

Chapter 9

Qualitative Tools

Business Research Methods

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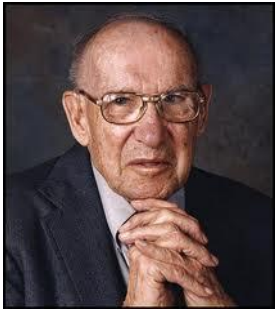
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Marketing Research

CHAPTER 9. QUALITATIVE TOOLS

“I never predict. I just look at the window and see what is visible –but not yet seen”

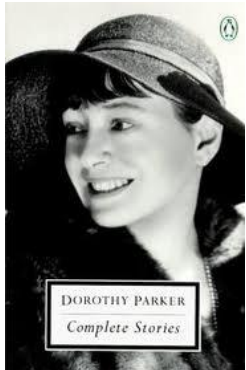
PETER DRUCKER



Peter F. Drucker (1909 – 2005) was an American management consultant, educator, and author, whose writings contributed to the philosophical and practical foundations of the modern business corporation.”

“The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity”

DOROTHY PARKER



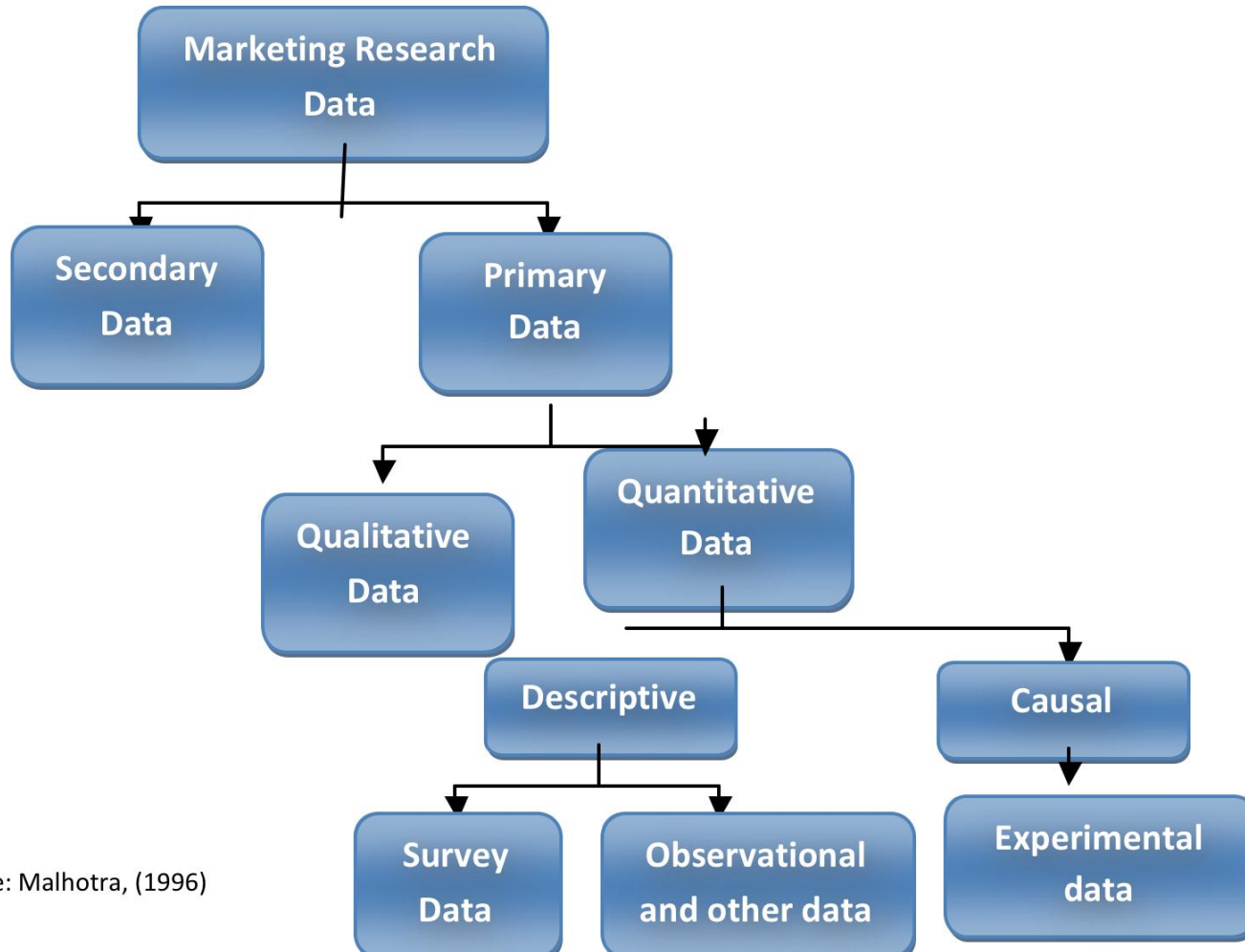
Dorothy Parker (1893 – 1967) was an American poet, short story critic, and satirist. She worked for The New Yorker and as a member of the Algonquin Round Table. She traveled to good to pursue screenwriting and got two Academy Award nominations.

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1. Types and general characteristics
2. Qualitative tool applications
3. Depth interviews
4. Focus groups
5. Projective techniques

TYPES AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 1. A Classification of Marketing Research Data



Source: Malhotra, (1996)

QUALITATIVE TOOL APPLICATIONS

Why using Qualitative Research

To provide an *insight* to the problem under question.

-Sometimes it is not easy or possible to use formal methods to obtain certain type of information, because people may be unwilling or unable to answer them.

E.G.: Questions that invade people's privacy embarrass them.

For example: Have you recently bought pills for anxiety?

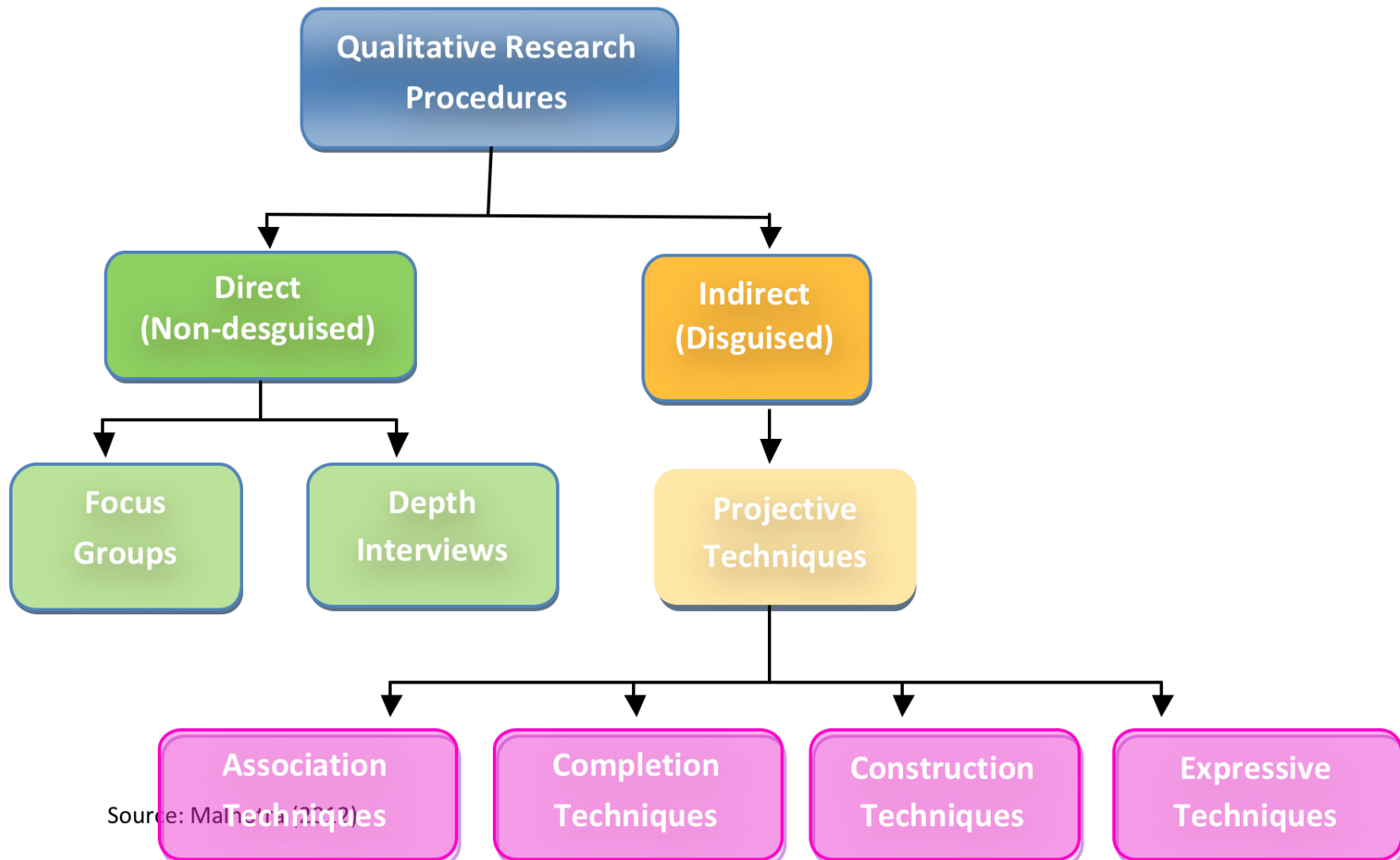
How much do you earn a month?

According to Malhotra (2012), people may be unable to answer accurately to questions that tap their subconscious. For instance, a person may have bought an expensive sports car for subconscious reasons, such as hidings feelings of inferiority. But if asked, "why did you buy this sports car? He may say "I got a great deal", "I have a lot of money", "I need to impress my customers", or "my old car was falling apart".

In such cases, the desired information is best gathered through qualitative research.

QUALITATIVE TOOL APPLICATIONS

Figure 1. Qualitative Research Procedures



Source: Malhotra (2012)

- **DEPTH INTERVIEWS:**

Main characteristics of depth interviews

“A depth interview is an unstructured, direct, personal interview on a one-on-one basis in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic”.

- ✓ 30 minutes and 1 hour
- ✓ Highly unstructured, and the wording and order of questions are influenced by the respondent's answers. **Probing** is of critical importance in obtaining meaningful responses and uncovering hidden issues (Malhotra, 2012). Probing is typically done through questions such as “Why did you say that?” “That is interesting, can you tell me more?”

- **DEPTH INTERVIEWS:**

Main characteristics of depth interviews

- The three main depth interviewing **techniques** are:

- ★ **Laddering**
- ★ **Hidden issue questioning**
- ★ **Symbolic analysis.**



- Durgee (1986) identifies laddering as one of the main three techniques for depth-interviewing, arguing that the combined use of laddering, hidden-issue questioning and symbolic analysis can be complementary, and can provide a great variety of material useful for areas such as creative advertising.

1. Laddering

“Laddering is an in-depth interviewing where the line of questionings proceeds from product characteristics to user characteristics”.

Thus, a laddering interview involves using a series of directed probes to uncover the full range of:

- ✓ attributes (A)
- ✓ consequences (C)
- ✓ and values (V)

associated with a selected product or service.

This technique prompts the respondent to think about the connections between the product's attributes and his/her personal goals (the motive behind one's preference for that particular product).

1. Laddering

This technique prompts the respondent to think about the connections between the product's attributes and his/her personal goals (the motive behind one's preference for that particular product).

Figure 2: Ladder Examples

Ladder from respondent
in diet soft drink study

self esteem



look good in clothes



maintain my figure



less calories



not syrupy

Ladder from respondent
in luxury car study

(V) self esteem



(C) prestige



(C) willing to pay a little more



(A) quality



(A) sleek look

Source: Blake et al. (2004)

2. Hidden Issue Questioning.

It attempts to locate personal “sore spots” related to deeply felt personal concerns, not general lifestyles.

2. Symbolic Analysis.

It attempts to analyze the symbolic meaning of objects by comparing them with their opposites.

Thus, to learn what something is, the researcher attempts to learn what it is not. For example, non-usages of products, attributes of an imaginary “non-product”, and opposite types of product. Typical questions would include, for example, what would it be like if you could no longer use internet?

The following ad is based on a non-experience competition



Interviewer´s role:

- Avoid appearing superior and try to relax the respondent*
- Be detached and objective but accessible*
- Ask questions in an informative manner*
- Do not accept yes or no answers*
- Probe the respondent*

Advantages and disadvantages of depth interviews

Advantages

- Depth interviews can uncover greater depths of insights than other qualitative techniques.
- Responses can be directly assigned to a respondent, because they are made on a one-to-one basis
- They result in free exchange of information, than may not be possible in other qualitative tools such as focus group because there is no social pressure to conform to group responses.

Disadvantages

- Skilled interviewers are expensive and difficult to find.
- The lack of structure may lead to interviewers' bias, and the quality and completeness of results depend to a great extent on the interviewer's skills.
- Data are difficult to analyze and interpret and normally skilled psychologists are required for these purposes.
- High costs

Applications of depth interviews:

They are normally used for exploratory research to gain insight and understanding to the issue under consideration.

Although this technique is not very much used, it can be very effective for (Malhotra, 2012):

- ✓ Discussion of confidential, sensitive, or embarrassing topics (personal finances, loose dentures)
- ✓ Detailed understanding of complicated behaviors (department store shopping)
- ✓ Interview with professional people
- ✓ Situations where the product consumption experience is sensory in nature, affecting mood states and emotions (perfumes, bath soaps, etc).

For example, What does “clean and fresh” mean to consumers? The interviewer can ask for mental pictures that come to mind, moods and feelings connected with it, music and colors, and even fantasies associated with those terms.

FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is an “interview conducted by a trained moderator in a non-structured and natural manner with a small group of respondents”.

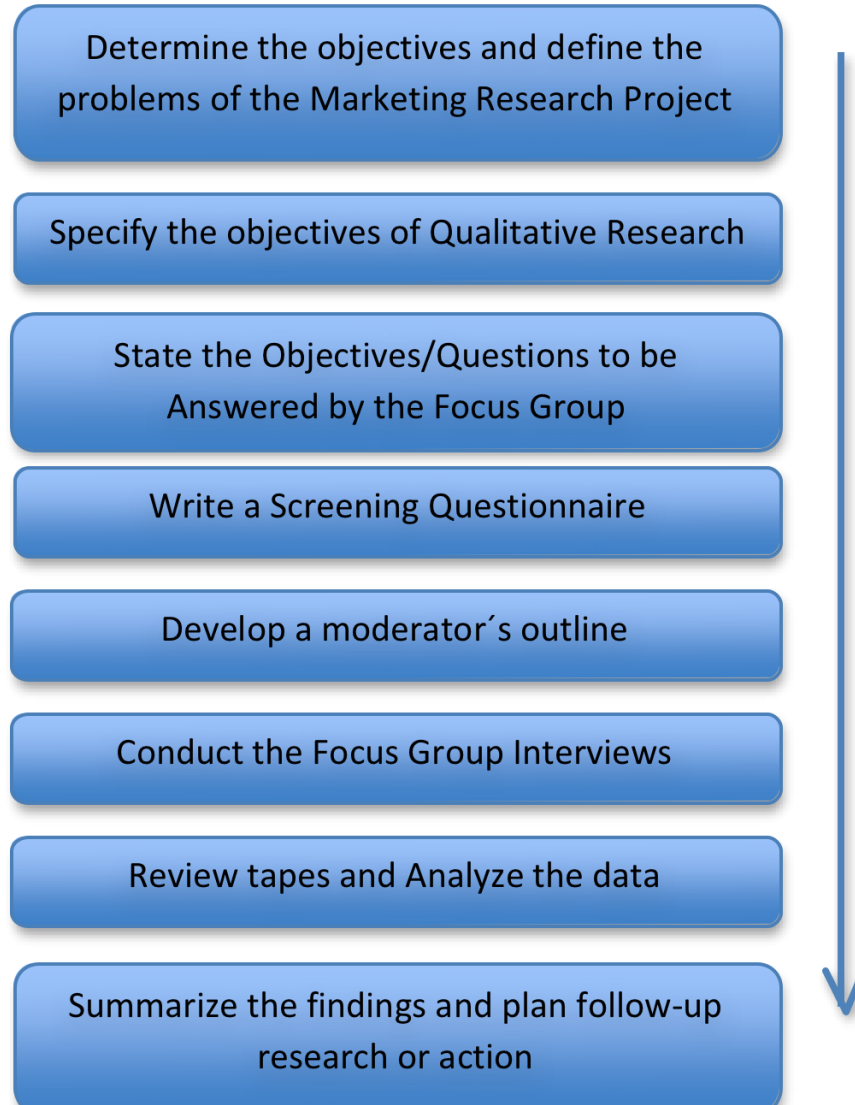
- ✓ The moderator leads the discussion.
- ✓ The main **objective** is to gain insights by listening to a group of people from the appropriate target market talk about issues of interest to the researcher.
- ✓ The **value** of the technique lies in the unexpected findings often obtained from a free flowing group discussion.

Focus groups are the *most important*, common and typical qualitative research procedure.

4.1 Main characteristics of focus groups

- ✓ They tend to include 8 to 12 members.
- ✓ A focus group should be **homogeneous** in terms of demographic, ethnographic, psychographic and socioeconomic characteristics.
- ✓ However, the participants should be **carefully selected** to meet certain criteria. The participants should know the issue under question relatively well.
- ✓ The **physical setting** is also important. The atmosphere should be relaxed and informal, to encourage a natural setting.
- ✓ The **duration** of the focus group is between **one and three hours** long. This period is needed in order to establish rapport with participants and to explore in depth their views, opinions and attitudes regarding the topic under consideration.
- ✓ Focus groups are invariably **recorded** for subsequent replay, transcription and analysis. Experts may also be observing the focus group through two-way mirrors or from remote locations via webcam or live video hookups (Zikmund et al., 2013).
- ✓ The **moderator** is very important in order for the focus group to be successful, since he is the one responsible for the natural flow of the conversation, keeping the discussion moving forward. The moderator may also analyze and interpret the data and re-conduct the discussion if necessary. Therefore, the moderator should have the necessary skills and experience.

Procedure for conducting focus groups



Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages

- Synergism.** A group of people are more likely to produce a wider range of information, insights and ideas than individual responses.
- Snowballing.** A bandwagon effect tends to occur, since one person's comments trigger a chain reaction from the rest of the participants.
- Stimulation.** After a brief introduction, participants do normally want to express their opinions and feelings as the general level of excitement over the project increases.
- Security.** Most of the participants have similar views, thus they feel they are in a secure setting and want to express their feelings.

Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages

- Spontaneity.** Because participants are not required to answer specific questions, their responses can be spontaneous and unconventional and should provide an accurate idea of their views.
- Serendipity.** Ideas may arise out of the blue.
- Piggybacking.** The interplay between respondents allows them to piggyback off of each other's ideas. In other words, one respondent stimulates thoughts among the others and, as this process continues, increasingly creative insights are possible. A comment by one individual often triggers a chain of respondents from the other participants. The social nature of the focus group also helps bring out multiple views as each person shares a particular perspective (Zikmund et al., 2013)
- Specialization.** Moderator has to be trained and specialized.

Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages

- Scientific scrutiny.** Observers can witness the sessions and record it for later analysis.
- Structure.** They allow for flexibility in the topics covered.
- Speed.** Data collection and analysis are relatively quick, since several participants are interviewed at the same time. In an emergency situation, three or four group sessions can be conducted, analyzed and reported in a week or so. The large number of companies that conduct focus group interviews makes it easy to find someone to host and conduct the research.

Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Disadvantages

- Misuse.** They can be misused if the results are considered as conclusive instead of exploratory.
- Misjudge.** The results can be misinterpreted and misjudged more easily than other techniques. They are also very susceptible of client and researcher's bias.
- Moderation.** They are difficult to moderate, and the quality of the results depends to a great extent on the moderator's skills.
- Messy.** The unstructured nature of the focus groups makes them difficult for analysis and interpretation.
- Misrepresentation.** It is very important to know that the results of focus groups cannot be generalized to the whole population, and therefore are not projectable.

Therefore, they should not constitute the bases for managerial decision-making.

Applications of focus groups:

Focus groups can be applied to almost any situation that requires a preliminary understanding and insight. They can be used to address the following issues:

- ✓ Understanding consumers' perceptions, preferences and attitudes towards specific product, brands or services
- ✓ Obtaining insight of new products
- ✓ Generating new ideas about old products
- ✓ Obtaining preliminary reactions to marketing strategies (prices, advertising...)
- ✓ Defining a problem more precisely
- ✓ Generating hypothesis that can be tested later with quantitative techniques

Online focus groups:

- ✓ The **number of participants** can be larger than in traditional focus groups. 25 participants or more is not uncommon for the simultaneous chat-room format.
- ✓ Participants can be at **widely separated locations** since the Internet does not have geographical restrictions. Of course, a major disadvantage is that often the researcher does not exercise as much control in precisely who participates. In other words, a person could very easily not match the desire profile or even answer screening questions in a misleading way simply to participate.
- ✓ A **major drawback** with online focus group is that moderators cannot see body language and facial expressions (excitement, boredom, interest, etc). Thus, they cannot fully interpret how people are reacting.
- ✓ Also, moderator's **ability to probe** and ask additional questions on the spot is reduced in online focus groups.
- ✓ Of course, research that requires focus group members to actually try something (such as a new package for a product) or taste something is not suitable for an online format.

- **PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES:**

Advantages and disadvantages of projective techniques

Advantages

- ✓ Since the purpose of the research is hidden, respondents may provide answers that they would be unwilling or unable to give if they knew the purpose of the study.
- ✓ Sometimes, in direct questionings, respondents may intentionally or unintentionally provide wrong answers due to misunderstanding, misinterpretation or because they are trying to mislead the researcher. In these cases, projective techniques are good ways to increase the validity of responses by disguising the purpose.

• PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES:

Advantages and disadvantages of projective techniques

Disadvantages

- ✓ Require personal interviews with highly trained interviewers and specialists.
- ✓ Skilled interpreters are also needed to be able to analyze the data
- ✓ They tend to be very expensive
- ✓ Risk of misinterpretation or interpretation bias
- ✓ The analysis and interpretation is difficult and subjective
- ✓ Techniques such as role-playing may not be representative of the population of interest, since researchers may assume that respondents who agree to participate are themselves unusual in a way.
- ✓ Therefore, it is advisable to **compare findings** of other techniques that allow a more representative finding

• PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES:

Applications

They can be used in a variety of situations, such as:

- ✓ They should be used if the required information cannot be accurately obtained by direct methods
- ✓ For exploratory research to gain initial insights and understanding
- ✓ Due to their complex nature, they should only be used by experts.
- ✓ Projective techniques should be used with caution in international settings, since pictures, colors and non-verbal stimuli are not always equivalent across cultures

PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Criteria	Focus Group	Depth Interviews	Projective Techniques
Degree of structure	Relatively high	Relatively medium	Relatively low
Probing of individual respondents	Low	High	Medium
Moderator bias	Relatively medium	Relatively high	Low to high
Interpretation bias	Relatively low	Relatively medium	Relatively high
Uncovering subconscious information	Low	Medium to high	High
Discovering innovative information	High	Medium	Low
Obtaining sensitive information	Low	Medium	High
Involve unusual behavior or questioning	No	To a limited extent	Yes
Overall usefulness	Highly useful	Useful	Somewhat useful

EXAMPLE

Procter & Gamble Detergents

With literally thousands of products to manage, P&G finds itself in the situation to conduct qualitative research almost daily. P&G does not introduce a product that has not been reviewed from nearly every possible angle. Likewise, before taking a product to a new country, you can be confident that the product has been “**focus grouped**” in that environment.



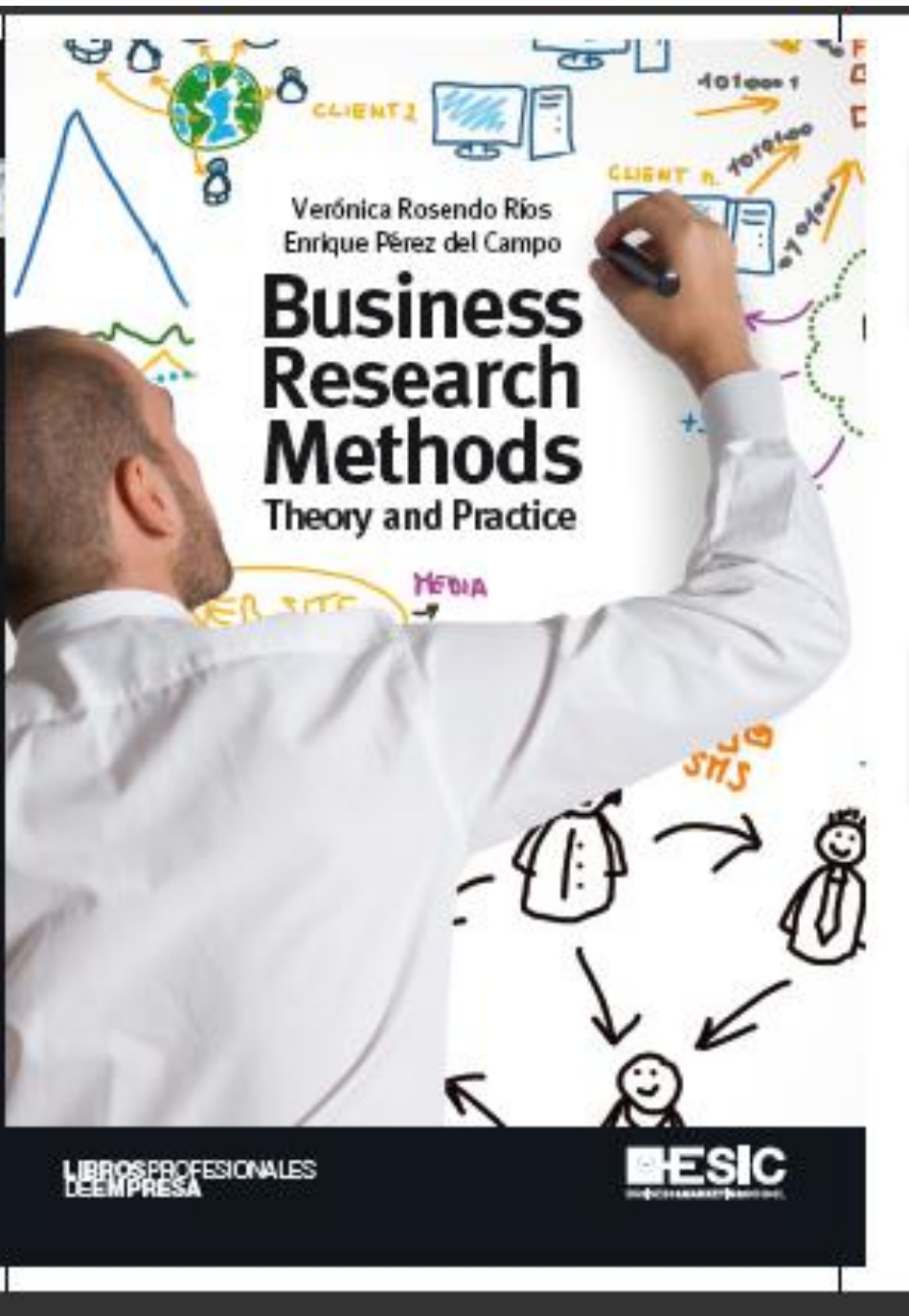
P&G often uses **qualitative research techniques** to discover potential problems or opportunities for the company's products. For example, **Herbal Essences Hair Care's** new logo, advertising copy, reformulated ingredients, and new bottle design. The redesigned bottles for shampoo and conditioner bottles are curved in a yin and yang fashion so they can fit together.

At times, P&G seeks outside help for its research. Such was the case when **P&G wanted a study of its own business problems**. The researchers selected began by applying qualitative research techniques including depth interviews, observational techniques (shadowing). And focus groups on P&G managers and marketing employees. These interviews gave the researchers the idea that perhaps P&G was suffering more from a management problem than from a marketing problem. It helped from a general research question that asked whether business problems were really due to **low morale among the employees**. After a lot of qualitative interviews with dozens and dozens of P&G employees, a quantitative study follow-up these findings and supported this idea, leading to **suggestions for improving employee morale!**

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Sources: Zikmund et al. (2013). Nelson, Emily "Focus Groupies: P&G Keeps Cincinnati Busy with All its Studies", Wall Street Journal 239 (January 24, 2002), A1, Eastern Edition; Stengel, J.R., A.L. Dixon, and C.T. Allen, "Listening Begins at Home", Harvard Business Review (November, 2003), 106-116.

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