Faculty, survey nonresponse, and organizational citizenship behavior: A population profiling study

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Findings

1. In this analytic sample, 27% (n=36) of faculty were nonrespondents. Among these, passive nonrespondents outnumbered active nonrespondents by 3 to 1. Chi square tests yielded no differences of statistical significance by gender, rank or tenure status.

2. Participants’ intentions to complete a survey correlated (.36, p<.001) with their past response behaviors. All four OCB constructs correlated significantly (p<.001) with survey response intentions. A bivariate linear regression using the four OCB subscales found civic virtue to be the only significant predictor (β =.41, p<.001) of survey response intentions.

3. With a strong observed power even in the face of small numbers of nonrespondents, a MANOVA (effective in achieving a statistically significant effect on a highly correlated group of independent variables) found:
   (a) compared to respondents, active nonrespondents rate themselves lower on conscientious behaviors by 1.03 SD (p<.05) and on civic virtue behaviors by 1.27 SD (p<.01); 
   (b) compared to passive nonrespondents, active nonrespondents reported lower civic virtue behaviors by .87 SD at a level of only marginal significance (p<.10); and 
   (c) passive nonrespondents and respondents showed no substantive differences on any of the four OCB subscales in the analytic sample.

Key literature


Faculty survey nonrespondents differ from respondents; approximately 1 in 4 nonrespondents differs dramatically. The type of professor who attends college meetings, reads university-wide email, and otherwise keeps up with campus news, is probably overrepresented in broad institutional surveys. So, as response rates decline, nonresponse bias is likely to increase in surveys about civic virtue behaviors—the kind of engagement often idealized as the path and marrow of the faculty attribute.

Practitioners take note: nonresponse from faculty who disengage also from other forms of service may result in a restriction of range—and a tendency-to-the-positive effect—on estimates of faculty efforts in institutional service. Survey findings may also overestimate the appetite of faculty to participate in institutional change efforts. Conversely, low response rates may be interpreted as a diagnostic indicator of a faculty disengaged.

Researchers take note: Supplementing a survey sample with still more high-OCB individuals (i.e., serial survey respondents), though it will increase response rates among subclasses, will also introduce greater nonresponse error. Therefore, studies that exaggerate the participation of faculty already inclined to be respondents will only aggravate the restriction-of-range effect that bedevils survey research.

Acknowledgements
This study would not have been possible without: Laura Perna, Matthew Hartley, Ginger O’Neill, Steven Rogelberg, Joan Lordan, Beverly Davenport-Sypher, the faculty who participated in this research, the administrators who love them, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Conclusions

In population profiling, each subject’s prior survey response status (respondent, nonrespondent) is combined with his/her expressed survey participation intent (“I would,” “I would not”), collected in a captive setting. The resulting “response profile” has three categories: respondent, passive nonrespondent, active nonrespondent. Additional data—here, a 19-item, four-factor OCB inventory—are gathered at nonrespondent, active nonrespondent. Additional data—here, a 19-item, four-factor OCB inventory—are gathered at the point of capture.

In this study, two large, public research universities, each of which realized an approximately 50% response rate on the COACHE surveys, granted me access to administer the profiling survey during several routine, on-campus meetings of faculty. I used chi square, correlations, OLS regression, and one-way MANOVA, among other techniques, to analyze the results.

Method: How do you study nonrespondents?

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Theory: What are organizational citizenship behaviors?

Derived from Blau’s (1964) social exchange theory, OCBs are discretionary work performance. Taking a faculty survey is a manifestation of OCBs: research in organizational science suggests a relationship between survey-taking and four OCB subscales:

- **Conscientiousness**: Going beyond minimally required levels of attendance, punctuality, conserving resources, and other matters of internal university maintenance
- **Civic virtue**: Responsible, constructive involvement in the political process of the university, including attending meetings, keeping abreast of larger issues at the institution
- **Altruism**: Behavior that has the effect of helping a specific other person with an institutionally relevant task/problem
- **Courtesy**: Voluntarily taking steps to prevent the creation of problems for coworkers

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**Further information**

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