

Member Checking of Results of Focus Group Interviews

The purpose of this paper is to examine the validation of the results of focus group interviews, first by involving group members in the analysing processes and then by conducting individual interviews. For this study, I conducted four focus group interviews with twenty-four leaders from sixteen self-help groups for parents of seriously ill children. The interviews, which focused on management problems that hinder their groups' activities, were tape-recorded and all the transcripts were analysed with NUD*IST and Atlas-ti. The problems most discussed were the shortage of potential leaders and conflicts between leaders.

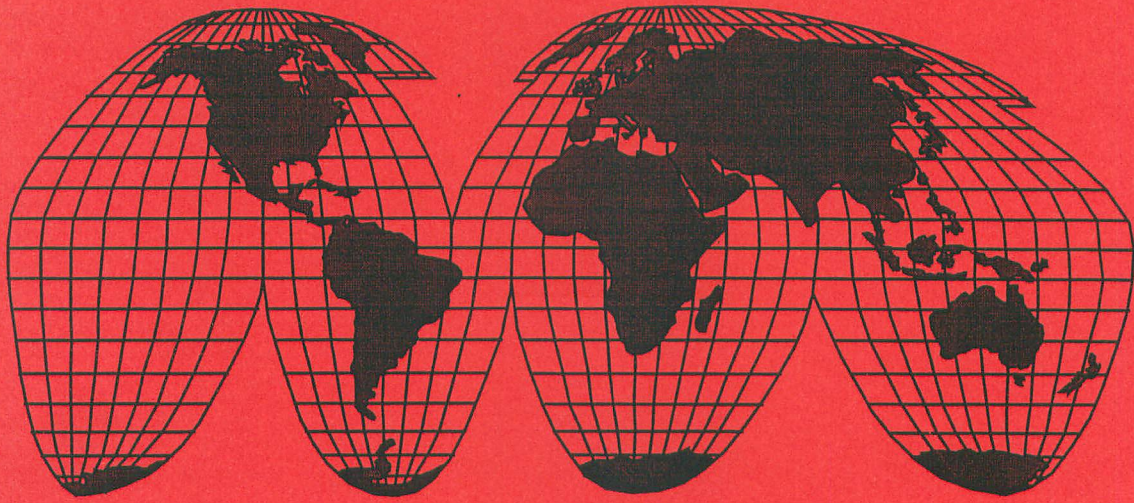
Focusing on the leadership problems, I sought member validation by conducting group discussions in two different types of meetings: one, an open meeting of eleven parent-group leaders, the other, a series of meetings involving a research team consisting of six parent-group leaders, a parent-group social worker, and myself. Later, I also conducted individual interviews with ten parent-group leaders who had shown considerable interest in this research project. These interviews were also tape-recorded and all the transcripts were analysed with Atlas-ti.

First, in the individual interviews simple questions produced simple answers. Those who had been deeply involved in the group discussion processes, expressed satisfaction with the client report and offered little discussion in the individual interviews, briefly repeating their opinions instead. Also, the individual interviewees referred to only a few aspects of the problems they had encountered, whereas in the focus group interviews the problems were explored from many perspectives. Moreover, because the group leaders felt they might be blamed for various management problems, they seemed to try to justify or rationalise their failures in the individual interviews. These defence mechanisms did not appear often within the focus groups. Therefore making the interviewees look over the client report that had been made as a result of the focus group interviews was not a successful way of carrying out member validation.

Second, the group discussion format made it difficult for participants to talk about sensitive topics such as "bereaved parents." The opinions they expressed in front of the "bereaved parents" were different from those made in meetings where "bereaved parents" were absent.

Third, multiple information sources were useful for verifying findings when the sources were different in nature: those of the focus group interviews were dynamic while those of the individual interviews were static. Consequently, the focus group interviews contributed to the establishment of causal networks for solving management problems more than the individual interviews did.

Fourth, some individual interviews were made two years after the focus group interviews, during which time some interviewees had experienced aspects of the causal network which had brought changes to their groups' conditions. All told, these interview transcripts provided considerable data about member validation of causal networks.



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