Questionnaires and Surveys.

This is perhaps the most widely used approach to research. and is usually (but not always!) a quantitative approach.

Key points:

- Questionnaires and Surveys are not quite the same.
- Considering the design of a questionnaire is important.
- There are a range of different kinds and styles of questions that can be asked.
- Consider the size and sample to be representative.
- A response rate of 30% or greater is reasonable.

Questionnaire or Survey?

Questionnaires and surveys are very similar in nature. Surveys tend to use the same principles described above in sample selection etc. The main difference from questionnaires is that surveys tend to ask questions in face-to-face or telephone interviews. A typical example is the pollster or market researcher that approaches you in the High street or telephones you at home to ask which political party you might vote for. Surveys tend to fall into two types - descriptive (which is concerned with identifying & counting the frequency of a particular response among the survey group) and analytical (which analyses the relationship between different variables in a sample group.

Here we will explore questionnaires in more detail. The key issues to consider are

- design of questionnaires (including piloting);
- different kinds of questions;
- sampling;
- response rates.

Questionnaire Design

The main points to remember when designing and using questionnaires:

a) Questionnaires collect data by asking all, or a sample of people, to respond to the same questions.

b) There are five types of questionnaire approaches:
   1. On-line (electronic) [e,g, survey monkey]
   2. Postal (printed)
   3. Delivery & collection (printed)
   4. Telephone (electronic/printed)
   5. Interview face to face/group (electronic or printed)

c) You need to be absolutely clear before you design a questionnaire what it is you want to know and what data you need to obtain to enlighten you in this search. You also need to think ahead about how you are going to collate the information you gather. There is no point in designing a questionnaire that produces a range of information you find very difficult to collate in any meaningful quantitative or qualitative way.

d) The validity (the extent to which the questions accurately measure what they were intended to measure) and reliability (the extent to which the data collection method will yield consistent findings if replicated by others) of the data you collect depend on the design of the questionnaire and the words that you use.

e) Questions can be open or closed:

Open questions: a question is posed, but space is left for the respondent's own answer (e.g. what could the NHS do to be a better employer?)

Closed questions: where a limited number of alternative responses to the set question are provided. These can be in list, category, ranking, scale/rating, grid or other quantitative form. They can be pre-coded on a questionnaire to facilitate analysis. (e.g. tick one box below to indicate which additional employee benefit you would most like to receive).

f) The order and flow of questions should be logical to the respondent.

g) There can be a low rate of return with questionnaires, so they need to be introduced carefully and courteously to potential respondents. This introduction should include the use of a covering letter.

h) All questionnaires should be piloted, if possible, with a small group before the main research to assess their value, validity and reliability. Those piloting the survey need to be asked about the process of completing the questionnaire, was it easy to do, how long did it take, were there any questions that were unclear or had double meanings.

Some General Rules of Designing Questionnaires

- In A covering letter, e-mail or survey introduction clearly explain the purpose of the questionnaire to all participants
- Keep your questions as simple as possible
- Do not use jargon or specialist language (unless the recipients really prefer & understand it)
- Phrase each question so that only one meaning is possible
- Avoid vague, descriptive words, such as 'huge', 'large' and 'small'
- Avoid asking negative questions as these are easy to misinterpret
- Only ask one question at a time
- Include relevant questions only
- Include, if possible, questions which serve as cross-checks on the answers to other questions

- Avoid questions which require participants to perform calculations (if it takes too long they will probably give up and not respond)
- Avoid leading or value-laden questions which imply what the required answer might be
- Avoid offensive or insensitive questions which could cause anger or embarrassment
- Avoid asking 'difficult' questions, e.g. where the respondent may struggle to answer (people hate to look stupid by not knowing the 'answer').
- Keep your questionnaire as short as possible, but include all the questions you need to cover your purposes

Different kinds of questions

1. Specific Information Request
In which year did you pass your driving test? _____

2. Category
Have you ever been or are you a union member? (Tick which)
Yes (currently) ☐ Yes (in the past) ☐ Never ☐

3. Multiple Choice
Do you view stocks and shares as?
If so, tick which.
A luxury ☐ An investment ☐ A necessity ☐ A gamble ☐ A burden ☐ A right ☐ None of these ☐

4. Scale
How would you describe your parents' attitude to stocks and shares?
Please tick one of the options below.

Very Positive	Positive	Mixed/Neutral	Negative	Very Negative	Not Sure
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Ranking
What do you see as the main purpose(s) of your school qualifications? Please rank all those relevant in order from 1 (most important) downwards:
Personal Development □ Career Advancement □ Subject Interest □ Recreation □ Fulfil Ambition □ Intellectual Stimulation □ Other □ (give details)……..

6. Grid or Table
How would you rank the benefits of having a swimming pool in your town to…
Please rank each item:

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative	Not Sure
You						
Younger people in your						

community (School Aged Children)						
Older people in your community (Those who have reached retirement age)						
Your Family						
Your Friends						
Visitors to the town (e.g. holidaymakers).						

7. Open Questions

Please summarise the positive aspects of swimming on your health in the space below:

Size and Sampling

It is convention that where a group is of about fifty people or fewer then, we should ask them all to complete the survey. For larger groups, some form of sampling is usually necessary to attempt to gather opinions that are likely to be representative of the whole group or organisation.

Sampling strategies are divided into two main groups: probability and non-probability sampling.

- Probability Sampling is used where the researcher has a significant measure of control over who is selected and on the selection methods for choosing them. There are several methods of probability sampling:
    - Simple Random Sampling - selection at random by the researchers from a list of people
    - Systematic Sampling – you select people to sample at numbered intervals, e.g. every ninth person in the list
    - Stratified Sampling - sampling within particular sections of the target groups, e.g. you target a specific number of people based on the percentage of the total group that share the same characteristics. So, for example, in a study of a university with 2000 postgraduate students and 10000 undergraduates a 5% representative sample of this population would target 100 postgraduates and 500 undergraduates to survey.
    - Cluster Sampling - surveying the whole of a particular cluster of the subject group

- Non-Probability Sampling is used where the researcher has little initial control over the choice of who is presented for selection, or where controlled selection of participants is not a critical factor. There are several methods of non-probability sampling:
    - Convenience Sampling - sampling of those most convenient or those immediately available to you
    - Voluntary Sampling - the sample is self-selecting; the respondents volunteer to be surveyed
    - Purposive Sampling - enables the researcher to use judgement in choosing people that are presented or are available that best meet the research objectives or target groups
    - 'Snowball' Sampling - building up a sample through informants. This starts with one person – who then suggests another and so on
    - Event Sampling - using the opportunity presented by a particular event, e.g. a conference, to make contacts)
    - Time Sampling - recognising that sampling at different times or days of the week or year may be significant.

Response Rates

A response rate of 30 per cent or greater for a postal/externally sent questionnaire is generally seen as reasonable. There are techniques that can help improve response rates to postal or electronic questionnaires:

- **Follow-up calls** (especially telephone reminders – people will say they have lost it rather than filed it in the wastebin – but then guilt often causes them to fill the second copy in!).
- **Pre-contact with respondents** (telling them about the questionnaire)
- **Type of postage** (first class or even special delivery is superior to ordinary mail; hand-written white envelopes with the person's name are more likely to be opened than brown/typed!)
- **Rewards**: prizes, or better still, cash incentives are sometimes used by employers but in the case of academic research there are ethical and sampling issues. A prize draw for a weekend in Paris for a questionnaire on Appraisals tends to attract a sample of people who like weekends in Paris to comment on appraisals and causes most respondents to question how this can be anonymous after all.
- **Personalizing the questionnaire**: writing to the person by name, e.g. 'Dear Jane' etc.
- **Emphasising Confidentiality**: ensuring that all views to be published remain anonymous, if appropriate
- **Appeals to the respondent**: based on the social, personal or other benefits that might flow from the participation of a respondent.

Note that postal questionnaires should always include a stamped return envelope and have a covering letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and the use intended for the findings in the future. First class if you want them back quickly!

In addition, you should provide full contact details and the offer to discuss the questionnaire with any respondent who has doubts or queries about it and offer to share the research findings with any participant, if requested, and this offer is best made in the covering letter.

Activity

 Consider the kind of questionnaires or surveys you want for your organisation and create them from the outset.

Need help?

You can contact at us and arrange a call at: sedg@tsdg.co.uk