STEP Skills Measurement
Survey of Employers

Implementation Manual

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1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of the STEP Skills Measurement Survey of Employers is to collect accurate information on the kinds of skills used and needed by employers in order to inform policymakers about educational and training policies. This Implementation Manual is designed to provide guidance to the firm contracted to implement the survey. It should be read by all employees and associates of the contracting firm, including project directors, field managers, and field supervisors. A separate field manual is provided for interviewers. Particular emphasis is placed on aspects of the Survey that might be somewhat unusual even for experienced survey professionals, principally that an employer survey is quite different from a household survey or opinion poll.

The Employer Survey on Skills Measurement will be carried out in a large number of countries around the world, and thus this Implementation Manual is intended for use in a variety of circumstances. The Survey uses a standardized survey instrument designed to assess skills in businesses around the world, but the questionnaire will be translated and adapted for each country in which it is used. The Surveys are conducted using a uniform sampling methodology in order to minimize measurement error and yield data that are comparable across the world's economies.

2. OVERALL ORGANIZATION

The Survey is designed to collect accurate and complete data on skills demanded by employers for each employer in the sample and for every question in the questionnaire. The data are collected through face-to-face interviews with the owners, general managers, human resource directors, or other top managers who are knowledgeable about the firm and its personnel practices. The type of information to be collected is generally objective and sometimes quantitative; while some evaluations of the firm's employees are requested, this is not a survey of subjective opinions. The Project will be carried out by a Survey Research Firm (SRF) on behalf of and under the direction of the World Bank country team (hereafter WB).

Quality and time are both of the essence for this Project. To ensure the highest quality of data obtained according to an agreed schedule, a clear and cooperative working relationship between the SRF and WB must be established. Thus, the SRF will assign a primary contact person and Project Supervisor for the entire Project duration (expected to be 3-6 months). The Supervisor should be available continuously throughout the project in order to handle any and all problems that arise during its course. The Supervisor must send reports at least weekly to a Project Monitor designated by the WB. The Monitor and other employees and designates of the WB may contact anyone from the SRF involved in the Project (including interviewers) at any time, and for quality-control purposes the former may also elect to participate in any and all stages of the research including but not limited to the actual field work and interviewing.[1]

3. SAMPLE AND CONTACTS

The observations in this Survey are establishments or workplaces – a single location at which one or more employees work – not the possibly larger legal entity which may include multiple establishments. The sample includes workplaces regardless of whether they are registered and unregistered (or "formal" or "informal"). Workplaces in the government, public administration, and other sectors whose budgets are part of the public sector are excluded, but establishments of state-owned enterprises with independent budgets (sometimes called "non-budgetary organizations") are included.

The sample list will be provided to the SRF by the WB, probably as a byproduct of a household survey already conducted. The sample size is expected to be in the range of 300-500. The list from the WB will contain information on the location, approximate size, and activity (industry or sector) of the firm, as well as its name. **No other list should be used to include firms in the sample, and the goal of this project is to obtain the highest possible response rate for firms on this list.**

It is the responsibility of the SRF to contact the employers on the list and persuade them to provide information for the project. In practice, this task is usually best carried out by the assigned interviewer, who can plan his/her travel schedule and perhaps establish some initial rapport with respondents. Sometimes it may be difficult to persuade firms to participate, but this project relies on persistent interviewers who can artfully persuade the managers of the firms on the list to share some of their time. Some of the means and arguments of persuasion that may be useful (based on experience from previous surveys of similar nature) include the following:

- Appeals to the common good, including nationalism, as participation contributes to inclusion of the country in an international analysis of skills and skill deficits
- References to the World Bank and all its support for the local economy
- Influence on policies for improved training and education of the workforce
- Letter of introduction from the World Bank addressed to the director of each company explaining the purpose, reference period, scope and coverage of the survey, promising confidentiality and use of data only for statistical/research purposes, and stressing the value of the survey to the country
- Letters of support from government officials (arranged either by the SRF or WB)
- Payments/gifts (previous experience suggests that cash is ineffective, but flowers, chocolates, bottles, etc. may smooth the relationship)
- This survey is shorter (30-45 minutes) than most (which frequently take 2 hours or more), and the focus is on employee training and skills (confidentiality issue is smaller)
- Anonymity guaranteed – only aggregated data will be published

[1] Prior to the field work, it would be extremely useful if the SRF can obtain any firm registries or other comprehensive databases on firms, which are commonly compiled by National Statistical Offices and other government agencies (and which in many countries are publicly available and frequently obtainable).

- All reports can be sent to the firms, for useful feedback on how their skills issues compare with others in their country

4. QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire to be used is designed and provided in English by the WB. Comments and suggestions from the SRF on the questionnaire are welcome. It should be translated by the SRF, and then will be back-translated by the WB, and if necessary questions will be adjusted to clarify concepts.

It bears emphasis that this survey is far from the typical public opinion or marketing survey that most SRFs have the most experience with. The questionnaire requests objective information on numbers of employees in different categories, for example, and on managerial evaluations of the skills of these employees. This difference has important implications for a number of aspects of the Project, including the need for active involvement and supervision by the WB at all stages.

In addition to an information sheet with basic data on the firm (some collected prior to the interview) and respondent(s), the STEP Skills Survey of Employers questionnaire is composed of five sections organized by topic:

- Section 1 – *Work Force*
- Section 2 – *Skills Used*
- Section 3 – *Hiring Practices*
- Section 4 – *Training and Compensation*
- Section 5 – *Background*

Detailed information on the questions is provided in the Interviewer's Field Manual.

5. PILOT TESTING

The SRF will carry out pilots (pre-tests) of the questionnaire in 10 firms from a list provided by the WB.[2] The pilots are essential for examining the following sets of issues:

- the extent to which the questions move smoothly and are easy to ask;
- indications that some questions are misunderstood, answered incorrectly because of ambiguities, or not answered at all because of lack of information or resentment;
- clarity of time reference;

[2] The firms in the pilots will be drawn by the WB from the full sample list in order to reflect some variety in types (sizes, industries) of firms so as to check the wording of questions for these different types. Although the standard in typical public opinion survey research would be to use a sample for the pilots that is distinct from the main sample, in this case each observation is precious and the objective nature of the information requested implies that it should not change if requested a second time. Furthermore, if the changes are the pilot(s) are small, then it may be necessary only to make a short phone call to each firm to re-ask a question that was ambiguous in the first round, thus saving the expense of another interview. Finally, some re-interviewing is useful as a quality control check (on the questionnaire and on interviewers).

- the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, indications as to the latter being puzzled or reluctant, extent of cooperation and response, evidence of embarrassment or uncertainty on the part of the respondent in answering certain items;
- the most appropriate type of employee who would respond to various kinds of information;
- the adequacy and clarity of the training procedures, survey instructions and training materials.

After the pilot stage, WB will evaluate the quality and the information in the pilot questionnaires, and will make changes is the questionnaire. The SRF will also participate in this evaluation and make suggestions.

If necessary, a second set of pilots will be conducted to further improve the questionnaire. Again the list for these pilots will be provided by the WB.

The pilots can also provide useful feedback on strategies for approaching firms and on interviewer training and suitability. The WB Monitor or other representatives from the WB may participate in any and all pilots.

6. INTERVIEWER TRAINING

In preparation for the actual field work, all interviewers will be thoroughly trained by the SRF Supervisor and WB Monitor, and possibly others from the WB. Multiple training sessions in multiple locations may be held depending on the size of the country and number of firms to be interviewed.

Basic components of training include the following:

- An interviewer's field manual that includes basic instruction on operational definitions for the data to be gathered
- Emphasis on special concepts and definitions attached to the survey explained during an intensive training session
- In order to ensure that interviewers are fully competent to assist respondents in recalling events and reporting accurate information, techniques, including those to be used if respondents have difficulties with questions or are reluctant to supply information, are demonstrated.
- In cases of non-responses due to refusals, either partial or total, the interviewers should be trained to make all efforts to fully explain the purposes and importance of the survey in simple and persuading terms and to reassure the respondent about the confidentiality of information.

The training is expected to last for an entire day, including explanations of all questions, role-playing of interviewers and actor-respondents, and a quiz at the end. All interviewers will be paid for participating in the training, but those not passing the quiz will not be employed in the rest of the project. The WB may also choose to exclude any interviewers from further participation at any time without specifying the reasons.

7. FIELD WORK ORGANIZATION

After having been trained, interviewers who pass the quiz and approved by the WB are allocated a set of companies to be surveyed in the form of a list containing the names, addresses and phone numbers of the companies as well as their codes. For each interviewer, the enterprises to be contacted should be grouped based mainly on their geographical location, with the purpose of minimizing travel-related costs. The list of interviewers, including names, mobile phone numbers, email addresses, and set of firms for which each is responsible will be provided to the WB.

Each interviewer should be expected to complete a minimum of 10 successful interviews. Past experience shows that interviewers learn on the job and provide better quality if they are fully invested in a project, so the results are better if there are fewer interviewers carrying out more interviews each. At the other extreme, it is possible for interviewers to over-work, so the WB Monitor should be asked for permission in case of any interviewer carrying out more than 25 interviews.

The interviewers' first approach to the sampled workplaces is usually made as a telephone call, in which they briefly introduce the survey and ask for a precise appointment with a respondent able to provide the survey information.

Prior to visiting each firm, the interviewer should complete the information sheet containing information discovered (as much as possible) in the process of making contact. This information includes the firm's name, address, owner or manager name, phone number, email address, firm's website, and legal form.

In case of larger countries, the SRF will supervise the field work through Regional Supervisors, whose names, mobile phone numbers, email addresses, regions of responsibility, and names of supervised interviewers will be provided to the WB.

In case of interviewer fraud, the SRF is expected to fire the interviewer immediately and report the circumstances to the WB.

In cases where firms on the list are not interviewed, the SRF must provide a complete accounting of the reasons, i.e., refusal, shut down, moved, could not be located, etc. Interviewers should make every attempt to interview all firms on their lists, if necessary repeating visits to the same company.

8. DATA ENTRY AND CONTROL PROCEDURES

The SRF will design a data entry program that can be used both by the SRF and WB. This program, which can exploit the fact that the questionnaire is pre-coded and can provide immediate error messages in response to invalid entries, must be finished and approved by the WB before field work can commence; it can be tested during the pilots. Each organization is responsible for one data entry; see below for more details.

Immediately upon completion of the questionnaire, the SRF Supervisor should check the questionnaire and ensure that all is in order. A short list of variables (TBA) about the firm, including the name, position, and contact information (telephone number and email address) should then be immediately provided (electronically) to the WB Monitor, who may organize a follow-up check by telephone or in person.

The data entry should also start immediately. The SRF should use its program (see above) to carry out one data entry and then transfer the original filled-out survey questionnaire to the WB (keeping a copy for safe-keeping), which will then carry out an additional data entry. The Monitor will then compare the two data entries in order to find mistakes. Upon finding any mistakes, the SRF will correct the data and maintain the full database. The SRF compensation will be adjusted according to the quality of its data entry.

After the data for the questionnaire have been reliably entered, the Monitor will assess the quality of the data provided using a set of quantitative and qualitative logical consistency checks. Suspicious cases may be investigated, and interviewers may be requested to follow-up.

9. DELIVERABLES

1. Lists of names and contact information (mobile telephone numbers and email addresses) for all SRF personnel (including interviewers) involved in the project. While partial lists should be provided as necessary and as described above, a complete list should be provided at the end of the project.

2. Weekly report on field work, including basic data on interviewed firms.

3. Originals of all filled-in paper questionnaires (copies should be retained by the SRF).

4. Cumulatively compiled database with all data entered, prior to checking by the WB.

5. Final database with all data from questionnaires after all checking is completed.

6. Final report including discussion of any problems encountered.