Public Service User Satisfaction Surveys: challenges when testing in immigrant populations

Elisabeth Gulløy
Statistics Norway
QUEST workshop, May 2009, Bergen
User satisfaction surveys: background

• User orientation in public service
  – Growing demand for documentation
  – Government strategy to monitor public sector success rate
  – Private survey agencies do user surveys on commission

• 2009
  – Annual national public sector user satisfaction survey
    ◆ Measure both general impression and specific user experience
  – Statistics Norway: project commissioned by immigration authorities
    ◆ To secure coverage and validity for immigrant population
    ◆ Development of guidelines for user surveys covering immigrant populations
Public Service User Satisfaction Surveys

- **Analytical purpose**
  - To measure service users’ experience and satisfaction

- **Practical purpose**
  - Management information
  - Often linked to strategic work
  - Instant need for data
User satisfaction survey questionnaires

- More or less standardised question batteries
- Objective: to measure satisfaction and importance
  - i.e. non-observable items: feelings and impressions, attitudes
- Level of analysis
  - Very general and very specific user satisfaction
- Common dimensions:
  - Use, availability, (quality of) information, run-through time, quality of advice/subject matter service, quality of frontline/desk service
  - Do ordinary users have the competence to evaluate all aspects of quality in a given service?
  - Difficult concepts with diffuse and varied meanings ("quality")
- Local government adaptations – various methods in use
Cross-cultural testing and development

- Relatively new issue in Statistics Norway
- Practical data collection issues: translation of questionnaires, training of multilingual interviewers, non-response follow up on minorities
- Increased attention towards language and understanding, cultural framework for communication
- Meaning of concepts and institutions in different cultures: ex. civil servant, public service, confidence, statistical agency
- Expectations and power structures differ: tendency to show negative response differ
- The meaning and use of response scales differ
What do we know of public service user satisfaction for immigrants in Norway?

• User satisfaction vary strongly between different minority groups

• Some minority groups are less satisfied with public services than the majority population (after controlling for socioeconomic status and place of living)

• Confidence in education system and health system is relatively high compared to majority group

• Self reported discrimination from civil servant less frequent (vary between 10 and 20 percent)

• Young immigrants less confidence in the police
Method for cognitive interviews

• Testing draft user satisfaction questionnaire from national government surveys
• Different formats of questions on experiences and evaluation of contact with national employment and welfare office (NAV)
• Cognitive interviews with immigrants
  Sample:
  – five years + in Norway
  – recently in contact with NAV
• Concept mapping
• Think-aloud sessions
• Follow-up questions
Example question 1

• To what extent do the quality of NAV* fulfill your expectations?

Response scale: 7-points (from -3 to +3) and DK

*NAV: national employment and welfare office

Source: Draft Government User Satisfaction Survey

Example question 2

(directly translated from Norwegian)

• What is your impression (”how good or bad impression”) of NAV when it comes to the following…:
  – Total impressions
  – Societal responsibility
  – Effectivity and financial management
  – Openness and information
  – Competence and professional knowhow

Response scale: five points (1 – 5) with specified etiquettes + ”impossible to answer”

Source: Synovate MMI’s impression survey
Results from cognitive testing

• Problems with the cognitive tasks
  – Q2 immediately viewed as "easier" (because of less words, more direct question?). Then problems arise: "what do you want me to do here?"

• Interpretation of questions – different from test group

• Meaning of scales: scale is seen as a rating of different objects or units
  – Better to avoid negative numbers

• Social meaning of response process
  – "what is the effect of this survey on my future relationship with NAV"?
Concept meanings in Q2

– Most clear: ”societal responsibility”, but depends on point of departure (origin culture)
– Unclear: ”financial management”. Understood both as assistance to achieve private financial management and as financial support
– ”Professional knowhow”: discussions between colleagues in a public office is seen as a weakness
– ”Openness”: understood both as a feeling of being welcome, and to give correct type of information. Not understood as ”availability”…
– Blurred difference between ”competence” and ”professional knowhow”
Implications for development of guidelines for user survey questionnaires

• Established question batteries from user satisfaction surveys are often too general
  – makes cognitive task very difficult

• Important quality dimension for immigrant respondents:
  – Feeling of being welcome, met with respect, seen as an individual
  – How can we measure this?

• Concept mapping important
  – Examples: civil servants, public sector, public service, quality

• Understanding social setting important
  – negative response is problematic