



Understand the meaning of quality learning using cognitive interviewing techniques

April 21

Advance HE Surveys & Insights Conference 21:
'Adapting to Challenging Times'

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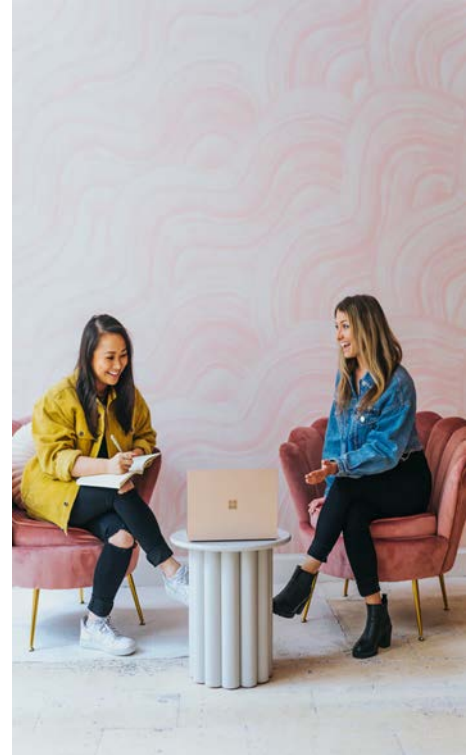
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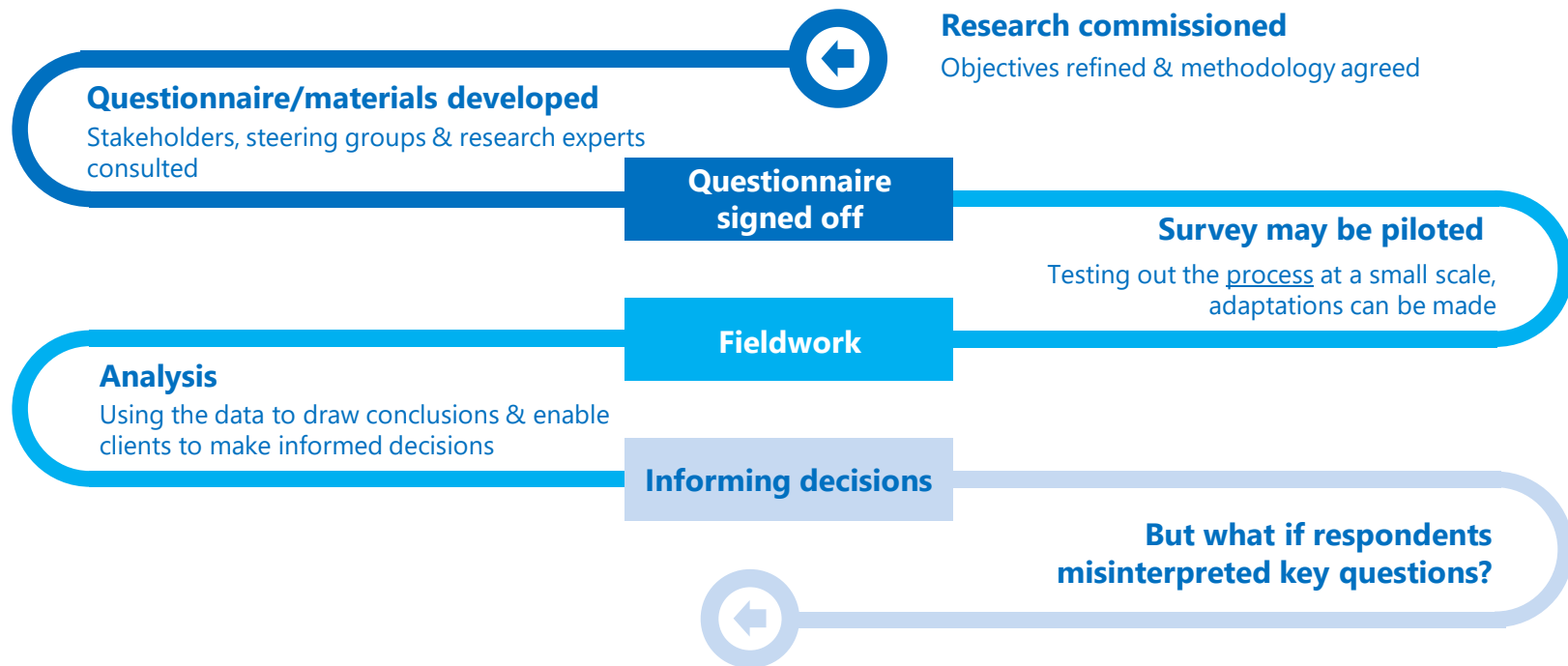
Accuracy of data

Research regularly informs strategic decision making across a range of industries.

Data accuracy, which is free from any bias, is key to enabling decision makers to have confidence in their conclusions.



Can we be sure that data is accurate?



Usage of cognitive interviewing in research



First developed in the 1980s & used by academics, government agencies, & commercial research firms.

Frequently used in large scale social surveys or complex research e.g. regulators.



Qualitative method used to help develop & test quantitative questions.

Explores how people interpret & answer questions to refine survey materials / questionnaires.



Respondents answer key questions.

Techniques such as probing & 'thinking aloud' reveal how questions are processed & answers are arrived at.

Body language also important.

Cognitive testing in practice ...

- Comprehension is **key**; essential that audience understands language used
- Testing understanding of **NET ZERO**; a phrase used commonly by the media & government
- Cognitive testing showed very limited understanding of **NET ZERO**
 - Issues regardless of demographic group
 - Shouldn't make assumptions about what is understood & what isn't



Student Experience Surveys

What did we learn from cognitive testing?



Background & aims

- **Background:**
 - Project commissioned by Advance HE
 - Ahead of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and UK Engagement Survey (UKES) 2021 some questions revised and some added in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Project aims:**
 - Explore the extent to which the proposed questions work
 - Identify areas where proposed wording is not clear or fully understood
 - Provide recommendations for any changes required to ensure data accuracy in PRES, PTES and UKES



Adapting methodologies

- **Cognitive interviews typically undertaken face to face**; allowing opportunity to pick up any non-verbal cues e.g. facial expressions or body language.
 - New approach needed due to constraints of Covid-19 pandemic; telephone interviews don't show any non-verbal cues.
 - **Zoom** selected to conduct cognitive interviews, allowing opportunity to pick up on non-verbal cues & sharing questions on screen allowed the students to read questions themselves.
- **18 interviews** undertaken with a good mix of students
 - 6 in each of the 3 different student experience surveys



Quality of experience can mean more than one thing

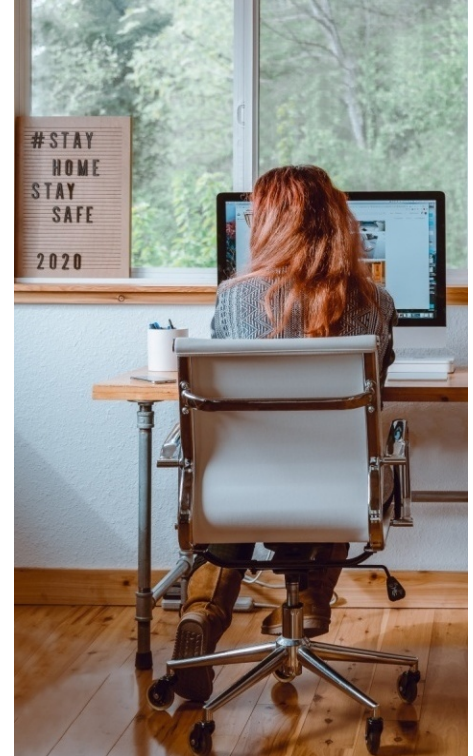
My institution has worked to ensure the quality of my experience during the COVID-19 pandemic

"I don't know how to answer this as there is the quality of the course or teaching and the quality of the social experience. The latter is so important to me."

My institution has worked to ensure the quality of my **academic** experience during the COVID-19 pandemic

Quality of experience needed to be defined as 'the quality of my ACADEMIC experience'.

Without this important indicator students also tended to reflect on the quality of their SOCIAL experience.



Terminology is of critical importance

Currently, does your research programme involve in-person interaction with staff?

"Last week we had a 2 week 'circuit breaker' with no access to campus, so if you asked me this question then I would have answered differently."

How have you usually had contact with staff this term?

Due to the pandemic the word 'currently' elicited different assumptions & potentially different responses.

Rephrasing as 'usually' was seen as more meaningful.

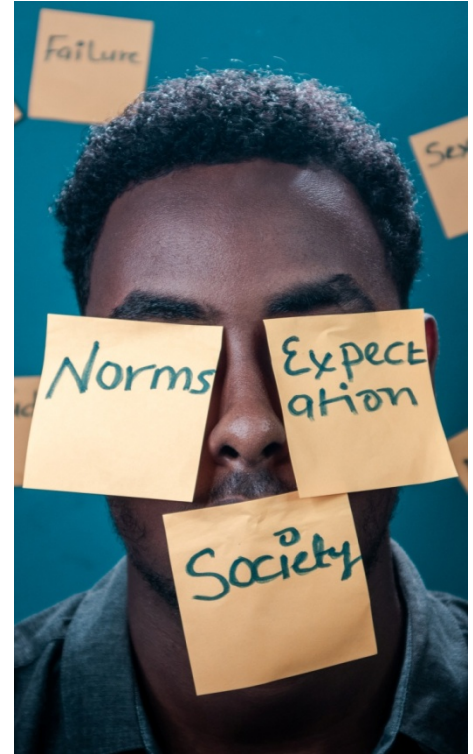


'In-person' rather than 'face-to-face' contact has more meaning

"I have come across this confusion with 'face-to-face' before with my placement. I was told it would be face-to-face and when it became clear that meant Zoom I was surprised."



Summary



Apply cognitive testing to truly understand the meaning of quality learning ...

Don't assume – that research participants understand words & phrases the way you do

Be open – to changing terminology so all participants understand survey content in a consistent way

Prepare to adapt – the structure & flow of your survey to keep participants motivated

Co-create – an improved version of the survey with cognitive interview participants

Result = happier participants, higher response rates & accurate data



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Thanks for listening!

