

Business Unit Harmonization, Phase 3

Case Study Interview Protocol

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(NOTE: This protocol is a guide – the questions presented here will not necessarily be asked exactly as worded in the protocol or in this order. Not all questions will be asked in every interview.)

Research Questions:

- Does the Kind of Activity Unit (KAU) work for the companies?
 - Which data items?
 - Less burdensome than current methods?
- What are the challenges for reporting at the KAU level?
- How do Full Service Account Manager (FSAM) services interact with the KAU?

Expected Length of Interview: 60 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Protocol
- Consent forms
- Digital recorder
- Copies of most recent survey submissions (for reference)
- Listing of proposed KAUs for the company

General probes that may be used throughout the interview:

- Reflect back on respondent's answer: "you said..."
- In your own words, what is this question asking?
- How did you arrive at this number/answer this question?
- Was this data easy to access?
- What records (if any) did you look at? What line or lines were of interest?
- Specifically, what did you include in this number? What did you exclude?
- Would you consult other people to obtain this answer?

Introduction:

- Explain purpose of meeting: to determine if the Kind of Activity Unit (KAU) project will be helpful, assess challenges to use from the respondents' point of view
- This is not a test of you! We want to understand how you are interpreting this form to make sure we are doing our jobs right and asking questions that can easily be answered.
- As we go through the interview, we will ask both general and specific questions. If at any time a question seems odd to you, please let us know! We encourage all feedback!
- Do we have permission to record our conversation for research purposes? Have respondent sign consent form.

Respondent Background

- Before we start with more specific questions, I would like to ask you a few questions about this company and your role in it.
- (For each person in the room): What is your formal job title? And, could you tell me a little about your role and responsibilities?

Company Background

- What would you consider to be the main operating activity of this company?
- How many locations are inside the US / outside the US?
 - o What types of locations are you including in this count?
 - o What types of activities are done at these locations?
 - o Are you including subsidiaries in this count?
 - o Has your company undergone any recent organizational changes, such as a merger, acquisition, opening new locations, closing locations, an internal restructuring, or change in business focus?
- What is your ownership status? Are you domestically owned or foreign owned?

Record-keeping and Terminology

1. How does your company keep records?
 - a. If needed: by EIN, state, industry, another variable?
2. Can you briefly walk us through the process that your company typically undertakes when answering an Economic data based survey?
 - o Do you work with other individuals or areas of the company?
 - o Do you interact with employees at other locations?
 - o What do you need to get from these locations?
 - o Do you make contact with EACH establishment or location of the company?
3. How do you define each of the following terms, which we currently ask for:
 - a. sales/operating receipts
 - b. operating expenses
 - c. purchases
 - d. e-commerce

- e. inventory
- f. accounts receivables

4. *For companies that are reporting for more than one industry:*
 Would you report by industry across all establishments, or can you report by product at each individual establishment?

5. Does your company use any of the data products that the Census Bureau publishes? What kind of data is important to your company, and your industry as a whole? Are there any data items you would like the U.S. Census Bureau to ask?

6. On some of our surveys, we ask for foreign inventory, detailed inventory (e.g. LIFO-related), e-commerce (including details like EDI), and detailed operating expenses. Are those easy or difficult to report?

7. For consolidated reporters (consolidated locations or consolidated industries):

- a. Why do you report in a consolidated fashion as opposed to by establishment/industry?
- b. Do you report the same data for all surveys?

8. What are the burden hours for each survey? Which questions take the longest to research?

Questions to ask companies based on trade specific reporting issues

Retail

1. Are you able to break out e-commerce segment data from brick-and-mortar data for things like sales, inventories, and/or expenses?
2. In your own words, what is the difference between a wholesaler and a retailer? Does your company do sales through both methods, or just one?
3. If applicable: How do you break out wholesale data from retail data?
4. Are you able to report data from your headquarters location by itself?

Wholesale

1. On our wholesale survey, we ask you to report distributor data separately from manufacturing sales branches or office. Does that distinction apply to you?
 If yes: In your own words, what is the distinction between those two types? Are you able to make that separation when you report on the survey?
2. In your own words, what is the difference between a wholesaler and a retailer? Does your company do sales through both methods, or just one?
3. If applicable: How do you break out wholesale data from retail data?
4. Are you able to report data from your headquarters location by itself?

Service

1. Are you able to report data from your headquarters location by itself?

KAUs

Now we'd like to talk more about the new method of data collection that we are working on, where we asked you to fill out our draft survey questions by a different reporting unit, the Kind of Activity Unit (KAU). We are investigating collection data at a level according to the business activities that a company engages in; these will be mapped directly to the NAICS codes that apply to your company (NAICS is the North American Industrial Classification System, and the NAICS codes are used to classify businesses by what they do). Our current practice is to do this on some data items on some surveys, whereas other surveys may ask you to provide data for each individual location that you have. Our proposed data collection The idea behind type of data collection that we are currently testing would see that we collect data in this fashion across surveys, with few exceptions. Your participation is helping us determine whether this is a path we should continue to pursue.

DRAFT QUESTIONNAIRE: APPENDIX B.

Several days ago, I sent you an attachment with a sampling of common questions that appear on Census Bureau surveys and asked you to attempt to collect the data by each of the KAUs that we believe were applicable to your company. Now I'd like to review each of these data items with you and talk to you about your experience.

- Were you able to collect this data at the KAU level?
- Tell me about your process for collecting the data in this way.
- Tell me about some difficulties that you had with this approach.
- Did you work with any colleagues to collect this data?
- How does that differ from your typical approach?
- For locations that have multiple activities there, how did you report their information?
 - Did you approach this in the same way for all of the data items, or did it differ per data item?
 - If needed: Did you assign them to one KAU based on their primary activity, or did you split them up based on their activity?

Note: ask the same basic questions for each subset of questions:

- Sales/receipts
- E-commerce
- Capital expenditures
- Inventories
- R&D

Inventory-specific

Now I'd like to ask you some questions specifically regarding the inventory questions, as these are undergoing some changes to the way they are currently presented.

- How would you go about gathering information to answer these questions?
- Does this differ from the way you currently collect it?
- I'd like to ask you about some of the terms we used in this, and please tell me for each of them how you would define them:
 - Finished goods
 - Work-in-progress
 - Materials, Supplies, Fuels, etc.
- In your own words, what are we asking you to provide in Question 8, total inventories?
- How about Question 9?
- Question 10?
- How do Questions 8-10 relate to one another?

End/Wrap up

- What are your overall impressions of reporting by KAU?
- How would you compare the process of answering these questions at the KAU level, compared with answering it at the establishment level as you do on the establishment-level surveys that you currently respond to, such as the Annual Survey of Manufactures or the Report of Organization Survey?
 - If needed, easier, more difficult, the same? In what aspects?
- To what degree were the KAUs we chose for your company representative of how your company is organized?
 - Were there any obviously incorrect KAUs that we identified for your company that do not apply? If so, which?
- What general difficulties did you have reporting by KAU?
 - Follow-up: Are these difficulties that you also experienced when reporting by establishment?
- What benefits did you see to reporting by KAU?
 - Follow-up: Are these improvements over the current reporting format, by establishment?
- Do you foresee any problems with reporting by KAU that we haven't yet addressed?
- Do you have any other comments or suggestions for us?

Thank you very much for your time today!