16

Survey fieldwork

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"
No matter how well the research
process is designed, the individuals
working in the field hold the key
to quality data.
"

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1 describe the survey fieldwork process and explain the selecting, training and supervising of fieldworkers, validating fieldwork and evaluating fieldworkers;

2 discuss the training of fieldworkers in making the initial contact, asking the questions, probing, recording the answers and terminating the interview;

3 discuss supervising fieldworkers in terms of quality control and editing, sampling control, control of cheating and central office control;

4 describe evaluating fieldworkers in areas of cost and time, response rates, quality of interviewing and the quality of data;

5 explain the issues related to fieldwork when conducting international marketing research;

6 discuss ethical aspects of survey fieldwork.

| STAGE 1 Problem definition | STAGE 2 Research approach developed | STAGE 3 Research design developed | STAGE 4 Fieldwork or data collection | STAGE 5 Data preparation and analysis | STAGE 6 Report preparation and presentation |

Overview

Survey fieldwork is a vital process, helping to generate sound marketing research data. During this phase, fieldworkers make contact with potential respondents, administer the questionnaires or observation forms, record the data, and turn in the completed forms for processing. A personal interviewer administering questionnaires door to door, an interviewer intercepting shoppers in the street, a telephone interviewer calling from a central location, a worker mailing questionnaires from an office, an observer counting customers in a particular section of a store, a mystery shopper experiencing the service of a retail outlet, and others involved in data collection and supervision of the process are all quantitative fieldworkers.

The marketing researcher faces two major problems when managing fieldwork operations. First of all, fieldwork should be carried out in a consistent manner so that regardless of who administers a questionnaire, the same process is adhered to. This is vital to allow comparisons between all completed questionnaires. Second, fieldworkers to some extent have to approach and motivate potential respondents in a manner that sets the correct purpose for a study and motivates the respondent to spend time answering the questions properly. This cannot be done in a 'robotic' manner; it requires good communication skills and an amount of empathy with respondents, but could be interpreted as a means to bias responses. These two problems may be seen as conflicting, but for the marketing researcher, fieldwork management means resolving these conflicts for each individual data gathering process. This makes survey fieldwork an essential task in the generation of sound research data.

This chapter describes the nature of survey fieldwork and the general survey fieldwork/data collection process. This process involves selecting, training and supervising fieldworkers, validating fieldwork, and evaluating fieldworkers. We briefly discuss survey fieldwork in the context of international marketing research and identify the relevant ethical issues. To begin, we illustrate the rigours of survey fieldwork: imagine trying to conduct interviews in a professional and consistent manner at one of the biggest street parties in Europe.

Example   ### Event of the century[1]

Edinburgh's Hogmanay (www.edinburghshogmanay.org) is branded as the biggest street party in Europe, attracting around 250,000 people into the Scottish capital city, to welcome in the New Year along with national and international coverage. Over the past 10 years, the celebration, which is actually a programme of events held in the city over five days, has generated around £55 million (€80 million) in economic benefit to the city. All the city centre hotels are fully booked and around half of the visitors are from outside Scotland. The major research challenge is to conduct face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of visitors attending the event over the five days, but especially with those in the city centre on New Year's Eve itself. The party mood and enhanced interviewer rates mean that they are never short of interviewers eager to work on this survey! The questionnaire is designed carefully to produce considerable detail on the patterns of expenditure by visitors to the event but also to establish the extent to which the event attracted visitors from outside the city.

The nature of survey fieldwork

Marketing research data are rarely collected by the persons who design the research. Researchers have two major options for collecting their data: they can develop their own organisations or they can contract with a fieldwork agency. In either case, data collection involves the use of some kind of field force. The field force may operate either in the field (personal inhome or in office, street interview, CAPI and observation) or from an office (telephone, mail and Internet surveys). The fieldworkers who collect the data typically may have little formal marketing research or marketing training. Their training primarily focuses upon the essential tasks of selecting the correct respondents, motivating them to take part in the research, eliciting the correct answers from them, accurately recording the answers and conveying those answers for analysis. An appreciation of why these tasks fit into the overall context of conducting marketing research is important, but it is not necessary for the survey fieldworker to be trained in the whole array of marketing research skills.

Survey fieldwork and the data collection process

All survey fieldwork involves selecting, training and supervising persons who collect data.[2] The validation of fieldwork and the evaluation of fieldworkers are also parts of the process. Figure 16.1 represents a general framework for the survey fieldwork and data collection process. Even though we describe a general process, it should be recognised that the nature of survey fieldwork varies with the mode of data collection and that the relative emphasis on the different steps will be different for telephone, personal, mail and Internet surveys.

Selecting survey fieldworkers

The first step in the survey fieldwork process is the selection of fieldworkers. The researcher should (1) develop job specifications for the project, taking into account the mode of data collection; (2) decide what characteristics the fieldworkers should have; and (3) recruit appropriate individuals.[3] Interviewers' background characteristics, opinions, perceptions, expectations and attitudes can affect the responses they elicit.[4]

For example, the social acceptability of a fieldworker to the respondent may affect the quality of data obtained, especially in personal interviewing. Researchers generally agree that the more characteristics the interviewer and the respondent have in common, the greater the probability of a successful interview, as illustrated in the following example.
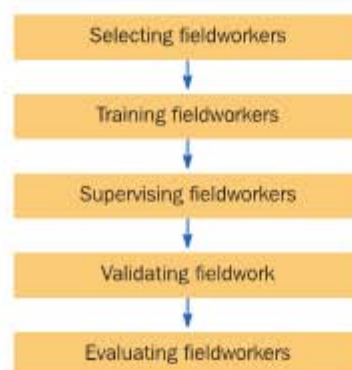

Figure 16.1
Survey fieldwork/data selection process

Example | **Searching for common ground[5]**

In a study dealing with emotional well being and mental health, older interviewers got better cooperation from older respondents than younger interviewers, and this performance appeared to be independent of years of experience. When the interviewer and the respondent were of the same race the cooperation rate was higher than when there was a mismatch on race. The more the interviewer and the respondent had in common, the greater the cooperation and the better the quality of the data.

Thus, to the extent possible, interviewers should be selected to match respondents' characteristics. The job requirements will also vary with the nature of the problem and the type of data collection method. But there are some general qualifications of survey fieldworkers:

- *Healthy*. Fieldwork can be strenuous, and workers must have the stamina required to do the job.
- *Outgoing*. Interviewers should be able to establish rapport with respondents. They should be able to relate quickly to strangers.
- *Communicative*. Effective speaking, observation and listening skills are a great asset.
- *'Pleasant' appearance*. If a fieldworker's physical appearance is unusual (from the respondents' perspective), it may be difficult to get respondents to cooperate.
- *Educated*. Interviewers must have good reading and writing skills and communicating with respondents of varying levels of intellect requires a sound education.
- *Experienced*. Experienced interviewers are likely to do a better job in following instructions, obtaining respondent cooperation and conducting the interview, as illustrated in the following example.

Example | **Your experience counts[6]**

Research has found the following effects of interviewer experience on the interviewing process:

- Inexperienced interviewers are more likely to commit coding errors, to mis-record responses, and to fail to probe.
- Inexperienced interviewers have a particularly difficult time filling quotas of respondents.
- Inexperienced interviewers have larger refusal rates. They also accept more 'don't know' responses and refusals to answer individual questions.

Training survey fieldworkers

Training survey fieldworkers is critical to the quality of data collected. Training may be conducted in person at a central location or, if the interviewers are geographically dispersed, by mail. Training ensures that all interviewers administer the questionnaire in the same manner so that the data can be collected uniformly. Training should cover making the initial contact, asking the questions, probing, recording the answers and terminating the interview.[7]

Making the initial contact

The initial contact can result in cooperation or the loss of potential respondents.[8] It also sets the potential respondent in a 'frame of mind' to answer subsequent questions. Thus interviewers should be trained to make opening remarks that will convince potential

respondents that their participation is important. They should also motivate potential respondents to reflect properly upon the questions posed to them and to answer honestly.

Asking the questions

Even a slight change in the wording, sequence or manner in which a question is asked can distort its meaning and bias the response. Training in asking questions can yield high dividends in eliminating potential sources of bias. Changing the phrasing or order of questions during the interview can make significant differences in the response obtained.

> *While we could be faulted for not writing as perfect a questionnaire as we possibly could, still it must be asked in the exact way it is written. It's a challenge for us to try to get the interviewers more conversational, but despite this, the field force absolutely must ask questions as they are written!*[9]

It was argued in Chapter 13 that questionnaire design is a craft. The researcher has to understand and step into the shoes of the respondents they hope to elicit information from. Researchers impose their language and logic onto respondents as they lead them through a questionnaire. If the interviewer is to behave as stated in the above quotation, researchers must appreciate what interviewers go through as they pose questions, probe and motivate respondents. This is because asking questions is an art. The subtle smiles, body language, tone of voice all get the most out of the vast array of personalities, intellects and contexts in which the interviewer must work. The art of interviewing develops with experience, allowing questions to be posed in a consistent manner.

The following are guidelines for interviewers in becoming consistent in asking questions:[10]

1 Be thoroughly familiar with the purpose of the questionnaire.
2 Be thoroughly familiar with the structure of the questionnaire.
3 Ask the questions in the order in which they appear in the questionnaire.
4 Use the exact wording given in the questionnaire.
5 Read each question slowly.
6 Repeat questions that are not understood.
7 Ask every applicable question.
8 Follow instructions, working through any filter questions, and probe carefully.

Probing

Probing
A motivational technique used when asking questions to induce the participants to enlarge on, clarify or explain their answers.

Probing is intended to motivate respondents to enlarge on, clarify or explain their answers. Probing also helps respondents focus on the specific content of the interview and provide only relevant information. Probing should not introduce any bias. An example of the effect of interviewer bias comes from a survey in which one of the authors helped in data analysis (but not in the management of the whole research process!). The survey related to bread and cake buying habits with one particular question focusing upon 'large cakes' that respondents had bought over the previous 12 months. In analysing the data a percentage had replied '*Christmas cake*'. When analysed further, all the respondents who said '*Christmas cake*' had been interviewed by the same interviewer. The conclusion from this analysis was that the interviewer in question had used his or her own probe to make the interview process work. None of the other interviewers had used this probe, which meant there was an inconsistent approach in eliciting answers from respondents. The paradox faced by the survey designers in this example was that the 'rogue' interviewer *may* have used a probe that elicited a true representation of large cake purchasing, the other interviewers consistently failing to draw out a 'true' response.

To help in the process of probing, the following list details some commonly used techniques:[11]

1 *Repeating the question.* Repeating the question in the same words can be effective in eliciting a response.

2 *Repeating the respondent's reply.* Respondents can be stimulated to provide further comments by repeating their replies verbatim. This can be done as the interviewer records the replies.

3 *Using a pause or silent probe.* A silent probe, or an expectant pause or look, can cue the respondent to provide a more complete response. The silence should not become embarrassing, however.

4 *Boosting or reassuring the respondent.* If the respondent hesitates, the interviewer should reassure the respondent with comments such as 'There are no right or wrong answers. We are just trying to get your opinions.' If the respondent needs an explanation of a word or phrase, the interviewer should not offer an interpretation, unless written instructions to do so have been provided. Rather, the responsibility for the interpretation should be returned to the respondent. This can be done with a comment such as 'Just whatever it means to you.'

5 *Eliciting clarification.* The respondent's motivation to cooperate with the interviewer and provide complete answers can be aroused with a question: 'I don't quite understand what you mean by that. Could you please tell me a little more?'

6 *Using objective or neutral questions or comments.* Table 16.1 provides several examples of the common questions or comments used as probes.[12] Corresponding abbreviations are also provided. The interviewer should record the abbreviations on the questionnaire in parentheses next to the question asked.

Table 16.1 Commonly used probes and abbreviations

Standard interviewer's probe	Abbreviation
Any other reason?	(AO?)
Any others?	(Other?)
Anything else?	(AE or Else?)
Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?	(Tell more)
How do you mean?	(How mean?)
Repeat question	(RQ)
What do you mean?	(What mean?)
Which would be closer to the way you feel?	(Which closer?)
Why do you feel this way?	(Why?)
Would you tell me what you have in mind?	(What in mind?)

The above list seems there are hidden dangers. For example, probing 'why' respondents behave in a particular manner or feel about a particular issue takes the interview into the realms of the qualitative interview. Compare the context of the street interview with a short structured questionnaire with the context of the qualitative interview with a questioning approach structured to the respondent and where a greater amount of rapport may be developed. The latter scenario is much more conducive to eliciting 'why' respondents behave or feel as they do. The question 'why' is an example of a seemingly simple question that can create many problems of consistency in fieldwork. In the greater majority of circumstances, 'why' should be treated as a qualitative issue.

Recording the answers

Although recording respondent answers seems simple, several mistakes are common.[13] All interviewers should use the same format and conventions to record the interviews and edit completed interviews. Although the rules for recording answers to structured questions vary with each specific questionnaire, the general rule is to check the box that reflects the respondent's answer. The general rule for recording answers to unstructured questions is to record the responses verbatim. The following guidelines help to record answers to unstructured questions.

1 Record responses during the interview.
2 Use the respondent's own words.
3 Do not summarise or paraphrase the respondent's answers.
4 Include everything that pertains to the question objectives.
5 Include all probes and comments.
6 Repeat the response as it is written down.

Source: © Getty Images

Terminating the interview

The interview should not be closed before all the information is obtained. Any spontaneous comments the respondent offers after all the formal questions have been asked should be recorded. The interviewer should answer the respondent's questions about the project. The respondent should be left with a positive feeling about the interview. It is important to thank the respondent and express appreciation.

The Association of Market Survey Organisations (**www.amso.co.uk**) publishes a 'Thank You' pamphlet that can be handed out to respondents who have taken part in an interview. As well as thanking respondents for their cooperation, it serves the purpose of educating respondents about the nature and purpose of marketing research, distinguishing marketing research from 'sugging' and 'frugging' as explained in the ethics section of Chapter 10.

The pamphlet explains why the respondent was chosen, the manner in which the interview was conducted and the purpose of marketing research interviewing. The following example presents extracts from the AMSO pamphlet.

Example | **Your time has been of great value, thank you!**

Thank you, for taking the time to give this interview; we hope you enjoyed it. Your interviewer is professionally trained by the company for which he/she works, a company which belongs to the Association of Market Survey Organisations. The Association exists to ensure that its members maintain the highest professional standards of market research. Your interviewer carries an identity card which guarantees they are a genuine market researcher.
AND
The way in which you were interviewed. In order to make sure that a representative sample was interviewed you may have been asked certain questions about your age, occupation, income and other descriptive details. These questions will be used in the research analysis to check the sample against other statistical information.

The questionnaire which the interviewer used will have been carefully constructed and tested by experienced researchers. The interviewer will have been instructed to read out the questions exactly as they are printed, and is not allowed to change the wording or give a personal opinion. These precautions are taken to ensure that your answers are not influenced in any way by the interviewer.

Summary of training issues

To encapsulate the process of interviewer training, the following list summarises the nature and scope of areas in which a marketing research interviewer should be trained:

1 The marketing research process: how a study is developed, implemented and reported.
2 The importance of the interviewer to this process; the need for honesty, objectivity, organisational skills and professionalism.
3 Confidentiality of the respondent and the client.
4 Familiarity with marketing research terminology.
5 The importance of following the exact wording and recording responses verbatim.
6 The purpose and use of probing and clarifying techniques.
7 The reason for and use of classification and respondent information questions.
8 A review of samples of instructions and questionnaires.
9 The importance of the respondent's positive feelings about survey research.

Conversely, marketing researchers should be trained in the 'experience' of gathering data in the field with a practical knowledge of what works in terms of:

- Motivating potential respondents to take part in a survey.
- Questions that will elicit the required data.
- Probes that can be consistently applied.
- An interview process that does not confuse or cause boredom in the respondent.

The marketing researcher needs to appreciate what the respondent and the interviewer go through in the interview process. Without such an understanding, the questionnaires and interview procedures, which seem fine on paper, can lead to very poor-quality data. The following example illustrates the experiences of a 'typical' respondent and researcher. Whilst the feelings expressed cannot be generalised to all interview situations, the lesson from this is that the marketing researcher should aim to understand how the target respondents and interviewers feel about the process. These feelings must form an integral part of any research design that generates sound and accurate data.

Example **How was it for you?[14]**

A respondent and an interviewer describe what their interview experiences were like for them.

The respondent

'I felt sorry for the interviewer, she was going around all these houses and nobody was in, so I agreed to take part in the survey. The interview did not take that long, only about 10 to 15 minutes, slightly less time than the interviewer said it would. The interviewer was smartly dressed, professional and helpful. She prompted me but did not actually push me. The experience was enjoyable, it was fun, and not a bad way to spend 10 to 15 minutes, although I think that is long enough. I like taking part in a survey if the subject matter is relevant to your life and you feel that your views are being taken into account. I think a lot of women prefer other females (or gay men) to interview them as there is an empathy there, and they might not feel they can be as honest or chatty with men. The age of the interviewer should relate to the subject matter. For example, if you are asking about children, then you should have an interviewer in a mother's age group. I think it is important to actually be in the same position as someone being surveyed. In an interview, you should be honest, do not tell them what you think they want to hear, relax, be friendly and go with the flow. A lot depends on the respondent as well as the interviewer. There has to be a bit of banter between the two of you.

The interviewer

'I do not have a typical day. If I am doing quota sampling I will do around 10 interviews a day. If it is preselected, then I will do 3 to 4 indepth interviews. But if it's exit interviewing, I can do as many as 20 in a shift. There are pressures to the job sometimes. Getting your quota is like looking for a needle in a haystack. People are much more suspicious, and fewer will open the doors these days. I have interviewed through wrought iron gates, letter boxes, front room windows, and with the chain on the door. For your own safety, you must be aware of where you are and what's around you. Technology has not made my job easier. I hate CAM and I do not use it now. It's slower, heavy to carry around, it sometimes crashes and I feel that interviewing using pen and paper flows better.

My job could be made easier by keeping questionnaires short, and using proper screening questions. The essence is to keep it interesting. The worst thing in the world is when you have got a survey that repeats itself and is boring; huge lists are our worst enemy. All I ask of a respondent is that they are honest, they do not have to be articulate or have strong opinions. There are two keys to successful interviewing, smile and be polite at all times, so that it is very hard for people to be rude to you, and be firm and in control of the interview.'

Supervising survey fieldworkers

Supervising survey fieldworkers means making sure that they are following the procedures and techniques in which they were trained. Supervision involves quality control and editing, sampling control, control of cheating and central office control.

Quality control and editing

Quality control of fieldworkers requires checking to see whether the field procedures are being properly implemented.[15] If any problems are detected, the supervisor should discuss them with the fieldworkers and provide additional training if necessary. To understand the interviewers' problems related to a specific study, the supervisors should also do some interviewing. Supervisors should collect questionnaires and other observation forms and check them daily. They should examine the questionnaires to make sure all appropriate questions have been completed, that unsatisfactory or incomplete answers have not been accepted, and that the writing is legible.

Supervisors should also keep a record of hours worked and expenses. This will allow a determination of the cost per completed interview, whether the job is moving on schedule, and whether any interviewers are having problems.

Sampling control

Sampling control
An aspect of supervising that ensures that the interviewers strictly follow the sampling plan rather than select sampling units based on convenience or accessibility.

An important aspect of supervision is **sampling control**, which attempts to ensure that the interviewers are strictly following the sampling plan rather than selecting sampling units based on convenience or accessibility.[16] Interviewers tend to avoid homes, offices and people (sampling units) that they perceive as difficult or undesirable. If the sampling unit is not at home, for example, interviewers may be tempted to substitute the next available unit rather than call back. Interviewers sometimes stretch the requirements of quota samples. For example, a 58-year-old person may be placed in the 46–55 category and interviewed to fulfil quota requirements.

To control these problems, supervisors should keep daily records of the number of calls made, the number of not-at-homes, the number of refusals, the number of completed interviews for each interviewer, and the total for all interviewers under their control.

Control of cheating

Cheating involves falsifying part of a questionnaire or the entire questionnaire.

Central office control

Supervisors provide quality and cost-control information to the central office so that a total progress report can be maintained. In addition to the controls initiated in the field, other controls may be added at the central office to identify potential problems. Central office control includes tabulation of quota variables, important demographic characteristics and answers to key variables.

Validating survey fieldwork

An interviewer may falsify part of an answer to make it acceptable or may fake answers. The most blatant form of cheating occurs when the interviewer falsifies the entire questionnaire, merely filling in fake answers, either on his or her own or through the use of friends or family members. Cheating can be minimised through proper training, supervision and by rewarding interviewers properly. Most importantly their work should be validated, which includes recording the names and contact details of respondents.[17] Supervisors usually call 10–25% of the respondents to enquire whether the fieldworkers actually conducted the interviews. The supervisors ask about the length and quality of the interview, reaction to the interviewer and basic demographic data. The demographic information is cross-checked against the information reported by the interviewers on the questionnaires. The major drawback of this approach is that respondents may not trust interviewers with a name and telephone number, perhaps believing that it is to be used to generate a sale, i.e. it can be confused with a 'sugging' or 'frugging' approach.

Evaluating survey fieldworkers

It is important to evaluate survey fieldworkers to provide them with feedback on their performance as well as to identify the better fieldworkers and build a better, high-quality field force. The evaluation criteria should be clearly communicated to the fieldworkers during their training. The evaluation of fieldworkers should be based on the criteria of cost and time, response rates, quality of interviewing and quality of data.[18]

Cost and time

Interviewers can be compared in terms of the total cost (salary and expenses) per completed interview. If the costs differ by city size, comparisons should be made only among fieldworkers working in comparable cities. Fieldworkers should also be evaluated on how they spend their time. Time should be broken down into categories such as actual interviewing, travel and administration.

Response rates

It is important to monitor response rates on a timely basis so that corrective action can be taken if these rates are too low.[19] Supervisors can help interviewers with an inordinate number of refusals by listening to the introductions they use and providing immediate feedback. When all the interviews are over, different fieldworkers' percentage of refusals can be compared to identify the more able interviewers.

Quality of interviewing

To evaluate interviewers on the quality of interviewing, the supervisor must directly observe the interviewing process. The supervisor can do this in person or the fieldworker can record the interview on tape. The quality of interviewing should be evaluated in terms of (1) the appropriateness of the introduction, (2) the precision with which the fieldworker asks questions, (3) the ability to probe in an unbiased manner, (4) the ability to ask sensitive questions, (5) interpersonal skills displayed during the interview, and (6) the manner in which the interview is terminated.

Quality of data

The completed questionnaires of each interviewer should be evaluated for the quality of data. Some indicators of quality data are that (1) the recorded data are legible; (2) all instructions, including skip patterns, are followed; (3) the answers to unstructured questions are recorded verbatim; (4) the answers to unstructured questions are meaningful and complete enough to be coded; and (5) item non-response occurs infrequently.

International marketing research

The selection, training, supervision and evaluation of survey fieldworkers are critical in international marketing research. Local fieldwork agencies are unavailable in many countries. Therefore, it may be necessary to recruit and train local fieldworkers or import trained foreign workers. The use of local fieldworkers is desirable, because they are familiar with the local language and culture. They can create an appropriate climate for the interview and sensitivity to the concerns of the respondents. Even with these advantages, extensive training may be required and close supervision in order to ensure that the questions are presented as intended. As observed in many countries, local interviewers tend to help the respondent with the answers and select household or sampling units based on personal considerations rather than the sampling plan. This means that the validation of fieldwork is critical. Proper application of fieldwork procedures can greatly reduce these difficulties and result in consistent and useful findings, as the following example illustrates.

Example   Americanism unites Europeans[20]

An image study conducted by Research International (**www.researchint.com**), a British market research company, showed that European consumers still tend to favour certain American products. The survey was conducted in the UK, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. In each country, local interviewers and supervisors were used because it was felt they would be able to identify better with the respondents. The fleidworkers, however, were trained extensively and supervised closely to ensure quality results and to minimise the variability in country-to-country results due to differences in interviewing procedures.

A total of 6,724 personal interviews were conducted. Some of the findings were that Europeans gave American products high marks for being innovative and some countries also regarded them as fashionable and of high quality. Interestingly, France, usually considered anti-American, also emerged as pro-American. Among the 1,034 French consumers surveyed, 40% considered American products fashionable and 38% believed that they were innovative, whereas 15% said American products were of high quality. In addition, when asked what nationality they preferred for a new company in their area, an American company was the first choice. These findings were comparable and consistent across the four countries. A key to the discovery of these findings was the use of local fieldworkers and extensive training and supervision which resulted in high-quality data.

Ethics in marketing research

Marketing researchers and survey fieldworkers should make respondents feel comfortable when participating in research activities. This is vital in order to elicit the correct responses for a specific project but also more broadly for the health of the marketing research industry. A respondent who feels that his or her trust has been abused, who found an interview to be cumbersome and boring, or who fails to see the purpose of a particular study, is less likely to participate in further marketing research efforts. Collectively, the marketing research industry has the responsibility to look after its most precious assets – willing and honest respondents.

Many marketing researchers do not meet respondents face to face, or if they have done it may have occurred many years ago. Not being in the field, marketing researchers can lose an awareness of what it is like actually to collect data in the field. Without this awareness, research designs that on paper seem feasible are difficult to administer in the field in a consistent manner. If there are problems in collecting data in the field, these may not always be attributable to the training and quality of fieldworkers; the blame may lie with the research designer. The marketing researcher, therefore, has an ethical responsibility to the fieldworker and the respondent. The researcher's responsibility lies in an awareness of the process that the fieldworker and respondent go through in the field for each individual piece of research they design. Poor design can leave fieldworkers facing very disgruntled respondents and can cause great damage.

Good marketing researchers have an awareness of their responsibilities to fieldworkers and respondents. The marketing researcher may take great care in understanding the difficulties of collecting data in the field and go to great pains to ensure that the data gathering process works well for the fieldworker and respondent alike. The fieldworker may have been told about the purpose of the study, the purpose of particular questions, the means to select and approach respondents and the means to elicit responses correctly from respondents. However, fieldworkers may behave in an unethical manner. They may cut corners in terms of selecting the correct respondents, posing questions and probes, and recording responses. In such circumstances the fieldworker can cause much damage to an individual study and to the long-term relationship with potential respondents. Thus it becomes a vital part of fieldworker training to demonstrate the ethical responsibilities fieldworkers have in collecting data.

The use of codes of conduct and guidelines can help fieldworkers to be aware of their responsibilities (see the esomar code on **www.esomar.nl**). It is good to have a specific set of guidelines to help with fieldwork, but applying them is another matter. Marketing researchers who train, develop and reward their survey fieldworkers well create an atmosphere where these guidelines work in practice.

Internet and computer applications

Regardless of which method is used for interviewing (telephone, personal, mail or electronic), the Internet can play a valuable role in all the phases of survey fieldwork: selection, training, supervision, validation and evaluation of fieldworkers. As far as selection is concerned, interviewers can be located, interviewed and hired by using the Internet. This process can be initiated, for example, by posting job vacancies notices for interviewers on the company website, bulletin boards and at other suitable locations. While this would confine the search to only Internet-savvy interviewers, this may well be a qualification to look for in the current marketing research environment.

Similarly, the Internet with its multimedia capabilities can be a good supplementary tool for training the fieldworkers in all aspects of interviewing. Training in this manner can complement personal training programmes and add value to the process. Supervision is enhanced by facilitating communication between the supervisors and the interviewers via email and secured chat rooms. Central office control can be strengthened by posting progress reports, quality and cost control information at a secured location on a website, so that it is easily available to all the relevant parties.

Validation of fieldwork, especially for personal and telephone interviews, can be easily accomplished for those respondents who have an email address or access to the Internet. These respondents can be sent a short verification survey by email or asked to visit a website where the survey is posted. Finally, the evaluation criteria can be communicated to the fieldworkers during the training stage by using the Internet, and performance feedback can also be provided to them by using this medium.

Call disposition
Call disposition records the outcome of an interview call.

Computers can be used in fieldwork for respondent selection, interviewer planning, supervision and control. They can also be used to manage mailing lists. For example, mailing lists can be sorted according to postal codes, geographical regions (which may include drive times from the centre of a city or from a shopping centre) or other prespecified respondent characteristics. Computers can generate accurate and timely reports for supervision and control purposes. These include quota reports, **call disposition** reports, incidence reports, topline reports of respondent data and interviewer productivity reports. Automatic reporting enhances supervision and control and increases the overall quality of data collection. Because less time is spent compiling reports, more time can be spent on data interpretation and on supervision.

Summary

Researchers have two major options in the generation of sound research data: developing their own organisations or contracting with fieldwork agencies. In either case, data collection involves the use of a field force. Fieldworkers should be healthy, outgoing, communicative, pleasant, educated and experienced. They should be trained in important aspects of fieldwork, including making the initial contact, asking the questions, probing, recording the answers and terminating the interview. Supervising fieldworkers involves quality control and editing, sampling control, control of cheating and central office control. Validating fieldwork can be accomplished by calling 10–25% of those who have been identified as interviewees and enquiring whether the interviews took place. Fieldworkers should be evaluated on the basis of cost and time, response rates, quality of interviewing and quality of data collection.

Fieldwork should be carried out in a consistent manner so that, regardless of who administers a questionnaire, the same process is adhered to. This is vital to allow comparisons between collected data. Fieldworkers to some extent have to approach and motivate potential respondents in a manner that sets the correct purpose for a study and motivates the respondent to spend time answering the questions properly. This cannot be done in a 'robotic' manner; it requires good communication skills and an amount of empathy with respondents. This makes the issue of managing fieldwork an essential task in the generation of sound research data.

Selecting, training, supervising and evaluating fieldworkers is even more critical in international marketing research because local fieldwork agencies are not available in many countries. Ethical issues include making the respondents feel comfortable in the data collection process so that their experience is positive.

Questions

1 Why do marketing researchers need to use survey fieldworkers?

2 Describe the survey fieldwork/data collection process.

3 What qualifications should survey fieldworkers possess?

4 What are the guidelines for asking questions?

5 Describe and illustrate the differences between probing in a survey and in an in-depth interview.

6 Evaluate what may be done to help interviewers probe correctly and consistently.

7 Outline the advantages and disadvantages of the interviewer developing a rapport with respondents.

8 How should the answers to unstructured questions be recorded?

9 How should the survey fieldworker terminate the interview?

10 What aspects are involved in the supervision of survey fieldworkers?

11 How can respondent selection problems be controlled?

12 What is validation of survey fieldwork? How is this done?

13 Describe the criteria that should be used for evaluating survey fieldworkers.

14 Describe the major sources of error related to survey fieldwork.

15 Comment on the following field situations, making recommendations for corrective action:
   a One of the interviewers has an excessive rate of refusals in in-home personal interviewing.
   b In a CATI situation, many phone numbers are giving a busy signal during the first dialling attempt.
   c An interviewer reports that at the end of the interviews many respondents asked if they had answered the questions correctly.
   d While validating the fieldwork, a respondent reports that she cannot remember being interviewed over the telephone, but the interviewer insists that the interview was conducted.

Exercises

1 Visit the websites of three major marketing research agencies. Evaluate how they present their quality management of fieldwork. Write a report that details what you feel to be the best elements of their respective practices. Note also what additional practices they should be highlighting to reassure potential marketing research buyers and users.

2 You are a field supervisor. Ask a fellow student to assume the role of an interviewer and another student the role of a respondent. Train the interviewer to conduct an in-home interview by giving a live demonstration.

3 In teams of four, design a questionnaire to be used in a street interview. One of the team then takes on the role of the interviewer, the other three to act as respondents. Conduct three interviews and video the process. Replay the video and write a report that focuses upon:

   a The questionnaire design
   b Stopping and motivating respondents
   c Interviewer instructions
   d The consistency of the process
   e Ethical issues involved in the process.

4 Contact a marketing research agency (so that everyone is aware and agreeable about the process) and arrange a field trip to a shopping centre where street interviews are being conducted. Working in pairs, observe the interviewing process of a number of interviewers over a time span of four hours. Write a report on what you feel worked well or not in the exchanges.

5 In a small group discuss the following issues: 'What makes street interviewing an art?' and 'Why do interviewers cheat?'

Notes

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10 This section follows closely the material in *Interviewer's Manual*, rev. edn (Ann Arbor, MI: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1976); Guenzel, P.J., Berkmans, T.R. and Cannell, C.E., *General Interviewing Techniques* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1983).

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