

Industry Forum

Adding Insight to Numbers and Numbers to Insight

Addressing common research paradoxes

“We don’t know much about the market or the drug candidate—but we need answers quickly”.

“We need to decide whether to proceed, based on a sound commercial analysis of the drug’s potential”.

These are two of the most challenging situations market researchers are presented with, and contain the paradox: qualitative approaches are needed to produce the required insights, but do not lend themselves to building robust commercial assessments, or delivering the means to quickly proceed to a quantitative (measurement) approach in more complex cases. The first situation suggests small scale primary qualitative exploration (perhaps combined with secondary data), whereas the second typically requires large scale quantitative measurement (and secondary data). Both require prompt answers. What is needed is an approach which effectively bridges the gap between these needs (qualitative exploratory research and structured measurement), achieves rapid turnaround, but does this in a way that delivers valuable insight.

A third challenging scenario can be summarized by “Now we have the data from quantitative research. But we don’t understand (or believe) the results”. This situation requires the same solution—research which adds insight but from a rapid, cost-effective approach.

All three situations are very real and are often encountered in situations such as:

- Acquisition /in-licensing
- Accelerated development programs
- Planning for major (quant) research projects
- Interpreting major (quant) research projects

An approach that supports rapid decision making

Conceptually, our approach encompasses two fundamental principles.

- **Adding insight to numbers**—where respondents are immediately challenged to explain their projected behavior or attitude, represented by responses to structured exercises.
- **Adding numbers to insight**—where respondents can discuss, debate and consider their attitudes and likely behaviors, then project that behavior in the form of numeric data collected through structured exercises.

Practically, our approach embeds a series of structured research approaches in a qualitative research setting, in which individual physicians generate data typically through the medium of computer-based exercises. The data generated are analysed in real time and discussed as the interview develops. Understanding is rapidly developed through immediate respondent reaction to analysis and self-explication of outcomes. This approach delivers rapid turnaround market insights based on respondents’ own explanation of behavior- or attitude-based numbers.

An approach that can be used in different settings and techniques

We have utilized this approach in a variety of settings. In terms of methodology, the approach works well across focus groups, mini groups, and depth interviews. In the focus group setting, it is particularly important that the group is moderated by senior and experienced executives in order to extract the full benefit of the real-time approach, bearing in mind that a consequence of this approach is that the moderator has no previous knowledge of the stimulus material that will be generated! Interviewers need sufficient knowledge to be able to adapt questioning to any outputs from the real-time analysis. Real-time analysis and discussion during the interview uncovers sometimes apparent ‘irrational’ physician choices, and explains the interest (or not) in new therapeutic options.

This approach also sits well alongside a variety of structured techniques including Adaptive Conjoint Analysis, Choice Based Conjoint, self-explicated trade offs, constant sum, and semantic differential scaling.

Market situations where real-time approaches add value There are a number of recurring situations where this approach provides a pragmatic and added value solution

- Supporting in-licensing decision-making
 - Considering future events and their impact on prescribing behavior
 - Developing materials for a subsequent major quant project
1. **Support for in-licensing decision-making**—This often challenges researchers to deliver some hybrid between qual and quant that provides an enhanced ability to assess opportunity if a decision is required early, and an ability to rapidly proceed to quant stage if time is available.

The need for rapid integrated assessment for decision support is seen in the context of in-licensing where a product profile may be available, but there are major uncertainties on many potential outcomes. Despite often poor internal knowledge of the market, research findings are often required to support a 3-4 week decision timeframe. Depending on negotiations, follow-up quant research for commercial assessment is a possibility. In this setting, research can assess product uptake in the context of relevant patient type. Real-time analysis will uncover any difficulties, misunderstandings and exercise assumptions, while at the same time providing insight into issues such as satisfaction with current therapy, reaction to product profile, patient types, disease diagnosis and referral patterns that form the basis of any early stage commercial assessment. Real-time review of research outputs

- Helps explain thinking, improve descriptors, and confirms understanding

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- As a result this enables an adaptive design approach, e.g. to quickly get to the point and focus the ‘what-ifs’ on those attributes considered important, rather than cover many attributes superficially
- Identifies scenarios for different outputs (patient types, order in treatment algorithm, etc).

Our experience of this real-time approach is that it adds value in terms of specific insights on ‘what-if’ scenarios, delivers initial measurement, provides confidence in the quantitative approach, and shortens the research timeline.

- 2. Considering future events and their impact on prescribing behavior**—This is critical in therapy areas where it is clear that a new product, if launched, would enter a market bearing little resemblance to the current market. This might be because of an extended drug development program (e.g. one requiring time consuming outcome trials) or because the market is forecast to be inundated by several different innovative product classes or other developments that can be expected to change behaviors. In this situation, the challenge is often to “future proof” the forecasting and planning as far as possible by obtaining customer insights on future events and their likely impact on prescribing behavior.

In this situation, future events and predicted outcomes are summarized and presented to research respondents for discussion and debate. Following this, respondents are asked to assess their impact on, for example, future prescribing behavior using structured exercises. The approach reveals how future scenarios (e.g. landmark studies, changes in competitor landscape, and other market place events) may affect prescribing different products over defined timeframes, and the reasons for any changes. The results provide a better perspective of the shape of uptake of new products and classes over time, and an enhanced understanding of how future events might drive future market dynamics.

- 3. Developing materials for subsequent major quant project**—Here the objective is different, there is less emphasis on getting the research done quickly, the issue is more about using the approach in situations where it is difficult otherwise to get insight, because respondents simply


can’t make the mental leap to understand the context for research. The challenge is to get respondents into the right context, so they can better inform you of what you need to know in order to conduct a valid quantitative study. In effect the real-time approach provides a total enabling environment which allows physicians to respond to a series of bite-sized pieces of stimulus and build understanding.

Summary

This qualitative research approach with embedded structured exercises, and real-time analysis and feedback has a number of advantages

- Creates a more effective integration between qualitative insight generation and structured measurement
- Generates insight plus and/or numbers plus
- Offers a rapid turnaround solution
- Allows better informed risk-taking!

The approach is beneficial in a variety of situations, for example: (a) Where there is no time for quantitative study, it delivers qualitative research with more insight and with numeric input; (b) where there is (some limited) time for quantitative study, the insight in the qual phase means the quant phase can start and proceed more quickly because we develop more understanding, e.g. better idea of attributes, and a better understanding of how to describe the product.

Typically, the approach adds most value in situations where ideas and information (including material held by the wider team) can be used to generate relevant stimulus material for structured exercises, which themselves can act as a projective technique to create understanding and generate insight. Having applied this approach in a number of settings, it is clear that customers benefit from real team involvement throughout the process, and the interviews themselves are well worth observing first hand. 

Phil Mellor, Director,
Adelphi International Research
www.adelphigroup.com/marketresearch