

Unit III

(b) QUESTIONNAIRE: QUESTION WORDING;

FAIRNESS AND CLARITY

Constructing Questionnaire

(A) QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire refers to a device for securing answers to questions by using a form which the respondent fills-in himself.

(B) SCHEDULE

It is the name usually applied to a set of questions which are asked and filled in by an interviewer in a face to face situation with another person.

(C) INTERVIEW GUIDE

It is a list of points or topics which an interviewer must cover during the interview.

In this case considerable flexibility may be allowed as to the manner, order and language in which the interviewer asks questions.

Some type of questions are automatically structured because of the precision of the only categories which can answer the questions.

An example of such a structured question is “How Old Were You on Your Last Birth Day?”.

Another example, frequently asked, is that referring to marital status.

This is best dealt with in a highly structured form. Thus the item might be formulated as follows: Are You at Present:

- (a) Single_____?
- (b) Married_____?
- (c) Divorced_____?
- (d) Separated_____?
- (e) Widowed_____?

To ask an open-ended question such as “What is Your Marital Status? might produce interesting but confusing answers, such as “fine”, “As good as could be expected”, or “ I will have to ask my wife”.

Any questionnaire must be limited in its length and scope.

In general, in the absence of special motivations for the respondent, an interview should not extend much beyond a half an hour and even this length is difficult to sustain without fatiguing the informant.

Self-administering questionnaires should not, usually, require more than 30 minutes to complete and even shorter period is desirable.

A researcher must know the cultural background of the respondent.

When the questioner and respondent possess a more detailed experience with the subject of enquiry, many questions become unnecessary.

On a more personal level, a friend may ask, “Where are you going to night”? and receive the

answer, “I am heading for Great Neck. Looks like a heavy freeze this weekend”.

This reply, although cryptic to an outsider, may convey a complete message to one familiar with the situation. It means that the respondent likes to hunt geese and it is the season for hunting geese, and it is the season for hunting geese; he can't afford to hunt often, and thus goes only when the weather is good; he has been waiting for a heavy freeze, etc.

In constructing the questionnaire, the researcher should consult **colleagues, friends** and **acquaintances** to get their thinking on his problem.

Then, the researcher must submit this list of questionnaire to **experts** in the field of the problem and in related fields.

Once the questionnaire is submitted to the experts, on their suggestion, the following changes may occur:

- (a) the list of possible questions grows.
- (b) the number of areas which are of interest increases.
- (c) the number of areas which the research can cover must be decreased.
- (d) ambiguities, biases, poor phrasing, etc., are corrected gradually; and
- (e) a closer logical relationship develops between the parts of the schedule.

PILOT STUDIES

Before actually starting the research, there should be a pilot study of the same problem.

At this stage, the researcher should cross-check

- (a) questionnaire
- (b) hypothesis
- (c) tabulate the data from this pilot study, in order to see what weaknesses are present.
- (d) pilot study must understand “Don’t know answers” ----why are the respondents saying “I don’t know”.

If there are a large number of “we don’t know” responses, then one must reformulate the questionnaire.

He must also include an additional question, if need be, to clarify the original question.

OBSERVATIONS

(A) Lack of order in the answers:

There is overwhelming evidence that social phenomena like other phenomena, are ordered. That is, they fall into classes of similar items and into characteristic distributions.

(B) All or None

It is obvious that such responses should make us look at our questions genuine.

(C) A High Proportion of “Don’t know” or “Don’t Understand” answers:

This is a good indication that the questions are improperly drawn, or that a bad sampling design has been used. Frequently, the “Don’t Understand” group gives the simpler, minimal answer “Don’t know”, so that these two can be treated together.

However, when the question is designed to measure public sentiment, or the past history of an emotional relationship, or the communication patterns of a worker with his superior, a large percentage of Don’t Know’ suggests:

- (a) that the question is vague,
- (b) that it is too complex,
- (c) that it involves answers which the respondent needs expert interviewing help,
- (d) that the respondent simply is not in a position to answer the question.

(D) A Great Number of Qualifications, or Irrelevant Components:

If many of these are offered by respondents when the question poses a choice between several supposedly clear and exhaustive alternatives, it is an indication of weakness.

For example, a question relating to sources of news might be formulated as follows: "On the whole from which of these sources did you prefer to get your news before the news paper

strike-- or from news papers or from the radio?”.

In pilot interviews, the interviewer will realise that list is inadequate.

Because, some may prefer to get their news from magazines, others will rely mainly on news reels or even other people.

All students have had the experience of having to answer examination questions whose alternative answer choices seem inadequate.

The temptation is to record the qualifications to these choices, such as “If X can be assumed.....”. Such additional comments suggest that the questions need revision and often indicate the precise revisions necessary.

(E) A High Proportion of Refusals to Answer:

If a considerable percentage of respondents refuse to answer the question and a considerable percentage refuse to be interviewed at all, it indicates that the interviewing instructions are not adequate or the interviewer training is insufficient.

However, *within* the questionnaire or interview some questions will remain unanswered. It is difficult to state an exact figure, but the researcher would do well to restudy carefully any question for which the refusal rate is over 5 per cent. Sometimes the fault lies in a poor **transition**. That is, a **taboo subject** is brought up without any warning, or a question seems out of context.

For example, a questionnaire may seem to be devoted to **household budgeting**, but within this context the researcher might interject a question about **anti-Semitism**. This destroys the pattern of answering and often arouses suspicion.

A similar result will sometimes result from improper labeling. Although the title of a study need not convey an exact picture of its focus, a totally irrelevant or unfitting title may arouse suspicion once the preliminary questions have been answered.

In this connection a more specialised case may be mentioned usually, the anonymity of the respondent is answered in a cover letter or in the preliminary statement by the interviewer.

However, some students have made the mistake of asking such detailed questions about the respondent that the latter sees that his anonymity **cannot** be answered.

For example, in one study carried out by a social scientist among faculty members on a college campus, the questions were asked about (a) age, (b) degrees granted, (c) years in which were granted, and (d) institutions at which the respondent has studied.

Therefore, the researcher began to ask questions concerning the attitudes of the faculty member toward the university. A number of respondents become suspicious because from the preliminary answers anyone could trace the identity of the respondent. Consequently, a number of respondents refused to answer possibly incriminating questions.

(F) Substantial Variation in Answers When the Order of Questions Has Been Changed:

The researcher will realise that if the order of questions is changed, then there will be variation in the answers.

From

Dr. Anjaiah Sundu

Department of Political Science

Shivaji College

University of Delhi

anjaiahsundu@gmail.com

Mob No:9013933761

