

Principles of Market Research

FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Amplify the Impact of *Principles of Market Research* in Your Organization Through Group Study

For more than a decade, *Principles of Market Research* has been recognized as an industry-standard curriculum that builds the knowledge and skills needed. Equally relevant to the provider and end-user organizations, its online format allows learners to study anytime, anywhere, providing a practical solution for adults balancing the challenges of work and family life. But the same factors that make online learning so convenient can also make it challenging. Even the most motivated of self-directed learners can find themselves distracted by other demands. A practical and workable solution to the natural human tendency to procrastinate is the creation of a social support network.

If yours is one of the many organizations strengthening its research capacity through *Principles of Market Research*, consider group study. A modest investment in time and planning can pay big dividends: your learners will complete the course faster, score better on exams, and understand how the concepts and skills they've learned apply to your organization's goals and culture.

Benefits of Group Study

Directly measurable benefits of group study include higher graduation rates and faster course completion. Research on adult and distance learning shows that student success is strongly correlated with social engagement. Personal interaction among learners helps them measure their own understanding, as well as stimulates questions and dialogue that increase comprehension. Scheduled group activities motivate learners to keep pace with their peers. As a result, they are more likely to complete

their courses quickly and to achieve good exam scores.

The indirect benefits of group study are less quantifiable but equally important. Group interaction makes *Principles of Market Research* come alive by connecting it to events and relationships in your workplace. Concepts that might seem abstract or difficult during self-study make more sense when learners see how they relate to day-to-day tasks and projects. By sharing real-world experiences, study group participants help each other connect the curriculum to their own lives, thereby increasing understanding about how different job functions combine to drive business results.

You do not need a full-time facilitator or elaborate instructional resources for effective group study sessions. Adapt the five strategies on the next page to your own organizational setting, and prepare to be amazed by the results.

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www.principlesofmarketresearch.org

Top Five Strategies for Group Study

1 Follow the Leader

A committed group leader is essential to successful group study. This individual is responsible for coordinating meetings and helping learners stay on task and on schedule.

The group leader should be a seasoned researcher or manager within your organization. The ideal leader has a broad range of research experience so as to be able to personally provide relevant examples and case studies. The group leader must also be familiar with the online materials.

The leader's role is to:

- ▶ Coordinate group meetings
- ▶ Orchestrate the pace of study and help the group keep moving together
- ▶ Explain material and facilitate group discussion to clarify key concepts
- ▶ Connect the curriculum to organizational goals, values, and business plans
- ▶ Stimulate learners' interest in research as a career

2 Join the Team

Forming study groups is the next step. You may need to have more than one group, depending on the number of enrollments in your organization; 10-12 people per group is ideal. Smaller groups can also work well, but if they are too small, learners don't benefit from as wide a range of experiences and perspectives. Larger groups may be harder to facilitate and might not generate as much constructive discussion. If you have more than one group leader, make sure they compare notes frequently to ensure consistency.

Study group members, their supervisors, and group leaders must all be on the same page about expectations for participation. The group leader can help both participants and managers keep in mind that the benefits of the curriculum are well worth the effort required to coordinate study sessions with work assignments.

Study groups are most likely to perform well when learners perceive *Principles of Market Research* as a desirable perk that enhances their personal skill sets and their value to their employers.

3 Keep Study Progressing

Once the group has been formed, hold a kick-off session to set goals and establish the schedule. There is no one right way for a group to study *Principles of Market Research*, and you will need to adapt the format of your meetings to your own organization, but following these guidelines will help:

- ▶ Schedule 1- to 1½-hour meetings every 3-4 weeks. Meeting more frequently may not give learners enough time to study the materials, while meeting less frequently can make it hard to sustain momentum. Meeting every three weeks to review a course topic is a realistic schedule that will allow your group to complete the course (including exams) in less than one year.
- ▶ Minimize interruptions by using a conference room or other space that is reasonably comfortable and noise-free.
- ▶ Make the sessions fun. Group members can take turns bringing snacks to share.

For a more detailed example of how one organization managed a successful study group, see the sidebar "Case Study: A Major Consumer Products Company."

4 Cram for Exams

To ensure reliable measurement of learning, *Principles of Market Research* requires participants to successfully complete two proctored exams. It's natural for learners to feel anxious about these tests. Group study can be extremely effective in building confidence and improving scores.



If your group is completing a topic every three weeks, you'll be ready for the first exam in five or six months, even if you've had to skip a session as a result of holidays or urgent business needs. During the last session prior to the exam, review all the topics covered by that exam, using the self-quizzes as a refresher. If you have access to a computer and projector, log in, pull up the self-quizzes, and involve the whole group in answering questions. You can go around the room in order. Often, there will be disagreement about the correct answer, which provides a perfect opportunity for discussion, after which, you can check the correct answer.

This approach also has the advantage of increasing familiarity with the multiple-choice questions used in both the self-quizzes and exams, and participants can discuss test-taking strategies.

5 Celebrate Success

Following the final exam, schedule a recognition luncheon or similar activity to let the group celebrate completing the course. Given that this can take about a year, finishing *Principles of Market Research* is a milestone worthy of recognition. If you have opportunities to celebrate the achievements of the study group participants within the larger organization, take advantage of them.

Case Study: A Major Consumer Products Company

Conclusion

As Director of Brand Development for a major consumer products company, Pat Jones depended on effective research every day, and he knew this required good professional development for his research team. At the company's U.S. headquarters, he organized and led a **Principles of Market Research** study group. In this case study, Pat describes the methods he used to help his nine participants master the curriculum.

How did you ask the participants to prepare for each session?

We met every three weeks or so, working on one topic at a time. I encouraged them to print out the text of the online topics and make notes as they read about any parts they found confusing or hard to understand. Naturally they read the assignments from the textbooks as well. I asked them to complete the self-quiz and share with the group any troublesome questions.

How did those sessions typically work?

Usually I would start meetings with a general question like, "What did you think about this topic?" That would inevitably get the ball rolling. The participants always commented about ideas they had or things that they had trouble with. After this opening discussion, I would typically go through the hard copy of the online topic point by point to clarify any confusion or amplify on the text.

It sounds as if you had to do considerable work yourself to prepare.

Anyone leading a study group needs to go through the online and textbook material along with the students and take the quizzes.

When I prepared for each topic, I would mark up my hard copy of the topic summary so that I knew the points I wanted to emphasize, explain, or give examples for in the session. I would also note what I thought were key tables from the textbook that needed some discussion. Sometimes, I would prepare some "war stories" from personal experience, bring in articles from market research magazines like *ESOMAR - Research World* or *Quirk's Marketing Research Review*, or bring case studies from our own department. While there was some work involved, I benefited from the review, and in the process, learned a lot about my team.

How did you wrap up your group meetings?

At the end of the session, I would preview the topic of the new topic. Sometimes I had to warn the participants that the material was going to be challenging or time-consuming, so they could plan appropriately. It was important to set those expectations for the analytical topics.

Those topics, by the way, provide a great opportunity to bring in guest speakers. In particular, the material on segmentation prompted excellent discussions. It's ideal if the group can work with "live" examples of recent segmentations, to see how the processes of clustering, segmenting, analysis, and reporting come together with real data.

Was the study group worth the effort?

Absolutely. All nine of our participants successfully finished the course, right on schedule. And I believe they learned much more about how **Principles of Market Research** relates to our work at our company than they could have working entirely on their own.



In addition to helping learners complete the course faster and with better exam results, you may find that group study of **Principles of Market Research** is surprisingly effective in instilling your organizational culture and values. If relatively new employees participate, this is a way to teach them the procedures required by your organization, before they acquire bad habits they'll need to unlearn. Group study is also an opportunity to reinforce your organizational mission and values by showing how they influence decisions and behavior related to research. And by aligning your organizational procedures with the course, you communicate to learners that your company is committed to best practices for your industry.

Considering the benefits, the work involved in organizing and leading study groups is well worth the effort. Group leaders can consult with **Principles of Market Research** experts at the University of Georgia and MRII at any time during your organization's enrollments. For more information, contact **Pamela Bracken** at the University of Georgia/Principles of Market Research:

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