

Methodological guidelines for focus groups

Deliverable 5.1

**EnTrust: Enlightened Trust: An Examination of Trust and Distrust in Governance –
Conditions, Effects and Remedies**

WP5: Developmental-psychological insight into trust/distrust

Work package leader: MU

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WP5 Guidelines for the Conduction of Focus Groups

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, trust is inherently related to situations characterized by a certain degree of uncertainty and personal vulnerability, that is, situations in which one can be potentially deceived, exploited, or harmed (Hamm et al., 2017; Yamagishi, 2011). Trust, in the context of such situations, can be defined as an expectancy of positive, rather than negative, outcomes following from the other party's actions (Deutsch, 1958). These situations can occur in personal relationships, in the organizational context, and also in the context of individuals' interactions with social and political authorities. The process of governance is actually closely associated with individuals' dependence on the decisions of the authorities endowed with an institutionalized coercive power.

A striking example of a situation involving increased perceptions of uncertainty and vulnerability and affecting the whole society was the Covid-19 pandemic. This suggests that trust in authorities might have played an essential role in this context. To control the pandemic, the authorities issued a number of measures whose scale had been unthinkable for decades. These measures could have been potentially harmful due to their serious impact on people's everyday routines, personal relationships, or work and educational activities.

The anti-pandemic measures affected the whole society. Even the youngest children have experienced the impact of these measures on their lives especially considering the home schooling at the beginning of the pandemic, wearing masks at school later on, etc.

Therefore, it is relevant to investigate what was the meaning of trust in the context of Covid-19 pandemic among people with different experience given by their age. Previous research has shown that the stability of generalized social trust increases during childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that the reasoning about general political issues such as democracy or human rights becomes more complex with age as a person becomes able to consider different perspectives. There is also an increasing tendency towards more pragmatic (and less absolutistic) understanding of these issues.

Research questions:

1. What are the meanings of trust and distrust to actors and institutions who issued measures to control Covid-19 in different age groups?
2. How are sources of trust and distrust constructed in this context in different age groups?

2. Sampling guidelines

Number of focus groups and participants per country

In every country, a total number of eight focus groups will be conducted. Four age categories will be targeted:

1. Childhood/early adolescence: age 11-12
2. Middle adolescence: age 14-15
3. Late adolescence: age 18-19
4. Adulthood: age 30+

There will be two focus groups with every age category. Four to six people will participate in every focus group. Please make sure that the groups are homogeneous in terms of age, that is, all participants belong to a given age category.

General inclusion criteria

- Participants must have previous experiences with online environment and be able to communicate online.
- No major medical or psychological condition hindering participant's active participation in the focus group should be present.
- Participants must be native speakers or have language skills comparable to native speakers.
- Participants in one focus group should not have close personal knowledge of each other. This means they should not be relatives, close friends, classmates, teammates, members of the same youth club etc. However, it is not necessary to sample participants who are completely unrelated, that is, it is possible that participants know each superficially from other contexts (e.g., it is possible to sample participants who go to the same school provided they are not classmates or close friends).

Composition of the groups

Gender

- At least two males and two females must be present in every focus group.

Educational background - age categories 11-12, 14-15, and 18-19

- For every age category, identify whether there are different educational tracks in your country – preferably identify two main tracks. For example, there might be academically-oriented grammar schools versus vocationally-oriented schools. At least two participants from each educational track should be present in every focus group.
- If there are no clear educational tracks for a given age category in your country, try to increase the diversity of the focus group by including, for example, at least two participants from “alternative (e.g., Montessori)” (versus standard) schools, or private (versus public) schools.

- Although it is possible that (some) participants in the age category 18-19 are already working or attending university/college, select them based on their high school educational track (no matter whether they have already completed high school or not).
- The selection of specific criteria will be always dependent on the specific context of your country, in which different types of schooling might be relevant. Always keep in mind that the final goal is to increase the diversity of participants' experiences and thus the richness of the data.

Educational background – age category 30+

- Sample participants aged between 30 and 50 (i.e., people from the generation that is one generation above the younger groups).
- At least two participants with completed university/college education and two participants without university/college education must be present in every focus group.

Recruitment strategies

- Convenience sampling will be used.
- The most preferable strategy is to approach schools, youth organizations, leisure time organizations, sport organizations etc., and ask them to help with recruitment. For example, they might distribute leaflets to prospective participants and their parents, or approach them directly.
- As an alternative strategy, researchers' personal networks can be used. However, focus group moderators cannot have any personal knowledge of participants.

3. Focus group guidelines

WELCOME THE INTERVIEWEES

First of all, we'd like to thank you that you've made time and agreed to participate in this group interview.

My name is **NAME OF THE 1ST INTERVIEWER** and I work at **NAME OF THE INSTITUTION**. I'll be the one asking questions today. There's also my colleague **NAME OF THE 2ND INTERVIEWER** who is responsible for all the technical issues and maybe she/he'll ask a few questions too.

(In case of younger age groups: Before we start, I'll talk for a while, just to explain why we're here today.)

Currently, we're conducting research, where we ask children, teenagers, and adults, how the past two years have been for them, during which we've faced the covid-19 pandemics. Primarily, we want to ask you about your sense of trust towards those who came up with various measures and restrictions. Also, we're interested in your trust towards people who're somehow close to you.

The interview will last about an hour, and it will be videorecorded. Can I turn the recording on? Are you comfortable with that?

I'd be glad if we briefly introduced ourselves to each other, now:

- *In countries, where relevant (e.g., Germany): Consider whether you want to be on first-names terms (i.e., German term 'duzen'), or if you want to be rather on formal terms (i.e., 'siesen') with interviewees. Consider what is more comfortable for you as interviewers and ask the interviewees what they prefer. For instance, we (the Czech team) are going to tell the youngest children directly to 'duzen' each other (also us as interviewers) – this could ensure less formal atmosphere for the youngest age group. In case of 14-15 and 18-19 age groups, we're going to ask the interviewees first, if they prefer 'duzen' or 'siesen'. In case of the adults, we're going to call the interviewers by their first name, but we're going to 'siesen' them.*

As I've already mentioned, my name is **NAME** and you can call me **XXX**. I'd like to ask you to say your name and how we should call you – whatever is preferable for you. Also, you can say where you're from and (*children*) which class are you in, (*adolescents*) what kind of school you attend.

PARTICIPANTS BRIEFLY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES

Thank you. Before we start, I'd like to mention two important rules which should be followed, so our discussion runs smoothly and without any problems.

The first rule concerns the fact that we're primarily interested in your own opinions and the way how you perceive different things. Therefore, there're no correct, or wrong answers. *(by younger age-groups: Therefore, there's no need to worry that we'll correct you or do something similar. I'd like to ask you, to treat each other the same way.)* Maybe, you'll disagree with others – that's totally fine. However, if you want to express your disagreement, please do it in a polite and respectful way. Please respect, that others may perceive some issues differently.

The second rule is rather technical. We'd like to ask you, to mute your mic whenever you're not talking. When you want to say something, you can unmute it.

Lastly for now, you can quit the study at the beginning or at any time until the discussion is over. If you decide to quit the study, you do not have to state a reason for doing so, but we would appreciate if you would give us the reason for doing so. In such a case, we will continue with the focus group. However, until the anonymized text transcript is created, you might request that your data is not transcribed and used in the analysis.

That's all for the beginning. Is there anything, you'd like to ask, right now?

QUESTION TIME

Part 1: Covid

We've been experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic for more than two years now. All of us have been affected in some way by the restrictions and measures that were implemented to mitigate the spread of the virus. These included wearing face masks and respiratory masks, online schooling, canceling different events, temporary travel bans, or mandatory testing.

How did you experience all of that, all these measures...? How was it for you?

Who do you think came up with these measures and implemented them? (alternatively: *who, according to you, came up...*)

In the younger group if not clear: *who exactly* was it? (or if they answer "the government" or "some group of people" you can ask: *who exactly is in the government that implemented these measures?* -just to make it less abstract for them, but it is not necessary)

Did you trust or distrust the people *(you can use the answer they gave you to the previous question)* that came up with these measures and implemented them?

Why did you trust them? *try to follow up on the answer and ask direct the question on the interviewees who mention they trusted – e.g., 'Ok, now, Jane and Peter said they trusted the government. Why did you trust them?'*

also, the interviewees can mention that they sometimes trusted and sometimes distrusted those who came up with the measures – if this is the case of your focus group, you can ask as follows: 'Ok, so you said that in some cases you trusted the Ministry of Health, but sometimes you didn't. Now, why was it? Why did you sometimes trust, and sometimes distrust them?'

Why did you distrust them? *try to follow up on the answer and ask direct the question on the interviewees who mention they trusted – e.g., 'Ok, now, Jane and Peter said they distrusted the government. Why did you distrust them?'*

also, the interviewees can mention that they sometimes trusted and sometimes distrusted those who came up with the measures – if this is the case of your focus group, you can ask as follows: 'Ok, so you said that in some cases you trusted the Ministry of Health, but sometimes you didn't. Now, why was it? Why did you sometimes trust, and sometimes distrust them?'

Can you think of any particular situations that influenced your trust or distrust?

Have you trusted/distrusted them (*the people who came up with the measures*) the whole time? Was it ever different?

Has anyone influenced your trust/distrust?

What are the consequences of trusting the people who came up with the measures?

Is it somehow good (/useful) to trust those people?

Can it be somehow bad to trust these people?

[For older age groups: Can trusting someone bring any dis/advantage for you/to your life]

And the other way around - What are the consequences of distrusting the people who came up with the measures?

Is it somehow good (/useful) to distrust those people?

Can it be somehow bad to distrust these people?

Part 2: Trust in general

Up to now we talked a lot about covid, about the government (*name the people/groups you talked about*). (It seems like trust/distrust can be very important in our lives.) Now we would like to know how you feel about people you know. Try to imagine a person that you trust. You don't have to say who it is; just picture this person. (*give them a minute to think*) Are you ready? Very well. Could you tell us why you trust this person?

Is it somehow good (/useful) to trust others?

Can it be somehow bad to trust others?

Now try to imagine someone whom you distrust. Could you tell why you distrust this person?

Is it somehow good (/useful) to distrust others?

Can it be somehow bad to distrust others?

Conclusion – wrap up what you talked about in the focus group. Ask the participants if they want to add anything they think is important. Thank all participants.