

The interviewers' memory

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Many researchers seem to endorse the fact that initially refusing individuals should be given some time to cool down before trying to convert them. Also noncontacts should better be re-approached after a while. Such memory effects may also be found from the perspective of the interviewer. Interviewer may temporarily be in a good mood because recent successes or have a rather bad temper because of recent refusals or other negative fieldwork experiences. If such effects exist, it might be helpful for the coaching of interviewers to wait a while after a unsuccessful contact attempt, and to encourage further fieldwork activity following the positive mood resulting from a successful attempt.

This presentation seeks to find some preliminary answers to the following question with regard to the fieldwork success within individual interviewer contact sequences:

1. Do negative experiences such as noncontacts or refusals from previous visits predict lower success probabilities at a subsequent attempt (same interviewer, probably different target (non)respondent).
2. Do positive experiences such as completed interviews or new appointments made from previous visits predict higher success probabilities at a subsequent attempts (same interviewer, probably different target (non)respondent).
3. If such effects exist, are they fading away over time?

Suppose we have paradata, displaying the sequence of contact attempts. These attempts can be sorted by interviewer and by date, as shown in table 1.

The question this paper seeks to address is how previous contact outcomes affect current or subsequent contact attempts within the sequence of events of one interviewer. Therefore consider table 2. Conditional on the previous contact outcome of the interviewer (row), the probabilities of current contact outcomes are provided. For example, If an interviewers' previous contact attempt was a noncontact, the subsequent visit will have

Table 1: Example of contact history paradata

ID Interviewer	ID sample unit	time	mode	outcome
5	2	01-10-2010 08:30	F2F	Noncontact
5	3	01-10-2010 08:50	F2F	Refusal
5	2	02-10-2010 10:50	F2F	Noncontact
5	6	03-10-2010 14:10	Telephone	Appointment
...				
6	1	02-10-2010 10.20	F2F	Noncontact
6	2	05-10-2010 08:30	F2F	Interview
...				

a noncontact probability of 53%. No other previous outcome category has such a high noncontact probability. It should be noted that all diagonal percentages in the table are considerable, suggesting that similar outcomes are very likely to chronologically follow one another within an interviewers' contact history. In this respect, compare the underlined percentages within each of their columns, they almost always seem to be the highest?

There may be a few good reason why this repetition of contact outcomes occurs. First, if an interviewer concentrates all his/her addresses on the same Monday morning, many subsequent attempts may result in a non-contact. Such effects should decrease as the interviewers leaves the field for a while. Second, some interviewers may just provoke more successes than other interviewers (suggesting interviewer variance), or systematically use some nonresponse codes more frequently than others, resulting in an increased similarity of subsequent outcomes. Third, as interviewers are usually assigned to local areas that may have internally homogeneous survey habits (contactability, reluctance), the similarity of subsequent contact outcomes may also be likely to occur. Fourth, the mood of the interviewer, probably affected by the last contact attempt, may have an impact on the subsequent attempts.

If mood-effects or memory-effects are present, they will probably decline in force after a while. In this respect, consider figures 1 and 2. Within the day after having experienced a positive fieldwork event (interview or appointment), the probability of achieving a new interview or appointment at a renewed attempt is 26%, reducing to a level of 11% when the new attempt is more than one month after the last positive experience. The probability of obtaining a refusal increases as the time since the last positive fieldwork experience increases.

Within one day after a negative experience (refusal), the probability of having a new refusal is considerable (20%) and decreases as time goes by. It is however unclear how a previous refusal affects future favourable attempts, as suggested by the rather flat line of blue diamonds in figure 2.

Table 2: Relationship between previous and current interviewers' contact attempt, row percentages, ESS5-BE, 117 interviewer and 10846 contact events

Previous outcome	Interview	Appointment	Noncontact	Refusal	'Away'	Ineligible	Moved	Other	Broken appointment	Executed appointment
(First contact)	0.09	0.23	0.31	0.13	0.09	0.09	0.01	0.06	0.00	0.00
Interview	<u>0.16</u>	0.12	0.28	0.15	0.04	0.05	0.00	0.07	0.03	0.10
Appointment	0.04	<u>0.20</u>	0.29	0.10	0.04	0.04	0.00	0.07	0.05	0.18
Noncontact	0.04	0.10	<u>0.53</u>	0.10	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.08	0.02	0.06
Refusal	0.07	0.12	0.32	<u>0.25</u>	0.03	0.04	0.00	0.07	0.02	0.07
'Away'	0.07	0.16	0.34	0.16	<u>0.08</u>	0.04	0.00	0.05	0.02	0.09
Ineligible	0.04	0.16	0.30	0.15	0.05	<u>0.10</u>	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.05
Moved	0.00	0.21	0.39	0.12	0.00	0.03	<u>0.03</u>	0.15	0.03	0.03
Other	0.06	0.14	0.36	0.12	0.02	0.05	0.00	<u>0.16</u>	0.02	0.06
Broken appointment	0.06	0.13	0.29	0.10	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.05	<u>0.09</u>	0.21
Executed appointment	0.05	0.11	0.30	0.10	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.07	<u>0.26</u>

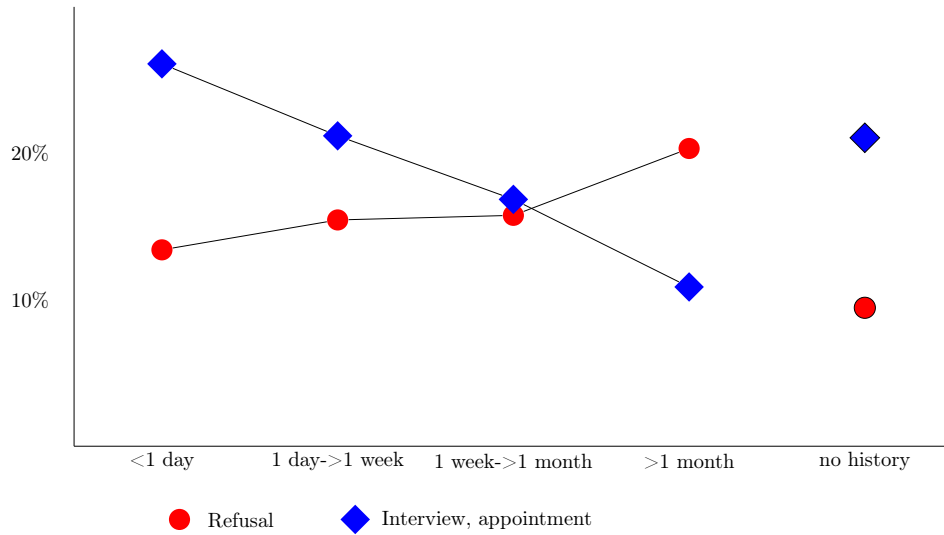


Figure 1: Time since positive experience (interview or appointment), ESS5-BE

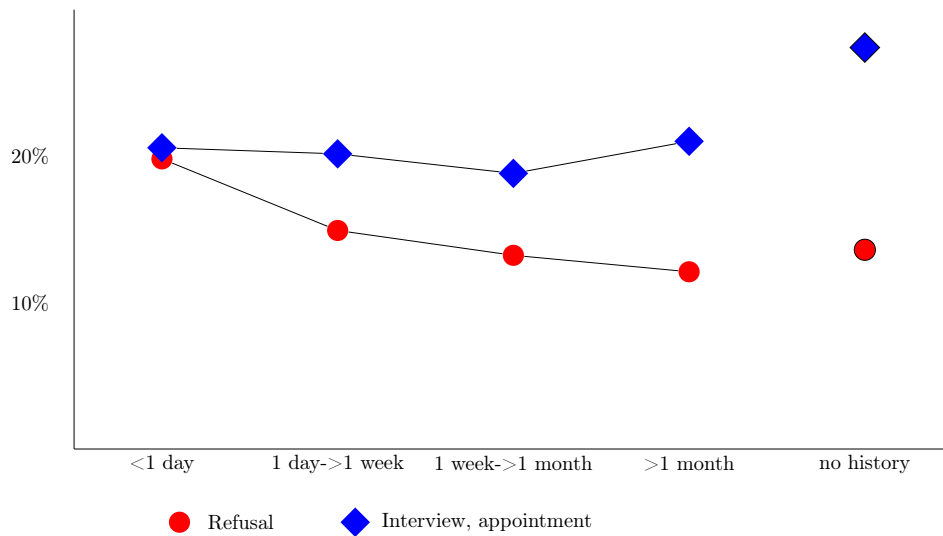


Figure 2: Time since negative experience (Refusal), ESS5-BE

Although it is quite difficult to prove the existence of mood-effects or memory-effects on behalf of the interviewers, their possible effects may anticipate strategic choices in order to optimize survey response: (1) better take advantage of positive interviewer mood in order to increase new successes and (2) better take a break after negative experiences. Such considerations are rather in contrast with the actual duration of the breaks, conditional on previous contact outcome, as shown in table 3. When interviewers have carried out an interview (with or without having made the respective appointment), the rest period is the longest of all previous outcomes. Instead, interviewer better reduce the break after such positive experience and increase the period of rest after refusals (or maybe also after broken appointments).

Discussion and questions

- The existence of interviewer mood or memory is hard to prove. Any advice on how to improve the analysis or the data that should be collected in order to obtain stronger conclusions about this topic?
- Is there currently given any attention to hold periods after positive or negative fieldwork experience on behalf of the interviewer? What kind of advise do fieldwork managers give their interviewers with regard to rest periods?

Table 3: Days of interviewer rest after previous contacts outcome, ESS5-BE

Previous attempt	Average rest period (days)
Interview	2.11
Appointment	0.73
Noncontact	1.03
Refusal	1.61
Away	0.87
Ineligible	1.11
Moved	0.14
Other	0.98
Broken appointment	2.02
Executed appointment	3.11