


# CHAPTER 2

## DECIDING WHAT TYPE OF QUESTIONNAIRE TO USE



Researchers recognise three different types of interview situations which in turn require three different types of questionnaires:

1. *structured*. In structured interviews, the questionnaires set out precisely the wording of the questions and the order in which they will be asked. Most of the questions have predefined answers and there will be little latitude for a respondent to stray beyond them. Structured questionnaires and interviews are the bedrock of large quantitative surveys.
2. *semi-structured*. This type of interview uses questionnaires with a mixture of questions with predefined answers as well as those where the respondent is free to say whatever is liked. In each interview the questions are asked in the same way and there may be hundreds of interviews in the whole survey. The semi-structured questionnaire is a more flexible tool than its highly structured counterpart and there is likely to be more probing to find out the reasons for certain answers.

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3. *unstructured*. In this type of depth or informal interview, the researcher uses a check list of questions rather than a formal questionnaire on which the answers are written down. There is considerable latitude allowed on the part of the interviewer and different channels of questioning will be selected during the interview itself. The interview is very often recorded on tape.

Whether the researcher uses a structured, semi-structured or unstructured questionnaire depends on the number of people who will be interviewed, what type of people they are, the type of information which is being collected and the type of interviewers who will be administering the questions. The method of data analysis also has an influence though in itself this is influenced by the size of the survey and the type of information collected.

### **An example of a survey using structured interviews**

A company manufacturing bread wants to test consumer's awareness of different brands of bread and to collect data on the types of bread people are buying. The company sells in a tight geographical area which is approximately defined by a radius of 100 miles from the bakery. This encompasses four major cities and numerous small towns, a total population of approximately 5 million. A decision is made to collect the data in street interviews, targeting women over the age of 18 and ensuring that the interviewers do not stand within 100 yards of a shop which sells bread. A total of 2,000 interviews are to be carried out from 20 sampling points, these to be chosen randomly from the towns and cities which are divided into 200 squares by a grid overlaying a map of the area.

The critical factors which influence the type of questionnaire which is used to collect information for the bakery are:

- street interviews. This means the interview needs to be short, say around 10 or 15 minutes at the most
- female respondents. In the main, the respondents will have a predictable buying pattern for bread
- 2,000 interviews. With this large number, questions should be pre-coded to aid data processing and to make the interviewing task itself easier

- a fieldforce of interviewers spread around the territory, one at each interviewing point, and in the main working without supervision.

The type of questionnaire used in this survey will need to be *structured*, allowing the interviewer little room for manoeuvre beyond the questions in the way they are laid down.

### **An example of a survey using semi-structured interviews**

A company makes central heating boilers which it sells through distributors to plumbers or heating and ventilating engineers who carry out the installation. The central heating boilers are fitted in new property or go into older property, replacing boilers which are past their useful life. Sometimes the boilers are installed in property which has never enjoyed the luxury of central heating. The company wants to find out where it is positioned in this market against the multiplicity of domestic and foreign suppliers and is seeking some insights into how it can build its share. A research programme is devised based on 500 interviews with installers throughout the country. The interviews will be carried out by phone as this is thought to be the best way of getting hold of a random sample of busy installers. It is estimated that the interviews will take around 20 minutes.

The forces which influence the type of questionnaire which should be used in this survey are:

- telephone interviews. This medium requires a relatively simple questionnaire which can be completed in 20 minutes
- an interviewer force working by telephone from a central location. This gives the facility to control and support the interviewers as the work is progressing and it allows interviewers to share problems which in turn helps one another.
- respondents who are installers. These people are likely to represent companies which are variable in size and interests from plumbers who are one-man-bands to heating and ventilating engineers who could employ hundreds of people. The range of responses from these different people will be hard to pre-empt.
- 500 interviews. This is a sufficiently large number to require a questionnaire designed to overcome analysis problems.

This study will need to have built in flexibility to accommodate the range of replies from the different groups of respondents. Questions which aim to find out about buying motivations would be difficult to pre-code as they could vary considerably according to the size of installer, the number of installations that he carries out and the type of customer for whom the installer is working.

Open ended questions will almost certainly be necessary and the interviewers will have to be well briefed to ensure that they can probe in depth and offer explanations should respondents face difficulties in providing answers. (An open ended question is one where the respondent is left free to give any answer and this is written down verbatim. Such questions are useful for teasing out the subtleties that may not surface in a closed question. More about open and closed questions in Chapter 3).

The questionnaire which will be used in the boiler survey will contain a mixture of closed and open ended questions and will, therefore, be *semi-structured*.

### **An example of a survey using unstructured interviews**

A third company sells pension plans to private individuals, many of them self-employed. This is a fiercely competitive market in which the target customers need a great deal of persuasion to invest in a pension at all and furthermore, they are ignorant of the schemes and distrustful of the people who sell them. The company selling the pension plans has asked its advertising agency to devise a new and innovative campaign which will differentiate the company and draw enquiries for its salesforce to chase. The researchers decided upon a qualitative approach, screening out self-employed people aged 30 to 40 years, who are currently without a pension and with the objective of carrying out 30 face-to-face interviews in total.

This survey needs to find out how potential investors learn about pension products and how they could be imaginatively advertised. The survey is concerned with understanding the feelings people have towards pension companies and the triggers and barriers which on the one hand prompt an enquiry and on the other hand which limit interest. Such insights are best obtained by depth interviewing and the factors which will influence the type of questionnaire (or in this case check list) which should be used are:

- interviews will be in-depth and one-to-one. In the interviews respondents will be encouraged to open up beyond the obvious

answers such as "all pension companies are the same", "it is a long way off my pension and I have far better things to do with my money".

- only two interviewers will be used so that they are able to build up knowledge of the subject which they can use to improve the incisiveness of their questions. The interviewers will be senior people on the team, experts in qualitative research.
- respondents will be self-made people or those who aspire to be self-made. They will be people who are short on time, patience and prima donas in that they are driven to succeed.
- 30 interviews is the size of the sample. This is a small enough number to be able to treat each respondent as a case history and to develop specific questions pertinent to a particular respondent. Equally, the researchers will be looking for some patterns of response as the aim is to find common triggers and messages for an advertising campaign. The two researchers must, therefore, work from the same list of questions.

This type of questioning needs to be adaptable and stimulating. It must encourage respondents to open the lids of their minds and give the researchers the facility to probe and follow interesting paths of discussion. The questions will be listed as subjects to cover and will be referred to now and then by interviewer during the interview to ensure that all the topics have been covered.

The precise wording of the questions will be crafted during the interview itself and almost certainly, additional ones will be added when appropriate. In essence, the interview and the questionnaire will be *unstructured*.

## A classification of questionnaires

Clearly these three research scenarios do not represent the whole cross section of possibilities but they illustrate the different types of interviews and questionnaires which researchers can use.

The three different classifications are summarised below:

### A classification of questionnaires

TYPE OF QUESTIONNAIRE	AREAS OF USE OF QUESTIONNAIRE	ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
Structured	Used in large interview programmes (anything over 50 interviews). Typically used where it is possible to closely anticipate the possible responses.	Telephone/Face-to-face Self completion
Semi-structured	Used widely in business-to-business market research where there is a need to accommodate different responses from companies. Also used where the responses can not be anticipated.	Face-to-face/ Telephone
Unstructured	The basis of many studies into technical or narrow markets. Also used in depth interviewing and in group discussions. Allows probing and searching where a skilled researcher is not fully sure of the responses before the interview.	Group discussions/ Industrial visit interviews/ Depth telephone interviews