

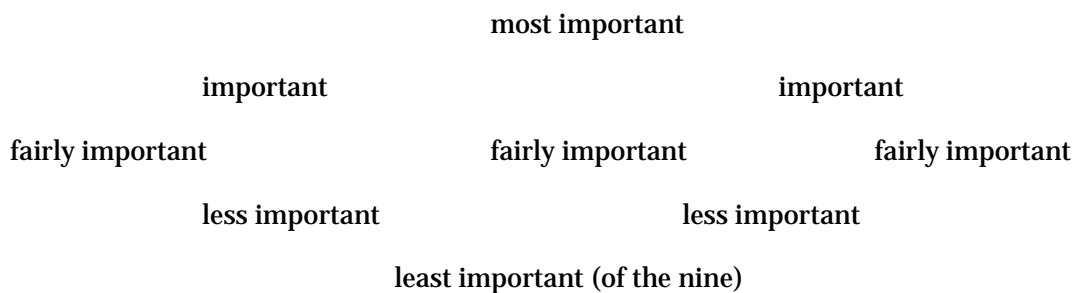
Mind the skills gap: Information-handling training for researchers (July 2008)

Research information focus group process

The steps taken in conducting the RIN Focus Groups are outlined below along with the card sort topics used. The process works with up to 16 participants.

A RIN Focus Group process

- 1 Give each participant a list of skills and areas of knowledge relevant to research information (derived from the project research – see D below for the list).
- 2 Individually - ask people to select the most important items for their research.
- 3 In trios – conduct 9 diamond card sort, as follows:
 - i. At the outset, stress the need to capture dissent – if people don't agree ask them to note and report back their differences
 - ii. Form people into small groups (3 to 4 people at most).
 - iii. Ask groups to sort out the nine cards that they collectively think represent the most important topics for their research.
 - iv. Then ask them to arrange the chosen propositions in the form of a diamond:



- v. Each group should be given one set of cards to sort and a time limit (c. 25 minutes). These can be cards or slips of paper - c. 16 point size minimum. Give each group two or three blanks and invite them to add any other topics that they feel are equally or more important.
- vi. When the first two groups have finished, invite them to look at each others' output but keep them away from the groups still working (if any).
- vii. When all have finished, de-brief as follows:
 - what each group ranked in the top tier and why (and did other groups leave this out - if so why?)
 - what people ranked in tier two and why
 - the extent of overlap between groups
 - any added items
 - (as light relief, but also to get a general view of priorities) what people found it easiest to throw out.

In this phase, focus on what these topics actually entail – what do the researchers do?

Ensure that this conversation (i.e. the feedback session) is recorded in full - the facilitator will only flipchart highlights.

Feedback will take about 20 minutes.

B Assessing confidence

You may wish to adapt this list of topics in order to assess how confident each of the participants feels when addressing the topic. A scale from very confident to not at all confident can be used for each item. If you wish to do this:

- 4 Distribute the Likert version of the topics.
- 5 Ask people to complete these individually.

C Support for researchers

6 If time allows, in plenary, ask:

- What group or one-to-one training is on offer in any of these areas?
- Who offers this training?
- What have they taken up/attended? [Numbers]
- What on-line help or support is available through the university in any of these areas?
- What have you used? [Numbers]

7 In discipline-based trios, ask:

- What is the most useful training/support? Why?
- What is the least useful training/support? Why?
- What differences would you like to see in in training/support?

Ask the trios to flipchart their responses.

D RIN Focus Group card sort topics

How important are these skills or areas of knowledge in your research?

1. How to find and obtain research evidence from outside the university
2. How to do literature searches
3. How to use specific subject databases
4. How to use subject-based electronic portals and gateways
5. How to use appropriate search engines (moving beyond Google)
6. How to obtain published research papers
7. How to find research material in the Library
8. How to evaluate published research papers
9. How to cite journal articles, books and reports to demonstrate that you have covered the ground
10. How to cite information on websites

11. How to manage the information generated through your research
12. How to retain and preserve the information generated through your research
13. How to use electronic repositories in your research
14. Licensing and copyright issues
15. Open access to research reports
16. Developments in metadata
17. How to avoid plagiarism
18. How to write research reports and journal articles
19. How to prepare and submit conference papers
20. How to use wikis and blogs in your research

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