CONDUCTING SURVEYS

Everyone Is Doing It

Overview

Surveys are everywhere. You will find them in doctor’s offices, schools, airplanes, and hotel rooms. Surveys are used to collect information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, feelings, values, and behavior. Surveys typically take the form of self-administered questionnaires and interviews. Self-administered questionnaires can be completed by hand (“paper and pencil”) or online (Internet or web-based). Interviews may take place in person (“face to face”) or on the telephone (landline and mobile/cell).

Survey data are used by program planners, evaluators, administrators, managers, researchers, and policy leaders in diverse fields, including business, health, education, social welfare, and politics. They are used because they get information directly from people.

Surveyors must decide on the survey’s overall purposes and specific questions. They also need to know who and how many people will be contacted (sampling) and when and how often the survey will take place (design). Surveyors must also process, analyze, and interpret data.

To choose among survey types (self-administered questionnaires or interviews) or methods of administration (mail, telephone, or web-based), surveyors need to select one that will produce credible and accurate results and for which they have resources.

Survey purposes and methods fall on a continuum. Some surveys can have far-reaching, generalizable effects, and their methods must be scientific. Surveys of the population’s health conducted by the U.S. government are examples of scientific surveys. Other surveys are conducted to meet specific needs; their methods may not always achieve the highest standards of scientific rigor, but they must still produce accurate results and so must use reliable and valid techniques. Polling students in a particular school to identify their summer reading choices so as to be sure the library is well stocked is an illustration of a survey designed to meet a specific need.

What Is a Survey?

Surveys are information-collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior. A survey can be a self-administered questionnaire that someone fills out alone or with assistance, or a survey can be an interview done in person or on the telephone. Some surveys are on paper or online, and the respondent can complete them privately at home or in a central location—say, at a health center. The respondent can either return the completed survey by snail mail, e-mail, or online. Surveys can be interactive and guide the respondent through the questions. Interactive surveys also may provide audiovisual cues to help.
Here are at least three good reasons for conducting surveys:

**Reason 1:** A policy needs to be set or a program must be planned.

**Examples: Surveys to Meet Policy or Program Needs**

- The YMC Corporation wants to determine which hours to be open each day. The Corporation surveys employees to find out which 8-hour shifts they are willing to work.

- The national office of the Health Voluntary Agency is considering providing day care for its children’s staff. How many have very young children? How many would use the Agency’s facility?

- Ten years ago, the Bartley School District changed its language arts curriculum. Since then, some people have argued that the curriculum has become out of date. What do the English teachers think? If revisions are needed, what should they look like?

**Reason 2:** You want to evaluate the effectiveness of programs to change people’s knowledge, attitudes, health, or welfare.

**Examples: Surveys in Evaluations of Programs**

- The YMC Corporation has created two programs to educate people about the advantages and disadvantages of working at unusual hours. One program takes the form of individual counseling and specially prepared, self-monitored videotape. The second program is conducted in large groups. A survey is conducted 6 months after each program is completed to find out whether the employees think they got the information they needed. The survey also aims to find out whether they would recommend that others participate in a similar program and how satisfied they are with their work schedule.

- The Health Voluntary Agency is trying two approaches to child care. One is primarily “child centered,” and the children usually decide from a list of activities which ones they would like to do during the hours they are in the program. The other is academic and artistic. Children are taught to read, play musical instruments, and dance at set times during the day. Which program is most satisfactory in that the parents, children, and staff are active participants and pleased with the curriculum’s content? The Agency surveys parents, children, and staff to get answers.

- The Bartley School District changed its language arts curriculum. A survey is conducted to find out whether and how the change has affected parents’ and students’ opinions of the high school program.

**Reason 3:** You are a researcher who uses a survey to get information about how to guide studies and programs.

**Examples: Surveys for Research**

- Because the YMC Corporation has so many educational programs, it wants to research how adults learn best. Do they prefer self-learning or formal classes? Are reading materials appropriate or are films and videotapes better? How do they feel about computer-assisted learning or learning directly from the Internet? As part of their research, and to make sure all the possibilities are covered, the Corporation conducts a survey of a sample of employees to learn their preferences.

- The Health Voluntary Agency is considering joining with a local university in a study of preschool education. The Agency conducts a survey of the parents participating in the new day-care programs. The survey asks about the participants’ education and income. Researchers need data such as these so they can test one of their major assumptions—namely, that parents with higher education and incomes are more likely to choose the more academic of the two preschool programs.

- The Bartley School District is part of a U.S. government-funded national study of the teaching of the English language. The study’s researchers hypothesized that classroom teaching depends more on their teachers’ educational backgrounds and reading preferences than on the formal curriculum. A survey is conducted to find out teachers’ educational backgrounds and reading habits so that those data are available for testing the researchers’ hypothesis.
When Is a Survey Best?

Many methods exist for obtaining information about people. A survey is only one. Consider the youth center that has as its major aim to provide a variety of services to the community. It offers medical, financial, legal, and educational assistance to residents of the city who are between 12 and 21 years of age regardless of background. The program is particularly proud of its coordinated approach, arguing that the center’s effectiveness comes from making available many services in one location to all participants. Now that the center is 10 years old, a survey is to be conducted to find out just how successful it really is. Are participants and staff satisfied? Which services do young people use? Is the center really a multiservice one? Are people better off with their health and other needs because of their participation in the center? A mailed self-administered questionnaire survey is decided on to help answer these and other questions. Here are some excerpts from the questionnaire.

10. How satisfied you are with each of the following services? Please indicate your satisfaction for each service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily counseling session</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal aid facility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. How much time in a 5-minute period does the doctor spend listening (rather than, say, talking) to you? (Please check one)

☐ Less than 1 minute
☐ About 1 or 2 minutes
☐ More than 2 minutes

The questionnaire was shown to a reviewer whose advice was to eliminate Questions 5, 7, and 11, and keep only Question 10. The reviewer stated that surveys are not best for certain types of information. Here is the reasoning:

Question 5 asks for a report of a person’s blood pressure. Is it normal? In general, information of this kind is most accurate if it is obtained from other sources—say, a medical record. Many people might have difficulty recalling their blood pressure with precision and also would be at a loss to define “normal” blood pressure.

Question 7 may be all right if you feel confident that the person’s recall will be accurate. Otherwise, the records of the center are probably a better source of information about which services are used.
Question 11 asks the patient to tell how much time the doctor spends listening rather than talking. If you are interested in the patient’s perceptions, then the question is fine. If, however, you want data on the actual time the doctor listened rather than talked to the patient, observation by an impartial observer is probably best.

Question 10 is appropriate. Only participants can tell you how satisfied they are. No source will do as well.

Surveys are by no means the only source of information for making decisions, nor are they necessarily the most relevant. Some other sources of information are the following:

- Observations or eyewitness reports; filmed, videotaped, and audiotaped accounts
- Performance tests that require a person to perform a task (such as teaching a lesson to a class); observers assess the effectiveness of the performance
- Written tests of ability or knowledge
- Record reviews that rely on existing documentation, such as reviews of medical and school attendance records; analysis of the content of published and unpublished articles and diaries or of recorded and filmed documentaries

Surveys can be used in deciding policy or in planning and evaluating programs and conducting research when the information you need should come directly from people. The data they provide are descriptions of feelings and perceptions, values, habits, and personal background or demographic characteristics such as age, health, education, and income.

Sometimes surveys are combined with other sources of information. This is particularly true for evaluations and research.

The YMC Corporation is researching how adults learn. Achievement and performance tests are given at regular intervals. In addition, a survey provides supplemental data on how adults like to learn.

**Self-Administered Questionnaires and Interviews: The Heart of the Matter**

All surveys consist of (1) questions and responses. To get accurate data, you must account for a survey’s (2) sampling and design, (3) data processing or “management” and analysis, (4) pilot testing, and (5) response rate. Survey results are presented as written (printed on paper or reproduced electronically) and oral reports.

**Questions and Responses**

Information from surveys is obtained by asking questions. Questions are sometimes referred to as items. The questions may have forced-response choices.

**Example: Forced-Choice Question**

What is the main advantage of multiple-choice over essay questions?

- Can be scored objectively
- Are best at measuring complex behaviors
- Can have more than one answer
- Are the least threatening of the question types

Questions on surveys may be open ended.

**Example: Open-Ended Question**

What is the main advantage of multiple-choice over essay questions?

Answer here

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

As part of its evaluation of child-care programs, the Health Voluntary Agency surveyed parents, children, and staff about their degree of participation and satisfaction. Also, the Agency reviewed financial records to evaluate the costs of each program, and standardized tests were given to appraise how ready children were for school.
The selection, wording, and ordering of questions and answers require careful thought and a reasonable command of language.

**Survey Sample and Design**

Surveys are data-collection methods used to obtain information from and about people: From and about which people, how often, and when? As soon as you raise questions such as these, you must become concerned with the sample and design of the survey. The sample is the number and characteristics of people in the survey. The design refers to how often the survey takes place (just once, or cross-sectional; over time, or longitudinal), whether the participants are selected at random or are chosen some other way, and how many separate groups are included.

Consider these three surveys:

Survey 1: What do graduates from the class of 2009 know about physical fitness?
- **Survey method:** Online questionnaire
- **Sample:** All 1,000 graduates from State College’s class of 2009
- **How often survey takes place:** Just once—at graduation
- **How participants are selected:** All graduates are eligible
- **How many groups:** Just one—the class of 2009
- **Design:** Cross-sectional

Survey 2: Does knowledge about physical fitness change over a 12-month period among graduates of the class of 2007?
- **Survey method:** Online questionnaire
- **Sample:** All 1,000 graduates from State College’s class of 2009
- **How often survey takes place:** Twice—at graduation and 12 months later
- **How participants are selected:** All graduates are eligible
- **How many groups:** Just one—the class of 2009
- **Design:** Longitudinal cohort

Survey 3: Over time, do differences exist among graduating classes in their knowledge of physical fitness?
- **Survey method:** Online questionnaire
- **Sample:** A 75% randomly selected sample of graduates from the classes of 2009, 2010, and 2011 to equal 2,250 graduates
- **How often survey takes place:** Three times—at graduation and 12 and 24 months later
- **How participants are selected:** Randomly
- **How many groups:** Three—the classes of 2009, 2010, and 2011.
- **Design:** Longitudinal and comparative

Survey 1 asks for a portrait of the class of 2009’s knowledge of physical fitness, and a mailed questionnaire is to be used. This portrait is called a cross-sectional survey design. Survey 2 wants to know about changes in knowledge of physical fitness over a 1-year period: from graduation forward 12 months. The design is longitudinal. The entire class is a “cohort” of people.

Survey 3 is longitudinal because survey data are collected from each of the three graduating classes over three points in time: at the time of graduation and 1 and 2 years later. The design also is comparative because knowledge can be compared between any two and among all three classes at graduation, 1 year later, 2 years later, or across all three times. An illustration of the design for Survey 3 can take this form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Time of Graduation</th>
<th>1 Year After Graduation</th>
<th>2 Years After Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey 3 differs from Surveys 1 and 2 in how the graduates are selected for participation. In Survey 3, a 75% sample of graduates will be randomly selected to participate. In the other two
surveys, all graduates, not just a sample, are eligible. Random selection means that each graduate has an equal chance of being included.

All three surveys are online, but their samples and designs vary.

Planning for Data Analysis

Regardless of your survey’s design or size, you must think ahead to how you plan to analyze the survey’s data.

Will you compute percentages so that your results look like this?

Of the total sample, 50% reported that they were Republicans, 42% were Democrats, 5% were Independent, 1% belonged to the Green Party, and 3% had no party affiliation.

Will you produce averages to appear this way?

The average age of the respondents is 56.4 years. The median educational level is 13 years.

Will you compare groups and report something like this?

A total of 60% of the men, but only 20% of the women, were Republicans. Respondents do not differ significantly in satisfaction with the present government.

Will you look for relationships such as this?

The survey found no association between how liberal or conservative people were and their educational attainments. High school graduates who were 30 years of age or older were significantly more likely to vote in the last election than were older, less educated respondents.

Will you look for changes over time?

Since 1997, statistically significant differences have been found in the number of men participating in two or more hours of child care per day.

Pilot Testing

A pilot test is a tryout, and its purpose is to help produce a survey form that is usable and that will provide you with the information you need. All surveys must be pilot tested before being put into practice. Self-administered questionnaires depend heavily on the clarity of their language (it does not matter if it is a written or online questionnaire), and pilot testing quickly reveals whether people understand the directions you have provided and if they can answer the survey questions. A pilot test of a face-to-face interview also will tell you about interviewers. Can they follow the interview form easily? Are the spaces on printed surveys large enough for recording responses? Do interviewers know what to do if the computer “freezes” while they are in the midst of a computer-assisted interview? Pilot tests also can tell you how much time it takes to complete the survey.

Testing helps make the survey run smoothly. Whenever possible, you should try to duplicate the environment in which the survey is to take place. That might mean obtaining permission from people just to be in the tryouts, but not in the survey, although they are eligible for full participation.

Response Rate

The surveyor wants everyone who is eligible to respond to all questions. Pilot testing helps improve the response rate because it can eliminate severe potential sources of difficulty, such as poorly worded questions and no place to record answers on printed questionnaires. Furthermore, if the entire set of survey procedures is carefully tested, then this, too, can help the response rate. Before you do a telephone interview, ask: Do you have available a current list of telephone numbers? Are you willing to make telephone calls at the time the survey respondents are available? Do you have a plan for reaching respondents who do not return calls left on their answering machines or voice mail? For online surveys ask: Do you have available a current list of e-mail addresses? Do you know how to ensure privacy of responses? Other ways of ensuring good response rates exist, regardless of survey type, such as keeping surveys short and simple and providing incentives for participating.

How high should the response rate be? If you are conducting a large, complex survey, you will want to use statistical procedures to answer this question. If your survey is relatively simple (say, a pool of teachers in a school or nurses in three hospitals), then you have to decide how many people you will need for the results to be believable. If 20 people are eligible for completing a mailed, self-administered questionnaire and only 10 respond, you may feel different from the way you will feel if, at another time, 200 of 400 respond. Both surveys have a 50% response rate, but reporting on the views of 10 of 20
Conducting Surveys

people may appear to be less convincing than telling about 200 of 400. Except when done statistically, the desired response rate tends to be entirely subjective, and the general rule is “higher is better.”

Reporting Results

Survey results are reported daily on the Internet, TV, newspapers, and magazines. To many, a survey is a poll usually of some, but not all, people about an issue of immediate political, social, or economic concern. Survey results typically look like this:

Example 1: The Look of Survey Results

| Question: If the election were held today, would you vote for Candidate X? |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|
| Men                    | Yes 50% | No 50% |
| Women                  | Yes 20% | No 80% |

Example 2: The Look of Survey Results

Survey results typically look like this:

Example 2: The Look of Survey Results

What is your favorite color?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Analytics

- Mean: 2.000
- Confidence Interval @ 95%: [0.040, 3.960]
- Standard Deviation: 1.414
- Standard Error: 1.000

Source: *Taken from www.questionpro.com

More information on standard errors is found in chapter 5, and more information on confidence intervals and standard deviations is provided in chapter 6.

Example 3: The Look of Survey Results

Survey results typically look like this:

Example 3: The Look of Survey Results

Source: A Survey of Applicants-Senate Committee
To get results such as these requires many steps, and all surveys follow them:

- Deciding on the type of survey (mailed or online questionnaire, telephone, or face-to-face interviews)
- Selecting the survey’s content, writing questions, and trying out the form
- Deciding who should participate (Everyone? A sample of people?) and how often (Just once? Each year for 5 years?)
- Administering the survey (Who should conduct the interview? By when must the online questionnaire be submitted?)
- Processing the data (Will a programmer be needed? Will a commercial online survey vendor do the analysis? Are data from written questionnaires to be scanned into the computer? Entered manually?)
- Analyzing and interpreting the results (Was the response rate good enough? What do the numbers or differences between people mean? Just how do people feel about Candidate X? Have opinions changed over time?)
- Reporting the results orally or in writing using text, charts, tables, and graphs (Who is the audience? How long should the report be? Which data should be presented?)

No credible survey can omit any single step, although, depending on its purposes and resources, some steps will receive more emphasis in any given survey than in another.

**The Friendly Competition**

How do you choose between self-administered questionnaires and interviews? Is a mailed or an online survey better? When is an interview the best choice? Here are some criteria for selecting among the different survey types.

**Reliability and Validity**

A reliable survey results in consistent information. A valid survey produces accurate information. Reliable and valid surveys are obtained by making sure the definitions and models you use to select questions are grounded in theory or experience. No single survey type starts out with better reliability and validity than another. Choose the survey method that is most precise and accurate for your specific purposes. For example, if you are worried that the people you are surveying cannot read well, an oral (face-to-face or telephone) interview is likely to produce far better results than a written one.

Focus groups and pilot tests help you decide which type to use and if you have done a good job of designing the survey and making it user-friendly. Respondents or survey administrators (the people who do the interviewing or hand out the questionnaires) who have trouble with the survey will use it incorrectly, introducing bias, and that in turn reduces the accuracy of the results. A well-designed, easy-to-use survey always contributes to reliability and validity.

**Usefulness or Credibility of Results**

The results will be useful if they are valid and if the survey method is one that users accept as the correct one. Find out before you start which method is the one people want. Sometimes the people who will use the results have strong preferences.

**Costs**

This refers to the financial burden of developing and administering each type of survey. The costs associated with written questionnaires (on-site and mailed) include paper, reproduction, and incentives. Mailed questionnaires require an up-to-date address list (which you may have to purchase), postage, and envelopes. Sometimes you have several follow-up mailings, adding to the costs.

The costs of face-to-face and telephone interviews include phone charges or, in large survey, the costs of purchasing a telephone system and paying for miscalled and out-of-date telephone numbers as well as hang ups. You also need to pay for writing a script for the interviewer, training the interviewers, monitoring the quality of the interviews, and providing incentives to respondents.

Online surveys require extensive development and testing. Any mistakes in programming or analysis can invalidate the survey’s findings. One way to save on development is to use user-friendly online commercial survey developers like QuestionPro.com. (There are others.)

Online survey costs mount if you need to purchase consultants and computers. Online surveys require special programming expertise or payment for the use of commercial services, a connection to the Internet, and special methods of ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Also, for some time to come, certain respondents (such as some who have not grown up with computers, do not have access to the Internet, or prefer to take cyberspace slowly)
continue to mistrust online surveys. Online surveys have become as common as other types and may be perceived as junk mail. Many people simply delete them unless they recognized the name in the “from” column of their e-mail program.

It is always wise to offer at least two modes of survey administration—say, online or mail. Be prepared to compare groups of respondents who choose differing survey types to make certain that they are alike in important ways. Are they the same age? Gender? If you find differences, you may have to regard each set of respondents as a separate sample.

**Making the Decision**

To help you decide among the different types of surveys that may be relevant to your needs, Table 1.1 compares the advantages and disadvantages of the major survey types and reminds you of their special needs and costs.

**Table 1.1 Comparing Survey Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Mailed</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>In Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written or “paper and pencil”</td>
<td>Reached directly through a web address or a link in the respondent’s e-mail</td>
<td>An interviewer uses telephone to contact respondent</td>
<td>Interview meets the respondent in a mutually acceptable place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>Can reach large geographic areas</td>
<td>Worldwide information is obtained immediately (in “real time”)</td>
<td>Can explore answers with respondents</td>
<td>Same as telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People are used to completing paper-and-pencil surveys</td>
<td>Can give respondent links that explain unfamiliar words and help with difficult questions</td>
<td>Can assist respondent with unfamiliar words</td>
<td>Some people prefer direct contact with interviewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can take the survey with you and complete it anywhere</td>
<td>Easier to send reminders to respondents</td>
<td>No worries about interviewer’s appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easier to process data because responses can be downloaded to a spreadsheet, data analysis package, or database</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to make complex skip pattern questions invisible to the respondent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>Need a motivated sample to return survey</td>
<td>Need reliable access to Internet</td>
<td>Need trained interviewers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many people think they have too much to do without also having to complete surveys</td>
<td>Respondent must be able to use a browser</td>
<td>Need to make sure respondent is home and have plans to follow-up messages left on answering machines or voice mail</td>
<td>Need trained interviewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respondents must be able to read, see, and write</td>
<td>Questionnaires do not always look the same in different browsers and on different monitors</td>
<td>Many potential respondents are suspicious of unsolicited telephone calls</td>
<td>Must find a suitable place to conduct interview, which may not be easy given respondents’ schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Survey Continuum:
From Specific to General Use

Surveys have become a major means of collecting data to answer questions about health and social, economic, and political life. How extensive and scientific must a survey be?

Compare these two surveys:

**Example: Survey With a Specific Use**

The directors of the Neighborhood Halfway Houses want to provide services that are appropriate for residents. At present, many complaints have arisen over the lack of adequate fitness facilities. A survey will be conducted to poll the five health care providers, 100 residents, and 10 full- and part-time staff to find out what facilities are desirable and affordable.

**Example: Survey With a General Use**

The County Health Department is concerned with the effectiveness of its 10 halfway houses. Together, the 10 houses have 20,000 residents and 220 full- and part-time staff. This County has negotiated arrangements for health care services from a number of providers in the public and private sectors. As part of its effectiveness study, This County is surveying a random sample of residents, staff, and providers at all houses. NextDoor County is interested in adopting This County’s halfway house model and is anxiously waiting for the results of the survey and evaluation.

The justification for the first survey is one halfway house’s concern with its own needs. The reason for the second is This County’s interest in the effectiveness of all its halfway houses. Also, NextDoor County is interested in the survey’s results. Survey 1, with its limited impact, can be relatively informal in its methods. Survey 2, in contrast, must be rigorous in its sampling plan, questionnaire construction, and data analysis and interpretation. Survey 1 is concerned primarily with usefulness.

Survey 2 also is concerned with validity and generalizability: If adapted in another place (NextDoor County), will This County’s halfway house model be equally effective?

Each time you do a survey, you must evaluate where its purposes fall on a continuum that goes from specific to general use. You have some leeway with a survey designed to meet specific needs. All surveys that aim to be generalizable in their findings must be conducted with rigor.
SUMMING UP

Surveys are information-collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior.

Surveys are best when you need information directly from people about what they believe, know, and think.

A survey can be a self-administered questionnaire that someone fills out alone or with assistance. Self-administered questionnaires can take the form of written or online surveys. Written surveys may be completed by mail or on location.

A survey can be an interview done in person or on the telephone.

All surveys consist of questions that include the opportunity to respond. That is why the term questionnaire is often used interchangeably with the term survey.

To get accurate survey data, you must take into account the survey’s questions, response choices, sampling methods, response rate, design, and data analysis.

Survey results are presented as written (printed on paper or reproduced electronically) and oral reports.

A reliable survey produces consistent information, while a valid one results in accurate information.

Mail surveys are often used because people are familiar with them; however, the response rate is often dismal without a great deal of follow-up and incentives.

Interviews require training, although people often like a face-to-face or telephone conversation.

The Internet is a particularly efficient method of reaching a wide audience, but some technical expertise is invariably needed to do them well, privacy may be a concern to respondents, and inability to get random samples is inconvenient for researchers.

Surveys may be done for specific or general purposes. Survey findings that are needed for many people and places will require special attention to how they are designed.

THINK ABOUT THIS

Read the description of each survey below and then answer these questions:

1. What is the survey about?
2. Name the survey method.
3. Is this the method you would have chosen to achieve the survey’s objectives? Explain.

SURVEY DESCRIPTIONS

Predicting Heart Problems from the Stress of the September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks on the U.S.

Health researchers wanted to examine the degree to which stress resulting from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States forecasted heart problems in the nation 3 years after. They enlisted a national sample of adults in a web-based survey of their stress. The people who participated had completed a health survey before the attacks so the investigators had “baseline” information on them. Within 2 weeks of the attacks,
the participants completed web surveys, and they continued to do so 1, 2, and 3 years after. The researchers contacted the survey participants’ physicians to find out whether they had diagnosed cardiovascular (heart) ailments over the 3-year period. The researchers found that acute stress responses to the September 11 attacks were associated with a 53% increased incidence of cardiovascular ailments over the 3 subsequent years.

School Furniture and Lower Back Pain
This survey was designed to find out whether some types of school furniture prevent or cause lower back pain in children. Five hundred forty-six schoolchildren ages 14 to 17 years answered a written questionnaire about sitting positions during school hours and the presence and severity of lower back pain. The dimensions and the weight of the children’s school bags were measured, as were the types and dimensions of the school furniture. The findings were that more than half of the adolescents experienced lower back pain during the preceding 3 months, and about one quarter reported reduced daily function or care seeking because of lower back pain. Lower back pain occurrence was not found to be associated with the types or dimensions of the school furniture or body dimensions, but was positively associated with carrying the school bag on one shoulder.

Male and Female Participation in Jazz Improvisation
Three hundred thirty-two surveys were given to students enrolled in middle school, junior high school, high school, college, and community jazz programs within 60 miles of a major Midwestern university. The survey was administered during jazz band rehearsals and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Jazz band directors and/or student teachers administered the survey to middle-school and high school participants, who were instructed to take the survey home for a parent’s signature indicating approval for the child’s participation in the study. The findings indicated that females are significantly less confident, are more anxious, and have less self-efficacy (attitude) toward learning jazz improvisation.

Satisfaction With Paid Personal Assistance Services
Traditional public home care programs in the United States rely on public or private agencies to hire and fire home care workers, schedule and direct services, monitor quality of care, discipline workers if necessary, and pay workers and applicable payroll taxes. In the agency-directed model, clients can express preferences for services or workers, but have no formal control over them. This survey was concerned with comparing consumer- versus agency-directed home care on satisfaction with paid personal assistance services among Medicaid beneficiaries in Washington State. The survey was primarily conducted through telephone interviews using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system, but there also were a few in-person interviews. The survey found that, among the older population, but not younger people with disabilities, beneficiaries receiving consumer-directed services were more satisfied than individuals receiving agency-directed care.