

WHAT'S NEXT

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How Do You Use These Tools?

Surveys, focus groups and plate waste studies can be used separately or in combination with one another depending upon the research question being answered. Frequently a survey will be used to gather broad information to solve research questions. Once data are compiled, other more specific questions may need to be answered. A focus group or plate waste study would then be used. There will be cases when surveys are not appropriate and plate waste studies and/or focus groups are all that is needed. For example:

Case 1

Joe Bern is a food service manager who was experiencing a declining participation rate even though the district recently remodeled his cafeteria. He wanted to know why students were not eating in the cafeteria. A survey was conducted to give a broad picture of how satisfied the students were with the school foodservice program and the factors driving student satisfaction. From the survey he found that food quality was the factor with which students were least satisfied. Within that factor, he found that variety of menu choices was one question that scored extremely low. In the written comments from the survey, students noted several times that pizza was greasy and the same foods were offered over and over. A focus group could be used to determine what types of foods students wanted on the menu and why they perceived variety a problem when Mr. Bern is offering five entrees each day.

Case 2

Maria Steinheart is a food service manager who has overheard several students complaining about food quality as they came through the line. Maria conducted a plate-waste study to determine which foods were left on the plate most frequently. From the plate-waste study she determined that the entrees were frequently discarded by students. A focus group could be conducted to determine why the entrees were not being eaten.

Case 3

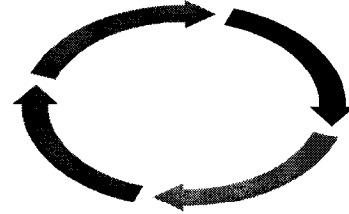
Ellen Holvick is a new foodservice manager. The manager whom she replaced retired after 30 years in the same school. She knows changes need to be made, but she questions where to start. A survey could be conducted to focus on service enhancements. Plans for changes would be based on students' views of satisfaction. After a plan for enhancements has been developed, she could conduct a focus group to validate the plan and determine if the plans will meet students needs.

As you can see, these tools can be used in a variety of ways to gather information to assist you with making decisions. But how do you use these data?

The Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is a cycle of events.
It does not have a definite start or stop.

After you have conducted the survey, determined an area for improvements and made improvements, you need to once again ask the students for their opinion. You may not choose to use an extensive written survey to check your improvement in a specific area. You may want to do an abbreviated survey. Use the survey questions from the original survey concerning the area or areas you have worked to improve. If you used multiple regression as an analytical technique, use the questions with the highest correlation to overall satisfaction. This will ensure reliability.



A focus group would be another way of finding out how the students perceived the improvements you have made. Plan a focus group of a random selection of seven to ten students and informally ask them if the improvements you have made are meeting their wants and needs.