

Asking survey questions: identifying problems

Debbie Collins

Consider the following survey question...

How many hours did you work last week?

Consider the following survey question...

How many hours did you work last week?

Survey Question Standardisation

“The goal of standardization is that each respondent be exposed to the same question experience, and that the recording of answers be the same, too, so that any differences in the answers can be correctly interpreted as reflecting differences between respondents rather than differences in the process that produced the answer.”

Fowler F. J. & Mangione T.W. 1990. Standardized Survey Interviewing: Minimizing Interviewer-Related Error. ASRMS Vol: 18. Sage.

Components of measurement error

■ Questions

- misunderstood
- that cannot be answered (accurately)
- that respondents will not answer

■ Administration

- question not read as worded
- record answers inaccurately

Theories on Response Process

- Four stage model (Tourangeau, 1984)
 - Comprehension of question
 - Retrieval from memory of relevant information
 - Judgement and estimation process
 - Response process; mapping answer to response options

Questionnaire evaluation methods

Quantitative

- Behaviour coding
- Analytical methods e.g. Item Response Theory, Latent Class Analysis
- Split ballot experiments
- Field piloting

Qualitative

- Focus groups
- Cognitive Interviewing
- Interviewer debriefing
- Respondent debriefing
- Usability testing

Desk based review

- Questionnaire Appraisal System
- Expert review

Mixed methods

- Eye tracking with cognitive interviewing
- Field piloting with respondent debriefing/web probing
- Split ballot experiment with cognitive interviewing