

An aerial photograph of a railway track system. The tracks are dark brown, laid on wooden sleepers, and cross each other in a complex, non-linear pattern. The tracks curve and intersect, creating a series of diamond shapes and other geometric patterns. The surrounding area is a mix of gravel, dirt, and green grass. In the background, there are some small structures and utility poles.

Non-linear questionnaires

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Surveys where respondents can answer questions in the order they want and answer areas they see as most important—e.g. for customer satisfaction

What business problem does it solve?

A standard survey is linear, requiring all questions to be answered. This mixes weakly held views with strongly held views and can cause dis-engagement for complex studies. Non-linear surveys allow respondents to focus on areas they find most important.



How does it work?

From an on-screen menu, respondents choose what sections to review and answer. This allows broad coverage of a subject while reducing survey length per respondent. The choice and the order of selection both give useful data about importance.

Types and versions

Routing is a basic approach to non-linear, but orders are still largely fixed. Full non-linear allows the respondent to determine the route through the questionnaire.

Challenges

Larger samples may be needed to coverage all the topic areas. A non-linear questionnaire itself still needs to be designed at full-length even though individual respondent journeys will be shorter and more relevant.

Potential business impact	★★★★
Sophistication	★★★★★
Use in forecasting	★★★★
Ease of design	★★★
Expertise required	★★★★