# Improving On-going Projects Through Methodological Research

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#### Introduction

- Identifying Relevant Methodological Questions.
- Working With Clients.
- Implementing Research and Results.
- Examples:
  - Telephone Study Advance Letter
  - Mail Study Personalized Cover Letter

## Why Do Methodological Research?

- Each study is different...
- Factors interact...
- Times change...
- Test assumptions...
  - About cost
  - About quality
  - About efficacy

### Why On-Going Projects?

- On-going projects are particularly good for inhouse methodological research:
  - Investment yields clear return
  - Engages staff at all levels in improvement activities
  - Provides multiple experimental design possibilities
  - Clients have greater incentive to agree

### Identifying Relevant Methodological Questions

- Will it improve survey quality?
- Will it reduce survey cost?
- Is it feasible?

#### **Working With Clients**

- Clients may be reluctant to experiment:
  - Fear of quality loss...
  - Fear of increasing expense...
  - Fear of reprisal...
  - Fear of success...

- Clients may be convinced if:
  - Experiment doesn't negatively impact cost or data quality...
  - Experimental condition may increase data quality or decrease cost...
  - Client helps design experiment...

#### **Implementation**

- Be sure to document and share new procedures with staff.
- Collaborate with colleagues two heads are better than one!
- Write up and share results!

### **Example #1: RDD Advance Letter**

- The Effect of an Advance Letter on Completion Rates for the Wisconsin Family Health Survey.
  - Continuous since 1989 (UWSC since 1999)
  - RDD of Wisconsin households
  - 1200 completes per year
  - Quarterly sample
  - Health status, health problems, health insurance, and access to health care
  - Interview most knowledgeable respondent

#### **Advance Letter Procedure**

- Sample randomly divided into two groups.
- Reverse directory search was performed on the entire sample.
- Advance letters sent to experimental group if an address was found.
- Variables of interest:
  - Completion Rate
  - Refusal Rate
  - Average Calls to Complete

#### **Advance Letter Results**

	Experimental	Control
Completion Rate	17.5%	17.9%
Refusal Rate	7.9%	9.3%
Calls To Complete	4.7	5.3

## **Example #2: Personalized Cover Letter**

- The Effect of Personalizing a Mail Survey Cover Letter.
  - UW System Computing Survey
  - Annual since 1998 (UWSC since 2000)
  - Mail survey of currently enrolled UW Students
  - 7000 students randomly selected
  - Technology use, satisfaction and need
  - 3 Waves, postcard reminder, email advance

## Personalized Cover Letter Procedure

- Sample randomly divided into two groups
- Control group received standard impersonal cover letter
- Experimental group received personalized cover letter
- Variables of interest:
  - Completion Rate
  - Response Time

#### **Personalized Cover Letter Results**

	Experimental	Control
Completion Rate*	60.9%	58.7%
Return Time	25 Days	32 Days

## Thank You!

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