envelopes elicit the larger response. Assurances of anonymity can also have an impact, whether the survey is organized from within the organization or from the outside. Finally, it makes sense to follow up any non-respondents with a letter and questionnaire.

**REDUCING ITEM NON-RESPONSE**

At the item (question) level, missing data may be far from random and pose a threat of bias to the study. For example, people may refuse to answer questions that are seen as intrusive or sensitive, or they simply may not know the answer. In interviews it is essential that interviewers are skilled in handling non-response to individual questions. This is helped by interviewers being able to remind respondents about the confidentiality of their answers (if they believe that the problem is one of sensitivity). Mangione (1995) argues that, for postal surveys, any problem of non-response should have been picked up at the piloting stage where it should have been clear which questions were giving respondents a problem. This is particularly the case with attitude surveys where subjects do not feel that their views have been represented in the questions or they dislike the way in which potential responses are phrased.
REDUCING INTERVIEWER ERROR

Unskilled, untrained or inexperienced interviewers can also be a source of error due to the way in which they handle the interview. The key is that the respondent should answer against the categories that are presented, and no other. So if these categories are ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly disagree’, or ‘No response’, these are what are marked down and coded on the interview schedule. If such responses are not forthcoming, the interviewer responds with a probe, a question designed to elicit an acceptable response. So, say a respondent answered: ‘Yeh, you’re absolutely right!’ the correct probe is: ‘Would that be …’ [read the categories again]?’ The incorrect probe would be: ‘So, would that be “Strongly agree”, then?’, as this, obviously, would be biasing the response.

ETHICS AND GOOD PRACTICE IN SURVEY DESIGN

As we saw in Chapter 4, two of the essential principles of ethical conduct are informed consent and the protection of confidentiality, and these apply to the use of surveys as to any other research method. This means that respondents must be told about the nature and purposes of the survey, who is sponsoring it and how much of their time will be required in answering it. They should also know about the purposes to which the survey data will be put. Subjects should take part purely voluntarily and not as a result of pressure being imposed on them. In protecting confidentiality, care must be taken to ensure that data sets or the results of the study do not allow individuals to be identified. Sampling frame lists should not be passed on to third parties, including other researchers, without the consent of survey participants. Even if consent is given, care must be taken to remove all identifying features that could link specific data to individuals. When research is being conducted by professional survey researchers, these kinds of principles are usually codified into a set of ethical guidelines or rules. To compare and contrast the ethical codes of a number of professional research bodies, return to On the Web 4.1 in Chapter 4.

SUMMARY

- Surveys are a common research tool because they allow for the collection of large amounts of data from large samples.
- Stages in survey design include the definition of research objectives, questionnaire design, piloting, survey distribution, and coding and analysis.

(Cont’d)
- There are, essentially, two kinds of survey: analytical and descriptive. Descriptive surveys can provide illuminating data which may provide the basis for more detailed analytical investigations. Analytical surveys are capable of finding associations between dependent and independent variables and between the independent variables themselves.

- Survey methods include self-administered questionnaires (postal, delivery and collection, and online) and interviewer-administered questionnaires (structured, focus groups and telephone). Postal and online questionnaires are usually the cheapest to use, but interviewer-administered questionnaires allow interviewers to explore issues of non-response and to follow-up with probes.

- Sources of error include variance and bias. To reduce sources of error, steps must be taken to minimize under-coverage and over-coverage in sampling frames, and to minimize the amount of missing data, including non-response to the survey and to individual items.

- In encouraging high response rates, care must be taken to abide by research ethics in not pressurizing people to participate or to answer questions that they find intrusive.

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**SUMMARY OF WEB LINKS**

http://www.dssresearch.com/toolkit/default.asp

http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/

http://www.nop.org.uk

http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/docs/surveys.htm

http://www.surveymonkey.com/

http://www.surveywriter.com/HomePage.html

http://www.yougov.com

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**FURTHER READING**

analytical and descriptive data which may involve investigations, associations between the independent
questionnaires (postal, interviewer-administered telephone). Postal and o use, but interviewer-
reduce sources of error; coverage and over-he amount of missing to individual items.
be taken to abide by -icipate or to answer

cing Survey Research, shed in 1992, this is a old, including the con-
