



Office for  
National Statistics  
Swyddfa  
Ystadegau Gwladol



# The re-design of ONS business surveys: *An Agile Approach*

**Katherine Ralph and Bethan Jones - Data Collection Methodology (DCM)**

# Overview

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## Cognitive question testing and re-design of ONS business surveys: An Agile Approach

- Background
- Challenges
- Standard vs. new agile approach
- Outcomes
- Lessons learnt

# Background

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1. The Data Collection Methodology team – what do we do?

2. **ONS business surveys** need to be compliant with **important new European requirements**

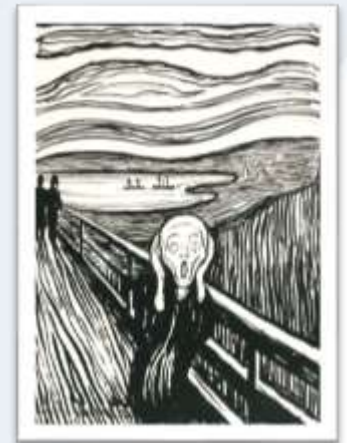
***= Substantial changes are required to the majority of ONS business surveys***



# Challenges



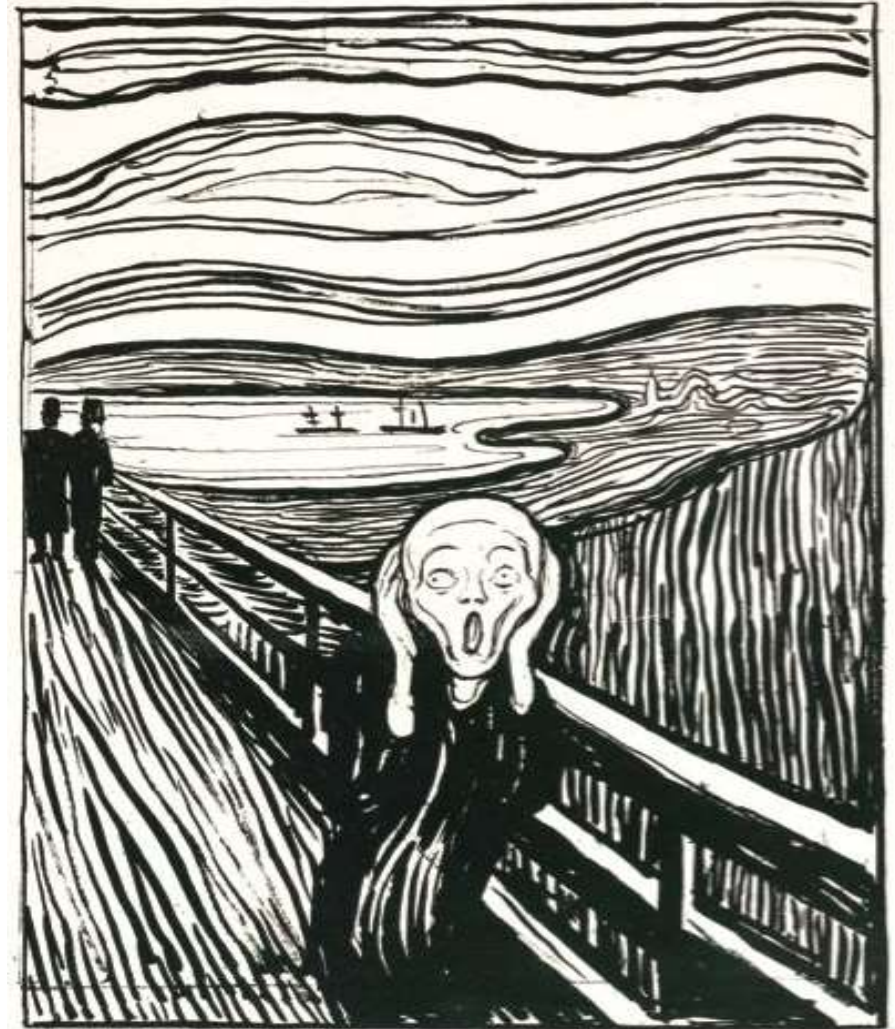
- Work started with two business surveys identified as a priority
- **Changes** included: 
  - Total re-design of the **questionnaires**
  - Inclusion of a large no. of additional data **requirements**
  - Surveys going to **businesses** that had not received them before



# User requirements



- **Substantial testing** for two questionnaires...
- ... within **3 months**...
- ... with **limited staff** resource!



# Possible solution...

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... develop and adopt a **new approach**  
for cognitive question testing  
and questionnaire design



# Methodology: standard approach



- **Waves of cognitive testing** with respondents
- **Transcription** of interviews
- **Analysis** using a thematic framework
- **Detailed report**
  - Background
  - Aims and methodology
  - Observations
  - Issues identified
  - Recommendations for changes



# Methodology: new agile approach



- Usual waves of **cognitive testing condensed into one week**
- **Detailed notes instead of transcriptions**
- **3 key analysis stages:**
  - The ordering and summarising of the data
  - Classification and categorising the data
  - Interpretation
- **Traffic light document + summary report**







# Weekly project structure

The structure of the project had 3 key stages:



Stage	Time period	Action
1	Monday to Wednesday	Field work <i>- 6/7 interviews per week</i>
2	Thursday	Debrief meeting attended by DCM and key stakeholders <i>- Changes to questionnaires based on:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>• findings</i></li><li><i>• end users' own observations and technical expertise</i></li></ul>
3	Friday	Survey Processing Centre (SPC) made the required design changes

# Traffic light document



- = **serious issue** with either the question **comprehension** or **ability to respond**
- = **peripheral issue**, such as the need to **emphasise an important word** to improve its **visibility**
- = the question needed **no further amendments**

*For example:*

Question number	Traffic light rating	Issues found in testing	Decisions made in debriefing
Q1		Respondents did not understand the term 'transferable deposit' and therefore would not be able to answer this question	The client and DCM agreed to add a definition explaining transferable deposits
Q2		The words 'more than one year' should be underlined for emphasis as respondents failed to notice this	Agreed
Q3		No issues	No changes needed

# Outcomes: *what worked well...*



- **Extensive changes** were made to the two surveys
- **Issues** were **addressed and resolved quickly**
- **Fewer comprehension and reporting issues** were reported
- Almost all **questions** were rated '**green**'
- **Reporting** included:
  - A brief report summarising the methodology used
  - A collated set of traffic light documents
  - The re-designed questionnaires
- **Very positive feedback** from the clients



# Lessons learnt: ... *what could be improved*



## Risks

- The **weekly testing and analysis schedule** is resource intensive
- **Different DCM members** may work throughout the project
- **Not all stakeholders** can attend debrief meetings
- Insufficient time for **analysis and interpretation**

## Possible solutions

- Future testing and analysis schedule could be **fortnightly** to ease the pressure
- **Same staff** throughout the project to establish expertise and build relationships with clients
- **At least one representative from each area** to attend de-brief meetings to ensure all perspectives are considered
- Approach to be adopted by **experienced researchers + an audit trail of changes**



# Any Questions?

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katherine.ralph@ons.gsi.gov.uk  
bethan.jones@ons.gsi.gov.uk

