



PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTH ANALYTIC RESEARCH, LLC

THE DELPHI PANEL

Using Quantitative Methods to Improve Healthcare Quality

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The modified Delphi expert panel process has been in use for decades—mostly in academic settings to improve the quality of healthcare. The technique was originally described by the RAND Corporation in the 1940's. There are hundreds of articles in academic journals describing its use.

The process involves developing a comprehensive understanding of the information desired from the board, creating a detailed, written questionnaire, and requiring advisors to complete it before an in-person meeting. At the meeting, advisors review the results of the initial questionnaire to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. Their discussion typically lasts a full day or more and a trained, impartial moderator keeps the focus on areas of disagreement. At the end of the meeting they repeat the questionnaire. The second round results are tallied and interpreted “offline,” providing the organization with a quantitative view of the advisors’ opinions and their level of agreement. The advisors never have to formally achieve consensus.

Participants usually enjoy these

meetings. They engage in stimulating conversation on a topic of mutual interest. They are “protected” from arguments by the moderator who encourages them to share their views without trying to convince others of their position. The data gathered is more useful than data gathered in an unstructured setting and less prone to misinterpretation.

The method has been extensively studied. It has content, construct, and predictive validity. The Delphi process is more reproducible than traditional consensus exercises; different groups using parallel Delphi processes produce similar results.

The Delphi process is the only consensus method that has been shown to produce clinical practice guidelines that actually improve health. That is, patients whose care follows guidelines developed using the Delphi process have better health than those whose care does not.