Chapter 5

Respondent's Psychology and Survey Participation

It would be too simplistic to assume that the success of a survey interview rests solely on the interaction between respondent and interviewer and on the ability of the latter to recruit the former. The survey interview is the end result of many factors, visible and not, interacting well before the interviewer and the respondent meet. It is the role of the survey manager to understand these factors, analyze them, determine the most influential in each environment, and coach interviewers about how to handle them to ensure the highest level of survey participation.

Unfortunately, only rarely do interviewer recruits receive training [. . .] in maximizing the odds of a 'yes' over all contacts. Instead, they are trained in stock descriptors of the survey leading to the first question of the interview.

—R. M. Groves, R. B. Cialdinia, and M. P. Couper, "Understanding the Decision to Participate in a Survey"

Reduc[ing] interviewing to a set of techniques is [. . .] like reducing courtship to a formula.

—Lewis A. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*

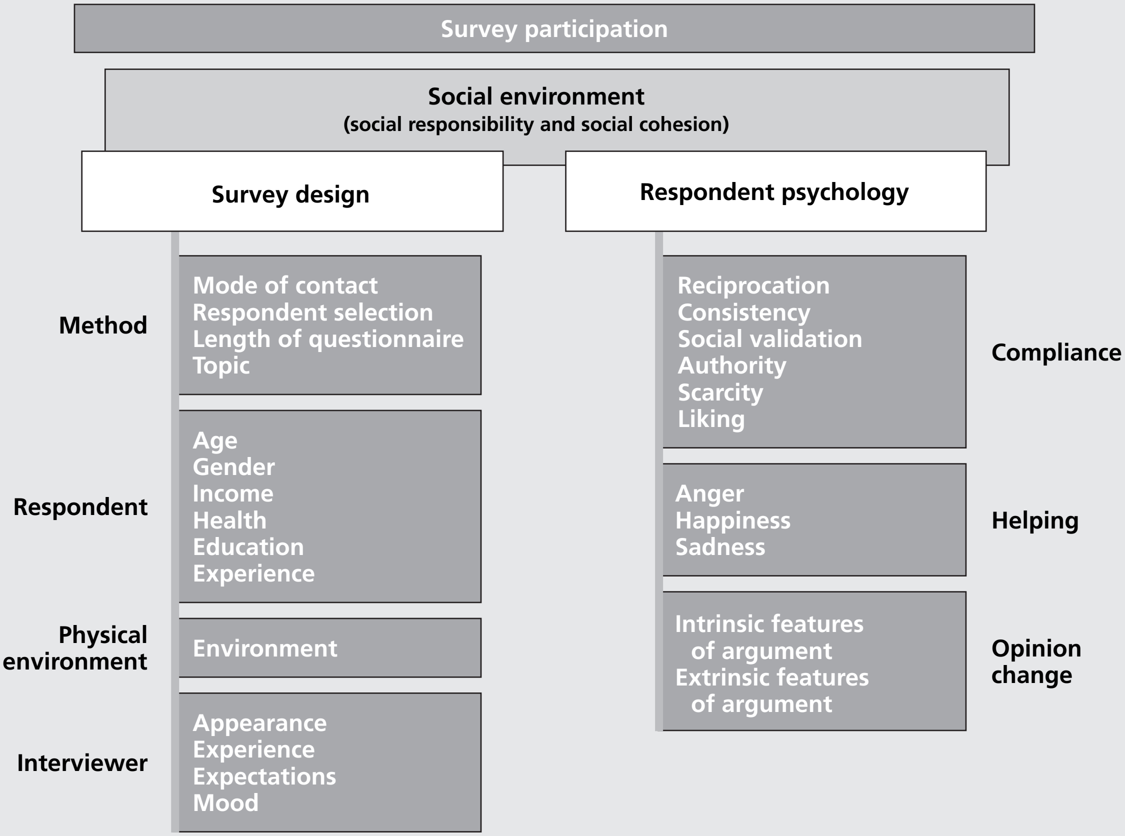
Factors Affecting Participation

Three broad factors contribute to the success of any survey interview: the social environment, the survey design, and the respondent's state of mind (figure 5.1). Their interaction generates positive and negative forces toward the survey interview that will ultimately have an impact on the quantity and quality of the data collected.

Social Environment

Two sociodemographic factors present in the social environment influence survey participation: social responsibility and social cohesion. These factors characterize the environment in which the survey takes place. The sense of social responsibility felt by the manager who is approached with the request for a survey interview, as well as the perceived legitimacy of social institutions and of the survey itself, will determine his or her predisposition toward the study (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992). What motivates a business person in Germany is very likely different from what motivates a business person in Ethiopia. Understanding the extent to which these factors operate will determine the appropriate strategy.

Figure 5.1.
Factors Affecting Survey Participation



Source: Author's creation.

Survey Design

Survey design calls for a number of different choices regarding the survey methodology, the unit of investigation, and the interviewer's characteristics,[1] all of which have a different bearing on strategies to elicit

[1] Groves, Cialdini, and Couper (1992) also identify location as a factor. Contrary to other surveys (for example, household surveys), the physical location of the interview has little relevance in business surveys. In fact, they are generally conducted during business hours in the offices of the establishment being interviewed. Only worker surveys (occasionally conducted as part of an Investment Climate Survey) might be influenced by the location and the presence of other people.

participation. Major attributes of ***survey methodology*** that have an impact on survey participation are the mode of initial contact, the person who makes the initial contact, the length of the interview, and the topic of the survey. Different strategies have been employed by survey practitioners as a mode of initial contact to foster participation. They involve the use of advance letters, the payment of incentives, the offer of brochures or other scripts, and the timing of contact (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992). It is not clear whether the use of advance letters has a positive impact on participation. Dillman, Gallegos, and Frey (1976) show that these letters improve responses, while Singer, Van Hoewyk, and Maher (2000) find no significant impact. What is evident from the literature (Goyder 1985; Heberlein and Baumgartner 1978) is that the number of times the respondent is contacted has a significant impact on his or her decision to participate. As a consequence, the use of advance letters to introduce the respondent to the upcoming business survey and to base its legitimacy should be encouraged, but it should not replace a personal visit by the interviewer. Introductory letters should be used only to provide advance notice and build the legitimacy of the study. Introductory letters should not request participation; this task should be left to a personal contact. The letter should be brief. It should make reference to the sponsors (to build legitimacy) and include contact names and phone numbers. It should also highlight the purpose of the survey (to arouse interest), while mentioning its unique characteristics and practical benefits.[2] While the letter should be addressed to the most senior executive in the company, it is unlikely, especially in large firms, that the company president will grant an interview. He or she might delegate another well-qualified executive to answer on his or her behalf (Kincaid and Bright 1957). The letter may indicate that an interviewer will follow up with a call to schedule an appointment. When scheduling the appointment, avoid expanding on the survey's description because it is more difficult to elicit participation on the phone (Atkinson 1971).

Advance Letters

Incentives

As expected, the payment of incentives does have a positive effect on participation (James and Bolstein 1992; Singer, Van Hoewyk, and Maher 1998; Singer, Van Hoewyk, and Maher 2000; Willimack,

[2] Other issues, such as confidentiality concerns, anonymity, sampling, and length are better addressed in the face-to-face visit by the interviewer. Sobal (1984) conducted an interesting review of the information disclosed in 78 survey introductions used in mailed questionnaires by members of the American Association of Opinion Research. He showed that although the majority of the introductory statements contain information on the research organization, the study director's name, and the research topic, less than half of them mentioned the sponsor and issues of confidentiality (see appendix 6).

Schuman, Pennell, and Lepkowski 1995). The impact is small—5 percent additional participation in face-to-face interviews—and has been proven effective only on the first visit (Willimack and others 1995). Although the payment of monetary incentives does not appear to bias data quality (Singer, Van Hoewyk, and Maher 2000; Willimack and others 1995), the actual payment of money poses ethical and practical problems.[3] Furthermore, the payment of incentives has been proven to be counterproductive if participation is not secured on the first visit (James and Bolstein 1990; Willimack and others 1995). In business surveys, such as the Investment Climate Surveys, it is advisable to use nonmonetary incentives, such as brochures and other scripts, which highlight the practical benefits of the survey to the individual respondent and emphasize the use of the data collected and the impact of previous studies (Gower 1993).

Timing

Finally, the timing of the interview is another factor to keep in mind when scheduling visits. Tax time, religious holidays, vacation time, and periods of economic downturn might make the interviewer's task even harder and could have a discouraging effect on the participation rate.

Contact Person

The correct identification of the person of first contact is also critical for the success of participation. It is important that the selection of the respondent be based on two criteria: the person who is eligible to answer the questions and the person who has the authority to direct other respondents to participate (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992).[4]

Questionnaire Length

The length of the questionnaire is another factor occasionally presented as influencing the success of the interview, because it is taken as an indicator of the burden posed on the respondent (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992). As pointed out in chapter 3, however, there is no clear empirical evidence that the survey length is a factor influencing participation. An experiment conducted on 700 respondents clearly showed that

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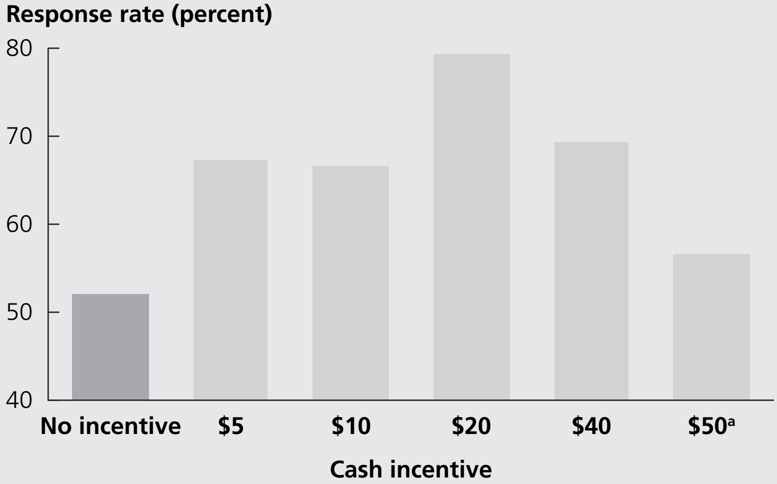
[3] These problems relate to who should receive the incentive and how large it should be. Should all participants receive it or only those who first refuse to participate? This decision might have an impact on the sample composition (see Singer, Van Hoewyk, and Maher 2000). Is the actual payment of a monetary incentive allowed by the rules governing the funding of the study? How large should the optimal incentive be considering the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents? All these are problems to which it is hard to find an answer, and the existing literature does not provide much help. What appears to be evident is the fact that the relationship between amount of monetary incentive and survey participation is nonlinear (figure 5.2), because after a certain threshold the incentive becomes, in the mind of the respondent, compensation for service rendered. This generates a host of additional problems for determining the appropriate fee to pay to elicit participation (Godwin 1979; James and Bolstein 1992).

[4] In an Investment Climate Survey, first the manager is approached and then the accountant, and not the other way around. This way only one person needs to be convinced.

Figure 5.2.
Survey Participation By Amount of Incentive



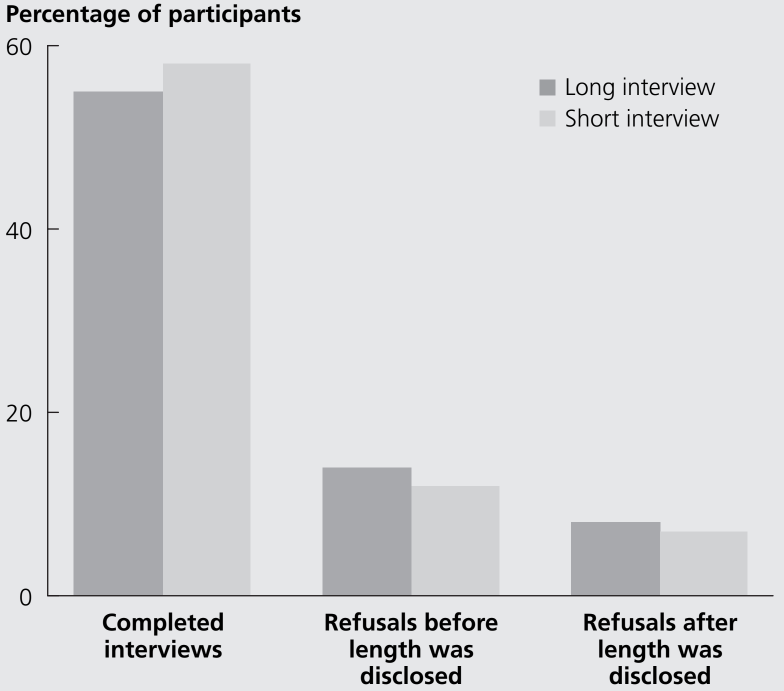
Source: James and Bolstein 1992.
a. Incentive promised.

the expected length of the interview had only a marginal and insignificant impact on participation (figure 5.3) (Sharp and Frankel 1983).

One of the most common reasons cited to justify refusal to participate is the respondent's impression that his or her time is wasted ("I am too busy," "I don't have time for this").[5] Although in a very limited number of cases time constraints are the true reason for refusals,[6] this popular justification is less related to the length of the questionnaire and more to the objective of the study. Because the arguments presented did not pique sufficient interest, the respondent replies that lack of time is the reason that he or she will not participate. The actual length of the questionnaire in itself is not truly a deterrent for survey participation, rather it is an excuse offered by a respondent who would not participate even if the questionnaire was one page long. In addition to experimental results, there is enough anecdotal evidence to support that, with the

[5] Another reason is not being interested (Couper 1997).
[6] This is the case in Investment Climate Surveys, because the interview does not necessarily need to take place at the moment of first contact but rather at the respondent's most convenient time.

Figure 5.3.
Interview Length Has an Insignificant Effect on Participation



Source: Sharp and Frankel 1983.
Note: Long interview is 1.25 hours; short is 25 minutes.

right strategy, respondents will take part in the study regardless of its length. In Malaysia and Brazil, although the Investment Climate Survey questionnaire was particularly long, it was completed through multiple interviews. Questionnaire length is used as an excuse to avoid participation rather than as a reason for refusal. In the Philippines, one large sampled company first refused to participate, stating the length of the questionnaire as the reason for declining. Later, although the questionnaire was not modified, the company reversed its decision after a friend pleaded for their participation.[7] In general, the replacement rate of par-

[7] Dexter (1970) points out in this case that, if a third party is used to convince reluctant respondents, it is important that the third party requests cooperation as a favor and refrains from going into the details of the study. This is to prevent any misinterpretation on the part of the intermediary affecting the interview.

ticipants attributed to refusal to participate is not larger than that for other reasons (for example, out of business, wrong address, out of scope, and so on).

As discussed earlier, questionnaire length affects response accuracy more than it affects survey participation. While in a few circumstances respondents decline to participate if they expect the interview to take too long, when they do participate, fatigue will hamper the accuracy of the information provided in a long interview. It is undisputed that a longer questionnaire leads to a higher risk of collecting inaccurate data and to longer completion times (Andrews 1984; Sudnam and Bradburn 1974). Experience shows that the survey instrument should not involve face-to-face interviews longer than one-and-a-half hours.[8]

Topic

The topic of the study also influences the success of the interview. The topic should be relevant to the purpose of the study, should not stimulate a sense of fear or hostility from the respondent, should not address personal issues, and should not give the sense of pursuing business secrets.[9] This last point is often raised when financial information is asked in the questionnaire. Many interviewers point out the reluctance of firms to share their true financial information, if any at all. A review of the literature by DeLameter (1982) shows no consistent evidence that the topic covered or specific sensitive questions have an influence on the decision to participate. The only effect of sensitive questions appears to be underreporting. My experience confirms DeLameter's findings. Although the specific country environment and the size of the sampled firm dictate how much financial information may be legitimately asked, if issues of confidentiality are appropriately guaranteed and the use of the information sought appropriately explained and understood, firms are more willing to share their financial data. Confidentiality assurances foster participation. However, the survey manager must be aware that these assurances have a limited effect, while the critical factor remains the trust in the integrity of the collecting agency (Singer, Mathiowetz, and Couper 1993). Furthermore, confidentiality assurances should be included only if sensitive questions are asked and should be tailored to the level of sensitivity of the questions. In fact, elaborate assurances of confidentiality might be counterproductive if used indiscriminately (Singer, Hippler, and Schwarz 1992; Singer, Von Thurn, and Miller 1995).

[8] Corresponding approximately to either 13 double-spaced pages, size 12 font, or 879 words.

[9] For instance, asking specific names of clients and suppliers might generate a sense of hostility and could be seen as unrelated to the purpose of the study.

A number of a ***respondent's characteristics*** have also been addressed in the literature as factors influencing survey participation. Age, gender, income, health status, education, geographic location, previous experience, and survey fatigue are all factors that have been considered. Although a number of these factors have been associated with survey participation (DeMaio 1980; Fowler and Mangione 1990), research evidence is mixed and the causal relationship is uncertain. More than causal factors, these characteristics determine the predisposition of respondents toward survey participation (Groves, Cialdini and Couper 1992). Psychological factors are critical components in motivating the respondent to participate. A first motive is the desire for self-expression. People often derive satisfaction from expressing their own opinion on topics of personal interests. Business people are often vocal about the problems they face in their activities, so this positive force should be taken into account by the interviewer to motivate the respondent to participate. Occasionally, feelings of altruism to help the interviewer with his or her task and the gratification from the performance of the respondent's role may represent positive forces stirring the respondent toward participation. There are, however, also negative forces in the respondent's mind that work against survey participation. Fear, apparent invasion of privacy, resentment toward the interviewer and sponsor, or threatening topics can all compromise survey participation (Warwick and Lininger 1975). It is the role of the survey manager, and even more so of the interviewer and survey firm, to understand what factors motivate or deter each respondent and how to address these factors in each circumstance. The interviewer must be aware that even positive feelings might generate bias. So, for instance, he or she must be able to understand whether a feeling of altruism might generate a courtesy bias in the respondent's behavior.

The ***physical environment*** in which the survey takes place also plays a role. In Investment Climate Surveys, the most important environmental factor having clear effect on the interviewing climate is the attitude of the business community toward surveys. In general, the business community is hostile to these type of studies for a number of valid reasons. The majority of managers see surveys as useless exercises that distract them from the more pressing issues of running their company without any clear positive impact on their business. This feeling is magnified if the sampled establishment is experiencing a downturn, if a number of (similar) surveys are being conducted more or less simultaneously, if the same sponsor has conducted other surveys in the recent past, or if the sponsor generates a hostile sentiment. The survey manager needs to investigate these factors while preparing for the fieldwork. Months before the interviews start, the survey manager must establish contacts with the business community to gather their support for the study and legitimate this endeavor. Here the list of potential partners depends on the particular country environment and on the selected survey firm.[10] Their role is to familiarize the associations' members and the business community, in general, with the study; foster participation; and support the implementing agency in its task. Eliciting cooperation from the business community is one of the hardest tasks, yet it is critical in fostering survey participation.

The ***interviewer*** remains the most important factor in motivating the respondent to participate and in ensuring the collection of quality data. As a consequence, observable characteristics and psychological factors play a fundamental role in the way he or she carries out the tasks. Brenner (1982) reports three basic sources of interviewer biases: background characteristics (such as age, education, socioeconomic status, race, religion), psychological factors (such as perceptions, attitudes, motives, expectations), and behavioral factors (such as experience, knowledge of interviewing techniques).

The interviewer's appearance and experience will have an impact on participation. Sociodemographic attributes (race, age, gender, and so on) determine the first impression the respondent will make of the interviewer at the moment of first contact, while experience (skills, confidence, and so on) will inform how the interviewer handles difficult situations and arouses the respondent's interest (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992). Often students or part-time interviewers are hired to conduct a survey. While the decision to employ part-time interviewers must be weighed against the expected duration of the survey, the survey manager should use extreme caution in relying heavily on students. Their relative youth might create problems in getting answers from senior executives. Furthermore, students in particular disciplines might even be unwilling to follow a structured interviewing methodology, which requires them to ask questions exactly as written. Finally, because of holidays, classes, examinations, and so on, students tend to be less reliable in their ability to complete a project (Dexter 1970; Warwick and Lininger 1975).

Further empirical evidence shows that interviewer expectations and mood have an influence on survey participation and data accuracy. Interviewers who expect the study to be difficult show a modest but

[10] Potential partners are the Chambers of Commerce, industrial associations, business institutes, and so on.

consistent effect on response rate (Singer and Kohnke-Aguirre 1979).[11] It is thus important for the success of the survey not simply to train all interviewers but rather to understand the psychological forces that motivate them to participate in the survey. Many of the reasons that push the respondent to cooperate also play a role in the interviewer's decision to participate, such as intellectual curiosity and identification with broader social concerns. Other factors play an even more specific role, such as the desire to improve their skills and knowledge and career advancement. Nevertheless, there are negative forces that also could weaken the interviewer's motivation toward the survey. In addition to the obvious dissatisfaction with the level of pay and the field supervision, fatigue, fear, difficult travel conditions, and frustration in locating respondents are the most common inhibitors (Warwick and Lininger 1975). It is the survey manager's job to identify these inhibitors and take the necessary steps to correct them.

Respondent's Psychology

The third broad factor that contributes to the success of an interview is the respondent's state of mind. This is admittedly one of the most difficult factors to gauge ahead of the actual interview. A successful interviewer must possess the ability to identify in the first few minutes of interaction which factors play a leading role in the respondent's psychological predisposition toward the survey and adopt the corresponding most appropriate persuasion strategy.

Cialdini (1985) identifies six major social norms that work in any person's mind when deciding whether to yield to a request for interview: reciprocation, consistency, social proof, authority, scarcity, and liking. The rule of *reciprocation* states that any person feels obliged to return favors, gifts, invitations, and the like received by another person.[12] This feeling plays a role in survey methodology when accepting the request for interview is seen as repayment for a payment, gift, or favor. This norm is the psychological basis of offering incentives to prospective participants. Psychologists also identify an innate sense of *consistency* in people: once a person takes an uncoerced stand on an issue he or she acts in conformity with that resolution. Otherwise, he or she risks appearing illogical, irra-

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[11] Estimated by the authors to be around 8 percent.

[12] This rule appears to be stronger than that of liking, described later. Therefore, this norm would work even if the person giving the gift is not liked by the receiver (Cialdini 1985).

tional, or unstable. This psychological norm constitutes the basis of awarding participants with certificates of commendation.[13] They generate a sense of commitment in the prospective respondent that can be used by the interviewer to elicit compliance (to show consistency).[14] The feeling of *social proof* pushes people to adopt the same beliefs and behaviors of others because they consider correct what other people think to be right. Thus, the wider the survey participation is the more likely it is that respondents who are sensitive to this particular norm will cooperate.

The sense of *authority* is yet another factor that often plays a role in the respondent's mind. People are more likely to concede to a request for an interview if it comes from a legitimate authority (in the respondent's mind). This is why it is important to have the right sponsor. The government is generally perceived as a legitimate authority and is generally more successful in gaining access.[15] *Scarcity* is another social norm that might play a role in encouraging participation. Sometimes respondents are more likely to comply with the request if they see it as a limited opportunity. This strategy assigns more value and weight to survey participation and might play a role in the decision to cooperate.

Liking is that psychological norm that pushes people to comply with requests from people who they know and like. Apart from the (obvious) physical attractiveness, other factors influence liking and thus compliance. Respondents are more willing to comply with requests from people who are similar to them, people who praise them, people who are familiar to them, and people with whom they like to be associated.

Many researchers argue that people have an innate sense of altruism that predisposes them to help others in need (***helping norm***). An appeal to this feeling of predisposition is generally used, explicitly or implicitly, to increase participation. This norm, however, is influenced by the

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[13] This practice is not common, though, probably because it is not appreciated for its psychological impact.

[14] Any of these feelings could also work to the detriment of participation. On one occasion, I recall the respondent was not impressed by the sponsorship of the survey because he had some negative feelings against the sponsor and he decided not to cooperate to be consistent with this belief. Knowing this is still extremely valuable to the interviewer, who can appropriately focus on those aspects of the survey (including other sponsors, if available) that conform to the respondent's consistency norm.

[15] As mentioned earlier, the selection of the survey firm has a particular impact on the willingness of respondents to share information about sensitive topics. Thus, while hiring the national statistical office will make it easier to collect accounting information, a higher refusal rate can be expected for sensitive questions, such as tax evasion and informal payments to government officials.

emotional state of the respondent at the time of the request. Therefore, the respondent's mood needs to be taken into account when he or she is approached. While anger will have a detrimental impact on participation, happiness will have the opposite effect. Sadness has an ambiguous impact depending on how the cost and benefits of the survey are perceived by the respondent (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992).

Finally, even the best arguments put forward by the best interviewer can fall on deaf ears if the topic is not meaningful to the respondent. Evidence shows that the best strategy to elicit ***opinion change*** is to fit the level of sophistication of the arguments put forward to the respondent's perceived saliency of the survey objective. If the purpose of the study is of high relevance to the respondent, a highly sophisticated introduction should be used to ensure participation.[16] If, on the contrary, the study objectives are of low personal relevance to the respondent, a more heuristic approach should be followed and the persuasion strategy should focus on extrinsic features of the study, such as the authority of the sponsor and the credibility of the implementing agency (Petty and Cacioppo 1984).

All this leads to the conclusion that "influences on the decision to participate vary over individuals" (Groves and McGonagle 2001, 252) and, therefore, there is no single opening statement or single argument that ensures the highest level of participation in all circumstances. Failed attempts to identify an optimal single script for eliciting participation have clearly demonstrated this finding (Dillman, Gallegas, and Frey 1976). On the contrary, the best persuasion strategy is tailoring, that is, "the use of different dress, physical behaviors, words, and strategies of persuasion for different sample persons" (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992, 487). Empirical evidence shows the effectiveness of tailoring. Morton-Williams (1991) showed that interviewers using a prepared script got a higher refusal rate than those allowed to tailor. To achieve a higher participation rate, interviewers should adapt their initial approach to the specific situation they face, and the respondent's reaction to the initial statement should dictate their choices of subsequent strategies (Atkinson 1971; Groves and Couper 1996; Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992).

[16] The interviewer should emphasize intrinsic characteristics such as the sample representativeness, the sophistication of the analysis and its goals, and the international perspective of the study. Although the high saliency of the topic implies a lower incentive effect (Groves, Singer, and Corning, 2000), this should not push the interviewer to believe that he or she can quickly move to the interview with minimal introduction.

Training

Well-designed questionnaires and experienced interviewers are undoubtedly the two most important ingredients affecting the quality of the data collected. Yet, while the former can be easily achieved (although often overlooked), interviewers' quality is the single most difficult aspect to handle. Even the best-designed question will gather inaccurate information if the interviewer reads it, probes it, or records it incorrectly.

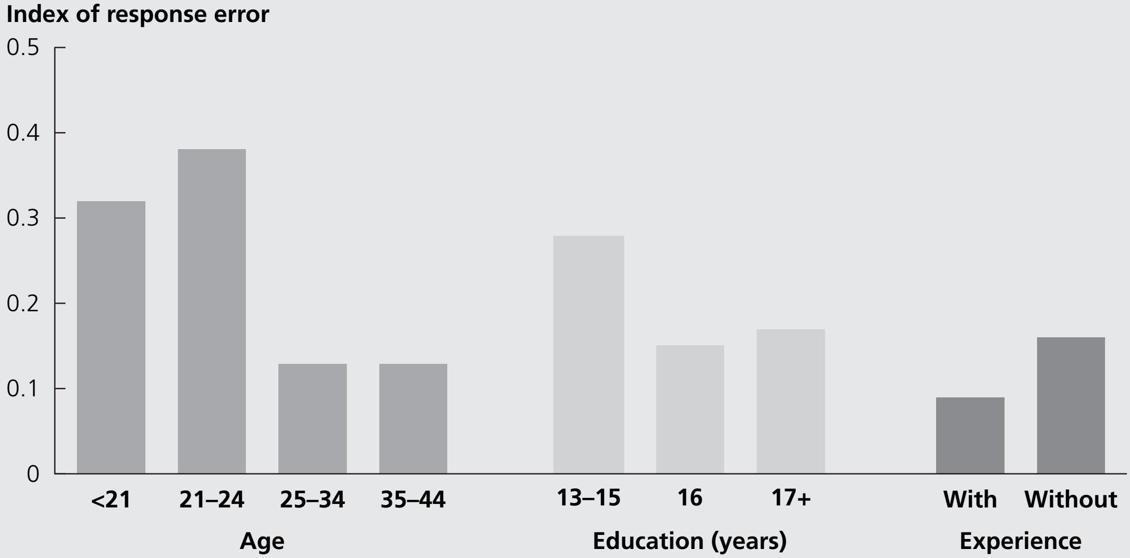
Interviewer Characteristics

Age, experience, and education are the interviewers' three most important attributes in business surveys. Although age and experience are to some extent coupled, the interviewer's age is important not as much for the ability to conduct the interview (here experience plays a larger role) but rather, and critically, for the ability to secure participation. The norm of liking plays a role in the decision to participate in surveys: respondents are more prone to comply with a request when it comes from people they like. Similarity plays a role in triggering this. The more similar the person making the request, the more likely the respondent is to accept it (Cialdini 1985). In business surveys, the respondent is generally a middle-age entrepreneur; employing young interviewers, no matter how experienced, can automatically precludes this compliance norm (the larger the company, the more evident the phenomenon). Experience in the field shows that entrepreneurs, especially in larger firms, do not lend legitimacy to studies presented by young interviewers. However, in business surveys, age plays an undisputed role on yet another critical norm. Because age is the physical attribute that first appears to the respondent, even before any other norm can be appealed to, the appearance of a young interviewer has an immediate negative impact on the sense of legitimacy of the study. It has a consequent detrimental effect on the liking norm and, ultimately, on the willingness to participate.

Experience more than age has an impact on data quality. It is not surprising that inexperienced interviewers show a higher response error than young interviewers (figure 5.4) (Sudnam and Bradburn 1974). Furthermore, experience plays a critical role in securing participation—an experienced interviewer has a larger set of persuasive strategies that he or she can tailor to each interview situation (Groves and Couper 1996).

Depending on the complexity of the questions asked and definitions adopted in the form, education plays a relevant role. Fowler and Mangione (1990) have pointed out that it is an illusion to hope that interviewers will open training manuals in the course of an interview. Education will reduce the necessity to consult manuals and, conse-

Figure 5.4.
Index of Response Error by Interviewer Characteristics



Source: Sudnam and Bradburn 1974.

quently, will improve data quantity and quality. Furthermore, because one of the interviewer's most important tasks is to probe when the respondent fails to meet the question's objective, having a clear understanding of the objective of each question will help the interviewer decide when, where, and how much probing is appropriate (Martin and Abelson 1984). Lastly, although nobody expects interviewers to be experts in every subject covered, when financial data are collected in business surveys, the practice of employing interviewers with accounting backgrounds should be encouraged.

Training

There is no doubt that training has a positive impact on both the quality of the responses recorded and on the quantity of the interviews completed. More than half a century ago researchers were testing the effect of training on data quality. The U.S. Census Bureau conducted an experiment in which the same questionnaire was administered by two separate groups of interviewers, one group receiving 5 hours of training and the second group 16 hours. On all questions, the first group of interviewers showed a consistently higher error rate (13% of nonresponse and nonacceptable answers), which was almost double the rate of the trained group.[17]

More recently, experimental research has shown that the usefulness of training is a function of the complexity of the questionnaire. While the response rate of simple questions is not statistically different between trained and untrained interviewers, the positive effect of training appears evident when the structure of the questionnaire is more complex and, thus, demands more interaction. The more the interviewer is required to give instructions, to probe, and to give explanations, the more effective is training in ensuring a higher and more accurate data collection. Billiet and Loosveldt (1988) report the results of an experiment in which trained interviewers outperformed untrained interviewers[18] in terms of reading, probing, and getting answers even on sensitive topics (figure 5.5).

Given the particular complexity of most business surveys, there is no ideal interviewer who can be employed without any training. While it is not uncommon for survey firms to promise to employ dozens of interviewers, an extremely small proportion of these interviewers would be capable of understanding and handling such a complex instrument as the Investment Climate questionnaire without appropriate preparation. This is where training conducted by an experienced survey manager with a profound understanding of the questionnaire and survey situations plays a crucial role. The selection of interviewers should be tailored to the distinct objectives of the survey. It is extremely hard to know when this match between interviewers' capabilities and survey objectives has been made, apart from warning signs that stem from poor interviewers. Recognizing that a successful interview is not just a matter of techniques but also of intuition and ability, it is possible to identify a priori some interviewer characteristics that will make a difference (Warwick and Lininger 1975). However, only after an intense training and face-to-face mock interviews will the survey manager have a better feel of the ability of prospective interviewers to handle business surveys.[19]

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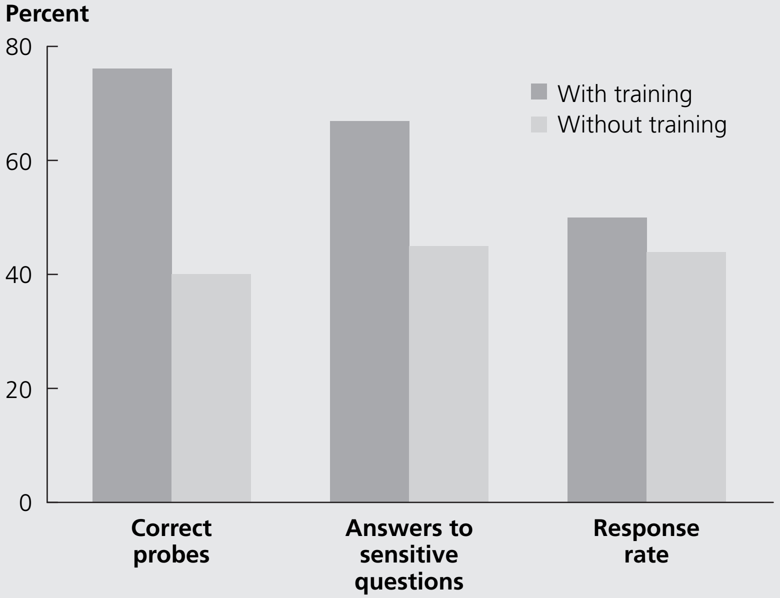
[17] Survey Research Center, University of Michigan (1951). *Field Methods in Sample Interview Surveys*. Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. As reported in Moser and Kalton 1971, 290.

[18] In this experiment, trained interviewers received extensive training while untrained interviewers received only elementary instructions. Furthermore, to control for other independent characteristics, all interviewers were female and had a minimum of experience.

[19] The complexity of the typical Investment Climate Survey precludes the use of simpler training techniques, such as on-the-job training, in which interviewers follow a more experienced interviewer to learn the techniques, or they learn the technique by reading dedicated material. Conversely, a formal training session of up to one week should be held and conducted by the survey manager.

Figure 5.5.
Effects of Interviewer Training on Quality and Quantity of Data



Source: Billiet and Loosveldt 1988.

Training, therefore, should be seen by the survey manager as more than just an opportunity to present the project and explain the questions, which can and should be covered in the survey manual. Rather the survey manager should approach training as a more complex endeavor in which he or she gauges the quality of enumerators and transmits enthusiasm for the project to all involved. "If the interviewer is interested in the study, enthusiastic about his work, and likes the respondent, these feelings will usually be communicated to the respondent with positive effects on the latter's participation" (Warwick and Lininger 1975, 189). It is important that the survey manager take the time to explain the purpose of the survey, the research aim, how the questions meet the goal, and the importance of the interviewer's role in achieving survey quality. Finally, an understanding of the psychological and behavioral motivations of the different actors—interviewers and respondents—should be the seasoned survey manager's starting point for training.

Practical Training Tips

Although high refusal rates might compromise the composition of the sample,[20] the typical training session dedicates little, if any, attention to behavioral rules and suggestions about how to handle initial contacts. As in many other surveys, the most common complaint from Investment Climate Survey interviewers is the difficulty of securing participation; however, few guidelines covering this important aspect of data accuracy are addressed during training. What follows is an attempt to describe a set of behavioral rules and social skills for training prospective interviewers.

Interviewer DOs and DON'Ts

Be prepared. Any interview requires a lot of preliminary preparation. You must study the survey materials and learn the questionnaire by heart. You must become familiar with the procedures and be ready to provide information and give answers. You must be organized (Morton-Williams 1991).[21]

Be likeable. Present yourself as a friendly but professional person. Before you can sell the survey, you must sell yourself. If appropriate, make friendly comments about things you see (that is, trophies, and so on). At all times you must be polite and respectful, especially if the respondent is rude. Never be patronizing (Morton-Williams 1991).

Be positive. Use positive verbs and expressions. Show you're happy to conduct the survey and highlight the positive aspects of the survey. People are naturally predisposed to dislike people who are negative (Cialdini 1985).

Be responsive to the specific situation you're facing. If the respondent is busy, annoyed, upset, or in bad mood, apologize and offer to come back on a different date. Give the information that is requested in a form that the respondent can understand (Morton-Williams 1991).

Be neutral. Show interest and appreciation for the respondent's answers, but do not volunteer any personal information and never share opinions with him or her.[22] Personal information might influence the respondent

[20] This phenomenon is particularly important in business surveys. Because there are not many large companies, the refusal of even a few might jeopardize the representativeness of the sample (Kincaid and Bright 1957).

[21] The psychological norm of consistency works against the unprepared interviewer. An untrained interviewer gives the impression that what he or she is doing is not important, and thus the respondent would not participate in an unimportant event.

who is trying to please the interviewer, might exacerbate the differences between interviewer and respondent, and might establish a personal rather than professional interview style. If the respondent asks personal questions, answer by stressing your professional characteristics and experiences. Furthermore, any feedback given to the respondent must not include any evaluation or judgment on the part of the interviewer. Even simple expressions of surprise, doubt, or disbelief amount to a leading question (Atkinson 1971; Dexter 1970; Fowler and Mangione 1990).

Do not lie. Answer questions truthfully while pointing out the positive aspects of the response.

Do not threaten the respondent. Keep a polite distance. Always ask if you can enter the room or if you can sit down. Don't mention legal obligations to participate (Morton-Williams 1991).

Do not rush. If the respondent is busy, be prepared to leave and come back at a more convenient time. Don't rush the respondent into participation until you are absolutely sure he or she is on board. Similarly, if you don't feel well, either physically or psychologically, or if you are stressed, postpone the interview. There is a good chance you will have a lower response rate if you press on with the interview (Morton-Williams 1991).

Do not ignore respondent's questions and expressions of reluctance. You must be observant and vigilant. You must be ready to answer any question or concern he or she might have and handle any expressions of reluctance appropriately (Atkinson 1971; Morton-Williams 1991). In the unlikely event in which he or she asks you a detailed technical question for which you don't have an answer, you should apologize and ensure the respondent that the supervisor will contact him or her to address the concern.

Securing Participation

Initial Contact

Timing and location. The interview should be set up at a time and location that is most convenient for the respondent. Generally, this is during

[22] Presser, Blair, and Triplett (1992) go on to say that not only the interviewer's beliefs but also the known opinion of the sponsoring agency might influence the undecided respondent.

regular office hours at the offices of the establishment being surveyed. The interviewer should assume that the respondent is not too busy to conduct the scheduled interview and should make arrangements to return at a more convenient time only if the respondent suggests it (Warwick and Lininger 1975). Similarly, if the interview goes too long and the respondent suggests to cut it short, the interviewer should set up the next meeting before he or she leaves or, if only few questions are left, should attempt to conclude the interview.

First impression. The interviewer's sociodemographic characteristics exert a lot of psychological influence on the respondent's first impression and on his or her decision to participate. Age, sex, appearance, religious belief, and class difference might affect the communication process during the interview or even the decision to take part in the study. These sociocultural factors must be taken into account in the preparation of survey interviews. The interviewer's actual appearance is the most immediate clue of his or her background. The interviewer should dress in a simple and inconspicuous manner, reflecting the characteristics of the respondent and of the environment in which the interview takes place. The interviewer should avoid displaying aspects of personal appearance that might evoke strong reactions from the respondent and should also avoid wearing particular clothing or accessories that associate him or her to a particular social group or cause (Warwick and Lininger 1975).

Establish and maintain interaction. There is no one single right way to introduce a survey. Each interviewer should develop and practice his or her own introductory statement until it comes naturally in accordance with the following general rules:

- *Opening remarks*. The interviewer should appear relaxed and confident.[23] The interviewer should introduce himself or herself by name, explain why he or she is there, and identify the organization he or she represents. The interviewer should wear an official identification card and display his or her credentials to avoid raising suspicions about the study (Warwick and Lininger 1975). Some

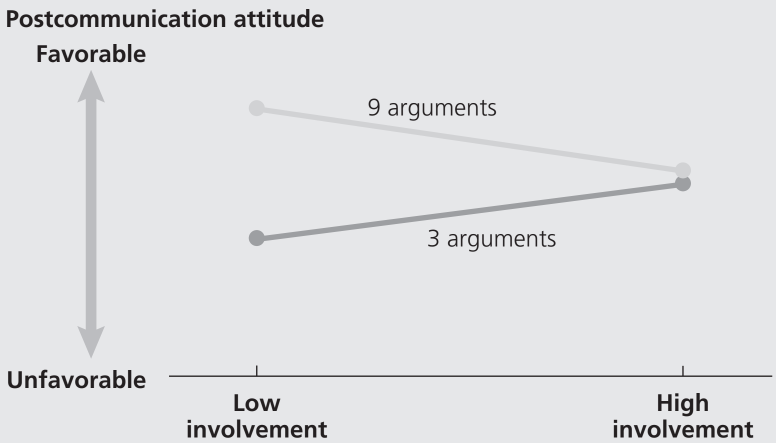
[23] This implies that the interviewer needs to prepare and practice the introductory statement ahead of time; he or she must always keep eye contact, organize the papers and documents in advance, and speak clearly and at a normal speed. At the same time, the interviewer must observe what is happening in the surroundings, what is the reaction and the mood of the respondent. Basically he or she needs to start "tailoring" (Morton-Williams 1991).

practitioners suggest adding, when the circumstance warrants it, positive comments about things seen in the office, thus appealing to the norm of liking (Dexter 1970; Morton-Williams 1991).

- *Explaining the study*. Soon after the introductory remarks end, the interviewer should explain the purpose of the study. Interviewers should not assume that the respondent is aware of the survey even if an advance letter has been sent. At this stage, it is very important to dispel any misconceptions. The respondent might misinterpret the reason for the visit and assume that it is related to business activity. If he or she agrees to the survey under this misconception, the interviewer should not be surprised to find the respondent justifiably annoyed when he or she realizes the true purpose of the visit (Atkinson 1971).

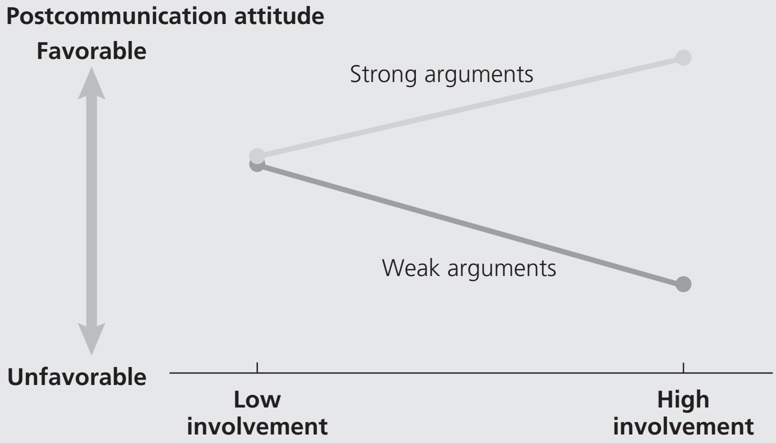
Three factors have been proven to affect persuasion: the quantity of the arguments presented, the quality of the arguments, and the relevance of the topic to the respondent. Research on attitude change shows that the number of arguments (quantity) presented has an impact on respondent attitudes only if saliency is low (figure 5.6). Conversely, the quality of the arguments has a positive impact on respondents only if personal involvement is high (figure 5.7) When respondents show high involvement, argument

Figure 5.6.
Effects of Quantity of Arguments on Persuasion



Source: Petty and Cacioppo 1984.

Figure 5.7.
Effects of Quality of Arguments on Persuasion



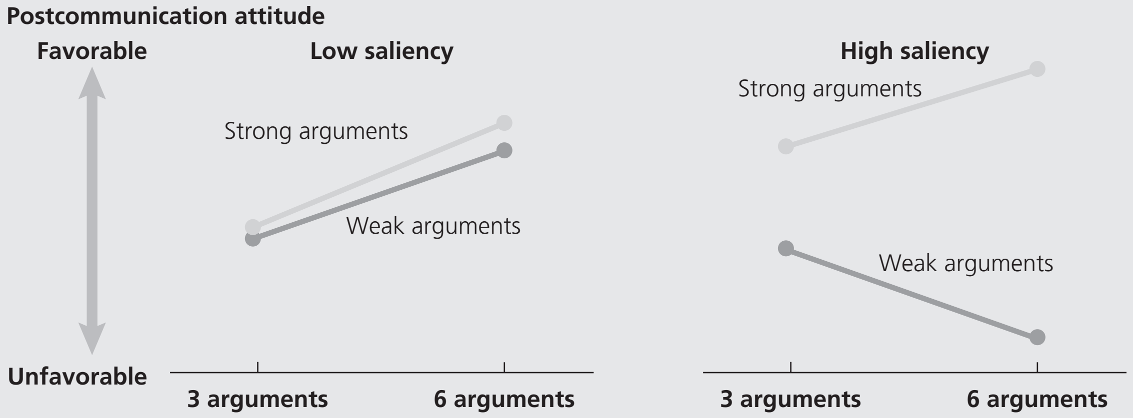
Source: Petty and Cacioppo 1984.

quality has a much stronger effect on persuasion, while weak arguments might be counterproductive. At the same time, when saliency is low, the quantity of the arguments appears to be effective, while their quality has no significant persuasive effect (figure 5.8) (Petty and Cacioppo 1984).

These few minutes of introduction will determine the climate of the entire interview. Hence, this time is extremely important and it must be used to pique the respondent's interest and eliminate any doubt in his or her mind. Three main points should be highlighted in the interviewer's speech: (1) the purpose of the interview and the sponsoring agencies; (2) the practical benefits of participation for the individual respondent; and (3) the confidentiality of the information collected.[24] It is definitely useful to show some results from similar surveys in other countries, ideally in a short brochure, and to show clippings from local newspapers. While being careful not to reveal more details than needed, interviewers should be prepared to modify their introduction to fit the unfolding interaction with the respondent. It is a good idea to be

[24] Some practitioners suggest to add, and show, a confidentiality statement on the back of the ID cards. (Atkinson 1971).

Figure 5.8.
Effects of Quantity and Quality of Arguments on Persuasion



Source: Petty and Cacioppo 1984.

ready to provide additional information about the sample composition, how the particular respondent has been selected, and the analysis of the data collected. None of these topics, however, should be discussed at length until the interviewer detects which argument the respondent is most sensitive to. Hopefully, after this brief introduction, the respondent will begin to engage, so that the interviewer can determine where the respondent stands. Throughout the interaction, the interviewer should not use the words study, research, or paper. These terms reduce the sense of usefulness of the interview in the eye of the respondent. Typically, entrepreneurs are not interested in research; they value practical analysis.

Tailoring. Following the introductory statement, successful interviewers adapt their approach to the respondent's verbal and physical behavior. Each respondent's reaction should dictate the interviewer's choice of subsequent statements and strategies. Successful tailoring requires the interviewer (1) to have a variety of cues, phrases, and descriptors at his or her disposal to use in any situation; (2) to be able to interpret the respondent's words and behavior; and (3) to apply the appropriate techniques in response. However, for the interviewer to successfully apply tailoring, he or she needs to keep the conversation going without abrupt interruptions or untimely requests for participation. Thus, "maintaining interaction is the means to achieve maximum benefits from tailoring, for the longer the conversation is in progress, the more cues the interviewer will be able to obtain" (Groves and Couper 1996, 68).

Dealing with Reluctance

There are three strategies that can be employed to preempt expression of reluctance to survey participation: (1) understanding the respondent's psychology and tailoring the interviewer's reaction to it; (2) highlighting the practical aspects and the benefits of participating in the survey; and (3) reassuring the respondent and acting in a nonthreatening manner. Reluctance can occur at any point of the initial contact and can be manifested not only verbally but also with specific behaviors (for example, breaking eye contact, looking over your shoulders, looking away, looking at a watch, going through documents, and so on). The successful interviewer needs to adapt and adjust his or her own strategy to the unfolding situation. Thus, he or she needs to be able to interpret what is happening and select the appropriate response. The first prerequisite of a good interviewer is to have considerable and accurate perception skills. According to Morton-Williams (1991), interviewers must be able to accomplish the following:

- Watch for signs of suspicion, fear, or reluctance;
- Observe cues;
- Listen to what the respondent says and how he or she talks;
- Tailor his or her approach to the unfolding situation;
- Address expressions of reluctance directly; and
- Be ready to change strategy.

Gauging Respondent's Psychology

As in any social interaction, the psychology of the people involved plays a critical role. Understanding and using the following basic psychological rules of compliance is a key to a successful interview:

- *Consistency norm*. If the interviewer is able to identify any of the respondent's commitments, which can be related to the survey objectives or sponsors, he or she can leverage this psychological norm to gain cooperation. For instance, if the respondent hints that he or she is involved in initiatives or associations aimed at improving the business environment, the delivery of public services, and so on, then the survey can be presented as a means to achieve this goal. The key is to determine the respondent's commitments. Once this is established, the experienced interviewer can link the respondent's commitment to the objective of the survey for the purpose of securing participation.

- *Social proof*. If the respondent asks, "Who else is involved?" this indicates that he or she is sensitive to social validation. If other people are participating, he or she will be more likely to participate as well. In this situation, the interviewer must be ready to provide information on the sample distribution as well as to explain how the size of the sample will give more weight to the results and the policy implications resulting from the survey. Two characteristics of this norm play a key role. First, this norm is triggered by uncertainty. Second, this norm can be best exploited by appealing to people similar to the respondents (Cialdini 1985). Successful interviewers need to appreciate and be ready to exploit this psychological norm.
- *Scarcity*. Because people value more opportunities when they are less available, the interviewer can appeal to this norm with such expressions as "Only a select number of entrepreneurs will take part in this survey" or "Only few days are left to complete the survey." The interviewer should emphasize not only the unique opportunity offered to the respondent to complete the survey and to have his or her opinion count and heard (Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992) but also the opportunity to use the sponsors of the survey as the vehicle through which his or her opinions and concerns will inform policy creation. Two factors can be employed to enhance this feeling. First, experiments show that the value of a scarce item is even greater if it is first made available and then becomes more scarce. Second, competition with others toward a scarce item makes it even more valuable (Cialdini 1985).
- *Authority*. If the respondent asks, "Who is behind this?" he or she is sensitive to the authority norm. The interviewer should honestly answer who is sponsoring the study.[25] Generally, the sponsoring institutions are mentioned in the letter of invitation and the interviewer should highlight those that most likely will foster higher participation from the individual respondent. It is not necessary to mention the funding arrangements or all agencies and institutions

[25] Note that identifying the appropriate psychological norm at play is not always easy. If the respondent asks, "Who is behind this?" or "Who *else* is behind this?" a different norm might be at play (authority and social proof, respectively).

involved in the study (Warwick and Lininger 1975). Appearance has also proven to play a role within this norm. Interviewers wearing their official dress (that is, Government Statistical Office staff) will elicit a sense of authority. Similarly, titles are perceived as symbols of authority and, if and when appropriate, should be mentioned to elicit participation (Cialdini 1985).

- *Liking*. Different factors have been associated with this norm: similarities in interests, background, or even dress increase the likelihood of compliance. Because everyone likes people who praise them, being complimentary can affect liking. Praise should not be detailed but rather simple and general and should always be honest, because respondents who feel manipulated will react negatively. Finally, familiarity produced by pleasurable contacts and cooperation toward a common goal are powerful causes of liking (Cialdini 1985).

Handling Practical Problems[26]

It is always possible that respondents will come up with a number of excuses and reasons to avoid participation. The interviewer should be aware of these excuses and have strategies in place to deal with them. The respondent's reply to a request for an interview could be as follows:

- "*I am too busy.*" "*I don't have time for this.*" In this case, if the respondent has a few minutes available, it might be a good idea to present the objectives of the study and engage the respondent. Before leaving, it is also advisable to leave a letter[27] explaining the study and schedule the next appointment. A second visit emphasizes the importance of the interview. If the respondent is making excuses to avoid the interview, it is possible that he or she is not interested. In this case, an alternate strategy to arouse the respondent's interest must be employed (Warwick and Lininger 1975).

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[26] In what follows, we make more specific reference to the Investment Climate Surveys.

[27] This letter is different from the advance letter sent by mail, whose goal was to arouse the respondent's interest to persuade him or her to voluntarily participate in the survey. This cover letter, instead, should be an expanded version of the introductory letter sent to respondents ahead of the beginning of the fieldwork. It should be concise and include the following elements: (1) purpose of data collection and how survey results are likely to be of benefit to the respondent, (2) assurance of confidentiality of data collected, (3) identification of institutions and agencies involved in the data collection, (4) identification of who is responsible for the survey and who is carrying it out, and (5) the names and contacts of the survey director and other officers from the sponsoring agencies.

- "*I am not interested.*" In this situation, the interviewer should maintain his or her composure and try to identify the exact reason for the rejection. If the respondent does not have any specific objection, it might be possible to convince him or her to participate by asking about a specific problem he or she is facing at work and changing his or her stance by employing the consistency norm. If the respondent has a specific objection, such as confidentiality, the interviewer should be ready and able to address the specific concern and proceed with the interview. Avoid general debates about the study (Warwick and Lininger 1975). If this strategy fails, however, and the interviewer realizes that the respondent is genuinely not interested, it is best to avoid pursuing an interview. Experiments have shown that respondents not interested in the survey, but later recruited, provide less accurate answers (Couper 1997).
- "*Do I have to do this?*" Here, as always, honesty is required. The interviewer should mention that the respondent is under no legal obligation to participate. However, he or she should stress that the respondent's participation, because of a random selection process, is important in reaching the goal of the study. The interviewer should stress the potential benefits of participation and the weight of the sponsoring institutions (Warwick and Lininger 1975). The interviewer should stress that this is a chance for the respondent to have his or her say, to make a contribution (Morton-Williams 1991), and to speak for himself or herself as well as for other entrepreneurs.
- "*How long is it going to take?*" The interviewer should stress that the actual length of the interview depends a lot on the respondent. If he or she is interested in a given topic, and is spending more time on it than other respondents, then the interview could take longer. The interviewer must honestly provide an approximate amount of time based on the estimation during the pilot.
- "*What benefit do I get?*" This is probably the most frequent objection and the interviewer should be well prepared to address it methodically. While it is unethical to promise specific benefits (such as a financial benefit) stemming from any survey, the interviewer should be ready to indicate the practical usefulness of the survey to identify problems faced by the business community and to help the government address these problems to improve the investment climate.

- "*What is this survey about?*" "*What is it for?*" First, the interviewer should reassure the respondent ("I will be happy to present you with the details"). Then the interviewer should apologize if the respondent did not receive the advance letter, should provide the respondent with a copy of the letter, and should relay the introductory statement.
- "*Why does it have to be me?*" "*I don't know enough about this.*" If this response is given, the interviewer needs to put the respondent at ease. The interviewer needs to be reassuring by stressing that everyone's view is important, not only the views of the well-informed, and that no one else can replace him or her in the study (Morton-Williams 1991). The interviewer should also stress the relative weight of his or her opinion within the sample composition.
- "*Can you come another time?*" The interviewer should apologize for the bad timing and show his or her willingness to come at a more convenient time. The interviewer should schedule a new appointment before leaving. If the respondent is available after a short period of time, the interviewer might consider waiting for his or her return instead of rescheduling a new appointment.
- "*This is a very sensitive question.*" The interviewer should stress the confidentiality statement and should be prepared to present in more detail the steps taken to ensure it. The interviewer should stress the anonymity of the form, that is, show that no names appear on the form and that no questions on names, addresses, or clients are included in the questionnaire. The interviewer can confidently add that no firm has ever been identified in an Investment Climate Survey. Finally, the interviewer can add that the respondent is not expected to answer all questions.
- "*What kind of questions are you going to ask?*" With this observation, the respondent shows a sense of fear for the role he or she is supposed to play. The interviewer should put him or her at ease by providing examples of questions he or she will be asked. This could be a good opportunity to begin the interview.[28]
- "*I have done it before without any benefit.*" Handling situations in which the respondent questions the value of the survey is among the most difficult tasks for the interviewer. Here, rather than stress the good things about the survey, it is preferable to stress its new and practical aspects. Very likely the respondent

[28] Recall that the interview should start with easy questions (see chapter 3).

associates a survey to some previous negative experience. So the best strategy would be to point out what makes this survey different from the ones before. Stress the new technique employed (such as productivity analysis) and show the practical impact (newspaper articles, clippings from other countries). Make sure not to promise things the survey cannot deliver.

Similarly, the interviewer can be faced with the following situational circumstances:

- *Respondent is away*. It is feasible for the manager to miss the appointment because of force majeure. In this case, the interviewer should give a minimal explanation about the survey and schedule a new appointment in the next few days. It is recommended not to give extensive explanations or to attempt to convince people to participate other than the selected respondent. Secondhand explanations of the purpose of the survey are generally not effective in eliciting participation. Unfortunately, sometimes the manager's absence is an indication that he or she is avoiding participation. In this case, the interviewer should attempt to win the support of other senior staff (Atkinson 1971).
- *Respondent is unresponsive*. This is an attempt by the respondent to undermine the interviewer's role as a petitioner for an interview. In this situation, the interviewer might feel the need to fill the silence with additional information or, worse, with a request for interview (Morton-Williams 1991). The best strategy is to engage the respondent by asking him or her direct and obvious questions related to the purpose of the study (such as "What is the biggest problem you are facing right now?").[29]
- *Respondent is hyperresponsive*. When interviewing elites, it is quite possible that the respondent will subject the interviewer to a continuous series of questions to determine his or her level of competence and commitment. In more extreme cases, the respondent might attempt to undermine the interviewer's confidence (for example, making negative comments on the survey, being aggressive). In these circumstances, the best strategy is for the interviewer to respond positively, smile, and point out the unique features of the survey, keeping in mind that the respondent is just testing his or her

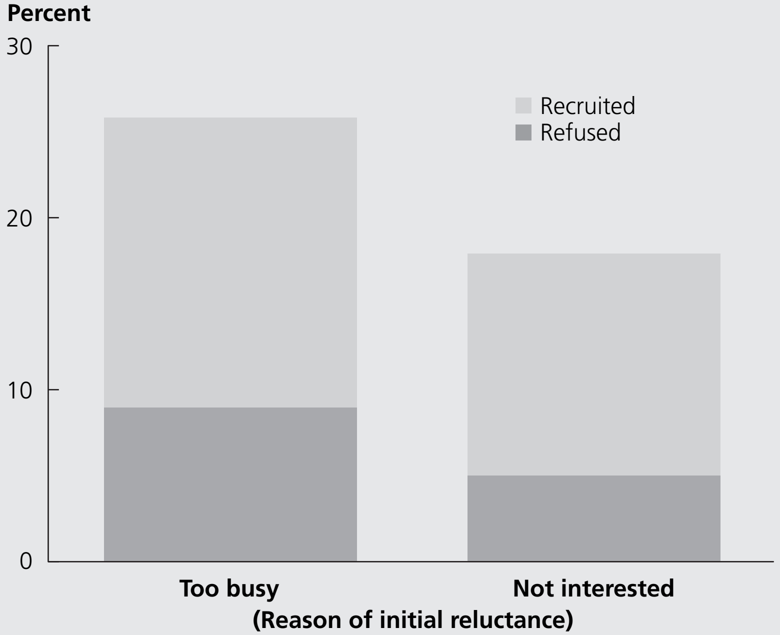
[29] As mentioned earlier, the greatest interviewer's asset is his or her ability to tailor. Thus, if unresponsiveness is an expression of reluctance because of the current mood, the best strategy is to apologize for the bad timing and come back at a later date.

abilities. The interviewer should provide answers to the respondent's questions, remembering that the study is backed by the sponsoring agencies. Nobody expects the interviewer to be an expert on every topic. If a question is technical, the interviewer should assure the respondent that he or she will be contacted by the central office with an answer. Paying particular attention during training will help the interviewer handle these situations (Zuckerman 1972).

- *Refusal.* In any survey, there are always respondents who wish not to be interviewed. Assessing when this is the case requires considerable judgment on the part of the interviewer. Sometimes the refusal is a veiled request for additional assurances. In other cases, it indicates a real desire not to be interviewed. In the latter circumstance, the respondent's wish must be respected and the interviewer must politely leave without any debate. This will also facilitate a second attempt by more senior staff (Warwick and Lininger 1975). Interviewers should remember that (1) the majority of respondents will be happy to participate, (2) some respondents will be a bit reluctant, (3) a few respondents will need more convincing, and (4) a tiny proportion of respondents will always refuse no matter what (Morton-Williams 1991). Evidence shows that expressions of reluctance can be overcome (figure 5.9). Interviewers should realize that they cannot reach a 100 percent success rate. Even the best interviewers receive refusals. If the interviewer has a bad day, he or she should (1) take a day off, (2) think of the pleasant interviews he or she has conducted, (3) talk to a supervisor, and (4) remember that he or she is not alone in this endeavor (Morton-Williams 1991).
- *Tandem interviewing.* It is a good practice to have two interviewers conduct the interview. This has the advantage of smoothing the interview process—with one interviewer asking questions and the other recording the answers—thus avoiding interruptions in the conversation, increasing the accuracy of the data collected, and saving the respondent's time. Conversely, the practice of having an additional respondent present during the interview should be avoided. Although it might appear that the presence of a second respondent is a source of supplementary information, in practice, this works to the detriment of the interview. According to Kincaid and Bright,

> For one thing, where the difference in ranks [is] considerable, either there [is] complete silence on the part of the subordi-

Figure 5.9.
Active Participation Rate of Initially Reluctant Respondents



Source: Couper 1997.

> nate or the superior waste[s] time asking the subordinate views on matters about which [he has] expressed himself. [. . .] In cases where the rank of the two respondents [is] about equal, time [is] wasted by the respondent's tendency to end a statement by seeking confirmation from each other. (1957, 310)

Nevertheless, if the interviewer cannot avoid having a second respondent present, he or she should be aware that the presence of a third party will have a different impact on data quality depending on the type of question asked. When asking factual questions, the presence of a third party is less of a problem and occasionally could be beneficial. However, when opinion and knowledge questions are asked, the presence of additional respondents makes the interview more complex because it becomes more difficult to avoid having the additional respondent help or educate the selected respondent. In these circumstances, the presence of a third party should be handled carefully. The interviewer should record only the replies of the respondent and preempt interruptions by tactfully asking the other person to hold his or her views for the moment while expressing that he or she is interested in hearing them after the interview. It is essential in this situation to assign a specific role to the third party, otherwise he or she might adopt one that will disrupt the interview (Atkinson 1971).

- *Exaggeration.* Occasionally it is possible that the respondent might want to impress the interviewer with a false image of himself or herself. In these cases, the interviewer should clearly indicate to the respondent that he or she is not impressed by such exaggeration. The interviewer should express that anything the respondent says is fine with him or her as long as it is the respondent's honest opinion (Atkinson 1971).
- *Untrue response.* If the interviewer feels that the respondent is not answering truthfully, he or she should ask the question again using a preamble such as "Sorry, let me check, I am not sure whether I made clear what we are asking here." The tone used should give the sense that the question asked is not of any special significance and that the respondent can modify his or her answers (Atkinson 1971).
- *Masked willingness to cooperate.* If the interviewer senses from the facetiousness of the respondent's answers that the respondent is not really interested in participating, the interviewer should stress the seriousness of the task and emphasize that he or she is interested only in meaningful answers. The respondent should take his or her role seriously. However, if the respondent does not take the role seriously, the interviewer should attempt to find out why the respondent is not interested and use all his or her skills to change the respondent's mind. If everything fails, the interviewer should not continue the interview (Atkinson 1971).

  A related, but less problematic issue, is the amount of interruptions considered acceptable (for example, phone calls received during the interview). In these circumstances, the interviewer should convey to the respondent that his or her undivided attention is needed and, if the respondent cannot completely avoid interruptions, he or she should tactfully attempt to reduce them to a minimum.
- *Handing out the questionnaire.* Occasionally, respondents ask to read the questions directly on a blank form during the interview. This request, although apparently simple and harmless, should be

resisted. By directly reading the questionnaire, the respondent might be influenced by the presence and order of alternatives. He or she might "educate" himself or herself on the flow of answers and carefully select specific answers to avoid having to answer additional questions (Atkinson 1971). If the respondent insists on having a blank copy of the form, it is preferable to give him or her a copy of the form with only the questions (without any skipping pattern or set of alternatives).

Conducting the Interview

Interview Style

The interviewer's job is not only to communicate the questions to the respondent but also to convey the framework in which he or she formulates the answers. At the beginning of any interview, the respondent is not sure what role he or she is supposed to play. The respondent is not clear if he or she has to play a task-oriented role in which he or she is required to respond adequately and accurately, or a conversational role in which he or she tries to relate to the interviewer by conforming to the interviewer's apparent opinions or by attempting to make a good impression on the interviewer. During the brief social interaction of an interview, the style employed by the interviewer has an impact on how the respondent perceives his or her role and, consequently, this has an impact on the accuracy of the data collected.

With a formal style, the interviewer clarifies that the respondent's role is to provide accurate information without engaging in irrelevant conversation with the interviewer. With a socioemotional style, the respondent is given the impression that he or she is not called upon to provide accurate information because any answer is warmly received. This style allows the interviewer more freedom in conducting the interview but also brings a greater risk for data quality. The interviewer can, voluntarily or involuntarily, (1) communicate opinions to the respondent, (2) assume the respondent has particular opinions and thus pose the question directively, and (3) infer the respondent's answer from previous information. Thus, socioemotional style carries a higher response effect, particularly when the topic is not salient, the question is sensitive, and the set of response alternatives might generate a sense of acquiescence. Respondent's education also appears to be related to the quality of reporting. A personal style seems to be more appropriate for respondents with little education, while an impersonal approach results in more accurate data among respondents with higher education. Accordingly, in business surveys, it is advisable to follow a formal style throughout the interview even if the respondent is more oriented toward a socioemotional style (Dexter 1970; Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1987; Martin 1984; Morton-Williams 1991).

We must recognize that the interviewer is called on to perform two distinct roles in his or her interaction with the respondent. The interviewer needs to be a neutral communicator but also a persuader. Unless the interviewer can convince the respondent to participate, there will be no opportunity to act as a neutral communicator. Therefore, during the introductory stage, when the interviewer needs to secure participation, it might be preferable to adopt a more relaxed, more social approach in which the interviewer relates to the prospective respondent's concerns and mood. It is important, however, that the interviewer appropriately communicate the change in style before the interview begins.[30] This is necessary because it is not clear whether the respondent can make this distinction himself or herself (Martin 1984).

Respondent's Role

After the introductory phase is finished and before the questioning begins, it is important to communicate to the respondent how to perform his or her role as information provider and explain the setting in which he or she will be asked to provide information. Martin (1984) identifies five different ways in which the respondent sees an interview: (1) as an intimate conversation, (2) as a citizen referendum, (3) as a form-filling exercise, (4) as a test, or (5) as a subterfuge. It is feasible to assume that each of these possible interpretations might influence the respondent's answers to some if not all of the questions. For example, a manager might personally be against corruption but have to practice it to run his or her business. It is therefore important to ensure that the respondent understands the point of view he or she needs to assume when answering the questions.

Asking the Questions

There is a lot of debate in the literature about which interviewing method provides the most accurate answers: standardized or flexible. With

[30] This can be easily accomplished by providing the respondent with a set of directions about how to perform his or her role.

the former, the interviewer is required to read each question exactly as it is written and leave any interpretation to the respondent. Supporters of the flexible approach argue that the standardized method undermines the validity of the answers because each respondent might have a different interpretation of the same question. Therefore, they argue, interviewers should engage the respondent with a conversational style in which they are free to use their own words to convey the same meaning of the question to each respondent. The debate on standardization is fuelled by the fact that, no matter how much people try, it is impossible to design questions that are always clear and have the same meaning for all respondents. Although a number of steps can and should be taken to reduce this risk to a minimum, it is always possible that somewhere in the questionnaire some respondent might not clearly understand a question, a concept, or a definition. When this happens, no matter what the interviewer does or does not do, there is going to be some degree of measurement error (Fowler and Mangione 1990).

The debate between standardized and flexible interviewing technique thus transforms into a debate between which measurement error—respondent or interviewer—is smaller. Obviously, the existence of such a debate demonstrates that there is no conclusive evidence on which approach is superior. There is plenty of empirical evidence showing that even a single word in a question can significantly change the pattern of answers. However, it is not possible to conclude that the validity of the data is always improved by standardization, when the respondent is unsure of the true meaning of the question he or she is answering.[31] When the respondent is so confused that he or she requests a clarification, it is reasonable to assume that a well-trained interviewer will be the best tool to reduce measurement errors.

These opposing theories have merits and the best solution is somewhere in the middle. As a general rule, the interviewer should ask the question in a natural tone exactly as it is written in the questionnaire, including all alternatives.[32] In exceptional circumstances, when the respondent cannot understand the question even after it has been read a second time, and only if the respondent asks for an explanation, the interviewer should be

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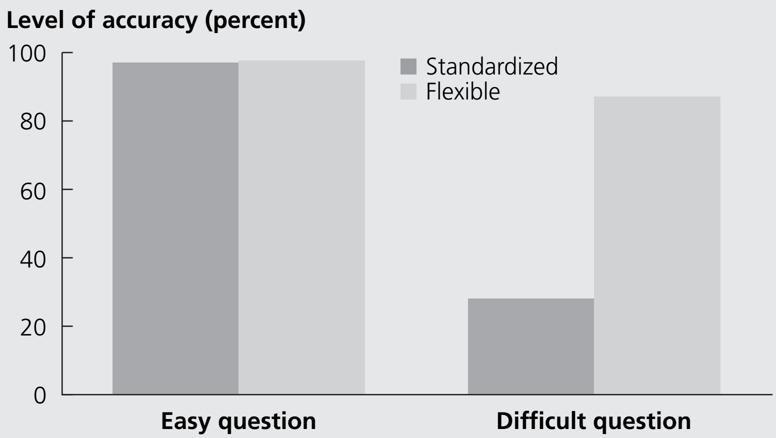
[31] We would not be measuring the phenomenon we wish to measure, but rather the phenomenon the respondent *thinks* we want to measure. In this circumstance, the best solution would be a nonresponse. However, even this is hard to enforce given the respondent's propensity to provide any answer.

[32] To phrase the question conversationally, it is important for the interviewer to learn and even memorize part of the questionnaire (Atkinson 1971).

given greater freedom to ask the question using different words, as long as the meaning of the question remains the same and the explanation is provided nondirectively.[33] This mixed approach improves the quality of the data collected. In an experiment conducted by Schober and Conrad (1997), the authors show that the response accuracy was close with both methodologies, standardized and flexible, if the questions were easy to understand. However, the flexible approach proved much better in the event of a complex question (figure 5.10). This approach works only if two conditions are met: first, the questionnaire is properly designed for a standardized interview; and, second, the interviewers receive a comprehensive and detailed training.

The main reasons pulling an interviewer away from standardization are related to questionnaire design. If the question is hard to read, if the concept of the question is hard to grasp, or if the style of the question is not conversational, the interviewer will attempt to phrase the question using his or her own words to facilitate the respondent's job (Fowler and Mangione 1990). Interviewers move away from standardization because

Figure 5.10.
Response Accuracy with Standardized and Flexible Interviewing Styles



Source: Schober and Conrad 1997.

[33] See the next point on how to conduct probing.

of their genuine desire to make it easier for the respondent to answer the questions and, as a result, to get more accurate information. Similarly, given that even the most experienced interviewers often are unaware of the risks of this deviation, an appropriate training session in standardized interviewing is equally necessary. By showing the effects of question rewording on data accuracy, this session will emphasize that—when respondents provide inadequate replies—interviewers should not act directively and should not add unrelated information to the question asked. The training session should demonstrate that doing so could compromise the accuracy of the answers.

Probing

One important aspect of the interview process is how to behave when the respondent provides an inadequate answer, that is, an answer that is partial, irrelevant, inaccurate, or nonresponsive. Probing is the action of asking the respondent to provide clarifications or additional information. Understanding how to probe is among the most difficult of the interviewer's tasks for two reasons. First, it is difficult because it must be performed in a nondirective way. During an interview, it is possible for the interviewer to inadvertently rephrase a question in a way that might lead or educate the respondent.[34] Second, it is difficult because it is not always obvious when the respondent's answer requires a probe. Interviewers must be careful not to overprobe because this might annoy the respondent or make him or her feel obliged to provide an answer at any price. Conversely, bias can be introduced by failing to probe. This is more likely to occur with open-ended questions and "don't know" answers. Open-ended questions are hard to probe because the interviewer needs to assess whether the question has been answered and whether the answer is complete and accurate. Similarly, a "don't know" answer can simultaneously be a legitimate answer and a temporary response, giving the respondent more time to think about the real answer. It can even be a sign that the respondent is unsure whether the answer is what the interviewer expects (Fowler and Mangione 1990).

Although there are no rules about how much probing is appropriate and decisions are left to the interviewer's discretion, few practitioners

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[34] "A directive probe is one that increases the likelihood of one answer over others. [. . .] any probe that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' is directive. In addition, any probe that lists or mentions some possible answers, but excludes others, is also directive because it increases the likelihood that the mentioned answers will be chosen" (Fowler and Mangione 1990, 40).

recognize that not all questions should be probed similarly. Atkinson (1971) identifies two styles of probing that correspond to two types of questions: factual questions and opinion or knowledge questions. In both cases, when the respondent does not understand the question on first reading, the question must be read a second time exactly as it is stated. After this second attempt, if the question is still not understood or the answer is incomplete, the interviewer is allowed greater freedom in probing factual events. The interviewer can rephrase the question using his or her own words within the terms of reference of the instructions provided during the training and in the survey materials. The interviewer can also use open nondirective expressions, as well as the "zeroing in" technique[35] to elicit more precise answers. Finally, if an accurate figure is not available, the interviewer can settle for the best estimate the respondent can provide.

On the other hand, after the second reading of an opinion or knowledge question, a more rigid probing style must be followed because, in this circumstance, it is much easier for the interviewer to lead or educate the respondent by slightly changing the wording of the question. In these circumstances, the interviewer should encourage additional information from the respondent only by using neutral expressions, such as "Can you tell me more about that?" "Can you explain a bit more what you mean with (. . .)?" "Which of these would be the closest to describe the way you feel?" or "Are there other (explanations/methods/cases)?" It is not a good idea to summarize the respondent's answer nor to wait in silence for more information. The first approach might generate bias because of the different ways that interviewers summarize, while the second approach could be misinterpreted by the respondent (figure 5.11) (Moser and Kalton 1971).

Prompting

Prompting means suggesting various answers[36] so that the meaning of the question is precisely defined and the respondent can easily provide his or her answer. Prompting is particularly useful when the question has a wide range of meanings and the researcher does not wish to use

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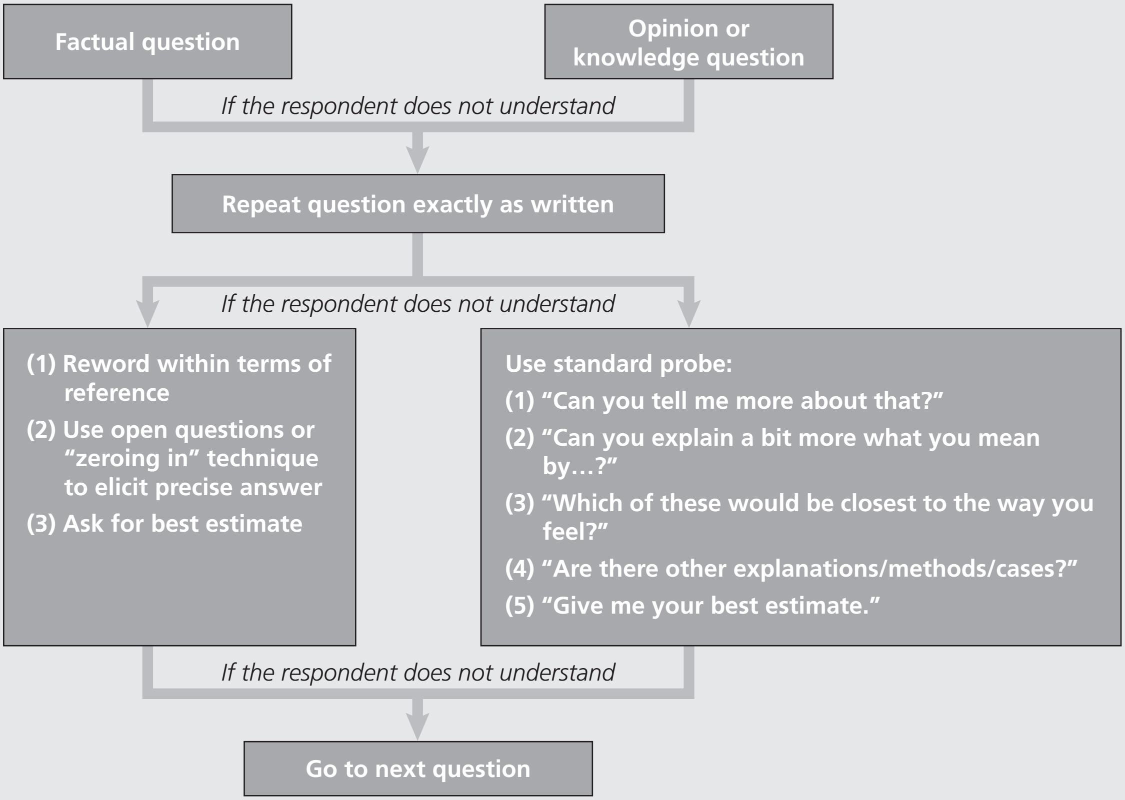
[35] With this method, after the respondent provides a general idea of where the answer lies, the interviewer follows up with a nondirective question to further narrow the range of his answer (Fowler and Mangione 1990).

[36] This is the case of a question with a list of precoded answers among which the respondent has to choose one (running prompt) or provide a reply for each item (individual prompt) (Atkinson 1971).

Figure 5.11.
Probing Styles



Source: Based on Atkinson 1971.

an open-ended question or when answering requires a high degree of effort on the part of the respondent. Because prompting basically amounts to suggesting answers, it should be used only when asked for in the survey form (Atkinson 1971).

Providing Instruction and Feedback

Instructions are added into the survey form to help the respondent perform the task accurately. They must be short and clear, and must be read by the interviewer before the question is asked. Instructions ask respondents to think carefully before answering, to take their time before providing an answer, or remind them that accurate and complete answers are needed.[37] Feedback is used to let the respondent know how well he or she is performing his or her job. Feedback must be nondirective and can include such expressions as "Thank you for your frankness," "We are interested in details like this," or "You answered quickly. Sometimes it is easy to forget all the details. Can you think again about it one more time?" (Kalton and Schuman 1982).

Ending the Interview

When the interview is completed, the interviewer should always thank the respondent for his or her participation. Before leaving, the interviewer should make sure that he or she has answered all of the respondent's questions. The interviewer should obtain permission to contact the respondent again to verify items if omissions or inconsistencies are discovered and require clarification (Atkinson 1971).

[37] If the form is self-administered, instructions must be highlighted in bold. Respondents, in fact, tend not to read instructions, or they refer to them only when they think they need help (Gower 1993).