



- In short** A form of group comprising a wide range of (usually 8-10) participants from significantly different situations using that breadth to create dynamic. Useful when:
- Groups are appropriate, but research budget only allows for a small number;
 - Target audience is wide (perhaps covering many ages, types of people, etc);
 - An alternative perspective (to that of conventional segmented groups) is required;
 - Some “creative conflict” (where respondents offer differing ideas) might be useful.
- What it is** The idea is to turn a problem (how to manage many different user-segments in a single research project) into an asset (the different segments are brought together in single sessions). Each forum is not narrow but wide; each participant is marked out not by similarity but by difference; each has different attitudes, behaviours, and need-states, from different walks of life. **This diverseness thus drives energy and creativity.**
- Why different?** The “conventional” group is usually based on a discrete consumer segmentation - respondents of same life-stage, sex, occupation, life-style, brand usage, etc. There are good reasons behind this: the research team may be particularly interested in this segment, or it may be that the responses of one segment need to be separately contrasted with those of another one; or perhaps one type of respondent might not be compatible with another where attitudes and behaviours are very different. But sometimes, a narrow, discrete segmentation may not be the answer (or the whole answer): matching a brand/product user-segmentation with a research group project structure may be impractical or expensive; it may be considered unnecessary or counter-productive; perhaps the brand/product is targeted at almost everyone, defying any straight-forward segmentation in the first place; perhaps the research needs to take a snapshot in several global markets where full segmentation may be out of the question. **These are the times when we may consider the people’s forum as an alternative to the normal group structure. Or the people’s forum may be used, not as an alternative to the main sample, but to augment it.**
- Set-up** A traditional group is defined by its homogeneity, whereas the people’s forum is all about heterogeneity; respondents find themselves with people not just of different views, but possibly with different perspectives from their stage in life. In terms of the conduct of the session, the approach is barely different from any other focus group (and can deliver against many of the same objectives as a conventional approach) – except that the moderator will be looking more closely at how the responses differ across each different respondent, and possibly try to harness this in the interests of a lively discussion or dynamic co-creativity. But participants here will be faced with the challenge of dealing with people from other life-stages. So, when it comes to recruitment, best to ensure the appropriate social skills: the 20-something will need to be at ease talking with a 60 year-old and vice-versa; likewise, the married parent talking with the single person, and so on. (Generally, we exclude extremes that might cause friction. And we need to acknowledge that the group might have a built-in bias away from some personality types.) **But this variety, after all, is what makes the people’s forum such a useful discussion arena.**
- In practice** **We have been successfully using this approach for many years, on numerous projects and subjects, in different countries, and for several clients.** We have used the approach both instead of conventional groups and as an additional element of a project structure alongside the conventionally segmented groups. We have seen the approach used to address various project briefs, often tending to commission people’s forums in units of two per market. A common recommendation is to split these 2 sessions across the central demarcation of the target audience: tea drinkers v coffee drinkers; car agnostics v petrolheads; social drinkers v connoisseurs, etc.
- Finally** Of course, people’s forums are not suitable for all projects or for all markets. For example, in some Asian countries, social hierarchy still has a powerful presence when it comes to inter-personal behaviour and makes the wide composition of this kind of group too much of a challenge for respondents. **But as long as we understand when and how to deploy this process, its value can be considerable.**