COMPUTER ASSISTED PERSONAL INTERVIEWING (CAPI) AND DATA COLLECTION ISSUES

Bill Connett, Discussant, Survey Research Center, University of Michigan
SRC, University of Michigan, 426 Thompson, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248

I am very pleased to be a discussant for this session on Computer Assisted Personal Computing (CAPI) and Data Collection Issues. I am particularly pleased because the papers that have been presented are of exceptional quality and import to this field of study.

Baker, Bradburn and Johnson

This is perhaps the finest study that has ever been done on the subject of paper and pencil vs. CAPI mode effects. It is as well designed and operationalized as one could hope for in a non-laboratory setting. The authors have years of experience in all modes of data collection and have done an excellent job in presenting a study that should, once and for all, put the nail in the coffin of paper and pencil vs. CAPI mode effects and allow us to get on with more important issues such as the possible effects suggested in the next paper.

We now have studies from several continents all indicating the same thing, namely, there are no main effect mode effects of the standard approaches to automated data collection as used by most large non-profit and academic survey organizations. This does not, of course, include the methods used by the market researchers such as mall intercepts and other less stringent approaches. We also recognize some fairly large mode effects between CATI and PAPI when questions are of a very personal nature. Still, one would hope, after this paper and ones presented previously from several other countries showing similar results, that researchers will begin to spend their time looking at more interesting questions related to automated data collection.

Grondin and Michaud

There are a number of papers that have compared CAPI mode effects but almost always by a direct comparison of the results from two modes, either paper and pencil vs. CAPI or CATI vs. CAPI. The paper by Grondin and Michaud, is the only paper I'm aware of that externally validates the data by using an objective criterion -- actual tax data.

The most important conclusion that I am able to draw from their data is that there are significant effects created by ancillary survey tools used to organize respondent data organization and recall that far exceed any CAPI mode effects and that may interact with the data collection mode. This is a generally unexplored or at least unquantified area that appears to be of considerable importance.

Perhaps it is time that we laid to rest concern about the main effect differences between paper and pencil and automated interviewing modes and concentrated on the many possible interactions that may exist when additional procedures are used to assist in data organization or recall.

Couper, Sadosky and Hansen

This paper is an important paper because it is the seminal paper on the subject of **keystroke analysis.**

Keystroke analysis opens the door to a tremendous variety of research on the behavior of survey takers and respondents. And, the real beauty of this approach is the extremely low cost of collecting the detailed data.

Survey research is plagued by the high cost of validation data, usually requiring tape recording and behavior coding or re-interviewing in order to examine interviewer behaviors. Keystroke analysis gives us a method of examining the actual interaction of the interviewer and the machine or of the respondent and the machine for computer assisted self interviews.

The uses of this technique are many including both behavioral studies of interviewer and respondent and objective measures of the effect of question modification in the instrument.

The authors should be commended for their foresight and creativity in taking advantage of a simple but very powerful side aspect of CAPI.

Edwards, et al.

Edwards presents an interesting paper discussing the effects of hardware on survey efficiency and

demonstrating an attempt to include hard data in the decision on when to purchase new CAPI machines. While the data indicated several benefits of new machines, unstable market forces and interviewer habituation (getting used to what were initial irritants) apparently out-weighed the efficiency data. I wish that the authors would have proposed a decision formula that attempted to lay out all of the variables that actually affected the decision to buy or not buy. It would be useful to think quantitatively about the interviewer irritation level, the market stability and other variables that clearly played a role in the decision described in this paper but that were discussed very tangentially.

Gardenier

Finally, the paper by John Gardenier starts off very well and is clearly a description of the CAPI process by someone who "has been there." John does an excellent job of pointing out some of the real operational weaknesses of CAPI development that we all deal with on a daily basis. This would be good for all researchers to read since they probably all think that the problems are specific to their own organizations and staffs who get abundant blame for these generic issues.

Unfortunately, John bogs down a bit by drifting off into speculation about length and cost issues of CAPI vs. paper and pencil. His propositions are somewhat dubious and he does not present any convincing data to support them. The positive aspect of this section is that John is committed to building a meta database to provide an empirical response to the questions that he raises and we will all look forward to his future presentations that will shed more light on the issues of timing and cost of CAPI surveys.