Part 2

How to assess the EESE and identifying priorities for reform

2.3
Assessment Tool **3**

Section 2.3: Assessment tools

Using Surveys

Purpose

Surveys are an integral part of an EO's policy role. This 'assessment tool' provides organizations with an overview of the rationale for surveys, how they can assist the EO's overall efforts, and structured ways to carry them out.

How to use this tool

This Assessment Tool is designed for use by EOs. It is best used as a guide for employers and enterprise development specialists who will facilitate the assessment process with the EO and other actors.

Introduction

Step 1: The Stages of Survey Work

Surveying members is a basic way in which to gather relevant and pertinent information. It is information directly gathered from those who are on the receiving end of regulation, polices, and legislation.

1.1 Deciding an approach

A number of choices need to be made in developing a survey:

- Is it targeted at all members' enterprises or does it also include member associations such as sectoral associations?
- Is it precise in terms of the information the EO is seeking and are questions forumlated so they don't lead to predetermined outcomes? The issue has to be defined along with the possible answers, as some information may already exist, but otherwise a survey may be necessary. This can be either analytic (to explore the viewpoints on an issue), or descriptive (to form an opinion about an issue).[1]

[1] Adapted from Gill & Johnson: "Research Methods for Managers" (2002).

- Is it short enough to ensure sufficient responses but long enough to gather the information the EO requires?
- Are questions time-dependent, i.e. will answers fit within a testing period?
- Are objectives clearly outlined to members? For example: *"This survey will greatly assist the EO in developing its policy priorities for the coming two year period"*?
- What is the budget? As the population under consideration, the geographic distribution of this sample population, and the type of questionnaire used will all have an effect on costs.

EXAMPLE: WHY SURVEYS MATTER

The Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) surveyed its SME members three times during four months (October 2008 – January 2009) to clarify and strengthen its advocacy efforts. Through surveys EK investigated the impacts of the financial crisis focusing on the demand for products and services, access to financing, and solvency among SMEs.

The results helped focus the Confederation's advocacy efforts by revealing that problems in obtaining finance had not increased dramatically during the previous few months as they had instead suspected, but that mostSMEs had just postponed their investments. However, solvency problems among SMEs were increased (due to reduced demand, rapidly leading to depleted working capital in the smallest firms). Addressing working capital and short-term financing issues then became a policy focus for the organization.

Source: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/10/42500916.ppt

Step 2: Designing and a structuring survey[2]

2.1 Provide context

The EO should first position the survey in terms of the EO's overall goals. What is the EO trying to achieve? (e.g. surveying members on these issues because it wants to ascertain whether "issue X" is a constraint on enterprise growth and want to use the information gathered in its dialogue with government). Include something from the outset that ensures participants that confidentially will be respected; below is such an example:

> "The goal of this survey is to gather information and opinions about constraints on enterprise. Ultimately, the information gathered here will help the EO to advocate to governments' policies and programmes that enhance employment and economic growth.
>
> The information obtained here will be held in the strictest confidence. Neither your name, nor the name of your business will be used in any document based on this survey."

The EO should only undertake a questionnaire or survey if it knows exactly what it wants.

2.2 Keep it simple

In general, in terms of design and length the easiest rule is to make the survey simple and straightforward.

In order to write effective questions, you need to consider four important factors: directness, simplicity, specificity, and discreteness.

- Write questions in a straightforward fashion using direct language.
- Don't use jargon.
- Specifically tailor questions to the membership.
- Keep questions short and simple.
- Specific questions are usually better than general ones. The more general a question, the wider the range of interpretation of an answer.
- Avoid questions that are overly personal or direct, especially when dealing with commercially-sensitive issues.

Test it thoroughly in terms of these indicators before it is sent to members.

2.3 Survey Structure

Putting effort into the design of the survey will save the EO time when it comes to analysing the data. Respondents should be able to navigate the questions clearly and logically and the survey should flow in a structured manner.

Questions should be designed with an eye towards those being surveyed, as the data gathered can additionally serve as supporting tools for interviews and focus group discussions.

Survey design should allow for easy compilation of the data obtained (for example, by designing questionnaires with closed questions). Design should allow for a systematic analysis and documentation of the responses, particularly if the sample is quite large.

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2 David S. Walonick: *Survival Statistics: Designing and Using Surveys* (1997-2004).

2.3.1 Question and Language design

It is extremely important that the EO design the survey with neutral, gender sensitive language. Use straightforward language and never use jargon.

Be careful with any definitions used and have absolute clarity in what is being asked of those being surveyed. For example in asking the question *"Are young people more employable today than five years ago?"*, without exactly defining the term 'young people', there is the possibility of the term being interpreted as anyone from 15 to 40 years of age.

The EO should always give the option of "No" even on an issue the EO thinks 100 per cent of employers will respond "Yes". For example, if the question was 'Do you favour higher taxes on your profits?", providing options for both "Yes" and "No" responses would allow the EO the ability to report the percentage of employers against such a proposal. It is also vital for the advocacy process.

Surveys can suffer from reactivity, in that companies or people can offer responses that are socially desirable rather than accurate; however, good survey design can improve this. Much depends on how the question is asked, for example, passive voices, maybe using slightly different (less emotive) language can sometimes get around this (unless the subject matter is of a particularly sensitive nature).

The EO should not make assumptions in the questions it asks.

In its approach to the survey the EO should try and ask questions in a way that allows companies to provide answers that deviate from the replies that may be expected.

Ensure that you avoid 'off-putting' questions. These are questions that ask such sensitive issues that they may cause a respondent to not take the survey at all. There are ways of arriving and extracting the information you may want by taking a more subtle and incremental approach.

If questions are structured in a logical sequence and ease the respondent into the process it is also possible to get information that the EO may have not expected to arrive at.

Ask the easiest questions first. Once a respondent has invested time in a survey they are more reluctant to not finish it, and will choose to ignore a difficult question. Whereas if the difficult questions come early in the survey they are more likely to not continue.

Avoid leading questions, for example: "How big an issue is climate change?" with a follow up questions such as: *"Do you think the Green party has the best climate change policies?"*

With respect to the time span of questions asked they should not seek information more than five years in the past. This is about as long a time horizon as should be used. Institutional memory beyond this point can be difficult to capture.

Questions can be closed ("Have the services delivered by the EO been good or bad?"), or open ("What do you think about the services?"). Both types of questions are examined below.

2.3.1 Closed questions

Closed questions limit respondents' answers to the survey, but they make analysis easier. The participants are allowed to choose from either a pre-existing set of dichotomous answers, such as Yes/No, True/False, multiple choice questions with an option for "Other" where a respondent can write their own answer, or a ranking scale response option.

The most common of the ranking scale questions is called the Likert scale question. This kind of question asks the respondents to look at a statement (such as "The most important issue facing the business community this year is the deterioration in export markets") and then to "rank" this statement according to the degree to which they agree ("I strongly agree, I somewhat agree, I have no opinion, I somewhat disagree, I strongly disagree"). Experience suggests that an odd number of options tends to generate a high proportion of answers in the middle – using an even number of choices forces respondents to come down on one side or the other of 'average'.[3]

Advantages of closed questions:

- More easily analysed;
- can be more specific, thus more likely to communicate similar meanings;
- require less time from the interviewer.

In terms of the closed (tick box type) questions, one of the major issues in survey design is that any pre-set list must be comprehensive and mutually exclusive, with only one item at each tick box. The EO should try and limit the number of answer options and certainly no more than 10 or 12.

2.3.2 Open-ended questions

The reason for using an open-ended question is to get as much information as possible. Open-ended questions do not give respondents answers from which to choose, but are phrased in a manner where respondents are encouraged to explain their answers and reactions to the question with a sentence, a paragraph, or even a page or more, depending on the survey. The EO should try to ask questions in such a way as to facilitate the most detailed analysis possible.

Open questions are like: *"What do you think is the most important issue facing the business community this year?"*. If you want the respondents to focus on their answer, the question can be phrased as *"Do you think that the most important issue facing the business community this year is the deterioration of export markets? Explain your answer below."* (Although you should note that writing questions in this way is likely to introduce bias into the answers).

Advantages of open questions:

- They allow for more information;
- they cut down on error by eliminating the option of not reading the questions and just "filling in" the survey with all the same answers (e.g., filling in the "No" box on every question).
- they allow for obtaining extra information, and can be used more readily for secondary analysis.

Open-ended questions are also difficult to analyse and often they do not allow the EO to make definitive statements. For example, if the following question is asked: "*What is the most important challenge for your firm in the next 12 months?*" The EO can only deal with each of the answers individually; what it can then say in its analysis is something like: *"Energy costs were seen as the most important challenge for 10 per cent of respondent companies."* The EO cannot make any statements about the relative importance of energy costs to firms who did not list this as the most important challenge, although it may have been important to them nonetheless. Therefore this important comparative ability can be lessened by using an open-ended style.

The EO will need to make a decision on which type of questions it will pursue, dependent on the resources and expertise it has. Both types of question style have pros and cons, and both have limitations.

3 The Survey System: http://www.surveysystem.com/sdesign.htm

Biases commonly found in surveys:[4]

Hawthorne Effect:
One bias commonly found in survey research is the Hawthorne Effect, which states that respondents tend to respond differently simply because they have been selected for a survey. Because of the special recognition which has been given them, it is sometimes found that the respondents tend to answer in the way which will most please the researcher. To minimize this bias, the questioner should be as neutral as possible in presenting the survey.

"Self-lifting" bias:
Closely associated with the Hawthorne Effect, the "self-lifting" bias recognizes respondents want to make themselves appear in a positive light, and will respond accordingly. This bias can be minimized by positioning personal questions about respondents at the end of the questionnaire, where they would tend not to affect other, more substantive responses.

The "Habit" bias:
If given a series of similar questions, respondents will fall into a habit of answering them similarly without considering each on its own merit. This bias can be minimized by changing the format of questions throughout the questionnaire. The format may range from simple "tick the box" questions, to one-word responses, to open-ended responses, to completing information on simple graphs and maps. Through these variations, each question is given its own personality, thus avoiding the "habit" response.

Non-respondent bias:
One type of bias often found in surveys is based on the assumption that individuals who haven't responded in a survey tend to feel the same as those who have responded. However, studies have found that non-respondents generally have a more negative outlook, which may not be otherwise represented in the collected data; although non-respondent bias can also be redolent of a more positive viewpoint. Sometimes with surveys verifying a "problem issue" only those with the problem respond, so non-respondents may in fact be more positively biased.

Stopping Rule:
A bias sometimes found in survey research is based on the fact that the survey procedure is terminated when a researcher has obtained the desired results, and the amount of data collected is determined by results. This can be avoided by establishing survey parameters beforehand.

Step 3: Roll-out of surveys[5]

3.1 Target respondents

Who the EO targets for its survey within a firm matters a great deal. The HR manger which is often an obvious choice is usually not the strongest part of the management hierarchy, and may not be involved in other areas pertinent to your survey. It is vital to get the right technical person for specific issues.

3.2 Timing

It is important to select the time when the EO does a survey. It is too late once a law or regulation is passed. The point of a survey is usually to influence policy change, not react to it once it has taken place. However, surveys can also be conducted by the EO that are 'press driven', in that the primary purpose is to generate publicity on an issue the EO wants to highlight and modify. This kind of research may not produce 'cutting edge' information, but it does enable the EO to further its agenda.

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4 Eastern Michigan University: *Education First Developing a Downtown Survey.*

5 David S. Walonick, op. cit.-.

Timing is also important in respect to the EO's profile. For example, if members are surveyed just after the EO has been involved in a high profile advocacy effort, rather than at a time when the EO has been out of the media limelight, it is likely there may be different responses based on different perceptions.

Completing the survey

A decision needs to be made on how the survey will be carried out – by mail, face-to-face questionnaires, online, and so on. How the EO carries out the survey will be predicated on their specific circumstances. In countries with a lower internet use online surveys will not result in a large enough response.; mail surveys may be required if the quantity of responses is the main goal; and face-to-face interviews around a structured questionnaire may be the way to go if a high quality targeted response is required. Individual circumstances will determine how the EO chooses to move forward.

But if online is the EO's choice, make sure that the survey can be 'saved' by the respondent and accessed at another time, so it need not be completed in one session.

Step 4: Analysing data

4.1 Ensure 'Representivity' in survey frame

Survey sample sizes need to be large enough to be significant (statistically speaking). More importantly, surveys need to be representative of the EO's membership, including its female members. It can be difficult to access the proper number and type of people who are needed for a representative sample of the business community. A lot of enterprises simply won't participate in surveys due to time constraints, and this can affect both the sample size and its representivity.

The EO needs to be on guard against asking the same participants to respond to questionnaires all the time. This can lead to bias in the information the EO receives. Having said that, asking the same company year after year similar questions on, for example, wages and salaries, can be a useful way to understand trends in the data.

If an EO finds that it has the same 'dominant firms' in survey after survey, then it simply should preclude them for the next survey.

What entails 'representativeness' may differ survey to survey. For some surveys, it can be not the actual number of respondents as much as the respondents themselves adding validity to a survey. For example, if an EO is doing a survey on the effect of a government policy in a particular area, it is greatly important to make sure that the big employers in a particular sector participate as much as the smaller players. A survey with a large number of smaller respondents may in fact be less representative than one with 10 respondents who are the main players in a particular sector, or who account for the lion's share of the market or employment in that particular sector.

4.2 Data interpretation

Surveys are essentially exploratory. The information they provide is an excellent base for further enquiry and is a firm basis for an EO's advocacy work, but it does have limitations.

Surveys are often full of systematic biases, and/or loaded questions, despite efforts to guard against this. Too many 'Don't knows' for example, could signal that it is too early to ask these kinds of questions.

An EO can make inferences from the data collected, but cannot definitively state a claim. The EO needs to be careful that it does not leave itself open to the charge that it has misinterpreted answers.

The data will often suffer from reactivity, in that respondents tend to give socially desirable responses that make them look good or seem to be what the researcher is looking for. All surveys suffer also from survivor bias: the companies that exist are the ones that were somehow able to cope with the problems that affected the companies that could have existed but no longer do.

Step 5: Presenting the Results

5.1 Using the results

Caution is needed in developing and relying on survey information. While they will be a main source of information they can themselves be bluntish instruments. For example, say an EO is seeking to find out if access to finance is a major concern to members. In the responses that come back, accessing a loan does not emerge as an issue, but this could be because the wrong question was asked. Accessing a loan does not emerge as an issue because firms, for example, do not request a loan if they have no expectation of getting one.

5.2 Using Case studies

A case study is a detailed conversation with a member. It is an excellent way to supplement a survey. It provides detailed information on the topic and a 'real life' example that can be related too. They can provide that extra detail in the form of a firm's story that in turn can help explain the numbers and what they mean in practice.

In undertaking a case study:

- Prepare your questions in advance;
- be clear on what you want the firm to answer;
- ask the firm what information they are comfortable sharing in the public domain and what instead they do not want made public;
- stay on topic;
- try and record the interview (but always seek permission);
- get the right person to interview;
- ask for a specific time and ask for a location where you will not be disturbed.

Design Aspect	Comments/Suggestions[6]
Open or closed questions?	▪ Closed questions generate quicker information that is easy to process. ▪ Providing scales (e.g. from 1 to 5) for answers can enrich information. ▪ Open questions are time-consuming to respond to and difficult to process.
Amount of time that can be requested from respondents to fill out questionnaires	▪ A good survey should not take more than 30 minutes for people with a stake in the evaluation, and 15 minutes for those who are indirectly involved.
Language	▪ Language should be clear, simple and gender sensitive. ▪ Think about translations in local languages.
Digital or paper	▪ Digital surveys are easy to process and the Internet can be used as a tool. ▪ In many situations, digital surveys will not be possible because of a lack of access to technology
Piloting and testing	▪ Customized surveys should be tested to assess if they can generate sufficient information and to make sure questions are understandable for respondents. Also, the amount of time needed to fill out surveys should be assessed.
Control questions	▪ A good survey should contain some control questions to ensure that the information collected is sufficiently reliable.
Number of desired respondents	▪ The reliability of results of surveys increases with the number of respondents. ▪ If it is not possible to disseminate surveys widely, they can still be used, provided that results can be cross-checked with other methods of data collection.
Survey structure	▪ The use of randomisation of answer options on electronic data collection can affect outcomes. Basically what this does is allow respondents to see answer options in different orders. So if two people are completing a survey, one is completing a survey in a set structured one way while the other is randomly selecting questions, this can result in different outcomes than if both were answering the survey in the same structured way.
Timing of questionnaires	▪ One should try to disseminate questionnaires at moments when respondents are ready and willing to invest time on them – for example, the end of the financial year is generally a poor time to survey entrepreneurs.
Level of effort that is realistic for analyzing and reporting data	▪ When digital means for processing surveys are available, analysing and reporting on data will usually not require significant time and effort. ▪ Open questions can only be processed when significant time is available for analysis.
Rolling out the surveys	▪ If surveys are sent to people without proper follow-up, non-responsiveness can be high. A successful response rate would be considered at least 60 per cent. ▪ Responsiveness can be greatly increased when surveys are collected manually or when distributed during events at the end of which the surveys can be collected.

6 Adapted from The PPD Handbook: A Toolkit for Business Environment Reformers (page 143)

SURVEY EXAMPLES:

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

International Organization of Employers Survey:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=6Dy4s54uiGHXvE7bDiqjUw_3d_3d

Survey Results:
http://www.ioe-emp.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents_pdf/papers/surveys/english/survey2008_trendsworkplace.pdf

LABOUR MARKET

CBI (Survey and Results):
http://www.skillsnortheast.co.uk/lib/liDownload/12026/Employment%20Trends%20Survey%202007.pdf?CFID=7008059&CFTOKEN=58595170

BUSINESS SENTIMENT ON LABOUR MARKET

IBEC: http://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/DFB.nsf/vPages/Economics_and_taxation~Resources~business-sentiment-survey-q4-2009-08-12-2009/$file/IBEC%20Sentiment%20Survey%20Q4%2009-Employment.pdf

COST OF COMPLIANCE

BNZ: http://www.businessnz.org.nz/file/1638/Compliance%20Cost%20Summary%20Report%202008.pdf