

Assessing and improving quality in official statistics: the case of the French Label Committee

Marc CHRISTINE

Scientific adviser at the Directorate for Methodology and statistical and international coordination

National Institute for Statistics and Economic studies (Insee), Paris, France



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1. Introduction

- ✓ Created in 1994.
- ✓ Competent to examine all projects of collecting social or economic data through **official** statistical surveys...
 - ... after the National Council for Statistical Information (**Cnis**) has appraised if the survey is of general interest or not (according to the statistical law of 1951).
- ✓ It checks the quality of the survey...
 - ...and delivers a **label of general interest and statistical quality**.
- ✓ Necessary condition for the survey to be implemented as an official statistical survey (with a « **visa** »).

⇒ ***This presentation aims to show how it works and its usefulness.***

2. Composition of the Committee

a. **Board of Governance :**

- President
- « Rapporteur »
- Secretariat

b. **Experts**, with an *advisory* status

- ✓ Methodologists
- ✓ High knowledge in data collection procedures...
- ✓ ...and in the field covered by the survey

c. **3 Commissions :**

- Households and individuals
- Enterprises and establishments, local public authorities or establishments
- Agricultural farms

2. Composition of the Committee

- ✓ Members of the commission are named in official regulations.
- ✓ Representatives in each commission from :
The National Institute for Statistics or Statistical services in Ministries and
 - Trade unions
 - National commission for data protection
 - National union of family associations
 - Social researchers
 - Employers
 - Union of craftworkers
 - ...
- ✓ They are *independent* and free to express their own views
⇒ **large scope of different points of view.**

3. Procedures of submitting and examination

- ✓ The survey department (« *producer* ») sends a file which provides a broad and accurate description of the survey.
- ✓ **First step** : preliminary examination by the Board of governance and the experts
 - ⇒ *Technical report* which points out the difficulties or problems met
 - ⇒ Sent to the producer and the other members of the Committee.
- ✓ **Second step** : written answers to the technical report from the producer.
- ✓ **Plenary session** of the Committee : the producer answers to any question, wide discussion among all participants.

3. Procedures of submitting and examination

✓ Results : Secret deliberation

⇒ **A wide scale of assessments:**

✓ The best case : notice of compliance delivering a label of « **general interest and statistical quality** » and then a « **visa** » from the Minister...

✓ ...but often with recommendations, with different degrees of expectation:

- Suggestions, advices
- Weak or stronger recommendations
- **Suspensive reserves** : the producer has to do further specific work until obtaining the label ; if not, it does not.
- 7 % of the surveys in this last case.

✓ The worst case : label is not at all delivered (4 %).

3. Procedures of submitting and examination

- ✓ The Label is generally given for **five years**
... but it may be for a shorter period if the Committee expects improvements in methodology or data collection procedures.
 - ✓ Each year, about **60 surveys** are examined.
More than 1200 since the beginning.
 - ✓ All the documents (files sent by the producers, technical reports, written answers to this report, decision statements, notice of compliance...) are archived.
- ⇒ It results a huge volume of documentation on any survey, which is very useful for the « **memory** ».



4. Assessment criteria

- The quality examination is « total » : it deals with ***all the aspects of the data collection process***.
- It takes place ***upstream***, not on the results.

- In depth analysis with six main criteria :
 - a. General context
 - b. Statistical methodology
 - c. Data collection process
 - d. Study of the questionnaire and examination of test reports
 - e. Costs and burdens on respondents
 - f. Data dissemination

- These criteria are linked with items of the European Code of practices.

4. Assessment criteria

A. General context

- European regulations or directives
- Other international constraints
- Order from the Government
- Comitology : the Committee must assess if all users, unions and employers, or researchers, have been enough **consulted**.
- Is it a new survey or a renewal?
 - Last case : what are the changes as regards the former survey, does the new one fit the changes in social or economic context, will it allow **comparability**?
- Is the field covered by the survey not dealt with by other sources?
- Is it **mandatory** (for interviewees) and why? The Committee puts emphasis on the way it is justified.

4. Assessment criteria

B. Statistical methodology: *a major issue*

a. Sampling

- Population covered by the survey
- Data basis, statistical units
- Accurate description of the sampling process:
 - sample size, linked with accuracy or costs constraints
 - stratification, balancing conditions
 - distribution of sample weights
 - sample rotation, if it applies
 - negative or positive coordination with other samples (especially in business surveys)

⇒ ***All the choices made for this process must be explained and justified.***

4. Assessment criteria

b. Post-data collection treatments

- The Committee verifies if all methodologic works are well planned and will be well done and if methodologists have been consulted:
 - Non-response correction
 - Calibration
 - Imputation
 - Setting final weights
 - Distribution of weights and risks of extreme values
 - Variance estimation
- It generally asks to have further papers describing those topics when the methods are implemented.

4. Assessment criteria

C. Data collection process

- Different ways of collecting data : face to face, telephone, questionnaire delivered by Post office, available on a web site... and how they can be mixed.
- The Committee must be convinced by the relevance of those choices.
- Who is surveyed and how he/she is drawn from the data basis?
- Will there be matchings with administrative data?
- **Security** of data transmission.

4. Assessment criteria

A wide emphasis on *notification letters to the interviewees*

- Key element of the contact, they aim to make the survey acceptable and give a good picture of official statistics.
- They should be:
 - motivating
 - short
 - clear, with *transparency* and *fairness*
 - explaining the purpose and future uses of the survey and by whom...
 - ..and how data will be disseminated...
 - ..and how statistical confidentiality is preserved.

4. Assessment criteria

To help producers, the Committee has written a booklet giving advices and principles for those letters:



COMITÉ DU LABEL DE LA STATISTIQUE PUBLIQUE



4. Assessment criteria

D. Study of the questionnaire

- Consistency with the general interest defined by the Cnis
- Relevance according to the purpose of the survey: avoid additional questions without direct correlation, or strongly justify them
- Non ambiguous nor redundant questions
- Items for answering: exhaustive, non redundant
- Correct organization of filters between questions.

4. Assessment criteria

A wide emphasis on tests.

- Tests are necessary to ensure the clarity of questions and to verify the quality of answers (coherence, understanding..) and the **response time**.
- The Committee strongly appreciates the test reports, showing how their results have led to modify the questionnaire.
- A survey without tests or with « poor » tests cannot obtain the label.

4. Assessment criteria

E. Costs and burdens on respondents

- **Length and duration** of the questionnaire, with respect to the data collection process (for instance, avoid long lists of items when the interview is by phone..)
- Ways to reduce it (such as matching with administrative data)
- Estimates of the costs of the survey for respondents (30 € / hour)
- Means dedicated to the survey => *wise use of public funds*

F. Data dissemination

- Programme of publications to be large enough, with not too long deadlines
- Individual data available for researchers
- Transparency of *metadata* (and *paradata*)

5. Contributions of the Committee to quality improvement

- ✓ The items described above show the way the Label Committee assesses the quality of surveys...
...and its recommendations are the way to improve the quality.
 - ✓ The Committee thus contributes to define standards of quality that any official statistical survey should follow.
 - ✓ The producers learn more and more what the best practices are and what they shall do in order to obtain the label, due to the criteria used by the Committee.
- ⇒ ***It results an increasing degree of high expectations from the Committee and, at last, of the quality level of all surveys.***
- ✓ The producers appreciate an ***outside expertise*** which helps them to take profit from others' good practices.

5. Contributions of the Committee to quality improvement

⇒ Finally, the Committee

- ✓ is an « **alert transmitter** » ...
- ✓ ...and it builds the **memory** of surveys through all documents it gathers or writes itself...
- ✓ ...which constitute a set of references and advices very useful to disseminate quality standards.

6. Some issues for future

A. Widening the Label Committee's role

Since 2010 its role has been extended:

- Assessment of statistics produced by **private law bodies**, bringing more accuracy or freshness to national statistics (rents, energy...)
- and of production and dissemination procedures of data produced by **French administrative bodies**:
 - Health expenditures and reimbursements from the social security system
 - Employment estimates from the same source
 - Prices of dwellings from notaries registrations

B. The case of specific surveys

At the border of the Committee's scope:

- Experiments (new internet surveys...)
- Qualitative « follow-up » surveys linked with a main survey, made by social researchers
- Surveys with parts or fields in health, using specific techniques such as biological measures...

6. Some issues for future

C. The case of European or international surveys

- What may be the role of the French Label Committee when the survey is framed at the international level?
- Very often, decisions have been taken before, either on methodology or on the questionnaire, and no change is more possible.

⇒ ***The French Label Committee feels uncomfortable in that situation.***

- Particularly, it may consider the lack in tests as a real difficulty.

6. Some issues for future

What solutions?

- Sending all technical reports made by the French Committee to Eurostat or international boards, in order to help them in future.
- ***Building a European Label Committee*** to deal with European surveys...
- ..and check their quality before granting regulations
 - Assessing preliminary and generalized tests before any decision on the questionnaire
 - Verifying that ***comparability*** is guaranteed (main issue: ***translations***).

7. Conclusion

- A very useful machinery to implement **external checking** on surveys.
 - **Independent body** whose advices are appreciated – even unfavourable.
 - It allows to verify that surveys still fit the standards of quality and **contributes to the dissemination of good practices**.
 - **The quality and relevance of results depend on the quality of the process.**
- ⇒ **The Peer review has underlined the positive role of the French Committee.**

*The Committee acts as a
« flame keeper »....*

*...and its vigilance preserves the
state of art.*

Thank you for your attention!

marc.christine@insee.fr

Insee

18 bd Adolphe-Pinard
75675 Paris Cedex 14

www.insee.fr  

Informations statistiques :
www.insee.fr / Contacter l'Insee
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