

Adult and Health Services and Children and Young People's Services



Step 6 - Analysing and interpreting information

October 2017

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Analysing and interpreting information

The guidance below provides the basics for analysing quantitative and qualitative data which can help to make sense of reams of data.

Always start with your research goals

When analysing data (whether from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or whatever), always start from review of your research goals, i.e., the reason you undertook the research in the first place. This will help you organise your data and focus your analysis.

For example, if you wanted to improve a program by identifying its strengths and weaknesses, you can organize data into program strengths, weaknesses and suggestions to improve the program. If you wanted to fully understand how your program works, you could organize data in the chronological order in which customers or clients go through your program.

If you are conducting a performance improvement study, you can categorize data according to each measure associated with each overall performance result, e.g., employee learning, productivity and results.

Basic analysis of "quantitative" information

(For information other than commentary, e.g., ratings, rankings, yes's, no's, etc.):

1. Make copies of your data and store the master copy away. Use the copy for making edits, cutting and pasting, etc.
2. Tabulate the information, i.e., add up the number of ratings, rankings, yes's, no's for each question.
3. For ratings and rankings, consider computing a mean, or average, for each question. For example, "For question #1, the average ranking was 2.4". This is more meaningful than indicating, e.g., how many respondents ranked 1, 2, or 3.
4. Consider conveying the range of answers, e.g., 20 people ranked "1", 30 ranked "2", and 20 people ranked "3".

Basic analysis of "qualitative" information

(Respondents' verbal answers in interviews focus groups or written commentary on questionnaires):

1. Read through all the data.
2. Organise comments into similar categories, e.g., concerns, suggestions, strengths, weaknesses, similar experiences, program inputs, recommendations, outputs, outcome indicators, etc.
3. Label the categories or themes, e.g., concerns, suggestions, etc.
4. Attempt to identify patterns, or associations and causal relationships in the themes, e.g., all people who attended programs in the evening had similar concerns, most people came from the same geographic area, most people were in the same salary range, what processes or events respondents experience during the program, etc.
5. Keep all commentary for several years after completion in case needed for future reference.

Interpreting information

1. Attempt to put the information in perspective, e.g. compare results to what you expected, promised results; staff management; any common standards for your products or services; original goals (especially if you're conducting a program evaluation); indications or measures of accomplishing outcomes or results (especially if you're conducting an outcomes or performance evaluation); description of the program's experiences, strengths, weaknesses, etc. (especially if you're conducting a process evaluation).
2. Consider recommendations to help employees improve the product or service; conclusions about program operations or meeting goals, etc.
3. Record conclusions and recommendations in a report, and associate interpretations to justify your conclusions or recommendations.

Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another language or format.



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