



Toolbox:

An easy-to-use guide to consult with youth





Introduction

This toolbox aims to provide a comprehensive and easy-to-use guide that will enable its readers to organise successful consultations with youth. It is designed primarily to help with Structured dialogue processes. However, its content can be used more broadly, by anyone who wants to engage with young people and wishes to learn about their opinions, preferences, interests or political views.

The main motivation behind this toolbox is the improvement of Structured dialogue process. Since its inception in 2011, Structured dialogue has moved through five 18-month cycles (copying the Presidency trios of the council of the EU). In the last cycle, around 70 000 young people have been consulted, making it the biggest European initiative connecting young people and decision-makers. Given this scope and success, it is very important that the consultation process is well managed, uses established and transparent tools, and its results are robust and can be relied on.

When it comes to the management of Structured dialogue consultations process, one of its advantages is its openness and flexibility. Each National Working Group is free to organise consultations the way that suits them, reflecting the specifics of their respective country. There are no harmonized tools, no common instruments. The questions are the same for everyone (agreed upon on the first EU Youth Conference in each cycle) and there are common outcomes (produced on the second conference). However, what happens in-between the

conferences is fully within the discretion of National Working Groups. Some sort of common ground is thus needed - and this document aims to provide it.

Even though some toolboxes about Structured dialogue consultations have been produced in the past, this document is unique in containing an unprecedented depth and scope of advice. It incorporates the basic principles and their explanation, lists elements that every consultation with youth must take into consideration, elaborates on success factors and closely describes individual instruments that can be used in consultation process. As a result, it can become a very valuable starting point for Structured dialogue novices, but it also contains a lot of information that even veterans of youth work might find very helpful.

Producing this document was a common task undertaken by Dutch National Youth Council and Slovak National Youth Council as a part of a Strategic partnership project supported by the Key action 2 of Erasmus+. With both councils being a part of presidency trio for the Vth cycle, we felt that we are in a position to think more broadly about the processes and instruments involved in Structured dialogue. We have therefore analysed its basic principles and connected them (via success factors and concrete instruments) with everyday practice.

We sincerely hope that this toolbox will inspire, provide analysis and show ways how to improve the consultation processes.

Yours, DNYC and SNYC

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Key Elements

Inclusiveness and representativeness

Perhaps the biggest and most important question with regard to participation mechanisms like Structured dialogue is this: What should be the basic requirements for consultations with youth? It is certainly clear that talking to some people you know is not a sufficient strategy to “consult youth”. Even if you let a young person speak for herself, she most certainly does not, simply in virtue of being young, speak for the whole generation. A set of honest opinions from young people can present a completely distorted image of what their peers think. The reason is simple: young people are a diverse group. Therefore, any consultation should reflect this diversity. We thus suggest the following answer to the question above: In order to be taken seriously, the minimal requirements for a consultation with youth is that it must track the various differences within youth (representativeness) and it must make sure that it also involves vulnerable or otherwise marginalised groups (inclusiveness). These two characteristics are thus the most important goals that any consultation with youth must seek to fulfill. They should lie behind any Structured dialogue campaign.

Inclusiveness

The challenge

Just as the conditions in which young people grow up differ, they themselves differ in all kinds of aspects (e.g. interests, motivation, development stage, values). In an ideal situation, none of these differences forms a barrier preventing them from being involved and heard. In reality, however, this is not the case. Thus, Structured Dialogue should take into account these differences and adapt to them in terms of methodology, so that everyone is involved.

Not every youngster wants to participate in consultations or be involved in ‘democratic life’. But this does not mean that we should accept that only the ideas and experience of youngsters who want to participate in, let’s say, a formal youth panel, should matter. Therefore, an extra effort is often needed to make consultations inclusive.

Practical steps to meet the challenge

An organiser of youth consultations should employ different strategies that reflect the interests, motivation and development stages of various young people. The fact that it might be a lot easier to involve certain groups (or that certain groups are much more motivated to be involved than others) does not take away a necessity to include marginalised groups. In addition to a broad quantitative consultations, there are plenty other possibilities: focus groups, a debate amongst students, or a light-hearted pizza-session at the local cinema. The key aspect is to make it as friendly and open as possible, catching the interest of everyone. Based on our experience, we know that that young people are willing to provide input when concerns their own interests.

Moreover, to be more inclusive to (the needs and interests of) specific target groups, it is necessary to make sure that the collected input is of high quality. In our opinion, the quality of the input of young people increases significantly if they have direct experience with a theme or issue. This concept of 'experience-based expertise' is further explored in the next chapter. The quality of the SD input also increases significantly when in-depth information from relevant people is collected. That is one reason why qualitative instruments like focus groups and in-depth interviews are indispensable.

In order to be inclusive, the system of Structured dialogue consultations should:

- 1** Be able to adjust the process to different groups and types of young people involved - not simply providing one fit-for-all type of consultation.
- 2** Focus on the interests and experience of the youth involved as the most effective tool to catch their attention.
- 3** Make the quality of the input a priority. This means combining methodologically sound qualitative and quantitative instruments.

Representativeness

The challenge

Direct representation would mean that all young people are fully involved and heard. As this is not possible, a sample of the entire group is used. This sample needs to be representative, in other words, the outcome needs to be applicable to the entire group. Thus, the ideal of representativeness in the Structured dialogue consultations is that a limited group of consulted young people produces a set of opinions that is the same (or very similar) to a set of opinions we would receive if everybody was consulted. The challenge is to make claims that are truly a “voice of youth” (and can be recognized as such by young people from a variety of backgrounds and by general audience).

In order to be representative, the system of Structured dialogue consultations should:

- 1 Identify the relevant demographic categories for a given population (the relevant ones, depending on context, can be religion, socio-economic background, age, etc.).
- 2 Aim to compose a sample from which conclusions can be drawn for a (sub)population.
- 3 Apply statistical methods to guarantee representativeness, for example by weighting data and testing of significance.

Practical steps to meet the challenge

A questionnaire or a big online or offline youth panel are instruments particularly suitable for broad representative consultations, at least in theory. The outcomes of using this type of instruments are valuable, since they provide a general picture of the opinions and ideas of the youth population.

When one thinks about the concept of ‘representativeness’, statistical criteria, (semi)random selection and correct compositions of samples are of crucial importance. In order for a consultation to be representative, several questions need to be answered. What

is the minimum number of participants/respondents needed in order to be able to draw conclusions for the entire (youth) population (N-value)? What variables are important in order to get a representative picture of the youth population? And how can we create a sample which guarantees representativeness of these subgroups within the population?

When designing a consultation, it is important to think about these questions. A consultation that is not representative does not do justice to the Structured Dialogue process.

Language as an important success-factor in youth outreach

The importance of the choice of language

The choice of language is critical in making youth participation efforts successful. This is true especially for online activities and questionnaires. While there are many other determining “success factors” during face-to-face interactions (described in detail elsewhere in this toolbox), the choice of language might be the single most important decision made with regards to online and printed materials.

During online and offline Structured dialogue consultations, the goal is to allow young people to express their opinions and to discuss matters that concern them. These efforts cannot be successful unless young people understand the issues at hand. This means that the material for consultation must be presented in a manner that

- 1 captures the true nature of the problem;**
- 2 is understandable to young people;**
- 3 makes young people appreciate the importance and appeal of the issue.**

All three factors are necessary in making the consultation successful. If the presentation fails to capture the essence of the problem, then it is meaningless. If it is not properly understood, then it is fruitless. And, finally, if young people fail to see why it is important, they tend to become disinterested, so the process yields the exact opposite of what it is supposed to do – which is to motivate youth into being more politically and/or socially active.

The problem with language

Political issues (which constitute the subject-matter of Structured dialogue consultations) are often relatively abstract. This creates a problem. Values, rights and goals of youth policy are not topics that most young people think about every day. Therefore, the way the content of the consultations is presented is of utmost importance. If the organizers do not make an effort to be sufficiently clear, they run risk of being misunderstood or losing attention of the youth involved. This usually creates a grave imbalance in the consultations as only the young people that are already interested in politics (usually majority middle-class from educated households) voice their opinions, while others are effectively silenced – because they might not feel confident using the abstract political language. Therefore, an effective gulf is created

between people that can “speak the language” – and thus can voice their opinions – and those who cannot. The problems presented above are not unfamiliar in youth sector. “Eurospeak” (the complicated language often used in various EU documents, including in the field of youth) is widely denounced, multiple European Youth Forum resolutions call for a simple language used in youth policy documents. Nonetheless, the problem persists. Solving it requires a continuous effort from those that already understand “the language” to take a step back and make sure that the questions they are asking and the opinions they are voicing are really as clear as they take them to be even to the people that are not at home in the political discussions. Only then can young people understand, appreciate and be involved in political discussions.

Case study I: Inclusiveness

The topic of the Vth cycle of Structured dialogue was “Enabling all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe – Ready for life, Ready for Society”. One of the key concepts here is “inclusiveness”. It was mentioned often throughout the guiding framework adopted during the Amsterdam conference and was supposed to be a key concept in the consultation process that followed.

As Slovak National Working Group for Structured Dialogue, we struggled a bit with how to communicate it, even though Slovak language has a straightforward translation (“inkluzívny”). The word in Slovak, however, is relatively young and exclusively bureaucratic. Still, policy-makers and youth workers with some experience in writing national and EU projects are using it often and fluently. All educated people know what it means, including active

young people that already have some experience with the youth sector.

In the end, we decided not to use it at all in our outward communication (be it online questionnaire, materials, leaflets, etc.). The word would have required explanation and it would have cost us some loss of interest amongst young people who would struggle to use it. Therefore, we decided to work around it.

When there was space for it, we explained what we mean without using it. When there wasn't, we used the word "tolerantný" (tolerant) instead. We know that "tolerant" and "inclusive" do not have the same meaning (it was forcefully pointed out by some members of our NWG). However, we felt that the switch in meaning was worth it, since "tolerant" in Slovak is much more familiar and widely used concept. Consulted young people thus had considerably less trouble voicing their opinions even when they did not belong to an already active and politically minded minority that felt at ease around words like "inkluzívny"

It is always important to note that the concepts that may seem ordinary and clear-cut to an NWG member can be unfamiliar to others. Moreover, even if the consulted young people know what a word means (are able to define it), they may be far less able to use it actively and spontaneously. And even if they can use it, it might not be a part of the way how they describe the world around them. Therefore, using "big" words might actively inhibit them in articulating the problems they face.

The contrast between "Do you think Slovak education system is sufficiently inclusive?" and "Do you think that various minorities are equally welcome in Slovak schools?" is staggering. The difference: you will get a real, honest answer to the second question very often. That is not the case for the first.

Case study II: Model texts

Example 1:

The unnecessarily complicated youth-unfriendly “policy-language”

The Youth Forum strongly advocates for young people to be actively involved in decision-making processes, as well as in exercising democracy. In the decreasing general interest of young people for the public sphere and the elections in particular, we accentuate participating and contributing to elections as important tools for both fostering the desirable skillset amongst youth and in empowering them to become integral parts of their respective communities.

(Source: www.youthforum.org. Text slightly altered.)

Example 2:

The youth-friendly(er) text

The Youth Forum strongly supports an active involvement of young people in decision-making processes, as well as in exercising democracy. In the decreasing general interest of young people in the public sphere and the elections in particular, we emphasize the importance of participating and contributing to elections. Participation teaches young people a very desirable set of skills and it also makes possible for them to play a truly important role in their communities.

Example 3:**The fake pseudo-youth speak devoid of meaningful content**

Yo! Here in Youth Forum we think that you – the cool young person reading this – should go out and make your voice heard! Just do it, anyhow you please – vote, participate, demonstrate. Participating is cool and you can learn a lot doing it! You will then become a true part of community. Peace!

There are two dangers. The first one is relying too heavily on the language of policy and law, making it hard for young people (especially the disadvantaged ones) to really “get” the importance of the political issues and their relevance to their lives. That may result in making “political debates” accessible only to the select few that can already think and speak in the abstract policy language – and feel confident doing so.

However, there is a second danger. The efforts to make politics “cool” or “hip” are almost always unsuccessful. While the choice of language should be as simple as possible, it is a bad idea to “dumb down” the issues themselves. There are two main reasons. First of all, dumbing down youth participation is paternalistic – the silent assumption is that young people are really not able to understand the real issues. Second, it is also “fake” (to use youthful language a bit). Consultations of radically simplified political questions cannot result in serious recommendations, because they do not address the real problems – and young people will usually see through it.

Success factors in working with youth

When working with youth, as part of setting up a consultation or in other projects, there are certain success factors that contribute to your project being successful. These success factors are applicable to both of the basic forms of impact youth (want to) have, namely: (1) impacting others and/or their environment; (2) impacting (youth) policy. We distinguish between the following six success factors:

1. Ensure that the basic psychological needs of youth are met

The need for autonomy, competence and connectedness is universal and is applicable to all youth. Take this as your point of reference but start with competence (development); the fulfilment of these basic needs leads to youth becoming intrinsically motivated to realise their potential and can trigger a desire to have impact.

2. Reach youth in their natural living environment

Meet young people where they are: their neighbourhood, their school, a sports- or hobby club, or a youth care institute. To reach youth, and to be as inclusive as possible, it is vital to operate within their primary living environment and avoid unnecessary barriers. Form partnerships with organizations that play a key role in the daily lives of youth, and meet youth in a place (and at a time) they are comfortable with.

3. Employ a target-group-specific strategy

Although the basic psychological needs of youth are universal, young people are of course not a homogeneous group but vary in their needs, values and interests, depending on their stage of development, but also on their social, cultural and economic background. It is therefore crucial to always strive for a target-group-specific approach.

4. Invest in relationships with and ownership amongst youth

Invest time in building and maintaining relationships with youth, genuinely listen to what they have to say and be transparent in what you do with their input. Focus on clear and realistic results. Furthermore, give them the responsibility they can handle, provide them with opportunities to expand this responsibility in order to create ownership.

5. Let youth convince and support each other

Youth are influenced most by their peers. Peer education is therefore ideal to reach and involve youth. Not only do peers know best what is happening in the lives of their fellow youth, they are also able to address sensitive topics as equals, and serve as inspiring role models. Moreover, peer education can perfectly overcome the differences in social and cultural backgrounds. And, not unimportantly, peer education gives peer educators the chance to further develop their talents.

6. Use the experience-based expertise of youth

When it comes to consulting, no one is a bigger expert than youngsters who personally experienced the theme or issue at hand. Collecting in-depth information on their experiences not only greatly improves the quality of the input, but also ensures a targeted, well-fitted approach, thereby creating more support and maximizing impact. Therefore, when consulting youth it is important to involve first and foremost the young people that are practically involved with the issue at hand. This involvement can be either passive (when young people experience school environment), active (when they learn about the situation in their community by volunteering in a local community centre) or a combination of the two. People with experience-based expertise, when interviewed, tend to be more interested, more focused and provide more relevant content. As a result, the whole consultation process can have a much bigger impact.

Focus groups in context of Structured dialogue - description of an instrument

Overview

Focus groups are the most common tool for gathering qualitative data in social sciences. The practice consists in summoning a target audience (a group of at least 4 people), asking them questions, facilitating discussion on given topics, and reporting the results. If done well, a focus group can give deep insights which are impossible to get from more "detached" instruments (like online questionnaire). Since the setting also enables a discussion amongst participants, it can show opinions shared within the group and not only by single individuals, as is the case with structured interviews.

Goals

The primary goal of a focus group is to collect narrative data on a problem from people with a personal experience with it. The point is not only to find out whether the people in a given group believe A, B, or C, but also why they believe it, what leads them to it, and their understanding of the wider context of the issue at hand.

The more general goal is to provide an in-depth analysis of how a certain group of people thinks about the subject of the research.

Target group

A choice of a target group depends on a research topic. In case of Structured dialogue (especially the European round of consultations), the topics are broad and applicable to youth as a whole. In order to make a question more interesting, it is also possible to pick a very specific topic relevant to a specific target group and report these, more concrete, results.

In practice, covering a more general topic may mean doing several rounds of focus groups with people from various backgrounds in order to get the full picture. If the topic is tolerance and diversity, for example, every relevant group of young people should be interviewed separately. In case of Slovakia, this would mean organising a separate focus group(s) with Roma youth (who are the main minority group) to discover their perceptions of the topic at hand.

Method

Focus groups are organised interactions focused on a specific pre-defined topic. When organising a focus group, there are three roles to fill:

Facilitator:

A supporter, not an actor

Her role is to guide the discussion and present the input questions. She should be sensitive to participants and manage inter-group dynamics.

Observer

The invisible one

She does not participate in group activities.

Her role is to take objective notes of participants' interactions and speech, manage the recording, etc.

Participants

The real actors

They should be similar in some respect - completely dissimilar groups of participants is not able to identify common standpoints and a group dynamic is hard to manage. This can have adverse effect on the quality of results. However, if this common element is present, complete similarity is not needed.

It is key for participants to feel comfortable, so that they can report their experience sincerely and accurately. If they do not feel at ease, the quality of results will go down. Therefore, it is always useful to organise focus groups in an environment that the participants are familiar with. If participants know each other, this can also increase their comfort and willingness to share their opinions.

The recommended practicalities:

Number of participants: min. 4 max. 10

Allocated time: 2 hours (min. 1 h / max. 3hrs)

Setting: The most comfortable to participants. Sitting in a circle is usually a good idea.

Reward: Many researchers argue against giving participants rewards because the quality of the output decreases if they participate just for material gain. However, giving them something small (like sweets) might make them more at ease.

STEP 1:

Planning and setting up the questions

Identify the topic, define target participants and formulate the questions

When organising a focus group, you should identify a group of young people you want to engage. Practically, this might mean contacting their school, youth organisation or club. The goal is to find them where they already are, not to artificially assemble them. Then think about the way to present the question - it must be easy to understand and track their interests (more on this in previous chapters of this toolbox)

The questions should go from more general (to raise interest and gain trust) to more specific ones (that tackle the key themes you are interested in).

STEP 2:

The actual event

The goal is to make participants comfortable and, gain their trust, so that they will be willing to share their thoughts and opinions.

1 Welcoming

Introduce the event, collect informed consent, socialize with participants (e.g. tag names).

2 Inputs Introduction

Start with open questions. You may use props (e.g. pictures, quotes, etc.) to stimulate thinking and discussion.

3 Discussion. There are two general strategies:

- Purely Verbal: good with lower-educated people and elders
- Writing on paper and/or flipchart: good to break the ice, participants can better express own positions, good for shy people that have problems with oral expressions

4 Conclusion and Reward

Debriefing, collecting feedbacks by participants, hand out reward (if you have one - which is by no means necessary).

STEP 3: Information Analysis

There are several steps when analysing the results of focus groups:

1 Transcript & Order the information.

Highlight answers according to participants' category (e.g. with colors), putting answers of questions in thematic blocks.

2 Interpret the information, for example by using the 7 criteria by Krueger¹:

- a words;
- b context (how facilitator and other participants influence individuals' involvement);
- c internal consistency: how do opinions change;
- d frequency (how often a comment is made) & extensiveness (number of participants reporting it);
- e specificity of comments (if they refer to real life experiences and not hypothetical);
- f comments' intensity (how terms color opinions);
- g big ideas (deep trends throughout discussions representing the big picture).

STEP 4: Writing the Final Report

Ideally a mix between an ethnographic approach (a narrative report quoting exactly what participants said) and a content analysis approach, reporting the trends in the participants' answers and a relative frequency of different types of answers.

¹see R.A.Krueger, M.A. Casey: Focus groups: Practical Guide for Applied Research (London: Sage Publications, 2015).

Tips and advice

Tip 1:

The questions prepared for a focus group should be open. The maximum feasible number is 12.

Tip 2:

If you plan to make an audio/video recording of the focus group (which is very much recommended), participants are required to sign an informed consent. Rules may vary from country to country, but with participants younger than 18 years old you might need an informed consent from their parents.

Tip 3:

If just a few participants interact between them, not involving the group, facilitator has two options: she can actively try to engage others or she can resort to using non-verbal means (small groups centred around flipcharts, for example), to give others a chance to give their opinion as well.

Tip 4:

Sometimes the groups will contain charismatic personalities / leaders who set the tone of the discussion. More moderated discussion is then required.

Tip 5:

Be prepared for all eventualities. Sometimes, the discussions get very passionate and some people get upset. Sometimes, the discussion cannot get going and people get bored. In these cases, good facilitation is essential (either to calm the room down or to get it interested).

Tip 6:

In case the topics are very sensitive (bullying is a good example), de-personalize the discussion. The participants then do not have to talk in public about their own traumatic experience, but can stick to more general insights.

Tip 7:

If you find out that there is a substantial heterogeneity within the group (a minority/majority gap or big differences amongst minorities), try to split them up.

Useful Links:

1. Conducting a Focus Group (straight and funny, 5:36 m.): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Auf9pkuCc8k>
2. Focus Group Lesson (complete and academic, 21:36 m.): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCAPz14yjd4>
3. General Data Analysis in Qualitative Methods (complete and academic, 17:11 m.): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opp5tH4uD-w>

Questionnaires in context of Structured dialogue - description of an instrument

Overview

Questionnaire is a method of gathering a large amount of input by producing a set of questions and then encouraging people to answer them either online or offline. The instrument usually does not provide deep, qualitative data, as it consists mostly of multiple choice questions, scaling questions or short answer questions. However, it can provide large amount of quantifiable data that can serve as a good basis for comparative analyses, mapping trends, discovering regional differences, and tracking the general mood and perceptions of the target group. Data gathered by this method can be transparent, good to work with and easy to communicate - so this instrument is particularly useful for media outreach.

Goals

The primary goal of questionnaire in the context of Structured dialogue is to reach as many young people as possible with an easy-to-use, quick-to-fill tool. Since engaging as many young people as possible is one of the aims of SD, questionnaire might be a tool to "make up the numbers". Moreover, the data can be easily made representative (when the questionnaire can filter for age/region/gender/background) and inclusive (when specific groups are particularly encouraged to fill it) - so the use of a questionnaire could also serve as a means to provide sufficient quality credentials to the whole SD process.

Target group

The Structured dialogue topics for any given cycle are quite general. Therefore, a typical questionnaire will target the youth as a whole. Still, one of the roles of this instrument is to try and differentiate disparate viewpoints and trends within this general target group. When writing the questionnaire, it is therefore important to include a section identifying the demographic characteristics of the respondent (more on that below).

Method

Questionnaire is a quantitative tool to gather perceptions and opinions of the target group.

It consists of roughly two parts:

1 Information about the respondent

This part is absolutely crucial because opinions and attitudes gathered by a questionnaire are only usable if they can be compared and precisely attributed. While it is not advisable to ask personal questions (the instrument should be anonymous), the questionnaire should be able to attribute responses to the relevant demographic groups. Most common would include gender, background, education, age, region, political affiliation, ethnicity, etc. However, categories should be modified with regard to the context of your country and the topic at hand. This may mean that it might be necessary to add some less typical categories (membership of youth organisation) while ignoring the more traditional ones (region or political affiliation).

2 The substantive questions

These questions should be designed to give you a desired amount of information regarding the topic at hand. They should be clearly formulated and (relatively) easy to answer. Most of them should be scale questions, multiple choice questions or short answer questions. Questionnaire is not a good instrument to ask long-answer questions.

The recommended practicalities:

Allocated time: The questionnaire should not take more than 15 minutes to fill. Otherwise the respondents lose interests and both quality and quantity of received answers significantly drops.

Tools: The easiest way to do online surveys is to use tools such as Survey monkey or Google forms - they are well-known, intuitive to grasp and easy to use. Also, they enable you to download the data directly to Excel and, in some instances, will sum up the results and do the basic graphs for you.

Offline questionnaires, on the other hand, are usually done via partnerships with a set of schools of various types from various regions who would distribute them to their students. Using these formal structures is the easiest way for the offline questionnaire to be representative.

STEP 1:

Planning and setting up the questionnaire

When the consultation guide and questions are set (after the first conference of the SD cycle), it is important to transfer them into questions for questionnaire. The first task is to agree which demographic characteristics are most relevant with regards to the topic at hand. You should also take into consideration the anticipated results when deciding to include some of these categories rather than others (do you expect rural youth to be less welcoming to diversity than urban youth? Then you should definitely include urban/rural question at the beginning of the questionnaire).

As to the substantive part, the questions agreed upon on the conference will almost never be suitable for this instrument. We recommend spending a lot of time on re-phrasing the questions, thinking about what choices to include in multiple-choice questions, and what questions to involve in the part about respondents. If you can, do enlist help of experts (sociologists and other social scientists with an experience with serious research) to help you with the questions.

STEP 2:

PR campaign / creating partnerships

The goal of PR campaign is to get as many people as possible to fill in the online questionnaire. Doing that usually requires more than using the usual tools that your youth council has at its disposal (the social media, website, newsletter, etc.). What really help is to get other actors interested in promoting the questionnaire as well. One possible tactics is to use youth organisations that are already known to you. If they find the topic and the online questionnaire interesting, they can distribute it amongst their members. However, the potentially richest source of answers are always schools. If you can distribute it to schools, you can achieve a large quantity of representative results.

When you organise offline questionnaire, no PR campaign is needed. However, you should have a set of schools that are willing to distribute the questionnaire amongst their students. Developing these partnerships and persuading schools to participate might take a lot of time, however.

STEP 3:

Information Analysis, writing the final report and press release

Offline questionnaires must be first manually converted to a suitable electronic format, while online questionnaire tool (like google forms) will do that automatically and provide some ready-made data and even graphs. When it comes to verbal answers, downloading the data to excel might be the best way to read them.

When analysing verbal (as opposed to multiple choice) answers, make sure you have a system counting relative frequency of recurring opinions, so you have some way of quantifying even these results (at least comparatively, so you can see, which opinions are more and which are less frequent).

Writing the final report, try to describe the received data as accurately as possible. Do include graphs and numbers. It makes it appear much more credible. When writing a press release, try to pick out one or two main trends - preferably ones that a general audience can find interesting or unexpected. Make sure that you do not use any specialized vocabulary and take nothing for granted.

Good practice vs less successful practice - tips and advice

- 1 If you can enlist help of social science researchers, do so. It will increase the quality of the results and make them much more credible. This will also help with media outreach.
- 2 Partnerships are important when using a questionnaire. Try contacting schools, youth organisations or other entities that may help you gain respondents. However, if you are getting a lot of people from similar background, make an effort to filter or weigh the results so they remain representative.
- 3 Offline questionnaires might be simpler to use in schools than online ones, but bear in mind that they take a lot of time to convert into suitable electronic format you can then analyze. When opting for an offline questionnaire, make sure you have enough volunteers or interns to process them.
- 4 One disadvantage of a questionnaire is that a space for text answers is limited. Therefore, an often used strategy is to list possible answers and let respondents choose from them. When doing this, make sure that you include the option "other" where they can write in their own answers as the list provided is never comprehensive.

Quantitative youth panel

The Dutch National Youth Council systematically conducts quantitative surveys on a range of topics relevant for youth amongst their DNYC Youth Panel; a sample of around 2500 secondary school students in approximately 24 schools, originally initiated by professor Micha de Winter. The panel, in which all 12 Dutch provinces are represented, is representative for Dutch youth between the age of 12 and 18. The questionnaires are distributed via schools. Teachers then decide which classes and how many classes participate. The specific composition of the youngsters participating in the questionnaires therefore varies, depending on the participating schools. On average, 800 youngsters in 10-12 schools participate. Questionnaires are either sent via regular mail (after which teachers are responsible for distributing and returning the questionnaires), or collected during school visits from DNYC employees.

A broad range of topics is surveyed amongst the DNYC Youth Panel. Examples are online privacy, opinions about societal issues and skills needed to create impact, elections, physical health, and children's rights. The DNYC Youth Panel thus provides a quantitative basis for the broad consultation of youth in the Netherlands, providing insights on youth's values and needs, behaviour and trends, as well as their attitudes concerning socially relevant topics. As such, the panel is not only an important source of information for the DNYC and the participating schools, but also for professionals, policy makers, politicians, and, more generally, the public debate.

The survey reports generate a lot of media attention. Moreover, the results are also actively used in a wider settings. An example is the National Youth Debate, also organized by the DNYC, in which the results of the various surveys were used in discussions between youth, ministers, and secretaries of state. Results concerning online privacy were used in a campaign from the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) and presented at the Amsterdam Privacy Conference organized by the University of Amsterdam.

Goals

The DNYC Youth Panel has four main goals:

- To research the opinion of youth who are not allowed to vote yet
- To provide youth with the opportunity to provide input to policy makers and professionals
- To provide insight in the values, needs and attitudes of youth on socially relevant topics
- To start a discussion in society on youth's opinions

Target group

- Primary: Youth between 12 and 18 at secondary schools
- Secondary: Secondary schools; professionals / care providers; policy makers

Step-by-step approach

- **Step 1: Collecting information on target population**
- **Step 2: Deciding on sample**
- **Step 3: Deciding on the topic to be surveyed and setting up the questionnaire**
- **Step 4: Deciding on strategy for data collection**
- **Step 5: Sending out questionnaires, collecting data, and analysing them**
- **Step 6: Preparing survey report and disseminating the outcomes**

Elements of a successful method

Choosing a topic and setting up the questionnaire: maximizing impact

When choosing a topic, it is important to start with your main research question, as well as the impact you want to create. What has been done already, what are your contributions, and why is this relevant? This can be established via a review of the available literature, and/or via interviews or focus groups [see above] with experts or youth who personally experienced the topic you want to examine (success factor 6).

Try to keep the questionnaire short and to the point: use only questions of which you are sure you need them to answer your research question(s), and include a short list of questions on the most relevant demographical indicators. It is also important to provide a well-thought-through structure: divide your questionnaire in sections, and be aware of the effect the order of your questions might have on the respondents. Finally, formulate clear questions, avoid (or explain) difficult words, and most importantly: conduct a small pilot amongst your target population to ensure that everything is understood and interpreted as you intended.

Selection of respondents: inclusiveness and representativeness

Inclusiveness and representativeness are crucial when setting up a Youth Panel. To ensure that the panel is as inclusive as possible, you aim for a diverse sample with respect to relevant characteristics of your target population. Examples are age, gender, educational level, ethnic and religious background, location, and level of urbanization. To ensure that the sample is representative, find out the distribution of these characteristics in the target population (in the current case, Dutch youth between 12 and 18 years old). For a national panel, this can be checked using national data. In the Netherlands, the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) is responsible for this.

Using this information, it is important to reach a decision on: (a) your ideal sample size; (b) the ideal distribution of the main characteristics within this sample; (c) the number of respondents you need to approach to reach this target size. The latter is dependent upon your expected response rate. And of course, this depends to a large extent on your strategy: how clear is your message, how persuasive are you, and how much are you willing to invest?

Approaching respondents in their “natural living environment”: at school

An important success factor to reach youth is to approach them in their “natural living environment”, i.e. at school (success factor 2). Contact with schools is therefore very important, so make sure to invest in sustainable partnerships. Make sure that schools understand why it is important for them to participate. Information on youth – their needs, attitudes, behaviours – is extremely valuable for schools. Participation in a youth panel not only provides

students with an opportunity to make their voices heard, it also helps schools understand their students better: what they are interested in, what they need, and what are best ways to approach and motivate them. In other words: it is a great way to gain more information on how to help youth reach their full potential and develop into actively participating citizens. In addition, the collected information can function as a useful tool in generating public attention (from media, politicians, other stakeholders) to the topic at hand.

When this message is clear, you can continue with the practical part of your data collection strategy: who are you targeting (principals, coordinators, teachers), how will you approach them (by telephone/letter/email/visit), will you use incentives to increase response rates (e.g. a gift card lottery), and how often will you approach them.

Collecting data: a target-group-specific approach

Also when approaching schools, a target-group-specific approach (success factor 3) is key, meaning that the best strategy for the collection of your questionnaires – by post (don't forget a return envelope!), email, or by personal delivery (i.e. visiting the schools yourself) – depends very much on the specific context. Some schools may be very familiar with online questionnaires, whilst others may prefer to fill out the questionnaires with pen and paper. Schools that are reluctant to participate may be persuaded when being offered an actual visit (bonus: this gives you the opportunity to gain a better picture of the classroom context, as well as how your questionnaire is received). In the end, it all depends on how much you are willing and able to invest.

Writing and disseminating your research report: make sure your message is heard

After your data is collected, it is time to start analysing. This is often done using SPSS. On YouTube, there are many tutorials available on how to use this program. To ensure your message is clear, it is important to provide the reader with a to-the-point overview of the conclusions regarding your main research question(s). Also make sure to provide a description of your sample, so the reader knows who the results apply (and generalize) to. Try to not report mere averages, but apply a more in-depth analysis of how the answers are distributed: how many students score relatively low, or particularly how? Cross tabulations and ANOVA-tests can help in providing more insight in compositional differences (e.g. variation in answers depending on one's age or educational track). To be able to say something regarding the significance of the displayed group differences, the p-value ($<.05$) is sometimes reported. However, since the size of the subgroups is often quite low, caution is key here. Moreover, weighting data can increase generalizability.

Do not forget to invest in the dissemination of the outcomes: your results are not only relevant for schools, but also for youth professionals, (youth) policy makers and politicians. Be sure to know who to contact to spread the word and create real impact with your results. Moreover, use your results to further improve your own work.

Youth care dialogue programme

As part of the Structured Dialogue, the Dutch National Youth Council runs a dialogue programme in youth care institutions. The youth care dialogue programme consists of a training session, focused on developing debate-, and presentation skills, and a dialogue session with youth from the institution, policy makers and professionals. They debate about topics relevant to that specific institution or relevant for youth care in general. The outcomes are specifically relevant for people working in the institution, but also for policy makers on a local, national and European level.

The consultation tool described here is currently applied in two types of youth care: youth care plus institutions and correctional settings. Youth care plus institutions are for young people in the age of 12-23 who often have severe behavioural problems. The court has placed them under surveillance because they pose a danger to themselves or their personal environment. They cannot receive care in their own environment (temporarily), for example because they do not want to receive care and they run away if they are not put under surveillance. The correctional settings are for young offenders between the age of 12 and 23 (they have to be between 12 and 18 when they arrive at the correctional setting). These young people are in trouble with the law.

For all youth institutions in The Netherlands, a regular consultation of youngsters residing in these institutions is mandatory. The dialogue programme provides a tool not only for the residing youngsters, but also for the institutions that want to structure their consultation of young people.

Goals

The dialogue programme has four goals:

- To strengthen and to preserve the input from youth in youth care institutions
- To focus on the Rights of the Child and Right to Participate
- To improve the quality of life in institutions
- To provide policy makers and professionals with ideas and experiences from youth

Target group

- Youth in youth care institutions
- Professionals / care providers
- Policy makers in institutions and (local) governments
- National/European policy makers

Step-by-step approach

Step 1: Presentation- and debate training at location

The presentation- and debate training is held in the youth care institution and aims to strengthen and empower the participants and to give them the tools to be able to express themselves in an effective manner.

Step 2: Dialogue session with youth and professionals/policy makers

In the dialogue session, which is also held in the youth care institution, a debate is organized amongst the youngsters, who discuss topics that are relevant for them within the context of the institution. Professionals/ policy makers from the institution attend the debate and they are given the opportunity to respond to the input. Examples of the topics discussed are personal development, financial education and the life 'after' their residence in the facility.

Step 3: Follow up

The follow up consists of two elements. Firstly, a report with the outcomes of the debate is shared with the institution. Usually, there will be contact between the DNYC and the institution to discuss the follow up actions. The second element is that insights and transcending trends from the dialogue programmes in the different institutions are collected and shared with relevant policy makers on a local, national and European level.

Elements of a successful method

Meeting the basic needs of youth and focusing on their strengths

The preparatory presentation- and debate training is crucial for the success of the dialogue programme. The training empowers the youngsters and helps them to develop the skills they need to participate fully in the debate. The trainers use the methodology from a Dutch expert (Karin de Galan), which means that the trainings always focus on positive elements and are focused on the development of the participants. A first step is the development of a feeling of competence, by discovering one's strengths (success factor 1). A feeling of competence gives the participants the confidence that they are able to express themselves and it increases the quality of the input from the participants. The skills and competences developed during the training, as well as the insights in their strengths, are useful outside of this dialogue programme as well.

To connect to the need of autonomy, make sure the participants feel taken seriously and experience that they can influence their life and the situation they are in. Give them the responsibility that suits them. This is also in line with success factor 4, which focuses on ownership amongst youth. The need for connectedness is met via the dialogues with other peers in the institution, as well as the professionals working there, with whom they share experiences and discuss solutions.

Approaching youth in their natural living environment: in the youth care institution

For this specific target group, approaching youth in their primary living environment (success factor 2) is perhaps even more important than when working with a regular group of youngsters. Focus on creating a safe atmosphere in which the participants are heard and feel that they can express themselves without being judged by others. To create such an atmosphere, it is crucial to invest time in building relationships with the youngsters (success factor 4): get to know them. Every participant has different needs, and tuning in to these individual needs is another key element of success (success factor 3). When these basic elements are met, the dialogue programme works as an inclusive tool that leads to high quality input.

Using peer trainers and focusing on equality

The entire programme is facilitated by young trainers. This peer to peer approach has proven to be effective (i.e. success factor 5). Peer trainers connect easily with the participants and are able to create an atmosphere in which the participants feel safe to express themselves and feel heard. The trainers will work with the participants as equals as much as possible. The focus on equality enables a bottom-up approach, as the input from the participants is the starting point of the programme.

A train-the-trainer programme is important to make sure that the trainers are well prepared, both for the content of the programme and for working with youth in youth care institutions. It is important to note that the peer trainers do not have to have the exact same age or same background as the youngsters in the institutions. They do need to be considered 'young' (i.e. below 30 years-old) and they need to have a good understanding of the daily lives of youth between 12 and 23 in order to connect with them.

Using debate as the primary method

Debate can be a useful tool to get input from youth, creating a means to present their views on topics that are relevant to them in their current living environment, as well as heightening their understanding for people with a different opinion. In the dialogue session, the participants are divided into two groups and sit opposite to each other in two rows. A trainer is the debate leader and during the actual debate there is a judging panel of 2-3 persons. Ideally, a manager or policy maker from the institution is part of the judging panel. The two groups debate on several topics, each taking about 10 minutes. Between the debates, the participants evaluate what went well and what could be improved.

Use of experience-based expertise

Using the experience-based expertise (success factor 6) of youth in youth care institutions is perhaps the most powerful strategy of the dialogue programme. Using this expertise not only empowers the youth participating, it also helps improve policies within the institutions, as well as on a local, national and European level.

Involvement of professionals and policy makers

Consultations become much more effective when there is a strong connection between all stakeholders. This means not only youth, but also professionals and policy makers should be involved (i.e. the trinity of youth policy). In other words, This guarantees that the input from youth is heard and people are present who can change policies and practices.



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