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NON-RESPONSE AND NON-RESPONDENTS IN SURVEY RESEARCH

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
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0-612-41600-3
This thesis on non-response and non-respondents in survey research involved two research exercises; the first consisted of telephone interviews of market research analysts. The concern was that much of the academic literature and texts dealing with non-response does not relate well to the commercial market research world. This was an attempt to obtain from this group information about their common practices and strategies, as well as the concerns in dealing with non-response in the interests of their business clients.

The second and major phase of the research was to follow-up and interview by telephone a group of 50 non-respondent representatives of business firms that had participated in a government-sponsored human resource development programme to find out why they had not returned the mailed evaluation questionnaire which followed the programme and to determine how satisfied they were with the programme. The findings from the interviews were compared with those of 100 respondents who had completed the mailed evaluation questionnaire.

One interesting finding was that most non-respondents were not negative about the programme they were asked to evaluate, a challenge to the commonly held notion that non-respondents do not reply to questionnaires because they are adverse to whatever it is they are being asked about. There were, however, almost one-quarter of the sample who indeed were dissatisfied with the programme and critical of the design of the evaluation questionnaire. When the response contents of the written questionnaire were compared with the oral replies (given in the telephone interviews), it was found that there were no statistically significant differences between the original respondents’ and the telephoned non-respondents’ answers to the questionnaire. This finding also confounds much of the academic literature on first and second-order respondents’ views.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the cooperation of the market researchers and the contact persons from the business firms who were involved in a government training consulting service. Their willingness to participate and their valuable time spent in interviews were most appreciated.

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This work also benefitted from my many discussions with Gerald and Harry Tomany, whose ongoing comments were both helpful and encouraging.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

For centuries our society has used some form of survey to gather information about property, people and their concerns. More recently as the number of surveys has increased they have been criticized as a nuisance, as an intrusion into daily life, as misleading and, ironically, as having undue influence or being useless. Some also resent this move toward the information highway, technology and data banks, and believe that citizens' individual privacy and confidentiality are at risk.

Because of such general criticisms when non-response rates are known, they offer a 'rational' basis for opposing and discounting the value of survey research. There is a common belief that the number of non-respondents has increased with the increased amount of survey research being done. If there really is increasing number of non-respondents this will pose a serious challenge for researchers. They already have to resort to many strategies to convince non-respondents to reply to their questions and, thus, improve the overall response rate. However, even when using such strategies, obtaining an acceptable response rate for the various types of survey research always remains in doubt.

In response to the risk of a high non-response rate, much emphasis has been placed on effective sampling techniques in order initially to select the appropriate population for the study and, thereby, avoid as much non-response as possible. For example, it is common for market
research firms to use quota sampling to obtain their desired number of respondents and thus
avoid the need to deal with the problem of following-up on the non-respondents. Academic
survey researchers, on the other hand, tend not to use quota sampling, but to follow a process
of carefully selecting the sample population, following-up on non-respondents at least once or
more frequently as appropriate and reporting on the non-respondents in the study report. Only
thus is the survey considered acceptable as producing credible findings. There is also a variety
of statistical techniques applied to samples to adjust for non-response rates. Since these are
clearly described in many statistical textbooks, they are not reviewed here.

The orthodox process for academic survey research is well documented in textbooks and
taught in university research methods courses. The common methods used to lessen the
probability of non-response are described in academic journal articles and in texts about survey
research. There have also been academic studies specifically focused on the response rate and
the conditions that affect it, studies which identify the similarities and differences between those
first respondents, subsequent respondents and those who fail to respond. In addition, there are
studies devoted to the response rates of particular questions and to the rates from mailed
questionnaires, personal face-to-face questionnaires and telephone interviews. The actual design
of the questionnaire, the preferred methods for collecting data, strategies for follow-up which
involve incentives or personalizing the covering letter of introduction have also been studied
academically and some of their techniques are used by market researchers to try to enhance
response rates.
Although market research companies should be particularly concerned about non-response, there are no studies in which they are asked about the design methods they use to reduce non-respondent rates. Moreover, few studies, other than those related to consumer products and behaviour, have actually followed-up non-respondents of companies which were requested to evaluate a government service. This, therefore, was chosen as the topic for this thesis.

Within the general topic of non-response and its importance in market survey research, the thesis was concerned with a number of specific questions: Is there a concern with non-respondents among the majority of market research firms? How do the firms generally try to deal with a low response rate? Are there strategies in place to allow for increasing the response rates in most of the survey research done? Are there opportunities to perform research specifically with the subjects who did not respond? Is this accessible and/or published research? Do these firms have other concerns regarding non-response that should be considered?

The first phase of the thesis research focused on interviews with a sample of market researchers to try to assess how important the whole area of non-response is to their day-to-day encounters with clients. They were asked directly about the acceptable response rates which their firms adopt for market surveys and the strategies they use to increase a specific response rate as necessary in order to try to achieve it. In these companies, records of the studies done on specific survey’s non-respondents are kept, along with other issues and concerns related to non-respondents in market research. The intention was to try to tap into such information
The second phase of the research directly followed a variety of other types of businesses that had not responded to an evaluation survey distributed by a government sponsored programme. That survey tried to assess their satisfaction with the programme which had been offered to their employees. The thesis research set out to ascertain the reasons why these companies had not responded, and to analyze their responses to find whether their current views differed from those expressed by the original respondents to the survey. Who were the non-respondents, how similar are they to the initial respondents? Why did they not initially respond? What might the original survey have done differently to persuade them to respond the first time? Why did they feel it was not necessary or desirable to reply to this survey? Was the evaluation they offered similar to or different from that of the initial respondents?

The thesis is divided into five chapters. After this Introduction, in Chapter 2, the related literature is reviewed and in Chapter 3 the research methodology is described. There then follow a chapter reporting and analysing the research findings and a final chapter containing the conclusions and recommendations. This introduction now presents, in sequence, statements about background information and relevant statistics, the problem, the specific research questions, the purposes of the research, the assumptions upon which the research rests, the importance of the topic and definitions of terms.

**Background**

During the past couple of decades market survey research has become a booming
business in Canada. The number of commercial, economic, sociological and educational research companies has increased dramatically in this period in response to the need for businesses to have data and statistics supporting products and services. This has become an industry that supports a large number of employees and researcher/analysts. Businesses spend a great deal of money each year on market research in the form of contracts made with research firms and university survey institutes. It is difficult to obtain recent precise income figures for private enterprises, but the amount which firms spent on market research is believed to have increased by at least five percent in 1995 and the same percentage increase was expected for 1996 (Pollack, 1996:20).

In a special report in Strategy Magazine, Corbin (1997:39), an adjunct professor of marketing at the University of Toronto (President and CEO of a Toronto-based market research firm and director of two major Canadian corporations), declared that market research is important and has finally "come of age" by wielding major influence in corporate boardrooms. Before 1975, associated costs for research and researchers were hidden in marketing overhead budgets. Now the researchers themselves have recognized the need to go beyond simply gathering data to providing information which can support management decisions.

According to Frigstad (1995:1-2), in the past, small companies with sales of less than $10 million per year did not make significant use of market research. However, with the more pervasive use of computers and databases, the value of market research even for such small companies has increased. The research done by such smaller companies generally consists of
information on customer preferences and interests extracted from purchasing records stored on personal computers. With larger companies, an estimated 20 percent are thought to utilize market research significantly in their business. More extensive and more frequent use of market research was found in companies experiencing high technological growth, rapid change and innovation than in those with mature markets.

The use of market research companies has been expanding as the benefits of market research are appreciated by business. Frigstad (1995:2) attributed this expansion in the use of market research to several underlying factors, which include:

1) changes in the backgrounds of managers, from engineering to financial,

2) increases in the availability of purchased market research, as comprehensive databases and libraries of market research information can be readily developed without an excessive expenditure of monies,

3) decreases in product life cycles and an increased need to continuously strive toward innovation and development of new products and potential markets for these new products.

According to Canadian market research sales statistics provided by the Canadian Association of Marketing Research Organizations, Toronto (Pollock, 1996:20), private industry was the biggest spender in market research in 1995, rising from 78 to 82 percent of the total pie, which also included government, Crown corporations, ad agencies and other groups. The total Canadian market research sales increased from $119 million in 1994 to $130.5 million in 1995 — a five percent growth rate, adjusted to keep constant the number of firms, as referred to previously.

The top three companies in Canada, both in 1995 and 1996, noted for their innovation
in product design and production methods, based on research and development spending as listed in the *Report on Business* (1997:100) in descending order were as follows: Northern Telecom Ltd., Whitney Canada Ltd. and IBM Canada Ltd. Each had spent over $225,000 per year in market research and development.

According to Industry Canada on-line database (Engelberts and Woyzbun Ltd., 1996:1), in Canada there is a total of over 500 market research companies, various types of firms which consult with and assist private and public sector businesses, specializing in designated market research functions. Ontario alone has 215, most head offices being located in the Greater Toronto area; and listed in the yellow pages of the Toronto Telephone Directory are 150 market research/analyst consulting firms. They include such well-known national market research firms as Gallup, Environics and Decima.

Numbers of additional related firms defined and categorized as responsible for undertaking market advertising and consulting, management consulting, and public relations related to consumers, business, economics, social and education are also summarized in the on-line database (Engelberts and Woyzbun Ltd., 1996:1); the total number of enterprises exceeds 5,000. Ontario, with a total of more than 2,000, also possesses the bulk of the affiliated market research firms. As with the market research companies themselves, these associated firms range in size, but as a group they employ a large number of interviewers and researcher/analysts at a variety of locations across Canada.

According to the information provided on the on-line database (Engelberts and Woyzbun
Ltd., 1996:2), key services provided by market research elsewhere are reflected in the well-established marketing services sector in Canada. They include advising on-line to: 1) increase the profile and value of marketing strategies among prospective customers; 2) take advantage of available technology in support of marketing strategies; and 3) explore increased exporting of services to appropriate markets. However, with many industries in Canada now extending their markets overseas, the importance of marketing strategies for the domestic front is decreasing. As a consequence, in recent years many key marketing positions have been eliminated and/or moved to off-shore locations, thus reducing the "talent pool" of strategic marketers in Canada.

Universities throughout North America have also expanded their linkages with the business community by participating in survey research that will increase product and marketplace awareness. According to Newson and Buchbinder (1988: 61), one alternative vision which they do not endorse of the Canadian University is that of furthering partnerships with corporations to promote economic growth and technological innovation. A significant component of this partnership entails research which addresses the priorities of the corporations.

A prime example of an Ontario university involved in market research is York University where great emphasis has been put on research partnerships with business. Located at that university is the Institute for Social Research (ISR), which also performs extensive consumer and market research. According to Berkowitz (1996: 7), the ISR is considered to be a premier polling firm by customers outside the university community; this accounts for half its work.
This private sector work is for profit; it is not subsidized by the university. Although the ISR also does applied policy research for the provincial government, it is barred from bidding for most federal contracts by policies established under a previous Conservative government.

In Ontario, the University of Waterloo is also heavily involved in market research — on stock brokerage derivatives through the Centre for Advanced Studies in Finance. The University of Calgary performs a considerable amount of market research related to pharmaceuticals, initially due to the interest of one of its professors who discovered a new drug treatment for migraine headaches. In this kind of specialized market research activity the large research universities in Canada follow the pattern of the major American institutions. There, universities such as Harvard (Business School), Yale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Los Angeles — indeed every large research university — have created some sort of ‘culture’, ‘institute’ or ‘consortium’ which improves academic-business collaboration and generates a profitable business through joint market research endeavours.

Articles in North American publications specifically on market research and education total about 5,000 currently listed on the ERIC on-line database. Journal publications resulting from survey research activity in education alone amount to over 25,000 on this same on-line database. And the number of such publications has increased steadily over these past two decades. Of course, universities are centres for research and are expected to publish research findings more readily than private market research firms who hold the study results in
confidence according to the proprietors' wishes and, therefore, as expected, most of the publications about market research are authored by university professors.

The typical market researchers and/or analysts in universities are professors with graduate student assistants. In commercial firms, the typical market researcher and/or analyst often has quite different qualifications. In recent years market researcher/analysts are expected to have an undergraduate (sometimes a graduate) degree either in business or applied social sciences with an emphasis on research methodology and statistics, or to have gained a grounding of marketing strategies and principles from a community college programme and have considerable on-the-job training and practical experience. Recent job advertisements in national newspapers list such qualifications for market research firms currently hiring.

The Problem

Dealing with non-respondents is a perennial concern of survey researchers, particularly those employed in private sector market research companies whose work relies heavily upon mailed questionnaires. Usually a number of strategies to increase the survey’s return rate are built into a study in its early stages to try to keep the number of non-respondents low. As a result, in the data analysis and report of findings to the client, the research firm is able to ignore or barely mention the likely impact of non-response. But its incidence is discussed in-house. This thesis focused on two aspects of problems created by non-response: 1) the strategies used by market research companies to improve response, and 2) explanations of why people do not
respond to surveys. The former was examined by telephone interviews, the latter by studying a selected group of non-respondents to a government programme evaluation survey to find out why some members in the sample did not respond and whether their eventual responses to key questions differed from those of the initial survey respondents.

Specific Research Questions

To consider the first aspect of the problem (the strategies), the following questions were addressed:

1. What approaches do market research companies presently use to try to increase their survey response rates?
2. What response rate do they consider acceptable for drawing conclusions from a study?

To consider the second aspect of the problem (non-response to a government survey), the following questions were addressed:

1. What were the non-respondents’ reasons for not returning the mailed survey questionnaires?
2. Do their responses when finally given differ from those of the initial respondents; if so, in what ways?
3. Do they accord with the findings of the related research literature?
The Purposes

The research for this thesis had four main purposes. The intention was:

1) to gain insight into the strategies used by professional commercial market researchers to elicit cooperation and participation in the surveys they conduct and to learn about their notions of the lowest acceptable return rate;

2) to increase our understanding of a group of non-respondents by asking them about their failure to respond;

3) to heighten awareness of the importance of non-respondent data in survey research by studying it as a market research problem rather than an academic survey research design problem; and

4) to demonstrate that non-respondents can be successfully studied and yield valuable information about non-response.

The Assumptions

All research is based on a set of underlying assumptions which should be made explicit so that communication and discussion of the findings can be facilitated. In this case it was assumed that:

- this is a serious problem worthy of study because non-response is one of the main sources of error and bias in survey research;

- only by serious study will we be able to understand the reasons for non-response sufficiently to predict its likely incidence and take successful action to avert it;

- a survey with a high response rate results in better, less biased sample findings from which to draw observations about a problem than a survey with a high non-response rate;
when data collection procedures produce returns from a carefully selected sample that cannot be said to accurately represent the population as a whole, it is difficult to make a credible case for the representativeness of the findings and hence that sound general conclusions may be drawn from them;

- continued follow-up and persistence usually will increase the response rate and later questioning an initial cooperating non-respondent will yield useful information about the nature of, and the reasons for, initial non-response;

- usually the researcher decides how much effort should be made to reduce non-response, depending upon initial returns, the desired response rate and the study's resources; this is not likely to change but a better understanding of non-response may reduce the need for expensive, time-consuming follow-up studies; and

- reporting the extent of non-response is a mandatory responsibility in survey research.

**Importance of Topic**

As one can see from the brief background information given illustrating the pervasiveness of commercial market research activity in our society, any research which assists surveys to become more accurate and effective is important. But this pervasiveness, it should be noted, is not limited to market research. Survey research also plays a major role in academic areas, particularly in the social sciences and education, making research on improving itself all the more valuable insofar as such improvements could help reduce public scepticism and cynicism about survey 'results' when they are quoted in the media. It could also reassure the client that the reported findings and conclusions, which cost a considerable sum of money, are valid and
were a good investment which will help the enterprise make a better business judgement.

Since non-response is a source of possible error of analytical judgement and weakens the credibility of a survey’s findings, minimizing non-response and its effects deserve high priority for serious study. It is difficult to know (or predict) the effect of non-response on survey data because it is hard to gain information about the population that was part of the selected sample but refused to participate in the study. Therefore, if such a population can be studied, this will make an important contribution to our knowledge about survey research technique. Since the survey is one of the main investigative devices not only of commercial market research but of the social sciences generally, greater understanding of non-response may well have both a theoretical and practical influence on future research.

**Definition of Terms**

In the social sciences, terms which are part of the general vocabulary of English frequently have a special meaning and, in context, are used in a special way. In order to avoid misunderstanding, therefore, it is a customary part of the reporting of research to include definitions of any ‘jargon’ or ‘unique’ meaning specialized terms, even though this may seem somewhat redundant given the probable background of the reader. For this study, the following definitions were used.

*List-assisted sample*  This sample is obtained often from a purchased list, usually of telephone numbers, which is used by researchers to meet the quota of respondents for the study.
Market research  This is simply a process of asking questions or finding existing data about the market, the competition and potential customers. It is often done before starting a new business, introducing a new product or service, or monitoring and maintaining an existing one.

Non-probability (or Modified Probability) Sample Design  This is a commonly used sample selection approach where specific individuals are not designated and for which response rates cannot be calculated.

Non-response Bias  Errors arise from non-response because of the missing data. The bias is caused by the difference between the survey data and data that would have been obtained had observations been obtained from all the designated respondents.

Non-sampling Error  This is an ‘error’ of measurement, which is not related to the choice of the original survey sample but arises out of such occurrences as poor schedule questions, refusals, an inability to contact the proper respondents and mistakes in data coding, processing or analysis. It leads to problems in analysing data which result from a large group of non-respondents in a study.

Probability Sample Design  This is an objective procedure used to designate respondents which allows response rates to be calculated and related to some total population of similar designation.

Quota Sampling  This is a data collection method used to obtain a desired number of completed cases in a short period of field time without the expense of call-backs. The interviewer simply keeps calling persons named on a list until the quota of responses is reached.
Refusals to Participate  This is a definitive and absolute denial to participate in the study or a portion of the study; it is not a deferment of the interview, although multiple deferments may discourage the interviewer to the extent that the particular potential interviewee is abandoned for lack of time.

Representative Sample  This is one whose characteristics mirror those of the population from which the sample was drawn and about which the expectation is that generalizations can be made.

In the research for this thesis subgroups of contact persons reply to a variety of sets of questions — for example in the sample who received the original evaluation questionnaire there were "respondents" and "non-respondents" and within this latter subgroup a number of groups. To provide clarity specific terms have been used to refer to each.

Non-respondent refers to a member of the evaluation study’s sample who did not return a completed questionnaire. S(he) is the subject of the telephone interview survey carried out for the second research phase of this thesis. Each is included in a sample of a corresponding group of individuals who were in the target but not in the actual survey population, as explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Participant is a member of the subgroup of the non-respondents who participated in a telephone interview by discussing their reasons for not completing the questionnaire and agreeing to reply to a set of common questions.
Cooperating Participant is one of the 35 participants who not only took part in the telephone interviews' common discussion (mentioned above) but also agreed to orally complete the questions of the evaluation questionnaire.

Subject is the generic term used to refer to someone replying to a question, and is used when the members of several subgroups are collectively being referred to, the context making clear which groups are involved.

Respondent is used exclusively to refer to those who, on behalf of the firms, completed and returned the mailed questionnaire used to evaluate client satisfaction with a programme. Sometimes the adjective "original" precedes the word.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis follows an orthodox pattern of development. Following this introductory chapter, there is one devoted to a review of the extensive literature (found in research methods texts as well as research reporting on the phenomenon) on non-response and how to counteract its effect. Chapter 3 explains the methodology and the research design used for the thesis research, reporting the adjustments which had to be made to the original design. In Chapter 4 the research findings are reviewed in four sections, each corresponding to a phase of the research activity. The final chapter addresses the original research questions, relating them to the research evidence reported in the preceding chapter. It embodies the conclusions and practical suggestions for commercial market research firms’ policies and procedures dealing with survey non-response.
CHAPTER II
RELATED LITERATURE

During this century as the survey has emerged as one of the main data gathering devices used in the social sciences, there have been numerous monographs, textbooks and articles published about the design and conduct of surveys, and the problems associated with non-response in census and sample surveys. Almost all the literature has been primarily concerned with academic research. This vast amount of literature (most of which originates in the United States) as it relates to non-respondents is reviewed in this chapter under three headings: Research Design, The Response Rate, and Error and Bias. In all cases, the writing on these topics is discussed in terms of the perceived or demonstrated effects upon the rate of non-response.

Research Design

In survey research, the important role that both the research design of the study and the design of the questionnaire play in achieving the highest number of responses cannot be emphasized too much. Most publications on survey design, as it relates to achieving high response rates, deal exclusively with methods of mailing out questionnaires. In comparison, there is very little literature which critically assesses the utility of the alternative choice of using the telephone, the computer or personal face-to-face surveys. Only recently has the collection
of survey data by computer networking begun to be used and it is too new to have generated many studies. Therefore, it is not surprising that few are reported in the ‘research methods’ literature. However, face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews have been common practice for many decades, so the lack of critical comparative research on the delivery’s effect upon non-response under a variety of conditions and constraints is surprising. Nevertheless, there have been a few studies which examined whether mail surveys produce better response rates than surveys conducted by telephone or personal interview. One of the best known is that of Sudman and Bradburn (1984:34-5). They found high cooperation rates are related to certain populations and depend on three factors: 1) the education levels of the respondents; higher education levels produce higher numbers of responses (the explanation advanced is that these individuals are used to completing forms); 2) the topic of the questionnaire; topics that are interesting and relevant to the target group will induce more of them to reply (which suggests that the decision on type of sampling and the decision on type of survey ‘vehicle’ are related and the topic of a study must be matched to the interests of the survey population); and, 3) busy respondents who are unlikely to agree to a personal interview because of lack of time seem willing, nevertheless, to complete a mail questionnaire at their own convenience.

In a survey intended to discover patterns of drug use and other life style behaviours, Gliksman and Smythe (1992:133-4) questioned 13,200 students in a representative sample of the undergraduate student body of four universities in Ontario using a mailed questionnaire and a telephone questionnaire/interview. Relatively few differences in the rate of response were found
between the two samples. Given the large number of comparisons made of the findings of the study, the differences between the two samples were thought to be artificial ones, not related to the manner of surveying.

In some studies which have tried to compare different methods of surveying, and as a by-product of their main interest to thus assess the resultant effects on response rates, a clear picture regarding response rates has been muddied by a variety of intervening factors. Using regression coefficients to compare non-response in 45 studies having methods of mail, telephone and face-to-face surveys, Hox and DeLeeux (1994:340) found that, on average, the face-to-face survey produced the best completion rate, over 70 percent. However, although it is generally believed that the public is becoming increasingly unwilling to respond to mailed surveys, the results from such surveys still showed relatively high levels of responses at 61 percent, a conclusion drawn from the research on mailed surveys reviewed during the study period of 1947-92.

Jones (1983:283) compared the response rates from each of 264 mail surveys with the rates of over 300 and 400 interviews obtained from the East and West Regions of a recently developed suburb in Australia. The purpose of the survey was to obtain an evaluation of the facilities from residents of these two different regions. There was no significant difference in non-response (i.e., in the difficulty of obtaining the desired response rate). He also found that the use of reminders was undoubtedly the most successful technique for obtaining a reasonable rate of reply. He, therefore, concluded that, whatever the survey manner, the inclusion of follow-up is essential for a good survey design.
Mailed Surveys

The mailed questionnaire survey is the most common surveying vehicle both for academic research and for commercial market research. Lockhart (1984:96) examined six stages of mailed questionnaire behaviour and the associated research design techniques that affect these behaviours. He found that in order to ensure receipt of the questionnaire by the target population, six fairly obvious conditions must be present: 1) Sample lists and addresses must be accurate. 2) The organizational affiliation and subject sample must be so identified as to be immediately obvious upon opening the mailed package. 3) The survey topic must be obviously relevant to the recipient populations and the length of the questionnaire be reasonable if an initial favourable impression is to be gained. 4) To persuade the participants to answer the questions, the questionnaire must be well organized and designed. 5) To have the questionnaire returned, return envelopes and postage must be included. 6) To deal with non-response, reminders must be sent to the non-respondents, replacement copies of mislaid questionnaires supplied and additional contacts obtained as there may be changes in the names of persons to whom the questionnaire was originally sent. Only if all are carefully followed is there a reasonable chance that there will be an adequate number of respondents for data analysis.

For his study of the job-hunting experiences of university graduates, Stevens (1974/5:621) sent out one hundred precoded and one hundred uncoded questionnaires to two samples of 200 students who had recently graduated from university. The major purpose of the research was to learn whether response rates to a mailed survey would be affected either by coded or uncoded
questionnaire formats. Only four percent of the mailed questionnaires had to be replaced because of unknown or incorrect addresses. He (Stevens, 1974/75:622) obtained overall response rates of 57 percent and 59 percent; there was no statistically significant difference in the return rates of the precoded and uncoded questionnaires. However, precoding the questionnaires certainly proved to be cheaper than coding returns manually, and it also appears to have offered the possibility of quicker completion time for the recipient.

Non-response involves questionnaire items as well as failure to return the instrument itself. If some vital questions are left blank by a large number of the respondent sample, this limits the value and strength of the findings. When assessing the importance of the error of response omission (as well as non-response) to specific sensitive questions related to household finances, Warriner (1991:266-7) found self-reports on such questions were accurate at the overall aggregate level, but significantly inaccurate at the individual level. Moreover, his efforts to acquire error-free, verified information resulted in unacceptably high proportions of item non-response. Therefore, he recommended a procedure to adjust for response bias which combines verified item responses on personal questions and data from self-reports. This helps reduce the non-sampling error. Unfortunately, he could make no other suggestions for altering procedures, methods, research design or questionnaire wordings to deal with this relatively common research dilemma of striving for complete responses to sensitive items on questionnaires.

Dillman (1978:6) analyzed reports of over 200 studies on mail surveys done by other researchers, and listed some 16 items which hold promise for increasing survey response.
They include:

1) advance notification by letter or telephone that a questionnaire will be sent;
2) the use of white or off-white stationery;
3) use of more expensive methods of delivering mail;
4) the denomination of the stamps;
5) the inclusion of stamped return envelopes;
6) shorter questionnaires;
7) attractive questionnaire layout;
8) official sponsorship of the survey;
9) personalization of correspondence related to the survey;
10) the addition of title or position with the sender's name;
11) the assurance of respondent anonymity and confidentiality;
12) the composition of the cover letter - permissive vs. firm; long and reasoned vs. short and punchy; a plea for help vs. offer of reward; request a favour; stress the social usefulness of the study and importance of the respondent to study success;
13) offers of incentives - money, trading stamps, lottery tickets, executive summary, copy of survey results, instant coffee, pencil, tie clip and note pad;
14) enclosure of incentive vs. promise of incentive;
15) use of repeated follow-ups by mail and/or telephone;
16) the timing of follow-ups.

He (Dillman, 1978:7-8) also identified some of the limitations of the studies he reviewed that had not used the total design method in planning the research. Many had focused on only one or two of the above attributes or activities to increase response. However, he concluded that valid comparison of studies is difficult because of the diverse populations being studied, the varied topics being surveyed and the different numbers and types of follow-up devices used. He felt that the differences in study results could not be attributed to follow-up styles or comparable factors; researchers tended to react to assumptions about respondent behaviour to specific aspects
of their mailed questionnaires, rather to the study as a whole. Thus, independently manipulating any one or two of the techniques listed previously had very little power to improve response.

Instead, Dillman (1978:20) proposed the adoption of a total design method of performing surveys. In essence this method encourages the researcher to prepare an administrative plan which aims for maximum response by encompassing all the following components -- identify in advance all the tasks to be accomplished; determine how each task is dependent on others; decide upon the order in which the tasks must be performed; and decide the means by which each task will be accomplished.

When he applied these elements to his analysis of 48 mail surveys that relied wholly or mostly on a total design method, Dillman (1978:21) noted that the average response rates of these surveys was 74 percent and no survey obtained less than a 50 percent response rate. Dillman (1978:27-8) also reviewed this same sample set of studies for length of the questionnaire as a factor influencing response. He found that there was almost no difference in response to questionnaires of various lengths but overall having fewer than 12 pages with about 125 items was recommended. He found that the studies' response rates reduced to an average of 65 percent in cases where the questionnaires had been longer than 12 pages. He also noted that item non-response was remarkably low, usually not beyond 3-4 percent for the shorter questionnaires.
In a comparison study of responses on mailed surveys in four different states conducted by Dillman with Christenson, Carpenter and Brooks (1974:755), all aspects of the data collection process were manipulated to try to increase the response rate for those studies which had used lengthy questionnaires. Although the response rates achieved were not as high as those which used personal interviews, they did reach between 70-75 percent, which is higher than most mail surveys.

Madow, Nisselson and Olkin (1983:42-4) also identified various common methods used in ten large-scale studies (that were reported in the literature) which had made significant efforts to successfully reduce non-response. Most are some version of those already mentioned, which include:

1) carefully prepare questionnaires to take into consideration the least amount of burden to the respondent;
2) make a research commitment to honour privacy;
3) train interviewers in methods of administering questionnaire and ways of obtaining the cooperation of participants;
4) send or have delivered ahead of the questionnaires an introductory letter and statement of survey intent and objectives;
5) provide respondents with evidence that responses will really be held in confidence;
6) identify questionnaire and item non-response as soon as possible in the data collection schedule to allow time for call-backs and follow-ups; for mail surveys, arrange to obtain changes of address from the Post Office;
7) make telephone or personal call-backs; mail additional requests to units not initially responding, or use other follow-up procedures;

8) in mail surveys, include reminder postcards; make efforts to learn whether the proposed recipient has moved or the agency or organization is no longer in existence;

9) verify that interviews were actually done and information correctly entered; that those categorized as ineligible are in fact, ineligible; and that attempts were actually made to contact and interview those classified as non-respondents;

10) include items in questionnaires that can be used in imputation or statistical adjustment for non-response;

11) attempt to convert refusals into responses in the final stages of data collection;

12) assign the call-backs to the more skilful interviewers or have the study supervisor do them;

13) use a shorter questionnaire consisting of key items of the earlier longer one in the later or final phases of data collection to obtain at least the minimum data needed for analysis of the survey findings and/or for imputation or adjustment for missing data;

Two less common procedures were also adopted for some case studies:

To increase both item response and the ability to adjust for item non-response, ask twice the questions expected to have high item non-response — first in the desired wording and later in a simpler (less threatening) version;

To offer incentives to potential responders; this is less often done in government surveys.
In order to stimulate response to questionnaires, Berdie, Anderson and Niebuhr (1986:46-51) recommend the general tactic of *personalizing the research process*, treating the potential respondent as a ‘research participant’ and assuring anonymity and confidentiality. Their specific tactics to establish a good initial contact include careful choice of printing and paper, colours, preletters and cover letters which accompany the questionnaire, as well as sponsorship of the study. Fowler (1993:45) also found that personal contact was significantly more effective in yielding good response than a letter. In addition, he recommends anything that makes a questionnaire look professional, personalized and attractive seems to produce positive results in terms of the response rate.

Using both control and experimental groups, Carpenter (1974/5:619) studied the effect of personalizing mail surveys to the general public, a sample group that had not been examined before on this particular variable. Unfortunately, he did not report on the topic or content of the questionnaires since this could have made a difference in overall response rates beyond his focus of determining whether personalizing surveys to the general public makes a difference. However, he did note that the two year difference between the distribution of the surveys to each group could have had an effect due to the differences in the political situations in the country as a whole at the time.

In any case, he found that personalization, which consisted of using the participants’ name on the envelope and cover letter, sending repeated letters and a final request by certified
mail, were all important and resulted in a return rate of over 70 percent in his study. In addition, Carpenter (1974/75:615) used a list of auto registrations in Arizona to obtain his initial mailing list for both the control and experimental groups as 25 percent of the general public do not have phones or have them unlisted. Although duplications of those that have car registrations were reviewed and eliminated to account for those households with more than one car, no limitations were acknowledged to take into account those households that do not have a car. Those without a car, in this case, would have been completely excluded from the study. Again, not knowing the topic of the survey makes the use of this sampling technique a concern.

In two studies of university students on alcohol consumption and related problems, McKillip and Lockart (1984:87 & 89) assessed the impact of different cover letter appeals in relation to rates of return of mailed questionnaires by samples of graduates and undergraduates selected randomly by certain digits of the student number, from 10 percent of the total university population in Illinois. The sample sizes totalled 600 and 500 undergraduates and 200 and 175 graduates in each study. For the graduate students, a combination of an appeal to both utility and knowledge slightly increased their return rates, although the opposite was the case with the undergraduates. However, they (McKillip and Lockart, 1984:90) found that having a cover letter that contained some sort of appeal in two dimensions was not significantly more effective than ones with a single appeal. They also found no evidence that the type of appeal based on functional theory of attitudes made a difference to the rate of returns produced by these differing subpopulations.
Frequently questionnaire length has been held to be an important factor affecting the response rate but shorter is not necessarily better. A controlled study on the participation in activities of full-time students at a large private university, whose purpose was to obtain additional extramural funds, found that a three-page questionnaire was more effective than a one-page one for achieving a high response rate (Adams and Gale, 1982:235). Other delivery influences such as the same type of mail-out, the same procedures and questionnaire type and format (except for length) were held constant for all three surveys having the same type of questions. It was found that the five-page version had a significantly lower response rate than both the one- and the three-page version. Each type of questionnaire had been mailed to a random sample of 550 university students and no follow-up or incentive procedures were used. Based on the return patterns, these researchers suggest that some follow-up procedures ideally might have been instituted about two weeks after the initial survey was sent out.

Burchell and Marsh (1992:240-1) examined the effect of questionnaire length on 300 respondents using a survey on employment carried out by the British Economic and Social Research Council. They found length to be a significant disincentive to respond. However, the length of the interview schedule (a spoken questionnaire) was not found to have an effect on item quality as determined by the number of responses provided to open-ended questions. In fact, variation and elaboration of response increased significantly toward the end of the interview, suggesting that the length of time taken in the interview exchange led to development of respondent confidence and interest in the topic.
However, 'exchanges-in-tune' are not neutral. A good interviewer who wants to establish a friendly cooperative discussion environment uses time well, to periodically deepen and re-affirm the value of the 'information donation' of the respondent. If the proper environment is not established and subsequently reaffirmed, then, over time, boredom and irritation set in.

Oppenheim (1966:35) found that much depends on the personal involvement and interest of the respondents, particularly their involvement with the subject of the study. These are more important than length of questionnaire or any of the mechanisms of delivery. Interested individuals will complete and return even the most lengthy questionnaire, although it may also be said that certain specific populations are more prone to respond than others and more prone to respond at some specific time to a topic (which has just become a burning issue for them) than is generally the case.

*Type and timing of follow-up* is also considered important in survey research. Altschuld and Lower (1984:9) found in a study on perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers in Ohio about the evaluation of teaching that careful attention to the timing and procedures for mailing their questionnaires paid off with a 96 percent return rate. Overall first wave return results were already 82 percent within the first three weeks of mailing. The remaining 14 percent came after follow-up telephone calls were made and three more weeks had passed. Specifically, the timing was found to be critical to ensure returns of completed questionnaires, because the topic of evaluation coincided with the usual spring schedule that many school districts follow for their evaluation process and likely was in the forefront of teacher and
principal interest at this time.

Other elements identified by Altschuld and Lower (1984:16-7) that also contributed to this high return rate included: topic, salience, good cover and endorsement letters, administrative support for the research, personal follow-up by telephone and limited time demand of the respondent, guaranteed confidentiality and overall attention to detail regarding accurate names and mailing addresses, as well as the use of contacts in the respondents' schools.

The effect of multiple questionnaire mailings was studied to assess how effective are successive requests to participate in improving response rates. The study of Sobal, DeForge, Ferentz, Muncie, Valente and Levine (1990:719) with a sample of 1,535 physicians used three questionnaire mailings to push the initial return of 39 percent to a final rate of 64 percent. The authors concluded that homogeneous groups, like physicians of one specialty, when surveyed about some issue of professional concern probably require fewer follow-ups than other audiences to ensure a high final response rate.

When attempting to gather information about undergraduate curricula from 297 former students, Denton, Tsai and Chevrette (1987:79) found that increasing the number of follow-up mailings did not make much difference in the response rate for a mail-out survey. Their first mailing yielded 70 completed surveys, the second only added another 55. Poor timing, they thought was one of the factors associated with their low overall return rate. Students respond better to surveys which are sent out during the middle of the academic year, rather than in the spring as this one was. Since they used two mailings, perhaps these researchers were also
interested in examining the effects of several annual surveys sent in one term to the students of the same department. Only one previous survey actually appears to have overlapped with the same population as theirs, but they noted that all the previous surveys did achieve higher return rates with completed questionnaires than theirs.

In designing any survey, and particularly a marketing study, a very important consideration "is the designation of the amount of effort that is required to achieve a satisfactory response rate" (Frankel and Dutka, 1983:74). This entails seriously considering the number of follow-up mailings or call-backs needed to locate people at their homes, as well as those needed to convince initial refusals finally to cooperate. The clients of the market research firm must be made well aware from the outset of the difficulties and expense often entailed in achieving a high response rate. Here, of course, we have the dilemma of the businessman. If the proposed research design appears to be too expensive, the firm may lose out to a competitor. If the agreed design then incurs extra expense the firm will lose reputation, client interest may wane and future contract work disappear. On the other hand, if the design minimizes the difficulties of obtaining response and 'skimps' on the estimated needed number of follow-up attempts, the final respondent sample may be inadequate (or biased) and fail to satisfy the client's needs. Deciding upon the adequacy of the follow-up research phase is a tricky professional judgment. According to these authors, as many as four attempts may be needed. And they warn: "If there is no relationship between the probability of response and the value of the variable being estimated, then it is not necessary to achieve a high response rate".
According to West (1991:134), the number and scheduling of follow-ups is critical for ensuring completeness of item response and for the representativeness of the sample, if these are important considerations. Rao (1983:40) noted that for three surveys which he analyzed, telephone call-backs, mail follow-ups and repeated telephone calls to obtain the original contact were all effective in reducing non-response. When he analyzed their return rates he found that the number of returns increased substantially as the number of calls and follow-ups increased, but he also warned that the feasibility of numerous follow-up calls must be taken into consideration. The decision about how many are enough depends upon the initial sample size, the type of respondent, the relative cost of each successive call, the biases and variances currently revealed in the low initial return and how many specific areas of the respondent sample must be improved. Some modest general follow-up combined with later successive specific follow-ups are more likely to produce an acceptable set of data for analysis than expensive, repeated ‘general following’.

Although many studies of academic survey research conclude that follow-ups are necessary to ensure a large and appropriate respondent sample, Dommeruth (1975:33), who focused specifically on the sampling used for market research, down-plays the value of call-backs which attempt to obtain cooperation from non-respondents. He found that call-backs were not much help in reducing the refusal rate. Once having said "no" to a request for a telephone interview, the same person is unlikely to relent. However, offering some sort of compensation for cooperation to a newly chosen subsample is an acceptable way to obtain the desired number
and type of replies.

In a review of about 100 experiments with mailed questionnaires which Heberlein and Baumgartner (1978:450) collected from the literature, it was found that, on average, 48 percent of the sample who received the first mailing of a survey returned it. The first follow-up mailing, on average, then added another 20 percent of the original survey sample (pushing the return to 68 percent) and the second and third successively yield 12 percent and 10 percent, pushing the final return to 90 percent. But these authors (1978:461) also concluded that further research about the factors related to successful surveys needs to be done. They suggest that attention be paid to examination of initial response to discover why the return was so low; to respondents' reactions to systematically varied input, rather than the single effect of a single instrument for a single population; and, to interpretation of the results related to non-response using theoretically sound assumptions about those who failed to respond derived from theories about voting behaviour/attitudes and helping behaviour. In other words, the authors feel that some theoretical basis should be used to provide a framework for analysis of survey returns which would permit implications and deductions to be drawn about the respondents whose views and information are not present as well as the ones whose views were recorded.

A variety of incentives have been used, particularly with students, to try to stimulate the completion of questionnaires. Feedback, as an incentive to return mailed questionnaires, was studied by Powers and Alderman (1982:207). They sent out questionnaires to over 2,000 high school students, selected randomly, to obtain reactions to a booklet designed to familiarize
candidates with the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Because the results of national surveys, such as theirs, showed that the offer of some feedback report improved response rates significantly, they included a feedback invitation. This would serve not only to acknowledge the respondents' cooperation, but also to increase the salience of the questionnaire by inclusion of respondents' suggested improvements and suggested changes. As expected, the promise of feedback raised the response rate to that survey and to subsequent ones.

Educational institutions in the United States, with its extremely varied public/private system of schools, colleges and universities, have developed to a fine art the techniques of forging commitment to, and hence financially supporting, the 'alma mater'. Whether it be the wealthy alumnus who pays for the new high school football stadium, or the many university graduates who took a history major whose combined annual voluntary taxing pays for the special library collection and endowed chair, ‘fundraising’ has long since become an important national occupation in the U.S. Other nations are now following their lead -- particularly for financing education and welfare ‘causes’. The basis of such donor behaviour is the commitment of the graduates to the institution for which they have fond memories. Therefore institutions try to develop a continuing, cumulative commitment by means of mailed communications.

In other words, ‘feedback’ may take many forms, serve more than one purpose and be included in the survey design for more than one reason -- depending on the topic under study, the purpose of the study and the type of audience the researcher is trying to influence. It can do more than simply increase the response rate. In the Powers and Alderman study, by their
response the respondents were coopted into providing user reactions which were the basis for redesigning an information booklet. In the case noted earlier of specialized surveys on current issues to a group of specialist physicians, the promise of an executive summary of findings, a special report or some other ‘report back information’ also coopted respondents with promise of the reward of obtaining ‘insider’, unpublished information of great interest.

In 1985, Denton, Tsai and Chevrette (1987:78-80) surveyed 259 former students of teacher education about topics of general professional interest, and obtained an overall 48.3 percent (125) return to a mailed questionnaire. Then 40 non-responding subjects were selected from the original sample to receive the questionnaire and a small monetary incentive of twenty-five cents, and another 88 of the total sample were sent the questionnaire and a departmental newsletter (which was considered as an incentive in fostering stronger association between former students and their previous university). Two mail outs were undertaken. Only 10 completed returns were received from those who had been given the quarter. Fifty responses were returned from those receiving the newsletter with a return rate of 57 percent. Since the rate of return (25%) from the monetary incentive sample was considerably less than those of the original survey with no incentive, it was concluded that a small monetary incentive was nonproductive in enhancing return rates. Also, by means of a number of inferential tests on responses by year of graduation and level of work experience they concluded that these respondent characteristics had no influence on perceptions of the curricula for teacher education.

In an article specifically discussing the follow-up used in a survey of teacher education
graduates, Lindsay (1985:33) recommended the use of a number of procedures when designing and conducting follow-up studies. These are: formulating the items on questionnaires and scales, determining the length and appearance of the questionnaire, preparing the cover letter, planning the follow-up reminders and comparing respondents and non-respondents. They all speak to careful planning of all aspects of a survey research project including knowing the audience, knowing the substance of the problem, issue, policy, condition and/or preference being investigated, and knowing the mechanical/technical aspects of good survey management.

Personal Interview Surveys

Many survey research projects reject the technique of using a mailed questionnaire in favour of face-to-face interviews. Since these are usually time-consuming and expensive, they rely for success on a small number of good interviews with a carefully chosen representative sample. Success in eliciting rich relevant information obviously depends upon the personality and skill of the interviewer, but gaining access to the respondent to obtain the information, and persuading the respondent to participate in the study are no less important. Much depends upon the initial contact between interviewer and respondent. In anticipation of possible non-response to the request for an interview, Frankel and Dutka (1983:72) identified several separate procedures which they found to be useful. They are the following: when designing the interview ease the burden on respondents; consider in advance the imputation process that will be used to estimate missing data; and develop interviewing skills. They also recommended a
model for repeated attempts to interview.

In addition to the importance of the generally agreed characteristics of good research design, Groves, Cialdini and Couper (1992:478-9) identified what they considered the desirable attributes of interviewers. They also noted that interview success depended upon two related factors: interviewer behaviour and respondent/interviewer interaction. Both influence respondents' willingness to participate in a study as well as what they contribute to it. The initial interviewer's impression is most important in establishing a favourable climate for response. The subject's previous experience influences the interview process whether it amounts only to a verbally delivered questionnaire or a longer less structured conversation. The hope is that all participants will answer all questions fully. If the initial contact is favourable, respondents are more likely to answer all the schedule's questions -- even those of a personal and confidential nature -- and offer frank, candid opinions and judgements.

According to Berdie, Anderson and Niebuhr (1986:60-2), to achieve response in interview surveys, two factors must be present: contacting the chosen people and persuading them to complete the interview. However, they agree that interviewing behaviour is not unimportant. The authors warn that obtaining cooperation during the interview is not automatic, and the goal is to complete the planned interview. They believe there are three factors contributing to success: the competence of the interviewer, an introduction which clearly states the purpose of the study at the outset, and the manner in which the questions themselves are arranged.
Telephone Surveys

Surveys which interview by telephone (whether in a highly structured manner, in essence a verbal questionnaire, or less structured involving discussion of broad open-ended questions) represent a relatively economical means of collecting very specific data from a specialized population. But there has been relatively little research done on telephone interview techniques, their particular problems, requirements and effectiveness. Commercial market research firms often use the telephone to, in effect, give oral questionnaires to sample groups who are asked short, ‘special topics’ opinion questions. However, it is generally conceded that telephone surveys are prone to coverage errors, the major one being households without a telephone. This eliminates low income groups, subscribers who have moved and failed in, or are experiencing delays in having the telephone re-connected, and ‘roomers’ who do not have a private telephone. This method also eliminates households which have chosen to have unlisted telephone numbers (ones not published for public access).

For his study which reviewed a number of telephone surveys, Keeter (1995:213) estimated that telephone non-coverage bias was surprisingly high because a "sizable minority" of the sample were non-telephone households. He noted that, in one of his own surveys this had been due, in large part, to a special circumstance, but such conditions might be quite prevalent. Many in his sample had only recently become part of the telephone population, and hence were still unlisted, or they were in hiatus between telephones and soon would join the telephone population. The kind of data which he used to document the transient households in his study
can be used not only to characterize the non-telephone population of a district, but also to alert survey researchers that their estimates for districts like that may be biased. In the United States, this can be demonstrated fairly simply by publicly available statistics, which compare part-year and whole-year households on a number of variables. This is not so simple in Canada, where the appropriate public statistics are not available.

Brick, Waksberg, Kulp and Starer (1995:234) examined the coverage bias that exists when list-assisted samples are used in telephone surveys. They acknowledge that the main disadvantage of this design is that it excludes a large percentage of households from the sample and hence from participating and presenting their views. However, they claim that using this design actually excluded from their sample only 3-4 percent of all residential households. Therefore, the coverage bias was fairly small. Furthermore, they found that differences in characteristics of the members of the randomly-dialled group and another which was obtained randomly from a list were also insignificant.

To counteract some of the weaknesses of telephone surveys, Traugott, Groves and Lepkowski (1987:522) proposed using a dual frame research design which they had tested. In a series of experiments conducted in Michigan, three samples for a political survey of telephone households were selected using random digit dialling and lists of telephone numbers purchased from a commercial firm. The cold call interview method was used for the 600 interviews in the research phase which used random dialling. (This involves telephoning a possible respondent without prior notice and just asking for participation on the spot.) For the phase using the
purchased lists (for about 2,000 telephone interviews), advance letters describing the study were mailed to over 75 percent of the names on the list. In two experiments the use of advance letters for names on purchased lists produced response rates 13.4 percent and 8.5 percent higher than the rates achieved by 'cold calls', but there was no difference in the other factors in which they were interested such as improved interview rapport.

However, not all the research evidence supports the widely held notion that the success of a telephone interview depends upon the first few sentences of the interviewer's communication -- the voice, the tone, the phrasing of the words as well as the actual words. In two experiments with telephone survey original samples of over 1,000 each, Dillman, Gallegos and Frey (1976:77) found that using the same interviewer but varying the introductory sentences did not affect refusal rates, even though they themselves had been convinced that the first few minutes of a telephone interview were critical to the success of the study. However, in a third experiment with an original sample of 1,354, when they used a prior letter of explanation, they did achieve significantly lower refusal rates (by 6.3 percent). They concluded that the types of incentives often found effective in mail questionnaire surveys, such as personalization and rewards, had not influenced the results in their experiments with telephone surveys, and the sex of the interviewer had no effect on the number of refusals in any of the three experiments.

So, perhaps, from the work of these researchers it may be concluded that the content of the introductory remarks to a telephone interview generally do not affect the recipient’s decision to listen and cooperate, but the actual voice and manner may have some effect. Their third
experiment simply showed that their findings reinforced what is well established for hard copy questionnaires: prior notice in a letter containing an explanation of the importance of the study, an appeal for cooperation, a brief description of what is involved and how long preparing the reply will take, and assurance of anonymity and confidentiality — all these standard procedures pay off in fewer refusals. If a high response rate is crucial to the success of a study, steps to minimize non-response must be taken from the outset. Original samples for these experiments were drawn from all the published telephone directories for the State of Washington. That state was chosen since census statistics show that 92 percent of all its households are reported as having telephone service. Although mention was made of the ‘unknown’ minority with unlisted numbers, they, of course, were automatically excluded. Although the original samples had over 1,000 members in each, in all cases almost 25 percent had to be excluded as non-respondents because of not answering, being disconnected and being ineligible to participate in the study — common difficulties associated with telephone surveys which reduce their usable samples considerably.

Incentives seem to have little effect on response rates to academic surveys. More effective is an appeal to the special audience’s specific interests (as in the case of physicians), or to their loyalty, remembered pleasure, affection and sense of ownership (in the case of surveys of a university’s graduates). However, incentives, particularly ones of monetary value (actual cash, participation in a lottery, expensive artifacts) might have more impact on participation in commercial market research surveys. To test this, Goetz, Tyler and Cook
(1984:153) offered a $10.00 incentive for response to market research telephone surveys. Their findings show that the promise of monetary reward can result in an increase in respondent sample size and a higher than expected response rate, compared to their experience with market research which did not offer respondent incentives. The completeness of the questionnaire and the data quality were also improved in this survey given over the phone, so the item response rate was enhanced and more detailed data obtained. They concluded that the expectation of receiving a specified cash reward seemed to heighten the listener's attention to the respondents' task at hand.

The efficacy of telephone interview surveys obviously rests heavily on the degree of telephone coverage and the efficiency in keeping the publication of telephone numbers up-to-date. There is also the problem of unlisted numbers in jurisdictions where that is a common practice, and this practice is growing. Single professional women who live alone increasingly choose to have their number ex directory. This also seems to be becoming a more common middle class choice. But, as yet, there has been no research published on the extent of the problem that ex directory poses for the market researcher. Nevertheless, there is one study by Goyder (1985:231) which is of interest in this regard. It compared the non-response rate on a national survey carried out in both Canada and the United States. Although the total sample was small (less than 450), in Canada 10-15 percent fewer responses were achieved than in the U.S. Over half the non-response was attributed to the difficulty of having to make multiple telephone call-backs. It was explained that this was probably due to geographical reasons and costs. The
constraint of *ex directory* was not mentioned, but the variance between the (apparent) telephone conditions in the two countries, which affected this study, provides evidence enough to think that ‘telephoning’ — even in two countries as similar as the U.S. and Canada — means different things (and probably there’s even more variance within each country since geographically they are so vast and so varied). This aspect of the telephone survey also needs further research.

Recently, with more telephones equipped with answering machines and voice mail (electronic voice messaging systems) many people no longer answer their calls directly, both in the workplace and at home. With this new technology affecting the telephone, one needs to know, for example, whether calls are returned after messages are left on the message system, particularly when participation in a telephone survey is being requested. If it becomes a rare practice to answer one’s phone personally, and recorded messages from successive call-backs merely reinforce the original decision to disregard the request of the market researcher, then call-backs become dysfunctional, an expensive waste of time. The researcher may be recording many call-backs with few successes in actually ever directly reaching the target sample. In future, this technology may alter the use of telephone surveys; the implications of such new technologies have yet to be studied.

**Computer Network Surveys**

Until very recently surveying by means of a computer network was virtually nonexistent, except for the academic interchanges which took place between specialist scholars in universities
(who supplemented their traditional means of communication by means of conference papers and journal articles by adding e-mail via the Internet.) Now, however, although Internet users are not yet a mass phenomenon, they include millions of computer owners throughout the world. In 1992, using this relatively new data collection method to try to achieve a high response rate, Walsh, Kiesler, Sproull and Hesse (1992:244) administered a computer network survey using 104 self-selected and 300 randomly selected respondents. The response rate from the random sample was 76 percent. Since this was not a study of participation bias, but of the ability of the computer network to push up response rates, comparison of the findings from the two samples was not reported. However, it can already be said from such recent evidence, the use of the computer network as the vehicle for a questionnaire survey or merely as the means of soliciting participation produces an amazing number of replies. Computer surveys attract unusual participation and have some unique advantages. They can obtain responses from persons located in distant geographical areas. (So, too, can a telephone design, so a comparative study of these two media might well contribute to our understanding of respondent bias.) The computer is user-friendly, easy to access and to answer -- indeed, for many it has become habitual and addictive. However, in the Walsh et al. study, not all respondents had above median network usage, so with this medium an additional random quality is added to the research design.

The Response Rate

The response rate is simply the "number of people interviewed [or replying to and
returning the questionnaire] divided by the number of people sampled" (Fowler, 1993:39). The denominator includes all persons in the survey population who were selected but did not respond, for whatever reason. Response rates are usually reported as the percentage of the selected sample approached to provide data. Further calculations which are often made are the proportion of the population which the original sample represented and the proportion of the population that the responded sample represents. It is generally agreed that the response rate is the prime parameter by which a survey’s value is evaluated. What is really at stake is the validity of the survey’s findings. If the data collection has been faulty or just inadequate so that a low (or biased) response sample produces less material (or ‘slanted’ material) for analysis than anticipated and needed, then the survey (in a practical sense for the commercial market research firm) is a failure. A clever academic can salvage a great deal even from a survey failure by using it for some purpose other than the original inquiry purpose (switching the research purpose to the causes of low response, for example). But a market research firm has a client to satisfy at a given cost. After-the-fact methods of improving survey response are expensive. If a great deal of time, effort, ingenuity and energy has been spent designing a survey and, in spite of the expense of remedial efforts, the response rate is still low, it must be judged a failure.

There is no generally agreed minimum acceptable response rate. For the U.S. federal government, the Office of Management and Budget expects a response rate above 75 percent. This is the office which reviews surveys done under contract for the government. Similarly, academic survey institutions usually expect rates for designated adults, using general household
samples, within the 75 percent range. However, many academic studies in the social sciences which involve long complex interviews or questionnaires with specialized expert audiences, where the issue of representativeness is sacrificed to the need for rich detailed content, much lower response rates are acceptable. Lower response rates also generally occur in surveys of central city samples and in those using random digit telephone samples (Fowler, 1993:40). In his book focused on non-respondents, Goyder (1987:6) indicated that in market research response rates of about 65 percent remain the reality because of limited budgets.

Babbie (1986:221), in his social research methods text reviewed the wide range of response rates reported in the survey literature. As a rule of thumb he considers response rates of at least 50 percent as adequate for analysis and reporting, of at least 60 percent as good and at least 70 percent as very good. However, he hastens to point out that these are only rough guides with no statistical basis and, in any case, a "demonstrated lack of response bias is far more important than a high response rate". It is the response bias, after all, that makes the study no longer representative of the general population.

Using thirty years annual data from the National Election Studies and Surveys of Consumer Attitudes conducted by the Survey Research Centre at the University of Michigan to review the trends in acceptable non-response rates, Steeh (1981:55) reported that, since the early 1950s, the trend has been toward substantial increases in the non-response rates of sample surveys (in other words to a higher tolerance of what once would have been regarded as an unacceptably low rate). This is particularly true of surveys conducted by academic
organizations, and those using full probability sampling at the household level. In addition, the use of proxy interviews has been more limited. She stressed the significance of urbanization as the probable explanation for growing non-response in personal interviews. But Goyder (1987:63) warned that there is much debate and no real consensus about the reasons for, the effect of, and the importance of the noted increase in non-response rates. The ones advanced by the writers reviewed for this thesis range from the effects on mailed questionnaires of deteriorating postal delivery systems to philosophical and social psychological explanations involving speculations about changing societal values, changing populations and changing response behaviours. Nevertheless, the consensus on the importance of many factors can be deduced by the prescriptive ‘methods’ lists contained in the studies which discuss what constitutes good survey research practice.

Factors Affecting Response Rates

Berdie, Anderson and Niebuhr (1986:44) reviewed fifteen studies focusing on the reasons why people do not respond to surveys. Actually receiving the questionnaire is important. In one study, about 40 percent of the sample never received the questionnaires. They had moved and there was no way of obtaining a more current address. The authors found that other reasons for inability to contact were also common; for example, some of the sample candidates had died. In cases where questionnaires had been received but not returned, political opinions and certain socioeconomic questions which were viewed as private had led to the decision not to
participate. In many cases objection is made to responding to such types of questions. Another reason provided in the research reports was that the potential respondents were not interested in the particular topic of the study. But there were also some not interested in participating at all, in any kind of study, regardless of the topic. It was suggested that, perhaps, an earlier bad experience with an interview or a questionnaire coloured this reaction. Perhaps potential candidates had spent a great deal of effort answering a long questionnaire or being interviewed at an inconvenient time, only to find later that the study had never been completed, or had had no impact. Perhaps they were irritated because, in the past, they had cooperated with many studies and never received any feedback on the findings.

Based on his experience, as a consulting editor and professor (now retired), West (1991:134) noted as common reasons given for non-response to an initial inquiry of a survey: laziness, oversight, illness, lack of time, lack of interest and/or reluctance to disclose personal details. In their study, Sosdian and Sharp (1980:400) tried to weigh in importance the various reasons non-respondents gave for not returning a mailed questionnaire. They interviewed 83 non-respondents who reported having received the questionnaire, but not returning it, asking them to choose from a suggested list the most important reason for deciding not to complete the questions and found that:

- 20 percent just ‘never got around to responding’;
- 17 percent were just ‘too busy’;
- 13 percent ‘forgot’ or ‘lost’ the survey instrument;
- 12 percent said they had completed and mailed it in;
- 10 percent completed the questionnaire but did not mail it back;
- 7 percent reported that the questionnaire ‘came at a bad time’ for them, personally;
- 6 percent felt 'the topic had no relevance' or 'did not apply' to them;
- 5 percent refused to answer;
- 1 percent felt that it was 'too long' and would take too much time to complete;
- 8 percent were 'other'.

The 'other' reasons consisted of a variety of idiosyncratic happenings too varied to categorize.

(Due to rounding, the total came to 99, instead of the usual 100 percent.)

The analysis of additional data from the same study of college degree recipients by Sosdian and Sharp (1980:400) showed that failure of access, rather than active resistance, was a major factor influencing those who had not completed and returned the questionnaires. They sampled one-third of the 2,000 cases eligible and available for follow-up, and found that, of the 666, 252 were true non-respondents and 270 had been cases of undelivered questionnaires. It seems, therefore, that non-response should be characterized as much a sin of omission as a sin of commission. "Easy access" was defined as those with accurate mailing addresses for which postage delivery can be made. Another complication in this study was that it was inconclusive as to whether the questionnaires had really been received in all cases, since slippage in post office handling had occurred. So if a person never received the questionnaire, he can hardly be accurately described as refusing to respond to it. However, it must also be admitted that, when contacted, people may prefer to say the questionnaire was not received in order to save face, rather than admit to the follow-up interviewer that they could not be bothered to complete it.

Regarding the attitudes of non-respondents from their follow-up telephone survey, Sosdian and Sharp (1980:401) found that respondents who had not responded to the questionnaire usually
were not hostile and did not seem to be suspicious or wary about participating in surveys in general. These were not reasons given for not responding. Participating in the particular survey merely had low priority. And it is interesting to note that Sosdian and Sharp also did not receive as many complaints about the burden of completing questionnaires or about the invasion of the recipient’s privacy as were reported in other studies.

A study by DeMaio (1980:230-1) was based on eight attempts to interview the same sample of non-respondents to a national study on current population. The study used a sample of 1,262 refusals. The reasons for refusing to participate in the initial study, before follow-up, were found to be difficult to categorize readily because of successive reasons for successive refusals. The author found that the frequency of occurrence of any one reason was less than 11 percent. However, it was possible to isolate the three most important (commonly occurring) reasons; they were: invasion of privacy, unfavourable past experience, and on being informed that participation was voluntary, the person decided to exercise that option. Analysis of the reasons for refusal by the characteristics of the refusing respondents found that the older, predominantly middle class members of the non-respondent sample, who eventually were contacted and still refused to cooperate, were urban dwellers, likely to be residing in the west.

Senf (1978:780) investigated non-respondents to her large mailed questionnaire survey. The survey pertained to the possibility of health services being offered on church grounds. It involved three mailings sent to 750 households. Two of the mailings enclosed a seven-page
questionnaire; the third provided only a post card, which simply allowed for a negative or a positive response. For a mailed questionnaire survey, two mailings have almost become de rigueur. The second sometimes merely repeats the first, sending it only to those on the non-reply list. Sometimes an additional appeal letter is included in the package. Sometimes the second mailing is sent to an additional randomly selected sample drawn from the same population pool as the original sample. The researcher then has a response sample of replies which may be termed 'early' and 'late'. Senf found that the return rate of the negative postcards was 62 percent and sent back five days earlier than the positive post-cards (55%). Unfortunately, the questionnaires were sent out uncoded (i.e., respondents were anonymous). Therefore, the positive/negative opinions and characteristics of these respondents could not be compared with those who returned the postcards -- a definite limitation of the study.

Generally, those being sent letters and questionnaires do not respond because they do not find the topic's interest value sufficiently high to warrant the effort of completing the questionnaire and returning it. This leads us to question the basic assumption of survey research: The researchers (or some client) would like information on some topic which they feel is important and which a selected group of people might help them understand, answer pertinent questions about, etc. Because the topic is important generally, or is important to the researcher, it is assumed that it must, therefore, also be important to every sampled recipient. It clearly is not. Hence we sometimes have low response rates and many candidates refusing to cooperate with the researchers. Therefore, surely the most important factor in trying to ensure the success
of a survey research project is to try to ensure that the members of the sample are likely to be interested in the topic and will probably agree that the study is an important one which ought to be supported!

Green (1991:275) studied the differences between the phases of responding to a mailed survey -- early, late and refusals -- regarding the use of, and attitudes toward, research in teaching. For her study, she surveyed some 600 in-service school teachers from two American states achieving more than a 71 percent final response rate. Then as a follow-up, by telephone, she interviewed 25 of the non-respondents. There were statistically significant differences (at a .05 level) found on their replies to the questions on the survey instrument. These reluctant respondents had less positive attitudes toward the topic of the study and less favourable views of themselves as teachers and researchers. There were also differences in response according to such demographic variables as age and sex. However, since this study had a fairly homogeneous group of subjects (all were teachers), there were no significant differences in the responses related to respondents’ level of education which is generally an important identifying variable in market research surveys.

Thomsen and Siring (1983:33) reviewed a number of Norwegian studies on non-respondents. Two of their most significant factors affecting non-response were the attitude of the public toward the usefulness of the survey, and acceptance by the prospective respondent of the investigators’ ability to keep their information confidential. The importance of such findings underlines the need to inform the recipient population about the importance and application of
the results, and to describe specifically the safeguards which will be used to protect confidentiality, computer security, and anonymity.

In a review of the literature on mailed questionnaire response rates in the United States since 1978, Baumgartner and Heberlein (1984:74) identified and discussed all the common factors already mentioned, but their comments on 'sponsorship' are of particular interest. They concluded that government or university sponsorship increases response rates. In market research, however, sponsorship is less important. Such 'official' or 'respectable' sponsorship does not necessarily decrease response but it is not usually a positive factor either. Response rates are enhanced generally if respondents believe that the prestige and credibility of the sponsor is directly related to the topic being studied. This makes the study important (i.e., likely to have an effect).

Fowler (1993:40) noted that response rates generally are higher in rural areas than in central cities, and that a high response is easier to obtain if the data can be collected from any adult in the household rather than only from the designated person. He also concluded that the high probability of a good return may be seen in advance, since in our society certain topics are of more general interest than others. Examining the effects of urbanization on non-response, Goyder, Lock and McNair (1992:44-6), who were conducting a survey in Ontario, found that response rates to personal interviews decreased dramatically from the largest to the smallest of three cities, which were Toronto, Hamilton and Kitchener. However, they also noted that variations of response rate within each of their three cities was negligible, which was not
expected since the cities variously include diverse communities, the smallest being much more homogeneous as to population origin than the largest.

Several research studies have focused on the question: Is there a difference in the information (the content of the replies) gained from those who respond at once and those who refuse to respond initially but do so later? When respondents and initial non-respondents are questioned about such aspects of the survey as the design, the administration of the questionnaire etc., do their answers show any significant differences? Could the initial high liability of non-response have been predicted from certain characteristics of the initial non-responders as they appeared in the population pool from which they were chosen? In an attempt to understand the decision to participate or not participate in some study, Groves, Cialdini and Couper (1992:477) reviewed results of over 75 studies of conceptual developments and experimental findings reported mainly in social and psychological journals. They identified most of the already mentioned factors which tend to influence participation. What is of interest in their findings for market researchers is their identification of what they called 'societal level' factors. These were defined as factors which point to the degree of social responsibility felt by the person being asked to participate in a study, factors which lead recipients to feel they ought to complete and return the questionnaire or place a call-back to the interviewer. Influencing these factors is the number of surveys being conducted at that time, with this type of people, in this society, and the generally perceived legitimacy of surveys as such, as well as judgement about the survey presently at hand.
In modern industrialized countries, the public's willingness to participate in surveys is of utmost importance to the research industry, and it is not unaffected by the public's view of the importance of all research. With this in mind, a market research firm in the United States has been conducting an industry image study every two years since 1974. Schleifer (1986:22) reported on one of the most harmful factors facing the industry -- "false surveys" which he found had moved upward by 17 percent from the study two years earlier. These are disguised sales pitches, enticing individuals to respond, and they have raised public suspicion. When this occurs, the reputation of legitimate research firms is affected and the refusal rates of the general public increase. Examples of such recent disguised sales pitches made by an insurance company, a bank and a telecommunications business would be comparable to ones described in this study several years ago. All asked questions about obtaining details for improving customer service under the auspices of market research for their various firms, but in all cases, it came out clearly near the end of the telephone interview that they had products to sell on behalf of their companies and that was the real point of the contact; they were selling life insurance, credit cards and long-distance service respectively.

In a study by Brennan and Hoek (1992:534), the behaviours of three groups were analyzed: respondents, refusers and non-respondents. Refusers were defined as those who outright reject any participation in the study; they return the questionnaires uncompleted. Non-respondents were defined as those who did not respond to the survey and failed to return the questionnaire. The original sample was drawn from 602 women selected randomly using the
New Zealand electoral lists. They were asked to participate in a mail survey on women and their finances; 384 completed, a 64 percent return rate. About half of the original sample were surveyed again. Of the original sample, 11 percent (66 of the questionnaires) were returned with incorrect addresses. The 7 percent (42) who were initial refusers were also re-surveyed as well as the 18 percent (108) who had not responded at all. It was found that response behaviour regarding survey requests is consistent over time. Most of those who had not responded quickly, who made up about half the respondent population, had needed reminders before they sent back their questionnaires, but they were not in principle opposed to surveys. Thirteen percent of those who had refused to cooperate initially reported that they generally did not participate in any surveys. Comparing the results on the second survey with those of the first, they concluded that about 90 percent were initial responders, 30 percent of non-responders would fail to respond a second time and over half of the previous refusers would refuse again.

Although there have been many studies trying to examine the differences between the characteristics of survey respondents and non-respondents, little research has been done on item non-response. The conspicuous exception has been the work of Goudy (1976:368). He studied the incidence of item non-response and its bias to the information derived from individual questionnaire items, as well as distortion in the relationships between item information and such variables as age, marital status, education and income. Goudy's 1976 journal article is based on the results of data obtained from a panel study of older men (50 years of age and older) in 42 small (with 2,500 - 10,000 population) communities in Iowa, who were surveyed on work
and retirement. Of his initial 1,870 interview respondents, 90 percent of those who were alive at the time of the second phase completed his questionnaire. He found very little difference in the characteristics of those who responded to various items on the survey and those who did not.

Error and Bias

Sampling

Sampling is defined as those decisions required to select the portion of the population that will be studied. Although decisions about a selected population are usually based on both time and cost constraints, the conclusions of a study ideally will apply to the whole population so they must be based on data seen to be representative of the population.

Difficulties encountered in survey research may not be due to the basic design decisions taken, but arise rather from errors resulting from the sampling process used. The methodological literature of the social sciences is rife with advice on this subject. Survey error is usually categorized into two types -- sampling and non-sampling. The former may bring into fundamental question the accuracy and credibility of the findings; the latter is related to non-respondents and is, therefore, of direct interest to this thesis.

According to Blalock and Blalock (1968:287), non-sampling errors arise from poor schedule questions; refusals and incomplete respondent answers; inability to contact the proper respondents; clerical errors in processing or coding questionnaire and interview responses; and, mistakes in data processing and/or in data analysis. To a greater or lesser extent, such errors
occur in all survey research. The non-sampling errors are commonly classified as ‘random’ and ‘bias’. Random errors are mistakes that are said to cancel out one another; bias errors are mistakes that have a cumulative effect, and produce biased information because they do not cancel out each other.

Satin and Shastry (1990:13) note that non-sampling errors are present both in sample surveys and censuses. Sometimes respondents cannot (or may not be willing to) provide correct information. Sometimes mistakes are made in the later stages of a survey where administration processing operations are at fault. Since it is recognized that both sampling and non-sampling errors will affect the accuracy of the sample results, considerable effort is usually made to design surveys so as to minimize their levels.

Bradburn (1983:289) categorized non-sampling errors into two types: those arising from difficulties in the execution of the sample (such as failing to obtain interviews with all members of a selected sample, or by item non-response); and those caused by other factors (such as respondents misinterpreting a question or deliberately providing false answers). Gray and Guppy (1994:138-151) refer specifically to different sampling strategies that can be used when applying the principles of probability. These include simple random, systematic, stratified, multistage cluster and random-digit dialling, as well as combinations of such procedures as in stratified random selection where first a survey target population is stratified into appropriate sub-lists and then the sample is randomly chosen from the members of each sub-list, proportionately to achieve some desired representation. There are many ways of sampling, but
no agreement as to which is the best way or the best for some specific purpose, or the minimum percentage. And in all cases those members of the chosen sample who do not participate have the effect of upsetting the desired sample whose character had been so carefully delineated. Precisely what these non-respondents represent differs from one to another, and the effect of their non-participation varies with the circumstances, the type and topic of the study project and many other variables.

Fowler (1993:38) divided into three categories those members of a selected sample who do not actually provide data for a study -- those who were not reached by the data collection procedures used, they could not be contacted and so they had no chance to answer the questions; those who, being approached and asked to participate, refused to answer questions; and, those who were willing to respond and were asked questions but were unable to perform because of some specific inhibiting condition such as language barrier, illness, unavailability or ignorance.

Survey researchers differ on the importance of using probability sampling. They disagree on it in terms of its relation to acceptable response rates, and in relation to the reliability and generalizability of study findings. According to Fowler (1993:49), the U.S. federal government will only fund survey research projects which are designed to make estimates of population characteristics if they are based on probability sampling. This limitation is also frequently demanded of academic research and of many studies undertaken by non-profit research organizations. However, almost all the major public opinion polls, political polling groups and market research organizations rely entirely on non-probability sampling. They use the method
known as quota sampling. Fowler (1993:50) describes the two common non-probability sampling procedures as follows -- for personal interviews: first, geographical areas are designated as 'blocks' and names are drawn accordingly from the probability sample of the population in that area; then the interviewer visits one of the blocks and completes from its names a fixed number of interviews; no call-backs are made; once the required number of interviews is reached work in that block ceases and the interviewer proceeds to the next block repeating the procedure and interviewing there. For telephone surveys the procedure is different. The interviewer is given a randomly selected list of telephone numbers from the community (or area) being surveyed and keeps phoning the numbers until the required number of interviews has been completed. Failure to answer the phone counts as a refusal to be interviewed and the interviewer just calls the next number.

King (1983:63-4) defines quota sampling in the same way Fowler does. It is a method of data collection to obtain a desired size of respondent sample considered necessary and sufficient for analysis of the information contained in respondents’ replies to the questions. For example, an established number of housing units is selected for a region using a multistage (possibly stratified) design, with probabilities proportional to size at different stages of the study. By that means the desired number of completed interviews can be obtained in the shortest (relatively) time without the expense of making additional calls to those that could not be reached. Quota sampling, rather than probability sampling, is the method frequently used by market researchers to collect census or public opinion political data when timeliness is of the
essence, and call-backs are expensive and cannot be completed rapidly. Many authors also point out that added to reduced cost, the sampling procedure has the advantage of convenience in administering a study (Madow, Nisselson and Olkin, 1983:76). However, when the research findings are reported, survey ethics demand that all procedures used to arrive at the main sample and any supplementary samples as well as the assumptions underlying them and the subsequent data analysis be clearly described.

Madow, Nisselson and Olkin (1983:75) point out that "Quota sampling differs from probability sampling in its treatment of non-response by largely ignoring its impact. It does not attempt to achieve a probability sample of the population and avoids the issue of non-response by not specifying a well-defined set of units to be included in the sample." Although non-respondents are avoided with quota sampling, missing data can still arise when interviewers cannot obtain the assigned quotas of completed interviews and/or when there are missing response items in the interviews because the respondent declined to answer some question. These authors (Madow, Nisselson and Olkin, 1983:44) also mention other types of sampling methods which are used to try to raise the response rate, ones whose titles are pretty self-explanatory -- double sampling, network sampling and randomized response.

Frankel and Dutka (1983:70-1) identified errors related to sample surveys as being of two types: 'source' errors (statistical sampling error) and response errors. And they noted that in market research where surveys are used for a variety of special purposes, a source of error due to incorrect or inadequate identification of study objectives, and/or specification of variables
of the population to be studied is possible.

A number of authors have produced classifications of the *sources* of errors in survey research. Cochran’s (1963:360) types of non-response error include: 1) non-coverage (failure to locate or visit some units in the sample); 2) not-at-homes (who reside at the designated place but are temporarily away); 3) unable to answer (who do not have the information needed or are unwilling to provide it); and 4) hard core (who adamantly refuse to be interviewed, are incapacitated, or are not at home during the entire time of the field work).

Kalton’s (1983:64) classification of total non-response is much the same although slightly different terms are used. It includes: 1) refusals (to be interviewed); 2) non-contact (because the intended respondent is unavailable or cannot be located); 3) incapacity (of the intended respondents to take part in the survey due to illness, deafness or inability to speak the language); and 4) lost or missing documentation (completed questionnaires lost in transit or processing). He notes that the main causes of non-response are refusals and non-contacts (mainly not-at-homes).

Correcting the problem of non-response was thoroughly discussed in an article by Aiken (1988:119) which made reference to many of the things already noted in this chapter. After suggesting a variety of approaches, he discussed the problems which arise when towards the end of a survey it becomes evident that the percentage response will be irremediably low. His advice is to discard the results, investigate the causes of the low response rate, correct the situation as effectively as possible, and then conduct an entirely new survey. However, this discouraging decision is not the only way of dealing with low response.
Cochran (1963:367) describes a method he used for many years. When only one sample study is intended and it has become evident that the attempt to reach persons by mail has failed, he recommends the researcher pull a random subsample of individuals who were not reached, contact its members and make a major effort to interview personally or by telephone. A variation on this theme is to replicate the study with a comparable but newly drawn sample, and for the analysis and report identify but amalgamate the findings, treating each set as a subsample. The researchers thereby not only achieve an acceptable total size respondent sample, but also gain the ability to compare one subsample with the other to check for dissimilarities. This is really a form of double sampling, but it is sequential and was not originally planned for the study.

According to West (1991:135), what is important is that the low response is admitted as early as possible and dealt with. Such a limitation is obviously problematic for generalizing from the findings, and must be reported for the study to be credible. The non-respondents may differ from the respondents on features that are significant to the purpose of the study. But this is difficult to demonstrate, both when it has occurred and when it has not. Sometimes there are public statistics which can help. For example, if respondents are asked about income, then the tenor and trends of income in the specified population can be checked against some objective data source. There have been many cases where it can be shown that respondents are reluctant to report low incomes and thus, the findings of studies do not represent these classes of the population, but nevertheless they can be important for other purposes. The limitation of the
findings must then be stated and their more constrained utility made clear.

But such well known remedies cannot always be used. For example, when a sample survey of law schools had a low response rate, Kaye (1993:595) recommended that the best approach to improving it would be to contact the non-respondents personally and persuade them to cooperate. However, often because of respondent anonymity this is not possible. If a general follow-up procedure is adopted and it also fails, it may be possible to use statistical procedures to estimate the missing data and add them to the findings. But when such steps are not possible, according to Kaye, the next best approach is to present the survey for what it is—a description of findings derived from a predominately self-selected sample. He warns that it is critical for those designing sample research projects either to demand a very large sample size (to insure against low response), or be guarded in reporting their findings and drawing conclusions from their data in cases where the expected response rate was not achieved. Of course, the former suggestion is of little use if there is, for whatever reason, a systemic refusal to respond by a specific subgroup within the larger sample.

Follow-up activities vary according to the type of survey being done. According to Yates (1960:107-8), precautions should be taken against simply substituting additional samples from the pool and surveying its members. However, a subsample of non-respondents may be used. But if this decision is made, instructions need to be precise for setting up and identifying that identical subsample. Failing more sophisticated procedures, one very simple subsampling method, such as taking every $q$th non-respondent and either contacting the person by telephone
or repeating the questionnaire mailing, is appropriate. But a better way would be to use a
computer-generated set of random numbers for a total which represents the number of non-
respondents and use this list to identify which non-respondents should be the object of the
supplementary survey.

If follow-up methods have been used and are successful, the study then has the advantage
of reporting the total findings and those of the two subsamples. If there are no statistically
significant differences in the ID characteristics and responses of initial and late respondents, it
is assumed that there is no need to distinguish them in the report. If there are differences, these
provide interesting problems to discuss and the final residual 'true' non-respondent is assumed
to be more like the initial non-respondents (who became a late respondent) than the general
sample population.

Bias of Non-respondents

The acceptable non-respondent rate in much of the survey research methods literature is
20 percent, but it varies according to the type of study (both what is being asked and how
respondents are approached). When the number of non-respondents rises above this level,
efforts are made to increase the numbers of respondents in order to avoid sample bias. In
contrast to sampling error, "the effect of non-response is to bias samples, that is, to make them
systematically different from the population from which they were drawn". According to Fowler
(1993: 39-41), estimates of the nature and level (degree) of bias likely to occur will differ
according to whether mail, telephone or personal interview procedures are used, as will the means of determining what bias may have developed. For example, with mail surveys, non-response bias is studied by comparing those who respond immediately with those who respond after follow-up steps are taken. Where possible both sets are compared on some known characteristic if some recent public statistics are available on that factor. Those who are interested in a survey’s subject matter tend to return the questionnaire. For mail surveys with low response rates, therefore, results may be significantly biased in ways associated with the purposes of the research. To check for such bias the characteristics of the respondent, on certain variables, should be checked against recorded statistics for the total population.

Another common bias in mailed surveys involves the educational level of the respondents. The higher the educational level, the higher the probability of response. Those with post-secondary education (apart from professors who are notoriously difficult to persuade to participate) tend to complete and return mailed surveys quickly. Since education and income level are often related, mailed surveys may then produce biased information on these important dimensions unless efforts are made to correct for possible bias and/or to achieve an initial high response rate (Fowler, 1993:41).

The availability of respondents is another common source of bias producing non-response. This is a particularly important factor in telephone and personal surveys. If the survey is carried out in homes, during weekdays, from 9:00 A.M.- 5:00 P.M., people who are not working from or in their homes, who have jobs away from home, are unlikely to be
contacted. Those contacted will include an unduly high proportion of housewives, stay-at-home parents of small children, child minders or guardians, persons with businesses at home, the unemployed and the retired. The adult employed will be under-represented and there probably will be a pro-female gender bias.

Like so many others, Kalton (1983:63) sees the main cause for concern about non-response is "the risk that non-respondents will differ from respondents with regard to the survey variables, in which case the survey estimates [information] based on the respondents alone will be biased estimates of the overall population parameters". Mailed questionnaires are easy to administer, but their greatest disadvantage, apart from the current high cost of postage, is that generally they yield poor response rates. The chief concern is not the reduced size of the sample, but the possibility of biased findings. According to Oppenheim (1966:34), there are two common methods by which to discover whether and how bias has been introduced, apart from those already mentioned. They are to compare respondents with non-respondents on the original sampling list, and to compare early respondents with late respondents. But, unfortunately, they cannot be used unless the returned questionnaire can be identified in some way and compared to the original list, and this runs against the guarantee of anonymity.

Usually the degree of bias produced by non-response is unknown. It is not acceptable to assume that the non-respondent group is unbiased. With this in mind, Fowler (1993:43) suggests that efforts be made, from the outset to avert bias by ensuring a reasonable response rate. A standard part of any study, therefore, should be to avoid procedures that will
systematically produce major differences between the respondents and the non-respondents. Regarding household and respondent selection, he (Fowler, 1993:50-1) suggests three kinds of biases can be readily introduced when using non-probability or quota samples. The first is interviewer discretion, the second, the effect of availability and the third, enlistment of cooperation. 1) In personal interviews, the interviewer may choose which house to visit, inadvertently, because of her impression of its attractiveness or accessibility, or merely on personal preference. A house where it appears the occupants are unlikely to be at home has less chance of being selected than one where someone clearly is at home. 2) A respondent who is approached may be too busy to participate, or be approached at the wrong time. Allowing potential respondents to refuse easily, for such reasons, biases the sample against busy people. 3) Bias may also be introduced because the respondents are those who have knowledge of the particular subject matter under investigation and are familiar with research in general, and hence are willing to take the time to be interviewed because they are aware that non-response may weaken a good study.

It is important to know what kind of bias is being introduced by non-participation as well as the degree of bias (and consequent threat to validity). In a study of survey participants, Lin and Schaeffer (1995:252) used two different models to try and estimate non-respondent bias. The first is a "continuum of resistance" where interviewed persons were placed at one end and non-participants at the other depending upon the number of calls (23 in this case) made to indicate the respondent’s resistance to the interview. Two relationships were to be determined
with the figures on the continuum: whether or not the criterion indicates there is evidence of a continuum of resistance among participants, and whether or not non-participants are more similar to participants who need more calls than to those who are interviewed with fewer calls. The placement of the groups on the continuum is arbitrary as it is not clear just how far apart participants should be from non-participants. The figures on the continuum are also complicated by the definition of non-participants when they include those who could not be contacted, those unavailable, as well as those who refused to be interviewed.

The second model, the "classes model", categorizes nonparticipants according to some characteristics, and the characteristics of respondents and non-respondents are assumed to be similar. Responses of non-respondents are extrapolated from the respondents’ answers. The case that was analyzed using these two models estimated child support awards and payments in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, neither of these methods could predict the impact of non-response on all aspects of the study, i.e., what impact the addition of non-respondents’ information would have had on the findings and its conclusion.

Although the best way of reducing bias due to non-response is to ensure that the study’s initial response rate will be high, a certain amount of non-response is inevitable. However, Thomsen and Siring (1983:43-5) suggest that bias due to non-response can be reduced by applying estimation techniques to the data. Two well-known techniques are post-stratification and the Bartholomew method. The former requires the selection of variables and the weighting of them, and then comparing them with those who had responded. Gains from using this method,
however, decline rapidly with an increase in the number of post-strata variables. This method was used in a fertility survey; the use of post-stratification eliminated slightly more than 70 percent of the non-response bias. In such demographic studies, fortunately, some usually unknown component used in the statistical estimating formula is readily available from public registers and it can be used to estimate the non-response. With this method, the percentage of non-respondent reduction was not at all surprising because the correlation among the post-stratification variables (age and marital status) and the study variable (number of live births) was very high. The Bartholomew method consists of assigning different weights to the results from the first and second call. It is particularly useful when data indicate that the mean findings in the second call is closer to the mean of the non-response than the mean in the first call. The rationale behind this correction method is that the interviewer in the second call is able to elicit a response from a sample representative for those non-respondents in the first call.

According to Frankel and Dutka (1983:69), all approaches used to reduce the impact of non-response can be classified into two kinds:

A traditional approach that eliminates or minimizes non-response during data collection, by using various procedures, such as increased interviewer training, repeated call-backs, subsampling for non-respondents, simplification of questionnaire content and randomized-response techniques; and, a more recent approach that deals with minimizing the impact of non-response after the data are collected.

Although some elements of the two methods are usually handled separately, they can be planned for from the outset and the coordination should result in reduction of the non-response bias.

Availability is the most important variable in non-response in telephone and personal
surveys. Fowler (1993:41) also claims that accessibility of a different kind, geographically related, produces serious bias associated with non-response. National U.S. surveys that use personal interviews usually have lower response rates in central cities than in suburban and rural areas. There seem to be several reasons for this: city respondents are 'hard-to-find', and the incidence of single persons is higher in central cities; a higher proportion of such persons live in high-rise apartment buildings, which offer difficulty of direct access to tenants; and there are more areas in the centre of large cities where interviewers are reluctant to try to undertake visits, particularly in the evening. These findings differ with respect to respondents in cities from those of the Ontario study by Goyder, Lock and McNair (1992) mentioned previously, and may be due to differences between Canadian and American cities.

According to Fowler (1993:42), there is some evidence that the use of telephone interviews reduces the differential response rate between central cities and rural areas. Better coverage can be obtained from urban households, people living in the otherwise inaccessible high security buildings can be contacted readily and more single people are likely to be at home in the evening. However, as already indicated, the widespread use of telephone contact creates its own problems. Less educated people seem to be less willing to talk when contacted in a random-digit telephone procedure. This is also true of seniors (i.e., those over 65 years of age). However, since these biases are found less frequently in personal interview surveys, the use of the telephone interview for survey research is increasing. It also has the advantage of being cheap in jurisdictions where local calls are not charged individually, which (unlike Europe) is
the practice in much of North America.

Fowler (1993:44) also emphasizes that two problems must be solved to achieve success in telephone and personal interview surveys: how to gain access to, and how to enlist the cooperation of, the selected population. He recommends that to reduce non-response resulting from lack of availability, from six to ten calls should be made at various times (including evenings and weekends) and interviewers must adopt flexible schedules and call by appointment at times convenient for the respondent. To elicit cooperation, information letters must be sent in advance of the survey describing its purposes, its importance and how it may benefit respondents.

Several authors have written at length about how to correct for non-response. Fowler (1993:47) concluded that the common approaches are of three types: to use proxy respondents, to perform statistical adjustments, or to re-survey a sample of non-respondents. Frequently when the specified respondent is unable (or unwilling) to be interviewed, some other household member will do as well. The interview information is then reported as a proxy for the designated person. However, the quality and reliability of proxy data may be questioned, particularly if the survey involved knowledgeable persons expected to have unique opinions, information and preferences. In any case, opinions are never identical among individuals, so at best, substitutions are suspect and should be avoided whenever possible. Often it is preferable simply to make statistical adjustments which estimate the error caused by non-response and thus reduce its expected impact on the study (Fowler, 1993:48-9). However, subsampling of non-
respondents should not be regarded merely as an expensive gimmick. It has value in and of itself. Where the non-respondents are known, a sample can be drawn, contacted and interviewed by telephone or by personal interview. From their data estimates can then be made of the direction and amount of bias in the initial respondent sample and the data can be used both to improve the statistical adjustments and to report total findings from a larger respondent pool. If the new round of data collection replicates the questions in the initial survey, then the value of the initial results has been reinforced. If it differs, new and interesting speculations arise because of the apparent differences. These data, however, need to be weighted to adjust for the fact that only a selected sample of the non-respondents received the follow-up treatment.

Summary

The review of the literature related to the design of survey research and the problems created by non-response provides necessary background for the research of this thesis. It demonstrates that there have been many studies in this area. There is general agreement that a low response rate is undesirable and unacceptable, but there is no agreement on how low a response is too low. The research on the effect (impact) of non-response is conflicting. Many common ways of trying to prevent non-response or, after the fact, to counter or remediate it are suggested and some have been the subject, themselves, of research. But many of these studies have been criticized for researching only one characteristic or using one method or component of the research design process. The recommendation is that a 'total
research design' method be used which at all times takes into consideration the non-respondents. All this really amounts to is to show that good survey research, like all good research, must be planned carefully, and problems should be anticipated and contingencies provided for.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the design, setting and sample decisions made for the research of the thesis are described. These are followed by information about the pretest, discussion of the validity and reliability of the instruments used, the type of analysis to which the data were subjected and finally, the limitations of the research.

Research Design

The study on which this thesis is based was basically descriptive in nature. It was decided that the research would be carried out in two phases of data gathering. For the first, the intention was to gather information by having professional market researchers as members of focus groups discuss the issues, problems and practices associated with non-response from their practical expert point of view. In the interactive discussion generated by a focus group, it was expected that the range of actions taken to nullify or lessen the impact of non-response in the commercial survey world would be revealed. Participants would be assured that, although the researcher and the other members of each group would know which market research firms’ employees were present, in reporting the discussions in the thesis, all information would be presented anonymously.
Thirty market research firms in Toronto were contacted and an employee from each firm was invited to become a member of one of three focus groups in which the problems of, and practices for, dealing with non-response in their survey work would be discussed. The group meetings would be held in a boardroom at the Ontario Skills Development Office in downtown Toronto. Each group would consist of ten company employees who would be knowledgeable of their companies' procedures and practices and hence could discuss them frankly, but were in no sense 'representatives' speaking for 'company policy'. The focus groups were scheduled, cooperation was promised, and attendance was confirmed by telephone and fax. But only one expected participant actually showed up; the others either cancelled their attendance "due to other unexpected commitments" or simply failed to attend. When they were informally contacted the difficulty soon became apparent.

What had not initially been fully appreciated by the researcher or the proposed focus group members was that although the information generated could be reported anonymously in the thesis, during the group discussions themselves, if they were full and frank, there was no way an employee of a survey research company could fail to learn about the "useful tricks" of all the others.

Clearly the design decision on this aspect of the research had to be changed; the same kind of information had to be gathered by other means. Some weeks later, attempts were made to contact the same persons who had been invited to attend the focus groups; they were asked to participate instead in a telephone survey. The purpose and type of study were described
(unchanged) and consent to participate was obtained (See Appendix A). The market researcher participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity from one another and in the reporting of all information obtained. They were told in advance about the type of questions which would be asked (see Appendix B for the list of questions) and were assured that each participant would be identified only by code, the findings would be summarized and analyzed categorically without identifying any specific person or firm.

The purpose of this first phase of the research was to obtain input from the experts (survey designers, analysts, interviewers and other employees) of market research firms on how they commonly deal with the problem of non-response and how they manage survey research situations. Although an in-depth discussion involving the exchange of information among employees of a variety of firms probably would have been more fruitful, to collect that information by telephone was acceptable. In doing so, a certain irony did not escape the researcher and the participants -- the market research firms themselves were acting as non-respondents of the focus groups and therefore, they had pushed the researcher to follow-up by telephone. In other words, the second research step for this thesis, which was effectively the first research phase, was a telephone survey, although this had not been the original intention, and thereby the benefit of using two different data gathering techniques for this study was lost.

The second phase of the research design involved a telephone survey of employees of a group of companies that had not responded to a government survey (i.e., had been non-respondents). These were among the large number of businesses which had been involved with
(were clients of, if you will) a government-sponsored training scheme, or the skills training of their employees. The survey was a "participant satisfaction" evaluation of the programme. Some fifty businesses in the City of Toronto were contacted and their human resource/training representatives, who had previously worked with a Training Consultant from the Ontario Skills Development Office, were asked to agree to be interviewed. The proposed respondents were chosen at random from a list of 100 non-respondents to the government survey which had recently been carried out. Telephone calls to try to reach each business representative were limited to three since more than that number would likely have annoyed the recipient, indicated undue researcher persistence and have been dysfunctional since the researcher was the manager of one (George Brown) of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology which mounted the skills training programme and evaluated that same programme for the Ontario Government.

When a representative had been reached by telephone, the employee was reminded that his had been one of the non-respondent companies, this study was introduced, verbal consent for participation was requested and assurance of complete confidentiality and anonymity was given (See Appendix C). If participation was agreed, either the interview followed immediately or a date and time were set for another phone call. After failure to respond to a third telephone call, that business (i.e., the non-responding business representative) was deleted from the study, and the researcher proceeded to the next name on the list. In total 50 randomly chosen representatives from the original list of non-responding companies were located, agreed to be interviewed and participated in the interview.
At the outset of the interview all participants were asked a common set of questions (See Appendix D). Then, those who agreed to continue with the second part of the interview were asked a specific set of questions related to the original mailed questionnaire evaluation survey that had been sent out to assess company satisfaction with the government programme of training and the human resources consulting services geared toward employee development that their employees had participated in (See Appendix E). These questions were based on the questionnaire that each company contact person had received in the mail, had been reminded to complete by a follow-up letter two weeks later, but nonetheless, had failed to return. The questions given orally by phone were worded precisely as they had appeared on the written mailed survey so that the responses of this telephone sample could be compared to those of the initial respondents to the (identical) mailed survey.

The telephone interview of the non-respondent representative took some ten minutes. Their responses were recorded and coded on the same type of questionnaire form as had been initially used, except that these respondents were given code identification numbers so that they could be distinguished from the original respondents. Neither the names of the responding individuals nor of their companies were designated on the questionnaire forms which recorded responses. However, data on selected characteristics of the non-respondents and their companies were collected from the programme management reports and coded so that for analysis these variables could be matched to question responses. They included: type and size of business, sex and position of representative within the company and the ID number of the
programme’s consultant who had provided service to the company. Certain characteristics of
the telephone participants, such as the type and size of business, were compared with those of
the initial respondents as well as with the local businesses using available public statistics.

**Setting and Sample**

After deciding to change the original research design for the first research phase, the
researcher re-contacted by telephone the 30 market research firm employees who had initially
agreed to participate in a focus group. Neither could all be reached nor would all cooperate,
but ten who were contacted in May of 1996 agreed to participate in the proposed telephone
survey about problems of non-response and non-respondents. There was difficulty contacting
the other 20 and some let it be known that they could not participate. Since the group of ten
was sufficiently diverse to obtain rich, factual and detailed information about non-response and
their firms’ ‘good tips’ on how to overcome them, this first research phase was closed after the
tenth interview. These were free-wheeling, frank discussions and typically included the set
questions of the interview schedule followed by a fairly long related description with examples
of practical situations that had occurred in ten different work experiences with current or
previous market research firms. All participants were experienced market research interviewers
and analysts. Their firms ranged from the very large and varied (which are household names
across Canada and conduct many polls and surveys) to small, specialized businesses serving a
particular market.
The 50 telephone interviews which formed the second research phase of this study were conducted over a six month period. The 'population pool' consisted of 100 companies which had failed to return a mailed evaluation questionnaire used in a government survey to assess satisfaction with a particular programme. From this pool, calls were made to members of the list until 50 completed interviews had been randomly accumulated. The information from the telephone responses of these participants was compared with 100 businesses which had returned the initial mailed survey throughout a one year period.

Pretest

The pretest of the telephone questionnaire for the market research employees was carried out with four persons who would not be involved in the research project. They were (a) the employees of market research companies comparable to those being interviewed and (b) business company employees who are knowledgeable, experienced human resource/training or financial representatives of companies which had not been involved in the original government survey. The market research company personnel were asked the questions on the interview schedule, questions which were not much changed from those that would have been used in the focus groups, but simply reworded appropriately for oral presentation by phone to create the relaxed, informal atmosphere conducive to persuading the informant to talk freely.

The company representatives were asked to complete the questionnaire for clarity and face validity. As expected, it was not found necessary to revise the instrument which is not
surprising since it had been thoroughly tested for the original written survey.

**Validity and Reliability**

The face validity of the original questionnaire regarding programme satisfaction had been initially tested by a research company which sought input from the field and then tested the questions with company representatives. Face validity of the common questions asked in the first part of the interview with all 50 participants was tested by submitting them to several university professors and market research field consultants to comment on their content. No revision was suggested; all questions were deemed to be clearly stated and appropriate to ask clients.

To test for internal reliability of the participants' telephone questionnaire, two statements that were similar in content were stated in different ways. It was expected that those who responded positively to one question would also do so for the other. The expected responses were obtained. To maximize reliability, assurances of anonymity were reiterated to each subject before the interview and privacy was maintained during the telephone conversation which was recorded by shorthand. They were promised that the shorthand notes would be destroyed after the data had been analyzed.

**Data Analysis**

The information obtained from the ten who would have been members of focus groups
was analyzed qualitatively using the related literature as the basis for descriptions of research strategies and an understanding of the issues and problems, characteristics and motivations of non-response and non-respondents. The analysis of responses to common questions put to all the 50 representatives (of the non-respondent companies) in the telephone survey and the discussion which followed was both quantitative and qualitative. Simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze and categorize the reasons given for not previously responding to the mailed questionnaire, and the discussions were analyzed qualitatively by documentary analysis to reveal attitudes and themes and to isolate useful anecdotal examples.

The telephone responses to the questionnaire items regarding satisfaction with the programme were coded, data entered and tabulated; the response distributions were then compared with those of the original respondents to the questionnaires (initial respondents vs. late respondents). The findings from selected questionnaire items and the overall reaction to the questionnaire were cross-tabulated with certain characteristics of the members of the two groups and compared. Characteristics of the initial respondents, late respondents and non-respondents were also compared. This analysis also included such common statistical tests of significance as the chi-square to reveal relationships and the differences between the replies of original respondents and those of the original non-respondents who had participated in the follow-up interviews. Among the latter were two sets: 50 who cooperated in the first part of the telephone interview which involved common questions and 35 who agreed to participate in the second part of the interview which involved replying to the mailed questionnaire’s items on
programme satisfaction. Fifteen of the 50 interviewees refused to cooperate in the second part of the interview in which they would orally complete the questionnaire items. The findings and data analysis are reported in Chapter IV.

Limitations of the Thesis Research

At the outset, it must be recognized that this study and its findings are probably limited by the environment in which it was carried out (North American, English speaking province in a highly developed country) and the specific population of respondents.

It must be admitted that the initial design for this thesis research was too sanguine. It unrealistically expected that commercial market research companies would allow their employees to freely discuss company policies and practices even when competitors' employees might be present. The redesign of phase one which proved to be necessary simply added to the other limitations of the study.

One difficulty in asking employees of market research companies about how they deal with non-response, even with the confidentiality of a one-to-one telephone interview that was undertaken for phase one of this research, is that it may reveal only partial information, which is misleading -- and there is no way that can be detected or checked. Companies may decide not to bother undertaking much follow-up, or to use inadequate follow-up procedures with non-respondents, not because they are ignorant of the methods suggested in the literature, but due to financial and time constraints. But their employees are unlikely to confide such disloyal
When quota sampling is used by market researchers, non-respondents are not an issue, so no follow-up is needed. Therefore, since one of the purposes of this research was to learn more about non-response in commercial survey work, the focus taken may have seemed entirely irrelevant to the main groups who might read the thesis and benefit from its findings. In other words, if a sample senior staff member of a market research firm was asked about non-response, (s)he might well reply "Forget it. If you really want to study one of the problems of our kind of work, try . . . ."

The focus group discussions would probably have elicited more detailed information than was obtained from the market researchers. For in the give and take of such discussions, each market research employee not only makes an independent contribution, but one that is also informed and affected by the contributions of others. This results in unexpected and more detailed comments. In the telephone interviews, to try to obtain comparable information the researcher had to resort to asking leading questions, based on the material from previous calls.

The second phase of the research exhibited a different set of limitations and constraints. The first involved the important dimensions of time, memory and interest. Telephone conversations with representatives of businesses who had not responded to the original mailed survey drew out their feelings about, and their memories of, their reactions at the time to a programme for their employees. In most cases, not only the programme but the programme's survey evaluation itself were long since (5 -9 months) over.
Obtaining meaningful follow-up data from non-respondents many months later may well be impossible. The investigator may not be able to speak to the original representative. The company may or may not have received the original survey forms; the representative may not remember much about their content, or about his reaction to the questions. All these limitations were experienced in this case.

In research such as this, while much might be learned about non-response generally and something about the specific non-response to the mailed survey, the representatives who received the follow-up telephone call might regard the whole experience as a waste of time. And some clearly did. They might be unwilling to spend time being interviewed, particularly if they believed the investigator was simply checking records. And this occurred. Moreover, there was also some confusion about the government survey under scrutiny. Two surveys had been mailed to the same participating businesses -- one on programme effectiveness and the other on client satisfaction with the programme. The latter was the one being used for follow-up in this study, but it was evident that some representatives had little memory about what each questionnaire contained, and although the interviewer tried to stimulate their memories with reminders this was not always successful. Some believed they had completed both surveys and returned them when in fact they had either returned only one or neither. Some were confused as to which one they returned. So the research material obtained by telephone interview in phase two may well contain much of the kind of *ex post facto* reasoning and justification that people indulge in when, long after the fact, they explain (rationally) why they did not do something they were expected
to do.

Therefore, it must be admitted that in research such as this it is difficult to discern the true nature of non-response behaviour and equally difficult to determine the true effect of non-response on survey data. To the extent that non-respondents are aware of and sympathetic to the difficulties involved in contacting and persuading them they may be led to treat the questions even more seriously than they would originally have done because they feel some obligation to help the researcher. Or equally, they may resent having been finally tracked and pinned down and forced to explain their failure to respond. Either way one must be properly sceptical, wary of a 'truth' which cannot be verified.

That is not to say, however, that both phases of the research did not yield interesting information about non-response, as well as about this particular group of non-respondents who it must be remembered were employees of non-responding businesses, acting as liaison representatives. By one interpretation one could say that it had been part of their job to respond to the initial mailed questionnaire, a part they failed to carry out which could indicate the low esteem in which questionnaire surveys are often held.

In summary, although focus groups were scheduled as a data collection method with a group of market researcher/analysts, a change was made because of lack of attendance and telephone interviews were done instead. A sample of non-respondents was also selected for telephone interviews from a group of original non-respondents to a mailed government programme evaluation. The instruments used for both of these telephone interviews were
pretested in a preliminary pilot project. The findings obtained from these two sets of interviews are analyzed and presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into two main sections, the first being much shorter than the second. They report the findings and analysis of phase I to phase IV of the thesis research. In this chapter no attempt is made to relate the findings of one part of the thesis research to the other. This is reserved for the concluding chapter. The main purposes of phase I of the research was to obtain some field-based information from practising professional market researchers which might be compared to the literature (which was described at some length). The purpose of phase II of the research was quite different. It is an example of a follow-up project to find and analyze the views of a group of non-respondents (hereafter referred to as participants) of a programme evaluation study and *inter alia* discover why their firms (of which they were the representatives) did not complete the original questionnaires, and whether their presently provided information differs from that of the original respondents. The report of this research phase follows the orthodox steps of quantitative research. It is divided into two sections: characteristics of non-respondents and responses to common questions. The remaining sections, phase III and phase IV, deal with the information derived from the telephone interviews regarding satisfaction with the programme and the comparison of the characteristics of the original respondents, the participants and the remaining original non-respondents.
Research Phase I

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH MARKET RESEARCHERS

Thirty market research companies within Metropolitan Toronto were contacted and asked to schedule one or two of their employees to attend a focus group to discuss the topic "non-respondents in survey research". Depending upon participation, four or five focus groups of some eight or ten members were intended and a schedule of themes for free-wheeling discussion was drawn up. Representatives were named and telephoned, and initially they sounded interested and committed to the project, confirming their attendance by fax and voice mail. Unfortunately, the focus groups failed (as described in Chapter 3), as almost none showed up as planned during the lunch hours on the three established dates/times, so one-third of the respondents randomly chosen were re-contacted by telephone and asked to agree to an interview which would use similar questions to those that would have been discussed in the focus groups. All agreed to participate in the telephone interviews. Brief descriptions of each participant market research firm and the interviewed market researcher/analyst (referred to as subject from now on) are provided in this section, along with detailed results and direct quotations of the telephone interviews, in order to gain further insight into the various practices associated with non-response at market research firms and the common as well as unique responses from those researcher/analysts who were interviewed.
Brief Descriptions of Market Research Firm Subjects

Subject A

A woman with a graduate degree who contracts others as needed to do economic and social research for companies as requested. As well as making referrals she has done public opinion polls, designed questionnaires and implemented product satisfaction surveys for her business clients.

Subject B

A male in an upper management position in a large (with 300-600 employees) national research firm specializing in media audience research.

Subject C

A female research analyst in a large national company. Many of its employees are professional marketing and social research consultants. Its mandate is marketing and public opinion research.

Subject D

A female researcher in a small public opinion research firm.
Subject E

A male research analyst with a doctoral degree working in a mid-size company which focuses on public opinion polls and social as well as economic research.

Subject F

A male research analyst with a doctoral degree employed by a mid-size market research, public affairs and management consulting firm.

Subject G

A male research analyst with a graduate degree employed in a large international management consulting and public relations research firm.

Subject H

A female in a small research firm that deals with business-to-business issues only, and thus is not involved in issues associated with non-response and non-respondents as other firms may be.
Subject I

A female research analyst working for a mid-size firm focusing on marketing research and opinion polls using consumer mail panels.

Subject J

A male research analyst responsible for designing the questions for and obtaining responses from telephone interviews. The mid-size company does only telephone surveys and public opinion polls.

Interview Results

The interviews revealed remarkably consistent views. The views of the representatives from market research companies were in almost complete accord, except for what they regard as an acceptable response rate in market research studies -- this varied from a return of 30-85 percent, depending on the research methodology, the individual’s own expectations, the clients, and their company’s policy. However, the range for the majority (80%) of the market researchers was much smaller. The acceptable return rate for most of their studies was between 50-70 percent. This information is consistent with the literature’s account of the current trends on acceptable return rates in survey research. In particular, Fowler (1993:40), Goyder (1978:6), and Steeh (1981:55) all indicated that, in general, return rates around 65-75 percent are considered good, based on the social and urban factors of today. Babbie (1986:221) also
acknowledged a specific acceptable range (with 50 percent being adequate and 70 percent being very good) identical to the market researchers interviewed in this phase of the study.

The general return rates for political and election type surveys are noted as higher, 80-85 percent, as evidenced by comments made to that effect by the contact person (Subject G), where other types of surveys have a 70 percent return rate that is acceptable for the firm. A business-to-business market research firm representative (Subject H) also claimed that an 85 percent return rate was the expectation, which is generally higher than the consumer research firms. And one person interviewed (Subject F) indicated that although the industry standard allows a 30 percent return rate, this particular firm always aimed for the higher return rate of at least 50 percent. Another interview respondent (Subject I) commented that the return rate has been as low as 5-10 percent when "cold" mail outs were done without any follow-ups, but with telephone interviews the return rates are expected to be between 60-70 percent with numerous call-backs to increase chances of reaching the respondents. All agreed that low budgets certainly limit the number of follow-up calls that can be made on behalf of the clients, and in such circumstances any response rate has to be judged acceptable.

The market researchers who were interviewed outlined numerous strategies and approaches they used to ensure as high a response rate as possible; all were consistent with the vast literature on this topic. Call-backs and repeat mail outs were the most common methods used, often made a week or two after the initial contact was attempted, varying the time of the
day and the day of the week. If the budget allowed, a minimum of five to seven call-backs were made, and to encourage better results some surveys might be followed up 12 times. Of course, several researchers noted that when you increase the number of call-backs for the client in order to obtain more responses, the cost is also raised accordingly. However, the money available to follow-up on non-respondents is limited. One (Subject A) simply declared that "proprietors just have no money for more follow-ups". Another (Subject J) stated, "Usually four call-backs are done (in his firm). If the client wants eight done, then the field time for the interviewer doubles. Now four days are needed to do this instead of the two, and the cost doubles for the client. Not many clients are prepared to pay these kinds of costs for merely enhancing the reported numbers of respondents at the end of it all".

A variety of other strategies to increase the numbers of respondents were also listed by each market researcher. Often incentives were offered. The financial ones which were mentioned by the market researchers (Subjects E and I) varied from $2.00 to $5.00 and were particularly beneficial in obtaining responses to television surveys done by the firm (Subject B). But non-financial persuasions were also used either alone or in conjunction with some other incentive: enclosing a personalized cover letter from the sponsoring organization, if possible, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of the completed survey instrument; reducing the length of questionnaires to a maximum of 15 minutes completion time and omitting much detail; making sure that the entire package looks professional and attractive. All were
common practices used by market research firms of the respondents and had been noted in the literature reviews of Dillman (1978:6) and Madow, Nisselson and Olkin (1983:42-4). The great emphasis by commercial survey market researchers on call-backs and follow-ups, and the information about market researchers’ practices gained in the interviews was also strongly supported in the literature by Frankel and Dutka (1983:74), Jones (1983:283) and Rao (1983:40).

Three of the market researchers interviewed indicated that their company uses the total design method to ensure maximum number of respondents. The total design method, which for the most part best is described by Dillman (1978:20), was reported at some length in Chapter 2. And the strategies described by these respondents (Subjects E, F and G) indicated that they were familiar with the details of "that design" and had indeed adopted the concept as described by Dillman. When asked about the use of "total design" the other six asked for clarification on what the total design method meant, how the method was being defined and what the method involved. They were too concerned about limited time and budgets to be able to institute such a comprehensive approach merely to try to achieve high return rates. Their approaches were largely based on what their clients wanted, how it could be implemented and how much the clients themselves were concerned about having a high response rate.

In other words, the evidence of these telephone discussions with the ten representatives of market research firms was that a strictly commercial, cost/benefit approach was taken to the
whole question of an acceptable return rate. The client determined what was decided. If a high rate was required and a large budget available, there was no objection to using the elements of a "total design" of the survey.

Three of the market researchers (Subjects B, C and I) also explained that some topics are just more appealing to potential respondents than others, and the appeal of the survey topic has to be taken into account when the desired rate of return and the possible ways of following-up are discussed and decided upon. For topics that involve delicate or controversial matters, the researchers might make a plea with the sample members using a human or a social conscience argument about the topic’s importance, or about public concern in an effort to raise response to the desired level. As one (Subject I) stated, "There are those times when we have to pull the heart strings, you might say, and make a plea on the human level for participation in the survey". It was explained that such persuasions are often used when respondents answer some of the questions on a questionnaire and return it incomplete, or refuse to answer some of the telephone questions although they’ve agreed to be interviewed. This relates to item non-response and completion of the entire questionnaire, as some individuals may stop at the more personal questions. One market research respondent (Subject G) indicated concern about the placing and wording of the personal questions on the questionnaire. This had to be seriously considered in order to ensure maximum response. He had found that "starting with demographic questions is less threatening and putting the more personal questions at the end seems to help ensure that
the respondents don't stop before that". Another (Subject F) reported that his firm did not resort to such persuasion. He reported, "Depending upon the working sample, of course, we very rarely, if ever, force anyone's hand to respond to the study". The firm relies upon random-digit dialling for 70 percent of the surveys, and a minimum of four or five call-backs are placed to locate the participant and ensure success. Another respondent (Subject J) described the telephone procedure used to ensure the maximum number of respondents for studies done by his firm. Assuming the researcher is given a list and knows the respondents, then four call-backs to each person are made. However, this may introduce non-response bias effects, because an additional 25 percent are recognized as having unpublished numbers and 25 percent of that same list are hard-to-reach numbers. Nothing can be done about obtaining unpublished numbers. But, for the rest, the call-backs are done at various times of the day and on different days during the week to reach as many individuals as possible.

The respondent (Subject H) from one firm remarked upon the difficulty of using any strategy for enhancing return rates with business-to-business research. Some strategies worked in consumer research, but if a business does not wish to give out information because of its competitors, then there is no really effective way of persuading it to. In this same vein, another respondent (Subject F) indicated that there really was not much that could be done with potential respondents' straight or "hard" refusals. Usually these individuals just did not want to be bothered again and they could not be "talked into" responding. In fact, all ten of the market
researchers who were interviewed made statements which could be described as ‘fatalistic’, more or less captured by the phrases of Subject I: "When they refuse outright, they won’t respond later. It’s hopeless. We don’t make call-backs to those refusals. Some might hope they’ll be in a better mood or something will be different to change their reaction next time. There is no next time for us. They are considered write-offs for us and for future research involvement too". Another respondent (Subject C) replied, "The hostile refuser just wants to be left alone. That’s all they ask. We don’t go on explaining the study. We just honour their wishes". Two others (Subjects B and H) were concerned about the impact of refusal behaviour, like "hang-ups" and "swearing" at the interviewers. As the former one put it, "It is this ‘negative attitude’ of the non-respondents that is so hard to deal with and keep the interviewing staff members motivated enough to continue their job." The problems created by such rude and hostile refusal behaviour by potential interview respondents was described in some detail by Dommeruth (1975:33).

As anticipated from the literature (Goyder, 1987:6), the two most common barriers that interfere with implementing various methods to increase response rates were lack of time and lack of money. Time and again in the interviews the market researchers expressed these concerns in one form or another, generally by reference to their clients. The three who deliberately were using the total design method indicated that these constraints by themselves were not crucial, the costs and time requirements simply had to be worked into the entire proposal at various stages of the research.
Two respondents (Subjects B and J) mentioned another major barrier to implementing methods for ensuring high return rates. In cosmopolitan cities there is the problem created by languages other than English. In cities such as Toronto, ethnic communities are one of their biggest markets, yet the different languages pose extra concerns and costs. Interviewers who speak the various languages (Italian, other European, Chinese and Indian) have to be hired to overcome this barrier so that people who do not speak fluent English (particularly on the telephone) can respond. This problem was also expressed by Kalton (1983:64). He identified inability to speak the language in his non-response classification system. But being able to speak the foreign language, in itself, is not enough. The interviewer must translate the English research instrument. So the interviewers either must be especially trained so that they do not distort or change the particular questions being asked, or the questionnaire itself has to be translated into each of the foreign languages being encountered. Both add time and cost to the survey, but it is essential that both be done carefully. Translations, whether pre-determined or ad hoc by the interviewer must be vetted so that terms and concepts are explained in a manner which does not insult the listener, raise hackles or involve sensitive taboos.

One respondent (Subject E) expressed concern that the use of high technology and other new ways of doing survey research may, in future, constrain good returns because many people do not have access to the technology needed to respond. He considers that "Matching the mode of data collection to the sample population is critical". Almost all Canadian households have phones and flat rates, with no limits on local calls, making the telephone an ideal market
research instrument. Canada Post serves the whole country. And although rising postage rates are making the mailed questionnaire expensive, it is still an economically feasible way of reaching a mass population. But now more surveys are being carried out by electronic mail, and these pose several new problems. Only a limited clientele have E-mail at present. Obtaining E-mail addresses for sampling is also a concern, as well as receiving the diskettes back from respondents when generally using the computer for the research. The most recent literature on computerized surveys described by Walsh, Kiesler, Sproull and Hesse (1992:224) also mentions the new problems encountered when members of the sample must have access to a computer in order to respond.

The respondents were asked whether their firms had specifically done studies on non-respondents. Three of the market research firms (Subjects F, G and I) had. Their studies had been undertaken for the government as well as for proprietors; the surveys consisted of topics on transportation and social value changes in Canada. Most of their reports were available and had been cited in publications. However, one study (for a proprietor) was restricted and could not be released by the market research firm. The seven respondents from the firms which had not done studies of non-respondents, as such, reported that nevertheless, they do routinely report the rates and types of non-respondents to their proprietors. This accords with the finding of Gray and Guppy (1994:27) that response rates are a usual and essential element for disclosure in the final report of a survey research project. However, these respondents confided that, although they report as much as can be easily ascertained about non-response, generally there
is not the time, money, or requirement to actually make a study of the non-respondents for the client. Their experience is that the response rate when they close a survey tends to be acceptable and needs no comment, particularly when quota sampling is used. They expect only a certain number of people to be at home at any one time, and from a large pool an acceptable number can be surveyed.

Other problems and comments raised by the respondents from the market research firms focused on four areas: the saturation and burn-out of persons being surveyed in Toronto; the question-by-question response rate; the impact which refusals have on staff doing the interviewing; and the need for further research in this area.

Half the respondents (Subjects B,C,D, I and J) reported that of the greatest concern to their firms were hustlers and sales people in the marketplace who were telemarketing people to death. Subject J referred to this as the "mugging and tugging effect", and explained that the public becomes fatigued and the reputation of legitimate research is damaged. Subject B said ruefully, "You have to tell them right up front that you are not selling anything to gain credibility" and Subject D believes that "time must be taken immediately to educate the prospective participant and differentiate ourselves from sales people."

Speaking for their firms, many complained that in large cities like Toronto it has become increasingly difficult to maintain desirable response rates. The surveys carried out by telephone and at the door have saturated the market. Subject J reported as evidence of this, a refusal rate of 25 percent as common in 1980; by 1996 it had increased to 38 percent for the telephone
surveys done by his firm. Only one of the ten firms represented (Subject D) indicated that she had not experienced an increasing number of refusals to participate in surveys. This information accords with the problem of "image concern" raised by Schleifer (1985:25). He referred to "false surveys", the disguised sales pitches that are becoming a trend in Canada and have already affected the United States public’s willingness to respond.

All the market research respondents were concerned about item non-response, but two, (Subjects E and G), in particular, emphasized their particular difficulty of obtaining responses to all the questions on the questionnaire or all the items in a question. The former reported, "We seem to have systematic attrition on one standard question regarding income. About 20 percent won’t ever tell us their household income, no matter what we do with it or how we ask it." Placing sensitive questions at the end of the session and then wording them carefully on the questionnaire were generally agreed to be useful, but these two firms were also reported to be interested in trying other strategies as well if they could be given references since total non-response was of general concern, but non-response to some particular personal or sensitive questions was also a concern sometimes even more important to certain clients. Reporting low rates for such items was not acceptable. Warriner (1991:266-7) was mentioned to them as he sees no other way to analyze incomplete data from item non-response than to use an algebraic procedure to adjust for non-response. Marketing research firms encounter item non-response particularly for sensitive, financial questions, but use of this statistical correction is not general commercial practice.
Subjects B and J raised their companies' particular concerns about discouraged interviewers who obtain many refusals while doing survey research. This is not only trying for the individual, it is bad for employee morale generally. Interviewers need to be trained properly to minimize the number of refusals but also to accept refusal as part of the job. However, they have found that most interviewers still find it difficult to adjust to refusal, not to take it as a personal rejection and not deal with it as confrontation. This, they felt, is where the training experience, skill and maturity of the interviewer counts. But it still is a discouraging problem for commercial research firms. These views were also expressed by Schleifer (1985:25) who focused on the need to enhance the public image of the market research firm which uses telephone interviews extensively. Other writers (Berdie, Anderson and Niebuhr, 1986:60-2; Groves, Cialdini and Couper, 1992:478-9) also emphasized the importance of the attributes of the interviewer and the manner of introducing the study, as well as the interaction that follows -- all these were found to be crucial for obtaining respondent participation in their surveys.

Three respondents (Subjects B, E and F) agreed firmly that further research in the whole area of non-respondents is required. They noted that the literature generally shows no difference between the substance of the responses of two groups (initial responders and late responders who began as non-responders). They speculated that survey findings from these groups might well be found to differ, if only more time and resources could be given to a real follow-up study. But Subject B warned, "Even when you do go back and cajole someone into
giving information, there are no differences. More analysis of demographics and characteristics needs to be done in this area for sure." And Subject E said, "I have a hunch that there are differences in respondents and non-respondents. Further studies would help us find out just what they are." And Subject F noted, "There are just too many discrepancies in the equation for the respondents. We need more consistency, even in the way we talk about and report the non-respondents". It was suggested that more call-backs should be made to obtain a better 'feel' for the unique concerns of the non-respondents, the reasons why they refused initially, what they disliked about the survey, the topic, the interviewer, the instrument and the conditions of the interview.

In summary, although for phase I of the research, the initially proposed focus group discussions among sets of market researchers might have yielded more examples of the current practices of commercial market research firms in confronting survey non-response, the substitute research exercise of conducting free-wheeling confidential conversations with ten representatives of market research firms did elicit interesting information, 'tips' and 'gimmicks' being used by their firms, which added useful background to the second research phase. The telephone interviews examined all the items originally planned for the focus groups. When asked, none would comment on the reasons for, or possible explanations of their non-attendance at one of the focus groups, but they willingly shared other information on a one-to-one basis. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that they were reluctant to share, in an open discussion with competitors present, their strategies and opinions about dealing with non-
response that might present unique problems for their firms. However, the interviews yielded no descriptions of methods or approaches for achieving high response rates, or improving low ones before the survey was closed, that were not previously found in the research literature, although all the methods reported therein seemed to be known and in current use. Having a large number of follow-up calls was the strategy most used. At this time the greatest concern of these researchers seems not to be the level of non-response as such, but the refusal effect of over-saturation by surveying the same population of large cities too frequently. This, they feel, indicates a long-term disaffection with responding to questions rather than simple disagreement with those of a particular survey. And there was agreement that the trend is for an increasing number of refusals.

Research Phase II

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS OF A GOVERNMENT EVALUATION

As mentioned in the methodology chapter (3), the second research phase was based on an evaluation study of client satisfaction with a human resource and training consulting service which was sponsored by the provincial government and provided by George Brown College. The purpose of the programme had been to deliver human resource and training assistance to businesses and community agencies, as required, located within the City of Toronto. It involved field consultants meeting each year with the owners, operators and human resource personnel
of some 1,000 firms to perform organizational needs assessments, develop training plans, suggest trainers and programmes to meet the needs and assist in development of the human resources within the firms.

Upon the request of the Government, an evaluation survey was undertaken by the staff of George Brown College to assess client satisfaction with the programme. Through the use of a private research consulting firm, a questionnaire was developed by representatives from this government programme incorporating suggestions and input from a selected group of programme managers and field consultants. Implementation would be across the province through each of the community colleges which was participating in the programme, but prior to that the instrument was tested with a group of clients from the Ottawa business community. The individual colleges were directed to prepare a cover letter to accompany the ‘satisfaction’ questionnaires. These were to be mailed to the client companies one month after their agreement with the consulting service had ceased. The questionnaire was mailed to the company’s contact person by name, position and address as listed on the college’s database. The questionnaire itself also contained introductory statements from the director of the government programme, in effect the sponsor of the survey.

Replies were coded with client and college numbers and dates for tracking results and follow-ups. To encourage maximum completion of the questionnaires, colleges also sent out a general follow-up letter (to everyone) about two weeks after the initial mailing requesting completion of the survey, if the questionnaire had not already been returned. Firms were asked
to send the completed questionnaire to an independent consulting firm, which had been selected by the Government, using the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Inevitably, some questionnaires were mailed back to the colleges. However, these were forwarded to the consulting firm for inclusion in the data entry process. Upon receiving the questionnaires, the firm entered the survey data on computer and then returned the original questionnaires and a computer diskette containing their data to each college.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the file used for this thesis was that of the evaluation study, relating to the programme which had been provided through George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology in Toronto. Comparable files were received by other colleges in the various regions of Ontario. The George Brown survey consisted of a sample of 300 firms drawn from the original programme participation list; its file had a respondent sample of 128, which represents a response rate of 43 percent. There had been 172 non-respondents. Among the initial respondents, however, 12 blank questionnaires had been returned, and 16 had been improperly coded on the first mail-out. Therefore these 28 possible respondents could not be tracked. Among the 172 non-respondents, 43 questionnaires had been returned to the office unopened indicating that the business had moved; it was no longer at the address on the college file and no forwarding address had been provided. Upon further investigation, it was found that most of these firms had ceased to exist under their current names, so no further follow-up was attempted. There were also 29 non-respondents who had received the original questionnaire and letters translated in French. These had to be automatically excluded from any follow-up
interview list because of the language limitation of the interviewer. This left a usable pool of 100 non-respondents who might be followed. This pool was used to randomly select the names of 50 non-responding firms to be followed-up by a telephone interview. Once they had participated in the follow-up study undertaken for this thesis, these initial non-respondents are labelled 'participants' hereafter.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS (FIRMS/REPRESENTATIVES)

In this section the reader is presented with the salient characteristics of the 'participants', i.e., the persons who were interviewed by telephone and the firms they represent. In addition they are compared, on these few indicators, with the Toronto business community, in general and, more important for this thesis, to the original evaluation survey's respondents (i.e., responding firms and their representatives) and non-respondents (the other 50 names on the original non-respondent list, who were not interviewed and hence did not become participants in the thesis research).

First some information about the local business community which was served by the government-sponsored consultative service. Table 1 shows the distribution of these firms by size and industry sector using Statistics Canada's 1996/97 Registry of Businesses in the City of Toronto. Note, in particular, the importance of the Financial/Business Services sector which that year represented 34 percent of the total with 9,794 enterprises. Note also, the considerably smaller size, the manufacturing sector, which formed only 5 percent of the total with 1,413
enterprises. The importance of the financial/business services sector is in accord with the size and role of the Toronto area in the economy of Ontario and Canada. Toronto is the capital of the province, and the largest city in Canada. It is the financial heartland of the nation. The low importance of manufacturing, on the other hand, is unexpected and disturbing.

Ontario is one of the two Canadian provinces which form the nation’s industrial heartland. Toronto was, in the past, an important manufacturing city. Much of the employment had been provided by an abundance of small and medium-sized manufacturing firms. The large enterprises employing tens of thousands (automobiles and automotive parts, steel, heavy industry) were in other cities in the province but Toronto had been the centre for the manufacture of light engineering, electric/electronic, domestic and comparable appliances and artifacts. Its traditional base had expanded explosively during World War II when it became an import supply centre for the Allied Forces, and in the postwar 1950s and 60s light manufacturing had continued to grow. But since the 1980s this sector has been in decline. And with the recession of the early 1990s, when Ontario’s somewhat outdated manufacturing base experienced the same serious adversity as that which affected such northern U.S. states as New York, Ohio and Illinois, this decline is all the more precipitous. As Table 1 reveals, the manufacturing sector in Toronto, as employers of labour, is small.

The lower half of that table shows the distribution of firms in the Toronto area by size, as measured by the number of employees. It is a city of small businesses, 93 percent of the firms in 1996/97 had fewer than 50 employees, 72 percent of them fewer than 10.
Table 1 Number and Percentage Distribution of Toronto Business Community by Selected Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Industry (SIC)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>00-09 Primary</td>
<td>355</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-39 Manufacturing</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 Const/Transport/Commun.</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 Wholesale</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69 Retail</td>
<td>4006</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
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<td>70-79 Finance/Business Services</td>
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<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84 Public Administration</td>
<td>3307</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>85-99 Services/Associations</td>
<td>6433</td>
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Size Based on Number of Employees

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>1-9 employees</td>
<td>2946</td>
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<td>10-49 employees</td>
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<td>50-99 employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>100-199 employees</td>
<td>465</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 or more employees</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>2</td>
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Source: Statistics Canada, Registry of Businesses in City of Toronto (1996/97);
SIC refers to the Standard Industrial Codes which describes the type of industry.

In the mid 1990s the provincial government’s policy goal was to try to stimulate the economy and, by doing so, reduce the high levels of unemployment which were the product of the recession. The programme referred to in this thesis was one of many attempts to ‘kick start’ local economies in the province. Since it was a consultative/training programme, carried out through the college system, its purposes and goals reflected government policy and priorities.
While not exclusive, the programme across the province was required to give specific priority to medium and large size enterprises employing 50 or more employees and companies in the manufacturing and financial/business services sectors. Since the focus of the Toronto programme reflected these same priorities, evaluation of recipient firms 'satisfaction' with the programme (an expectation of the contract) would also reflect that biased distribution.

This may be seen if the figures of Table 1 are compared with those of Table 2. The latter table also enables comparison to be made, on these characteristics, of the telephone interview participants, the original respondents to the mailed questionnaire survey and the remaining original non-respondents (i.e., the residual 50 firms after the 50 participants had been randomly selected from the total of 100). The latter comparison is important not only to identify the participants who cooperated with this phase of the research but also to demonstrate how they differed from the other two groups.

By reference to the tables it can be seen that participant manufacturing firms were well over-represented in this research in terms of their numbers in the Toronto business community (14% of the sample vs. 5%), but precisely represented in terms of the mailed surveys’ non-respondents (both 14% of the sample). It should also be noted that the manufacturing firms which responded to the mailed questionnaire, although a somewhat larger group, are fairly close to the manufacturing representation generally (7% vs. 5%).
Table 2  Number and Percentage Distribution of Participants, Original Respondents and Non-respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Participants (n=50)</th>
<th>Respondents (n=100)</th>
<th>Non-respondents (n=50)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>#  %</td>
<td>#  %</td>
<td>#  %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Industry (SIC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-09 Primary</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-39 Manufacturing</td>
<td>7 14</td>
<td>26 26</td>
<td>7 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 Const/Trans/Com.</td>
<td>2 4</td>
<td>7 7</td>
<td>4 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 Wholesale</td>
<td>2 4</td>
<td>4 4</td>
<td>1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69 Retail</td>
<td>2 4</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79 Finance/Bus.</td>
<td>26 52</td>
<td>43 43</td>
<td>27 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84 Public Admin.</td>
<td>2 4</td>
<td>7 7</td>
<td>1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-99 Services/Assoc.</td>
<td>9 18</td>
<td>11 11</td>
<td>7 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-9 employees</td>
<td>24 48</td>
<td>42 42</td>
<td>17 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-49 employees</td>
<td>17 34</td>
<td>25 25</td>
<td>21 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>7 14</td>
<td>14 14</td>
<td>5 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199 employees</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>4 4</td>
<td>3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 or more employees</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>15 15</td>
<td>4 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position in Company of Contact Representative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President/Vice Pres.</td>
<td>15 30</td>
<td>17 17</td>
<td>13 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner/Partner</td>
<td>12 24</td>
<td>17 17</td>
<td>7 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/Manager</td>
<td>7 14</td>
<td>22 22</td>
<td>12 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>4 8</td>
<td>17 17</td>
<td>2 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Systems</td>
<td>7 14</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>5 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/None Listed</td>
<td>5 10</td>
<td>25 25</td>
<td>11 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of Contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27 54</td>
<td>54 54</td>
<td>22 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23 46</td>
<td>46 46</td>
<td>28 56</td>
</tr>
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</table>
So when the content of replies to questions is reported it should be kept in mind that, if the participants' information differs from that obtained from the respondents', the latter is more likely to be representative of manufacturing firms' opinions, etc., but the former is more likely to be truly representative of all the manufacturing firms which did not reply to the evaluation questionnaire.

By reference to the two tables it may be seen that firms in the financial/business services sector were also overrepresented among the participants (52% vs. 34%) and also in the respondent and non-respondent samples (43% and 54% vs. 34%) so that systematic slight bias (which will stress the financial/business services representatives' views, information etc.) should be borne in mind as well as the fact that, in terms of their influence upon the various sub-samples, participants' information should be fairly congruent with the original respondents and non-respondents since they formed a similar proportion of the subgroup total.

The information in these two tables reveals that the programme did not proportionately serve the very small firms (under 10 employees) and therefore the evaluation study's subjects did not either. In Toronto, 72 percent of the total business enterprises in 1996/97 were such small firms. The comparable percentages for the participants were 48 percent, the original respondents 42 percent and the non-respondents 34 percent. The explanation probably is that such small businesses do little formal planning for, or training of, their human resources. Although they might provide considerable useful and important on-the-job training, it is not structured. Such firms probably do not regard 'human resource development' as their
responsibility. In any case, in the information provided herein, the reader should be aware that the voice of the very small employer with just a handful of staff is scarcely heard.

Among the 50 participants the large majority (66%) were from the two priority sectors, but not equally: 52 percent were from the financial/business services sector and 14 percent from the manufacturing sector. In addition, there were nine firms (18%) from the service sector, and others (two firms each from construction, transportation and communication; wholesale; retail; and public administration) formed a total of 16 percent of the total.

With respect to company size (based on number of employees), the majority (82%) of the participants were businesses having fewer than 50 employees; 24 of them had as few as 1-9 employees and 17 with 10-49 employees. The remaining 18 percent included firms having 50-99 employees (7 companies), 100-199 employees (1 company) and 200 or more, (1 company).

Over half of the participants (54%) held senior positions in their companies. They included 15 presidents or vice-presidents and 12 owners or partners. All others held various middle management positions which included: 7 directors or managers, 7 finance or systems personnel, 4 human resources personnel and 5 whose precise designation is unknown. The 50 participants included 27 males and 23 females.

Details of the characteristics of the 50 participants, and comparison of them with those of the 100 original survey respondents and the 50 non-respondents are presented in Table 2. The participant group had a slightly greater percentage of firms with fewer than 50 employees than both the other groups (82%, 79% and 76%). As a consequence, the distribution by larger
companies differs slightly from those of the respondents and non-respondents.

The contact persons for the companies were originally designated by the owners or chief executive officers, who were spoken to about the training consulting service and its use within their firms. These individual names, along with their position title within the firm, appeared on the database print-out of those eligible for receipt of the evaluation survey and those who had responded or not responded to it.

The participants’ contact persons’ position in the business also differed somewhat from those of the respondents. A much higher proportion were senior personnel. This is evident by combining the presidents, vice presidents, owners and partners. Such contact persons among the participants and the non-respondents formed 54 percent of each sample; for the respondents only 34 percent. This might well make the policy information derived from the participants’ research not merely representative of the whole non-responding total (from the original mailed survey), but also more accurate than that gathered from the respondents’ questionnaires. On the other hand the information about procedures and attitudes (satisfaction) to the programme from lesser level contact persons might be more accurate and useful. This is particularly so in the case of the next two categories in Table 2, directors and managers and other human resource employees. Their direct responsibilities brought them into contact with the programme consultants who were experts in training and related organizational arrangements. The participant sample included concomitantly fewer of such people (11) 22 percent vs. 39 percent of the respondents and 28 percent of the non-respondents.
Regarding the distribution by sex of contact persons, among the participants and respondents 54 percent were males; among the non-respondents there was a higher percentage of females and only 44 percent males.

In summary, the majority of the 50 participants who were surveyed by follow-up telephone calls were from the financial and business service sector or from manufacturing firms. This was also true of the respondent and non-respondent groups. This accorded with the programme participation priorities of the Government of Ontario which was sponsoring the programme. However, most of the participants contacted were employees or owners of companies which had fewer than 50 employees which was not in accordance with the government’s priority but, in this case, better reflected the local business community in which 93 percent of companies have fewer than 50 employees. Slightly more than half of the participant contacts were male; in this they differed slightly from the original non-respondents. And they included a higher proportion of senior decision makers than the other two subsamples.

PARTICIPANTS’ RESPONSES TO COMMON QUESTIONS

The 50 participants, whose firms had not returned the mailed questionnaire of the evaluation study sent by George Brown College’s government affiliated office after the service contract covering the programme ended, were all asked a number of common questions. These related to:

- whether the questionnaire had actually been received by the company
- the number of questionnaires their company commonly receives
- the usual behaviour of their firm (procedures, routing, responsibilities) when questionnaires are received
- the reasons for not returning the particular questionnaire of the evaluation study, and
- their initial reactions to that questionnaire.

After introducing the purpose of the interview follow-up study and obtaining agreement to participate, and learning whether the contact was the same one as the person to whom the mailed questionnaire had been addressed the participant was asked: *Do you receive quite a few questionnaires at work? Approximately how many would you estimate that you receive per week/month/year?* The second part of this first question was left totally open-ended and then the responses were categorized after the data were collected.

In response to whether the business receives quite a few questionnaires, 34 (68%) indicated "yes", 5 said "no" and 11 said "do not know". Most made it clear that receiving at least one survey a month was indeed "quite a few" from their point of view. When asked to estimate the number received, 11 participants were not sure how many questionnaires were received and explained that they, personally, would not usually receive them so they could not even provide a guess which was likely to be accurate. The replies from the remaining 39 were either firm statements because the participant received all such material or were best estimates because their office did, or they received reports from the office that did. Fifteen thought there would be fewer than one per month; the other 24 reported numbers between one and 15, with
the four highest frequencies being experienced in not-for-profit firms which received a high number of questionnaires regularly, particularly from government. Unfortunately, no other study was found that could provide evidence of the volume of surveys commonly received by companies of these types. However, if the numbers of questionnaires in these interviews are not too "inflated", then the most common reason given by the participants for not returning the evaluation questionnaire, namely, that they were just too busy, is quite credible.

The experience of the market researchers, reported previously, could be captured by the phrase "Once a refuser, always a refuser." And from many the advice was not to waste one's time trying to persuade a reluctant subject to cooperate, just find a substitute subject. This was in accord with a large body of research literature (see the studies reported by Lockhart (1984); Senf (1987) and Brennan and Hoek (1992)) which refer to the common behaviour patterns of non-respondents (i.e., those who refuse to participate or fail to complete surveys). The group who initially refuse outright to complete a specific survey will also frequently refuse to complete others as well. They just adopt an attitude of non-cooperation and generally they stick to it, consistently. To check whether these were similar cases, the next question asked of participants was: Do you usually complete and return survey questionnaires that you receive? In this case, the participants were asked which of the following five terms best describes their behaviour in completing and returning surveys: always, usually, occasionally, seldom and never.

Table 3 tabulates the replies. As may be seen the most common response was "usually", 22 participants, 44 percent of the sample. Of greater interest are the categories "never" and
"only if required" (a different response identified by the participants than the ones provided), which combined formed almost a quarter of the total. Those mentioned who might 'require' a completed survey response were the company itself, the industry, or the government. This is hardly encouraging information for market researchers and academic social scientists for whom the survey (by questionnaire or structured interview) is a common research tool. Given the 24 participants occupying the first two categories of Table 3, one might say that, on the whole, this group saw themselves as cooperative survey completers. But since they had not originally been willing to complete the evaluation questionnaire, one wonders how much their replies owe to politeness and the desire of an interviewee to give the interviewer the preferred reply.

Table 3  Number and Percentage Distribution of Replies to Survey Completion Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Response</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally/Seldom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only If Required</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next question dealt with the evaluation survey itself, where the participants were asked: *Did you receive the questionnaire sent to you from the Ontario Skills Development Office in [month/year]? And, did you know that it wasn't returned?* Both parts of this questionnaire required a yes, no or don't know/remember response and any additional clarifications that were offered by the participant for a complete response.

Forty-three of the 50 participants replied that the questionnaires had been received. Five (10%) were sure that it had not been received, and two did not know. Most of those who were sure they personally had not received the questionnaire thought that probably it had been received by someone else in the firm since they were not the original contact person. Either they were new in the position or they were temporarily covering for someone else who was away on leave of absence. The large number of participants who admitted that, to their personal knowledge, their firm *had* received the questionnaire but it had not been returned is in contrast to the findings of Birdie, Anderson and Niebuhr (1986:46-51). Their review of research related to non-returns found that most could be explained by reference to logistical problems. For example, two-fifths of one large household sample had not received the intended survey.

Having already dealt with the general pattern of behaviour the next question was specific to the participants' company's failure to return the evaluation questionnaire. It asked: *Why didn't you return the questionnaire sent to you which was intended to solicit your satisfaction with the programme you had taken part in?* For this question, the 50 participants were offered a series of possible reasons (including an "other") and were asked to choose the main one. The
number and distributions of participants’ replies are shown in Table 4. All but 12 of the participants had reasons which amount to a deliberate refusal "for cause": they were too busy, they had no time to fill out and return the questionnaire; it was a waste of time, completing offered no obvious benefit; they had not (or hardly) used the programme’s services so why comment on them; the content (i.e., the questions asked were irrelevant anyway). In the 12 cases there was a survey administration failure; either the questionnaires were sent to the wrong person in the firm or the participant thought that it had been returned but agreed that it might have simply ‘gone missing’.

Table 4 Number and Percentage of Distribution of Reasons Given for Failure To Complete the Evaluation Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No time to complete/too busy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste of time/no benefits</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never used services or used few</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire sent to another person</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content not relevant/not interesting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics problem/thought it had been returned</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The firms being surveyed were fairly typical businesses in the private sector. They are busy workplaces; answering questionnaires interrupts their employees’ work and this they usually cannot afford. Only if the topic is of great importance to that firm and an employee is told to answer the questionnaire can one be reasonably sure of a quick and complete response. Lack of time is the most common explanation for non-response given by the non-responders. It is a legitimate, polite, even graceful, explanation. And it was the most common reason offered during the telephone conversations with participants. Unfortunately the research literature reports on questionnaires mailed to individuals and individual households, not to persons at their workplaces who would be replying on behalf of their firms, so this finding cannot be evaluated by reference to published studies. However, not ‘getting around’ to completing a questionnaire, forgetting it, misplacing it, accidentally destroying it are among the most common reasons for non-response found by Sosdian and Sharp (1980:396). How the true use of the ‘busy’ excuse for the household non-respondent compares to its use by the employee in the workplace cannot be measured. Folklore suggests scepticism. As the old tag says, "If you want a difficult, time-consuming task done, give it to a busy person". This explanation is in accord with West (1991:134) who suggests that people say they are too busy, finding it an acceptable excuse when in fact, laziness, oversight and lack of interest are the real reasons for not cooperating with a research study by completing its questionnaire.

Another ‘wise saying’ is, "If you really want to do something because it’s important to you, you will find time somehow to get it done". The topics of many of the surveys which ask
for one's cooperation probably are entirely irrelevant to one's interests. In such cases when the respondent acts, it is either out of a sense of responsibility and community accountability or because it is a requirement. If the content of the questionnaire is not of sufficient relevance, subjects may well be unwilling to make its completion and return much of a priority. In this study, such a reason accounted for 10 percent of those given in reply to the question. Five of the participants said that they were not interested in the topic or the content of the evaluation questionnaire; in their opinion it was not at all relevant to their current or future business, or to the industry as a whole. The Sosdian and Sharp (1980:396) study found much the same percentage of respondents held comparable views. Their initial lack of response was because of no interest in the topic.

The second most frequent reason given for not completing the questionnaire was that it was a waste of time. These ten participants might simply have been expressing (in slightly different wording) their irritation with the lack of relevance of the evaluation questionnaire, or they may have been offering a generic response to questionnaires as a form of gathering information, or they may have been reacting to a common complaint of government-sponsored training consulting programmes: too much paperwork, endless forms at all stages, even after completion of the programme several surveys evaluating the activities! (This is referred to again later.)

DeMaio (1980:230) found that non-response and a critical reception of the surveys might not be due to the current study at all. It might be a reaction triggered by the memory of former
irritations, unfavourable past experiences and disappointments with studies long finished. But this was a comment on research dealing primarily with households not with employees of firms whose job it is to complete a questionnaire that had been sent to their office. She reported having difficulty categorizing the reasons given for non-response, since they were varied and the frequency of occurrence of each was limited. Participants in this study, however, had specific reasons for failing to cooperate, and although they might express their reasons in slightly different words, they unmistakably fell within the suggested categories. A common response, after the categories of possible reasons were read out and the participant was told "just tell me the reason in your own words", can be paraphrased as follows: "Well I suppose you could say the reason for not completing your questionnaire was _____. It was like this -- I think . . . ."

Participants based their verdict, responding would be a 'waste of time', on their experiences with the programme which was being evaluated and gave examples to justify their lack of satisfaction. A common reaction, even when they gave some other reason for non-response was to follow it up with a complaint about the administration of the programme and specifically "the paperwork". They felt it was excessive and not useful. It did not result in any payback for their company. Completion of the questionnaire simply represented 'more of the same', so it was either simply 'let slide' or was positively rejected. In this case, much of the non-response seems to have been a form of passive resistance or passive protest.

The seven who indicated that the evaluation questionnaire had been directed to a different person in their company cited evidence which could not be followed-up. But this excuse simply
documents one of the problems of trying to survey business enterprises in the private sector. To whom should the questionnaire be sent? In this case a company representative had been designated for the programme, a liaison person with whom arrangements had been made for participation of some of the company’s employees in the programme. That offered a more precise lead than is usually present, but it still did not avoid all non-recipient problems.

Positions change within companies. A new person is promoted to the office or an employee joins the company. The transfer of what might be termed "office memory" in a commercial firm seems to be fairly haphazard. It is probably quite efficient in terms of customers and suppliers. It does not seem to be efficient in terms of requests for cooperation with surveys. Some participants at times proved to be unfamiliar with the firm’s history of programme participation and entirely ignorant of any request for participation in the evaluation survey.

Most of the individuals who were telephoned, after some introductory exchange and explanation, were able to address the questions about their firm’s satisfaction with the programme since they had worked on it, but they were not necessarily the persons who had been expected to respond to the questionnaire.

In most cases, the questionnaire had been received by the superior (the supervisor or the senior company official), and (s)he was identified as the contact person for the programme. Ten percent of the participants were surprised that their firms had been named as non-respondents; they thought the questionnaire had been returned by someone else in the firm. They were wrong. Upon checking the college records, about half of them were found to have
indeed completed a questionnaire, but it was a different one, regarding programme effectiveness, which had also been sent out by the same office of the college, as required by government. For most participants, the answers to the questions of who received the questionnaire and whether or not it had been returned were quickly obtained by the exchange of a few sentences. But there were three participants for whom utter confusion reigned, and it took quite a few minutes to clear up which questionnaire was being addressed. The informal telephone conversations provided an opportunity to clear up the confusion, but this is an example of the negative effect of overkill, which often is inevitably the by-product of government’s attempts to ‘control and monitor’ the programmes it sponsors and contracts out to educational institutions and the private sector. One can turn a very willing and interested respondent into an irritated non-cooperating one by insisting upon too many ‘forms’ and sending out too many questionnaires to the same sample population.

In the case of the evaluation questionnaire, this was compounded by the participants’ view that all the extra paperwork sent out by the government affiliated office was a waste of time. Over half the participants had some complaint about the amount of paperwork which accompanied the programme’s services. Unfortunately, when the evaluation study was carried out, the office that had provided funds for training assistance to business firms had spent its budget so it could not consider spreading the inquiries over more companies.

The following are typical of the comments which were made relating to excessive paperwork and the funding difficulties: "We only used the services of filling in forms for one
course. Yes, it is a good service, but too much time is needed to complete all the forms for funding assistance. We do not need the human resources services you offer, we have all that."

Another participant stated, "We only needed the funds for training, but then they were discontinued. We are willing to pay for consulting services if we get training money in return for our company. The turnaround time for funding approval when there is money available is also way too long and needs to be shortened. It takes forever (3-4 weeks), I would say."

And, quite bluntly, "Don't survey us when there is no incentive money left to assist us to do the training. Be sure there is money to go with the Consulting Services." And in much the same vein, "There was absolutely no problem working with the consultant. She was good and I enjoyed working with her. I was disgusted with the funding though. They did not treat us as a priority. And in the end they could not fund our training anyway."

Even those firms that had not been expecting (or relying on) some financial assistance from the government for their employees' participation in the programme felt that completing the questionnaire would yield no benefit for them, so why bother. They had the impression that in this as in other aspects of the programme (not least the paperwork overburden) their input would not lead to any change. The small businesses stressed this, particularly those with only two to five employees. Their contact person explained that, upon receipt of the questionnaire, they felt that the government was catering to big business anyway; their input or feedback provided on the questionnaire would not alter the situation at all, so they ignored it.

There were many comments from the small firms. Their flavour can best be conveyed
by excerpts from the interviews. One participant explained with aggravation:

We are just too small to benefit from these services. We attempted to do the paperwork, but it was just too complicated and we could not see the end result. We have recently done lay-offs, so we have no full-time staff any more. We just do not need or want the human resources services provided by your programme. On-the-job training is still the best for us. We wanted the funding for training. There was just too much paperwork for that funding and then the funding wasn’t available any more for computer training. There should be funding, if a company wants it. I just want to say we had no problem with the consultant.

Another complained: "We did not need or use most of your services, except for helping us identify funds to assist with the training. Only the larger firms can use all of those services. A small firm like us needs financial assistance only."

Some of the participating companies, for a variety of reasons, needed few or none of the services of the programme. There seemed little reason, therefore, to complete and return a questionnaire which asked how satisfied they were with the services. The eight participants who gave this as the main reason why the questionnaire was not completed and returned explained that there was very little in it that they could comment on. As one said, "We met only once or twice with our consultant. We did not need those services." A number of the participants whose reasons fell into this category reported that the consultants had not informed them of the complete range of services they might have used. However, most did admit this was their own fault. Their particular company had not taken advantage of the services they might have found useful, but added that this was primarily because the company was being reorganized and was not in a position to use the services.
To obtain input into non-respondents' initial reactions to the questionnaire, the participants were asked: *What was your initial reaction to our questionnaire? Was it favourable or unfavourable and then comment please.*

Twenty-two of the 50 were generally unfavourable and critical; 18 did not remember the instrument at all or had no specific comments to make about it; only 10 were positive. Included among the negative remarks were:

- the questionnaire struck them as being too long, involved, detailed and complicated and, therefore, would take a great deal of time to complete;

- the questionnaire was just a lot more work and effort with too little payback to make completing it worthwhile;

- completing and returning the questionnaire was not worth the effort since their views would have little impact to bring about change; and,

- they were not prepared to *make* the time to complete a questionnaire which so obviously was not relevant to the current needs, purpose and progress of their business.

Although for uniformity, the question had been asked in such a way as to have the respondent voice the *main* reason why the questionnaire had not been returned (and the distribution of these is shown in Table 4), in all cases there then followed some discussion which demonstrated all participants had several reasons why they did not initially cooperate and why they felt justified in this behaviour. However, there was no 'reason' or criticism voiced which could not be fitted into one of the categories already discussed.
Ten participants revealed that initially they had viewed the questionnaire favourably. They felt that it was important and time should be made to complete it, but it just never got done. Several regretted that their firms had not made better use of the services offered them and admitted that, had they used the available services, they might have been able to justify completing the survey which they saw as fine. Several also admitted that the questionnaire, and hence this telephone survey, could be viewed as offering them the chance to give feedback to the government.

But generally in replying to the question the participants did not volunteer comments on the questionnaire itself. So they were specifically asked: Did you have any concerns about or comments you’d like to make on the method (mail) or design used for this study? Twenty of the 50 participants had no concerns about this example of a mailed questionnaire, but an equal number could not remember the questionnaire or had no comments to make about its design or administration. The other 10 did have concerns about the survey design. They felt the evaluation study should have used phone calls to administer the questions. In their experience mailed surveys are not treated as priority. And they should have been called ahead before the launch of the study itself. Their views may be summarized as follows: surveys should not waste their resources, and when they fail researchers should not waste those of the subject’s office resources. It is a good research expenditure, not a waste, to spend time and money announcing a study to the subjects whose cooperation is being sought.

When asked to make other suggestions about the questionnaire, 12 participants thought
it should be shortened so that it represented less paperwork and took less time to complete. This suggestion accords with that of Burchell and Marsh (1992:240-1) who found that length of the survey instrument was a significant deterrent for respondents. But they also noted that length of the instrument can be offset by relevance and interest of topic and personal involvement in administration of the project. These play an important part in ensuring responses, their lack explained much non-response. Adams and Gale (1982:235), for example, found that their five-page questionnaire brought in a significantly lower return rate initially, than did their 3-page questionnaire with no follow-up. The comments of 13 of the participants support these conclusions. In the evaluation study there had been some follow-up, but it was entirely inadequate in scope. One letter was sent to all subjects in the sample about two weeks after the initial questionnaires were mailed out. Whether the sample members had returned the questionnaire or not, the entire sample was thus followed-up. But they had not been asked then to comment on any aspect of the questionnaire, not even its length. Even those who cooperated by completing and returning the questionnaire might have had some concern about its length; but they were given no opportunity to comment on this or any other aspect of the instrument. They could, of course, have provided written-in comments on the open-ended section at the end of the questionnaire, but that was rather a haphazard and chancy approach to critiquing an instrument. A few of the participants volunteered a number of comments on, and suggestions about, the evaluation study’s questionnaire, but clearly most felt that questionnaire design is not the subject’s responsibility.
However, they did make some suggestions:

- keep the questionnaire simple without so much detail;
- use the tick off and point form only;
- use multiple choice;
- allow space for additional comments;
- ask more pointed, specific questions to get at the real issues;
- provide some incentive for completion;
- shorten it; timing is everything.

In other words, the 50 participants’ advice can be encapsulated as follows: Don’t send out a survey when there is nothing in it for the participant -- in this case, when you don’t promise government dollars to assist with training the firm’s personnel. There was nothing new in the improvement suggestions made; they were practical common sense items that are rife in the survey methods literature. The reasons given by this group of initial non-respondents for failing to complete the questionnaire and their ideas about its methods of distribution could have been predicted before the telephone conversations took place. All can be found in the literature cited earlier. For example, the importance of timing was stressed by Gray and Guppy (1994) and Altschuld and Lower (1984); the advantage of providing incentives by Denton, Tsai and Chevrette (1987), Goetz, Tyler and Cook (1984) and Powers and Alderman (1982); and the specific ways of improving a mailed questionnaire to enhance return rates by Berdie, Anderson and Niebuhr (1986), Dillman (1978), and Sudman and Bradburn (1984).
Research Phase III

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS REGARDING SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAMME

In this section the findings of Phase III of the research are reported and analyzed. It consisted of comparing the replies to questions in the second stage of participants' interviews with the written replies of the initial respondents on the evaluation questionnaires which they completed and returned. The comparison is structured according to the behaviour of and information provided by the interviewees as follows: refusals, missing data, responses to specific questions and additional comments.

Refusals

After the common questions were dealt with in the participants' interviews, contact persons were asked if they would agree to participate in the second part of the interview which would focus not on their reasons for not completing and returning the mailed questionnaire, but on the satisfaction their firm (and they) felt with the government sponsored training consulting programme the survey was intended to evaluate. Fifteen participants refused, saying more or less, that they were not interested in answering any component of the original satisfaction survey. Six of them indicated that, in any case, they had been dissatisfied with the programme because the expected funding support for their training had been eliminated, and five declared that they had been dissatisfied because the programme was not geared toward small businesses such as theirs since it had had few services, if any, they could benefit from. And the remaining
four refused further participation either because they did not like long telephone interviews and would prefer written exchanges, or they were new contact persons, unfamiliar with the programme who felt they could not add any useful information; they did not know the services or the consultant well enough to offer accurate comments. One suggested that rather than continue the telephone conversation, she would prefer to have the mailed questionnaire sent out again. Another was convinced that the survey instrument had already been completed and returned by her company; they had done enough. And when it was suggested that she summarize the opinions and comments which had been returned, she refused. This was one of the cases found, upon checking the records, where a different government survey had been completed about the same time as the evaluation study.

When these participants heard that the questions of the satisfaction questionnaire survey would include reasons why they had not returned the initial questionnaire they decided that they had no interest in repeating themselves no matter what the research purpose was. Many of these refusers had already told the interviewer in the discussion on the questions that completing the written survey would have been a waste of time; there would have been no benefit from doing so. They still thought that responding to the ‘satisfaction survey’ would be a meaningless exercise. However, almost all of them gave assurance that their concerns with the whole organization of that programme should not be interpreted as dissatisfaction with the work of the consultants or the services that the consultant had delivered. As one of these participants summed up this point of view: "Our consultant tried to do her job with us. She told us of the
human resources services she had to offer. But it wasn't those services that we needed for our small business. We needed the money for training, something she just could not deliver". Most of the programme criticism which were heard related to its mandate as dictated by the government, as well as that the expected funding subsidy was no longer being provided or that their particular company was too small to benefit from a programme of this type.

Thirty-five of the 50 participants agreed to cooperate with the second part of the telephone study. Comparing the non-compliance rate of the participant sample with the actual refusal rate of the mailed questionnaire study, it must be admitted that the former had the higher incidence (30% vs. 10%), the latter is made up of the 12 cases (about 10% of the 128 returned questionnaires) where subjects themselves sent back their blank questionnaires, opened but not completed at all. These were distinct from the questionnaires returned by the post office because it had been unable to deliver them. They were "returned addressee not known". "Refusal" is a special type of failure to respond; it differs from what might be termed "normal" non-response. Non-respondents who simply do not return a questionnaire represent passive rejection rather than active rejection. Refusers are an interesting group. Upon investigation not all seem to be "true" refusers. The "true" refuser is independently exercising power, the power of insisting upon non-cooperation. Not all the 12 cases were "true" refusers.

Seven had written on the envelope of the questionnaire or on the questionnaire itself, which was then resealed in the envelope provided, a comment to the effect that the instrument could not be completed or that the recipient did not want to do any more paperwork for the
government. Precisely why the recipient could not complete it was not explained, except in cases such as "this cannot be completed as I am new to the company" (4). The other common comment was, "do not bother us with any more paperwork from the government" (3). Generally in survey research subjects do not send back blank questionnaires in the mail even when a self-addressed, stamped envelope has been provided. To do so, particularly with no explanation, is the sign of a true refuser. The 15 participants who refused to answer the questions in the second part of the interview (i.e., complete the evaluation questionnaire questions orally) may be said to be double refusers. They had ignored the original questionnaires, some deliberately returning them blank (a positive act). Then, having agreed to participate in a telephone conversation about the evaluation study which was investigating their satisfaction with the programme they had joined, they balked at the questions of the second part of the interview. The two groups are not comparable in all respects but they are similar. The interest is in knowing to what extent their satisfaction with the programme accords with, or differs from, that recorded by the evaluation study's original respondents.

That the views and complaints of the group referred to as ‘double refusers’ were similar to those of the questionnaire ('single') refusers accords with the findings of a study by Dommeruth (1975:33). He denigrates the value of call-backs as an effective way of obtaining cooperation from a non-respondent group. He found call-backs did not help reduce refusal rates. He concluded: When individuals have made up their minds, for whatever reason, not to participate in a study, it is almost impossible to persuade them to change their decision because
their 'reason' for making the refusal decision still stands. However, sometimes this can be overcome by offering an 'incentive'. This might well have been effective, in this case, if the refusers could have been ‘guaranteed’ (and trusted the ‘guarantor’) that their replies would change the programme and its administrative and financial arrangements would be revised for these employers. As one refuser put it:

Sure, I would be more than willing to take it the next step and respond to the questions you want to ask, if I knew in some way that my comments would be taken seriously by the government and changes would be made to help my business out. Can you promise me that? No, of course not. You’re limited too. See. That’s my whole point.

The promise of feedback of the findings of the "satisfaction" questions which, according to the literature can be effective, was not in this case. It did not change the decision of any of the double-refusers. They exhibited a cynicism about a government (the training programme’s sponsors) being sensitive to any evidence of customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction. And possibly these refusers had little real interest in the overall findings on "satisfaction" anyway; they voiced strong personal convictions which were critical and cynical. Only one contact person among the 50 participants interviewed asked how the results of the mailed questionnaire and this thesis research would be used. This was unlike the project of Powers and Alderman (1982:200) in which they found that the incentive of promising feedback of the survey results had real success in increasing participation.

'True' refusers are often described in the literature as persons who never complete surveys and are not loath to proclaim that. There were few such among the participants. They
were of a different breed. Brennan and Hoek (1992:534), for example, found that generally some 13 percent of a sample are not at all disposed to participate in any type of survey research. This cannot be said of the participants in these interviews. Most said they did not have a general aversion to completing surveys; they just had not wanted to complete this one from the Government of Ontario because they considered it a waste of their time. In fact, they proved their contention about their general willingness and cooperativeness by agreeing to be interviewed by telephone and readily answering the common questions. In this research, whether categorized as 'one time' or 'double', the refusers are not 'typical' as described in the research literature on non-response.

Nor does experience of the participant interview phase of the thesis research accord, in terms of the incidence of refusal, with the results of Baumgartner and Heberlein (1984:74). They found that the prestige and credibility of a government-sponsored survey ensured respondents' willingness to participate. In this case it would not be exaggerated to claim that the government sponsoring was a serious research liability. Possibly this highlights the difference between the American and the Canadian business firm's attitude toward government-sponsored inquiries. None of these refusers felt compelled to respond to the questionnaire or to the second part of the telephone interview because this was dealing with a government-sponsored survey evaluating a government-sponsored training programme.

Missing Data

For the 35 participants who agreed to be interviewed in the second part of the telephone
survey, to some extent, the effect of their decision mitigated the initial non-response, although it did not entirely off-set it. For the sample of 35, there was an excessive amount of missing data (item non-completion). It was found that several of the questionnaire's questions could not be answered with the choices which had been offered. They included questions #1 and #2 which provided choice among a set of responses. Respondents to the mailed questionnaire had answered as best they could, according to how appropriate they found the items. Judging by the comments of the participants as they were replying to the telephoned questions, the set of choices was inadequate. These questions should have had additional response choices. Examples of other response choices suggested by the participants were: "Such services were not necessary or not needed by the company"; "Our company was not at a stage to take advantage of the services listed. Some of these take time to implement"; "These services were not offered or provided by the consultant". Similarly, the questionnaire had asked respondents to rate the consultants' ability to provide the service. But participants objected, no comment was invited on whether those abilities were needed or required, and offered to or provided to the company. That does not mean, they explained, that participants were dissatisfied (or more satisfied) with these services and/or abilities, but that judgements just could not be made about services or abilities when, for a variety of different reasons, they had not been provided. Had such additional response choices been offered, more recipient companies might have been persuaded to return the questionnaires in the first place and thus reduce the amount of missing data and avoid the expense of follow-up.
In addition to the inadequacy of Questions #1 and #2 which resulted in missing data, Questions #3 and #5 also had serious weaknesses which led to items being ignored and data thereby missed, both from the original respondents and the participants who were interviewed. Seven questions were extracted from the original questionnaire to be used in the telephone interviews with the participants (See Appendix E). They were ones with large item non-response; all were complex requiring the subjects to rate and/or choose. The benefit of the telephone interviews with the 35 cooperative participants was that they pointed out the inadequacy of the questions which had the effect of producing disgust or frustration. They suggested additional choices which would have made the questions more appropriate and capable of being responded to, and would offer some assurance that the subject was making a useful contribution.

Question #1 asked how satisfied the company was with ten different services provided through the training consulting programme. Respondents would use a Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 4) to rate their degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with "1" being "very dissatisfied" and with "4" being "very satisfied". They were expected to give each service a rating. Although there were 100 original respondents and 35 telephoned ones who responded to the questionnaire as a whole, many from each set did not rate each service item for this first question although asked to do so. Item non-response within a question poses a serious problem. It lessens the sample of replies. If it is large, it weakens the value of the responses to the question. Table 5 shows the number and percentage of respondents and participants who did not rate a particular
service.

It is immediately apparent that the item percentage non-response was higher for the participants than the respondents except in two cases (Items "c" and "d"). The participants averaged 37 percent missing data on these services, and the respondents averaged 25 percent per item. The reason, participants explained, they could not rate some of the items was that they could not express degrees of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with services with which they had no experience.

Table 5  Number and Percentage of Missing Data on Question 1 by Item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Respondents (n=100)</th>
<th>Participants (n=35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Human Resources Serv.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Needs Analysis</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Training Plan Develop.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Identify Training Funds</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Organization Needs</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Identify Trainers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Cost-Benefit Analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Training Evaluation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Employee Involvement</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Employment Equity</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question #2 asked the subject's degree of agreement/disagreement with seven statements about the training consulting services and the way the consultant had delivered them. The same Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 4) was used but reversed with "1" being "strongly agree" and "4" being "strongly disagree". Table 6 shows the percentages of item non-response by the original 100 respondents. Comparable information is not given for the participants because each answered all parts of the question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Respondents' Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Delivered Timely Service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Qualified in HR Matters</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Identified HR Needs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Developed Action Plan</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Referred to Other Sources</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Improved HR Planning</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Time Well Spent</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having the participants on the telephone and asking them directly about the consultant's delivery of service ensured that each item could be and was rated; there were no missing data. All that was required was clarification of what the scale numbers represented and this was repeated by the interviewer for each item. On average, respondents missed rating 12 percent
per item of the question which resulted in missing data with no explanation as to why items had been ignored. One common problem, referred to in the literature, is subject fatigue in which there are a great number of items to rate and several such questions on a page of a questionnaire. Respondents just lose interest in completing all sections of a question. They also become more critical as they read down the list of items. Respondents averaged 24 percent per item with disagreement ratings regarding the consultants, but there were no negative ratings from the participants. One possible explanation of this may be that on the phone the interviewer carefully pointed out that for this question a reverse rating scale was being used.

Question #3 asked whether the written agreement which their firm had signed and the letter of registration were adequate to define and guide the consultation service. Respondents were told to use a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with "1" to indicate "very dissatisfied" and "4" for "very satisfied", and to note with "9" if their firm had not had a written agreement. Fifteen (43%) of the 35 participants replied that they could not remember whether or not (or they did not know if) there was a written agreement, so only 20 were able to provide the desired rating. On the respondents’ returned questionnaires there are 20 percent which have no response provided for Question #3. With so large a percentage of data missing, the information provided by this question and any comparison between the participants and respondents are meaningless.

Question #5 required the subject to choose a category which would represent a fair price for the consulting service if their company had had to pay for it. Again there was a fair amount of item non-response. For the participants there was 23 percent missing data; for the
respondents, 16 percent. The questionnaire failed to direct: "Please tell us why in the space below if you are reluctant to indicate what would be a fair value for the programme". It is not known why many respondents left this question blank. The advantage of the telephone conversation was that the 15 participants who did not indicate a "fair price" had no hesitation in explaining their reluctance. They said:

- that they did not think a price per hour was a good way to price the consultant’s services;

- that they did not know enough about consultants’ normal rates to come up with a fair answer;

- that they did not decide financial matters like this and just do not know -- can’t answer; and/or

- that they did not think this an appropriate question to ask on a "satisfaction-with-the-programme-service" questionnaire.

Some participants made more than one of the above type of comment. Possibly the respondents who returned the questionnaire but left Question #5 blank had similar reservations, but there is no way of knowing whether the two groups differ in their reluctance to state a dollar value for some service which most of the participating companies expected to have free. None of the participants actually said, "If we state a price, perhaps in another programme that’s what we would be charged", but that reason for their non-response on this item cannot be ruled out.

Warriner (1991:266-7) discusses the problem of missing data from item-by-item responses to a question. Often this can be accounted for by the personal nature of the question. In rating some questions subjects are reluctant to be critical and give low negative ratings. Also,
as one reads through a questionnaire the net effect of rating a set of items (like services) negatively become cumulative. As subjects progress down the item list, when such an effect builds up, many respondents either cease to rate the items or they become more neutral, moving to the central position. So the placement of an item, particularly in a long list, may have an effect on the incidence of non-response to it.

Fowler (1993) and Gray and Guppy (1994) suggest that the best way of reducing item non-response (and hence, having no missing data) is by carefully designing and pretesting the questionnaire on a variety of potential respondents using a variety of item sequences. Using a scale to measure anything (in this case, the degree of satisfaction with a service) assumes that the subject can honestly rate the item and is willing to do so. When the provision of an honest rating is not possible (e.g., through ignorance, as when the service is not experienced) respondents will likely skip the item. The more disgusted members of the sample might well just fail to return the questionnaire. A similar "turn off" occurs when subjects are not provided with enough appropriate choices. The participant's loss of interest in a questionnaire is cumulative. As this occurs, the reasons for not bothering to complete the survey become compelling. Unfortunately, often the reasons behind missing data are unknown, so they cannot be used to help improve any subsequent use of the instrument. Providing information for instrument revision is one example of how the telephone interview is superior to the mailed questionnaire. In the case of Research Phase III for this thesis, explanations for missing item data were readily obtained in discussions with the 35 cooperating participants, additional item
choices were suggested and clarifications of the measurement scales were given frequently.

**Responses to Specific Questions**

When the replies of the 35 participants to the specific questions of the questionnaire were compared to those of the 100 original respondents, the response overall was almost identical — within a maximum of 10 percent difference. But individual questions showed some variances, particularly Question #1. This was the question regarding satisfaction with the types of services provided. Ten services were listed and subjects were asked to rate them. The positive responses ranged from 28 to 70 percent. These are shown in Tables 7 and 8 by which the preferred services of participants and respondents may be judged. In both tables, the services are listed in rank order; lower rank in Table 7 are the services most appreciated and in Table 8 those rated low.

In the tables, the rank order was determined by computing the average scores given by subjects who ranked these services positively (i.e., used codes 3 and 4). Those who did not score the service at all because they did not use it or thought the service was not necessary for their company have been deleted. The rank ordering of those services rated low (using codes 1 and 2) is shown in Table 8.

As evident from the rank ordering of consulting services that received positive responses, the respondents identified training plan development as the service with which they were most satisfied. The participants, however, were most satisfied with the training evaluation
done by the consultants. Both groups were equally positive about the consultants' ability to identify trainers for them. As for those who responded with low ratings ("1" or "2") indicating dissatisfaction, the respondents were really critical of the cost-benefit analysis service. No participant gave a negative rating to the human resource services item, and generally so few participants gave low (dissatisfied) ratings that further analysis is not warranted.

Table 7 Comparison of the Positive Ratings of Services by Respondents and Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Item</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>N=</td>
<td>Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Plan Develop.</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiz. Needs Analysis</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Services</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Training Funds</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Trainers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-Benefit Analysis</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Evaluation</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of Employees</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Equity Info.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 Comparison of the Negative Ratings of Services by Respondents and Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Item</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=</td>
<td>Rank Item Order Average</td>
<td>N=</td>
<td>Rank Item Order Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-Benefit Analysis</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1 1.41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Plan Develop.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 1.47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiz. Needs Analysis</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3 1.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Analysis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4 1.52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Evaluation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5 1.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Trainers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6 1.60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Services</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7 1.63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>- 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Training Funds</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8 1.67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Equity Info.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9 1.82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of Employees</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10 1.83</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question #2 approached the question of satisfaction with the consultants' delivery of services in a different way. It offered the subjects a series of seven comments all positively phrased and asked that they rate the comments with "1" being "strongly agree" to "4" being "strongly disagree". The overall average rate accorded by participants to the comments differed from that of the respondents by almost 25 percent. About one quarter of the respondents indicated disagreement with the statements made about the consultants' delivery of service, and
generally the ratings of the participants were all positive.

Table 9 shows the rank order of the ratings given to the statements by subgroups and the other relevant information. For Table 9 the average rate value was obtained for each item using all the ratings accorded it, both positive and negative. In table 7, the higher the average rate, the greater the satisfaction, and in Table 8 the lower the average rate, the greater the dissatisfaction. In Table 9, since the statements of Question 2 were all positively phrased and the scale reversed ("1" being "strongly agreed" with the phrase), the lower the average rate, the greater the subject’s satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Item</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=</td>
<td>Rank Item</td>
<td>Order Average</td>
<td>N=</td>
<td>Rank Item</td>
<td>Order Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Service</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to Sources</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified in HR</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify HR Needs</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Action Plan</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved HR Plan</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Well Spent</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possibly no dissatisfaction was expressed by the participants in the follow-up interviews because the interviewer identified herself as the manager of the programme. When this occurs, it is highly likely that company individuals will be reluctant to give direct verbal negative feedback to the manager about a specific consultant’s performance for fear that there could be adverse ramifications for their company or adverse effects on the career of the service individual. The telephone contact is much more direct and personal; the complaining person can be readily identified. Identification is less likely for written negative comments made by the original respondents who can only be indirectly identified through the coding system. In some cases, the participating businesses were still being served by the consultants; in others they wished to use the consultant again. Negative comments against the consultant might jeopardize continuation of the service. For those participants dissatisfied with the programme, it was noticeable that they made a special point of stating they were neither dissatisfied with their particular consultant nor with the services the consultant was trying to deliver. Their complaint was with the basic set-up of the programme, the business priorities that the government had mandated for it, and with the affiliated funding.

As evident from Table 9, the respondents highly agreed with the statement about the consultants’ timely service. The participants were less impressed with this, but both groups highly agreed with the statement about the consultants’ ability to make referrals to other sources. Both groups were least impressed with the statement that time with the consultants was well spent. Calculating an overall average rating per subject for all items of this question, it was
found that both groups' average was below 2, which indicate that they were generally satisfied with the consultants' delivery of service. For the participant group (overall average, 1.77) this was not surprising since there were no negative ratings for any items, but for the respondents (overall average, 1.97) the average was lower than expected. The conclusion may be drawn, therefore, that the responses of the two sub groups were similar, generally positive.

Participants' and respondents' replies to the questionnaire's remaining questions showed few differences. Question #3 asked for a rating of their overall satisfaction with the written agreement for services; 31 percent of each subgroup reported their firm had no such agreement. The agreement had not proved to be useful for some 3 percent of the participants and 13 percent of the respondents. The average rating per person given by the 9 participants (15 missing, as described before) and 49 respondents (20 missing) who could (and did) rate the written agreement were 2.89 and 2.86 respectively. With an individual response selection of "3" or more meaning "useful", the written agreement was just short of being useful for both groups.

Questions #4 asked about the overall satisfaction with the consulting service, where six (17%) of the 35 participants expressed some degree of dissatisfaction and 16 percent of the respondents had expressed dissatisfaction with the programme in general. This question was replied to by all 35 participants; the average rating value assigned per person was 3.05. But it must be kept in mind that 15 of the 50 participants had also refused to participate in the second part of the interviews because of their dissatisfaction with the programme. There were 88 respondents who also completed Question #4; the average rating assigned per person was 3.15.
As with the participants, this "3" average rating per person conveys general satisfaction by the respondents with the overall training consulting service programme.

Question #5 asked subjects to place a financial value on aspects of the consulting service they used. The distribution of the replies is shown in Table 10. The majority of responses from both groups expressed a value of $50 per hour or less. Missing data, as described previously, accounts for the additional 16 respondents and 8 participants.

Table 10 Number and Percentage Distribution of Participants’ and Respondents’ Choice of Financial Value Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Value Choice</th>
<th>Respondents (n=100)</th>
<th>Participants (n=35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $25/hr.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$26 - $50/hr.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$51 - $75/hr.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$76 - $100/hr.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100 +/hr.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question # 6 asked whether the subjects would recommend the programme to other businesses. Twenty-nine of the 35 participants (almost 83%) answered "yes"; 75 of the respondents (75%) gave the same reply. Only two of the participants gave a definite "No" as
did seven respondents. Four participants were "Not Sure", as were 11 of the respondents. The other seven respondents did not respond to this question.

In summary, generally in the replies to specific questionnaire questions in this survey there was little difference in responses of the two sub groups. The exceptions were Questions #1 and #2, where the item rating differed somewhat. This finding accords with other studies (Gliksman and Smythe, 1992 and Denton, Tsai and Chevrette, 1987), wherein no significant differences in the content of response were found due to different data collection methods or to the use of incentives and multiple mail-outs.

**Additional Comments/Suggestions**

One advantage of an oral exchange of information is that it is less trouble for most people to talk than to write. So the interview (whether face-to-face or on the telephone) yields a greater volume of spontaneous, original and personal opinions and suggestions than the questionnaire, even when the latter is liberally sprinkled with "other" categories and blank lines inviting "additional comments". There were twice as many comments made by the 50 participants as were written on the 100 returned questionnaires, expressing dissatisfaction with such things as lack of assistance with funding, excessive and redundant paperwork and advice of limited value to small businesses. Whereas 15 percent of the respondents had written such negative comments, 30 percent of the participants voiced them fairly spontaneously and their complaints were more detailed and explicit. All the comments made about the programme are exemplified
in these few sentences: "There seemed to be a lot of redundant paperwork"; "We were unable to explore these possibilities as funding had stopped"; "I own the firm -- we do not require this type of service"; "Streamline the process for smaller business". Few were ready to spend time being interviewed about the details of their dissatisfaction with the programme and, in any case, a pre-designed interview schedule was being used. Nevertheless, some managed to convey their concerns about the programme. However, many participants provided a great deal of detailed criticism -- far more extensive than the written comments on the questionnaires. They conveyed them with passion and anger. The best way to convey the tone and extent of these criticisms is to quote one:

The time we spent putting forms together and completing all that turned out to be a total waste of time. We didn't need to do all that to keep our business viable. We did it to get some government assistance for our training. But we weren't considered a priority. It makes me sick thinking what big businesses might be the priority.

The superiority of the verbal open-ended response over the written one which was abundantly evident in this research is in accord with the experience of Burchell and Marsh (1992:240-1). Spontaneous, independent variations on item responses generally increased toward the end of these interviews, particularly after the first phase which consisted of the common questions. Participants became more involved in the discussion and more confident that they could critically express concerns with the interviewer.

There were also, of course, numerous positive comments made about the programme
both by the respondents and the participants. Again the written ones tended to be laconic; the oral ones detailed and expansive. They included accolades for a particular consultant, for the value of the programme in organizing the training for that company, details of improvements in employee productivity and morale as a result of certain training that was achieved, examples of improvements in the management’s commitment to training and the greater emphasis on training within the organization as a whole. An example of the latter taken from the interview shorthand notes:

Through the Consulting Services, we were made aware of the importance of our management communication training. We were assisted in preparing the training plans. In my opinion, the Consulting Services, and specifically the consultant, played a critical role in planning and preparing our training plan, and the training has made a world of difference to our business. This in turn will help us achieve our business goals.

In summary: This follow-up research, by telephone interview, with a sample of survey non-respondents clearly demonstrated the value of an oral exchange (whether with respondents or non-respondents) to supplement and enrich the gathered data. At least double the amount of information was obtained by the telephone calls, particularly in terms of details assessing the good points and weaknesses, the satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the programme. This is the type of information that enables improvements to be made to a programme. Almost one-quarter of the participating firms had not sent back the evaluation questionnaire because they felt their comments would have had no impact for change. The fact that there was so high a non-response rate to the evaluation survey not only brought into question the validity and reliability
of the data gathered by questionnaire, but was in itself an indication of dissatisfaction with the programme. If programme participants are delighted with its offerings, they are likely to reply to an evaluation with a request for 'more of the same'. If disgruntled participants withhold completion of the evaluation surveys, they not only lose the opportunity for their views to be heard but they put the programme at risk for further support funding. Had participants' detailed suggestions for change been put forward, it is possible that a revised programme might have survived. From the findings of this research one might well advise that a telephone interview dimension be added to all surveys. Whether the response rate to the mailed questionnaire is high or low, the interviews will add rich detail to the gathered information and also reveal any weaknesses in the survey instrument that might be mitigated or offset in the research report.

Research Phase IV

COMPARISONS OF THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS' CHARACTERISTICS

When designing a survey, particularly one which evaluates a college programme (always a requirement of training programmes contracted for some sponsoring agency or government), it would be helpful if one could predict the category of subjects -- e.g., the type of recipient of the programme, the business being served or the office of the contact person -- which was least likely to cooperate and provide the desired information. In other words, ideally one should be able to predict non-response and either take preventative action (say by using a different
research design for such people) or plan from the outset for the additional cost of supplementary action. To see if the various research activities undertaken with the different sub groups used in this study might yield some useful insights in this regard, the fourth phase of the research involved preparing sets of comparison tables. They compare the original respondents and non-respondents on the mandatory variables for the programme priorities (Tables 11, 12 and 13), and they compare the cooperating and non-cooperating participants by type of business, size and contact person's position in the firm.

Comparisons on selected characteristics were demonstrated first using the sample groups: respondents vs. original non-respondents, including the participants who were followed-up and agreed to be interviewed, and those who refused to be interviewed in the follow-ups.

**Original Respondents and Non-respondents**

There were 100 respondents and 100 non-respondents to the evaluation survey which had been conducted by mailed questionnaire. Included among the original non-respondents are the 50 who were later interviewed by telephone. The reader will remember that the questionnaire was designed to inquire about business firms' satisfaction with a training programme they had participated in, and that the programme sponsor (the Ontario Government) gave priority to programme admission only to certain types and sizes of firms. Did these priorities for programme acceptance seriously affect the probability of response to the questionnaire survey? Did the restrictions arising from the priorities for programme acceptance affect the probability
of response to the questionnaire survey? Table 11 shows the distribution of the participating firms by industrial sector and their response/non-response to the evaluation questionnaire. Table 12 shows the same information by company size, based on the number of employees.

Table 11 Frequency of Response/Non-response by Type of Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Industry</th>
<th>Respondents (n=100)</th>
<th>Non-respondents (n=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Const/Tran/Com.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Bus.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Admin.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services/Assoc.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = .00375, \text{ d.f.} = 1, \text{ n.s.} \]
Table 12 Frequency of Response/Non-response by Company Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Company</th>
<th>Respondents (n=100)</th>
<th>Non-respondents (n=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-9 employees</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-49 employees</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199 employees</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200+ employees</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 3.65, \text{ d.f.}=1, \text{n.s.} \]

Although in the distributions by industry sector there are some noted differences, at the .05 level, no significant relationship was shown to exist between the programme selection priorities as represented by the participating business firms and their response/non-response behaviour.

Perhaps the type of contact person makes a significant difference. Perhaps one could improve the probability of response in cases like this (and any subsequent survey) if the contact person for the programme held a senior rather than a middle management office in the participating firm. However, it would be difficult to dictate this to participating firms, particularly since the middle management individuals had been designated by a senior official in the business to serve as his/her representative. Table 13 shows the distributions by office of the contact persons.
Table 13 Frequency of Response/Non-response by Position in Company of Contact Person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact's Position</th>
<th>Respondents (n=100)</th>
<th>Non-respondents (n=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President/VicePresident</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner/Partner</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/Manager</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Systems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/None Listed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 3.47, \text{ d.f.} = 1, \text{ n.s.} \]

Again, the chi-square test revealed no statistically significant relationship between the variables. It must be concluded, therefore, that these characteristics which were known before the survey was designed and administered would not have been of much use in predicting which companies and/or which contact persons were least likely to respond to the evaluation questionnaire and would, therefore, require some sort of follow-up.

**Cooperative and Non-cooperative Participants**

Of the participants who had neglected to complete and return the evaluation questionnaire, there were 50 who were contacted and agreed to be interviewed by telephone. All were willing to explain why they had not replied to the questionnaire and to answer several
other questions about surveys in general, but when the second part of the interview came up -- replying orally to the same questionnaire's questions -- 15 refused. What made that group act differently from the majority of the participants? Could their refusal have been anticipated if the records had been checked earlier to ascertain the industrial sector (i.e., type) of the firm they worked for, the firm's size, or the position in the firm of the interviewee? These distributions are shown in Tables 14, 15 and 16.

Even after several of the categories in Table 14 were amalgamated, a chi-square test of significance could not be calculated due to the small numbers in the cells. Chi-squares were calculated for Tables 15 and 16.

Table 14  Frequency of Cooperating/Non-cooperating Participants by Economic Sector of Their Firm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Industry</th>
<th>Frequency of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative (n=35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Const/Trans/Com.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Bus.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Admin.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services/Assoc.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15 Frequency of Cooperating/Non-cooperating Participants by Size of Their Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Business by Number of Employees</th>
<th>Frequency of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative (n=35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-9 employees</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-49 employees</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199 employees</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 + employees</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = .0153, \text{ d.f.}=1, \text{ n.s.} \]

For purposes of calculating the chi-square test score, since the numbers in some size categories were small, the data were collapsed into two categories: fewer than ten employees, ten or more employees. This produced remarkably similar "cooperating" and "non-cooperating" by size category so it is not surprising that no statistically significant relationship was found between the size of the participant's firm and the willingness of its representative to complete the entire interview.

The profile of the 35 cooperative and 15 non-cooperative participants related to the position and sex of the contact person are shown in Table 16. The numbers in some of the categories are too small to calculate a test of significance, but merely looking at the distribution in Table 16 leads one to conclude that none of these personal characteristics would be a good predictor of response behaviour.
Table 16 Frequency of Cooperating/Non-cooperating Participants by Position and Sex of Contact Person in Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions/Sex</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Non-cooperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=35)</td>
<td>(n=15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President/VicePres.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner/Partner</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/Manager</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Systems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Not Listed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no obvious relationship between the position or the sex of the contact person and his/her willingness to cooperate with the entire telephone interview. Goudy (1976:368) had a somewhat similar set of findings. He found that there was no statistically significant relationship between such personal characteristics as age, marital status, education and income, and item non-response on his questionnaire.
Summary

The research for this thesis involved four research exercises which were reported separately in this thesis. First, the ten telephone interviews which replaced the unsuccessful attempt to hold focus groups with 30 analysts, employees of market research firms, confirmed that the industry is indeed concerned about non-response in survey research and tries to ensure the maximum response by a variety of strategies. But nothing new or unusual was mentioned; all are activities outlined at some length in the research literature on study and questionnaire design and reviewed here in Chapter 2. Follow-up of the non-respondents by mail or telephone was most commonly used to increase the response rates, and the number of follow-ups attempted depended upon finances. The analysts reported that their firms considered as acceptable a respondent rate of between 50-70 percent. (This also is generally supported in the survey research literature.) However, they added the limitations of time and money often force their firms to settle for less since the client usually is reluctant to incur the extra expense. The analysts also revealed they seldom do studies specifically focusing on the reasons for non-response itself. Those studies of which they had some knowledge, except for one, were published. The confidential one could not be published, or even informally shared, since it was the private property of the client. Clearly, this first research exercise was disappointing since it had been intended to probe the private, hands-on ways in which commercial market research firms dealt with the problem of non-response. It was expected that this information would be a valuable supplement to the research literature on non-response, which for the most part has
an academic origin. The salient impression left by the interviews is that market research is a business. As such the client’s wishes rule. The employees designing a survey and the analysts carrying out the data analysis and writing the report may have a professional/technical interest in the non-respondent, but their chief concern is to provide an impressive report of the survey findings. Sometimes the non-response rate is hardly mentioned.

The second research exercise involved telephone interviews with the 50 participants whose firms had not responded to a mailed government survey intended to evaluate a company’s satisfaction with a government-sponsored training consulting programme in which they had participated. The chief findings of this research included the reasons for their non-response and the conclusion that much of the failure must be the responsibility of those who had organized the programme. The most common reason for not replying to the evaluation questionnaire was that those participants were dissatisfied with the organization of the programme whose services were irrelevant to their needs. They used the familiar "too busy, lack of time" excuse to justify their non-response because they thought any input of theirs would, in any case, not bring about needed changes to a government programme.

Unlike the research literature which advises that government-sponsorship of surveys helps to ensure high returns, the conclusion of this research was that because it was a government-sponsored questionnaire, these participating business firms felt it was a waste of time to complete and return it. They did not see that their desired programme changes would likely come about as a consequence.
The third research exercise considered the second part of the participants' telephone interview. Unfortunately the sample of 50 was reduced to 35. This part of the telephone conversations involved the oral completion of the original questionnaire. Fifteen participants decided that they had not changed their minds. They would not want to waste any of their time responding either to the questions of the written original questionnaire or the simplified version which extracted just several key questions to be used in the telephone interviews. Even though they were assured that the telephone short version had only six of the original questions, they were adamant. With regrets, they would not cooperate.

The third research exercise did proceed, nevertheless; 35 of the participants answered the questions extracted from the original questionnaires. But one of the strongest impressions gained from this activity was the strength of the disgust of the contact persons' firms with the whole matter of the programme and the evaluation survey which followed it. Even though, on the whole, there was satisfaction with the consultants who carried out the programme, its arrangements generally were too bureaucratic -- paper-ridden.

However, not all who did not respond to the mailed questionnaire were negative or cynical about the programme under review. More than half of the 35 cooperating participants replied that they were generally positive about the programme as a whole. This is an interesting fact since it contradicts a considerable number of studies reported in the literature. The general contention is that people who do not respond fail to do so because they do not want to convey their negative reaction about whatever it is the survey deals with. The non-cooperating
participants were, for the most part, contact people from small companies. It undoubtedly was the case that the programme elements and arrangements were not entirely suitable for the very small participating firms, and the telephone conversations were successful in eliciting their grievances and soliciting suggested changes. These firms had few training and human resources services that were provided by the training consulting service, but they wished to benefit from the training incentive fund, and unfortunately, about the time of the survey, it had been reduced and later was eliminated.

The fourth research exercise was to compare the replies on the 35 orally administered questionnaires to those on the original 100 written questionnaire respondents, and also to compare the company and contact person characteristics of the firms which did and did not complete and return the mailed questionnaire, and of the participants who did and did not agree to orally complete the shortened version of the questionnaire. Since the programme, which was administered under contract by a College of Applied Arts and Technology, was a government-sponsored consulting-in-business effort, the contract required that priority be given to firms from two economic sectors (manufacturing and financial/business services) and to large firms (having 50 or more employees). The contract also required that, at the close of the programme, it be evaluated by a survey of client satisfaction. It would have been satisfying to this doctoral student if from the documentation, some statistically significant difference could have been found between the characteristics of the responding and the non-responding firms. There were none. It would have been equally rewarding if there had been a statistically significant difference
between the replies of the 35 cooperating participants on the six key questionnaire questions and those of the 100 responding firms who returned the mailed questionnaires. But there were only very minor differences.

However, several interesting things were learned from the entire research effort. One was the importance of timing in the distribution of a survey. This was a critical factor in the survey under study, as in a number of studies reviewed in the literature. In this case, two factors interfered with these business firms’ full cooperation. While the survey was being conducted, the government training incentive fund which was closely associated with the consulting services of the programme, was initially reduced and then totally eliminated. After this happened, for the client firms depending on financial assistance from the fund to receive an evaluation form was the last straw! It only reminded them of their disappointment with the entire affiliated government programme. In addition, there were two evaluation surveys being run concurrently. The other dealt with the effectiveness of the programme’s consulting service. Both had questionnaires which looked much alike; both had been sent out by the same office of the college; to many clients they seemed one and the same and simply confirmed the firms’ impression of bureaucratic overkill in an activity which also had seemingly endless numbers of forms.

Another lesson which was ‘re-learned’ was that the importance of the questionnaire design cannot be overemphasized. Although the field consultants had provided input, the survey
was designed and pretested by a private consulting group in order to demonstrate its independence of both government and the programme providers. But it was a poor questionnaire and its weaknesses led to unduly high item non-response as well as to the high number of non-respondents who ignored it entirely. For respondents and the participants who cooperated, certain questions had at least one-quarter of their data missing. Only by interviewing the group of non-respondents did it become clear why some of the questions could not be responded to. Companies that had not (for a variety of reasons) used some of the services listed on the satisfaction questionnaire did not feel they could rate their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a particular service that they had no experience of. No allowance was made for anything other than the rating of each service on a scale from 1 to 4. A questionnaire that assumes that all respondents are the same, in this case had the same needs for a programme, simply increases the recipients' frustration level. Even if there is an acceptable high overall response rate, if there is high item non-response, the study is a failure.

Another thing which was 're-learned' is that one cannot draw conclusions merely from ratings on a written questionnaire to indicate levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, particularly if items are ignored. In follow-up interviews, explanations can be given and a verbal understanding of each rating obtained, as in the case with the 35 participants. Most registered their preference for such verbal exchanges over the written numerical rating, and when a cooperating participant failed to rate an item which was part of a question, the perfectly valid reason for the failure was immediately explained.
That one obtains additional different replies to the survey questions was not borne out with the telephone follow-up interviews in this case. Therefore, one might challenge the value of spending a great deal of effort to persuade non-respondents to reply (except where it is needed to acquire a minimally acceptable return rate or to demonstrate that a biased lack of response by a subgroup of the sample had been remedied). However, a third useful benefit from this study may be that it demonstrates that additional verbal data can be obtained by telephone interviews, and these suggestions will allow changes to be made to a weak questionnaire should the survey be repeated in the future. The verbal clarifications about ratings and scoring which proved necessary should assist designers to make alterations to this questionnaire, and the discussions about the programme should enable the programme/curriculum designers to improve its services and simplify its administration.
This thesis contributed in several different ways to the topic of non-response and non-respondents in survey research, particularly by examining how non-respondents are handled by researchers in the academic world and those in the commercial world of practical market research. Differences and similarities between the two types of researchers became evident during the study. In this final chapter, conclusions are drawn from the findings and analysis regarding the two interests of this thesis: common market research practices and follow-ups of non-respondents. The conclusions are interrelated with the literature and findings from all phases of the research. From the conclusions, recommendations are made of alterations which should be made to the survey under study -- if it were ever replicated -- and suggestions are made of future studies which would usefully supplement and complement research -- based on knowledge about survey non-response and non-respondents.

Differences and Similarities Between Academic and Commercial Survey Research

That there would be differences and similarities between survey research conducted by academic and by commercial research firms was almost axiomatic. That the academic research methods and research reporting literature on surveys and surveying stemmed entirely from the
experiences of professors, their research assistants and their graduate students is all too apparent — that, indeed, was the impetus for this thesis. This research could be considered representative of both market, commercial research (market researchers were interviewed on the phone and business non-respondents were questioned in telephone interviews) and yet academic in that it had its origin in the curiosity of a graduate student, had no paramount client interest which would restrict inquiry or skew its priorities, and was seeking to discover general principles and findings which might have broad application and make a contribution to the research literature. To some extent this thesis was a 'bridging' effort to the vast literature on survey methods and non-response, which is found in textbooks and journals read mostly by academics, and the experiential, intuitive knowledge of professional market researchers and executives in the business world which seldom is put into print. One must not discount, and should not disregard, the shrewd understanding and entrepreneurship displayed in commercial life.

The easily apparent differences between the academic and commercial survey research may be found in three related areas: 1) incentive to complete and return (and have completed and returned) the questionnaire, particularly the value of feedback as an incentive as well as other useful incentives; 2) the importance of sponsorship; and 3) ethical concerns regarding non-respondents. There are two parties to survey research: the questioner and the questioned. When the questioner is an academic the topic is likely to have limited general interest but considerable interest for a small population. It may, indeed, be intelligible only to academics
of a similar background and be concerned with esoteric information or controversies of importance only to fellow members of the 'guild'. So, frequently (one might almost say generally) the questioner and the questioned are both interested in 'the findings' of the research. Promiseing feedback of the survey results, provided individually to respondents in some abbreviated pre-publication form, therefore, is often a very effective inducement to cooperation. Even where the promise of feedback is unrealistic or the feedback is cursory, the knowledge that the research will probably be reported in a professional journal, which all are likely to read, is itself an incentive to participate. The academic literature recognizes the importance of feedback but academic studies note that other incentives are seldom successful. For the commercial researcher the picture is more complex. The academic usually speaks for himself/herself (or for a recognized school of thought, a group of academics within the discipline or academe itself). The academic questioner, therefore, has (almost) complete control over the formulation of the question and (almost) complete assurance that the questioner, however critical, will find the question intelligible, important and answerable and will agree that giving the question serious consideration is a worthwhile use of time. None of these conditions is assured for the commercial market researcher. The research designer is a proxy for the client who desires information (e.g., about a product, about a service, about a competitor, about a possible development in public policy such as a government regulation which will adversely affect the business). The designer lacks the freedom of the academic. The designer is not following interest, curiosity or guild controversy. S/he has to ask questions which are relevant but in a
form acceptable to the real questioner. Feedback is not given to the questioned but to the questioner.

The respondent is very different from the respondent of the academic. S(he) frequently is asked about a product or service s(he) knows little about, is asked to make comparisons among nearly identical products none of which s(he) uses, is asked opinions about public issues which are the stuff of controversy (even embarrassment) s(he) would prefer to avoid. Offering feedback through unpublished information about the research findings is seldom of interest (unless the questioner is a Nader researcher asking about some detail of automobile safety). Such modest concrete incentives as are feasible for general distribution (samples, a small inexpensive artifact, a few dollars) are not enough compensation for the time involved. Recently inventive entrepreneurial market researchers have offered the chance (with high odds) of entering a lottery for a really large reward. For the most part incentives to respond to mailed survey research and with non-respondents have not been successful. The findings of phase two of the research showed that incentives are not necessarily the answer. Incentives to cooperate were not offered to the non-respondents in this study and none of the 50 participants expected them or suggested they be given. They were willing to participate in the common set of questions asked because they were representing their particular firm and explaining its actions.

Is it a question of hitting upon the right incentive? Clearly, for academics confidential information about research findings of common interest is the most effective persuasion which can be used. Perhaps market researchers have just not found the right incentive for the general
public of an affluent society. Food is a powerful incentive to a starving man but unlikely to persuade an obese person who is on a slimming diet to cooperate with one's request. In the second part of the participant interview, 30 percent of the interviewees refused further participation. No incentive would have encouraged them to participate; only one asked how the findings would be used and even he felt that feedback of the results given to the contact person or the firm was useless. The non-cooperating participants felt that their cooperation would not make any difference in how the government viewed the programme or possible changes to it. Their non-response was a statement, a vote of non-confidence. Some of the cooperating participants agreed to the second part of the interview to bring forward their criticisms and suggestions and bring about changes in the programme, ensure an increase in the financial assistance for training, and provide services which would better meet the needs of the small businesses. This was an incentive the doctoral student/researcher was powerless to make.

The market researchers interviewed in the first phase of this study indicated that they do sometimes use incentives, token monetary ones, to gain support for participation in the research, but they are not really successful. Commercial research does not reject the incentive factor in principle and if it is expensive, it is just another cost factor to be considered. Small monetary rewards certainly would not have encouraged the non-cooperating participants; they wanted programme changes and substantial money from government for training at their firms.

The reports of academic survey research noted that sponsorship by government or by some public body (authority) was a key component in ensuring participation in their projects.
The findings of this research, on the contrary, mistrusted government sponsorship, even while (inconsistently) expecting government financial support. They were "double refusers" because they rejected completion of the written questionnaire and replying to some of its questions orally.

The ethical review process is much more rigorous for the academic researcher than the common procedures used in market research. All components of academic research are reviewed for ethical implications by a review committee established by the university, and the research must meet with overall approval prior to the initiation of data collection. As mentioned previously, market research projects are driven by the needs of the proprietors; they must meet the requirements of those proprietors (assuming they are reasonable and fall within the budget allocation established jointly with the market research firm). Business ethics and what is regarded as "unethical business practice are much 'looser' than those applied by peers in academic settings.

Since the university has high prestige in our society, the participant in a survey research project must be seen as having rights that need to be protected. While much university-based research produces results that are beneficial to the larger society, this does not justify university personnel using its authority in a cavalier manner to induce a potential non-respondent to cooperate. Indeed, because the potential for abuse rests, to some extent, on the institution's reputation for 'authoritative knowledge', it is all the more essential that its members respect the individual rights of potential respondents and avoid even the appearance of practices which could be interpreted as interference with informed consent. Therefore, while the academic researcher
can point out the importance of the research being done, care must be taken to ensure that the potential respondent does not feel (s)he is personally jeopardizing the success of the project if (s)he refuses to cooperate.

With respect to following-up respondents or non-respondents with many repeat mail questionnaires and/or telephone calls, a university ethics review committee will be careful to limit them in order to avoid any perception of harassment of the research subject. The base line assumption is that it is the right of the subject to refuse to take part in any research without having to state a reason. All market research firms who participated in this study at some point during the interviews reported that they seldom go after more than once a subject who outright refuses to participate in their study because it wastes time and money and, eventually, has no positive outcome. Calling back those who actually refused only makes them hostile and angry. But no interviewee mentioned the ethics of multiple call-backs or the resulting harassment of subjects.

Clearly, the point made with respect to the university's authority standing behind academic research is also germane to the situation encountered in market research. Their surveys carry only the prestige of the firm, but for large well established ones, this is not negligible. Market researchers still can attempt to obtain response not by impressing the subjects but by "pressing" them to the point where their compliance is obtained through dubious means. This would not be regarded as "unethical" but simply assiduous business practice, provided it was cost effective.
The representatives from the market research firms indicated that with new technology it has become difficult to reach the prospective subjects directly. Often they do need to call back, sometimes up to 12 times, just in order to *speak* to someone about the research rather than leave messages on voice mail systems and answering machines, messages that are seldom returned. Frequent follow-up calls are necessary just to reach the individual and give her/him the opportunity to choose to be interviewed. The budget generally agreed upon with the client rules how many of these follow-up calls will be made to contact and obtain the established sample size, not some conception of ethical behaviour. The question of human rights was not raised in the interviews, the numerous follow-up calls were said to occasionally be necessary merely to establish initial contact with the prospective subjects. The question of undue persuasive pressure to entice subjects to cooperate was not considered.

Other important factors which emerged were not new learning but were reinforced by the research for this thesis: the salience of the topic, the importance of timing, the need for rigorous questionnaire design, and skilled interviewers who can handle rejection. Yet here, too, although there are similar needs in academic and market research surveys, there are also differences -- the needs are different because the determining circumstances differ.

To ensure maximum interest and survey success, the academic researcher tries to match the topic of the study with the interests of a knowledgeable specialized population and usually is free to do so, subject to the degree of his/her skill, knowledge and perceptions. The market researcher tries to do so but generally does not control the necessary elements. A client’s topic
may have little general interest and most of the specialized populations may be unavailable or impossible to approach. Unable to tap the responses of an expert population, the market researcher does the best s(he) can. Seldom is a lucrative contract refused; even the ethical firm which decides it must warn the client about difficulties and possible failures does so in a fashion which will not lose the contract to a competitor.

The effective design of a questionnaire is equally compelling for the academic and the professional commercial research scientist since both are likely to have the same advanced education. But the academic works in a university environment which generally (there are alas, exceptions) encourages collegial discussion and helps to perfect research instruments. In a large market research firm something of the same helpful ethos is also not uncommon, but not possible in small firms and within the industry competition is fierce.

All the above factors of topic importance, timing, questionnaire design and interviewer skills are important both to the academic and commercial researcher. The ability to control and manipulate the interviews for these factors were mentioned by the market researcher/analysts, but it was conceded that difficulties often are intractable. In telephone interviews, interviewees were often irritated, and hence became uncooperative, because of poor training of the interviewer and poor questionnaire design.

Regarding the salience of the topic, only ten percent identified this as the main reason for not completing the questionnaire under study. The topic was of interest and importance to the firms which received the questionnaire. Their contact employees should not have been
"too busy" to complete the questionnaire. But although the topic was important, the non-respondents had no confidence that their participation would have been effective in bringing about changes.

The market researchers ruefully recognized that people cooperate with surveys in which they saw the salience of the topic and which are addressing topics of importance to themselves; respondents become impatient with, or ignore, topics and questions which seem irrelevant. The market researchers agreed that ‘non-response’ itself was an important topic; one in which they had a professional interest. It was pointed out that this attempt to hold focus group sessions on the topic failed, that they collectively were acting as non-respondents on a topic which should have been of absorbing interest. They pleaded that special constraints of commercial life made group participation unwise. But the ten who were interviewed were quite frank in one-to-one discussion, being as informative as their experience permitted. They agreed that non-response and non-respondents are salient topics to their profession, and it is important for them to understand the key variable in eliciting cooperation in interviews and mailed surveys.

In the timing of administering the questionnaire an academic is bound only by his/her knowledge of the receptiveness and work cycles of the target recipients. For the market researcher it is seldom possible to postpone a contract without losing the client to a competitor.

All agreed that rigorous design and testing of questionnaires cannot be stressed too strongly. The plethora of ‘research methods’ literature available reveals how much stress
academics place on these factors. Market researchers also recognize they are crucial to the success or failure of a project. But, again, while both groups of researchers operate within some constraints, the degree of restriction differs. Academic projects seldom have the entire desired budget, but they can frequently offset limited dollar resources by obtaining 'free' labour from graduate students and, even, respondents' organizations (by designing the project as a cooperative effort). And they generally can obtain some hidden subsidy from their institutions in the form of free supplies, computer time, etc. No such subsidy is available to the commercial researcher. All activity must be costed and the project must yield a profit. So many research alternatives are simply not viable.

All the greater necessity, therefore, to 'get it right the first time'. Although the written questionnaire of the survey under study was designed with input from the managers and consultants in the field and was pretested on a sample business population, it proved in fact to be a poor effort: Respondents found the rating request confusing. From one question to the next the scale was reversed. Even on the telephone, the interviewer had to make numerous clarifications before the participants assigned a rate. Although in the telephone conversations the interviewer could recategorize the responses into common groups when discussing the participant's responses with them, the written respondents could not and one must wonder what value can be attached to the resultant ratings. The written questionnaire provides the respondent with no way to explain why an item was left blank.

The difference in the volume of item response experienced in this research illustrated the
advantage of the personal interview over the mailed questionnaire. Even with open-ended questions on the written questionnaire, more open discussion and comment was drawn during the interview conversations -- even on the telephone. As the interviews proceeded, participants became more relaxed in speaking to the interviewer and confident about airing their opinions. Additional information was willingly volunteered. So undoubtedly the interview gained further data from a small number of people which supplemented the larger mass gained by questionnaire. Again this highlights differences between academic-based survey research and the commercial-based counterpart. The academic enjoys several degrees of freedom that his conferee employed in the business world is denied.

One must keep in mind that interviews are also expensive; the chief cost is the salary of the skilled, knowledgeable interviewer. Therefore, it is advisable to keep respondent samples small. This is true whatever the researcher's employment setting. The economical use of interviews therefore is to supplement and complement the information gained by means of the written survey instrument -- not, generally speaking, to repeat it (except for a specific purpose, such as adding a few respondents to plug a hole in the representative character of the respondent group). Adding even a small number of interviews adds costs to a survey which the client may be unwilling to accept. This is especially true if the cost was not provided for in the original contract. If the absolute number of respondents is impressive, even if it represents a small proportion of the total sample mailed-out, there is no disquiet.

Not so in the academic world where other critical academics will scrutinize the return
rate in detail. But to bolster a low rate the academic, at no direct cost, can carry out the necessary interviews himself/herself, or at little cost can have them performed by graduate students. On the other hand, the commercial researcher enjoys a different advantage over the academic conducting a piece of survey research vis-à-vis the interest and nature of the intended research user. The client generally is not a sophisticated researcher but rather a shrewd businessman. S(he) has a practical interest in the outcome of the project being sufficient for the intended purpose. S(he) is not striving for perfection. Not so the academic. S(he) is not uninterested in the actual product of the project (the information, the theory related to initial questions). But even more s(he) is interested in the effect these have on those of her/his guild who read her/his reports and journal articles. S(he) is well aware that this is a critical audience both able and willing (as a routine response) to critique and dissect the research in detail. In fact, frequently the academic colleagues are more interested in the sophistication of the analysis of research findings than the findings themselves. The risk that this involves is not faced by the market researcher.

**Review of the Research Questions of the Thesis**

Based on the original research questions raised at the early stages of this thesis, answers were obtained from the findings which relate to the two phases of the study: interviews with the market researchers and with the non-respondents of the programme evaluation questionnaire. Among the numerous approaches used by market research firms to attempt to increase survey
response rates for clients, the ones identified were all commonly known and conveyed in the literature and include: sponsorship and incentives, as previously mentioned, personalizing the introductory letter and envelope with a name (and position and department for business firms), making the questionnaire look professional for mailed surveys, keeping the questionnaire short and simple, having the interviewer on the telephone sound professional, often further developed through training and experience, and clarifying immediately the purpose of the study (to differentiate legitimate research from sales pitches). The most commonly used strategy for increasing response rates was to follow-up the non-respondents with telephone calls. However, the number of follow-up calls that could be made depended a great deal on the money available from the clients and the time established by the firm for completion of the study, as the follow-up calls increased the time and costs expended on the overall project. There were no approaches to enhancing respondent rates other than those previously studied at length in the literature.

What actually constituted an acceptable response rate varied a great deal from firm to firm. This rate depended upon the type of study being done and the expectations of the clients in achieving the required results based on whatever sample size was agreed upon. When quota sampling is established initially, once the quota numbers are met either through list-assisted or random-digit dialling methods there is no further need to be concerned with non-response rates. However, the majority of the market researcher/analysts still agreed that generally an acceptable questionnaire response rate would be at least 50 percent of the determined sample population.

The group participating in the second phase of the research dealing with non-respondents
who had not completed an evaluation survey of a government-sponsored training consulting service conveyed a number of reasons why they had not returned the initial survey. Generally, their reasons matched those previously identified in the literature on reasons for non-response, although many had more than one reason making it difficult to conclude the "main" reason to be their only one. They certainly were not all negative or resentful about the programme itself that resulted in their failure to respond. However, there were almost 25 percent who were indeed critical of the programme and the questionnaire mailed out to evaluate the programme; those in particular felt it would be "a waste of time" to complete the questionnaire. Others claimed they were "just too busy" or "never used the services" or "used so few services" that they just could not evaluate them. Interestingly enough, there was almost 25 percent that indicated that they never complete questionnaires anyway or they only complete them if they are required to do so by a superior in the workplace or in the industry. Obviously, the requirement to complete this evaluation survey of the programme had not been made.

It should be noted here that the responses of these non-respondents did not differ from those of the original respondents. In fact, the responses of the non-respondents were similar to the respondents on all questions of the questionnaire. However, the group that was critical of the programme as a whole refused to cooperate on the second aspect of the interview, which dealt with a selected group of questions taken directly from the original evaluation questionnaire. They could be referred to as "double refusers", in that they stuck to their conviction that their input on the questionnaire, whether it be written or verbal, would make no difference in
changing the programme. Many of those already found that the programme itself had too much paperwork so they did not want to augment the problem by completing again yet another form for the government; the others thought that the mandate of the programme was not established to meet the needs of their small business.

A comparison of the characteristics of the non-respondents to the respondents, and a comparison of the groups of cooperative participants with those who refused to cooperate on the second part of the telephone interviews revealed no significant statistical differences among any of these groups. These findings are indeed in accordance with the related literature on non-respondents in survey research, where seldom were there differences between the respondent and non-respondent groups either in their types of responses to specific questions or in the demographic characteristics used to identify the subjects.

The findings and conclusions of this entire thesis have reinforced the importance of current research practices stressed often in the literature which include: the ‘total design’ research method, particularly on the design and testing of the instruments and the follow-up of non-respondents. The results of the study also remind current researchers of the advantages of the interview method over the mailed questionnaire, even for use during the follow-up approaches established in the research. This too has been identified many times in the literature on research methods used in survey research.
Replication of the Research

When a substantial research project has been completed, particularly if it had yielded interesting information, worthy in itself but not quite satisfactorily answering all the research questions, the usual researcher’s reaction is to suggest replicating the project. This is an orthodox suggestion. Replication to confirm research evidence in order to safely draw general principles is the basis of scientific method. But in the social sciences a research activity is seldom entirely replicated.

So one of the questions to be considered at the end of the research for this thesis is: should it be replicated? If so, what should be replicated? And what investigations should be made so that partial replication rather than duplication should occur? Most important is the question: What should be replicated, the original (satisfaction) evaluation survey of the thesis or the thesis survey which tried to find out why it was a failure and remedy its obvious weaknesses? In other words, is there value in pursuing further the kind of research undertaken for this thesis? Non-response is a serious problem for survey research and survey research is a pervasive design in the social sciences as well as the basis for a thriving industry. Clearly it is of value to study one of its major methodological problems. Having decided that, the next question is: Is the design used in this thesis a good investigative one and likely to lead to new knowledge and understanding of this problem? Was it wise to base the research on the re-examination of a failed survey? The conclusion is that one learns much from failure -- the failures of others as well as one’s own. Science itself progresses through challenges to and the
concomitant abandoning of theories; this can in itself justify replication of research efforts. Therefore, if one were to replicate the thesis research using another similar failed survey, a mailed questionnaire study with an unduly high non-response rate, what changes should be made?

There was much to be said for the notion of frank discussion in focus groups held with participants who are professional market researchers. How could this be done and still preserve the anonymity of the participants’ employers? Perhaps greater participation is the answer. An open forum on the Internet might be attempted in which contributors’ texts were not identified but interactive written presentations were encouraged.

For phase II of the replicated research, using a different original survey, a random sample of non-respondents might be followed again through telephone interviews with the difference that, this time, a random sample of original respondents would also be interviewed regarding both groups’ likes and dislikes, criticisms and approvals of the questionnaire on the basis of the way it was distributed, its timing and the adequacy of its questions. In the research for this thesis the original respondents to the written questionnaire had no opportunity to voice their criticisms. The fact that they completed and returned the questionnaire does not mean that the respondents held it in unqualified approval. They may have shared many of the irritations and criticisms of the non-respondents who became participants and thereby had the opportunity to present their grievances to an objective third party.

Subsamples of the original populations could be asked to cooperate in a project which
refined and improved the original questionnaire with at least two different revised versions. Each might embody basic changes allowing for alternative responses to items, taking into account some of the information gathered in the telephone interviews and avoiding the large amount of missing data due to item non-response.

The size of the follow-up samples might be larger. This is not feasible for a doctoral thesis wherein the student undertakes all the interviews herself but, providing there is financial support, it could be easily accomplished in a large research project. Having many interviewers has the disadvantage of inter-person differences, particularly in the conduct of relatively unstructured discussions, but this can be partly offset by training the interviewers beforehand with (quite commonly used) role playing/taped rehearsal sessions. In larger follow-up samples data analysis would be simplified permitting the use of more sophisticated statistical tests. The effect of incentives might also be studied by offering inducements not to the contact person but to their firms and approaching first the CEO or President of the business before contacting the operating personnel (in the thesis case, Human Resources employees of the company).

Further Research

Apart from any attempts to replicate and/or modify the kind of research undertaken for this thesis, the review of the survey research literature revealed many areas which have been neglected: There is no body of research reports/journal articles discussing the factors involved in shaping public images of market research in our society so academic research is needed to
explore this. Application of various theoretical frameworks to commercial survey research and new technology in data collection also need to be further examined. The effects of missing data and non-response bias on the findings of a survey should be studied by running the same study in different geographical areas and with different specialized populations.

With the size of the survey research industry continually growing, its expansion will mean penetration into the lives of more and more people, doubtless to the point where very few will be untouched by its practices. This makes it incumbent upon the industry to create a positive public image which can in part be done through the production of honest, unbiased information. To this end, the academic practice of disclosure and transparency of reporting non-response must become the norm. Market research associations should take as their ethical imperative the position that their members perform with the same rigour as the academic who is kept honest by the firm knowledge that each of his/her research publications will be dissected and argued over by groups of knowledgeable peers. That being so, probably the most urgently needed further research should involve investigation into the ethics of market research work and businesses. This would be difficult to undertake by outsiders. It is a responsibility for the industry itself.

But there are many research inquiries which would benefit from greater academic interest. For example, studies on new technology and its impact on data collection in survey research are timely. More research is needed on the effects of missing item data in creating general bias in an entire study (not all questions are of equal value for the purpose of an
inquiry). More statistical techniques for modifying the impact of non-response need to be developed. Statistical procedures to estimate and provide the missing data need to be assessed for effectiveness and more widely publicized and used. Systematic study of effective ways of training interviewers needs to be encouraged. This research would examine pedagogical principles in an effort to determine their applicability in order to meet the performance expectations of the industry. This thesis demonstrates that doctoral research can be and should be conducted on many of these topics.
APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTION (AND CONSENT) USED TO TELEPHONE MARKET RESEARCHERS FOR PHASE I OF THE THESIS RESEARCH

With Receptionist of Market Research Firm

Hello. My name is Katie Welnetz. I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. My doctoral dissertation research is on non-response and non-respondents in survey research. Would you please transfer this call to one of your analysts or researchers who may be interested in this topic so that I could discuss it with him or her? (Alternative, if not possible: Would you then please take my request forward and ask a representative of your firm to call me back so I can explain what I want?)

With Analyst/Researcher of Market Research Firm

Hello. I’m Katie Welnetz, a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. My doctoral dissertation research is on non-response and non-respondents in survey research.

One part of my thesis research is to contact a number of representatives from market research companies regarding strategies used to achieve high response rates. At first I thought I’d do this through focus groups, but it has been difficult to arrange attendance at the groups so now I intend to do a telephone survey with market researchers on this same topic. Would you participate in this study?

I assure you that neither your name nor that of your company will be mentioned in the thesis. Complete confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed. This research project has been approved by the OISE Ethics Committee, acting for the University of Toronto. Your participation is voluntary; you may withdraw from the study at any time. The data will be analyzed by group/cohort analysis, so that no individual and no firm can be identified.

Will you participate in a telephone interview now? (If not, when would be a good time to call you back?) (If refusal, but doesn’t seem decided, discuss how important non-response is in market survey work and that most study of non-response covers academic research not market researchers.)
APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MARKET RESEARCHERS
(PHASE I OF THE THESIS RESEARCH)

Introduction: My questions are broad ones and I’ll be noting your answers by my own amateur shorthand. I’m seeking some factual information, but after that if you’d like to add comments, examples or opinions feel free to discuss cut-and-dried interviews. Here’s the first question:

1. What approaches, strategies or methods do you use to try to ensure a high response rate to mail surveys? Reply followed with — How about personal interviews, telephone surveys, others?

2. What does your firm consider an acceptable response rate for a survey?

If laconic reply, follow with — How about sample size. Do you have a different rate for large and small surveys? Special populations? Special topics? Different areas of the province or country?

3. What barriers/constraints interfere with implementing some of these methods?

   a) lack of time  
   b) lack of money  
   c) other

Ask for examples.

If little information given, follow with — How about . . . . ? (cite examples given by earlier respondents).

.../continued
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW OF MARKET RESEARCHERS (CONTINUED)

4. Have you personally or your firm done any studies for clients specifically about non-respondents to some of your surveys? If so, can you tell me about them? For example, what kind of study(studies) was(were) it(they)? Are you able to share the results with me? Could you send me a copy of the study report suitably censored? If not, can you at least describe what was done and why, and what was the main finding?

5. Would you like to share with me any concerns or comments that you’d like to make about non-respondents? I’d be very interested to hear your views based on your own experience.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. I really appreciate your cooperation.
APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT USED FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH THE NON-RESPONDENTS FOR PHASE II OF THE THESIS RESEARCH

Hello. I’m Katie Welnetz, the Manager of the Ontario Skills Development Office at George Brown College. I am also a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto and my dissertation is about non-response and non-respondents in research surveys. I would like you to be a participant because you and your business are part of a special sample.

A few months ago you should have received a survey from my office, the Ontario Skills Development Office at George Brown. Our records show that the survey sent to you was not returned. For my thesis I want to learn more about those who did not respond to the survey and why they decided not to. If it’s possible, I’d like to ask you several questions right now. This should only take about 10-15 minutes of your time. Please cooperate. It would really assist my research if you would agree to be interviewed now on the telephone. But if this is not a convenient time, I’ll call you back at whatever date and time you suggest.

This doctoral thesis research has been approved by the university ethics committee. I assure you that all information you provide will be kept confidential. At no time will you or your company be named in the thesis. The data analysis will concentrate on cohorts and groups, not individuals. I will anonymously report all the information I gather in the thesis, which will be presented at my final examination.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study or you wish to decline to answer any of my questions, just let me know.

Now - will you agree to be interviewed and answer some questions right now?
APPENDIX D

COMMON QUESTIONS FOR THE NON-RESPONDENTS
(RESEARCH PHASE II)

1. Do you receive quite a few questionnaires at work?  yes ___ no ___ don’t know ___

   If yes, approximately how many would you estimate that you receive per
   week/month/year? __________________________

2. Do you usually complete and return survey questionnaires that you receive?

   Always ___ Usually ___ Occasionally ___ Seldom ___ Never ___

3. Of course, I am interested particularly in our survey which I mentioned to you earlier.

   Did you receive the questionnaire sent to you from the Ontario Skills Development Office
   in __________(month/year)? yes ___ no ___ don’t know/remember___

   It wasn’t returned. Did you know that? yes ___ no ___ (If yes, …)

4. Why didn’t you return it? I have a list of common reasons which I’ll read out slowly. Then
   I’ll go back over them again. Pick out the one which is your reason. If none applies there
   is an ‘other’ category. Just tell me why the questionnaire was not returned.

   a) directed to a different person ___
   b) never used services/used very few services ___
   c) no time to complete the survey/too busy ___
   d) content not relevant/interesting to business ___
   e) waste of time/no benefits for completing it ___
   f) other ______________________________
COMMON QUESTIONS FOR THE NON-RESPONDENTS (CONTINUED)

5. What was your initial reaction to our questionnaire? Favourable__ Unfavourable__

Comments: ________________________________________________________________

6. Did you have any concerns? Were you put off by the method used (mail) or the design of
the questionnaire? Yes__ No__ Don’t Know __

If yes, please explain. ______________________________________________________

7. What suggestions do you have about ways of encouraging more people to respond to our
questionnaires in the future? Really, none__

Comments/suggestions: ____________________________________________________
APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS TO THE NON-RESPONDENTS REGARDING THE SATISFACTION SURVEY (PHASE II OF THE THESIS RESEARCH)

Now I would like to ask you a few questions directly off the old written questionnaire to see if your responses will be the same or different from the other study participants who returned our original questionnaire. These may seem quite structured but I am sure you can appreciate that I cannot change the wording from that on the original survey.

1. How satisfied are you with the following types of services you received from the OSDO? (ranging from 1 to 4 with 1 being very dissatisfied and with 4 being very satisfied)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a) human resource services (job descriptions, performance evaluations, etc. ____

b) needs analysis _____

c) training plan development _____

d) identifying funds for training _____

e) organizational needs analysis _____

f) identifying trainers and training programs _____

g) cost benefit analysis _____

h) training evaluation _____

i) assisting with the process of involving workers in planning for training _____

j) providing employment equity and pay equity information _____

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the OSDO consulting services and the way the consultant delivered the services? (ranging from 1 to 4, with 1 being strongly agree and 4 being strongly disagree)

a) The OSDO consultant provided service in a timely, responsive and respectful manner. ____

b) The OSDO consultant was qualified to provide you with advice on human resource matters; he/she had the necessary skills and knowledge. ____

c) The OSDO consultant helped you to identify human resource development and training needs. ____

d) The OSDO consultant gave you an acceptable action plan for dealing with your organization’s training needs. ____ .../continued
QUESTIONS REGARDING SATISFACTION (CONTINUED)

e) If the consultant could not help you, he/she referred you promptly to other sources of information and support. _____

f) The advice of the OSDO consultant helped you improve your workplace human resource planning practices. _____

g) The time you spent working with the OSDO consultant was time well spent. _____

3. Was the written agreement and letter of registration with the OSDO useful to define and guide the consultation service? (using a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being not at all to 4 being very useful and 9 representing no written agreement)

4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the consulting service? (using a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being very dissatisfied to 4 being very satisfied)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. If you were to place a financial value on the OSDO consulting service, what would be a fair price to pay for the services?

   Nothing...............1
   Up to $25/hr.........2
   $26 - $50/hr.........3
   $51 - $75/hr.........4
   $76 - $100/hr........5
   $100+/hr...........6

6. Would you recommend the OSDO consulting services to other organizations?
   Yes..................1 No...............2 Not sure........3

7. Do you have any other comments about the OSDO consulting service that would help us to improve our services?

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and for answering all my questions. I really appreciate your cooperation.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


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