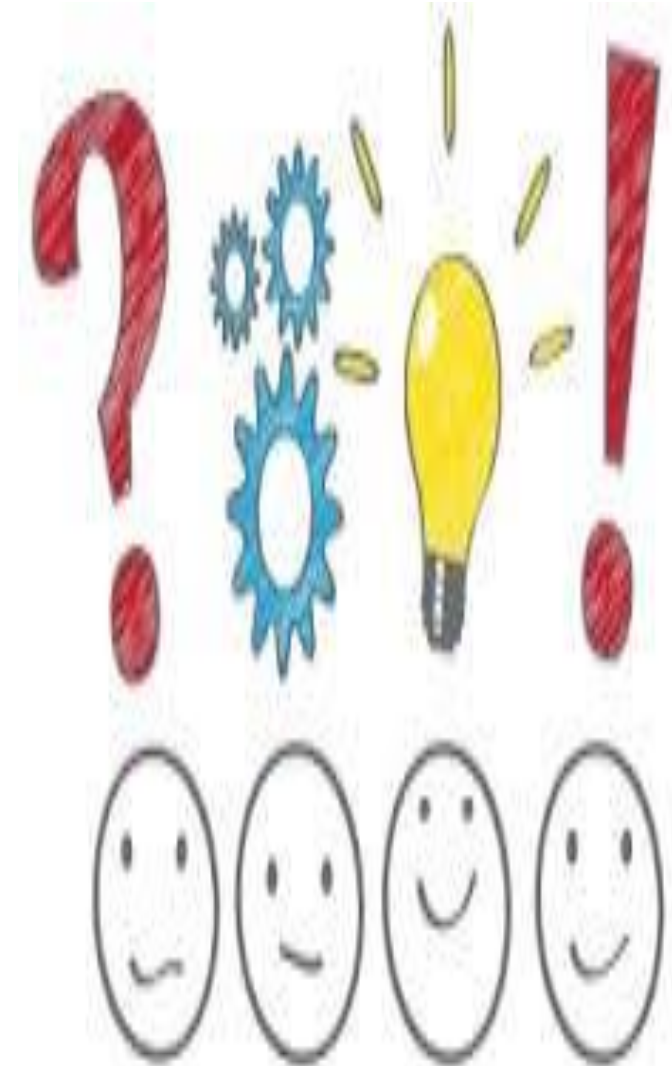
1. **Engagement Questions**
   - introduce participants to and make them comfortable with the topic of discussion

2. **Exploration Questions**
   - get to the meat of the discussion (key evaluation questions; specific questions)
   - Probes & follow-ups

3. **Exit Questions**
   - check to see if anything was missed in the discussion
   - conclusion

AN EXAMPLE
Questions for a Focus Group on Dental Flossing

Engagement questions:
1. What is your favorite toothpaste?
2. What do you notice when you look at other people's teeth?

Exploration Questions:
3. Who in particular has influenced your dental habits?
4. What are the pros and cons of flossing your teeth?
5. When you floss, how do follow through? When you don't, why not?
6. How do you feel when told about possible damage caused by not flossing?
7. How do you feel about yourself when you floss regularly? When you don't?

Exit question:
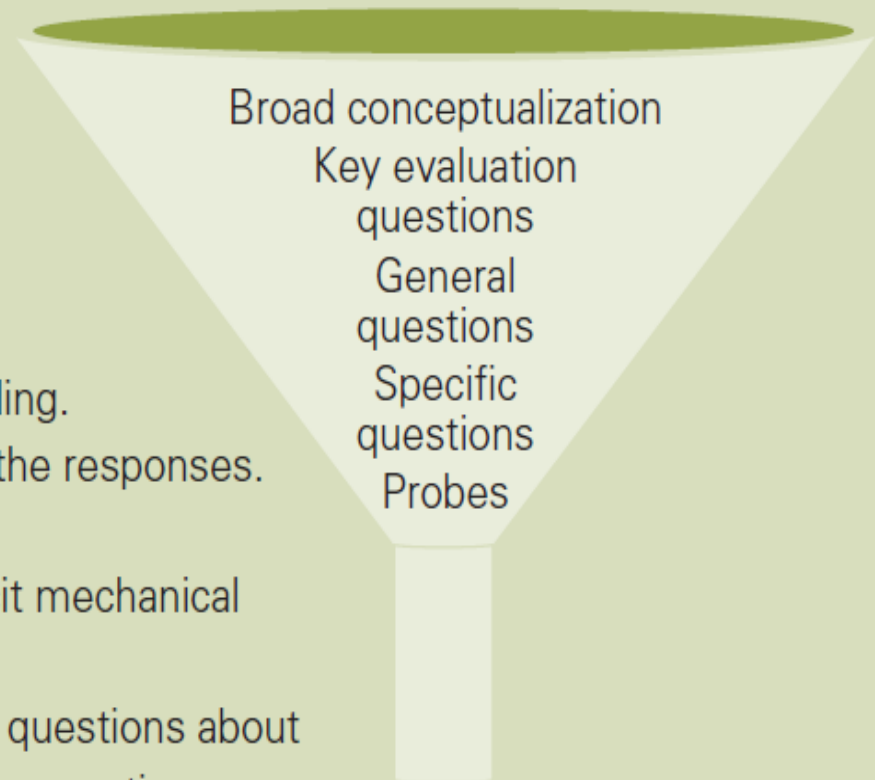8. Is there anything else you would like to say about why you do or do not floss your teeth on a regular basis?

Note: Flossers and non-flossers in separate groups.

Source: Elliot & Associates, 2005

Tips for Designing Focus Group Questions

The following tips can help evaluators get the most out of focus group sessions:

- Think first about how the information gleaned from the focus group will be used. Make sure all questions will lead, directly or indirectly, to usable information.
- Avoid vague, confusing wording.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Avoid assumptions that are leading or misleading.
- Avoid questions that introduce bias, skewing the responses.
- Avoid supplying alternative responses.
- Make it interesting. Mechanical questions elicit mechanical responses.
- Use the "protocol funnel," which begins with questions about broad conceptual issues and ends with probing questions.

Source: Billson 2004: 29.

The Protocol Funnel

Broad conceptualization
Key evaluation questions
General questions
Specific questions
Probes

Group Activity I

- **Divide yourself into groups**
- **Select a topic of focus group discussion** (e.g...)
  - "Understand the outcomes of a campaign to improve girl education"
  - "Determine the effects of farmer training on climate smart agriculture practices"
  - "Explore how mothers and/or expected mothers are satisfied with the role of maternal health workers"
- **Spend 5 minutes for preparation** (e.g. Assign a moderator; identify 5-8 sub-questions for focus group)
- **15 minutes for Focus Group**
- **Spend 5 minutes to evaluate the focus group using the checklist**
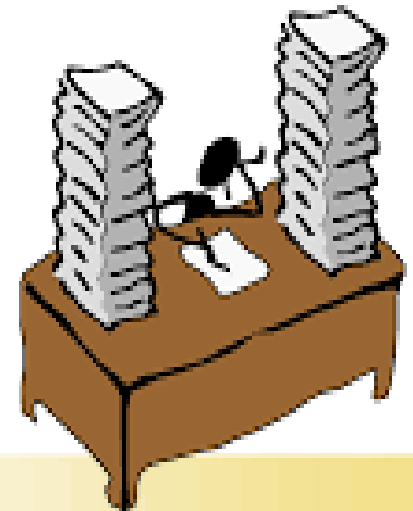- **Report back**

... AND ACTION!

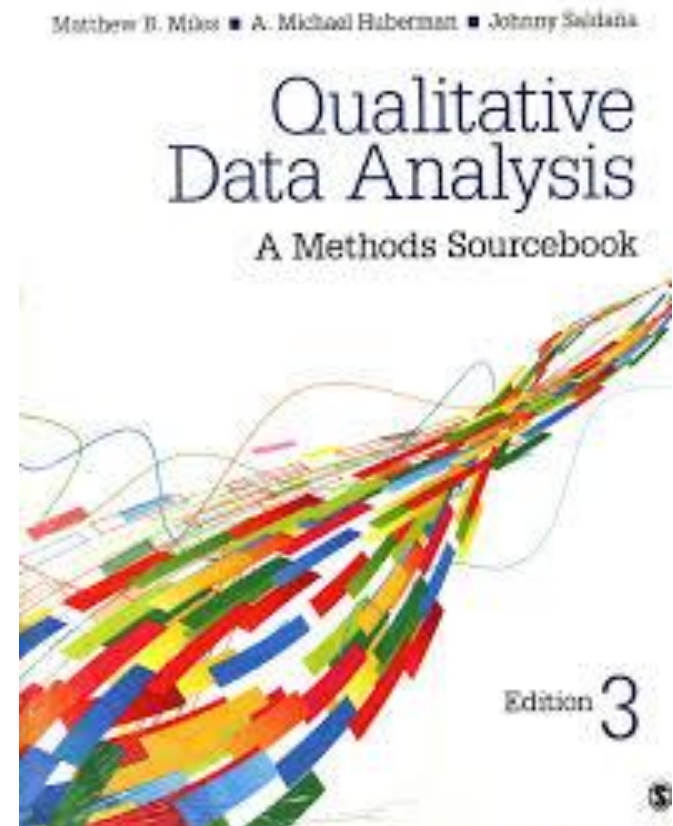# How to analyze data from focus group?

What is Qualitative Data?

- Data that are not easily reduced to numbers

- Data that are related to concepts, opinions, values and behaviours of people in social context

- Transcripts of individual interviews and focus groups, field notes from observation of certain activities, copies of documents, audio/video recordings

www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualdata.php

What is Qualitative Data Analysis?

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating

Source: http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php

Matthew B. Miles ■ A. Michael Huberman ■ Johnny Saldaña

Qualitative Data Analysis

A Methods Sourcebook

Edition 3

4 Steps in Qualitative Data Analysis

- Organize Data

- Reduce Data

- Describe Data

- Test the validity and trustworthiness
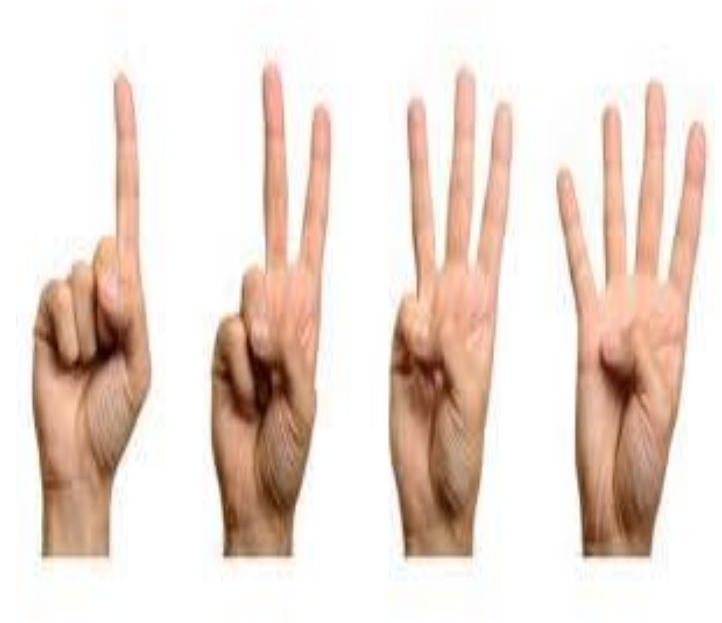
Step 1: Organize Data

- Transcribe
- Clean and label according to your data analysis framework

  - ✓Analysis of data using existing frameworks, concepts, and predefined themes (Deductive)
 - ✓Analysis of data involving discovery of patterns, themes, and categories (Inductive)

Step 2: Reduce Data

- Divide the data into neat, coherent chunks called "coding".

Step 3: Describe Data

- Group similar codes into categories

- Define themes using categories

- Look for patterns and relationships across the themes

- Use a method or methodology to describe and/or interpret

- Look for answers to your questions first
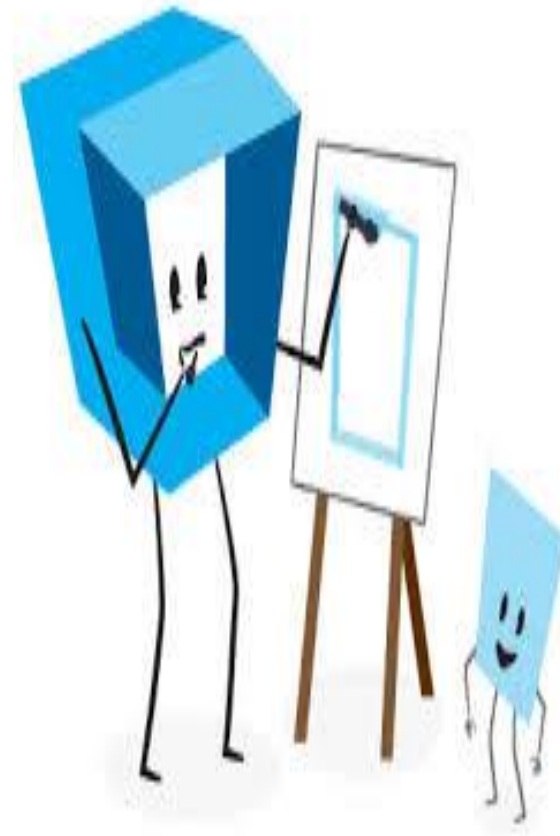
How to Code- An example

Example 2. Identify themes and label data.

Focus group interview, 10-02, North

Interviewer: What makes a **quality** program? What are the characteristics of a community-based program that you think is **high quality**?

Respondent 1: Availability. Any time you need a question answered, it's important that the staff be willing and able to answer questions and if they don't know the answers they get them for you quickly. With some services, you get routed 15 times before you get to the right person. When you call other offices if they don't know they will research it and they will get back to you so you don't have to worry whether you are on a wild goose chase or not. Local people want to talk to locals. They don't want to be pushed off. They want answers from their local staff and follow-up, too. I mean, they don't say OK I'll get back to you and 3 weeks later you still haven't heard anything.

Respondent 2: I know everyone is trying but being from the West side of the county, I don't feel like we're being served the way we could be and it seems the same people are being served over and over and over again; programs need to extend out.

Respondent 3: I guess its all about the staff. They have to serve the community. Staff need to carry themselves in a professional manner and be attentive to any questions you have.

Respondent 4: I don't know if it's the program or the staff but its gotten to the point that staff are wearing so many hats and they are stretched too thin. Programs have to prioritize and pick some of the most important things.

Margin labels (left):
Availability
Responsive: willing and able to answer questions, timeliness, personal touch

Local connection
Follow-up

Geographic coverage
Service area, serve same people, need to extend out

Staff
Serve community, professional, responsive

Focus
set priorities; stretched too thin

Margin notes (right):
Be responsive to local needs and questions

Staff = program

Reaching out vs. focus

Callout boxes:
Keep notes of emerging ideas.

Create a wide margin where you can label key ideas.

Highlight quotes for future use.

How to Code-Example 2?

Interviewer: Tell me about teens and drug use.

Respondent: I think teens use drugs as a release from their parents. Well, I don't know. I can only talk for myself. For me, it was an experience. You hear a lot about drugs. You hear they are bad for you. There is a lot of them around. You just get into them because they're accessible and because it's kind of a new thing. It's cool! You know, it's something that is bad for you, taboo, a "no". Everyone is against it. If you are a teenager, the first thing you are going to do is try them.

Handwritten annotations: Rebellious act · Experience · Drug talk · negative talk · drug talk · ① easy access · Challenge the adult negative stance · Negative Connection

Interviewer: Do teens experiment a lot with drugs?

Respondent: Most just try a few. It depends on where you are and how accessible they are. Most don't really get into in hard-core. A lot of teens are into pot, hash, a little organic staff. It depends on what phase of life you are at. It's kind of progressive. You start off with the basic drugs like pot. Then you go on to try more intense drugs like hallucinogens.

Interviewer: Are drugs easily accessible?

Respondent: You can get them anywhere. You just talk to people. You go to parties, and they are passed around. You can get them at school. You ask people, and they direct you as to who might be able to supply you.

Interviewer: is there any stigma attached to using drugs?

Respondent: Not among your peers. If you're in a group of teenagers and everyone is doing it, if you don't use, you are frowned upon. You want to be able to say you've experienced it like the other people around you. Obviously, outsiders like older people will look down upon you. But within your own group of friends, it definitely is not a stigma.

Interviewer: You say you did drugs for the experience. Do kids talk about experience?

Respondent: it's more of sharing the experience rather than talking about the experience. You talk about doing drugs more than what it's like when you take drugs. It depends upon what level you are into it, I guess. Most kids are doing it because it is a trend in high school. They are not doing it because of the experience in some higher sense. They are doing it because they are following the crowd.

How to Convert Codes into Patterns
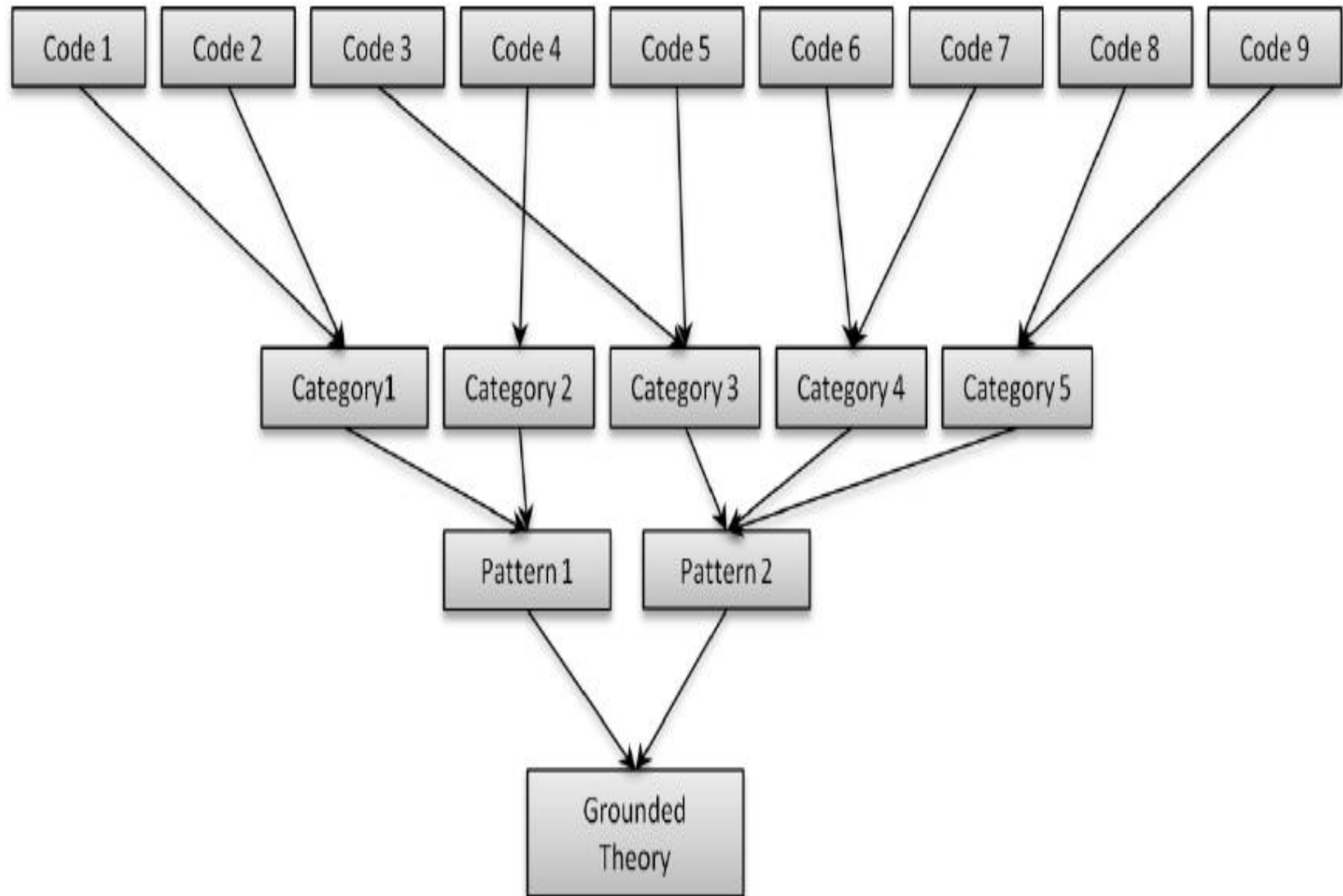

Source: Khandkar, Open Coding

Now you know how to analyze data, let's try to do it. Following is part of an interview transcript with a girl in her 20s and it is about drug use by teens.

Work in your groups and analyze the data. Use flip charts or a piece of paper and write down your codes, categories and/or emerging themes.

Duration: 20 minutes

- "naysayer": Say to yourself, "I wonder whether what I found is not true."

- Competing explanation: are there any alternative or competing explanation if data is organized differently?

- Outliers: Say to yourself, "If I reread the notes with the negative cases in mind, do I gain a new perspective"
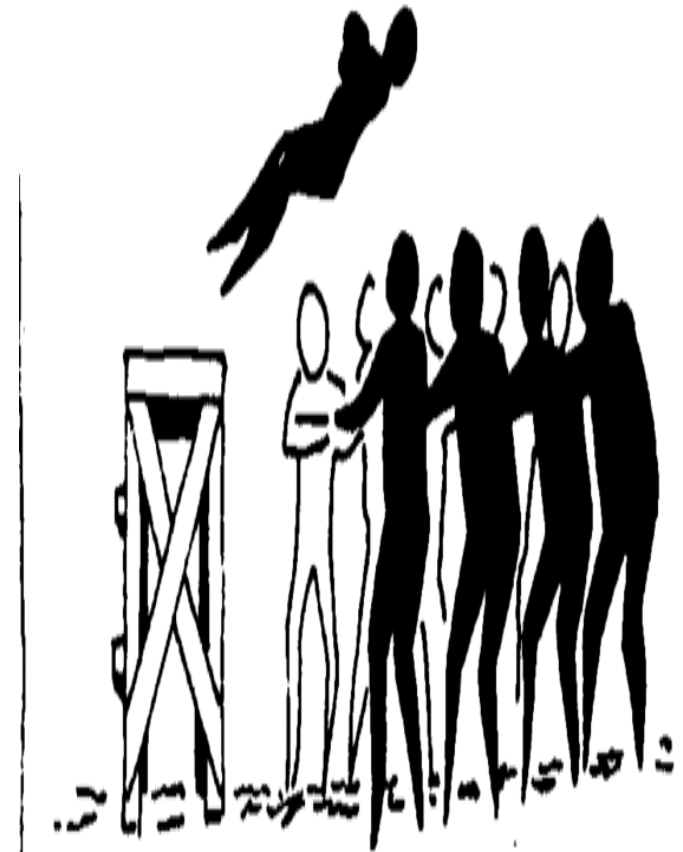
- Triangulation
  - Different sources
  - Different methods
  - Different researchers
- Member checking
  - Obtaining feedback from participants
  - External validation for codin schemes
- You and your bias
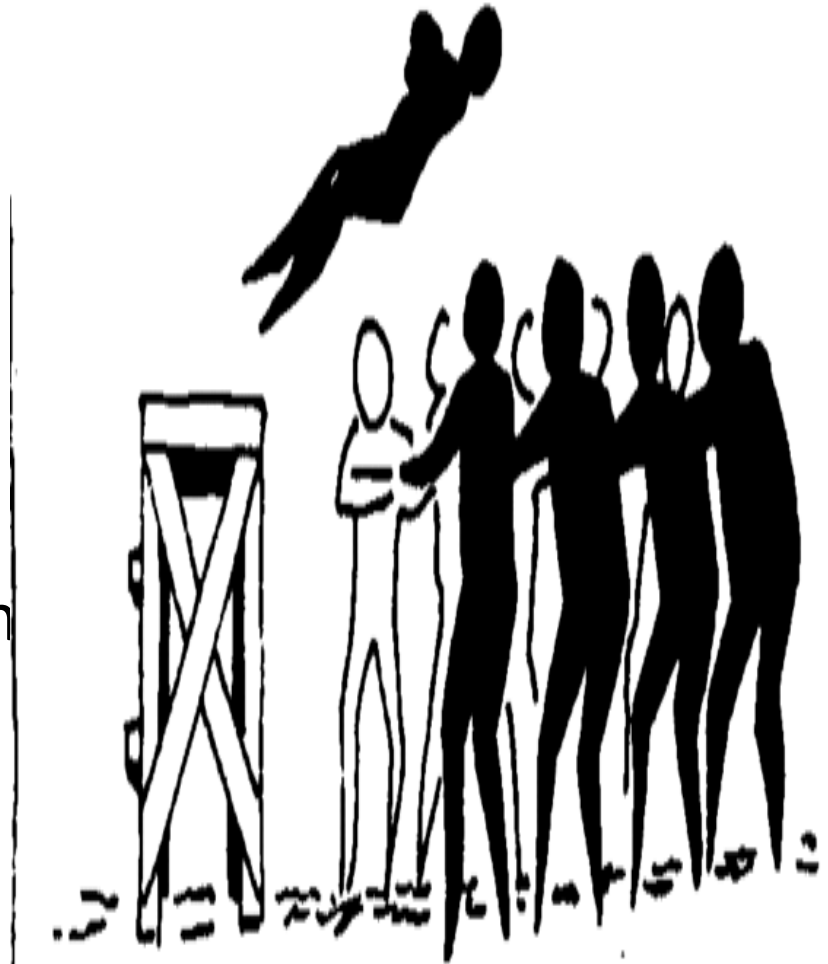
Wrap up and conclusion

- What is a take away from today session?

- What did you like? What did you not like?

- Please review your expectations and let us know to what extent the workshop is successful in meeting your expectations (S. Agree, Agree, N.S., Disagree, S. Disagree)

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