Improving On-going Projects Through Methodological Research

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Introduction

- Identifying Relevant Methodological Questions.
- Working With Clients.
- Implementing Research and Results.
- Examples:
  - Telephone Study Advance Letter
  - Mail Study Personalized Cover Letter
Why Do Methodological Research?

- Each study is different...
- Factors interact...
- Times change...
- Test assumptions...
  - About cost
  - About quality
  - About efficacy
Why On-Going Projects?

On-going projects are particularly good for in-house methodological research:

- Investment yields clear return
- Engages staff at all levels in improvement activities
- Provides multiple experimental design possibilities
- Clients have greater incentive to agree
Identifying Relevant Methodological Questions

- Will it improve survey quality?
- Will it reduce survey cost?
- Is it feasible?
Working With Clients

- Clients may be reluctant to experiment:
  - Fear of quality loss…
  - Fear of increasing expense…
  - Fear of reprisal…
  - Fear of success…

- Clients may be convinced if:
  - Experiment doesn’t negatively impact cost or data quality…
  - Experimental condition may increase data quality or decrease cost…
  - Client helps design experiment…
Implementation

- Be sure to document and share new procedures with staff.
- Collaborate with colleagues – two heads are better than one!
- Write up and share results!
Example #1: RDD Advance Letter

- The Effect of an Advance Letter on Completion Rates for the Wisconsin Family Health Survey.
  - Continuous since 1989 (UWSC since 1999)
  - RDD of Wisconsin households
  - 1200 completes per year
  - Quarterly sample
  - Health status, health problems, health insurance, and access to health care
  - Interview most knowledgeable respondent
Advance Letter Procedure

- Sample randomly divided into two groups.
- Reverse directory search was performed on the entire sample.
- Advance letters sent to experimental group if an address was found.
- Variables of interest:
  - Completion Rate
  - Refusal Rate
  - Average Calls to Complete
# Advance Letter Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental</th>
<th>Control</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completion Rate</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refusal Rate</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calls To Complete</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Example #2: Personalized Cover Letter

- The Effect of Personalizing a Mail Survey Cover Letter.
  - UW System Computing Survey
  - Annual since 1998 (UWSC since 2000)
  - Mail survey of currently enrolled UW Students
  - 7000 students randomly selected
  - Technology use, satisfaction and need
  - 3 Waves, postcard reminder, email advance
Personalized Cover Letter Procedure

- Sample randomly divided into two groups
- Control group received standard impersonal cover letter
- Experimental group received personalized cover letter
- Variables of interest:
  - Completion Rate
  - Response Time
# Personalized Cover Letter Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental</th>
<th>Control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completion Rate*</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Return Time</td>
<td>25 Days</td>
<td>32 Days</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Thank You!

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