

# SOUTHERN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF MARKETING RESEARCH

Research disaster movies

Clients' role in  
ensuring seriously  
useful research

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Research must  
focus on  
understanding  
people

A social  
segmentation  
model of South  
African society

**Research Heritage:**  
How automation or AI  
has come to be of  
relevance for research  
and where it is headed



# HOW GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SERIOUSLY USEFUL RESEARCH



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**Discussions about what constitutes useful research and insights will probably focus on the role of the research provider's team, and what they should and should not do. I would, however, like to contend that producing useful research results should be a shared responsibility and requires collaboration between the research and client teams.**

Throughout my career I have always believed in the value of good working relationships with my clients. By working together with a complete understanding of the background and objectives, this leads to a greater understanding of the purpose of any project. Active involvement from the

client empowers the research team to deliver better, more actionable research results. My definition of client goes wider than the research- or insights manager that is my direct contact. Colleagues I have spoken to agree that their best and most productive projects were those where the end client business leader or team who will be using the findings, were closely involved (together with the research/ insights staff).

Present corporate culture and the increasing demand on clients and researchers to accomplish more in shorter time, with less budget, has unfortunately eroded this relationship and I have witnessed how the level of client involvement during the research process has diminished. On the forum of my international professional organization, and in conversations with worldwide colleagues, I can see that this is not unique to South Africa, but a global problem. Some of my colleagues feel that research is at times a tick box exercise where decisions have already been made at a global level. This may be depressing to local teams who know that the strategic direction has already been concluded, and that involvement will not make a difference.

Let us consider how a lack of involvement from the client can curb the value of the research outcome throughout the research process and why it is ideal to have opportunities to connect with the client during different stages of the research process.



## Briefing and commissioning of the project

Some project briefs have become very lean and limited with insufficient information about the need behind the research, the definition of the target market, what the research results must address and how the results will be used. It is very beneficial to have a meeting with client soon after the research is commissioned to confirm the objectives and obtain more in-depth, richer information about the research problem, what they currently know, and what they are hoping to find out. It is also very helpful to have access to previous work on the subject. It is unfortunate, but inevitable, that a lot of what we learn in most projects is already known to the Client. If that is shared at the outset of the project, the research team can maximize the new learning and/or tie findings to prior learning.

## Recruiting

Recruiting is, in my opinion, the make-or-break component of a qualitative research study as it is crucial to be interacting with the right consumer. We, as research providers, carry the responsibility of delivering the right participants. It is critical that we brief our field resources to understand the objectives of the project and the importance of their role in the process. Defining the target market and designing the sample for the research is an important detail that needs to happen in a collaborative way. This goes hand in hand with method selection and choosing methods that are realistic for the target market. It is not productive to insist on conducting online discussions with a target that is not tech-savvy or that has limited access to technology. Neither does it work to conduct traditional in-person group discussions with difficult to recruit, time-challenged targets such as medical specialists or top-level business execs.

List recruiting comes with a minefield of challenges. In my experience, very few clients look at their own lists before forwarding them for recruitment purposes and I am often amazed at the lack of insight clients have about their own database. It is not unusual for us to be asked to recruit a certain profile from a list, only to find that it does not exist, or that there are too few to make up a significant sub-group.

## Fieldwork

Observation of fieldwork, group discussions, and especially in-situ ethnographic interviews, is so important for clients as it provides a window to get to know their customers first-hand. We can learn so much more when we can step into the shoes of the consumer in their environment. Yet very few clients use the opportunity to observe research interactions. Sometimes they intend to, but then don't show on the day. With the advent of digital

research and streaming of in-person research, one of the advantages is that clients can save on down time away from the office by logging in and observing from the comfort of their computers. Ironically, I find that clients are less inclined to utilize this opportunity and I can name many instances where client ordered and paid for streaming and not a single observer tuned in. It seems that there is just too much demand on their time at the office and that one needs to abduct them away from the office to capture their attention.

Client attendance of in-person research and active participation in observing digital qualitative research (by posting comments and follow-up questions which are not visible to the participants) adds immense value to the research process because it affords the research team the opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of the client's needs and expectations and learn from their reaction to the information or the probes they are interested in. One also picks up very valuable insights with regard to hidden agendas and inter-company politics and their effect on the topic under investigation.

## Analysis and reporting

Allocating time for a debrief which involves client (especially those who observed the research) and not just the research team, can be very helpful in terms of fine-tuning early findings and can help to optimize and shorten the analysis and reporting process. On larger projects with multiple phases, such a debrief can contribute to a deeper focus for the following phase of the fieldwork.

In my experience, the most frustrating and unsatisfactory



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presentations are those where you deliver a one-way monologue to a mum audience. I doubt whether those are any good at transferring the insights from the mind of the researcher to the minds of the client team. An interactive workshop style presentation is so much more productive but requires participation from a client team that were actively involved during the research process.

Although it adds to the cost of those ever-shrinking budgets, video material is very important in giving life to insights. It can also remain useful to the client team for an extended time, especially if it can be curated in a creative way.

So, although I acknowledge all the acronyms that rule and devour the time and energy of client teams, and understand the call for more agile research processes, I would like to

request clients to prioritize and allocate some of their time to be involved and immersed when they have commissioned an important research project. They will reap the long-term benefits when they implement the research insights by being an active partner rather than leaving the research provider to manage the project like a single parent.

In the spirit of true collaboration, our industry probably needs to brainstorm (ideally together with our clients) how we can support our clients to survive their corporate demands and provide win-win solutions that give research insights the meaningful voice it deserves.... a topic for a follow-up article?

*Note: Corette Haf is a qualitative research consultant and this article is written from a qualitative research perspective.*

## What's the BUZZ?

### Zero-based Budgeting (ZBB)

**Zero-based Budgeting (ZBB)** is a method of budgeting in which all expenses must be justified for each new period. So, starting from a zero base, every function within an organisation is analysed for costs and needs. Budgets are then built around what is needed for the upcoming period, regardless of previous budgets, with justification of both old (recurring) and new expenses. This is done to optimise not only revenue, but also costs. Traditional budgeting uses incremental increases over previous budgets (e.g. a 1% increase in spending), looking only at new expenditure and assuming the recurrence of old expenditure. Some advantages of zero-based budgeting include budget flexibility, focused operations, lower costs, and disciplined implementation of budgets. However, the disadvantages include resource intensiveness, manipulation by managers and bias toward short-term planning instead of long-term thinking. (<https://www.investopedia.com/>)

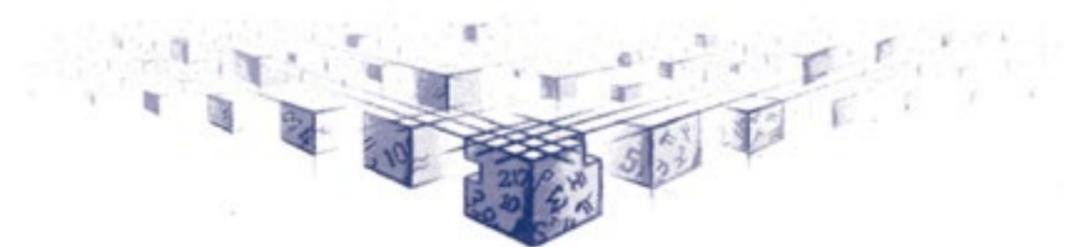


### TRS FOR YOUR EVIDENCE BASED STRATEGIES & INVESTMENTS

Topline Research Solutions (TRS) is a Pan-African market/ing research consultancy inspired by the glaring need for correct, clear and complete understanding of African communities. TRS provides consumer, product and communication insights that connect businesses with minds, hearts & wallets of their customers through the following types of surveys:

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- **Advertising Effectiveness Evaluation**
- **Media Audience Measurement**
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