

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON BUSINESS DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

19–21 SEPTEMBER 2018 – STATISTICS PORTUGAL, LISBON

LEVERAGING BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TO IMPROVE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESSES' SURVEY RESPONSE

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Abstract

Background

The timeliness of participants' response to government surveys is essential to guarantee the quality of the derived data and statistical outputs. The Monthly Business Survey (MBS) – Construction and Allied Trades is the most resource-intensive ONS business survey for response chasing. Responses are typically late, and respondents complain that they are unable to provide the data. This raises quality issues for the Monthly Construction Statistical release.

Objectives

To apply principles from the behavioural sciences to increase the number of businesses that return the survey questionnaire by the specified deadline, thereby reducing resources spent response chasing. To assess the feasibility of behavioural insights trials across business surveys, and gauge the benefits of behavioural insights interventions weighted against the operational and reputational risks.

Method

We set up a cross-team project group with members from the ONS Business Data Operations Division, ONS Behavioural Science Unit, Survey Processing Centre, Business Statistical Outputs and Methodology. This allowed us to engage key stakeholders in decision making, understand practical operational issues, test the risk appetite of the business and speed up sign off process. We designed and ran a two-arm stratified randomized control trial (RCT) while conducting the MBS for the construction sector in the months of April and May 2018 (research in progress). Businesses were newly selected participants in the survey sample for January- May 2018. To mitigate the risk that the intervention could adversely affect the data for the statistical release, only businesses with fewer than 20 employees (and rotationally in the survey sample) were included in the trial. Businesses in the control received the business-as-usual survey material. For the BI intervention group, we redesigned the material to include several behavioural 'nudges' to help the businesses understand

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the purpose and expectation of the letters. We also introduced a prenotification message to build businesses' confidence that the ONS values their input and respects their effort, and an infographic flyer to help businesses appreciate the relevance of their data and so create a positive engagement loop.

Conclusion and Contribution of the study

The RCT is still in progress. Data will be collected in April and May 2018. In the analysis, we will assess the expected effect of the BI intervention to increase businesses' likelihood to comply to the return deadline. Results will be finalized by August 2018. An assessment of the feasibility to conduct behavioural insights trials across business surveys will be discussed, including key challenges faced (i.e., stakeholders' risk aversion, operational constraints, difficulty influencing long-standing respondents) and lesson learned. Basic guidelines will be shared with conference attendees on how to run their own behavioural insights trial with business survey respondents.