

The IAB-Establishment Panel is the most comprehensive establishment survey in Germany with almost 16.000 firms participating every year. It is designed as a longitudinal survey in which the same establishments are contacted every year. One of the challenges of a panel survey is to design a questionnaire that guarantees the continuity on one hand but also provides questions that cover current topics. Therefore the questionnaire is divided into two parts. Most of the questions do hardly change over the years whereas three out of 24 pages are reserved for current topics. To control the quality of these questions cognitive pretests are used. In a two-step approach the respondents are first asked to fill in the questionnaire by themselves and then they are invited to comment on the questions. Our experience shows that this technique is extremely helpful to get an insight into the establishment and to find out about the availability of data and the willingness to provide the information. Cognitive pretests should be conducted for every business survey. We will illustrate their importance with the example of the personnel recruitment process. In Germany the lack of skilled employees is widely discussed. Therefore scientists and politicians would like to find out more about recruitment processes in establishments and why certain potential employees like elder persons or long time unemployed are still not recruited. One of the questions tested was whether or not there were applications of those persons. In the first step the respondents answered in writing without any obvious problems. But when they were asked afterwards many respondents said that the applications were preselected by another person, so they didn't really see all of them. The results give an insight into the importance of cognitive pretest in business surveys and provide a reference to improve questionnaires for panel surveys.