

Using Behavioural Science to Improve ONS's Communication with Social Survey Respondents

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Office for National Statistics

What we do

- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and its recognised national statistical institute. We collect and publish statistics related to the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels. We conduct the census in England and Wales every 10 years.
- ONS employs over 1,000 social survey interviewers, who work face-to-face, on the telephone and at ports and airports.
- We collect data for core surveys like the Labour Force Survey, the Living Costs and Food Survey and the International Passenger Survey.
- We also win competitive tenders to run externally-funded surveys, such as the Family Resources Survey and the National Survey for Wales.

How we communicate with respondents

Printed materials:

- Advance letters
- Leaflets (sent with letter or available to interviewers)

Website:

- About ONS
- About each survey

Interviewers:

- On the doorstep or phone
- Answering helpline enquiries:

Future:

- Online survey help
- Webchat

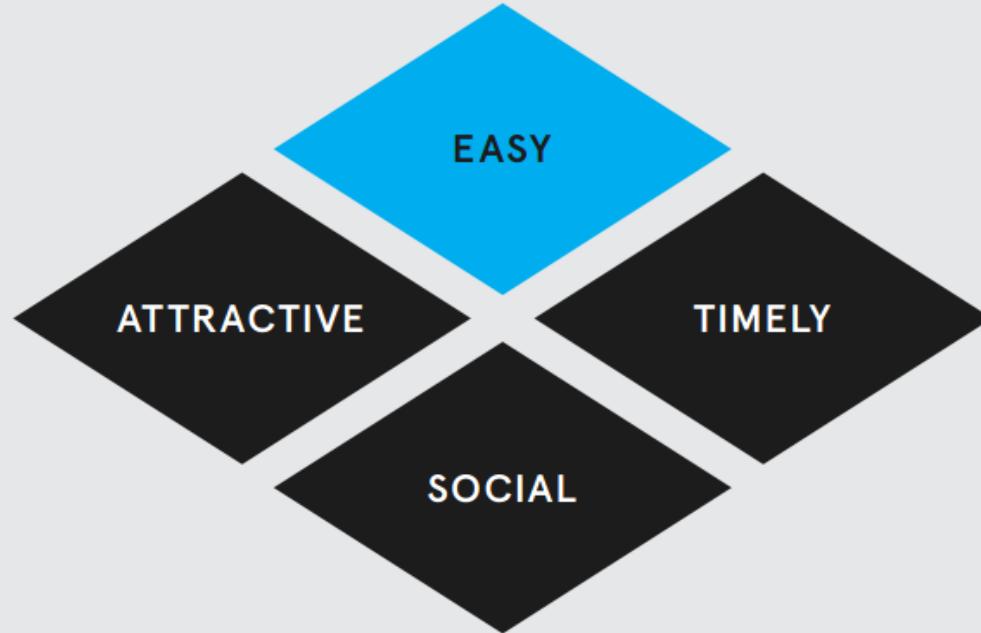
What is Behavioural Science?

Most of us believe that we are highly rational, making decisions on the basis of logic and evidence.

Psychological research shows that our actions and behaviour are influenced as much by automatic reactions as by our cognitive processing.

Behavioural science is about designing services and interventions to reflect the ways people really behave, rather than the ways theory or logic suggests they should rationally behave.

What are the principles?



EAST

Four simple ways to
apply behavioural insights

THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS TEAM.

Applying the principles to respondent communication

ONS sends an 'advance letter' to each address selected to take part in one of its social surveys.

We carried out a research project to use behavioural science to improve this letter to increase the likelihood of participation in the survey.

Following various stages of testing and review, including focus groups and cognitive interviewing, we developed a new letter and tested its effect in a split-sample field experiment.

The letter aimed to be simpler, more appealing and to make clearer what the recipient is being asked to do.



 Office for
National Statistics

www.ons.gov.uk

July 2013

Dear Resident(s)

I am writing to ask for your help with the **Opinions and Lifestyle Survey**. This study gathers a range of information which is quickly available to government, public bodies and charities for planning policies and services. Information collected varies each month but can be on topics as diverse as health issues, transport use and employment. By taking part you can help to influence matters that affect us all.

This study is being carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the government department responsible for collecting information and publishing statistics on almost all aspects of life in the UK. We also carry out the 10-yearly census in England and Wales.

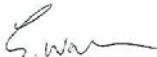
Your address was selected at random from the Royal Mail's list of addresses, and your participation in this study is very important in ensuring that all groups in the community are properly represented. Any information you provide will be treated in complete confidence. I have enclosed a book of stamps as a thank you for helping ONS in this work.

One of our interviewers will contact you to conduct the survey. If you are busy when they visit, the interviewer will be happy to arrange a more convenient time. All our interviewers carry an identity card with a photo, for your reassurance.

If you have any questions, please call our Survey Enquiry Line on **0800 298 5313**. Minicom users should dial 18001 before this number. Opening times are: Monday to Thursday – 9am to 9pm; Friday – 9am to 8pm; and Saturday – 9am to 1pm.

Thank you for your help.

Yours faithfully,



Glen Watson
Director General

This letter is also available in large print. To request a copy, phone **0800 298 5313**.

The personal information you give us is protected by legislation and must be treated as confidential under the Code of Practice. It will be used for statistical purposes only.



The Resident
Address line 1
Address line 2
Town
County
Postcode

Segensworth Road
Titchfield, Fareham
PO15 5RR

0800 298 5313

March 2013

Dear Resident(s)

Your address has been selected for the **Opinions and Lifestyle Survey**. This study is carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Each year about half a million people take part in our surveys.

Taking part will help your household

Many of the news stories you see or hear, about the economy or the cost of living for example, are based on information we collect. Your contribution to this study is essential for producing statistics about services and facilities that you, your family and your community need.

We need to interview somebody in your household

One of our interviewers is planning to visit your address to arrange a convenient time for an interview. If you'd like to arrange a time to suit you, or if you have any questions, please call **0800 298 5313**. Our interviewers are available during the day, in the evenings and at weekends and carry an identity card, for your reassurance. Please show this letter to other people in your household in case the interviewer visits when you are not at home.

We value your contribution

Your answers will be treated as confidential. I have enclosed a book of stamps to thank you for helping ONS.

Yours faithfully,

Glen Watson
Director General

This letter is also available in large print. To request a copy, phone **0800 298 5313**.

For more information, go to our website www.ons.gov.uk and click on the "Taking Part in a Survey?" link on the right hand side, or give us a call.



New Letter

Easy – repeats the phone number three times

Attractive - Colourful design; headings to break up text and highlight messages

Social – “Each year about half a million people take part in our surveys.”

Timely – encourages them to get in touch with us

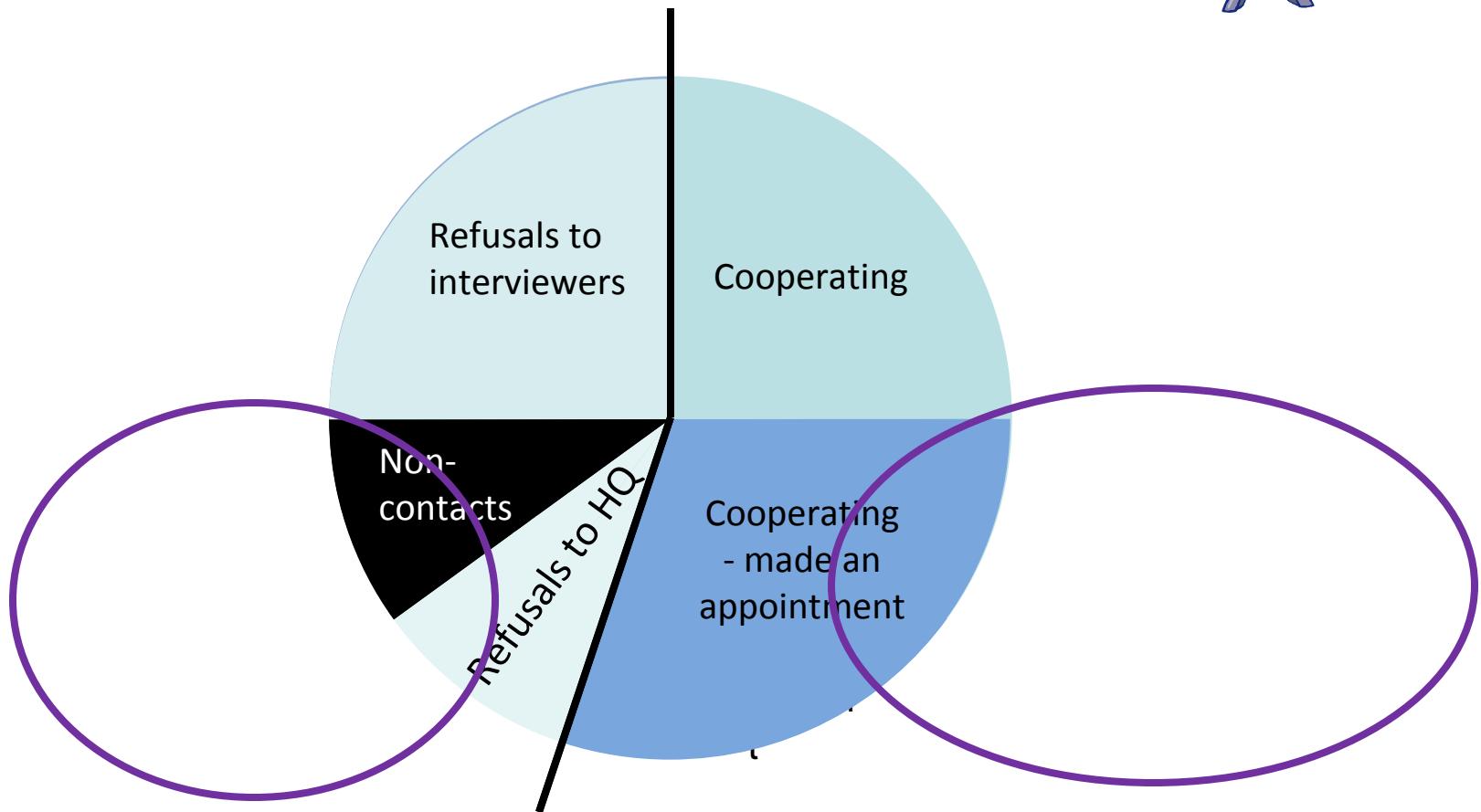
Results of RCT and conclusions

Outcome rates and test for significant change, Mar-Sep 2013

	Control Group (current letter)	Treatment Group (test letter)	Difference	P-value test for sig decrease	P-value test for sig increase
Response Rate	55.8%	56.3%	0.5%		0.275
Contact Rate	87.9%	89.0%	1.1%		0.018*
HQ Refusal Rate	5.3%	6.4%	1.1%		0.002*
Int Refusal rate	25.2%	24.7%	-0.5%	0.259	

*Indicate change is significant at the 5% level

Results



Control
group

Test group

Influence Workshop

We also communicate via interviewers. We developed a workshop for face-to-face interviewers on using behavioural science techniques to gain respondents' cooperation on the doorstep.

The principles were:

- Reciprocity;
- Commitment and consistency;
- Social proof;
- Liking
- Authority; and
- Scarcity.

Future use of Behavioural Science

- Projects across social surveys, business surveys census and ONS HQ relating to:
 - Encouraging response
 - Encouraging particular modes of response
 - Longitudinal response (Peak End Theory)
 - Recruiting and motivating staff
 - Influencing the way users engage with us