

Step 6

From Analysis to Findings

Here is a document that illustrate how to identify key findings from survey analysis

Student groups in a *TfC* class were asked to choose key findings from a list of survey results that the analysis produced. Bill—the senior researcher—compiled these five recommendations from student suggestions, examined them and then made comments that challenged and supported the students’ work with evidence from the survey results.

After Bill read and explained his comments the students were divided into groups and armed with the original survey results asked to discuss the comments. Specifically, they were asked, which comments they agreed with, which did they disagreed with and, of course, why. They were then asked to make a second attempt to identify the key findings of the research. Specifically, identify the most important finding and support this choice with bullet points. The class then voted on which two of these findings (and arguments) should be the basis for the Analysis and Findings section of our final report.

Student’s first effort at identifying key findings from survey results (in bold) with Bill’s comments

Research question: Why do adults in Rye town lack basic information about the voting process, issues, and candidates?

Bill: Last class you identified some possible findings. As the senior researcher, I looked at these findings and have some comments. You will see I agreed with some of your conclusions and disagreed with others.

- 1. Lack of voting information may not be the problem we had thought it was for voters and non-voters.** (Do we have any other evidence for this statement besides: A) question 6, where the number of responses to the question: why they did not vote was very small and lack of information about the voting process was a distant second (3 responses out of 60) to not registered (6 responses) when non -voters were asked why they did not vote; and B) question 10, where people were asked if they know who their elected officials were and so many people in our sample said they did that we thought they might be lying. Given the fact that the evidence for the theory that they were lying doesn't exist, I don't think we should use this as a major finding.)
- 2. Respondents seem to be embarrassed by their lack of information about issues and candidates.** (This is directly opposite to number 1 above and is based wholly on the belief that people were lying on question 10. The problem here is we don't have any real evidence that people lied on that question. My thought: this sounds right but we can't do much with unless we got additional evidence. Because they filled out the survey anonymously we are not going to get additional information from this sample. I don't think we can use it as a major finding. What do others think?)
- 3. People are passionate about issues—for example, taxes—but there is no evidence they are doing anything about these issues.** (What is our evidence that they aren't doing anything? Some of us mentioned the fact that 10 (out of 60) people or just over 15 % of our sample knew about absentee voting. The students in our class then argued that absentee voting information is something that everyone should know about and

the fact only 15% of our sample seemed to know about suggested people weren't passionate about issues or voting. I am not convinced that the fact that only 15% of our respondents knew about absentee voting is all that significant. If 15% said they didn't know there was an election that would be significant. Because this was the strongest piece of data supporting this possible finding, I don't think this is a major finding. What do you guys think??)

4. **Most people get their information about the voting process from community members (24 responses) and the Internet (24 responses).** (I think this is really important finding, because it may suggest why so many people feel they lack information about the voting process and the issues: information from friends is often not well organized or comprehensive, "I am voting for x, because I like his views on education." The same is true of the Internet—bits and pieces. Is it possible that people are getting information but it's not comprehensive enough for them to feel they are well informed, but may be enough for them to cast a ballot? What do you think? The other issue to think about is related to our next step, policy recommendations: what kinds of information might augment information supplied by family or information from the internet? Can we make these sources of information more comprehensive so people think they are better prepared to vote? Compare this finding to the focus group results.)
5. **In terms of the *kind* of information people most value, people seem to most highly value debates, either via TV (35 responses) or in person (21 responses) or talk to friends (19 responses).** (I think this is a key finding in our study. In class, we thought this showed that voters were not willing to put much effort into getting information about

issues/ process. Are we sure about that? On what basis do we make that claim? What is wrong with focusing on debates and friends and community members? If this is what people are focusing on maybe this again tells us what kinds of information people get. Debates provide information but they force the voter to draw their own conclusions—is this what we mean by being lazy? Community members and friends provide information but much of it is subjective etc., forcing us to filter it. Or if we don't want to put the effort in to filtering it, we might simply do what friends are doing on Election Day. By the way, this also tells us what we might want consider in the next step, when we make our policy recommendations for addressing this challenge.)

An alternative analysis strategy:

In her seminars, Valerie has responded to the time constraints of a school schedule by taking a whole group approach to help students practice working with data analysis. Students looked at frequency charts that described the data they had collected in a survey. Within their research groups, they identified relationships among the data sets that they found interesting. Then, students verbally defended the possible meanings of those relationships in front of the class and a record was kept of the related data and supporting arguments for each possible finding. Next, Valerie shared the entire list of preliminary findings with a community expert who was closely involved with the issue. The expert was invited to class (in person, on his/her cell phone, through Skype or Google Hangouts) where he/she weighed in on which findings he or she thought were most relevant. Students were allowed to ask questions. This process re-connected students with their research question, broadened their understanding of how experience and perspectives play into an analysis, and it reminded them that they are part of a

larger conversation and not working in a vacuum. Finally, the research groups re-convened and looked at their original thoughts on findings and how similar or different their analysis was from the experts.

Bill has led students through the process of identifying findings using the assignment presented here. Valerie has used the alternative method. What is important is that you know your class, work within your own constraints, and give your students as much practice as possible doing the fun and exciting analytic work that is at the creative heart of the research process.

