

Experiences in Innovation Surveys South African Perspectives

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History

- South Africa has had four Innovation Surveys
- The Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CeSTII) has undertaken the last two of these for 2002-2004 and 2005-2007
- Sample sizes of 3087 and 4000 respectively
- Response rate of 37.3% for 2005 but lower in 2008

What went right

- Process of obtaining a random stratified sample from the business register of Statistics South Africa
- Having a dedicated call centre to follow up on respondents
- Following the EU Community Innovation Survey (CIS) process and methodology very carefully – kept us on the right track

What went right

- Holding a consultative workshop before final design of the questionnaire helped obtain buy-in from stakeholders
- Having an accompanying letter with the questionnaires from the Minister of Science and Technology helped to formalise and elevate the survey
- Having the input of knowledgeable statisticians in the extrapolation process

What went wrong

- The SA business register is a tax database and contains records of many closed and non-existent businesses
- A lot of sample cleaning is necessary and this can reduce sample size at the level of strata
- Turnover is not a good proxy for company size (number of employees) and many firms were in the incorrect size class

Learning

- Following by example and reading widely on the conduct of innovation surveys strengthens methodology and confidence
- Business sector in SA is burdened by many official and unofficial surveys – response rate to surveys without follow up is usually less than 10%
- Requires much hard work to increase response rates to over 30%

Learning

- Difficult to engage the business sector but did get some feedback that the innovation survey helped some to better understand their businesses
- Having dedicated staff working on specific sectors helped us to better understand the dynamics of the sectors

Learning

- Analysing innovation survey data is a complex process
- In most countries the central statistical agency is responsible for the survey – they have the resources
- CeSTII managed to do the survey with a relatively low level of resources

Learning

- Having an innovation survey econometrician visit CeSTII from UNU-Merit helped to build our confidence that we were on the right track
- Some of the questions provide illuminating information on policy issues e.g. use of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), collaboration between firms and universities

The future

- Results of the 2008 survey are about to be approved for release
- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) and CeSTII will hold a national consultative workshop on the content and conduct of the next innovation survey
- Will probably still follow CIS but will have a focus on South African questions of interest

The future

- Need to find a solution regarding having number of employees rather than turnover as the determinant of size classes of firms
- More in-house analysis of the databases and other information produced



THANK YOU!

