

An Inquiry into the Efficacy of a Short Training for Interviewers

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Context of research

- Not many papers published on the topic of interviewer training besides recent publications around Groves and McGonagle (2001)
- Almost nothing on telephone survey interviewers.
- Rarely in the context of social surveys of the general population
- Rarely in the context of private pollsters
- Rarely in the context of newly hired interviewers

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Context

- Drill and practice types of training are the norm; have not proven to be very efficient i.e. much effort and time, not much impact and if so, hardly attributable to training
- Measure of performance may not be appropriate : does not take into account refusal conversion and completed interviews from previous appointments; biased by average length of interview and not comparable across studies

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Our view

- Telephone surveys require the ability to improvise very rapidly. But, you can hardly teach or practice how to improvise, i.e. “Be spontaneous!”
- Training should focus on cognitive aspects, improving interviewers’ understanding of their role. This will help them find their own solutions, tailor to themselves.
- If training is pleasant for the interviewer, it will be more efficient.
- In social surveys, meaningfulness of the task can be used in the training process

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The setting

- Canadian Addiction Survey of 2004 conducted by a private pollster;
 - ♦ 14,000 interviews, mostly in English, average length: 24.6 minutes
 - ♦ response rate has to be high (47% reached);
- 79 interviewers,
 - ♦ 72 who worked 7 days minimum;
 - ♦ 41 new to the firm,
 - ♦ 14 new to the job itself;
 - ♦ most have French as their mother tongue.
- 2436 interviewer-days,
 - ♦ 109 days in the field,
 - ♦ a maximum of 65 days of work per interviewer

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The training itself

- Low performers are identified using group-based trajectory analysis two weeks before training. Low performers and newly hired interviewers are selected for training.
- **Trained group** : Selected interviewers scheduled to work on training day (n=18);
- **Control group**: Selected interviewers not scheduled to work on training day (N=21).
- **High performers**: N=42.

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The training itself

- One-hour sessions divided in *two parts*, repeated 3 times on one afternoon; 5-7 selected interviewers per session
- a) what is a sample, how is a sample selected, what is the possible impact of a bad selection, why it is important to convince selected people (**using bags of M&Ms to explain** (Auster, 2000))
- b) why do people refuse, what can you do about it (using Goyder's Silent minority and interviews of high performers).

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The results

- Effect of training may be found in three areas
- 1) attitudes : Trained interviewers may be more confident in their abilities, less stressed. It may have a positive impact on the working climate.
- 2) employee retention : Trained interviewers stay longer.
- 3) performance : The performance of the trained interviewers improves more than that of the untrained interviewers in the control group

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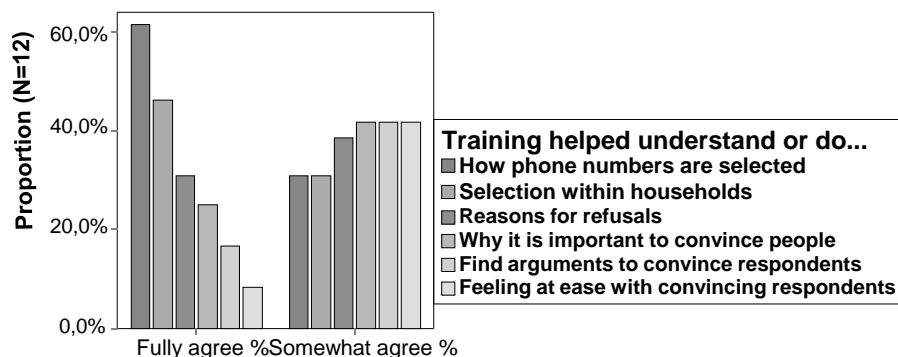
The results (1)

Perception of training - questionnaire two weeks after the training

- Highest agreement (75-95%) : training helped understand how telephone numbers are selected and selection within households
- Medium agreement (65%-74%): training helped understand reasons for refusals and why it is important to convince
- Lower find arguments and feeling at ease with persuasion

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Evaluation of training by trained interviewers



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The results (1)

Attitudes and knowledge acquisition- comparison

- Trained group's attitudes are generally similar to the high performers group.
- Trained interviewers are more likely to say their confidence in their capacity to convince has very much improved since the beginning of the survey
- High performers are more likely to see the interviewer's role as central

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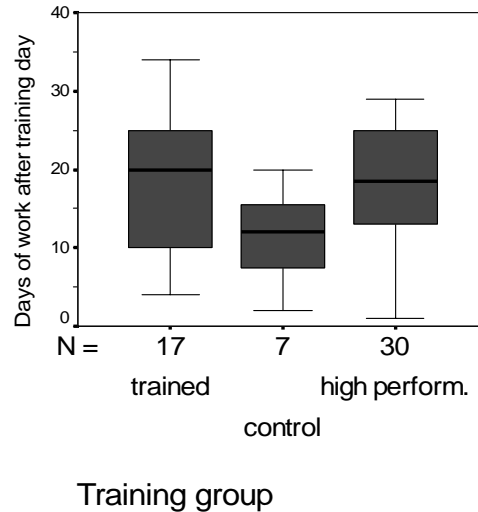
The results (2)

Employee Retention : difference but not significant

- 17 of the 18 trained interviewers stayed after training day for an average of 17 days (4 to 34 days).
- 7 of the 17 untrained control group were still working with the firm on training day. They stayed an average of 11.4 days afterwards (from 2 to 20).
- The 30 high performers who were still working on the project on training day stayed an average of 17 days (1 to 29).

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Days of work after training day according to training group



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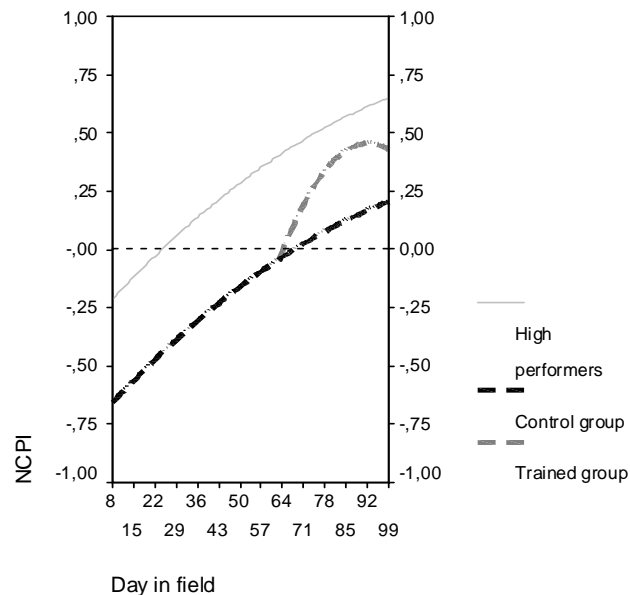
The results (3)

Performance measured by NCP index (NCPi)

- The analysis was conducted using longitudinal multilevel analysis in order to tap the evolution of performance before and after training
- The analysis shows an effect of training: there is a significant change in performance trajectory for trained interviewers after training (see graph).

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Evolution of performance according to training group



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Discussion

- Results show :
 - ♦ Training helped understand better what the interviewer is doing and why; did not help understand how to do the job better
 - ♦ Low impact of training on attitudes: feeling that capacity to convince has very much improved; high performers see interviewer's role as central; not enough interviewers left in control group to compare
 - ♦ Employee retention better (but dif. not significant)
 - ♦ Performance improved (using NCPi)
- Hawthorne effect ? If so, inexpensive one...

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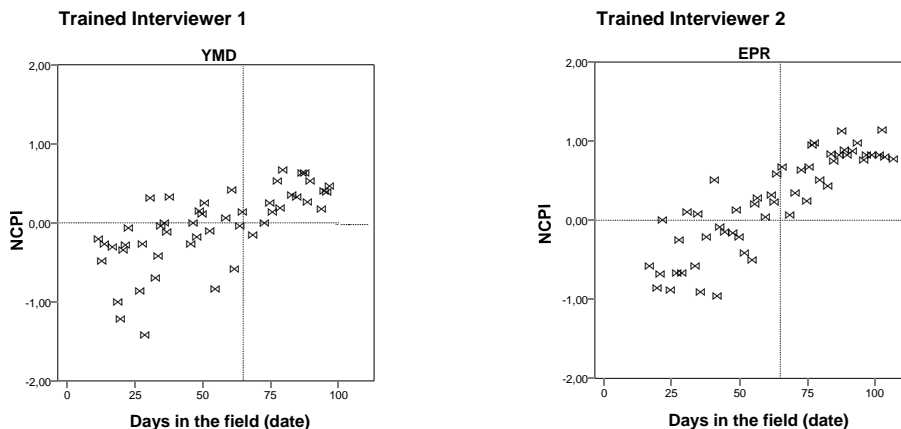
Conclusion

- Good success as a first experiment but suggested improvements in training :
 - ♦ Include concrete explanations of the sampling procedure : selection of phone numbers, RDD, etc.
 - ♦ Include explanation on where all this is going to : percentages, research reports.
 - ♦ The part on refusals has to be more lively, include discussion with interviewers.
 - ♦ If possible two one-hour sessions, one for each topic

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Trajectories of performance by date -trained group

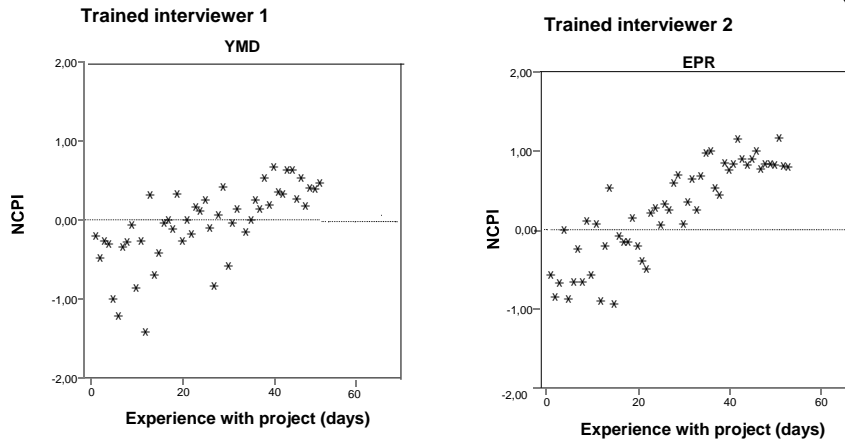
Net Contribution to Performance Index (NCPi)



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Examples of trajectories-trained by interviewer's experience

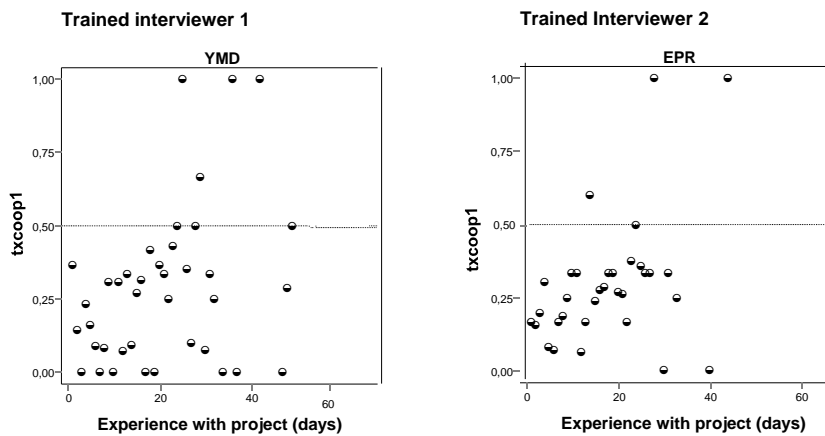
Net Contribution to Performance Index (NCPi)



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Examples of trajectories-trained

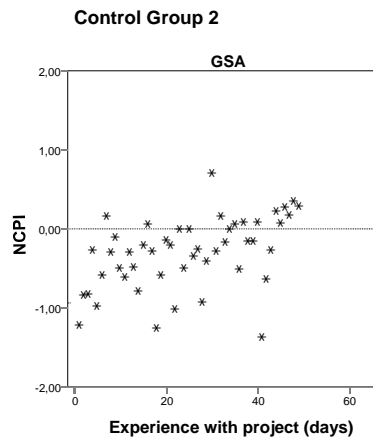
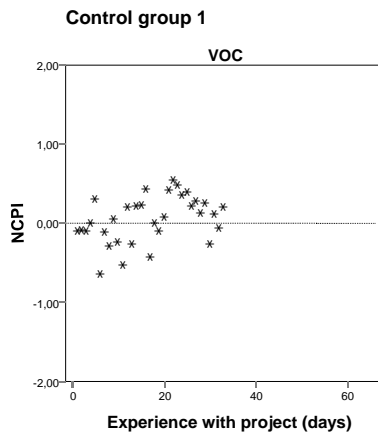
Cooperation rate at first contact



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Examples of trajectories- control group

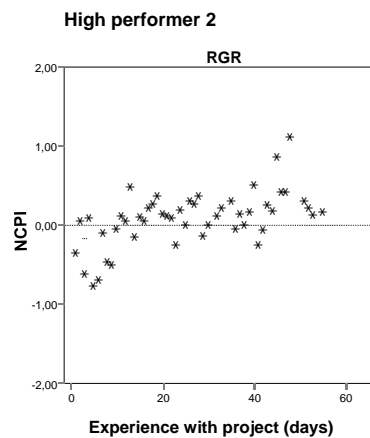
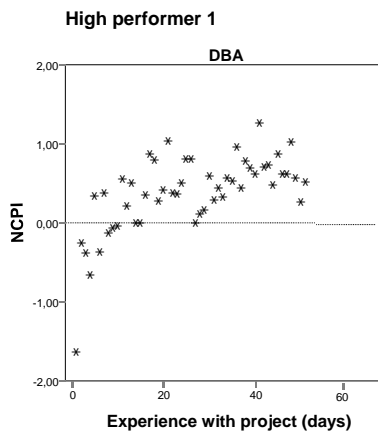
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Examples of trajectories-high performers

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