

Five Questions to Ask About Your Research Project

It's really easy to just dive into a survey research project. There's nothing like getting something going quickly, something you have may had on your mind for a while. But, hold your horses! Our recommendation is to temper your enthusiasm, take a deep breath and ponder the following questions. When you have a great vision of what you may want to do you'll be much better off.

1. What are my objectives?

Readex Research has been doing this a long time and the best survey research outcomes are always based on well-considered, thoughtful objectives. In other words, what do you want your project to help you accomplish?

A great way to think about it is this: What decisions might you want to be able to make when all is done? Or, what data do you need to help you or your executive team make decisions? Objectives provide guiding lights to the entirety of the plan.

2. What will be the sample frame?

Well, let's start by defining sample frame. This is the population from which a sample is drawn, and if possible, this sample should include all of those in the population. For example, if you work within a larger organization and have employees scattered around the country, you might say your sample frame is all employees or a subset, say only those in a particular city or region.

What's important to keep in mind is this. If your sample frame is anything other than all employees, it's not necessarily the case that your sample will be representative of all employees. In other words, don't assume that a survey of the folks in the Chicago office is representative of everyone else. You might feel you may infer this to be the case, but it's not. If you want to position results as representative of all employees, your sample frame should be all employees!

The good news is that with employee surveys, you usually know who they are and where they are, meaning they can all be enumerated and included in the survey.

3. Who will design the questions?

We hate to say it, but designing questions, while suggested by some is an easy process, isn't. This has to be carefully considered because well-designed questions yield the most effective results. Sure, you can look things up on the internet or ask a pal. If in doubt about your skill level or the levels of those who you may wish to use, consult with a research pro. Even if you wish to conduct the survey on your own, which is fine, get guidance from an expert. Junk in is junk out.

4. What methodology will be used?

More often than not, the best method to deploy will be dictated by the nature/objectives of the survey. For example, a survey of employees in which anonymity is extremely important would be best done using a self-administered method, online or mail. A customer experience survey that is focused on recent transactions would be best met with online or phone, one that is fast. Obviously there are many means to collect data. What will be best for you and your project will depend and your specific situation.

5. What do I plan to do with the data?

So the field work is closed and now you have the information, the data. Hopefully you will have determined in advance what you want to do. Who will see all of the results? Who will see partial results, for example by office location? Who will have access to all of the data and be able to manipulate data for the purpose of running more analysis? How will the data be made available, for example, SPSS file or Excel? Will you need to create PowerPoint slides and who will do that?

These questions are not all-inclusive, surely there are more. Here's the point: Have a plan! And, one final caution. If you are going to run an analysis by job titles or other segments, make sure you have enough responses in each of those segments so that respondent ID remains anonymous. In other words, if you have only one person in Accounts Payable and you run a cut by job function, then the identity of that respondent can easily be revealed.

If ever in doubt on any of these main issues, seek the advice of a pro!

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