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Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

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Solutions for Engaging Businesses and their Employees in Research Studies (cont’d)

Gaining Employee Cooperation

There are several strategies that can be employed to maximize employee cooperation rates. Prior to calling them for interviews, we sent advance letters to participants to describe the study and how the information they provide would be used. These letters served as a reminder that the recipients had agreed to participate, assured them of the confidential nature of their responses, and reminded them of a monetary incentive for participation (which has been shown to improve response rates).

It is also helpful to obtain multiple modes of contact information for respondents if the study is longitudinal. During the consent process, in addition to asking the respondents to provide multiple contact phone numbers (e.g., work, home, cell phone), they were asked to provide the name and phone number of an alternate person to contact in case interviewers were unable to reach the respondent using any of the original numbers provided. These procedures are especially beneficial when following a sample that may leave their jobs, move, and/or change phone numbers over the course of the study.

Due to the nature of the recruitment process, respondents readily volunteered to participate, and we didn’t experience many challenges when the call was made to conduct the interview. Nevertheless, prior to the initial call a lead letter was sent to remind the employee that an interviewer would be calling soon to complete the interview. If the proposed interview time was inconvenient, an alternate time was scheduled based on the employee’s availability. About 79% of all the interviews were completed in less than 10 call attempts, which is much lower than the average. In the rare case of a refusal, a targeted letter was sent which stressed the importance of the study and one additional contact was made with the employee by an interviewer specially trained in refusal conversion procedures. If the employee still refused then the case was closed and no further contact attempts were made.

An important step all business surveys should consider is conducting a pilot study prior to data collection in the main study. Implementing a pilot study prior to the main study can help predict the length of time needed to establish a POC within a business, determine the length of time required to gain corporate approval, and identify other potential barriers that could affect participation rates among businesses. Post-recruitment debriefings with businesses and project staff provide additional insight into the reasons for business non-response and what might be done differently to improve business and employee cooperation in the future.

Conclusion

A sizeable body of literature exists on conducting health-behavior surveys. Yet, this article makes a unique contribution to the literature by describing the combined challenge of conducting interviews with individuals and recruiting participants through businesses. Based on our experience with this study, we recommend the following:

(1) Allow sufficient time at all business recruitment stages. It can take months for a POC to navigate all the necessary channels to gain approval for the organization’s participation.

(2) Business recruiters need to be experienced in order to move past gatekeepers, automated systems, and call screening devices. Household surveys are often pre-tested before the main study is implemented. Businesses should not be treated any differently.

(3) Plan for a pilot study to test your procedures and inform data collection in your main study.

(4) Offer businesses and participants more than one avenue to participate (i.e., on-site/in-person recruiting meetings, contact through the web or distributed hard copies of study materials).

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At the end of April and the beginning of May, while preparing to publish the sixth issue of the Newsletter, I got in touch with the unit of APA that publishes PsycINFO. I wanted the Newsletter to be covered. Covered, that is, by another APA database that is housed in the office that publishes PsycINFO. APA publishes PsycEXTRA, a database devoted to the so-called “gray literature,” or documents such as newsletters, newspapers, magazines, and technical and annual reports; government reports, consumer brochures, standards and more! (Introducing PsycEXTRA!, 2004). APA launched PsycEXTRA in 2004 for the purpose of creating a database devoted to difficult-to-find documents that are nonetheless of value to researchers and practitioners. Much of the literature is outside the peer-review world. Of course, PsycINFO covers peer-reviewed journals.

PsycEXTRA includes citations and abstracts and, when possible, entire articles. APA partnered with EBSCO in creating PsycEXTRA. The database is available at APA PsycNET through an annual site license and at many university libraries.

PsycEXTRA now covers the Newsletter of the Society for Occupational Health Psychology, including back issues.

Reference