

FOCUS GROUP IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF A BUCHAREST FACTORY*

M. CONSTANTIN

The paper is an approach of focus group as a qualitative field method within the social sciences, with a particular emphasis on an applied anthropological research in the Rocar factory, in Bucharest. Five focus-group sessions are described in terms of “problems identified”, “ideas and solutions”, and “recommendations for leadership”, as regards the management of human resources. While the results of focus group are useful for their intrinsic relevance in assessing local viewpoints and enhancing the public participation, they are to be considered together with the findings of other ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and the life-history interview.

In the anthropological and sociological literature, the focus group is described as a qualitative research method in collecting field data and accounting for the field informants' vision on issues related to who they are and what they do. David L. Morgan defines (1988) focus group as an “explicit use of the group interaction”, during around two hours, with properties like the informality and spontaneity at the level of 6–8 members; their dialogue is “like a conversation between neighbors and friends”. A moderator's usually low involvement is another mark in conducting a focus group following a given topic, with maintaining the rhythm and equilibrium of discussion (Morgan, 1988). While stressing the focus-group utility for empirical discoveries, but also its limits in testing hypothesis and approaching private concerns, John van Willigen proposes (1993: 145) the following definition:

“A focus group is a small group discussion guided by a moderator to develop understanding about the group participants' perspective of a designated topic.”

Sociologist Alfred Bulai presented (2000) the focus group starting from the empirical fact in which “people communicate naturally within a group framework and feel better within horizontal communication processes”. According to Bulai,

* Note. Information for this paper was collected in the framework of a research supported by Research Support Scheme (Soros Foundation), in the period 2000–2002.