

Improving Question Evaluation for Federal Surveys: Recommendations from an FCSM Subcommittee

Discussion

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FCSM Question Evaluation Subcommittee

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FCSM Question Evaluation Subcommittee

- **Not an easy task**
- **Challenges of language and differences in agency traditions**
- **Translation of the charter into action was not immediately obvious**
- **Extensive discussions often revisiting key points – this is a group very interested in wording and meaning**
- **Perseverance paid off!!**

FCSM Question Evaluation Subcommittee

- **2006: OMB Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys**
- **2009: Workshop on Question Evaluation Methods held at NCHS**

Conclusions from NCHS Conference

- Agreement that work to evaluate data collection instruments is important and more work needs to be done
- Agreement that standards and evaluation criteria for the valuations need to be developed and adopted
- Agreement that the results of evaluations need to be documented
- Agreement that results need to be available outside of the sponsors/conductors of data collection – both to advance the field but also to inform data users
- The FCSM subcommittee reports are a step in moving forward on these agreements

Methods Inventory

- Useful compilation of methods currently in use with set of references for additional information
- Could serve as a blueprint for additional standards development for some or all of the methods listed
- Highlighted a key ‘philosophical issue’ – the distinction between design and evaluation methods
 - While the process is iterative, should there be a clearer differentiation among the methods set?

Standards and Guidelines for Conducting Cognitive Interviewing Studies

- Follows OMB Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys
- Intent was to address the ‘validity’ side of information quality – perhaps the hardest component
- Cognitive interview evaluations that purport to address validity are powerful and therefore we should be the most critical of the results and require standards and guidelines for conducting this type of work

Standards and Guidelines for Conducting Cognitive Interviewing Studies

- **Subcommittee strove for consensus – this was not always possible but the content of the resulting document represents high levels of agreement**
- **Some tension in determining where the field of cognitive interviewing is in its development**
 - Need for more research into best practices
 - Consensus on the current content of the standards and guidelines
- **Need to build on what has been done – a beginning rather than an end**

Policy Issues

- **What are the costs of implementation?**
 - Monetary/Staff – no new resources
 - Time
- **How to implement -- Do all cognitive interview projects need to adhere to all the standards?**
 - What criteria should be used?
 - How can those that adhere to the standards be differentiated from those that do not?
 - How can the information about the 'test' be made clear to the survey developers and data users?

Policy Issues

- **Should we be building on existing instruments or inventing a better mousetrap?**
 - Using existing well-tested and documented instruments can save resources
 - Tradeoffs between consistency and cost savings vs continuous improvement of questions

Discussant's Recommendations

- Agencies should endorse and support the use of standards in conducting question evaluations – if not these standards than another set
- The most important contribution of the CI Standards is the requirement for documenting the results of the test
 - Adds credibility to the statement 'the questions were tested'
 - Reduces cost of retesting questions
 - Informs data users even if this also documents that questions aren't perfect

Discussant's Recommendations

- **While benefits need to be balanced against costs, loss of benefits (evaluation of validity) due to a desire to control costs will be a major loss**
- **Benefits from greater cross agency cooperation are possible**
 - Development of improved evaluation tools
 - Improved quality and better understanding of questions that are used across agencies