LAB-MOVIE
Labour Market Observatory in Vietnam universities

WP 2
Transfer of knowledge and methodology to analyse the labour market

Outcome 2.1
Development of educational materials

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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The topics that will be examined:
1. Definition of questionnaire.
2. How to construct a questionnaire.
3. Types of questions:
    3.1. Single-choice and multiple-choice (closed-ended) questions.
    3.2. Filter questions.
4. Formulation of questions.
5. Question sequence.
6. Questions encoding.
7. Questionnaire length.
8. Questionnaire graphic design
    8.1. Front page (cover).
    8.2. Closing page.
9. Auxiliary survey tools.
    9.1. Cover letter.
10. Conclusions, a good questionnaire.

1. Definition of questionnaire

- The questionnaire is a structured set of questions, possibly accompanied by possible answers, recorded on a suitable support for submission.
- It is the fundamental measuring tool for collecting data and information relevant for research.

The design of the questionnaire (although it contains elements of "creativity") is based on a precise methodology and cannot be improvised.
NOT EVERYONE is able to construct a questionnaire correctly: specific skills are needed.

2. How to construct a questionnaire

1. Specify well the cognitive purposes and methods of submission defined during the survey design phase.
2. Define areas (topics), fields and constructs to be investigated.
3. Prepare a provisional plan of the statistical analyses to be carried out (to make sure that the contents necessary for the study are all expressed).
4. List the variables to be "measured".
5. Draw-up and formulate the questions into writing.
6. Define the order in which the questions are to be submitted.
7. Encode the questions and the set of responses.
8. Prepare auxiliary detection tools.
9. Carry out a pilot submission, to test the questionnaire in advance (pre-test).
10. Carry out a review of the questionnaire before submission.

3. Types of questions

1. **Open-ended questions**: no predefined answers by the researcher (set of responses); they allow full freedom of expression to the interviewee.
2. **Closed-ended (or structured) questions**: they have fixed set of responses defined in advance by the researcher.

Open-ended questions vs closed-ended questions

Open-ended questions
Advantages:
- It's the same for everyone.
- In retrospect-coding.

Limits:
- High level of arbitrariness of the interviewer.
- Criticality in the answers.
- Difficulties with large numbers of interviewees.

Closed-ended questions
Advantages:
- Same frame of reference.
- Easier to remember.
- Stimulates analysis and reflection.
- Can also be used with large numbers.

Limits:
- Excludes unforeseen response alternatives.
- Influences answers even in those who do not have opinions.
- The answers offered do not have the same meaning for everyone.

3.1. Single-choice and multiple-choice (closed-ended) questions

Closed-ended questions can be single-choice or multiple-choice:
- **Single-choice questions** allow the respondent to indicate only one opinion.
- **Multiple-choice questions** (or simply **multiple**) allow the respondent to indicate more than one opinion (depending on the case, the respondent may be left free to indicate all the options as well, in others it will be necessary to limit them).

3.1.1. Single-choice (closed-ended) questions

Depending on the used set of responses (and, therefore, the type of measurement you want to get with the questions) it is possible to classify different types of single-choice (closed-ended) questions.

Generally speaking, the main ones are:
- **Dichotomous** (with two answer options. E.g.: Yes/No, True/False, ...).
- **Polytomous** (with more than two options).
- **Numerical or verbal scales** (using various scales for measuring attitudes or opinions).

Numerical or verbal scales

Numerical or verbal scales may provide:
- An **even number of responses** (does not provide for a "neutral" response. E.g.: A scale from 1 to 10, 1 to 6 or 1 to 4 is required).
- An **odd number of answers** (provides for a "neutral" response. E.g.: very agree, quite agree, neither agree nor disagree, not agree at all).

Even scales force the respondent to express an attitude or an opinion, but if used improperly they can over/underestimate an attitude/opinion.
Odd scales allow "a way out" for those who are actually unable to express an attitude or have no opinion, but if used improperly they can make the question useless because the answers vary little (they are concentrated in the middle option).

3.2. Filter questions

Among the (closed-ended) single-choice questions the most important for the construction of a questionnaire are the filter questions.

Filter questions allow you to skip one or more subsequent questions when certain conditions are met. They are useful when:
- particular groups of respondents need to be directed to questions specifically addressed to them (employed or unemployed),
- you want to avoid going into detailed questions when it is useless (e.g.: do not ask questions about recruitment to those who say they have not recruited during the year),
- you want to avoid conditioning the answer (e.g.: you do not want to ask opinions on staff recruited in the last 12 months to those who have not recruited, in order not to provoke answers given in order not to make a "bad impression").

4. Formulation of questions

The questions must be:
- Same for all respondents.
- Formulated in such a way that they contain all the information needed to be unambiguous.
- Understood in the same way by all respondents.

In particular, it is crucial:
- To process questions that are not too complex syntactically.
- To use appropriate language for the people you are addressing.
- To pay attention to the length of the questions and the number of ways of answering them (set of responses).
- To avoid ambiguous definitions.
- To avoid using words with a strong negative connotation.
- To avoid double negations.
- Always (or almost always) to give the possibility to answer "I don't know".
- To eliminate redundant (content present in others) and non-discriminatory questions (answers vary little).
- To avoid double questions (double query).

- To avoid, if possible, the use of multiple-choice questions.
- That the answers (in closed-ended questions) are clear, comprehensive and exclusive (they should be mutually exclusive).
- To formulate questions that do not affect the answer.

5. Question sequence

The sequence in which questions are asked can help the respondent to provide the desired information.

To help the respondent, you can use two "styles" in sorting the questions:
- The **funnel sequence**: you move from general questions to more specific questions to give the respondent time to focus attention on the proposed theme. This helps the memory and facilitates the collection of non-meditated opinions.
- The **inverted funnel sequence**: first the specific questions are asked and then the more general ones. Useful when you want to collect meditated opinions on a particular topic.

NOTE: the order in which the questions are asked may not be "neutral": unintended conditioning may occur by ordering the questions in a certain way.

More generally, it's a good practice to:
- Organize the questions according to a logical order (avoiding radical leaps), grouping them according to specific topics (sections of the questionnaire) and preparing filter questions (which should be handled with great care).
- First present the questions that are easy to answer (respondent data).
- Place the questions that are most important for research purposes in the middle of the questionnaire (it is better to enter slowly into the core of the topic, but before the respondent is too tired) or that require a memory effort (to avoid that in the beginning the respondent is not yet available for this effort and in the end he is too tired).
- Place the questions on sensitive issues (e.g. health, income, political preferences) towards the end (to take advantage of the increased confidence and availability now acquired and not to risk that a refusal to answer could compromise the acquisition of the information placed on the last part of the questionnaire).
- Close the questionnaire with simpler and lighter questions.
- Alternate challenging questions to easier ones.
- Ask the open questions at the end of the questionnaire or at the end of each section.

6. Questions encoding

The questions included in the questionnaire and the relative set of responses (in the case of closed-ended questions) should be coded to facilitate data storage and analysis.

In general:
- **Questions** are classified by alphanumeric codes identifying the section they belong to and the position they occupy within the section (e.g.: A.1 = First question section A, A.2 Second question section A, ... A.n Last question section A; B.1 First question section B, ...).
- **Set of responses** (closed-ended questions) are classified by assigning a number to each answer option according to the order they have in the question (1 First answer, 2 Second answer, 3 Third answer, ... of question X.Y).

Often, in paper questionnaires, the coding is visible directly in the questionnaire.

7. Questionnaire length

The questionnaire must be concise and essential.
Its length depends mainly on the survey technique:
- A **face-to-face interview** must not last more than an hour, an hour and a half.
- A **telephonic interview** should not last more than half an hour, even if, for some target populations, it may exceed one hour.
- A **self-filled questionnaire** must not be more than 16 pages long; if not really engaging, it must not exceed 4 pages.

8. Questionnaire graphic design

It is essential to pay the maximum attention to graphic presentation and layout.
The typical page:
- Compact (without large white spaces at the end).
- It has a uniform structure (to make it easier to identify questions and how to answer them).
- Question and response in the same page (except for long lists of answers).
- Numbered questions (for identifiability).
- Numeric codes aligned with the set of responses.

The questionnaire must also have:
- A **front page (cover)**.
- A **closing page**.

8.1. Front page (cover)

The front page must contain:
1. Name and logo of the organisation that promoted and conducted the research (the respondent must be identified as an institution of recognised impartiality).
2. Title of the survey. "Survey on ..." (it must mean something to the entire population under investigation).
3. The word "Questionnaire".
4. Request to the respondent ("circle/bar the suitable answers", with possible information on how to respond).

8.2. Closing page

The closing page must contain:
1. Thanks to the respondent for their cooperation.
2. Any comments on the survey, the questionnaire, the use of the data.
3. Contact details of the organisation promoting and conducting the survey (address, telephone number, e-mail).

9. Auxiliary detection tools

- Cover letter.
- Any visual aids (folders, vignettes, special scales, etc.) to be submitted to the respondent.
- Possible instruction manual for interviewers.

9.1. Cover letter

Each questionnaire must be accompanied by a simple, clear and not too long cover letter that must contain:

1. Name of the organization that promoted and conducts the research.
2. Title of the survey. "Survey on ..." (it must mean something to the entire target population).
3. Brief presentation of the project, its aims and how the collected data will be used.
4. Any comments on the survey, the questionnaire and the use of the data.
5. Reason why you are contacting the respondent and with what request(s).
6. Importance of the respondent in conducting the research.
7. Privacy.
8. Contacts for any clarifications.

10. Conclusions, a good questionnaire ...

Ultimately a good questionnaire:

- depends, in its content and structure, on the survey technique,
- has a well thought out logical sequence,
- is structured according to homogeneous areas,
- uses understandable and unambiguous language,
- is based on a careful choice between open and closed questions,
- is based on careful management of sensitive questions,
- has an optimal length,
- is graphically edited,
- is well coded.