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Australasian Journal of Market & Social Research

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AJMSR – President’s Letter

December 2005

Dear Colleague

Welcome to the second edition of the Australasian Journal of Market and Social Research for 2005. This edition we are offer up three papers for your consideration.

Michael Valos and David Bednall report on their study of market research effectiveness, conducted among a sample of 240 Australian marketing managers. Looking at market research effectiveness as a function of internal research buying expertise, resource allocation and strategy, they share their findings.

Philip Gendall, Janet Hoek and Anna Finn report their findings of research designed to determine why non-response occurs in a mail survey, at what point it happens, and what may be done to overcome it.

Clive Boddy highlights the differences between focus group interviews and focus group discussions and identifies the source of the difference as being in the predominant scientific and cultural paradigms of the qualitative researchers involved. His paper seeks to clearly name and identify what the different approaches are so that a degree of clarity can enter the vocabulary of qualitative market researchers around the world.

The forum section provides a summary of the award winning papers presented at the Society’s 2005 IMPACT Conference. We have approached the Conference presenters and are aiming to have some of the papers included in the next edition of the Journal.

We encourage reader contributions – academic papers, articles on current issues and debates, and book reviews are welcome.

Read and enjoy!

Grey Wayman
National President
IMPACT conference review

The Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2005 and to commemorate, the annual national conference explored the impact that market and social research has had over the past 50 years - and is continuing to have - on communities, government and business.

Keynote speakers included Rachel Lawes from Lawes Consulting in the UK, researcher, author and radio commentator Neer Kom from Heartbeat and leading Australian demographer Bernard Salt from KPMG.

The conference organising committee, led by Susan Bell, encouraged the industry to share experiences and ideas about what they could do, individually or collectively, to deliver more impact, more meaningfully, more often over the next 50 years.

Topics ranged across methodologies (semiotics, ethnography, online qualitative techniques, parallel online opinion polls, quantitative motivational research, cognitive interviewing, neuroscience and traditional CATI), participant groups (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, gay and lesbian consumers, multicultural groups, youth, single mothers), clients (the board and ‘C-suite’ level, not-for-profits, advertising agencies and the media) and subjects (alcohol, elections, alternative media, mainstream media, sport, retail shopping experiences, corporate and social responsibility, wellbeing and the issue de jour, the ‘man drought’).

Paul Vittles wins Tony Wheeler Best Paper Award

All submitted papers were eligible for the Tony Wheeler Best Paper Award, which is sponsored by Millward Brown and is named in recognition of its former CEO for Australia, New Zealand and Japan, who died in August 2001.

Wheeler was secretary of the Society’s National Council from 1985-87 and it is worth noting, given the anniversary year, that he was a signatory to the Memorandum and Articles of Association which created the national body (then called the Market Research Society of Australia) from a collection of state societies in 1955.

In 1974, Wheeler and Warwick Hoare formed Hoare Wheeler & Associates. In 1979 they began sharing resources with Inview, the Melbourne company headed by Max Yann and Alastair Campbell. Two years later the quartet formed Yann Campbell Hoare Wheeler (YCHW), which they developed into one of the country’s leading market research companies. In 1991 they sold the company to UK-based Millward Brown, part of the WPP group. Wheeler was CEO of Millward Brown from December 1999 until he fell ill.

Paul Vittles’ paper ‘Beyond expectations: research as a life changing experience’ won the award. Vittles is a Fellow of the UK Market Research Society and a former CEO of the UK agency RBA Research. After 22 years in the industry in the UK, he and his family came to live and work in Australia early this year. Paul is now director of client service for ACNielsen’s customised research services.
Vittles made three points eloquently, by tracking his own personal journey from what he called 'London agency land' to a client-side role in social and government research in York (North England), back to an agency and then to Australia.

He urged researchers to be more optimistic about the impact they could have and said that, if there wasn’t evidence that research delivered valuable insights that influenced decisions and effected change, then researchers should try harder. He also illustrated how research can be an agent for change and argued that researchers can be highly effective 'change agents'.

“Research can be a life changing experience for all concerned and I challenge researchers to go beyond their narrow remit to make more research more life changing for more people - participants, colleagues and clients,” said Vittles.

In addition, Vittles said creating a safe environment to encourage creativity, learning empathic listening and incorporating life coaching into work with clients and researchers have all helped him push the boundaries.

Vittles explained how research could have more impact when researchers focus more on achieving outcomes and less on rigidly observing methodological conventions.

“The York Experience had probably taught me to go further than we might otherwise have done, and it certainly taught me not to be so ‘purist’,” says Vittles. “So, for example, in a research project to look at what might help people to quit smoking, when we found that more useful insights were coming out of the ‘fag breaks’ than the group discussions themselves, we felt comfortable letting the ‘breaks’ go on longer rather than harding ‘our respondents’ back to ‘our group’.”

In another case, he explained how he and his colleagues had delivered an upbeat presentation demonstrating how the research had helped to bring about change.

“Decision-makers took decisions on the back of the research, and were inspired by the presentation. Sometimes the underlying research was technically very good, sometimes it was OK. The ‘inspiration’ gained from the presentation appeared to transcend the quality of the underlying research.

“At first, this made us a bit uncomfortable, but we learned to live with it. After all, many of the most influential management gurus (like Tom Peters) bring about change as much from how they say it as from what they say. We still took a pride in our research, but clients were prepared to pay for our services as ‘change agents’.”

He also explained how he had learned about the value of the ‘sample of one’.

“Sometimes, statistics from large representative sample surveys have no impact but a case study documenting how policies had affected a young, homeless person cause the decision-makers to change direction.”

**Special commendation for the F word**
The judging panel also awarded a ‘special commendation’ to Tracey Hardie and Nick Kotsomitis for their paper, 'The F word in market research: High impact PR in the 21st century’, and three other papers were highly commended.
In their paper, Hardie and Kotsomitis (both from SURVEYtalk) argued the case for a national advertising campaign levy to halt falling response rates.

"Field in all its many forms has been the central mechanism for collecting the invaluable data that are the basic ingredients of every report and strategy provided to clients," said Hardie in support of their argument. "Field has (also) played an equally crucial role as the public face of the industry."

In preparation, SURVEYtalk conducted original research to find out why people participate in research and why they refuse. The main sample of 1,360 (telephone, face-to-face and online) were asked a number of questions about what influenced their decision whether or not to do a survey. Those who refused to participate were asked just one open ended question "Why have you refused to do this survey today?" and of those who refused to participate in the main survey, 338 people "were kind enough to give us publishable answers".

Interestingly, while there has been a growing perception in the industry that the population is over researched, SURVEYtalk's figures instead indicated that in any sample of respondents there is a significant group who might participate more often if asked. This group was larger among the face to face sample (15%) compared to (9%) among the telephone sample.

Hardie and Kotsomitis applauded the joint AMSRS-AMSRO launch in June 2005 of the Your Views Count campaign, saying the "LIST recommendations are a wonderful first step in the war to reclaim respondents". But they argued that the industry needed to go one step further – and that an industry with revenues of more than $557 million a year (ABS 2002) should be able to spend 3-5% of that turnover on an advertising campaign – just as the Institute of Chartered Accountants has done.

Hardie and Kotsomitis presented four ads, which were developed by art director Gary Godkin and copywriter Stuart Clark. According to Kotsomitis the most positive feedback from delegates was about the ad titled: 'Market research: there should be laws against it' followed by 'Why do researchers always call me at dinner time?'.

**UK case study highly commended**

One of three other highly commended papers, Adam Joseph's paper, titled 'Urbanites, insights and the bottom line', provided an overview of the role online panel research has played at Metro newspaper, the UK's fourth largest daily. The research has become integral to the existence of the newspaper at both an editorial and also a commercial level.

The online panel is called Urban Life and taps into the views of 4,000 so-called 'urbanites' - regular Metro readers, aged between 18-44 years, in full-time professional work and with internet access. Urban Life is managed for Metro by BMRB International, part of the global Kantar Group.

Each year Urban Life runs six main online surveys, six weeks apart. Respondents are sent an email inviting them to take part in each survey.

"The panel is weighted to our latest National Readership Survey profile so that our sample of 4,000 readers can actually be used to represent around 50 percent of our total readership on the NRS," says Joseph.
He revealed that the annual research cost to Metro of running Urban Life is €250,000 (AU$502,000), and so far the paper has invested over _1,000,000 in the project (AU$2.3m).

"Research on its own does not win new business - only people win new business. The role of research is to help people win business, and that is exactly what Urban Life has done for Metro."

Joseph estimates that Urban Life helps Metro's commercial team bring in millions of pounds worth of advertising revenue each year, as 95 per cent of the sales data used by Metro's commercial team on a daily basis comes from Urban Life.

**Let's talk about us, expertly presented**
A paper by John Sergeant and James Lane, titled 'Let's talk about us', was also highly commended.

Their paper was based on years of research to collate the definitive collection of cartoons, TV segments, movies and even poems that reveal something about what the public really thinks of the market and social research industry.

Sergeant and Lane concluded that the overall impact of market research on the popular psyche is both small and inaccurate. Representations in popular culture focus on data collection methods, usually without exposing the profession that lies behind them. For all practical purposes, the image of the interviewer either brandishing a clipboard or phoning at dinner time is the only part of the industry ever exposed in popular culture.

They say that it is important to acknowledge that the act of research itself influences society while trying to observe it. This underscores the importance of recent efforts to make sure market and social researchers engage with the public in a way that respects their willing cooperation as a valuable resource.

**Marketing metrics**
John Roberts presented the third highly commended paper, written in conjunction with John Clark and Roger James and titled 'Impact from meaningful marketing metrics', which described work being undertaken to embed marketing metrics within a number of test organisations and develop a flexible set of standards to enable widespread adoption of these measures.

The authors said marketing measurement remains a hot topic, not least because the recent biennial review of The Marketing Science Institute, the top industry-academic liaison body that represents most of the top global marketers (including Coca Cola, P&G, J&J, GE, IBM, Intel, Citigroup, McKinsey, ACNielsen and many others) found that the overwhelming issue was the need to make marketing more accountable.

He said this was an opportunity for the market and social research industry because US GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) don't include brands on the balance sheet - despite studies indicating that 77% of the value of Nike, Apple and BMW resides in the brand.

"If accountants won't measure intangible assets, researchers should personally expect research budgets to substantially increase over the next 10 years if they can move to fill the gap in a rigorous and credible way."
Roberts went on to explain how a number of issues had arisen from their review of global practice and their preliminary probe of the Australian environment.

Roberts, Clark and James say, “While marketing accountability may be a laudable (and inevitable) trend, there lurks within it incredible danger. Short-term marketing effects are considerably easier to estimate than long-term ones. There is a real risk that the only effects of marketing activity that are calibrated, and thus considered, will be the most obvious ones. Like the drunk looking for his keys under the light, because it is easier to look there, rather than where he thinks that he lost them, we run the risk of ignoring the important but immeasurable. Marketing metrics will indeed do the profession (and the firms that use them) a great disservice if their ambit is narrow and limited. Such measurement focused management will lead to gross under-investment in marketing and the loss of leading positions by cost-conscious, myopic, overly-numerate, marketing icons.”

They concluded that market research has a major role to play in the development and implementation of marketing metrics.

“As we move forward with the development and implementation of marketing metrics we have to learn to speak the language of the boardroom better. But in doing so we must make sure that we do not lose the language of the consumer. The only way to achieve that is to build a strong bridge between the two.”

He also urged researchers to develop metrics that were relevant to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), not just the multi-nationals and big employers.

**George Camakaris Award for Best Paper Award for a young researcher**

Researchers under the age of 30, or in their first five years of their career, were eligible for the George Camakaris Best Paper Award. George Camakaris was the founder of Quantum Market Research, which sponsors the award and is now helmed by Adrian Goldsmith.

The Young Researcher Best Paper Award was inaugurated to encourage young researchers in the industry to develop and grow and to aspire to reach the heights attained by Camakaris during his career.

Duncan Rintoul from Urbis Keys Young won the award with his paper ‘Not for prophesy: the impact of social research and evaluation in the not-for-profit sector’, a paper that reflected on the role of market and social researchers in the world of the not-for-profits.

“In the community sector, questions of efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accountability now come with the territory, and not-for-profits are being forced to trade in their historically loose structures and collaborative family-like management styles for ‘contemporary management practice’ – corporate-style leadership, planning, structuring and control that is fluent in the language of financial reporting, government regulation and output metrics,” Rintoul says.

His paper, which was co-authored with Anne McEachen (BoysTown), included a case study about a program called Youth Insearch: a weekend camp program for at-risk high school kids where they discuss issues such as self-esteem, family breakdown, drugs, alcohol and abuse. Although the program was well-established and had plenty of anec-
otal evidence, Youth Insearch struggled to get government funding because it couldn’t “prove” what outcomes it was achieving.

“Their fight to get funding turned into a fight to get evaluated - and here they were successful,” said Rintoul. “Every relevant department kicked in a few bucks and sat on the reference group, and it was an excellent process (managed by the NSW Attorney General’s Department) where every ‘stakeholder’ genuinely held a stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

“We built trust with the project and the reference group, we kept them informed, took their feedback seriously, played no games, held nothing from them. At the end, our evaluation report had credibility. It was warts and all, and the limitations were acknowledged up front. No-one trusts an evaluation that smells too much of roses.”

Youth Insearch received a significant injection of funds from the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services to spend over three years, strengthening their program and putting the evaluation recommendations into effect.

“They’re spending around $20k out of that funding on more evaluation, because they trust us, and they trust that evaluation is genuinely useful to them,” said Duncan. “In my books, that is an outcome.”

Two papers presented by other young researchers at the conference were highly commended: James Lesage who co-presented, with Anne Woodhams, a paper titled ‘Do respondents understand questions differently when answering online versus in person? What is the impact of this on our results and conclusions?’ and Peter Drinkwater’s ‘Generation next: revitalising the research industry brand’.

Lesage and Woodhams, who both work at TNS, aimed to demonstrate that the research industry needs to develop a best practice approach when migrating quantitative studies from traditional forms of data collection to an online methodology.

Citing a recent case study, Lesage and Woodhams suggested that cognitive interviewing, which they believed was an under-utilised methodology across the board, proved extremely useful when migrating studies.

“Surveyors cannot possibly write perfect questions, self-evident to each respondent, that never need clarification,” said Lesage.

The first stage was a parallel study comparing the face-to-face tracker with an online version of exactly the same questionnaire. Many questions matched almost exactly, but for a few they found markedly varying responses between the methodologies.

Next, they used cognitive interviewing (qualitative probing) to investigate how respondents actually interpreted, responded to and answered the questions, and whether this differed when answering online versus in person.

Their research revealed that online respondents have the added benefit of seeing all answer fields.

“We found that this meant their answers were much more considered as opposed to answering the questions ‘on the spot’ when asked face to face. They had more time
to plan their responses, and more control over changing and re-inputting answers after further consideration."

On the other hand, face-to-face participants were under more pressure to interpret and answer quickly.

They concluded that the use of cognitive interviewing should be part of any best practice approach when migrating studies to online, but also in re-evaluating the ongoing effectiveness of all tracking studies.

The premise of Drinkwater’s paper was that the youth market’s outlook is critical in keeping any brand alive and vital, and so he focused on young researchers as an important audience for the research industry brand.

To explore the industry’s brand, identify how it could best move forward and identify how its positive attributes could be communicated to external stakeholders, Drinkwater applied multiple research methodologies including self completion surveys for undergraduate marketing students (quantitative), depth interviews with senior marketing thought leaders (qualitative), mini-groups amongst younger marketer/researchers (qualitative) and desk research.

Alarmingly, he found that 86 per cent of Sydney-based undergraduate marketing and business students – who he identified as “prime potential industry thought-leaders of the future” – said that market research was boring, dull, tedious or mundane. However, he thought that much could be done to re-position researchers as “the purveyors of the intelligence that drives decision-making”.

In concert with the theme that emerged in Vittles’ paper, Drinkwater said, “[The] ‘old’ mindset of research is no longer relevant, as through technology and training, technical excellence is now recognised primarily as a hygiene factor and does not in itself add relevance or value to a client’s business.”

The research industry, Drinkwater concluded, needs to make a fundamental paradigm shift from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’.

This suggestion prompted rousing applause and his paper won the inaugural AMSRS Conference People’s Choice Award, which was sponsored by AMR Interactive and determined by the highest number of SMS votes received. This was the first time SMS voting had been used at the conference. Delegates were only allowed to vote once, and mobile phone numbers were cross-referenced against registrations.

**In closing**

In summary, conference speakers celebrated the work they did, encouraged the industry to be more optimistic and while they did not dismiss the importance of maintaining high standards of quality in data collection, called for a shift from pedantry and convention to an outcomes focus where research acts as an agent of change.

As John Roberts reminded delegates at the conference, the research industry needed to get better at working out what ‘good’ means: "Einstein said once, ‘not everything you can count counts and you can’t count everything that counts’."
Market Research Effectiveness: The Effects of Organisational Structure, Resource Allocation and Strategic Type

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Abstract
According to the marketing literature and marketing textbooks, market research is required for successful marketing. However organisations differ in the way they both manage and resource their market research. This study hypothesised that market research effectiveness would be a function of internal research buying expertise, resource allocation and strategy. The research was conducted among a sample of 240 Australian marketing managers. Market research effectiveness was measured in terms of (a) decision making support, (b) contribution to marketing strategy, (c) leveraging customer and competitor data, (d) its ability to represent the "voice of the customer" and finally (e) bolstering the role of the marketing group and marketing manager within the organisation. The findings showed that having dedicated internal market researchers and allocating internal and external resources to the research function enhanced market research effectiveness. It was also found that organisations with an entrepreneurial strategic orientation were more likely to see value in the market research function, with these organisations being less likely to use market research for internal political purposes.

Introduction
The Australian market research industry, in the face of competition from other sources of business intelligence, is determined to demonstrate its usefulness for marketing decision makers. Recently, the Australian market research industry announced the formation of awards for market research effectiveness (AMRSF 2005). As market research is a co-produced service involving co-operation between supplier and client organisations, its effectiveness will depend on the technical quality of the research and also the client organisation and the structure of the internal market research function. Further, organisations with differing strategic intents should vary in the purpose, use and value derived from market research. For example, entrepreneurial organisations depend on identifying and exploiting opportunities and are therefore likely to be heavily reliant on research findings for their success. These entrepreneurial organisations are also likely to be active in scanning the external environment and in ensuring that the internal organisation hears the "voice of the customer". On the other hand, organisations operating in mature markets may have less need for market research, as would niche organisations, which rely on their specialist areas of expertise and intimate knowledge of customers.

In summary, it would be expected that strategic intent would affect the resources allocated to the structure of the market research function, the structure of the market research function itself and the value or effectiveness organisations judge the research to provide. In this paper, we will also consider whether strategic intent will have a greater influence on market research effectiveness than the market research function and/or the resources allocated to market research.

Strategy and Market Research
In terms of broad strategic intent, we examined two classical typologies devised by Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1980, 1985). Both were included in this study as Segov (1989) showed they subsume complementary rather than entirely duplicated strategic dimensions. These typologies classify organisations or
business units according to relationships between business strategy and relationships with human resources, organisational structure and information requirements (Hagen and Amin, 1995). Because of this they provide testable hypotheses for the relationships between strategy and a) structure of the market research function and b) resources allocated to market research and c) desired research benefits (i.e. market research effectiveness).

In the Miles and Snow (1978) typology, there were three successful generic strategies. The entrepreneurial Prospector strategy achieves competitive advantage through being first into new markets with new products. In other words, it is highly entrepreneurial in orientation. Prospectors are innovative and adapt to new technology well. Such an approach would lend itself to market focused research aimed at delineating which opportunities were the most promising. Prospectors are also likely to make effective use of all types of market data available in the organisation (Bednall and Valos, 2005a). Since entrepreneurial organisations deal with great uncertainty and organisational change, they are likely to need to distribute the research findings widely - both to gain acceptance of change and to sensitize the organisation to the opportunities in the external market. Olian and Ryynes (1984) proposed that Prospectors require employees who are able to deal with task ambiguity, unstructured environments and have a high tolerance for change. Sinkula (1990) found that a centralized research buying department impeded the use of market research and made it more likely that external suppliers would be used. This makes it unlikely a Prospector could rely totally on internal research buyers. In another paper Sinkula and Hampton (1988) indicated that internal market research buyers are likely to be managing the information dissemination within the firm, while the external research provider tackles issues relating to decision making and growing market complexity (Sinkula 1990). It is likely that the balance between these roles will differ according to whether the strategy is a Prospector or a Defender strategy.

A Defender strategy achieves competitive advantage by becoming more efficient while remaining in traditional markets with existing products. Defenders operate in environments where there is less uncertainty compared to other strategic types. In contrast to Prospectors, Defenders would be more likely to use market research to monitor their market share and track perceived service quality. The third Miles and Snow generic strategy is the Analyser strategy. This strategy combines elements of the Prospector and Defender and is likely to have a mix of Prospector and Defender market research structure, resourcing and outcome traits.

The Porter typology is the second of the two typologies included in this study and has a greater emphasis on the strategic dimension of "how we compete" i.e. differentiation or low cost. Porter (1980, 1985) characterizes organisations as cost leadership; product or brand differentiation; or market focus strategies. The most entrepreneurial organisations are Differentiators who compete by providing either leading edge solutions or premium quality products or unique branding. This strategy requires deep understanding of customer needs, resources and behaviour. Like the Prospects of Miles and Snow, these Differentiators are likely to be the most dedicated and reliant users of market research. In contrast, Cost leaders would be reluctant to conduct research, focusing instead on internal efficiencies as they have less environmental change to monitor and less apparent risks to face. In addition, like the marketing function itself, market research is a cost which can be reduced often without an obvious effect. Finally, Focus strategies appear to require less market research as they have high customer intimacy, strong customer links, deep industry knowledge and good knowledge of competitors in their niche.
Changing Structure of the Market Research Function

In recent times, there appears to be a split between organisations that have downsized the market research buying function (Shaw and White 1999) versus those organisations that have retained or redeveloped the internal function. Valentine (2002 p.191) has observed a possible split in organisations with internal market researchers between "market research managers" and "consumer insight managers." Moore (2003) has recently described this latter role in detail, combining internal and external data to deliver valuable insights to internal clients and providing a voice of the customer framed within the strategic organisational context. For others (Baker and Mouncey 2003; Smith and Dexter 2001), this has become an imperative for the modern management of market research. Practitioners such as from Thygesen and McGowan (2002) have similarly identified the contrast between research as, "...due diligence; we did it because we had to," (p.144) as opposed to a research process which provided real consumer insights.

The choice between an emphasis on internal or on external function structure to achieve market research effectiveness may be a function of:

a) recognition that business strategy should determine whether the internal or external function is more effective;

b) recognition that trust is a key requirement in successful client research supplier relationships; or

c) greater use of CRM and database systems, increasing the need for internal data collection and information synthesis.

In terms of business strategy, information and structure, Valentine (2002) has noted that internal researchers face a tension between the rational, fact-centric, stable and predictable market research function (heteronomy) versus the need for creative, entrepreneurial, ambiguous and contentious research; the latter focusing on imagination rather than objective knowledge.

She also talks of a "new community of clients" (p.169) referred to as nomadics - people who may attach themselves at various times to groups within the firm but who otherwise have no fixed role. Although marketing research is typically depicted as a rational process, aiming to get reliable information to assist decision making at a senior level (Raphael and Parket 1991), studies of actual practice are starting to reveal a far more complex picture.

In terms of this study it was expected that, since research buying is a specialist task, it would occur more frequently in Miles and Snow Prospector organisations. By a similar logic, Porter's market Differentiators should put more resources into the buyer role. These organisations would be more likely to have a separate role for the buying function (rather than combining research buying with other tasks) and put emphasis on the knowledge enhancing aspects by using titles such as "Consumer Insights Managers". Further, Strategy should be reflected in the job design or task characteristics of the research buyer role. Prospectors and to a lesser extent Differentiators would require less defined, and more dynamic and flexible roles for research employees than either Defenders or Cost Leaders respectively.

The use of internal market research employees to conduct research has been found by organisations to produce the most effective research (Pont et al. 2004). It would be expected that client organisations with a more developed internal market research function who have greater research skills (Shea and LeBouveau 2000; Donnelly, Van't Hull and Wil 2000) would see greater value in the research collected. This would be reflected in organisational judgements about the usefulness of the internal market research function.

Trust is an important issue in the research supplier relationship as it can lead to a positive effect on the use made of mar-
market research (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé 1992; Boughton, Novak and Washburn 1996). Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé also showed that good relationships between internal market researchers and their internal clients led to more effective use of market research. Thus, it would be expected that people with a dedicated buying role, with at least a medium term commitment to building internal relationships, would be better placed to provide valued services. One significant element of trust is the forgoing of opportunistic behavior. Given that market research is a potential agent of change within the organisation, we may expect to see what Piercy (1983) has called the “non-rational” use of market research to bolster entrenched positions within the firm. Market research is often used to justify proposed marketing action (from Thygesen and McGowan 2002) rather than to drive change. Finally, the increased use of market research to measure managers’ key performance indicators suggests that market research is likely to be conducted and interpreted within the power and political frameworks of the organisation.

With the increasing usage of customer relationship management (CRM) and other customer database systems, there is a need to integrate these informational systems, or even to design market monitors within the framework of CRM systems (Marr 2001). Similarly, a combination of market research with competitive intelligence is another apparent imperative (Stantat 1998).

In summary there are two internal factors in the management of the market research function that would have an impact on the value obtained from market research. The first factor is the presence of dedicated research buyers. Research buyers have the opportunity to build relationships with both suppliers and internal clients. They also have the ability to understand the needs of client groups and to apply creativity in their role of delivering value within a dynamic, politicised organisational context. The second factor is the availability of research skills. These are exemplified by conducting their own market research projects which should enhance understanding of the issues and the meaning of the data collected. This should make the data more useful. Internally developed research may also confer some authority or legitimacy on findings when research provides the “voice of the customer” information. Finally, an organisation which conducts some of its own market research is likely to have internal specialists who over time have the opportunity to build relationships with internal clients. This would be less likely when using external suppliers.

This study hypothesised that the way market research was structured would affect the perceived quality of the market research process. In particular, having dedicated researchers and research expertise was believed to enhance the ability to deliver valuable benefits.

**Strategy and Market Research Resource Allocation**

It was expected that the more entrepreneurial organisations would place more value on market research than would be the case with more reactive organisations. This is likely to lead to greater resource allocation as the Prospectors and Differentiators seek to reduce chances of decision-making failure in more uncertain environments than environments faced by more reactive Defenders and Cost leaders respectively.

The relationship between research function structure and the allocation of resources to market research is less clear. It is possible that organisations outsourcing market research tasks are doing so for cost reasons. This would suggest Prospectors and Differentiators allocate more resources overall than both Defenders and Cost leaders.

**Market Research Effectiveness**

Implicit in the discussion to this point are the actual benefits or value deliv-
erred by market research to the organisation. Traditionally, market research is seen as most effective when it supports decision making (Raphael and Parket, 1991). Based on the literature (Menon and Wilcox 1994; Bednall, Huynh and Alford 2005; Percy 1983) and preliminary research, other dimensions of market research effectiveness were included:

- Business Value of Market Research
- Value of Market Research Information in Use
- Marketing Group Gains its Own Way
- Bolstering the Marketing Manager’s Position

Resource Allocation and Market Research Effectiveness

4. That organisations who allocate more resources to market research will achieve greater market research effectiveness than organisations who allocate fewer resources to market research.

Strategy and Market Research Effectiveness

5a. That Prospectors will achieve greater market research effectiveness than Defenders.
5b. That Differentiators will achieve greater market research effectiveness than Cost leaders.

HYPOTHESIS

Strategy and Market Research Structure

1a. That Prospectors will rely more on internal research employees to carry out market research buying and research management and Defenders will rely more on external market research suppliers.

1b. That Differentiators will rely more on internal market research employees to carry out market research buying and management and Cost Leaders will rely more on external market research employees.

Strategy and Market Research Resource Allocation

2a. That Prospectors will allocate greater resources to market research than Defenders.
2b. That Differentiators will allocate greater resources to market research than Cost Leaders.

Structure and Market Research Effectiveness

3. That organisations who rely more on an internal market research function will achieve greater market research effectiveness than organisations that rely more on external market research.

METHOD

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase comprised 16 preliminary discussions about the management of market research and its value to the organisations. These were held with senior marketers and research managers in Australia and the United States. The purpose of these interviews was to generate a series of scale items to measure the effectiveness of the market research program.

The second phase of the research was a self-completion survey using an initial mailing, with subsequent mail, phone or internet follow-up. A list derived from Dun and Bradstreet of the top 1000 senior marketing managers in for-profit Australian organisations comprised the sample frame. A sample of 240 usable replies was received.

The questionnaire covered the organisation of the market research function in the firm, research program, research resource allocation, business strategy, perceived utility of market research for the organisation, marketing decision making, integration of market research data with other information, such as CRM systems and competitor data. Finally the survey items addressed key performance indicators and manager’s self preservation, using
market research to confirm, to protect and to enable success in dealing with top management. These items were derived from the literature, including studies of the value of particular projects (Menon and Wilcox 1994; Yamin and Shaw 1998; Bednall, Huynh and Alford 2005) and from the interviews with marketing and research professionals in phase one. Academic colleagues in Australia and the United States reviewed the questionnaire prior to its completion.

Where results are shown to be statistically significant, this is done at the 5% level, which is consistent with a sample of this size. Where ad hoc tests for differences between means were conducted, Tamhane’s T2 test was employed.

**FINDINGS**

**Respondents and Market Research Program**
Most of the respondents (65%) had company-wide responsibility for marketing, with the remainder having responsibility within a smaller business unit in their firm. The marketing managers described the market research activities in their area of responsibility – be it organisation wide or for their particular business unit. Of the total sample, only 208 managers (87%) reported that their area of the business conducted or commissioned any customer, intermediary or internal (e.g. employees) research project in the past financial year. Of the 13% percent who reported no research, over half (8%) had responsibility for marketing across the firm not just a single business unit. Thus it would appear that there are a number of organisations, even large ones by Australian standards, which do not use market research in any given year.

**The Structure of the Market Research Function**
All the results which follow refer to the 208 organisations who had conducted one or more research projects in the past financial year. As predicted, there were a variety of models for structuring the market research function and process. Table 1 characterises the management of MR in their organisation. (See Table 1).

Some organisations used none of these methods for organising market research. It is not clear how these organisations managed the process. One possible model would be to outsource the buying function to a research broker or external consultant, as Gondik (1999) has observed.

The results can be compared with Pont et al.’s (2004) study of Australian organisations which had their own website as at 1999. In that study, 41% of businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Structure of the Market Research Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No-one assigned a buying role 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Business Unit:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more specialist buyers 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who buy market research as one of their jobs 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People conduct research projects themselves 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal group or department of specialist buyers 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere in the organisation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more specialist buyers 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who buy market research as one of their jobs 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People conduct research projects themselves 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal group or department of specialist buyers 8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
did not have any person dedicated to the market research function, while 14% of organisations used a central market research department.

The sample in the study reported in the current paper was of major organisations, who would have both the evident need and the resources to invest in market research. To examine the impact the market research structure might have, organisations were grouped into five categories. These categories were based on levels of research sophistication – a) organisations who conducted their own research, b) organisations with their own research groups or departments of buyers, c) organisations with one or more specialist buyers, d) organisations with part-time buyers and e) organisations with no research buyers. Where organisations were in more than one of these five "research sophistication" categories they were classified according to the most "sophisticated" category they operated. In other words, if they were in category a) and e) they were classified as category a).

Market Research Resource Allocation

Table 2 shows the allocation of resources to market research, including estimates of internal resources (labour, overheads) and amounts paid to external market research consultants. The table shows 5% of business units recording no expenditure in the last financial year. As they all participated in some form of market research, such groups evidently had their expenditure met outside their business unit. The 5% of respondents having no expenditure can be explained by research expenditure being met by other parts of the organisation.

**Strategy and the Structure of the Market Research Function**

This section examines the relationship between the strategic types and the structure of the market research function. To do this a three-cluster non-hierarchical solution for both the Porter and the Miles and Snow typology was used. Firstly, the Miles and Snow clusters were labelled as Prospector, Defender and Analyzer types in accordance with the closeness of the relevant items to the cluster centre. Secondly, the Porter clusters were labelled as Cost Leader, Differentiator and Focus types.¹

Surprisingly, the strategy types were unrelated to the way market research was structured within the organisation, with one exception. The Porter Differentiators were more likely to use a part-time research resource from another part of the organisation (36%) than were either Cost Leaders (17%) or Focus strategies (14%). Thus, there was little support for Hypothesis 1a and 1b.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure SA</th>
<th>Internal Expenditure %</th>
<th>External Expenditure %</th>
<th>Neither %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $50k</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$50k - $100k</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$100k - $200k</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$200k - $500k</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$500k - $1m</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$1m - $2m</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$2m - $5m</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$5m</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Details of the items used and detailed tables are available on request to the first author.

*Table 2: Expenditure on Market Research - Last Financial Year*
Results for structure hypotheses

1a. That Prospectors will rely more on internal research employees to carry out market research buying and research management and Defenders will rely more on external market research employees - Not Supported.

1b. That Differentiators will rely more on internal market research employees to carry out market research buying and management and Cost leaders will rely more on external market research employees - Not Supported.

However, there was a relationship between size of the Business Unit and market research function structure ($x^2 = 44.65$, 5df). Surprisingly, business units with less than 100 employees (when compared with larger business units) were more likely to have either a) a full-time buyer in the organisation, or b) have no dedicated research buyer in the organisation at all. The no dedicated researcher outcome may simply reflect resources, while some other small organisations, in seeking to grow rapidly, may have a critical need for market research and can justify a full-time buyer.

Strategy and Market Research Resource Allocation

In terms of resource allocation, the strategy types were not related to the amount of internal or external spending on market research within the Business Unit.

Previous research has found relationships between organisation characteristics and resource allocation. For example, Pont et al. (2004) found that the type of industry was more influential on amount of research expenditure than was the structure of the research function. This finding was not apparent in our data, nor was industry type related to the level of internal or external market research expenditure.

Results for resource allocation hypotheses

2a. That Prospectors will allocate greater resources to market research than Defenders - Not Supported.

2b. That Differentiators will allocate greater resources to market research than Cost Leaders - Not Supported.

Effect of Research Function Structure on Market Research Effectiveness

This section examines the impact of the five market research function structures on the marketing manager's evaluation of the benefits of market research. As discussed earlier, these structures reflect a range between highly sophisticated (organisations who conducted their own research) to the least sophisticated (organisations with no research buyers) structures.

A series of seven-point Likert scale item statements measured the benefits of market research. Table 3 shows the results of an exploratory factor analysis of these items. Four factors were produced, using principal components analysis with an oblique rotation. The results for the Pattern matrix are shown with items loading above 0.35 shown. The KMO test at 0.90 was satisfactory.

The first factor represented the benefits gained from market research in terms of better products and services, better productivity and a strong contribution to marketing strategy. This factor captured the broad business value of market research. The second factor represented the value of the information produced and its ability to integrate with customer and competitor data. The third factor related to the marketing group "getting its own way" in the organisation, of providing data to bolster their business case, rather than the inherent value of the research information collected. The fourth and final factor was also internal and political in nature. It represented the bolstering of the marketing manager's position within the organisation, through providing key performance measures, covering "your backside" and using the information collected to get support from senior management.
Table 3: Evaluation of the Benefits of Market Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has profoundly shaped our marketing policies.</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has led to an improved implementation of new products or services.</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has led to increased productivity.</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has helped us to understand the dynamics of the marketplace.</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces reports that are easy for my staff to understand.</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normally leads to concrete actions being taken.</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is mainly used to increase our understanding of marketing issues.</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes a major contribution to the marketing strategies developed by our Business Unit.</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps my marketing group get its own way in our Business Unit.</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is mainly used to assist marketing decision making.</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is mainly used to confirm our understanding of issues.</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides the main “voice of the customer” in our Business Unit.</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is used to provide key measures of managers’ performance.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a major influence on our top management.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps cover our backside when my group needs to make risky marketing decisions.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces information that’s easy to integrate with our customer data.</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces information that is easy to integrate with our competitor data.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The value of our marketing research information far outweighs its cost.</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Factor Inter-correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Decision Making Support Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The appropriateness of using an oblique rotation was supported by the Table 4 correlation matrix. This showed the factors 1, 2 and 4 to be moderately correlated. (See Table 4).

Table 5 shows a further variable which represents decision making support. This is the traditional benefit of market research and was derived from three 7-point semantic differential scale items. The three items were combined into a scale with a Cronbach's standardised alpha of 0.84.

Table 5 shows marketing managers to be slightly positive, about the decision making support provided by the market research.

Given these results, analysis was undertaken to determine the extent to which the structure of the market research function determined the evaluation of market research effectiveness. This was achieved by using the four market research effectiveness factors from Table 3 and "Decision Making Support" from Table 5. A fixed effects MANCOVA was used for this purpose. The independent variable was the research management structure (the five research function structures previously described), while external spending on research (up to or above $50k) and internal spending on research (up to or above $50k) were used as covariates. Table 6 shows the summary outcomes for the five analyses which show the impact on each of the market research effectiveness measures.

Table 6: MANCOVA analyses summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External Expenditure</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Expenditure</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIR management</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = .171 (Adjusted R Squared = .147)
### Dependent Variable: Factor 2 (Value of market research information in use)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External expenditure</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal expenditure</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR management</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = .113 (Adjusted R Squared = .087)

### Dependent Variable: Factor 3 (Marketing group gets its own way)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External expenditure</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal expenditure</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR management</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = .031 (Adjusted R Squared = .002)

### Dependent Variable: Factor 4 (Bolstering the marketing manager's position)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External expenditure</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal expenditure</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR management</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = .059 (Adjusted R Squared = .031)

### Dependent Variable: Decision making support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External expenditure</td>
<td>21.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.06</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal expenditure</td>
<td>32.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32.43</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR management</td>
<td>79.84</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.96</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = .100 (Adjusted R Squared = .073)
For the factor titled "Business value of market research", the data showed that greater internal and external expenditures were positively related to market research effectiveness. The structure of the market research function came close to showing a statistically significant effect in predicting market research effectiveness. Pairwise comparisons showed organisations with no dedicated market research personnel rated the research benefits less positively than organisations with full-time buyers or organisations which had internal employees doing research.

The second factor, "Value of the market research information in the organisation", was strongly related to the market research function structure. Paired comparisons showed those with no dedicated market research people or those just with part-time staff were less likely to see market research as being valuable than were the other groups. In contrast, internal or external research expenditure had no impact on functional structure.

The third factor "Marketing group gets its own way" was strongly related to research expenditure. A rational explanation is that greater research expenditure provides superior market insights. A political explanation could be that large expenditure legitimizes the marketing group's position internally. This is most likely to occur where the research finding or research outcome is predictable in advance. This is often termed confirmatory research where the results are used to support the positions the marketing group puts to the organisation.

For the fourth, and final factor, "Bolstering the marketing manager's position", the type of market research function structure came close to statistical significance in predicting the perceived value of market research. Having a separate research buying group facilitated this outcome. Possibly this was because the buying group manager has authority for the research group's activities and hence the way research was reported internally.

The final market research effectiveness variable, titled decision-making support was strongly related to internal research expenditure but not related to external research expenditure. Decision-making support was also not related to organisational structure. This suggested that organisations which commit internal resources to analyse and make sense of their market research were more likely to judge the research as useful in their decision making.

In summary, research function structure was related to market research effectiveness. Firstly, structure was related to the rational value derived from market research, and to a lesser degree, the role of research in developing new products and strategies. Secondly, the research function structure was related to the "less-rational" or political outcome of market research. It did this by helping the marketing manager achieve organisational objectives. Organisations with dedicated market research resources achieved greater market research effectiveness than organisations with part-time or no dedicated market research employees. The contribution of research function structure to market research effectiveness was not simply a function of the internal or external expenditure, but how the function was organized.

Results for the hypotheses linking structure and effectiveness
3. That organisations who rely more on an internal market research function will achieve greater market research effectiveness than organisations that rely more on external market research - Supported.

4. That organisations who allocate more resources to market research will achieve greater market research effectiveness than organisations who allocate fewer resources to market research - Not Supported.

Effect of Strategic Intent on the Value of Market Research
Although the strategic typologies had little relationship to functional structure, it was possible strategy type might directly
affect market research effectiveness. Recently Bednall and Valos (2005a) have shown a weak relationship between the Prospector strategy type and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the most recent market research project conducted, using the USER scale (Menon and Wilcox, 1994) as a measure of research effectiveness. To test this relationship, the strategic types clusters were used to predict the value of the four exploratory market research effectiveness factors and the decision making variable. The results for the Miles and Snow typology are shown in Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Business Value of Market Research</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>18.02</td>
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<td>9.01</td>
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<td>.92</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>207.00</td>
<td>207</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Value of market research information in use</td>
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<td>4.97</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>207.00</td>
<td>207</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing Group Gets its Own Way</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.11</td>
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<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>202.78</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>207.00</td>
<td>207</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering the Manager’s position</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>199.33</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>207.00</td>
<td>207</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support market research gives to decision making</td>
<td>85.272</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42.64</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2214.57</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2299.85</td>
<td>205</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the Miles and Snow strategies, there was a strong relationship between Factor 1 (Business value of market research) and strategy type. The Prospector strategy type was far more likely than the Defender strategy to achieve the business value of the knowledge generated by market research. There was also a strong relationship between Factor 2 (Value of market research information in use) and strategy type. The Prospector strategy type was far more likely than the Defender strategy to achieve value from usage of market research information. However, in Factor 4, Prospectors were less likely than Defenders to use market research for internal political reasons. Finally, Prospectors achieved the fifth variable, decision-making support to a greater extent than Defenders. The data suggested that, as hypothesised, the Prospector type had a deep and abiding need for the information produced from research. In contrast the Defender firm, while conducting market research, have

In terms of the Miles and Snow strategies, there was a strong relationship between Factor 1, (Business value of market research) and strategy type. The Prospector strategy type was far more likely than the Defender strategy to achieve the business value of the knowledge generated by market research. There was also a strong relationship between Factor 2, (Value of market research information in use) and strategy type. The Prospector strategy type was far more likely than the Defender strategy to achieve value from usage of market research information. However, in Factor 4, Prospectors were less likely than Defenders to use market research for internal political reasons. Finally, Prospectors achieved the fifth variable, decision-making support to a greater extent than Defenders. The data suggested that, as hypothesised, the Prospector type had a deep and abiding need for the information produced from research. In contrast the Defender firm, while conducting market research, have
Table 8: ANOVA Analysis – Porter Strategy Clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Business Value of Market Research</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Value of market research information in use</td>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td>206</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bringing in a market place understanding</td>
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<td>.84</td>
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<td>1.01</td>
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<td>Bolstering the Manager’s position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>28.54</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10.08</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Results for hypotheses linking strategy type to market research effectiveness

5a. That Prospects will achieve greater market research effectiveness than Defenders – Supported.

5b. That Differentiators will achieve greater market research effectiveness than Cost leaders - Partially Supported.

DISCUSSION

The primary aims of this study were to firstly, examine the relationship between the structure of the market research function and strategy, and secondly, to examine the relationships between strategy, structure, and research resource allocation on effective market research.

The overall finding showed that strategy and structure had an impact on the various dimensions of market research effectiveness, despite surprisingly not being associated with each other. On the other hand research resource allocation was not related to market research effectiveness.

Structure of Research Function

In terms of organisational structure the results showed that considerable variation in market research structures existed in major Australian organisations and business units. Apart from some smaller business units being more likely to have dedicated internal market research resources, few characteristics of the organisation accounted for the varying structures of market research management. Similarly, organisational strategic intent had minimal impact.

Possibly one explanation is that structures which existed at the time of our survey reflected the history of the organisations involved. When structures were being designed for the marketing function, a related decision about the market research support function would also have been made. Experience suggests that once you have a function like market research in an organisation, the people who work there will become advocates for that function. They will therefore act to protect their position even when the identified organisational need which spawned them in the first place has disappeared. It is only when structures are re-examined or re-organised that the function may change.
In a separate study of Australian research buyers Bednall and Valos (2005b) have shown that the job title given to the person in the main research buying role was related to the judged effectiveness of specific research projects. More modern titles like "analytics manager" or "consumer insights manager" were related to higher levels of effectiveness. This suggests that the market research function needs to be re-examined on a regular basis lest those supporting the function themselves become more like Defenders than Prospectors in "defending their patch". In our current study we have no information on the history of the functional structure within the organisation. Future research will need to take this into account when measuring the impact of structure on effectiveness.

Whatever the origins of structure, the findings did show structure was related to the judged effectiveness of the market research function. In particular, having a dedicated group contributed to the effectiveness of market research. This was through gaining marketing knowledge and in assisting the marketing group and the marketing manager to promote their business cases within their organisation. In summary, the decision to outsource research or maintain an internal research unit should not just be a cost issue. It has important implications for strategic decision-making support.

Research Resource Allocation
The degree of external expenditure contributed to the value of market research information. Possibly better users of research data get a better return from expenditure and are more likely to do more? Internal resource allocation and not external expenditure was related to achieving the benefit of "use of market research for decision making." Presumably this reflected a valued process of applying organisational knowledge to the interpretation of incoming market data. In summary, the decision to spend more or less on market research is only part of the issue. The proportion of internal expenditure vs. external expenditure is more critical and impacts the derived value or usefulness of data collected.

Strategy Type
Although strategic type was not related to functional structure as hypothesised, the findings did show strategy, as described by Miles and Snow (1978), was related to market research effectiveness. This provides an indication that the results are not an artefact of a self-serving view of managers justifying their actions as managers of the market research function. The more entrepreneurial Prospector organisations were most likely to judge research as being effective in terms of a) generating useful information, b) in providing data that could be combined with other sources and c) in decision making support. Such organisations have an urgent need to gain reliable market information to identify and exploit market opportunities. The Prospectors were also less likely to misuse market research to bolster their position within the firm – this was more likely to be done by the Defender type. A weaker version of these relationships was found in the Bednall and Valos (2005b) study of market research buyers.

However, there was little relationship between the Differentiator and Cost Leader Porter strategy types with research effectiveness. It was expected that Differentiators would be more effective in using research as they are competing on more than just price as is the approach of the Cost Leaders. On the other hand the Miles and Snow Prospectors who face greater uncertainty than the Miles and Snow Defenders achieved far more effectiveness from their use of market research. Strategies that are more customer and externally focused are expected to require better research and have employees with greater expertise in the use of research.

Above all, the results indicate that market research effectiveness cannot be judged merely on the basis of the technical quali-
ties of the project or the innovativeness of the design. Strategic intent also needs to be taken into account. Defender organisations were more likely to engage in the internal political use of market research. Presumably "bolstering the manager’s position" is not what we typically assume research effectiveness to be, but for some organisations this is where a part of the value lies. This reminds us that not all market research is about decision making. Often it serves a valuable function in reinforcing or confirming decisions (Bednall, Huyhn and Allford, 2005) already reached, in situations where surprise and radical change are not welcomed.

However, our research suggests that Prospector organisations were the most likely to see value in the research function in terms of both knowledge enhancement and decision support. The evidence suggests that for these organisations, research effectiveness is likely come from the systematic integration of the market research function into marketing management, good analysis, good communication of findings and, above all, a willingness to listen to the marketplace.

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Groups in focus: The distinctive difference between focus group discussions and focus group interviews

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Abstract
This short paper highlights the differences between focus group interviews and focus group discussions. It discusses the fact that when researchers from different cultural and scientific backgrounds talk about ‘doing some groups’ they may each have totally different types of research in mind. The type of group that an English or Australian qualitative researcher has in mind may be a abhorrance to a qualitative researcher from the USA, and vice versa. The paper identifies the source of the difference as being in the predominant scientific paradigms of the qualitative researchers involved. Qualitative researchers from the USA tend to have a very positivistic, numbers oriented, approach to research where width of understanding is paramount whereas qualitative researchers from the UK and Australia tend to have a constructivist approach to research where depth of understanding is paramount.

Key words: Focus group discussions, focus group interviews, positivism, constructivism

Introduction
For many years UK and Australian trained qualitative researchers working internationally have been confused (Boddy 2005) by the US approach to qualitative discussion group research, where group sizes are larger with up to twelve participants (and occasionally sixteen) (Henderson 2003c), discussion guides are eleven or so pages instead of three, the moderator has little freedom to veer off script, the client sends in questions at intervals throughout the group (Henderson 2003b) and counting exercises are spread liberally throughout the exercise; ‘ask them to put their hands up if they like this pack’ being the type of question the US researchers want the moderator to ask. This is not a universal approach to group research in the USA but it is the most common approach (Rook 2003) and some critical American researchers such as Rook have referred this to approach to being dull and superficial, characterising such focus groups as being little more than hurried, highly flawed and expensive group surveys involving too many questions and no activities other than talking. Other North American researchers (Henderson 2003b) are less critical of USA style focus groups and make recommendations as to how to ‘make every minute count’ and to ‘speed up’ the process of group research but even they also call for a more flexible approach to moderating and less rigidity in following the discussion guide.
A UK or Australian trained qualitative researcher would expect to undertake a group in the complete opposite manner to this. The discussion guide would be just that – a guide covering areas of concern rather than a list of questions – and the moderator would have the freedom to change the order of questions, move onto different areas that appeared to be important to group participants whether or not these areas were expected to come up by the client. The moderator would also not expect to be interrupted at all during the course of the group. Counting exercises would not be present although perceptual mapping might and the aim would be to develop an in-depth understanding of the marketing problem from the group participants’ point of view rather than the client’s point of view. Indeed this would be seen as the whole essence of taking a market led approach to market research rather than a product led approach. The researcher is seen as being there to discover and understand what is important to the customer or user rather to get answers to questions which are seen as being important by the manufacturer or supplier.

These are clearly different types of group research altogether. A terminology for differentiating them has been proposed by a UK trained market researcher currently working in Australia and that researcher has proposed (Boddy 2005) that a difference be made between the terms ‘focus group discussion’ and ‘focus group interview’. This paper supports that viewpoint and hopes to clarify the situation even further by a renewed discussion of the issues involved.

Discussion

The aim of this paper is not to discuss the relative merits of the different approaches to focus group discussions as each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. Rather the aim of this paper is to clearly name and identify what the different approaches are so that a degree of clarity can enter the vocabulary of qualitative market researchers around the world.

These different approaches to group research are learnt, at least by market researchers, on the job (Rook 2003) depending on the employing research or advertising companies’ usual ways of conducting research. Therefore as the most common approach in the USA is now the interviewing style approach mentioned by Rook, this means that this approach will probably become the accepted way of conducting group research in the USA. The differences in approach between the USA and UK and Australia are likely therefore to become wider and more firmly entrenched rather than narrower and this in turn means that the adoption of a common terminology would be of benefit to the market research industry worldwide so that confusion is minimised.

Rook identifies, whether consciously or not, what is probably the cause of the USA approach to group research when he says that most managers he has spoken to are concerned about the small numbers in groups and prefer the larger numbers that surveys provide. This is a clear indication that American managers are more at home with a positivist approach to research than a constructivist approach because they will have been brought up and trained in this approach to scientific enquiry (Tannass 2000).

Viewed from a positivist perspective, groups are just small numbers of people (respondents) talking about things without much reliability because of the small numbers involved. From this perspective it’s no wonder researchers want to ask as many questions as possible in the time allowed and US qualitative researchers report just this, saying, (Henderson 2002) “Every minute in a group is precious because there are more questions planned than can be asked and answered in 120 minutes”.

From a constructivist point of view this is an absurd way to conduct groups because viewed from a constructivist perspective groups are an ideal opportunity to get some real in-depth understand-
ing from people (participants) talking in their own time and in their own language (instead of that of the advertising agency or manufacturer) and in terms of what is really important to them and to a level of understanding that surveys would almost never manage. The researcher is then constructing reality from the group participants’ point of view.

Further evidence of the positivist approach to research by US researchers is their terminology for describing the people in the groups, US researchers tend to talk about ‘respondents’ in groups (Henderson 2003a) in other words people who respond to questions – exemplifying a positivistic approach to research. UK researchers tend to talk about ‘participants’ in groups (Boddy 2005) in other words people who participate in the group exercise and in the construction of reality – exemplifying a constructivistic approach to research. These different scientific approaches are really different cultures and what is right and appropriate in one culture is not right and appropriate in the other.

Historically US researchers have tended to use the terms Focus Group, Focus Group Interviews or Group Interviews while UK researchers have used the terms Group Discussion or Qualitative Group Discussion. For example, in the book “Planning Focus Groups” the US based researchers Morgan and Scannell say “We welcome you to this series of books on focus group interviewing.”

Thus we can see that there are different expectations and norms about what qualitative group research should be. Thus a “good, effective” focus group discussion has been described by an Australian and Hong Kong Chinese research team (Robinson & So 1990) as being one marked by “how little we had to direct and prompt discussion – and by how much the group went into ‘auto-pilot’ and actually directed itself.” This is a view which UK researchers would appreciate but which US researchers used to a group interview/focus group type approach would not appreciate at all because of their different expectations as to how a group should be run and what its aims were. Such a US qualitative researcher, used to a group interview approach and who was expecting a facilitator to go through each and every question on the interview guide would be exasperated if a moderator, deciding enough information was already available on a particular subject cut out further questions on it or moved on to an interesting area that came up in the discussion but that was not previously specified as being an area the client wanted to know about.

A Note on the Positivist and Constructivist Scientific Paradigms

For an excellent description of the evolution of western scientific thought see Tarnass’ book, “The Passion of the Western Mind” (Tarnass 2000). Lacking that, a brief description of what this paper means by positivism and constructivism is given below.

The realist/positivist scientific paradigm is so called because it confines itself to what is positively given and avoids speculation. The point of view held by this scientific tradition has effectively been the tradition of western science from Descartes until the advent of postmodernism, it holds (Blackburn 1996), that the highest or only form of knowledge is the description of sensory phenomena. Under this scientific paradigm the focus group interview approach to qualitative group research makes most sense because the positivist tradition assumes that objective answers, such as those to be gained from a question and answer group interview session, are there for the asking. In the positivist tradition social scientists study respondents in a consciously similar way (Rosenau 1992), in order to gain scientific respectability for the research, to that of natural scientists, for example like a scientist in a physics laboratory studying particles of matter. They look for interrelations of cause
and effect and study respondents using objective criteria, measures and research designs which are available for other social scientists to repeat and thus verify or disprove any conclusions. Based on this understanding of science some US market researchers have gone so far as to argue whether or not qualitative market research can even qualify as true market research at all, (Wade 2001) because it does not follow the (positivist) scientific method. Wade puts these arguments against qualitative research in their place but it is not an argument one can even imagine taking place in the UK or Australia.

For researchers coming from a constructivist or post-modern tradition, which is the idea that universal objective truth cannot be found with certainty and that individual subjective truth is a valid form of truth, the suggestion is that such positivist confidence in objective truth is misplaced and that people are transient in their attitudes and beliefs and that people can not always articulate or access or know what is real to them. Post-modern qualitative research (Creswell 1998; Lincoln & Guba 2000) discusses how the researcher applies critical subjectivity in participant transaction with the subjects of the research and spends time in the field with participants, such as those in a focus group discussion rather than talking about how researchers engage in the objective empirical observation or study of respondents. The post-modern tradition with its emphasis on a constructivist ontology; the idea that the kinds of things that really exist can be identified and explored by a cooperative exploration between the researcher and the subjects researched, and a concomitant interpretive epistemology; the idea that a researcher can interpret and investigate research subjects in terms of their own subjective knowledge and experience of the world, is much more amenable to and in tune with a focus group discussion approach where a deeper understanding of the areas of investigation is sought.

This understanding that researchers coming from different scientific backgrounds have different understandings and expectations of qualitative group research enables the suggestion that there are actually two different kinds of research groups: focus group interviews and focus group discussions. These are defined and explained below.

Focus Group Discussion Shown Diagrammatically
# Focus Group Discussions

## Research Philosophy

Follows the UK tradition of qualitative group research.

Implicitly a constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology or at least one encompassing a critical approach to positivism and therefore incorporating such elements as psychotherapy, projective techniques and psychoanalysis.

## Research Process

Group members are participants, moderator is first among equals.

Run by a moderator who mediates the discussion between participants.

Moderator gently guides discussion and keeps it on track.

Moderator uses a typically short discussion guide to make sure the key areas of concern in the research are covered.

Moderator can go with the flow of discussion and does not need to ask questions in any particular order or to ask all of the relatively few questions written on the guide.

Moderator typically has substantial authority to decide when enough discussion has taken place to understand the areas of concern in the research.

Discussion is maximised across and around the group.

The flow is relatively unstructured.

Group members interact freely with each other on a group basis.

Participants’ statements may be verbally played back to the group members to stimulate further responses or to clarify meanings or differences.

## Research Suitability

Good for exploratory research in-depth.

For understanding non-rational motivational factors.

Exploring the answers to ‘why’ people do things.

Subsumes the terms:

Group Discussions, Qualitative Group Discussions
Focus group discussions are marked by a free flowing discussion of the areas under investigation around the group. The moderator is first among equals and everyone has the chance to participate in the research and contribute to the understanding of the area under discussion. Diagrammatically this may be shown as a circular flow of discussion as below.

Focus Group Discussions Defined

A focus group discussion is defined as a group of usually 4 to 8 people brought together to participate in the discussion of an area of interest. The focus group discussion aims to provide an environment in which all members of the group can discuss the area of investigation with each other. A successful focus group discussion has the group members involved as participants in discussing the area of interest. They may argue with each other, try to persuade each other of their point of view, agree or disagree, ask each other questions and generally discuss the topic in an open and usually friendly manner. This results in a broad breadth of discussion as well as discussion in depth. The direction of interaction is between each group participant (including the moderator) and each of the other group participants individually or collectively. The moderator is there to gently guide the discussion and keep it on track. The moderator, acting as first among equals, intervenes (i.e. moderates) only to keep the topic of discussion on the area of interest or to introduce new elements of the area of interest or to probe for deeper understanding of statements made by group members or to gain explanations for differences of opinion held. Participatory discussion is maximised. The moderator in a focus group discussion mediates between group participants and settles disputes in terms of trying to explore and understand different points of view or to explain differences in opinions.

Focus Group Interview Shown Diagrammatically

Focus group interviews are marked by a flow of information between the respondents individually and the facilitator of the group. Diagrammatically this may be shown as a discrete series of flows of information between the facilitator and the respondents as below.
Focus Group Interviews

Research Philosophy
Follows what has become the USA approach to qualitative group research.
Implicitly a positivist ontology and empirical epistemology.

Research Process
Group members are respondents.
Run by a facilitator who eases the data collection process and enables respondents to respond.
Facilitator controls and directs the interview via controlling the delivery of questions to respondents.
Facilitator uses a detailed interview guide to make sure that all the questions in the research have answers from the group to them.
Facilitator typically has minimal authority to digress from the questions in the interview guide or to decide when enough information has been gathered for the purposes of the research.
Discussion between group members is minimised.
The flow is relatively structured.
Group members mainly interact with the facilitator on an individual basis and often one at once.
Individual results are gathered possibly using hand-counts, hand held electronic voting devices or mini-questionnaires.
These results may be presented back to the group members as averages or visually in graphs to stimulate further responses.

Research suitability
Good for exploratory research in breadth.
For understanding the more easily accessible rational factors.
Exploring the widest range of possible reasons for behaviour.

Subsumes the terms:
Focus Group, Group Interview, Nominal Group Interview,
Focus Group Interviews Defined

A focus group interview is a group of usually 6 to 12 people brought together to participate in a group interview concerning an area of interest. In a focus group interview the facilitator controls the group interaction and group members are more like respondents than participants in the research. Discussion is mainly directed between the facilitator and the group respondents individually rather than between respondents themselves. The group members may be asked to vote on various topics or to complete mini-questions for each sub-topic of interest. Stimuli materials may be new product ideas, advertisements or other conceptualisations to which reactions are sought. The facilitator is there to facilitate the delivery of the questions to the respondents. The facilitator controls the group: what it is doing, what members are talking about and when they talk about each subject, in a much tighter way than a moderator would do in a focus group discussion. A facilitator in a focus group interview eases (i.e. facilitates) the process of collecting data from group respondents and enables respondents to respond to questions and to other stimuli such as group averages.

Conclusions

An acceptance of the argument presented in this paper will enable researchers, when faced with a request for qualitative research from a research culture with a different scientific background to their own, to ask; "do you want focus group discussions or do you want focus group interviews?"

An explanation of the difference can then easily be given and any confusion sorted out before the project gets going. Misunderstandings on the night of research will then be more a thing of the past and American qualitative researchers can understand where UK and Australian qualitative researchers are coming from, and vice versa.
References


Boddy, C. R. 2005, 'A rose by any other name may smell as sweet but “group discussion” is not another name for a “focus group” nor should it be.' *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 248 - 255.


The Behaviour of Mail Survey Non-respondents

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Abstract

Despite many studies on the factors affecting mail survey response, surprisingly little is known about why or at what point in the mail survey process non-response occurs. A better understanding of what happens when respondents receive a mail survey but do not respond to it would enable researchers using this survey method to concentrate their efforts to increase response rates on factors with the greatest potential. This paper reports the results of research designed to determine why non-response occurs in a mail survey, at what point it happens, and what may be done to overcome it.

The study involved attempting to contact non-respondents to three separate mail surveys of the New Zealand general public, conducted in 2003, to determine why they had not responded to these surveys. The results provide estimates of the proportion of non-respondents at each of five stages in the survey response process – opening the outer envelope, reading the cover letter, starting the questionnaire, completing the questionnaire, and returning the questionnaire. The paper concludes by discussing the practical implications of the findings for researchers concerned about mail survey response rates.

Introduction

Mail survey response rates are declining, or if they are not declining, it is only because more effort is being expended to maintain them at previous levels (Baruch, 1999; Connelly, Brown & Decker, 2003). There are some obvious reasons for this; people are busier, they are over surveyed, and their privacy concerns have increased. However, despite more than 50 years of research into factors affecting mail survey response, relatively little is known about why or at what point in the mail survey process non-response occurs.

From a mail survey of 600 New Zealand women, Brennan and Hoek (1992) concluded that people tend to respond to mail survey requests in a consistent manner and that refusers have a different predisposition towards mail survey participation than other non-respondents. In particular, 'hardcore' refusers, those who will almost never respond, do not respond to repetitive contacts. This finding was consistent with earlier research conducted by Stinchcombe, Jones and Sheatsley (1981), who found that active refusers (those who explicitly refuse to participate in a mail survey) had different attitudes and behaviours to those of passive refusers (those who simply fail to respond). Using both experts (marketing research managers) and industrial respondents
(executives of major UK companies), Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmich (1996) examined the possible impact of different design and implementation factors on industrial mail surveys. Mail questionnaires were sent to participants asking how 92 separate items were perceived to increase the likelihood of mail survey participation. The study generated a number of guidelines for mail survey research congruent with previous research. These included: having the study approved by an organisation respected by the participants, personalising the covering letter, providing assurances of confidentiality, multiple contacts, including stamped, addressed return envelopes and providing a summary of the study's results.

However, while the research by Brennan and Hoek (1992), Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmich (1996) and Stinchcombe et al. (1981), provides some valuable insights into survey respondent and non-respondent behaviours, it has two fundamental problems. First, as Gwyther points out: "The epistemological limitations to surveys on surveys is self-evident; employing an instrument to measure its own importance is immediately contradictory" (1986, p.28). Second, the research concentrates on respondents, rather than non-respondents, and the factors that lead to non-response cannot automatically be assumed to be the opposite of those that prompt response. One solution to both of these problems is to survey non-respondents to a mail survey using a different methodology.

Two studies that used telephone interviews with mail survey non-respondents to examine their reasons for non-response, suggested four main sources: inaccessibility, inability, carelessness, and non-compliance (Robinson & Agisism, 1951; Sosdian & Sharp, 1980; cited in Hogelberg & Luong, 1998). Inaccessibility refers to potential respondents failing to receive a survey; inability to respondents being physically unable to respond, because of illness or a language problem, for example. Carelessness covers situations in which respondents receive a questionnaire but misplace it or forget about it, while non-compliance refers to the conscious decision of individuals not to respond.

These studies are now quite dated and, as Hogelberg and Luong (1998) point out, social-desirability bias and post hoc rationalisation may have influenced non-respondents' answers (a criticism that inevitably applies to all studies based on respondents' self reports). Nevertheless, inaccessibility (e.g., 'never received', 'away from home') and carelessness (e.g., 'forgot it', 'mailed it') were the main reasons given for nonresponse. Non-compliance and inability to respond were reported much less often as reasons for nonresponse.

In another, more recent, study that employed the same approach, Kaner, Haighton and McAvoy (1998), telephoned 276 non-respondents to an earlier mail survey of United Kingdom general practitioners. Kaner et al. found the main reasons given by GPs not responding to the mail survey were that the questionnaire had got lost in paperwork (34%), the GPs were too busy (21%), and that questionnaires were routinely "binned" (18%). Kaner et al. reported that higher workloads, including more administration, meant that participation in research had become a low priority for doctors. Suggestions for increasing GPs' response rates included greater awareness among researchers of the pressures of general practice and reduction in the amount of research material sent to GPs. However, the extent to which the behaviour of a sample of GPs can be extrapolated to the general public or to other populations is arguable.

Though not specifically concerned with mail survey non-respondents, Helgeson (1994) used a phenomenological approach to study how receiving a mail survey fits into the lives of a group of participants.
Helgeson examined how survey research design influences respondents' decision to respond, and suggested that the key variables include: helpfulness and courtesy, obligation and guilt, interest in the survey and the surveying process or its results, fun and entertainment, self expression, the impact of others, the attitude of respondents when they receive a survey, benefits to respondents, and ease of response. While Helgeson's study provides little in the way of explanation of non-respondents' behaviour and is limited in its generalisability by the size and nature of its sample (20 business students aged between 21 and 41), it does provide some research hypotheses and a different methodological perspective for examining survey non-response.

Only one reported study provides quantitative estimates of participation drop out at different stages of the mail survey response process. In 1991, as a result of significantly lower than expected response rates in the mailable component of the 1990 Census, the US Bureau of the Census conducted a national, face-to-face survey of approximately 2,500 households to determine the characteristics, circumstances and attitudes that may have related to census mail response (Kulka, Holt, Carter & Dowd, 1991). The results of this study are shown in Table 1.

Leaving aside the fact that the estimates shown in Table 1 are based on respondents' self-reports, non-receipt of the Census survey form was one of the key determinants of non-response for the 1990 census; 10.8% of the sample, representing 46.8% of non-respondents, reported not actually receiving their census form. This is consistent with the 10% of respondents identified by Brennan and Hoek (1992) who reported not receiving a mail survey questionnaire.

Of those who remembered receiving the 1990 US Census form, 8% reported either not opening it or not beginning to fill it out; 2% said they started filling it out but did not finish it, and another 3.5% reported finishing the form, but not mailing it back (Kulka et al. 1991). Concerns for privacy and confidentiality, alienation, and distrust of government were the major reasons given for non-response. However, it is difficult to determine whether the same concerns would be prevalent in surveys sponsored by universities or commercial firms. Similarly, while Kulka et al.'s study identifies where in the survey response process non-response occurs and the relative importance of each of these stages, these estimates are for a government-initiated census, not a sample survey of the general public.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Census Participation</th>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Extent of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not receive the Census form</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received the form, but did not open it</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened it but did not start filling it out</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started filling it out, but did not mail it back</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished filling it out, but did not mail it back</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailed Census form back</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>2,478</td>
<td>2,210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kulka et al. (1991)
Though we know a lot about the effect of various factors on mail survey response, we know much less about survey non-response; when it occurs, why it occurs, and how it could be overcome. The research described in this paper was designed to address these issues, by combining the approaches taken by Kulka and his colleagues (1991) and Helgeson (1994). Successful achievement of these objectives would allow future research to focus on factors with the greatest potential for increasing response rates.

Method

Attempts were made to contact the non-respondents of three separate mail surveys of the New Zealand general public, conducted in 2003. The three mail surveys and their associated follow-up surveys are described below.

Survey One: Roles of Men and Women in Society
A sample of 400 Palmerston North residents, aged under 70, randomly selected from the Palmerston North and Rangitikei electoral rolls, was sent a self-completion questionnaire on the ‘Roles of Men and Women in Society’. Each survey package contained a questionnaire in the form of a 20-page A4 booklet, a covering letter and reply-paid envelope, posted in an official, white Massey University envelope. After one reminder that included a replacement questionnaire, 243 questionnaires had been returned, including refusals and GNAs (questionnaires returned ‘Gone no Address’), leaving 157 non-respondents to be contacted.

The follow-up survey involved an attempt to contact and interview in person all of the 157 non-respondents to the initial survey. Despite considerable effort on the part of the nine interviewers, involving at least three call-backs for each non-respondent, only 32 interviews were successfully completed. This was partly due to the fact that 56 non-respondents had moved (i.e., were ‘gone, no address’) and a further 39 were uncontactable, even after repeated attempts. In addition, 21 non-respondents refused to be interviewed and nine turned out to be ineligible for various reasons. The 32 contactable non-respondents who agreed to be interviewed were each administered a face-to-face questionnaire designed to explore their reasons for not responding and to investigate ways in which they could have been influenced to become respondents.

Survey Two: National Identity
The second survey involved a random sample of voters selected from the complete New Zealand electoral roll, plus an additional 200 selected from the Maori electorates. Each member of the sample of 2,200 was sent a self-completion questionnaire on ‘National Identity’. Again, the questionnaire was a 20-page A4 booklet and the survey package included a questionnaire, covering letter, reply-paid envelope and an official Massey University addressed cover sheet that acted as an outer envelope. The whole package was shrink-wrapped in clear plastic. After two reminders that included a replacement questionnaire, 940 questionnaires had not been returned.

The follow-up survey involved a third reminder letter sent to all 940 non-respondents after two reminders. While this reminder letter was designed to enhance the overall response to the survey, it was also used to gain information from non-respondents. To do this, four questions were printed on the back of the letter. The questions asked whether the respondent recalled receiving the survey, what happened after they received the original questionnaire and why they didn’t complete it. Participants were asked to complete and return this brief questionnaire if they were not willing to answer the National Identity questionnaire itself. Forty-seven respondents did this.

While it can be argued that it is inappropriate to use a mail survey questionnaire to
investigate non-response to a mail survey, in this case it can be partially defended by observing that the purpose related to a particular survey rather than survey response in general. In cases where non-respondents would not be willing to respond to a survey on surveys, they might be willing to explain or justify their behaviour in relation to a particular survey.

Survey Three: Advertising Regulation and Consumers

The third survey involved another sample of 800 voters from the New Zealand electoral roll, sent a self-completion questionnaire on advertising regulation for prescription medicines. The survey package comprised a 10-page A4 booklet, covering letter and reply-paid envelope posted in an official, white Massey University envelope. After one reminder, 276 questionnaires had not been returned. The follow-up survey was very similar to that for survey two, except that an attempt was made to interview all non-respondents by telephone. The questions asked were the same as those used for the follow-up survey for survey two, but adapted to a telephone interview. A total of 60 non-respondents were successfully interviewed.

Results

The relative levels of non-response at different stages of the survey process for each of the follow-up surveys are shown in Table 2.

In each of the follow-up surveys some of the non-respondents claimed not to have received the questionnaire. The implication of these 'undetected' undelivered questionnaires is discussed later. Similarly, in two of the follow-up surveys,

Table 2. Relative Levels of Non-response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Survey Process</th>
<th>Survey One</th>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Two</th>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Three</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not receive questionnaire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received questionnaire, but did not open it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened it, but did not read the covering letter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the covering letter, but did not start questionnaire</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started filling questionnaire, but did not finish it</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished questionnaire, but did not mail it back</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailed the questionnaire back</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. These respondents claimed to have returned their questionnaire but it was not received.

Table 3. Mail Survey Participation by Non-respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Survey Process</th>
<th>Follow-up Surveys %</th>
<th>Kulka et al 1991 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received questionnaire, but did not open it</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened it, but did not read the covering letter</td>
<td>19 (19)</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the covering letter, but did not start questionnaire</td>
<td>41 (60)</td>
<td>(33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started filling questionnaire, but did not finish it</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished questionnaire, but did not mail it back</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
some non-respondents claimed to have returned their questionnaires, though these were not received. Removing both these groups of non-respondents from the data allows direct comparison of the remaining non-respondents’ participation at each stage in the survey process for the three follow-up surveys combined and the study reported by Kulka et al. (1991). These comparisons are shown in Table 3.

For the three surveys studied, nearly 70% of non-respondents did not start filling out the questionnaire. Relatively few (about 10%) did not open the survey package, but most of those who did read the covering letter. However, for some reason, a large proportion of non-respondents (40%) were not persuaded or motivated by the cover letter to start filling out the questionnaire. Most of those who started the questionnaire but did not respond failed to complete the task; though 8% of all non-respondents simply failed to return their completed questionnaires.

Like their New Zealand counterparts, most of the US census non-respondents (59%) did not start filling out their questionnaire. The US Census is a mandatory, government survey, whereas the three New Zealand surveys were all voluntary and conducted by university researchers. Nevertheless, the same conclusion can be drawn from both studies, namely, that the key to improving mail survey response lies in motivating respondents to open the survey package and to start answering the questionnaire. However, the fact that 30% of respondents reported starting their questionnaires suggests that some respondents also need motivating to complete the task.

In all three follow-up surveys participants were asked why they did not move onto the next stage of the survey process. A variety of reasons were given, but unlike the respondents in Kulka et al.’s (1991) study, privacy and confidentiality were not major concerns for our participants; lack of time was the most frequent explanation for non-response. This is consistent with the results of Kaner et al.’s (1999) study in which 25% of UK GPs said they had no time for extra work when asked why they did not respond to a mail survey. ‘Lack of time’ may just be a convenient euphemism for lack of interest— if a survey is interesting enough or relevant enough, respondents will make time to do it. However, it was apparent from the follow-up surveys that ‘lack of time’ is related to the perceived length of a self-completion questionnaire, which in turn is a factor in the perceived burden of the task for a potential respondent.

**Questionnaire length**

The evidence on the effect of questionnaire length on mail survey response is inconclusive (see Dillman, 2000; Edwards et al., 2002; Yammarino, Skinner & Childers, 1991). Furthermore, there is a problem in actually determining questionnaire ‘length’. This can be defined in terms of number of questions, number of pages, or the time taken to complete a questionnaire; but by themselves these measures are too simplistic. Some questions are more difficult than others, for example, while the number of pages in a questionnaire depends on formatting, font size, etc., and respondents will vary in the time they take to answer a questionnaire. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that, other things being equal, response is more likely to a two-page questionnaire than a 20-page one (and this is consistent with Edwards et al.’s (2002) meta-analysis that showed response to a mail survey was more likely when short questionnaires were used).

Another possibility would be to manipulate the graphic ‘paralanguage’ of questionnaires, using the principles espoused by Jenkins and Dillman (1997), to create more attractive questionnaires that are easier for respondents to answer. (Graphic paralanguage refers to the three key elements of visual perception: brightness and colour, shape, and...
location.) Research has shown that even simple tasks such as orienting a questionnaire and turning the pages may burden less able readers and that carefully ordered questions in easy-to-answer formats can increase mail survey response rates (Dillman, 2000; Dillman, Sinclair & Clarke, 1993; Dillman, Jenkins & DeMaio, 1996). The elimination of, or reduction in, skip instructions might also help to reduce the burden of survey response and hence the ‘length’ of a questionnaire (see Featherston & Moy, 1990; Gendall & Davies, 2003). While such measures may not reduce the actual length of a questionnaire, they may reduce its perceived length, which, as far as the respondent is concerned, is all that matters.

Survey topic
The non-respondents interviewed in survey one also provided some insights into the effect of various survey features on the likely behaviour of survey recipients. These non-respondents confirmed that the degree of relevance, or salience, of a survey topic and its impact on potential respondents’ personal lives is an important determinant of survey response. Studies by Martin (1994) and Roth and Bevier (1996) are just two examples of research that has established this. Our non-respondents said they were most likely to respond to surveys on local issues or social surveys on topics of high public interest (e.g., the environment, immigration), and least likely to respond to commercial surveys or intrusive, personal surveys (e.g., surveys of personal, financial or medical history).

This knowledge is not particularly helpful for a survey designer for whom the survey topic is given, however, it is related to another element of survey design, the cover letter. Aside from the normal precepts of a good cover letter – the source of respondents’ contact details, assurance of confidentiality, emphasising the rationale and importance of the research, providing sponsor contact details – non-respondents suggested three possible ways of improving cover letters. First, including an explanation of how the results will be used or published; second, including a survey deadline; and, third, providing an estimate of how long the survey will take to complete.

Cover letter content
Previous research (see Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1996) has suggested that including a survey deadline in a covering letter may actually be counterproductive. Similarly, while an estimate of the time taken to complete a questionnaire may be helpful if the survey is a short one, it could conceivably depress response for a long survey. However, these questions would need to be tested empirically. An explanation of how and where survey results will be used seems unlikely to depress response and may help to persuade some potential non-respondents to participate.

Sponsorship
The survey one non-respondents also confirmed that the survey sponsor has an impact on survey participation. Surveys from universities are more likely to be responded to than those from government departments, ministries or not-for-profit organisations. (Edwards et al. (2002) estimate the odds of responding are 30% higher for a university-sponsored survey.) Surveys from commercial research companies are least likely to encourage participation, though in all cases there will almost certainly be some interaction between survey sponsor and survey topic. Again, this information is not particularly helpful for an individual survey researcher, who generally has little control over survey sponsorship. Nevertheless, it may be possible for a commercial survey company to incorporate university co-sponsorship or endorsement from a credible non-commercial source in some circumstances.

Over surveying
On average, each survey one non-respondent had completed 2.3 surveys over the
previous six months, from an average of 5.3 requests. Half of these requests were by telephone; consistent with the fact that telephone is the dominant survey mode in New Zealand, though it is also likely that some respondents confused telemarketing and marketing research by telephone. All participants had, of course, received at least once mail survey request, but requests for in-person, mall intercept, e-mail or Internet surveys were relatively rare.

While there is no objective way of determining if these survey request statistics amount to excessive surveying, the experience of our non-respondents tends to support Brennan’s (1991) assertion that New Zealanders’ exposure to surveys is high. Nevertheless, the completed survey figures show that, although these non-respondents did not complete our mail survey, some completed other mail surveys and most completed other types of surveys. This supports Brennan and Hoek’s (1992) conclusion that most non-respondents to a particular survey are not non-respondents in general (at least in New Zealand).

Attitudes to survey
Some researchers (for example, Cavusgil & Elvey-Kirk, 1998; Helgason et al., 2002) believe that individuals’ attitudes to surveys in general (or to market research) are an important determinant of survey response. In other words, potential respondents with negative attitudes towards surveys will be less likely to respond than those with positive attitudes. However, in our study, non-respondents’ attitudes to surveys were generally positive. Our survey one non-respondents agreed that surveys serve a useful purpose, give people an opportunity to express their views on important issues, and help manufacturers produce better products. They also agreed that answering survey questions is usually an interesting experience and did not consider surveys a waste of time.

Surveys were not seen as an invasion of privacy, and non-respondents said they trusted survey research firms to maintain respondents’ confidentiality. Only two aspects of surveys were negatively perceived. First, most participants agreed that that surveys often take longer to answer than is claimed and, second, that the term ‘survey’ is often used to disguise a sales pitch. The latter echoes Brennan’s (1992) finding that 60% of New Zealand mail survey respondents believed that selling under the guise of research, or ‘sugging’, was a serious issue.

The conclusion, that attitudes to surveys in general have relatively little effect on the response to a particular survey, is consistent with most research on the link between attitudes and behaviour (see Hini, Gendall & Kearns, 1995; Wright & Klyn, 1998). And even if attitudes and behaviour are linked, the correlation is invariably small and the direction of causation often debatable. Consequently, if attitude to surveys does play a part in determining survey response, is likely to be only a very minor part. However, this does not mean that market research industry organisations should not expose and denounce sugging, or that researchers should not be honest with respondents about how long their surveys will take.

Survey non-receipt
Another result of this research is the finding that survey package non-receipt is an important, but generally unrecognised, contributor to mail survey non-response. Across the three surveys studied, an average of 13% of non-respondents claimed not to have received their survey package (though the figure ranged from 4% to 25%). Generally, survey non-receipt is only recognised when survey packages are returned to the sender; it appears that the actual number of undelivered questionnaires could be much higher than this in some cases.

This discrepancy between acknowledged and actual GNAs is consistent with Esslemont and Lambourne’s (1992) finding that 30% of incorrectly-addressed survey...
packages are not returned. Esslemont and Lambourne's study involved no reminders, which is one reason why their estimate of unreturned GNAs is higher than the 13% found in this study. However, more recent studies by Braunsberger, Gates, and Ortinau (2005) and Healey and Gendall (2005) found 41% and 47%, respectively, of deliberately misaddressed survey packages returned unopened. There is no suggestion that the under-recording of GNAs is responsible for declining mail survey response rates, since there is no evidence that this is a recent phenomenon. However, the knowledge that some undetected non-returning of undeliverable questionnaires occurs could routinely be incorporated in the calculation of mail survey response rates.

An alternative to the conventional formula for calculating mail survey response is shown below. It assumes that the proportion of (unreturned) GNAs in the non-returns is the same as the proportion of (returned) GNAs in the total sample. Applying this formula to the three surveys studied would increase the reported response rate, calculated using the conventional formula, by between 2% and 3%. This is shown in Table 4. In other surveys, the observed effect will depend on the number of reminders and the currency of the sampling frame used.

**Conclusions**

This study suggests that relatively few mail survey non-respondents do not at least open the survey envelope and study its contents. However, many non-respondents go no further than this. The main reason given for not continuing with the process is 'lack of time'. However, while it is undoubtedly true that many non-respondents are busy and pressed for time, the explanation for their failure to respond is subtler than this. Non-response occurs because the burden of the task of responding is not matched by the benefit of doing it. To increase the likelihood of survey response, researchers need to tilt the balance for potential respondents (to use Groves, Singer & Couling's (2000) leverage-salience theory analogy), by increasing the benefits of responding, or reducing the burden, or both.

It is well established that prepaid monetary incentives and reminders are consistently

\[
\text{Response Rate} = \frac{\text{Valid Responses}}{\text{Total Sample} - (\text{Ineligibles + GNAs})} = \frac{\text{GNAs}}{\text{Total Sample}}
\]

**Table 4. Comparison of Conventional and Alternative Response Rate Calculations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conventional Response Rate</th>
<th>Alternative Response Rate</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey One</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Two</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Three</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. GNAs and ineligibles combined.
effective in stimulating response to mail surveys; personalisation and pre-notification may be effective, but this is less certain (see Edwards et al., 2002; Gendall, 2005; Wright, 1995). However, in New Zealand it is no longer legal to send money by mail, consequently prepaid monetary incentives cannot be used in mail surveys. Furthermore, in areas such as health research, offering monetary incentives raises ethical considerations that make many researchers reluctant to use it as a strategy. Thus, the most effective means of stimulating mail survey response is denied to or not appropriate for some researchers, and, for other researchers, simply continuing to apply the techniques that have worked in the past seems unlikely to arrest the decline in mail survey response rates.

Beyond what we already know about the effects of the manipulable elements of mail surveys, this study suggests that the greatest potential for 'tilting the balance' towards response may lie in questionnaire design. This could influence not only respondents' willingness to start a survey but also their likelihood of finishing it. One obvious measure for reducing the burden of response is to write shorter questionnaires; to place greater emphasis on data quality than on data quantity. Alternatively, paying greater attention to the content and layout of questionnaires and manipulating their graphic design could reduce respondent burden by reducing apparent questionnaire length. To increase the benefit of responding to a survey, an explanation in the covering letter of the use of the research results may resonate with some potential non-respondents and encourage them to respond.

Confidence in these suggestions must be tempered by the fact that none of them were empirically tested in this study; they are based on interpretation of self-reported data, collected using three different survey modes, from small samples of non-respondents who agreed to cooperate. Nevertheless, this is one of the few recent studies to focus on survey non-respondents. Though its findings do not provide a panacea for the problem of mail survey non-response, they do at least suggest where researchers should concentrate their efforts at solving the problem, and provide some potential solutions. They also support the contention that conventionally-calculated mail surveys response rates probably underestimate actual response rates, because a proportion of undelivered questionnaires are not returned.
References


