

The Focus Group Teaching Notes

What Are the Relevant Facts?

1. Elspeth has moderated a focus group for a potentially important client.
2. The local economy is bad, and the marketing research firm is seeking clients from segments that traditionally have not been marketing research users.
3. Elspeth's superior and the client are pleased with the way she moderated the focus group. This could result in more moderating tasks for Elspeth and additional research engagements from the client.
4. Franklin told Elspeth to get Peggy's last name.
5. Participants were never told that they would not be identified to the client.
6. There is no time for Elspeth to deliberate about what to do.
7. Elspeth did not object when she was told to get Peggy's last name for the client.

What Are the Ethical Issues?

1. Would providing Peggy's last name to the client be a violation of her privacy?
2. Would Peggy have said what she did about the firm if she had known that the same firm sponsored the focus group?
3. Should members of focus groups assume that what they say will be held in confidence?

Who Are the Primary Stakeholders?

- Elspeth
- Franklin
- Elspeth's firm, including her superiors, coworkers, and the owners
- The law firm and its staff member(s) who worked on Peggy's husband's case
- Future clients of the law firm
- Peggy
- Peggy's husband
- The marketing research community/industry
- Persons who participate in or respond to marketing research studies

What Are the Possible Alternatives?

1. Elspeth could refuse to provide Peggy's last name. (She could even destroy any record of it to prevent

anyone else in the marketing research company from providing it.)

2. Elspeth could discuss her feelings with Franklin and let him decide whether identifying Peggy is unethical. (It is possible that Franklin is having the same misgivings and/or just did not think of the possible ethical issue.)
3. Elspeth could provide Peggy's last name but note that she is doing so against her better judgment.

What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?

- Consider the utilitarian model:
 1. Which alternative yields the greatest benefit to the greatest number of stakeholders? To what extent should the relative importance (financial and emotional/personal costs) be considered?
 2. How are costs and benefits measured in this case—especially since neither Peggy nor her husband will know that Peggy has been identified?
- Consider the rights model:
 1. What does each of the following stakeholders have the right to expect, and why?
 - The marketing research firm and Elspeth's superior
 - The law firm
 - Peggy and her husband
 - Elspeth
 - The law firm's future clients
 - The marketing research industry/community
 - Persons who agree to participate in marketing research studies
 2. For each possible alternative, determine if any rights of each stakeholder are violated.
 3. Are some rights, or the rights of some stakeholders, more important than others?
- Consider the justice model:
 1. Do some stakeholders carry a greater burden than others in this case? For each possible alternative, explain which stakeholders have a greater burden.

2. For each stakeholder, state which alternative you would want if you were that stakeholder or belonged to that stakeholder group.

What Are the Practical Constraints?

1. Elspeth is an employee of the marketing research firm, and her superior instructed her to provide the requested information.
2. If Elspeth refuses to provide the information or in some way makes an issue of it, she may jeopardize her standing in the firm.
3. The relationship between the marketing research firm and the law firm could be adversely affected at a time when the research company needs new business.

What Actions Should Be Taken?

1. Are there other alternatives available to Elspeth and/or the marketing research firm?

2. What action(s) can Elspeth take? Why?
3. Which ethical theory--utilitarian, rights, justice--makes the most sense in this instance? Why?
4. Which alternative should be selected? Why?

Additional Readings

The instructor may suggest the following sources to the class:

Churchill, Gilbert, A. *Marketing Research: Methodological Foundations*, 5th ed. Chicago: The Dryden Press, 1991. See Appendix 2A, "Marketing Research Ethics," pp. 44-65 (especially Table 2A.1: A Personal Code for Practicing Market and Opinion Research, pp. 46-48.)

Qualitative Research Council of the Advertising Research Foundation. *Focus Groups: Issues and Approaches*, New York: Advertising Research Foundation, Inc., 1985.