

OECD WORKSHOP ON BUSINESS AND CONSUMER TENDENCY SURVEYS, WARSAW – 14 SEPTEMBER 2004

Session 3: BTS/COS EXPERT GROUP TASK FORCES IN PRIORITY AREAS

a. Introduction

1. In December 2003 delegates who attended the joint EC-OECD workshop on International Development of Business Tendency and Consumer Opinion Surveys on 20-21 November 2003 in Brussels were asked to provide comments and proposals for future work, and indicate interest in membership in working groups to undertake work in some specific priority areas. This note summarises comments received and provides recommendations on creation of the task forces for discussion at the meeting.

2. In summary, it is recommended that three task forces be created to work on:

- improvement of response rates, minimization of respondents load;
- seasonal adjustment;
- harmonisation of survey operation and technical design

3. The following section provides a suggested outline of the specific issues that might be covered by each task force and lists possible membership of each task force based on initial responses to the summary record of the November 2003 meeting. Additional nominations will be sought at the meeting.

b. BTS/COS Task Force Groups: 2004-2005

I. Improvement of response rates and minimization of respondents load

Initial list of participating organisations/persons

United States	University of Michigan	Richard Curtin
China	National Bureau of Statistic (NBS)	Lin Tao
South Africa	Bureau of Economic Research (BER)	Murray Pellissier
South Africa	Bureau of Economic Research (BER)	Linette Ellis
Belgium	Gfk Ad Hoc Research Worldwide (GFK)	Mark Hofmans

Task force leader: to be discussed / determined

Co-ordinator: to be discussed / determined

4. Improvement of response rates and minimization of respondent load are primarily matters of national activity. The joint EC-OECD framework could, however, provide a useful forum for sharing information and discussing experiences across participating countries and institutions in the use of techniques to improve response rates and reduce respondents load.

5. Specific work in this area includes the identification of good national practice and perhaps recommendations and guidelines covering the following issues /practices:

- communication with survey respondents to gain their co-operation. Regular personal contacts with respondents increase response rates, and can also be used to improve the survey by identifying questions that respondents do not properly understand, questions that respondents cannot easily

answer, or questions that are not seen relevant by respondents. In addition, personal contacts can provide feedback on how the survey can be made more useful to respondents and how publications of the results can be improved;

- use of carefully designed questionnaires with clear and simple layouts and relevant information presented in a logical order to minimize respondent load and to improve response rates;
- more efficient sample design leading to possible reduction in sample sizes;
- use of efficient data collection/data capture techniques and follow-up routines, including the internet, as a medium for collecting information from respondents; exchange of information on recent innovations in this area;
- methods to estimate bias caused by non-response and to adjust estimation methodologies to account for this

II. Seasonal adjustment

Initial list of participating organisations/persons

France	INSEE	Helen Erkel-Rousse
Finland	Statistics Finland (SF)	Perti Kangassolo
Switzerland	Swiss Institute for Business Cycle Research (KOF)	not named

Task force leader: to be discussed / determined

Co-ordinator: to be discussed / determined

6. Seasonal adjustment in the context of qualitative survey data has different complexities than seasonal adjustment of quantitative statistical data. Differences between countries suggest that the amount of seasonality in series may be dependent on the way questions are asked, or if respondents are asked to exclude seasonality in their answers.

7. The focus of work on seasonal adjustment of survey data will therefore involve:

- investigation of the relationship between seasonality and noise in survey data. Preparation of recommendations on smoothing of volatile series with weak or not significant seasonality;
- use of seasonal adjustment by respondents and/or seasonal adjustment procedure. In many industries, managers are actually aware of the seasonal pattern affecting production, sales etc. Approaches to deal with this information and how to use it in combination with a standard seasonal adjustment procedure;
- guidelines for seasonal adjustment of survey data in general including recommendations concerning the use or not of respondent's knowledge concerning seasonal patterns and recommendations on approaches and methods for use by national institutes;
- best practice for dissemination of survey data including both raw and seasonally adjusted data by national institutes and international organisations. This will include recommendations for dissemination of nationally seasonally adjusted series by EC and OECD.

III. Harmonisation of survey operation and technical design

Initial list of participating organisations/persons

United Kingdom	Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	Jonathan Wood
Italy	Institute for Studies and Economic Analysis (ISEA)	Marco Malgarin
Japan	Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)	Takashi Sakuma
Japan	Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)	Masatoshi Kimura

Task force leader: to be discussed / determined

Co-ordinator: to be discussed / determined

8. There are at present no international guidelines and recommendations outlining best practice for the development of business tendency surveys. However, in 2003 the OECD published a handbook aimed at helping non-member countries to implement and/or develop their business tendency surveys. The survey procedures presented and recommended in the handbook are procedures which are used for official statistical surveys. These recommendations could, however, be used as a starting point for further discussion on development of standards for survey operation and technical design.

9. Specific work in this area includes:

- identification of ways to improve on the infrastructure of the survey by better use of registers, defining sampling units and determination of reporting units and response units;
- best practice concerning efficient sample design, updating procedures and weighting methods to improve on the quality of the survey;
- investigation of ways to achieve better comparability between countries in terms of survey periodicity, timing of surveys and release dates of results.

c. Organisation of task force work

10. The work of the task forces over the next year on the three topics outlined above could be organised as follows:

- The identification of an initial set of agreed best practice by each of the three task forces during 2004/2005 for dissemination on the newly created web-portal for business and consumer opinion surveys. These could subsequently be expanded / revised following the proposed 2005 meeting.
- The dissemination and presentation of specific recommendations by each of the three task forces at the proposed meeting at the end of 2005.

11. The first activity of each of the task forces would be the development of a detailed programme of work and the distribution of tasks among their members. The task force leader would contact task force members in the weeks following this workshop with initial proposals for consideration and comment.

12. It is envisaged that most of the work of the task forces will be undertaken via electronic communication, e.g. email. or through the establishment of electronic discussion group (EDG) databases. If practical, informal task force meeting(s) could also be held over the next year.