

MOTIVATING RESPONDENTS IN BUSINESS SURVEYS

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Introduction

The quality and relevance of official statistics depends crucially on the accuracy and timeliness of data reported by the Providers of Statistical Information (companies, families, public and private institutions). One way to improve the quality of official statistics is to motivate respondents by enhancing the relevance of the data provided.

Regarding this concern Statistics Portugal started in 2017 a regular initiative based on a voluntary ad hoc survey, , to the companies that usually participate in business surveys. This initiative provided a picture of how the reporting obligation is seen by respondents. The survey was divided into four sets of issues: I - Characterization of the respondent; II - Level of effort and difficulties in data reporting III - Number of reporting obligations, and IV - Perception of the quality and usefulness of statistical information produced by Statistics Portugal (for society and for the company itself). The questionnaire has mainly qualitative questions with an ordinal scale reflecting greater or lesser severity of judgment.

This short questionnaire is appended to current online business surveys. Being logged into the data collection secure portal (WebInq) and after completing an online mandatory business survey, respondents are directed to a second voluntary block with these questions. Some 64,000 voluntary responses involving 68 surveys were received in 2017. It allows Statistics Portugal to start the measurement of Perceived Response Burden and the quality of the data reported, and obtained critical suggestions for the improvement of procedures in data collection.

In consequence and in order to enlarge the perceived utility of statistical information for the respondents, Statistics Portugal started a regular production of Personalized Feedback Reports. These reports are produced as a mix of individual statistical information and aggregate data, and the respondent see it as a payback for the data reply and is an important way of communication in order to have better and more collaborative data providers.

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Likewise other countries, Portuguese business structure is composed by more than 95% of micro and small companies. This has a particular impact on sampling and consequently, around 85% of the surveyed companies have also micro or small size.

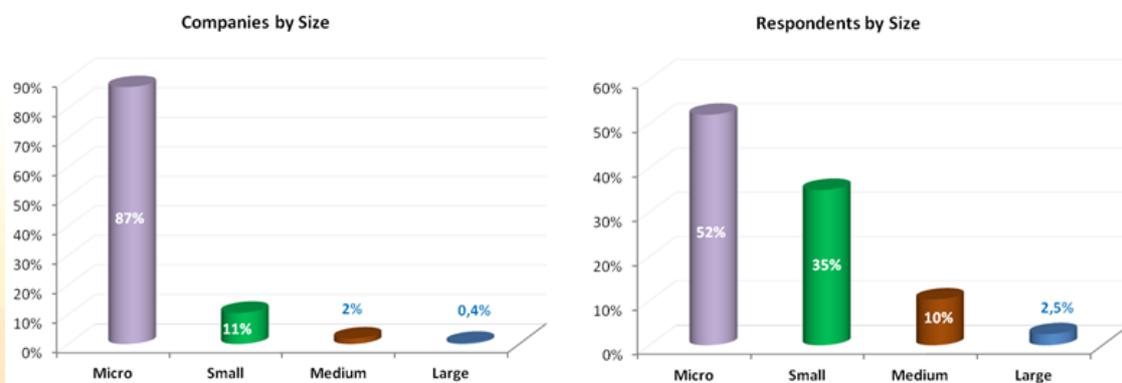


Figure 1

Contrary to what we expected the level of difficulty of reporting statistics information, is independent of the companies size, with almost of 50% of the companies considers that reporting statistical information is an “Easy” or a “Very easy” task.

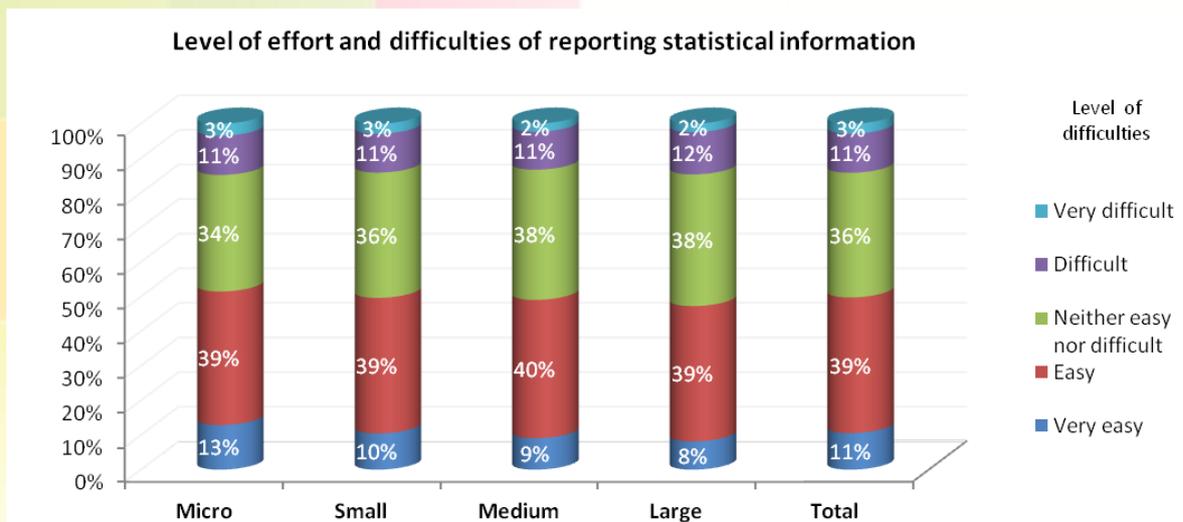


Figure 2

These figures could be explained by the Number of Surveys that each company has to report. As we can see in the next chart, 90% of the micro companies don't have any statistical obligation and 8% have only one survey to report by year. On the other hand, all large

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companies are involved in surveys, and 37% have the obligation to report more than 10 different surveys by year.

Reporting statistical information obligations

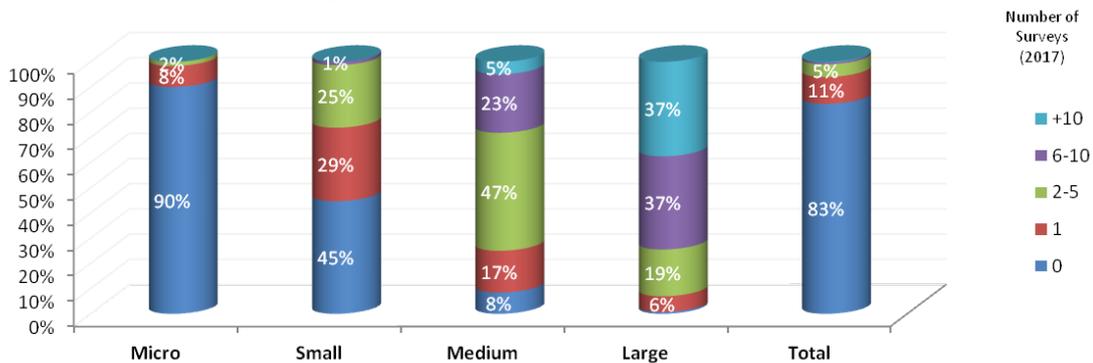


Figure 3

This ad hoc survey also allowed Statistics Portugal to obtain a picture of how the obligation to reporting statistics is viewed by the respondents. With the results was possible to have further information about the Perceived Response Burden. After the survey, one of the major results was the following: “Companies consider that the statistical information disseminated by Statistics Portugal has significant utility to the society, but they are more reluctant to admit their own interest on it.” These results are presented in the figure indicated as followed.

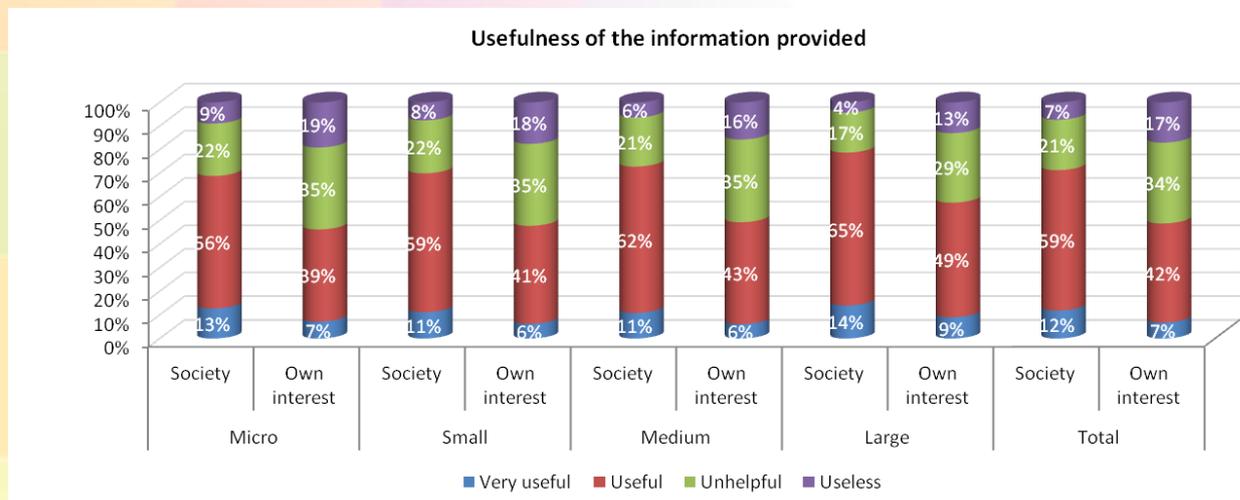


Figure 4

Another relevant aspect that comes from the ad hoc survey was obtained critical suggestions for the improvement of procedures in data collection, and also shows us the respondents' willingness to receive statistical personalized feedback reports.

Respondents free text suggestions

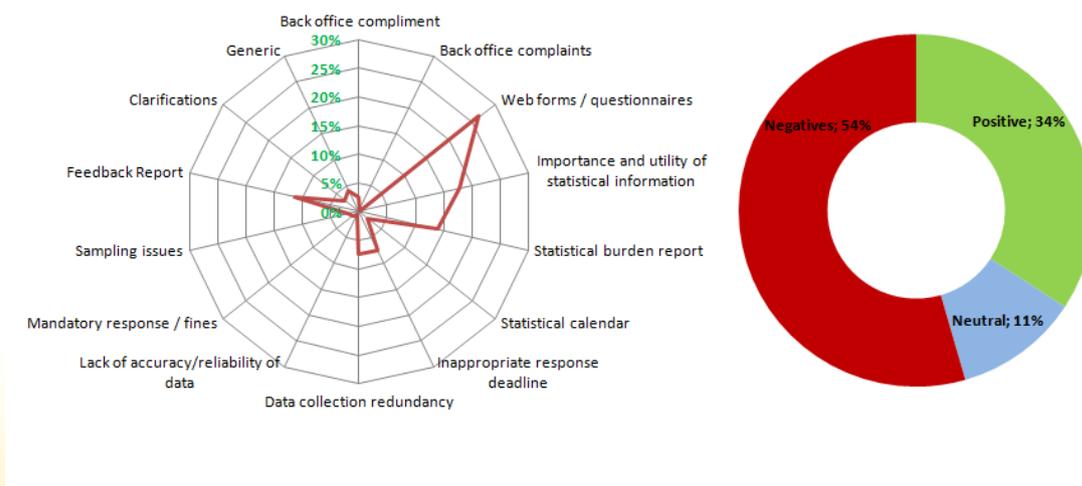


Figure 5

In order to deal with contradictory perceptions and also offering a sign of recognition for the effort of the information providers, Statistics Portugal reinforced the work begun in 2014 and developed more statistical personalized feedback reports, created the Annual Statistics Calendar, refreshed some Web forms and reviewed the Handbook of Principles and Practices for Business Surveys, simplifying reminders and letters and when possible adjusted the data collection schedule.

This feedback corresponds to the periodic provision of three types of reports:

- Customised Reports, which bring together, in a synthetic and targeted way by themes, the information collected - including indicators of the relative position of the company given the results of investigations in which it participates and other information of a specific nature, provided they do not compromise the principle of statistical confidentiality;
- National macroeconomic framework, quarterly updated;
- A link to the electronic brochure of economic activity more updated.

For confidentiality reasons, this feature is available to specific WebInq users with the proper authorization from the companies to access this kind of sensitive information. After authentication by username and password, the respondent can access customized reports for all companies who have authorized his or her access to WebInq, as shown in the Figure 6.

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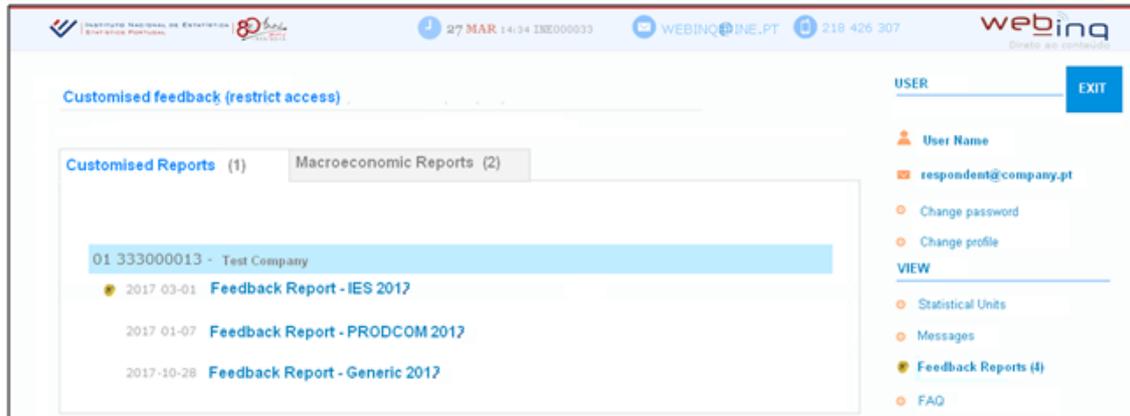


Figure 6: WebInq menu to access the customised feedback reports.

The reports have been designed in a very concise manner, using graphics and images, as in the example shown in Figure 7.

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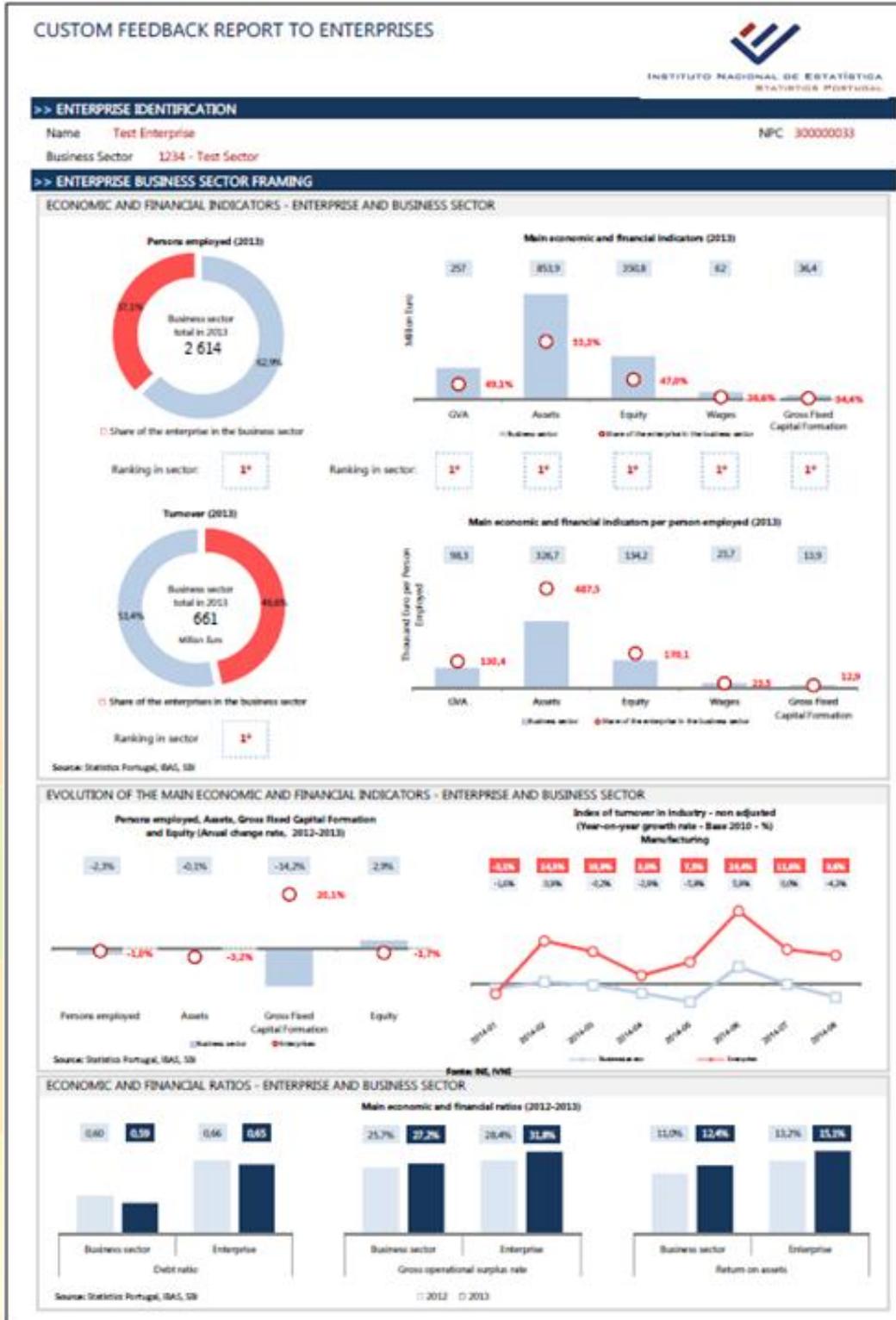


Figure 7: Example of a personalised report to a data provider (fictitious).