

Book Review

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Snijkers, G., Haraldsen, G., Jones, J., and Willimack, D.K. *Designing and Conducting Business Surveys*. 2013. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons. ISBN: 978-0-470-90304-9, 640 pp., £58.95.

The six-hundred plus page book *Designing and Conducting Business Surveys* is an ambitious effort between the four listed authors (and an additional four contributing authors) with vast experience and diverse expertise to provide a complete guide on the entire process of administering business surveys. The resulting text should prove to be a valuable reference for both researchers and practitioners of business survey theory and methods. Covering the entire process, from the question and sample design to estimation and dissemination of results, the book contains a discussion of most survey methods and sample theory necessary for conducting surveys, focusing on the issues especially relevant or unique to business surveys.

Given the multiple authors, there are different styles throughout, but each step of the complex process of conducting a business survey is covered by an author with the appropriate experience. The level of detail is greater in some chapters than in others, however, a starting place for additional research and information is provided for all topics, including an extensive set of references. For these reasons, the volume seems most appropriate as a comprehensive reference book on business surveys.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the book, briefly introducing definitions, frameworks, and concepts that are important in understanding business statistics and surveys. Information is provided on business data and its key association with economic performance and policy making, as well as the statistical and survey production processes that underlie economic statistics. The authors point out unique features of business surveys beginning a discussion that continues throughout the book on the business survey characteristics that drive survey practice. Given the number and range of topics discussed, this chapter can be difficult to follow; however, the authors expand upon the topics in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 sets out the attributes and behaviors of businesses as organizations and economic actors, with a key focus on implications for survey response. One of the strengths of this chapter is the discussion drawn from the rich literature on the business survey response process model. This includes steps in the decision to participate in and complete a survey that are linked with the business environment, organizational and social characteristics associated with the business and the respondent, as well as respondent

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cognitive processes. Readers with an interest in administrative science as well as survey methodology will be well served by the detail in this chapter.

Chapter 3 introduces a quality framework with multiple dimensions that has been developed and refined over time to assess the “fitness of use” of statistical products for clients and users; the framework has been adopted by many national statistical institutes and statistical governing bodies. The author also expands upon the total survey error (TSE) framework mentioned in Chapter 1, a framework originating from the statistical literature that corresponds to the “accuracy” dimension of survey quality in “fitness for use” models. The TSE framework provides the structure for the rest of the chapter, with a detailed discussion of sampling and measurement components of survey error tied to the unique features and complexity of business surveys.

In Chapter 4, the authors start the “how to” conversation that is continued in the next eight chapters of the book. They include project management basics with references and the planning for steps of a survey, from the specification of survey objectives, to designing, testing and building data collection and processing systems, through data dissemination. The authors provide a strong discussion of the planning process and how it integrates into existing processes in organizations that already have a survey infrastructure and process in place. Another strength of the chapter is the conversation about risk management and how to plan what can go wrong in the survey process and how to moderate it.

Chapter 5, the most mathematical of all the chapters, provides an overview of sampling theory with emphasis on techniques and challenges most commonly associated with sampling businesses (a very skewed population). The chapter goes into substantial detail on the construction and maintenance of a business frame or registry from which to draw the sample and the concomitant challenges. The chapter then discusses a number of sample plans (sample designs with their associated estimators) commonly used in business or establishment surveys. Fittingly, considerable attention is given to designing stratified samples and appropriate estimators. The chapter also touches on more complex estimators that use auxiliary information, including model-assisted estimators and estimators for small areas, but the treatment is necessarily brief, giving just an idea of the issues involved as well as pointing the reader to external references for more details.

The authors focus on respondent burden in Chapter 6, beginning with an interesting discussion on the costs and benefits of surveys from both a business and political perspective. The chapter provides considerable detail on how to measure and calculate actual and perceived burden, a research topic with numerous studies conducted across Europe, due to national policies and European Union goals to reduce the administrative reporting of businesses. Strategies to reduce survey burden are described, covering possible reductions tied to survey sampling and coordination, communication with respondents, and questionnaire improvement. The chapter ends on an important note, discussing the need for further research evaluating specific burden measures and measurements to better understand the effectiveness of burden reduction interventions.

Chapter 7 focuses on data collection instrument content and testing, with the interest of assuring quality responses while controlling or reducing burden. This is an area with a considerable literature to draw from. The chapter highlights the uniqueness of business respondents and their use of records to complete surveys. This, the author notes, makes it difficult to observe how respondents process and complete survey instruments in real time.

Developing content, measurements, and questions for a survey can be a particularly challenging task, and the author provides a strong focus on theory, and moving from concepts to operationalization. Methods and best practices for testing and evaluating questions, instructions, and instruments are well covered and summarized for different stages in the data collection process, including a section on web data collection that readers will find very useful.

Chapter 8 pulls together an enormous amount of information on questionnaire design, referred to as “questionnaire communication.” The first part of the chapter concentrates on the wording, structure, and visual design of self-administered questionnaires and associated quality issues. The author weaves together recommendations from past and current research and practice to provide comprehensive instructions on designing a business questionnaire. Examples focus on visual principles with discussions of cues to attract a person’s attention in tandem with integrating consistency into questionnaire features. Another section of the chapter covers how to build a coherent message to potential respondents through introductory materials, the design of web portals, and questionnaire layout for surveys that require multiple respondents within an organization. Final sections of this ambitious chapter include designing the questionnaire to communicate intent, definitions and tasks, and minimize response burden.

In Chapter 9, the authors extend “communication” to the data collection process. This chapter is full of new theory and practice on how to build a strong communication strategy to assure the questionnaire gets into the correct hands and quality responses are received back from businesses, and all the steps in between. First, the authors outline communication objectives for prefielding, fielding, and postfielding data collection phases, providing process models with activities and actions linked to the survey organizations and businesses. Then the authors turn their focus to tailoring communication, taking into account both external and internal businesses characteristics (e.g., economic sector/size and organizational policies, respectively). The authors devote a final section to planning and testing a comprehensive communications strategy, as well as detailing guidelines and practices, with the aim of increasing survey participation.

Chapter 10 is no exception to the rule – the authors are very diligent about continuity and integration in the book—so in this chapter and others they summarize and build on earlier chapters, setting an effective stage for new material. This chapter moves to implementation and active data collection management in the field and associated paradata and quality indicator measurement and monitoring, using the TSE framework. The authors incorporate responsive design planning in their discussion, i.e., designing data collection in such a way that it can be changed in real time. Since responsive design is a promising but relatively untested method, particularly for business surveys, this is an area very much in need of research. The authors set out good principles and very specific and all-inclusive measures/metrics relevant to business surveys to monitor quality and the production process of the survey organization.

Chapter 11 provides an overview of the iterative process of data editing and cleaning, covering data capture, coding and cleaning, both during and after survey collection. The section on data capture includes a major focus on specific data collection modes, and the coding section covers major business classification systems. For all processes, the authors set out detail on minimizing, measuring, and monitoring errors, and document implications

for instrument design. For editing and imputation, types, identification and treatment of micro errors are delineated (e.g., missing values, systematic, random and influential errors), as well as errors at the macroediting stage.

Chapter 12 discusses the process of making inferences from the collected data and how to balance the need to protect respondents' proprietary data with the desire to make as much information as possible available to the public. The author provides an excellent overview, particularly given the scope and complexity of business surveys, covering analytical techniques, disclosure control methods, dissemination, and archiving for economic statistical products.

Given this is a lengthy book, we hesitate to make suggestions for more detail and additional topics, but there are a few areas that are candidates for further development, when the authors begin a second edition (!). The book primarily focuses on surveys that produce official economic statistics; we think that the book could benefit from more detail and examples on business surveys that cover other topics, for example, workplace conditions, health and education, energy, and agriculture, as well as non-governmental surveys. Self-administered questionnaires are commonly used in business surveys, but we are aware of many agencies and organizations that conduct a great deal of telephone interviews, and to a lesser extent, personal interviews with business respondents. We would welcome detail on these additional modes of data collection. Given the skewed nature of employment, the book correctly spends considerable time on large, complex businesses. Small businesses have different issues, and their participation is often of concern, a topic that seems ripe for greater detail.

Finally, the authors are to be commended for putting together this comprehensive book and crediting the international workshops and conferences that contributed to building the networks and inspiration to undertake this major endeavor. As they note, the business survey methodology literature is dispersed across disciplines, and in our experience, is often found in workshop and conference papers, and to a lesser extent, in books, and peer reviewed journals. To have synthesized and provided new direction to this large body of literature is a major accomplishment.