Utilizing Online Technologies to Effectively Facilitate Data Gathering in Large-Scale Qualitative Research

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Abstract: Conducting effective qualitative studies with subjects dispersed over large geographical distances is challenging to researchers. Creative uses of online technologies can help researchers overcome those hurdles. A team from a national research center used a variety of synchronous and asynchronous online technologies to collect data from subjects in multiple states and with varying backgrounds through focus groups, a Delphi study, think tanks, advisory boards, and expert panels. Asynchronous technologies included learning management systems, websites, surveys, forums/discussion boards, and social networking systems. Synchronous approaches included Cisco Webex and Adobe Connect platforms. Researchers found that by matching proper technologies with certain research methods and audience types, the quality, efficiency, and efficacy of data gathering all improved. They dramatically decreased cost, increased n-size, and gathered richer, deeper data.

The researchers are from the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). NCEO was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in designing and building educational assessments and accountability systems that appropriately monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. NCEO works with states and federal agencies to identify important outcomes of education for students with disabilities, examines the participation of students in national and state assessments, evaluates national and state practices in reporting assessment information on students with disabilities, and conducts directed research in the area of assessment and accountability.