

Example Case Study for QUAL (qual.org.uk)

Magnetic North (<https://www.magneticnorth.org.uk>)

Background

Formed in 1999 by playwright, theatre and opera director Nicholas Bone, Magnetic North is an award-winning theatre company, based in Edinburgh. Magnetic North's mission is to run a multi-art form programme of artist-centred development and production that creates the time and space to produce high quality art works for UK based and international audiences.

What are you trying to find out?

- To explore the multidisciplinary artists' experiences and reflections of Magnetic North's Rough Mix residency;
- To explore Magnetic North's potential audiences' attitudes and perceptions of its production of *Our Fathers*.

Who do you want to talk to?

- Magnetic North Rough Mix's Artists responded to a request by Nicholas Bone to take part in the research, all of the artists were self-selecting. Research was conducted before and after the Rough Mix retreat.
- Potential Attenders (professionally recruited/recruited through Magnetic North mailing list)
- Edinburgh and Glasgow groups – professionally recruited; St Andrews through a Magnetic North mail out to its database (all had not previously attended a Magnetic North performance).

Choosing your approach

Rough Mix Artists

- A focus group of (nine) artists was conducted at the beginning of the two week Rough Mix retreat.
- Individual interviews were conducted via Skype (for logistical and cost- efficient reasons) after the Rough Mix retreat. In total five interviews were conducted.

- Time: the group was conducted at lunchtime, the interviews took place on agreed date and time
- Duration: Group, 1 hour; interviews, varied from 20 to 50 minutes
- No incentive given

Potential audiences

- Three mini groups were conducted pre and post- performance of Magnetic North's Our Fathers production (Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews). Mini groups (3 or 4 people): mini groups were chosen because of budget constraints – mini groups keep down costs of both recruiting and incentivizing participants.
- Edinburgh and Glasgow groups were recruited professionally at £25 per person (www.taylormckenzie.co.uk). St Andrews groups were recruited through an advertisement with Magnetic North's email newsletter
- Time: pre and post-performance (evening)
- Duration: 1 hour (pre-performance) and 30 minutes (post performance)
- Incentive: £30 per person and a free ticket to Our Fathers

Example fieldwork schedule

	Duration and time	Target	Research Aims
1	May 3rd 2017 12-1pm	10 x Rough Mix artists (pre-Rough Mix)	<p><i>To explore the multidisciplinary artists' experiences and reflections of its Rough Mix two week residency.</i></p>
2	Variant times and dates (skype interviews - for convenience/save resources): July-August 2017	5 x Rough Mix artists (post-Rough Mix)	
3	November 2017 Pre and post Our Fathers performance groups	<p>Magnetic North potential audiences – who attended its performance of Our Fathers.</p> <p>Focus groups (6 participants in each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh; • The Tron, Glasgow; • The Byre, St Andrews. 	<p><i>To explore the attitudes and perceptions of Magnetic North's potential audiences (those who seek out new and contemporary theatre works who had not previously attended a Magnetic North performance) to its</i></p>

Topic Guide

Artist Pre-Rough Mix Topic Guide

Introduction: important to establishing a rapport

- Assurances of confidentiality and introduce the recording device to the group (if there are objections to recording, cannot proceed with recording, take notes only)
- Early childhood / adolescent experiences of theatre / writing – key motivators
- Key influencers / mentors in development of writing
- Experiences in ‘trying to get in’ to the theatre community / and progression – influencers / how / why? Explore fully.

Warm up questions: important for context

- Explore perceptions of the current contemporary arts scene – particularly in relation to theatre. Key issues that are affecting them as artists / their work / the community – how/why?
- Probe for awareness and experiences of different theatres / theatre companies (FOR NOW, other than Magnetic North)/ residencies locally, nationally, internationally.

Key questions to meeting your research aim (pre-retreat expectations)

- How did you become aware / find out about the Magnetic North rough mix?
- What are your reasons for attending the Rough Mix / what are your expectations for the week / what are you seeking to get out of the residency – why?
- Explore how ‘prepared’ (relative to expectations / anticipations) are they for the creative development process / the residency – and why/why not?

Sum up

- Explore perceptions and feeling related to Magnetic North, and in particular the value of / around Rough Mix, and what it offers them.

Thank & close

Topic Guide

Our Fathers: Pre-performance

Introduction: important to establishing a rapport

- Warm up: Ask group to introduce selves/background info: occupation, family, where live etc.

Warm up questions: important for context

- Discuss / brainstorm (on flip chart) all types of arts activities they like to do in their spare time – why, how often, key things that matter, what people relate to etc.?
- Discuss theatre going behaviour and motivations for attending a theatre – how often and why?
- What make a good or bad performance (probe for examples)?
- Explore barriers to attending a particular type of performance (explore examples)

Key questions to meeting your research aim

- Explore perceptions of arts/theatre(specifically) venues that are currently available in their respective cities (and nationally) – how /why does a venue contribute (or not) to a live performance experience
- Ideally what types of arts / (specifically) theatre performances would they like to see more of? Explore why / venues/ how would they find out about them etc.

READ OUT DESCRIPTOR OF OUR FATHERS

- Explore fully expectations (and related emotions) of the night's Magnetic North performance... what they hope / want to get out of the performance experience / what would they like to come away feeling – why - etc.

Hand out reflective / observation note books;

Remind them to come back to the room after the performance.

Our Fathers: Post: performance

- Explore reactions to the performance, probe on:
 - Experience of the story – resonates / enjoyable / meaningful etc (explore points / themes made in notebooks)
 - Experience of the live performance / quality of acting
- Explore what particular aspects of the performance experience they liked / disliked most – why?
- How could the performance experience been improved (explore fully – note what they value, and why).
- Would they attend another Magnetic North again (explore fully in terms of why / why not?

Thank & close

NB these represent headline findings only and are presented here to give a flavor of the insights that can be elicited from qualitative research. We also present illustrative quotations from the transcripts to support the findings.

Rough Mix Artists

Magnetic North's Rough Mix was highly valued by artists, particularly in terms of:

- ❖ Dedicated time and space; *“away from the everyday”* to pursue and share their practices:

“For me ...with two young kids, this is complete luxury. I never get this amount of time a day to even think about work and practice ...and as you say it's paid...actual real quality time to think about practice and to be exposed to others as well.”

- ❖ Sharing experiences and collaborating with like-minded artists:

“Just being able to sit down with a group of intelligent, articulate people and look at other people's ideas, and look at things from their point of view, and then have a lot of options juggled...in a safe space...”

- ❖ No pressure for outputs / adaptation of collaborative practices according to individual working practices:

“I wanted to go because I thought it would be a good learning experience, and it was...I thought Magnetic North, it's a completely intense experience.”

Magnetic North Potential Attendees

- ❖ Motivation for attending: the live performance experience:

“It’s a wee bit of excitement ...it does kind of get away from the nine to five...you’re watching television and it’s the same sort of stuff you see...I do like live performance far better. You can feel it and touch it and the music and people performing it.”

Theatre habits / tastes:

- ❖ New writing: A play, A pie and A pint – most regularly attended:

“I’m a Play, a Pie, and a Pint man as well, I love going but you kind of roll the dice with that...I think the technical expression it’s complete shite. But some of them are just fabulous.”

- ❖ Edinburgh Festival: time to risk take and ‘take a punt’ / a time to experiment ... Edinburgh Festival perhaps a key time for Magnetic North to perform and create awareness:

“I saw the first Trainspotting at Edinburgh Festival. It was phenomenal. It was one of those experiences that I really look for, just cracking out of this world, everyone on the edge of their seats, didn’t want to leave, real mix of people. I love that. I live for that, it’s brilliant... total punt.”