Chapter 5
Policy Lessons for the Use of Perception Surveys for Evaluation, Diagnosis and Communication

This chapter discusses the strategies used by OECD countries in order to benefit the most from stakeholder surveys for evaluative and diagnostic purposes (Section 1) and to better communicate reforms (Section 2). It provides policy makers with policy lessons to address the complexity of perceptions and the risks entailed in the interpretation, use and communication of survey results.

Using perception surveys in regulatory policy evaluation and design

Many OECD countries run perception surveys to evaluate or inform the design of regulatory policies. In Canada, for example, the results of the survey on regulatory compliance costs are intended to help determine whether efficiency measures introduced by government are helping business save time and money and have made it easier to deal with administrative forms. In the Netherlands, the micro and macro perception surveys serve to find the answer to the question: "Are we doing the right things, and are we doing the things right?" (Atkinson and Van der Zwet, 2010, Slide 8).

However, governments cannot rely exclusively on survey results to benchmark the performance of their regulatory policy. The reason is the complexity of perceptions discussed in the last chapter: many factors can cause changes over time that are independent of changes in regulatory reform policies. In line with this, most countries involved in the OECD's work on perception surveys did not report a clearly defined standard process of using the results. Commonly, results were reported to be circulated as part of high-level reports for discussion, but it was not clear to what extent the results influence policy actions compared with other information available to government.

While there is no systematic evidence on the actual use and impact of the results of perception surveys, three policy lessons for the *use* of such surveys are particularly worth emphasizing. These are based on the experiences and insights of OECD officials and academic experts as reported at the 2010 OECD workshop on perception surveys in Istanbul:

Policy lesson 1: It is necessary to look beneath survey results.

Perceptions and hence survey results are shaped by many factors. Thus, before drawing any concrete policy conclusions, it is necessary to look beneath a survey's results in order to understand what factors are driving them. For example, two countries may run an identical survey and findings may indicate in both countries that businesses perceive an increase in administrative burdens. The identical survey results in both countries do not necessarily mean that the reasons for this perceived increase in burdens are identical. For example, in one country the negative survey results might be due to negative experiences with front-line service staff and public authorities in charge of regulatory matters, while in the other country a degradation of the economic climate led people to answer negatively. In-depth questions and qualitative research methods prove very valuable in bringing to light the reasons for the results and drawing concrete policy conclusions.

Policy lesson 2: A comprehensive evaluation system will include different types of indicators, each revealing different information for policy evaluation.

A combination of different evaluation tools brings different pieces to the performance puzzle, as every evaluation tool has its strengths and limitations. Discrepancies in results can show the need for deeper analysis to evaluate and inform policies. For example, in many countries surveys have tended to reveal negative perceptions of the quality of regulations while in contrast more facts-based measurements have shown an improvement. As discussed in Chapter 1, this appears to apply, particularly with respect to programmes targeted at reducing administrative burdens. Table 2 illustrates this gap with an example from Sweden where the areas identified as most burdensome by the Standard Cost Model (SCM) were different from those identified as burdensome by businesses in a perception survey.

Table 5.1. Results of the regulation barometer and the SCM measurement in Sweden

Most costly areas according to SCM measurements	Most burdensome areas according to NNR Members
1. Company Law	1. Environmental Law
2. Accountancy	2. Health and Safety Legislation
3. Food Safety	3. Labour Law
4. Planning Law	4. Statutory Audits
5. Tax regulations	5. Tax regulations
6. Labour law	6. VAT
7. Consumer and Product Safety	7. Statutory action plans for equality
8. Environmental Law	8. Statistics and providing information to government

Source: Hedström, Jens (2010), “Measuring Progress in Regulatory Reform”, presented at the OECD Workshop on Measuring Progress in Regulatory Reform: Perception Surveys, 21-22 June, Slide 4, available at *www.oecd.org/dataoecd/13/53/45604673.pdf*.

Along with qualitative research methods, stakeholder consultation can help to understand the discrepancies between the results on different evaluative tools and to inform reforms accordingly. For example, it might be worth testing different explanations for the gap between the SCM and the perception measurement, such as the relatively small role administrative burdens play in compliance costs or the persistence of irritation costs.

Policy lesson 3: Irritation costs and negative front-line service experiences seem to explain a significant degree of business and citizen's dissatisfaction with regulation.

Lessons learned from perception studies conducted in a number of OECD countries participating in the workshop in Istanbul 2010 seemed to suggest that irritation costs and negative front-line service experience explain a significant degree of business and citizen's dissatisfaction. Often, this can be to a greater extent than is suggested by the measurable costs of administrative burdens. Some OECD countries therefore focus on policy actions that reduce irritation costs. Of course the reasons for the same survey results can differ significantly across countries, and irritation costs may not be responsible for bad survey results in all OECD countries. Governments are therefore well advised to first understand the reasons for the results before designing appropriate policy responses (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4).

Using perception surveys for communication with stakeholders

Perception surveys can be an integral part of a two-way communication strategy with stakeholders. First, they can help to evaluate the success of the government's communication strategy by assessing the level of awareness of recent initiatives among stakeholders. Second, perception surveys can serve as a means to communicate stakeholder views on regulatory reform to the government and a discussion of the results can lead to fruitful exchanges between government and stakeholders on the case for regulatory reform.

Communicating regulatory reform to stakeholders

Perception surveys can provide information about stakeholders' awareness of regulatory reform programmes, of their awareness of changes in particular regulations and of their awareness of costs and benefits of regulations. This means that they provide important information about the effectiveness of the government's communication strategy. For example, the Dutch Macro Business Sentiment Monitor asks: "Are you familiar with the government's intention to reduce the number of laws and regulations and the resulting obligations?" and the Swedish Regulation Barometer asks: "Are you aware of the Government's better regulation programme?"

Stakeholder awareness is crucial for regulatory reform to succeed: limited awareness of changes in regulation may lead to low levels of compliance with the new regulations. Similarly, a low level of awareness of a government's regulatory reform programme may lead to limited support for it. If stakeholders are only aware of the costs of regulations to them and not of the costs and benefits for the society as a whole, they may not support a growth and welfare enhancing regulatory policy.

Box 5.1 lists a number of lessons learned in Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to successfully communicate regulatory reform to businesses, and hence to raise awareness of government initiatives and to improve perceptions of regulatory reform through better communication.

Box 5.1. Lessons for communicating regulatory reform from Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, Denmark and the Netherlands compiled key lessons learned in their countries for communicating regulatory reform to businesses. Concretely, they advise to:

- Focus on specific target groups and adjust the message to them;
- Create a corporate government website on regulatory reform;
- Provide companies with a question box;
- Run a media campaign with examples of changed regulations;
- Give an overview of what government does and has done to reduce burdens, presenting clear examples of burden reductions and administrative simplifications made by government;
- Have others (ambassadors and businesses itself) spread the message of burden reduction and noticeable simplification.

Communication to enterprises must be:

- *Timed* so they get the information when they need it – when they do not need it they discard it;
- *Targeted* to specific enterprise so they know the information is relevant to them;
- *Sufficient* so the enterprises do not have to seek further information.

Information taken from Atkinson, Rachel and Daphne Van der Zwet (2010), "Examples and lessons learned on Perception and Communication", presented at the OECD Workshop on Measuring Progress in Regulatory Reform: Perception Surveys, 21-22 June, Slides 5; pp. 11-13, available at *www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/24/45640144.pdf*.

Engaging in a dialogue and learning from business and citizens

A good communications strategy is not limited to a public relation strategy. Stakeholders are not just passive receivers of government communication. Rather, their knowledge and support is crucial to a successful regulatory reform design and implementation. A good comprehensive communication strategy is a two-way strategy, involving stakeholders at every step of the regulatory reform cycle (see Box 5.2). This can include the use of perception surveys to systematically gather stakeholder feedback. Governments can also discuss the results of perception surveys with business and consumer representatives to understand what is behind the results, to identify what really bothers stakeholders, and to define priority areas for future reforms. For example, the government in Belgium discusses the results of the biannual survey on administrative burdens with businesses involved in the project.

Box 5.2. A two-way communication strategy: Involving businesses

The United Kingdom, Denmark and the Netherlands identified concrete actions that foster co-operation with business and help gather information and feedback from business on the case of regulatory reform:

- Involve stakeholders in an early stage of regulatory reform, for example by organising working panels to identify key issues for businesses;
- Listen to their stories and give feedback on what has been done to solve their problems;
- Have a complaint website; use one sender. For example, in the Netherlands, businesses are referred to the website *answersforbusiness.nl*;
- Work together with branch organisations like the Federation of Small and Medium-sized enterprises;
- Measure perceptions of businesses.

Information taken from Atkinson, Rachel and Daphne Van der Zwet (2010), "Examples and lessons learned on Perception and Communication", presented at the OECD Workshop on Measuring Progress in Regulatory Reform: Perception Surveys, 21-22 June, Slides 11-13, available at *www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/24/45640144.pdf*.

Communicating results to stakeholders usually implies making results publicly available. Many countries do publish the results (see Table A.1 in the Annex). Some use results only for internal discussions and other governments publish them widely when they are positive.

Publishing results has the advantage of enhancing transparency and accountability, and to make a public debate possible. Some risks associated with publication are that results might be easily misinterpreted and that media may report results without taking into account the complexity of the perceptions driving those results. Survey results might be used by governments, the opposition and civil society to demonstrate the effectiveness of certain policies, criticise the government or to lobby for reforms, depending on the political agenda of those interested in the surveys. Systematic evidence on the use of perception data by different groups across a number of OECD countries is not available.

Lessons learned in some OECD countries to address these risks suggest that:

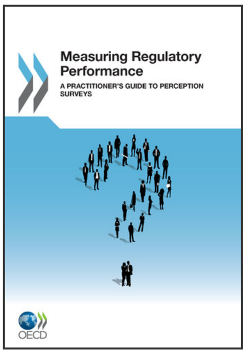
- Governments should publish the results of perception surveys along with the insights gained from qualitative studies on the factors underlying the results, the methodology used and data from other sources and indicators on the same topic.

- The design of the survey should be neutral, *i.e.* surveys should not be designed to support electoral voting intentions, political party preferences or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders (Turcotte, 2010).

Conclusion

Perception surveys are used for *i)* regulatory policy evaluation and design and for *ii)* communication. First, they evaluate the success of regulatory reform programmes from a user's perspective and serve as a diagnostic tool, to identify areas of concern to business and citizens to inform future regulatory reforms. Perception surveys, while useful, have their limitations. Experience suggests that there is likely to be a disparity between the perceived quality of regulations as reported by business and citizens and the measurable results of regulations. For example, in many countries surveys have tended to reveal negative perceptions of the quality of regulations while in contrast more fact-based measurements have shown an improvement. This appears to apply in particular with programmes targeted at reducing administrative burdens. A comprehensive evaluation system will therefore include different types of indicators, each revealing different information for policy evaluation. Discrepancies in results can highlight the need for deeper analysis to evaluate and inform policies.

Perception surveys are also an integral part of a two-way communication strategy with stakeholders. They can serve as a means to communicate stakeholder views to the government, and as a basis for discussion that can lead to fruitful exchanges between government and stakeholders on the case for regulatory reform. Survey results can also help to evaluate the success of the government's communication strategy by assessing stakeholders' level of awareness of recent initiatives.



From:

Measuring Regulatory Performance

A Practitioner's Guide to Perception Surveys

Access the complete publication at:

https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264167179-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2012), "Policy Lessons for the Use of Perception Surveys for Evaluation, Diagnosis and Communication", in *Measuring Regulatory Performance: A Practitioner's Guide to Perception Surveys*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264167179-8-en