

## The Power of Research

Public Aspect's work is powered by **research**. It informs and underpins everything we do.

**Research** helps individuals and organisations make informed judgements and decisions, and to reduce risk and uncertainty.

**Research** is not about generating information or data. People and organisations are drowning in data. Information may have been power at one time. But today, power lies in interpreting information.

### How we use research

When we start working with a client, we use **desktop research** to find out more about them and the issues that concern them. This involves using data that was not specifically collected and collated with our client in mind but from which we can draw out background themes for the field in which they operate and recent developments that may affect them. It sets the context.

We hold exploratory but **focused discussions** with our client (often also members of staff and other key stakeholders) to set clear objectives and deliverables for our work for them, to clarify any areas of uncertainty. This allows us to understand what you as our client already know and create a



shared understanding of what is important, whilst still maintaining the objectivity that is important for us to bring you new insights.

## Qualitative research

We use **qualitative research** among our clients' stakeholders - decision makers, opinion formers, specialist audiences and general public. These are usually in-depth interviews<sup>1</sup>, which typically last up to an hour, and give important insights into the issues our client is interested in, and why they think what they do.

The power of **qualitative** research is most clearly evidenced by examples. Here are just a few from our experience:

1. **The “aha” moment:** when a starting hypothesis is overturned. For example we recently tested a well established battery of indicators which had been developed by the UK government for assessing wellbeing in older people. We realised that most of our respondents - themselves older people - found one of the statements insulting.
2. **Making the connection** between tangible and emotional drivers of behaviour - for example how radically different the motivation is for two forms of “charitable giving” - working in a charity shop and giving money to a charity.

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<sup>1</sup> We do group discussion as well when they are appropriate but we have strong views on when groups are appropriate - and inappropriate - and let's just say they don't necessarily line up with the views of the government of the day...



3. **Overcoming taboo and social constraints:** much of what people tell us is filtered through a monitor of self preservation. Body language and the look in someone's eyes can tell you that you are being told what you ought to hear in a way that would never be revealed in a quantitative study. This might typically be when you working in a politically restrictive regime, or a country in which women are marginalised in formal decision-making. A top notch interviewer can then find different ways to task the question to find out important information without compromising the respondent. Similarly, Exploring taboo subjects - e.g. sexual attitudes - where people may not have voiced their opinions before and may need to work them through in the course of the interview.
4. **Understanding why** people say what they do - are they saying they don't want a service because it isn't of use to them? Or because it is a violation of their values to accept charity?
5. **Establishing influencers** in a market - for example the role played by family members and other carers in service users' choice of social and health services.

**Qualitative** work enables us to develop indicators that form the framework for impact assessment in new areas or ones where existing indicators are not giving the the complete picture.

An example is our work for WRVS. Our qualitative research among staff, opinion formers, service users, carers and volunteers, combined with an understanding of how people make decisions and respond to communications (for more on this theory see our next thought piece),





enabled us to develop a set of indicators which gave our client precisely what they needed:

- A headline measure which enables them to compare across services
- A set of drivers which gives them levers they can pull to improve their performance in the headline measure and provide an even better deal for service users

## Quantitative Research

We use **quantitative research** to provide a statistically robust measure of how our clients' services perform against the indicators we develop. That gives them hard evidence on which to make strategic investment decisions. Increasingly, those who pay for services and developments - customers, governments, private investors or charitable trusts - are relying on that hard evidence in the decisions they make about where to spend their money.

If you would like to **talk** more about our approach to research and research might give you valuable **insights**, please call Marian for a no- strings- attached chat on 0161 610 0249.

We look forward to hearing from you!

