

Interviewer Debriefing by e-mail

by
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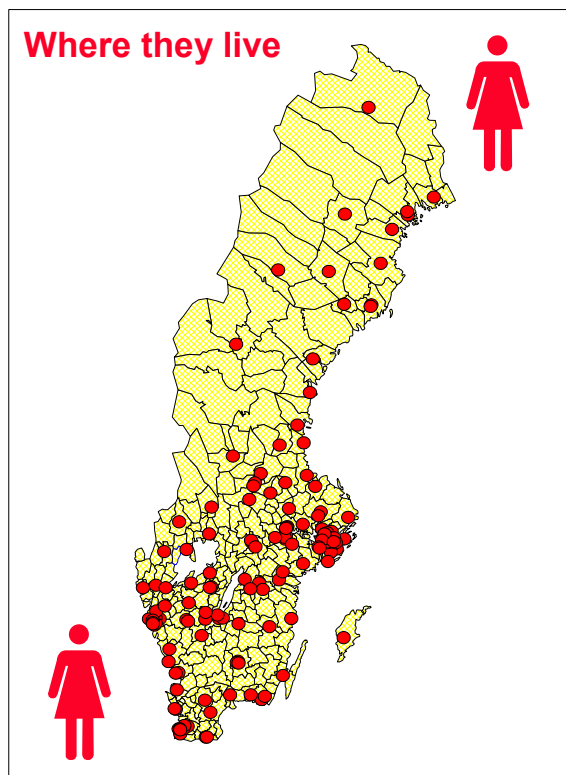
1. Introduction

The Swedish government is a major buyer of our surveys. Some run monthly, others yearly. The economic resource for making cognitive tests are often all too small as well as the time for making them. In this situation we got the idea to utilize the experience of our interviewers and e-mail communication. This gives us a method being quick as well as cheap although it cannot provide the depth of the information a cognitive test will do.

2. “Survey” at Statistics Sweden

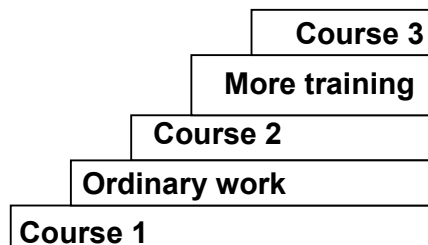
We have a long history of statistics in Sweden. Our unit for interviewing has experience from more than 35 years. We do 142 000 hours telephone interviews annually and 60 000 face to face interviews.

Statistics Sweden has 150 employed interviewers all over the country. We also have a central telephone group with 25 employees and 25-100 extra interviewers. Most of our interviewers have more than ten years experience.



A computerized information system makes the interviewers well informed about the surveys. Every night the system calls up every field interviewer and collects working material and leaves new job.

The interviewers are professionals and well trained. The training follow a stepladder and looks like this:

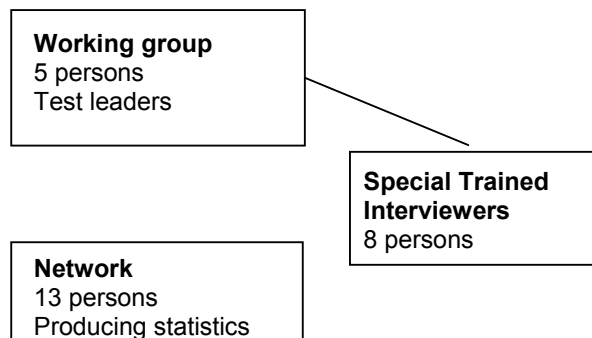


New interviewers will be trained during three weeks with theoretical basic training, interviewing technique and data collection. They work with a particular telephone survey as well as face-to-face surveys. The facilitators follow their job and give them feedback. After one year the interviewer will have more training for three days. The course deals with communication and social interaction, measurement in surveys and quality.

3. Measurement Laboratory

The Measurement Laboratory (ML) started 1989. In 1995 ML was reorganized to a network organization. The aim was to broaden the services of ML, the knowledge about and willingness to use the services of ML. Some persons in the central staff are not working full time within ML, but are still ‘rooted’ in other tasks – from development of methods to producing current statistics. We also have a network with colleagues from all departments, who serve as ‘promoters’. Our network organization has turned out to be very successful. The services of ML are nowadays much more well known and well used. Last year we had more than 100 different jobs. We make a lot of tests and “expert examine”. If you want to know more about our jobs read “Cognitive testing of Mail Surveys at Statistics Sweden” by Gunilla Davidsson.

The ML-organization is as follows:



4. Interviewers at the Measurement Laboratory

ML has eight interviewers especially trained for working in the Measurement Laboratory. They have been working many years for Statistics Sweden, from 7 years up to 18 years. They live in different parts of Sweden. We have three in Stockholm, the capital. The ML-interviewers are chosen as interviewers who make especially good work with high quality. From the beginning they also have shown interest in making better questionnaires. Half of them have been working as ML-interviewers since the start 1989.

Once a year the working group and the ML-interviewers have a meeting. We think it is very important for all of us to increase our competence. We discuss the job for the last year and compare notes.

5. E-mail debriefing

The interviewers have an internal e-mail system. That makes it easy for us to reach the interviewers easy and quick.

We give the ML-interviewers the following instructions:

”We want you to use your routine as a Measurement Lab - interviewer. When you find questions being *difficult to understand*, *to answer* or *being problematic in any other way* for the respondents, use a couple of hours to write your comments.

- Use 2 - 3 hours
- Write your comments. Start with the *questions* in the questionnaire that have given you the greatest problems. It will be a Top Down list where you take the most important things first.
- If you have problem with the *survey instructions* – comment. Or if you have other ideas.
- Give comments if there are any problems with the *introduction letter*
- We want your opinion of the whole survey. If you have any suggestions for improvements we would appreciate that.
- Do you have any other questions about the survey?”

Before they start the job with the debriefing they have to make at least 20 interviews in the present survey. The job has to be done close to the data collection.

6. The Report

The interviewers send their remarks to the Measurement Lab where the test leader puts a final report together. The list of contents depends on what the problems are. Very often the interviewer will give us example of how you could solve the problem.

Afterwards all the ML-interviewers will receive the report. We believe that to study the report and see what other colleagues have written is developing their competence.

7. Experiences

An e-mail debriefing gives a good picture of problems that occurred in the survey, when asking (the interviewer) as well as understanding and answering (the respondent) the questions. It will also – in many cases – contribute examples how to solve these problems.

In one e-mail debriefing the eight interviewers had made 500 telephone interviews. As you can understand they had a lot of experiences when they started to write their comments. They are all well trained to be observant and to notice the reactions from the respondents. With all their experiences from the survey we get a lot of suggestions for improvements.

8. Compare with Other Methods

The method discovers the problems the interviewers will have when they ask the questions and the problems for the respondent to leave the answer. Thereby you cannot explain the understanding and the answering strategy of the respondent in the same way as you can do in a cognitive test. If the respondent misunderstands the question and directly give an answer the interviewer will not notice anything.

It is a quick method and to a low cost. We always prefer to make a cognitive test but if it is not possible this method will give you more than you think.

9. Train your interviewers!

We will recommend other statistical agencies to use their interviewers to make better questionnaires. If they have been interviewing for a while they know how questions are working. Give them some extra training and they will help you to get better questionnaires.

Even if you do not have an e-mail system you can use it. But it will take more time. If you train the interviewers in a CATI group for the job you can very easily use the method.