

Transforming social surveys in ONS: opportunities & challenges

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Background

- ONS is the UK's NSI and is the largest producer of Official Statistics
- Complex organisational structure but all elements of GSBPM feature
- ONS runs some of the largest and impactful social surveys in the UK including the Labour Force Survey.
- Data collection on these surveys is primarily by in-person CAPI and we have a field force of ~ 700 interviewers
- Telephone interviewers also NO paper collection
- Online collection – growing capability

- Move on-line part of strategic vision for the Census, Business and Social Surveys
- Aligned with the UK Government's *Digital by Default* policy
- ONS Census has been hugely successful – 97% response vast majority online
- Business surveys are moving from paper to online collection.
- However whole different set of challenges with social surveys.

Why are social surveys more challenging?

- Voluntary
- Lengthy
- Complexity
- Comprehension
- Continuity
- Designed for the data user NOT for respondent

Labour Force Survey

- Voluntary – response pre-C19 50%-54%
- Length – ~45 minute HH interview
- Complexity – 600 variables substantial routing
- Comprehension - usual/actual hours worked; net pay etc
- Timeseries running back decades

Complexity & comprehension

You said that you have qualifications related to work. Thinking about ALL of these qualifications, which qualifications do (you think) you have [gained PROMPT AS NECESSARY in the UK] related to work, starting with the highest?

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

31 response options

In total, how long have you not worked to look after your children, please include maternity, paternity and parental leave? Should consider all the spells when they were off because of the children for at least one month, from stopping work until taking up work again. Consequently there are times included even when care responsibilities were no obstacle to employment. They should be added together for an approximate amount of months / years.

Move the LFS online.....

In that case it has to....

-engage respondents
-be shorter
- ...be easy to complete
- ...be comprehensible
-meet data user requirements

Design principles

LFS Transformation approach

- Data user requirements & survey design
- Question Research & Design team
 - Cog testing & UX
- Experimental testing
 - Engagement + Comms
 - Incentives
- Statistical testing
 - LMS and LFS
- Parallel running

LFS to LMS

- Agreed a set of core labour market requirements
 - LFS = 600 variables; LMS = ~100 variables
- Question and questionnaire design for the respondent
 - Self-completion; comprehensible; and easy
- Iterative testing– engagement strategies, incentives, between wave engagement etc
- Measure the impact – what the data quality like?

Experimental trials

- Respondent Engagement
 - Communication strategy
 - Invitation and 2 reminders – 19.5%
 - Invitation and 1 reminder – 16.3%
 - Timing of mail out and reminders
 - Letter dispatch Wednesday – 18.3%
 - Letter dispatch Friday – 17.3%
- Incentivisation
 - £5 unconditional + £10 conditional – 30.5%
 - Tote bag – 27.5%
 - No incentive – 22.3%

Statistical test

- Sample of ~14,000 households (England, Wales, Scotland)
- Online first, Face-to-Face for non-responders
- 2 weeks online only, 6 weeks online / F2F – longer than LFS collection period
- Core labour market survey
 - Online uptake - 30.5%
 - Face-to-face - 29.2%
 - Overall uptake – 59.7%
- No statistical difference in key labour market estimates between the LMS and the LFS over the same period.

What is the opportunity that this challenge gives us?

- Efficiencies
- More inclusive design
- Reduced burden
- Improved data quality
- Research into subset of question on the LFS not defined as core labour market
- Discovery – user requirements; interviewer feedback
 - Are the current questions measuring what the customer actually wants to output on?
 - Lost of concerns about timeseries but what you might find is that the opportunity redesigning for online collection gives you is a chance to break a bad series.

Publications

<https://digitalblog.ons.gov.uk/2018/04/17/getting-ons-social-surveys-online/>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourmarketsurveycharacteristicsreport>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourmarketsurveyattritiontestcharacteristicsreport>