

Cognitive interviewing- a tool to improve survey question design

WHAT IS COGNITIVE INTERVIEWING?

Do you want to improve your survey questions to make them more meaningful and engaging for respondents?

Do you have sensitive or complex questions to ask but aren't sure how to ask them?

Are you concerned about data quality from survey questions?

Do you want to reduce survey measurement errors?

Cognitive interviewing is a technique used to evaluate and improve survey questions by conducting in-depth interviews to understand how respondents interpret and respond to questions, through observation and qualitative probing techniques.

What does cognitive interviewing involve?

Selection of questions for testing

In-depth interview between a respondent and a cognitive interviewer

Conducted virtually, online

Up to 60 minutes

Uses observation, 'think aloud' and probing techniques

Client can observe (if required, and consent given)

How Lotus can help

- Assistance with identifying questions to test
- Initial review of questions and response frames for sense and readability
- Desktop review for comparable or similar questions already tested
- Drafting of the cognitive interview instrument, complete with prompts and probes
- Advice on sampling strategy and sample size
- Recruitment of research participants (identification, appointment setting, administration of incentives etc)
- Conducting the fieldwork (online via Zoom)
- Full analysis and question-by-question report, identifying any potential sources of error and suggestions for improvement (if required)

(we also offer training on how to do cognitive interviewing - contact Karen for details)

The 4 stages of answering survey questions (Tourangeau, 1984)

Comprehension

- What does the respondent think the question is asking?
- What do specific words and phrases mean to them?

Retrieval

- Can the respondent recall the information asked of them? How do they work out their answer?

Judgement

- What effort does the respondent put into giving an accurate answer?
- Is there any evidence of social desirability?

Response

- Can the respondent find an answer option that matches their desired response? (If not, what do they do?)

"...given the sensitivity of the research questions it was essential that we thoroughly test the items both for validity and comprehension but also for the potential to cause distress....(Karen's involvement contributed significantly to our project's success, and we have since co-published a scientific article about this process"



For more details contact Karen Kellard

Lotus Research Director and
Principal Researcher

Karen@lotusresearchservices.com