Why is cognitive testing important for cross-national surveys like the European Health Interview Survey & the European Social Survey?

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Presentation Plan

1. Importance of cognitive testing on cross-national projects
2. Challenges and practical solutions for cross-national teams
3. General observations
Two Examples

The European Health Interview Survey
- General Health Survey
- General population
- Wave 1 (2007-2009) in 21 countries
- Cognitive Testing Qs for Wave 2 (2014)
- 4 partner countries (Belgium, Estonia, Germany, UK)

The European Social Survey
- Attitudinal Survey
- General population
- Wave 5 (2010-2011) in 28 Countries
- Cognitive testing Qs for Wave 6 (2013)
- 5 partner countries (Bulgaria, Austria, Israel, Portugal and the UK)
“As with any research strategy, cross-national research comes at a price: It is costly in time and money; it is difficult to do; it often seems to raise more interpretive problems than it solves”

(Kohn 1989:77 cited in Harkness et al 2003:3)
Question design

Measurable Indicators  Construct (being indirectly measured)  Concept (looking at theoretical concepts)

Source: Harkness et al. 2003:11

National Centre for Social Research
Why is cognitive testing important?

- Ambiguity of natural language
- Concepts and categories have fuzzy edges
- Conversational norms violated in survey context
  - negotiation of meaning is stilted
  - misunderstandings are difficult to repair
- Result: intent and meaning of questions may not match respondent’s understanding of that intent and meaning
- Question testing can help detect where standardisation of meaning breaks down and repair questions before going into the field
Why is cross-national cognitive testing important?

• Source questions may be culturally specific
• Concepts may not be common
• Concepts may not be measured by the same constructs
• Language to express constructs may differ
• Researchers/ translators may not be typical
Challenges and Practical Solutions

• Challenge
  • Cognitive testing is a qualitative approach
  • Variation in practice between and within countries
  • Under-developed literature
  • Language barriers
  • Dispersed research teams

• Practical Solutions
  • Adopt a consistent approach from the start
    • Sampling and recruitment
    • Interviewing and probing
    • Analysis and recommendations
  • Common and clear timetables
General Observations

- Role of the coordinating centre
- Communication is key to success
- Ensure objectives are clear to all
- Use skills and knowledge of all research teams

- Outcomes of cross-national cognitive testing
  - Meaningful cross-national comparisons
  - Valid and reliable data
  - Efficient use of resources (time and money)
Thank you

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