

Self-Reports

How the Questions Shape the Answers

Schwarz, N. (1999) *American Psychologist*, 54, 93-105.

Slide summary

Summary

- main topic, suggestions, recommendations and/or conclusions

Article reviews how individuals respond to questionnaires and other types of self-reports, and how to improve the quality of the results by being aware of this behavior

Literal meaning & pragmatic meaning (relation, quantity, manner and quality) + the types of response alternatives = different combinations, different answers

Retrospective vs. concurrent reporting -> intense feeling are more memorable

Researcher always gives clues and respondents always try to interpret what is expected, preferable or 'normal'

Respondents cannot follow the frequencies of previous actions rationally nor analytically

Several ways to avoid the misinterpretations of the answers have been developed

"Questionnaire is not a measurement device" (p. 103)

Opinions

- e.g. key learnings, opinions, what was interesting, strengths / weaknesses

After reading the article, I really started to wonder how reliable the questionnaires can be, considering the researchers capability to formulate the questions, the respondents ability to understand and answer the questions truthfully and as intended, the contexts affecting the answers, and finally, researchers ability to know what the respondent really meant

Formulating questions is difficult: in your question, you may not express what you really meant, words you use may be interpreted differently or the context may be misunderstood

-> respondents always interpret your questions => how to know how?

-> how to balance the level of guidance with the level of open-endedness?

To formulate a questionnaire or other self-reported tool the researcher must be extremely clear about the research aim and the phenomena studied