Data Gathering Methods

Method	Description	Tips
Interviews with: • Manage-ment • Exemplars • Workers • Clients	Interviews are conducted one-on-one or with a small and homogeneous group (the smaller the better so that everyone has a chance to contribute fully, e.g., 6-10 people maximum). Interviews can be used throughout the data gathering process, but they are perhaps most useful during the performance analysis stage, when you are trying to determine what the real performance deficiency is. Although the process is time-consuming, it is useful because you can gather specific information and ask follow-up questions to get more detail on items of particular interest.	1. Write down your questions before the interview and give them to the person(s) being interviewed, if possible 2. Decide beforehand how you want to document the information you gather 3. Consider audiotaping the interview so that you have a record to refer to later 4. Put the persons being interviewed at ease by telling them the purpose of the interview and how you will use what they tell you; assure them that there is no right or wrong opinion, and that each one will be valued 5. Assure them that what they say will be kept confidential, that they are free to refuse to respond to any question and can stop the interview at any time
Panels of Experts	Panels of experts are used to get the collective observations and opinions of the "best of the breed." They are particularly useful when there is not one correct solution or procedure (e.g., conducting a goal analysis).	1. Make sure that each participant is truly an expert 2. Let participants know well in advance what you expect of them and give them time to prepare 3. Focus the discussion on the topic at hand and keep participants on track 4. Document your panel just as well as you documented interviews
Observations	Direct observation of work performance is an excellent means of gathering data. Observations are usually done in conjunction with another data gathering method that is used to fill in the gaps and answer questions.	1. Make sure to arrange your observations well in advance and get permission from management 2. Let workers know why you are observing them; assure of confidentiality and informed consent 3. Have an expert conduct the observation, and use checklists that guide what to look for 4. Videotaping observation sessions works well if it is permitted
Surveys • Formal • Informal	Surveys are used when you want to gather data from a large number of people and when it is impractical to meet them all face to face. Surveys can be both formal (where the results are subject to statistical reliability and	1. Decide up-front if you need to base your conclusions on statistically valid and reliable data. If so, consult an expert to help determine your sample group, method of data collection and how you will compute your results

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	validity) and informal (where results are anecdotal).	2. Use commercially designed instruments, if they are available. They save development time, and they have been tested to ensure they work 3. If you must design your own survey, make sure you try it out on a sample group from the target population
Reviews of Performance Data	Almost all organizations maintain records. They may include data about time and attendance, rates of production, and cost of goods sold. A review of some of these records can provide valuable information to substantiate the performance deficiencies under consideration and lead to potential causes. It may be a challenge to determine which data are relevant and whether the quality of the data is adequate.	1. Make sure you understand how the data were collected and what the data mean 2. Make sure that the data you have are current. Outdated or incomplete data can be more harmful than no data at all 3. It is important that you comply with any restrictions your client puts on your use of their data. Unauthorized use of confidential data can be illegal and harmful to the organization
Focus groups	A focus group is a structured conversation used to obtain in-depth information from a group of people about a particular topic. The purpose of a focus group is to collect qualitative information about people's feelings, preferences, experiences, values, and ideas, regarding performance of development activities, services, and products, or other issues, not to come to consensus or make a decision. A facilitator guides 7 to 11 people in a discussion by raising issues identified in a discussion guide and using probing techniques to solicit views, ideas, and other information. Sessions typically last one to two hours.	1. Provide advance notice of day and time. 2. Use a variety of methods for recruitment: letter or e-mail, and then follow up with phone calls or other personalized contact to confirm attendance. 3. Find a comfortable and suitable space. Have participants face each other by sitting in a circle, to promote ease of interaction. 4. Provide drinks and snacks, if appropriate. 5. Identify a good facilitator to guide the conversation by asking questions, probing respondents to clarify answers, keeping the group on topic, and making sure that everyone is heard. 6. Identify a good note taker to capture as much accurate detail from the discussion as possible, noting participant comments, group dynamics, and interesting shifts in conversation. A tape recording can also be used to provide a complete record. 7. Set group ground rules at the beginning of the discussion to help build trust among participants and give the facilitator rules to use if someone is dominating the discussion or not respecting others' opinions. 8. Develop a focus group discussion (FGD)

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		guide in advance to outline the flow of the questions and topics to be covered during the focus group. 9. Develop Informed Consent Forms to be read to each participant individually in order to obtain his/her consent before the FGD starts. 10. Start the FGD with participant introductions, and a description of the purpose and format of the focus group. Begin the discussion with a non-threatening question or topic that is relatively easy for everyone in the group to answer before moving to more difficult, specific, or potentially controversial topics and questions. Use open-ended questions, and avoid leading participants towards a particular answer.
Process mapping	A process map is a pictorial representation of the sequence of actions that comprise a process, used to document, analyze and improve on a process. Cross-functional process maps show how work is done across 2 or more functional areas within an organization. These maps detail the sequence and identify handoffs and roles within a process. Each piece of the map can be examined for possible quality gaps, bottlenecks, or inefficiencies that can be improved.	1. Use information gathered from interviews and observations, or convene a group representing the functions in the process. 2. Place a large piece of paper on a wall or flat surface. 3. Draw a horizontal band (aka swim lane) for each functional area involved in the process. Typically the end customer of the process is placed in the topmost band. 4. Have each group member write on a card or Post-It note each step that makes up their functional area's portion of the process and place it on the draft process map. 5. Move the Post-It notes around until the group is satisfied that all the steps are identified and that each step is in the correct order. Add labels, flow arrows, input descriptors, output descriptors, and decisions to complete the map.