

## How Organizations Monitor the Quality of Work Performed by their Telephone Interviewers

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### Abstract

A web survey of the interviewer monitoring practices of survey organizations that conduct telephone surveys was conducted in the summer of 2005 and the spring of 2006 to measure (1) monitoring staff characteristics, (2) reasons why organizations monitor their interviewers, (3) resources dedicated to monitoring, (4) the interviewing dimensions that are monitored, and (5) tools used by organizations to monitor. Approximately 767 organizations world-wide were sampled for participation and a response rate of 25% (AAPOR1) was achieved. The results gathered from this survey did not reveal any notable differences between organizations in the commercial and non-commercial sector with respect to why they monitor, how they monitor, and what they monitor. In fact, results indicated that these organizations are more similar than dissimilar on many monitoring dimensions (e.g., behaviors monitored, monitoring tools). However, there were some variations in some of the monitoring practices with respect to organizational size. The non-commercial organizations (not for profit, government, and academia), for example, were typically smaller in size and thus reported having less call volume capacity and smaller staffs dedicated to monitoring. Conversely, larger organization (e.g., typically commercial organizations) reported having larger call centers, more call volume, and larger staffs dedicated to monitoring. Despite some of the differences in organizational size and capacity, many of the organizations indicated that the primary reason of why they conduct monitoring practices is because monitoring is fundamentally important in the telephone survey research they conduct.

**Keywords:** telephone monitoring, telephone surveys

### 1. Introduction

Survey organizations that gather data through interviewer-administered questionnaires need to be concerned with the quality of the interviewing that is conducted. For organizations that gather data via the telephone, use of a centralized

facility for interviewing lends itself much more readily for monitoring the work of interviewers than in the case of those organizations that use face-to-face interviewing to gather data. Lavrakas (1987, 1993) suggests that being able to monitor the quality of interviewing in a centralized telephone facility is one of the main advantages in choosing the telephone mode for data collection over other modes, all other considerations being equal.

Although there is a lot of anecdotal information about what survey organizations do to monitor the quality of the interviewing done by their telephone search staffs, little empirical work is available to characterize the range of practices. As part of the Telephone Survey Methods II international conference held in early 2006, we were invited to contribute a chapter on Monitoring to the monograph that will be published from that conference. As part of our work on the chapter we conducted a survey of telephone survey organizations to learn how they monitor their telephone interviewers. The information we gained via this survey was too extensive to report it fully in the chapter (given page limitations) and thus we have prepared this paper to allow us to share more of the findings with the survey research community, in particular with all the organizations that made this paper possible by responding to our survey.

A web survey was conducted in the summer of August 2005 and in the spring of 2006 to gather information about how survey organizations monitor the quality of work performed by their telephone research interviewers. The sampling frame was constructed by using various lists of survey research and marketing research organizations that conduct telephone surveys. The questionnaire consisted of 53 closed-end (multiple choice) and open-end questions about various characteristics of the survey organization, its data collection staff, and the organization's telephone monitoring practices.

This paper will present detailed findings from this web survey on how the characteristics of survey organizations relate to (1) general

monitoring staff characteristics, (2) reasons why organizations monitor, (3) amount of resources dedicated to monitoring, (4) the dimensions of interviewers' behavior that are monitored, and (5) tools used by organizations to monitor. The paper discusses these results with our primary purpose being to share with the survey research industry the monitoring practices currently being used in the industry.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Questionnaire

The survey consisted of fifty-three questions (both multiple choice and open-ended formats) pertaining to telephone survey research in general, facilities / operation of the organization and telephone monitoring practices. The questionnaire was structured so that initial questions would eliminate the need for some respondents to complete the entire survey (e.g., if they did not conduct their own telephone interviews). Organizations were instructed to have the person who was most knowledgeable about their interviewer monitoring practices complete the survey.

### 2.2 Sampling

For the first phase of sampling organizations were given approximately six weeks to complete the survey on-line (July 26 – September 2, 2005) and in the second phase of sampling, organizations were given three weeks to complete the survey on-line (April 5 – April 26, 2006).

The sampling frame for this survey was constructed using various membership lists, including the Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO), the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), and the International Field Directors and Technologies Conference (IFD&TC). The sample was stratified across lists so that all organizations belonging to AAPOR, CASRO, and IFD&TC were selected, while a subset of the organizations on other lists were selected.<sup>1</sup> In total, 767 organizations were selected to participate in the web survey.

<sup>1</sup> The decision to use this approach to sampling reflected the fact that both AAPOR, CASRO and IFD&TC lists had far fewer organizations that

These research organizations were recruited via e-mail (54 of which were returned undeliverable), followed by a second reminder e-mail requesting their participation. Of the 767 organizations assumed to have been contacted by email over the two sampling periods, only four responded via email to disqualify them from participation. We do not know how many of the others that never responded were ineligible to complete the questionnaire, but assume that it may have been a sizable minority. In total, 193 organizations logged onto the survey website to provide information. Additionally, four organizations were excluded from these analyses because they indicated that their organization did not conduct telephone survey research. Of the remaining 189, 183 cases included valid data and were included in the data set for data analyses. Collectively the response rate for both sampling phases was 25% (AAPOR1). More specifically, the response rate for the first phase of sample was 23% and the response rate for the second phase of sampling which focused on the IFD&TC list of organizations was 42% (AAPOR1).

## 3.0 Results

### 3.1 Characteristics of Survey Organizations

Of those organizations who completed the survey, 31% were established prior to 1975, 20% were established between 1976 and 1985, and 24% were established between 1987 and 1995, and 24% were established between 1996 and 2005. Nearly 67% were commercial survey research firms, whereas a smaller percentage of the non-commercial firms were from academia (18%), the not for profit sector (9%) and the government (5%). Thus, of those organizations who responded, approximately two-thirds were commercial organizations whereas one-third was from the non-commercial / public sector. A large proportion of the non-commercial organizations were located in the United States (90%) while nearly half of the commercial

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reported doing telephone survey data collection and we decided that we wanted to make sure to include all of those in our frame as we believed that it was these organizations that were most likely to deploy systematic monitoring of their interviewers. ESOMAR, for example, had many hundreds of such organizations and thus a sample of those was drawn rather than including all of them into our sampling frame.

organizations were located outside of the United States (53%).

The organizations in the public sector (e.g., not for profit, government, and academia) conducted a majority of their research internally (public sector = 78%, commercial sector = 51%) though they did indicate outsourcing some of their interviewing (16%) as did those organizations in the commercial industry (36%).

The results presented here will primarily concentrate on the monitoring practices of commercial versus non-commercial organizations (e.g., not for profit, government, and academia) and how the size of an organization may influence monitoring practices used in today's survey research industry.

### 3.2 General Organizational Characteristics

In general, commercial organizations indicated that in an average year they outsourced telephone interviews almost nearly ten times as often (32%) than did organizations in the non-commercial sector (3%). Many of the organizations in the non-commercial sector reported handling a smaller call volume than commercial organizations.

Table 1: Average Call Volume

Type of Organization	Number of completed interviews		
	Less than 10,000	10,001 to 50,000	50,000 or more
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	57.1%	36.7%	6.1%
Commercial	45.6%	28.9%	25.6%

Regardless of whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial, over 60% of the organizations who responded indicated that they had at least one telephone call center.

Table 2: Organizations with One Call Center

Type of Organization	Organizations with one call center
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	67.9%
Commercial	60.0%

Non-commercial organizations indicated that they had fewer work stations and were smaller in size than commercial organization.

Table 3: Number of Work Stations

Type of Organization	Number of work stations			
	small (20 or less)	med (21 - 50)	Large (51- 100)	very large (101 or more)
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	34.0%	44.7%	6.4%	14.9%
Commercial	35.6%	21.8%	25.7%	16.8%

On average commercial organizations reported having more interviewers on staff regardless of whether they were part-time vs. full time (Commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 134.8; Non-commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 102.8) or paid vs. unpaid (Commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 170; Non-commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 55.6). However, non-commercial organizations ( $\bar{M}$  = \$8.89) reported paying their research interviewers an average of over a \$1.00 more per hour than commercial organizations ( $\bar{M}$  = \$7.43).

### 3.3 General Monitoring Characteristics

Regardless of whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial, nearly three-fourths of organizations indicated that they did not conduct remote telephone monitoring.

Table 4: Percentage of Organization Who Did Not Conduct Remote Telephone Interviewing

Type of Organization	No, Remote telephone interviewing
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	74.0%
Commercial	75.7%

Nearly 95% of all organizations monitor some portion of their telephone interviews regardless of whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial.

Table 5: Percentage of Organizations Who Monitor Any Portion of Their Telephone Interviews

Type of Organization	% of Organization Who Monitor
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	98.0%
Commercial	94.4%

Regardless of whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial, organizations reported that of all the contacts made, they monitored approximately the same proportion of telephone interviews (commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 16.8 %; non-commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 15.6%).

### 3.4 Characteristics of Monitoring Staff

Approximately seven staff members on average were dedicated to monitoring (commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 8; non-commercial  $\bar{M}$  = 7). Also, the number staff members allocated to monitoring varied slightly depending on the size of the organization with respect to the number of CATI stations.

Table 6: Average Number of Staff Members Allocated to Monitoring by Number of CATI Stations

Type of Organization	No. of CATI Stations (Grouped by Size)			
	small (20 CATI STATIONS or less)	med (21 -50)	Large (51-100)	very large (101 or more)
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	3.17	5.28	11	19.8
Commercial	2.2	3.7	12.5	18.2

Both commercial and non-commercial organizations used the same types of criteria for selecting who to hire as part of their monitoring staff (e.g., expertise / skill set, part of management staff, and past research experience).

Table 7: How Individuals Are Selected To Be Part of the Monitoring Staff

Type of Organization	Monitoring Staff Selection Criteria		
	Based on Skill	Member of Management Staff	Market Research Experience
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	42.6%	37.7%	0%
Commercial	46%	21.8%	5.6%

Regardless of the type of organization, organizations indicated that their staff received on-the-job training, formal training/classes, shadowed another person on the job, and/or were trained by a manager.

Table 8: Types of Training Provided to Monitoring Staff

Type of Organization	Types of Training		
	On Job Training	Program/Classes	By Manager
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	24.6%	37.7%	26.2%
Commercial	21.8%	26.6%	22.6%

On average, monitoring staff of commercial organizations ( $M = 33.8$ ) receive nearly three times more hours of training than did staff at non-commercial organizations ( $M = 12.3$ ). Also, on average when asked the number of staff members who were solely dedicated to monitoring 100% of the time during the last thirty days, non-commercial organizations ( $M = .65$ ) indicated far less staff member than did the commercial organizations ( $M = 3.07$ ). As indicated in Table 9 the number of staff members allocated to monitoring 100% of the time in the last thirty days varied by the size of the organization (e.g., size determined by number of CATI stations).

Table 9: Average Number of Staff Members Dedicated to Monitoring 100% in the Last 30 Days

Type of Organization	No. Of CATI Stations (Grouped by Size)			
	1small (20 or less)	med (21 -50)	Large (51-100)	very large (101 or more)
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	.00	.16	.00	4.0
Commercial	.52	1.1	3.5	11.2

**3.5 Reasons Why Organizations Monitor**

Regardless of whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial, organizations provided quite similar reasons to why they monitor. The primary reasons why they monitor were for training and coaching purposes, mandated by clients, consistency issues, project and interviewer performance, and for research purposes.

Table 10: Reasons Why Organizations Monitor Telephone Interviews

Type of Organization	Reasons Why Organizations Monitor		
	Training & Coaching	Required	Consistency &Tracking
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	84.8%	58.7%	71.7%
Commercial	74.2%	46.1%	67.4%
Type of Organization	Reasons Why Organizations Monitor		
	Project Perf.	Interviewer Perf.	Research & Development
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	69.6%	84.8%	28.3%
Commercial	76.4%	80.9%	21.3%

**3.6 How Organizations Monitor**

When organization monitored, they typically provided feedback that was both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

Table 11: Types of Feedback Given to Interviewers

Type of Organization	Types of Feedback	
	Qualitative	Quantitative
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	93.6%	66%
Commercial	90.9%	52.3%

Over 70% of all commercial and non-commercial organizations provided feedback fairly quickly after the telephone interview. In fact, most of the feedback was provided either immediately or within the same day of the call.

Table 12: Frequency of Feedback Provided After the Call

Type of Organization	Freq. of Feedback Provided After the Call		
	Immediately	Same Day	Weekly
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	77.8%	35.6%	13.3%
Commercial	70.1%	39.1%	13.8%

  

Type of Organization	Freq. of Feedback Provided After the Call	
	Monthly	Yearly
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	8.9%	4.4%
Commercial	10.3%	4.6%

### 3.7 Monitoring Tools

Approximately 80% of all commercial and non-commercial organizations used live audio equipment to monitor whereas a slightly smaller percentage used visual display.

Table 13: How Interviews Are Monitored

Type of Organization	How Interviews Are Monitored	
	Live Audio	Visual Display
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	80.9%	78.7%
Commercial	80.5%	57.5%

Though the percentage difference is small, commercial organizations indicated that more of their interviewers were aware that they were being monitored.

Table 14: Percentage of Interviewers Who Are Aware Of Being Monitored

Type of Organization	Awareness of Being Monitored
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	29.8%
Commercial	40.2%

Regardless of the whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial, they reported almost identical numbers with respect to duration length of a typical monitoring session (commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 26.7 minutes; non-commercial,  $\bar{M}$  = 22.6 minutes). And a large percentage indicated the use of a standardized monitoring form.

Table 15: Percentage of Organizations Use a Standardized Form

Type of Organization	Use A Standard Monitoring Form
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	80.4%
Commercial	72.0%

Almost one-half of all organizations indicated that their standard form was paper; one-third indicated that it was both paper and computerized, while a smaller percentage indicated that it was only computerized.

Table 16: Type of Standardized Form Used by Organizations

Type of Organization	Type of Monitoring Form		
	Paper	Computer	Both
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	56.8%	5.4%	37.8%
Commercial	41.5%	23.1%	32.3%

### 3.8 Dimensions Monitored

Regardless of whether the organization was commercial or non-commercial, all organizations indicated that they evaluate their research interviewers on similar dimensions. In fact, all but two (e.g., monitoring results in an overall score, data entry errors) were consistently monitored by 80% or more of the organizations.

Table 17: Dimensions Monitored by Organizations

Type of Organization	Dimensions		
	Voice Char.	Read As Worded	Tailor Script
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	95.7%	100%	80.9%
Commercial	84.9%	97.7%	88.2%
Type of Organization	Dimensions		
	Non Directive Probing	Gain Coop.	Counter Refusals
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	93.6%	97.9%	93.6%
Commercial	88.0%	87.2%	87.1%
Type of Organization	Dimensions		
	Data Entry Errors	Overall Score	
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	82.6%	53.2%	
Commercial	67.9%	52.6%	

Both commercial and non-commercial organizations have the capability to allow their clients and staff to monitor remotely.

Table 18: Percentage of Clients / Staff That Can Monitor Remotely

Type of Organization	% Capacity to Monitor Remotely
Non-commercial (Not for Profit, Government, Academia)	43.5%
Commercial	64.7%

Lastly, on a scale of 0-10 ranging from “Not at All Important” (0) to “Very Important” (10), all organizations indicated that monitoring was important to their organization (commercial,  $\bar{M} = 7.7$ ; non-commercial,  $\bar{M} = 8.3$ ).

#### 4.0 Discussion

The results gathered from this survey did not reveal any notable differences between organizations in the commercial and non-commercial sector with respect to why they monitor, how they monitor, and what they monitor. In fact, results indicated that these organizations are more similar than dissimilar on many dimensions (e.g., behaviors monitored, monitoring tools).

However, there were some variations in some of the responses with respect to organizational size. The non-commercial organizations (not for profit, government, and academia), for example, were typically smaller in size and thus reported having less call volume capacity and smaller staffs dedicated to monitoring. Conversely, larger organization (e.g., typically commercial organizations) reported having larger call centers, more call volume, and larger staffs dedicated to monitoring. Despite some of the differences in organizational size and capacity, many of the organizations indicated that the primary reason of why they conduct monitoring practices is because monitoring is fundamentally important in the telephone survey research they conduct.

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