DATA INTEGRITY

Regardless of the type of data you are collecting or the purpose for collecting it, it is absolutely necessary that you have data integrity. With data integrity, you are maintaining and assuring that your data is accurate and consistent. This is a critical aspect of any planning, implementation, and use of data – whether storing, processing, or retrieving it.

The overall intent of any data integrity is to ensure that data is recorded exactly as intended and as originally recorded (e.g., survey answers recorded accurately, interview discussion transcribed and interpreted correctly). Data integrity aims to prevent unintentional changes to information. It should not be confused with data security, which protects data from unauthorized parties.

Depending on the kind of data collected, data integrity can look very different. For example, if part of a focus group transcription has been omitted from the transcript, the integrity of the data has been compromised. In another example, if survey results are coded incorrectly, the integrity of the data in the database has been compromised.

Key considerations when ensuring the integrity of data

1. Be clear with participants and stakeholders about your purpose for collecting the data and intended use for the data. Collect participant consent beforehand. If any changes occur, additional consent is necessary.

2. Spend time getting to know your data and organize/clean it thoroughly.

3. Double check your data to ensure there are no errors. Having a trusted colleague review the data can be a helpful step to ensure accuracy.

4. Be transparent in your work. Keep detailed and easy to access notes on your process of data collection, compilation, cleaning, analysis, and reporting. This can be referred to if asked to comment on your work or for you to review if necessary at a later date.

5. Ensure that any recommendations, next steps, conclusions, or learnings are consistent with what the data says. Having a trusted colleague review your final report can support this process.