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Reading Assignment 5

Research & Development Methods

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“Questionnaire design” outlines the multi-stage process that is required to form an effective questionnaire. There is a scientific approach to making a questionnaire that makes it most effective. The article goes into how to develop a question, measuring change over time, open and closed-ended questions, question-wording, question order, pilot tests and focus groups, and pretests.

When developing a question one must identify the topic that will be covered in the survey. As people’s opinions change, then so must the questions in the survey.

Then measuring changes over time is important to monitor people attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. “To measure change, questions are asked at two or more points in time.” “When measuring change over time, it is important to use the same wording and to be sensitive to where the question is asked in the questionnaire to maintain a similar context as when the question was asked previously.”

When conducting a survey, deciding what kind of question you will ask will directly impact the type of answer that you will receive. There are two possible types of questions and thus two types of answers that can come out of a survey. In an open-ended question, the respondent will be able to answer the question in their own words. The closed-ended question is accompanied by a set list of possible answers that the respondent can choose from. Using open-ended

questioning allows researchers to gauge which answers are most popular to then develop a set of closed-ended questions.

“The choice of words and phrases in a question is critical in expressing the meaning and intent of the question to the respondent and ensuring that all respondents interpret the question the same way. Even small wording differences can substantially affect the answers people provide.” The wording of a question can have an impact on the way that different respondents answer the question. In the agree or disagree answer format for questions it has been shown that less educated responders have been known to agree with questions more often than their more educated counterpart.

It has been found that “If closed-ended questions that relate to the topic are placed before the open-ended question, respondents are much more likely to mention concepts or considerations raised in those earlier questions when responding to the open-ended question.” Placement of the questions within a survey can have psychological implications. It is made apparent that survey creators must be aware of the effect their layout will have on the respondents' answers. It is best to design a survey to flow naturally such as a conversation does. Including more engaging and interesting questions will keep the attention of the respondent and motivate them to continue to answer the next question.

Focus groups and pilot tests can be helpful in the further development of the survey. A pilot test would be “particularly helpful when surveyors are testing new questions or making substantial changes to a questionnaire, testing new procedures or different ways of implementing the survey, and for large- scale surveys, such as the U.S. Census.” Finally, a pretest may be conducted to see how people respond to the questions.