



Running Case Study 8

Rebecca's focus groups

Being very conscientious and dutiful, Rebecca had difficulties understanding why fellow students would free-ride and cheat. She just couldn't imagine how anyone would do that. If she ever free-rode, she would crawl under a rock rather than return to university where she would meet her fellow students that she had let down. She knew that her friend Claire was easier about those things. Usually Claire would work hard, but sometimes opportunities presented themselves that were more enjoyable than studying. Just last weekend, Claire went off to Brussels to a movie festival, although on Tuesday a group assignment was due and the group hadn't done much work on it. Claire came to the group with her broad smile and said: 'You will not believe it, but Leo a school friend of mine has two premium passes for the Brussels movie festival and asked me to join him. This is the chance of my lifetime; I always wanted to go there.' Although she promised to do her share of work, her contribution was less in the end. The group worked hard on the weekend and everybody was commenting on Claire's absence. On Monday when Claire returned, those comments were, however, not repeated and all listened to Claire as she joyfully presented stories of glamour and inspiration. That she did not contribute as much as the others did not matter anymore.

Rebecca wanted to understand this better. Surely every student has experienced free-riding, many have engaged in it, but how should you respond? Report it to the professor? No, that is joining the enemy. What are strategies to prevent it? Rebecca decided to ask Claire's group if they would participate in a focus group on this issue in exchange for her famous home-made cake and coffee. She invited two groups and in both groups she raised that issue. Below you find a couple of citations from these focus groups:

Participant A: 'You know, they are asking so much from us, you have to work together – giving and taking is necessary to survive.'

Participant B: 'I really want to get good marks, but in a group you cannot expect that everybody has the same aspiration – if I want to get better marks I have to put more effort than others in it.'

Participant C: 'But then others profit from you, somehow that is not fair.'

Participant B: 'If the others do something, it is hard to tell them to do more.'

Participant A: 'As said it is give and take, next time the other will do more or he buys you a beer.'

Participant C: 'If I buy you are beer, I can become lazy and do nothing.'

Participant A: 'Not that directly. You know my English is not the best, so I have often asked Brenda to read through and correct my individual papers and then I invite her for a pizza. Is that cheating?'

Participant D: 'That is different. Brenda just helps you a bit, but she does not write the paper for you.'

Mehmet interviews everybody

Since Mehmet has started with his research project, he has talked to many people: entrepreneurs, business angels, policy makers, scientists and so on. He only talks about entrepreneurship. If he buys his groceries in the Turkish shop down the street and chats with the owner, he asks how business is going or how everything started. He tells them that he is conducting some research on this topic for his research project at the university. In the evening he joins the party, tells others about his research project and as soon as people tell him about some own experiences related to entrepreneurship he starts asking them more and more. Although all this talk has made Mehmet more knowledgeable, he had no idea how to analyse all the information he had obtained. What made matters even worse was that he did not really have notes on the interviews, what he had was an incomplete collection of business cards and a collection of all kinds of folders. As a first step, Mehmet sat down and tried to recollect the talks he had had so far and put them in some notes.

- 1 What can Rebecca gain out of her focus groups, given that her main research is based on a survey?
- 2 Do you have any suggestions how Mehmet could integrate the information he has obtained in all these informal talks?
- 3 What should be Mehmet's next steps?