Descriptive Methods: Surveys

A questionnaire or interview designed to investigate the opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a particular group.

![Survey on Behalf of the Litterers' Society](image_url)

**Survey on Behalf of the Litterers' Society**

1. Prior to reading the enclosed letter, were you aware of how little damage litter does to the environment, or how much money the government wastes in an effort to harass innocent citizens who happen to drop a little bit of litter now and then?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Undecided
2. Do you agree that moderate, responsible littering is one of the rights we should expect in a free society?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Undecided
3. Are you in favor of having the government use your tax dollars to arrest and persecute people whose only "crime" is littering?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Undecided
4. Do you see a need for an educational campaign to inform the public about the good that littering contributes to natural recycling?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Undecided
5. Are you outraged that short-sighted do-gooders would pass extremely restrictive, punitive laws against littering, merely to advance their own political careers?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Undecided
6. Do you support the noble attempts of the Litterers' Society to fight against excessive and unnecessary regulations, and will you support the Society with your generous donation?
   - Yes! Enclosed is my generous donation!
   - Sorry, I can't afford a contribution at this time.

*Image source: Kalat*
Examples of Surveys:

- How many hours per week do most people watch violent TV programs?
- How is our customer service at Home Depot, Office Depot, Red Robin, etc.?
- How do you feel toward your President?
- What do you give your boyfriend/girlfriend for St. Valentine’s Day?
- An Industrial/Organizational psychologist tests to see if wearing nametags make the employees happier with their work.
- A Personality psychologist explores whether extroverted people have more fun at parties than introverted people.
Surveys

Student and Employer Perceptions of Student Workplace Preparedness Across Learning Outcomes (Hart Research/AACU, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Outcome**</th>
<th>Perception of Readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with others in teams</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical judgment and decision making</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical/analytical thinking</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

original work by Paul Hettich, Ph.D., DePaul University
** 80-85% of employers consider these skills/outcomes as “very important”
## Surveys

Student and Employer Perceptions of Student Workplace Preparedness Across Learning Outcomes (Hart Research/AACU, 2015)

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<th>Perception of Readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing / solving complex problems</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating, organizing, evaluating information</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being innovative / creative</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying current on technologies</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with numbers / statistics</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with people from different backgrounds</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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** 56-70% of employers consider these skills/outcomes as “very important”
## Surveys

**Behaviors that lead to promotions and new assignments of new college hires** (Garner, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Most frequently mentioned from 1500 listed by employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking Initiative (above and beyond, self-starter, volunteer)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-management (time and stress management, establishes priorities)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attributes (reliable, flexible, patient)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment (passionate, positive attitude, positive work ethic)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (building consensus, management skills)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show and Tell (presenting ideas persuasively)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical competencies (mastery of position)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## Surveys

**Behaviors that influencing the disciplining and firing of new college hires**

(Garner, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for discipline</th>
<th>Frequency per employer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of work ethic / commitment **</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unethical behavior **</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to follow instructions **</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective in teams</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate use of technology</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing assignments / deadlines **</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to communicate verbally</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being late for work **</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to communicate effectively-writing</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to take initiative</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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** reasons given for **firing** new hires
Surveys

Example:

In 2011, a 60 Minutes/Vanity Fair poll asked the following and discovered the following:

How should you balance the budget?
  61% responded with increase taxes for the wealthy
  20% responded with cut defense spending
  4% responded with cut Medicare
  3% responded with cut social security

The results of a survey only tell you what people think, which may or may not reflect reality.

What was the other example from class where a survey reflected what people thought, which may not be what actually occurs?
Strengths of surveys:
- A large amount of information can be acquired quickly.
- Accurately predictions of large-scale trends can sometimes be made.

Weaknesses of surveys:
- Generalizability may be questionable unless persons surveyed are a representative sample of a larger population. Many “call-in” or magazine surveys do not have a representative population. Most are self-selected and represent a small slice of the population.
- Responses provided may be inaccurate due to a person’s lack of awareness of their own attitudes and biases.
- The characteristics of the interviewer may influence the response.
- Interpretation of the answers may be difficult, especially with a biased survey.
- Surveys lack the ability to explain.
Problems with Surveys: Leading Questions

When collecting data with surveys, you need to be careful
• about the wording of the questions and avoid leading questions,
• the choice of words, and
• that the sample is representative of the much larger population.

Ideally, survey questions are worded so as not to suggest a desired answer where interviewees will answer in a way that they think the interviewer or sponsoring organization wants to hear, thus making the survey flawed for scientific purposes, (but good for political purposes). Such surveys include questions that are intentionally worded in a biased manner.

Examples of good questions:
• Which candidate do you plan to support?
• Do you think that increased parking fees would be a good idea or a bad idea?

Examples of bad questions:
• Do you plan on supporting Hillary Clinton?
• Do you plan on supporting Donald Trump?
• Are Macs better than PCs?
• Is Captain Picard better than Captain Kirk?
Problems with Surveys: Word Choice

In addition to how a question is phrased, small changes in words can affect the outcome of a survey. For example:

![Survey Results](image)

While there is no real descriptive difference between “homosexuals” and “gay men and lesbians”, there is an emotional and cognitive difference. The emotional and cognitive difference affects how people respond to their opinions.

If you don’t know much about the topic or thought about the topic, we react emotionally (see peripheral route of persuasion, chapter 12).
Problems with Surveys: Unrepresentative Samples

You cannot survey the entire population to find out what they think. You can take a smaller sample and have a 95% confidence that your sample is similar to the larger population as long as your sample is a representative sample of the population—the sample resembles the larger population.
Most call in internet, television and radio show participants have strong beliefs and choose to volunteer their opinions and thus do not resemble the larger population.
Examples of non-representative samples:

- A senator is interested in whether his constituents favor the death penalty. His staff reports that letters about the death penalty have been received from 854 constituents and 654 favor it.

- A cookie manufacturing company wants to know what percentage of Denver residents make cookies from scratch. A sample of 1,000 residential addresses is chosen and interviewers call these households during regular working hours on weekdays.

- A newspaper is interested in finding out what proportion of drivers in the city wear seat belts. Some reporters go to a GM plant and record the number of employees who fasten their seat belts when they leave work.

Consequences of an Unrepresentative Sample
During WWII, the Navy tried to determine where they needed to armor their aircraft to ensure they came back home. They ran an analysis of where planes had been shot up, and came up with this.

Obviously the places that needed to be up-armored are the wingtips, the central body, and the elevators. That’s where the planes were all getting shot up.

Abraham Wald, a statistician, disagreed. He thought they should better armor the nose area, engines, and mid-body. Which was crazy, of course. That’s not where the planes were getting shot.
Except Mr. Wald realized what the others didn’t. The planes were getting shot there too, but they weren’t making it home. What the Navy thought it had done was analyze where aircraft were suffering the most damage. What they had actually done was analyze where aircraft could suffer the most damage without catastrophic failure. All of the places that weren’t hit? Those planes had been shot there and crashed. They weren’t looking at the whole sample set, only the survivors.

Scott Osborn