Consensus Group Methodology in Health Professions Education Research: The Nominal Group Technique

Defining the Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

- NGT is a consensus group method used to generate ideas, synthesize expert opinions, and enhance decision making for topics lacking consensus in education (e.g., curriculum development, assessment, program evaluation). 1-3
- NGT entails a highly structured face-to-face meeting of 5 to 12 participants. 3
- NGT requires 1 to 5 hours to complete, depending on project complexity. 4

Planning Your NGT

- **Purpose**: Clearly state your study purpose and research question.
- **Participants**: Recruit experts who have deep knowledge of the study topic to ensure the credibility of the results.
- **Lit. Review**: Present your literature review (which is optional, but recommended) after item generation to minimize bias.
- **Facilitators**: Select a moderator to ensure that each participant has equal opportunity to contribute and an assistant to record and compile results.

NGT Key Features

1. Silent Idea Generation

- **Introduction**: After outlining the NGT procedures, the moderator poses the question to participants who then have 15 minutes of silence to generate items (i.e., ideas) on their own.

2. Round Robin

- **The moderator asks each participant in turn for one item each, until no items remain.**
- **An assistant transcribes the items for participants to see.**

3. Discussion and Clarification

- **Review the Literature (optional)**
- **Review Items as Group**: Once all the items are transcribed, the moderator presents the literature review to the group who may then decide to include additional items.
- **Add/Combine/Remove**: Each item is then reviewed and clarified through moderator-led discussion. Items may be combined or removed if deemed appropriate.

4. Private Rating and Iterative Rerating as Needed

- **The assistant prepares rating sheets for participants who then have 10 minutes to prioritize items in private.**
- **Results for each item (mean score and voting distribution) are shared.** While consensus criteria can vary, we recommend keeping an item if:
  - ≥ 70% of participants rate it as 7–9, and
  - ≤ 2 raters assign a rank between 1 and 3.
- **This process repeats until:**
  - No significant changes in voting occur between rounds,
  - A reasonable number of items is reached, or
  - Participant fatigue occurs.

References:


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