

READEX REVIEW

Fall 2009

In this issue...

Unbiased & Accurate
Survey Results Depend on
Question Quality

Unbiased & Accurate Survey Results Depend on Question Quality

As the sole instrument used to collect your survey's information, there's a lot riding on your questionnaire. Capturing accurate and representative information should be the prevailing objective of your survey. Incomplete, misinterpreted, biased, leading, or loaded questions can easily destroy your survey efforts, resulting in unsound data. Worse yet, those relying on do-it-yourself survey techniques may not even realize the questionnaire has these faults, so decisions are based on flawed data. That's when big mistakes can be made.

While it may not seem so, there's much more that goes into questionnaire writing than figuring out the information to collect and jotting down some questions. Two elements that contribute to successful questionnaire design include third-party objectiveness and expertise.

Involving an unbiased researcher in questionnaire writing can pay off exponentially in results that accurately meet your information needs. People close to the issues may subconsciously bias the questions. Asking leading questions or loaded questions, even inadvertently, can do profound damage to your results and

render them useless. A skilled researcher drafts questions that avoid bias and makes sure that questions aren't open to personal interpretation, ensuring that the survey gathers the information you need.

Another benefit to having a skilled researcher assist with questionnaire design is that he or she makes sure each question can be traced back to the original objectives of the survey. Furthermore, the questions are drafted so that they capture responses that fill in the information gaps identified in the objectives. Slipping in a few questions here and there that are nice to know may seem harmless. In reality, these extras don't address the objectives and can derail your survey in a number of ways: respondent fatigue, low response rates, and bloated survey budgets. Your project director will keep to the task at hand and ensure that no question is asked without a plan for use with the results.

Concrete and specific language should be used in order to capture information that will help you meet your objectives. Look below at the questions. What impact, if any, do you think the addition of the clause in Question B will make in the results? Turn the page to find out.



Experienced
Trusted
Insightful

2251 Tower Drive West
Stillwater, MN 55082
tel 651.439.1554
fax 651.439.1564

www.readexresearch.com

Question A

Do you favor or oppose a proposed constitutional amendment to require a balanced federal budget by 2002?

Question B

Do you favor or oppose a proposed constitutional amendment to require a balanced federal budget by 2002 that cuts government spending on Medicare by 20% over the next 7 years?

**Did the differences in these questions impact the results?
Turn the page to find out.**

Question A

Do you favor or oppose a proposed constitutional amendment to require a balanced federal budget by 2002?

Favor.....70%
Oppose.....18%
Don't know /Refuse...12%

While the first question seems straightforward, it doesn't give respondents an idea of the entire situation.

Question B

Do you favor or oppose a proposed constitutional amendment to require a balanced federal budget by 2002 that cuts government spending on Medicare by 20% over the next 7 years?

Favor.....31%
Oppose.....58%
Don't know /Refuse...11%

The second question explains the whole issue and gauges opinion based on the reality of the situation. As a result, an entirely different response is shown.

If a policy-maker simply had data from the first question to go on, and decided to favor an amendment that balanced the budget while decreasing Medicare spending by 20%, there would be many frustrated constituents—and possibly no next term. On the other hand, the results of the second question make it clear that this group opposes the trade-off involved with the balanced budget, and provides policy-makers with valuable and more complete information to use in decision-making.

Although from the past, the questions above are still relevant examples of how results can differ depending on how a question is asked.

Your project director will help you flesh out any relevant issues that the questions need to address in order to collect accurate responses.

When going through the time, effort, and expense of conducting a survey, it's imperative that the questionnaire—the sole mechanism for collecting responses—is crafted so that it accurately and effectively captures the information that you can confidently use to meet your objectives.



Experienced
Trusted
Insightful

A proud member of:



Marketing Research Association



The *Readex Review* is produced quarterly.
e-mail: sales@readexresearch.com
Copyright ©2009