

Response Burden in Business Surveys

Mojca Bavdaž¹

Abstract

Response burden has long been a concern for survey organizations. It grew into a more urgent matter as business working time became more precious with global competition, pressures on achieving higher productivity, spreading of lean approaches to eliminate any “waste” activity etc. Voluntary business surveys request and many government business surveys simply require businesses to dedicate some of this time to questionnaire’s completion.

Businesses have been loudly questioning the need to provide data to survey organizations, especially because of existence of alternative data sources, growing demand for data as well as lack of convincing explanations about the necessity of participation and usefulness of resulting statistics.

This introductory overview lecture first introduced the concept of response burden that may refer to the time needed for a survey response, the costs associated with such a response (both found under the expression actual response burden) or the feeling experienced when faced with a survey (also known as perceived response burden).

The lecture then explained the relevance of response burden, and challenges of its operationalisation and measurement (Bavdaž et al., 2015). The measurement of response burden is not straightforward because it has to deal with complex relations among people participating in the response process (Bavdaž, 2010) and intricate context in which the survey is set from its conception to its outcome (Haraldsen et al., 2013).

The lecture reviewed common approaches to measuring response burden and noted survey questions recommended for burden measurement (Dale & Haraldsen, 2007). The presentation of burden-reduction actions and the current state of affairs in national statistical institutes was based on the not so up-to-date, but still the latest available international comparison, a survey of 41 NSIs from 39 (mainly European) countries in the period 2006-2010 conducted in the framework of the BLUE-ETS project (Bavdaž et al., 2015).

Finally, gaps in present knowledge and open issues about response burden were exposed, among them exact impact of response burden on data quality, real causes and the most relevant factors of response burden, relation between actual and perceived burden, heterogeneity among businesses (also within size classes), effects and efficiency of burden-reduction actions etc.

Key Words: actual burden, perceived burden, compliance cost, standard cost model.

¹ Mojca Bavdaž, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, Kardeljeva pl. 17, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, email: mojca.bavdaz@ef.uni-lj.si.

Acknowledgement

I thank Deirdre Giesen from Statistics Netherlands for her great contribution and cooperation on the topic of response burden through years.

References

- Bavdaž, M. (2010). The multidimensional integral business survey response model. *Survey methodology*, 36(1), pp. 81-93.
- Bavdaž, M., Giesen, D., Korenjak Černe, S., Löfgren, T., and Raymond-Blaess, V. (2015). "Response Burden in Official Business Surveys: Measurement and Reduction Practices of National Statistical Institutes", *Journal of Official Statistics*, 31(4), 559–588. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/JOS-2015-0035>
- Dale, T., Haraldsen, G. (2007). "Handbook for Monitoring and Evaluating Business Survey Response Burdens". European Commission, Eurostat. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4374310/12-HANDBOOK-FOR-MONITORING-AND-EVALUATING-BUSINESS-SURVEY-RESPONSE-BURDEN.pdf>
- Haraldsen, G., Jones, J., Giesen, D. and Zhang, L.-C. (2013). "Understanding and Coping with Response Burden". In G. Snijkers et al. (Eds.), "Designing and Conducting Business Surveys" (219-252). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- The BLUE-ETS project (www.blue-ets.eu), funded by European Commission (n. 244767).