

To the Moderator of the Focus Group Interviews on Research Culture

Thank you for taking on the role of moderator for your focus group interview on research culture.

Overall Task

Your main task is to ensure that the group thoroughly explores the themes of career paths, expectations alignment, work-life balance, diversity, and belonging within the available time. These five themes overlap intentionally, so you won't need to start from scratch with each theme. It is your responsibility to take notes, manage the time, summarize and present your results at the next meeting, which will also include the management team.

Ask and You Shall Receive

As a tool, you have some pre-written questions for the group to discuss. These questions are supplemented by keywords that can be used if more input is needed. As the moderator, you are like a heat-seeking missile, aiming for where the group members have valuable contributions. You might need to ask follow-up questions such as "how does that manifest?" or "can you give an example?"

Stick as much as possible to open-ended questions that start with who, what, when, how, which, etc. Hold back a bit on why, as it tends to elicit a defensive response. Your task is to help the group progress, and the advantage of WH-questions is that they invite elaborations and arguments, as opposed to closed questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. These tend to close and wrap up discussions.

Create Progress and Summarize

As a moderator, you need to keep track of time and signal when it's time to summarize and conclude. Remember, the final product should be a list of topics that the participants want to be addressed, with concrete suggestions on how to do so. As the moderator, you are responsible for taking notes and it is also your job to present the conclusions at the subsequent meeting, where the leader and senior researchers will also participate.

The Strength of the Focus Group

A focus group is very effective when the goal, as here, is to gather statements, opinions, arguments, and possible solutions. The potential for movement often lies in the questions the group members ask each other and in their discussions. As the moderator, you need to equip yourself with big ears and a small mouth – and take notes as if your life depended on it.

The Weakness of the Focus Group

A known challenge is that individuals can end up dominating the discussion. Here, you as the moderator must be prepared to politely stop the most talkative participants and

perhaps also allocate some speaking time to the quieter ones, such as saying, "You haven't really had the chance, Kim – but what do you think about this?"