



QUALITATIVE OR QUANTATIVE?

Whichever consultation method you choose, you will be making a decision between collecting data that is qualitative (quality) or quantitative (quantity).

Qualitative

What is it?

This type of consultation explores how people feel – their attitudes, behaviours and motives in depth. It is about collecting ideas rather than numbers. It allows you to develop an insight into the reasons why people feel the way that they do.

This type of consultation is usually carried out through one-to-one interviewing or through group discussion.

Whilst it does not provide statistically reliable results it will explain behaviour much better than quantitative research.


i.e. A quantitative survey (postal questionnaire) will tell you how many people are not using the leisure centre, a qualitative survey is more likely to tell you why they aren't using it.

When should it be used?

It is most useful when consulting on complex issues where there is no simple 'yes' or 'no' answers or where there is a need to share ideas.

It is also a good way to develop – through discussion – an idea of how people might react to changes in policy and services or what changes they would like to see.

It can also be used to pilot written material such as leaflets, posters and guidance documents or a questionnaire.



Examples

Citizen's Panels

Forums

Focus Groups

Workshops / Visioning Exercises

Individual in-depth interviews


What are the Advantages?

- Opportunities to explore issues in depth (if people are properly briefed).
- Panel can be structured to be fully representative of the whole community.
- The respondents decision making process can be followed and analysed.
- Can be used to tackle different issues or to assess changes of opinion over time.
- Host of the consultation can make sure that everyone understands the question. Misunderstanding can be addressed.
- Range of issues can be covered.
- Bringing people together and sharing ideas and experiences can be a creative experience – people learning from each other.
- Sensitive topics can be discussed in a supportive environment of similar experience.
- Minority opinions can be explored and debated with the majority (and vice versa).

What are the Disadvantages?

- Views may be unrealistic / unrepresentative.
- Meetings can be dominated by a few people with strong views.
- Some individuals may feel intimidated, unable to express themselves freely.
- Individual views are not represented properly in order to gain a consensus. Discussions can drift from the point if not carefully managed.

More detailed information can be found on the Consultation Toolkit Methodology page.





Quantative

What is it?

This type of research / consultation is intended to collect information that can be easily measured. It asks questions that give people a number of pre-selected answers that they can pick from.

I.e. Are you satisfied? Yes or No

The information collected is turned into numerical data that is statistically representative and can be compared with other similar data.

When should it be used?

This type of consultation should be used when you are looking to identify the weight of opinions in a population.

This can include agreement / disagreement with a current or proposed policy / initiative and how satisfied users are with the council as a whole or with a specific service.


This type of consultation is a good way of identifying if a problem exists (i.e. high dissatisfaction) and whether any further information / action is required.

It should be used as early as possible in any planning process. There is no point rushing into organising a project (which will involve detailed research) to see why people are dissatisfied with a service when in reality people are actually quite satisfied.

Examples

Satisfaction Surveys
Opinions Polls
Referendums
Ballots





What are the Advantages?

- Respondent suitability can be checked ensuring a representative sample
- Good for simple issues.
- Rapid response/fairly cheap
- Wide geographical area covered
- Can ask sensitive questions.
- People can give information anonymously that would not give in a public arena.
- Easy to compare data with previous years and identify changes.

What are the Disadvantages?

- Responses can be unrepresentative of population
- Can be difficult to access hard to reach groups.
- Not all questions are necessarily answered.
- Answers are not explained.
- Not suitable for complex issues that need detailed explanation.
- Potential for bias.
- No visual information (mannerisms etc...)
- Low response rate / high refusal rate.
- High spoilage/non return rate
- Arms length approach to public (no personal touch)

More detailed information can be found on the Consultation Toolkit Methodology page.

