

# Barriers to Response in Annual Economic Surveys

Melissa A. Cidade

Kelsey Drotning

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# Framework – Fisher et al. 2003

## External

- Environmental
- Business
- Respondent

## Internal

- Mode
- Marketing
- Burden
- Request

# Participant Overview

- Interviewing period: Sept. 6 through 17, 2021
- Total or partial non-response to the following annual surveys:
  - Annual Survey of Manufactures (ASM)
  - Service Annual Survey (SAS)
  - Annual Wholesale Trade Survey (AWTS)
  - Annual Retail Trade Survey (ARTS)
- 19 total interviews, lasting about 20 minutes each, all multi-unit firms

# Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** Are firms getting our communications?

**Research Question 2:** *For total non-responders:*  
What are the reasons why firms are not completing at all?

**Research Question 3:** *For partial non-responders:* What are the reasons why firms are not completing all requests?

What  
happened?!

# External Factors

Things we can't change....

# Environmental

- Mail delays
- Remote work
- Changing economic conditions
- “Normally [survey requests] come to one person through the mail, but with COVID, we do **go to the office only once a month** to collect the mail. Sometimes [the mail is] not on time - there's a lag.”

# Business

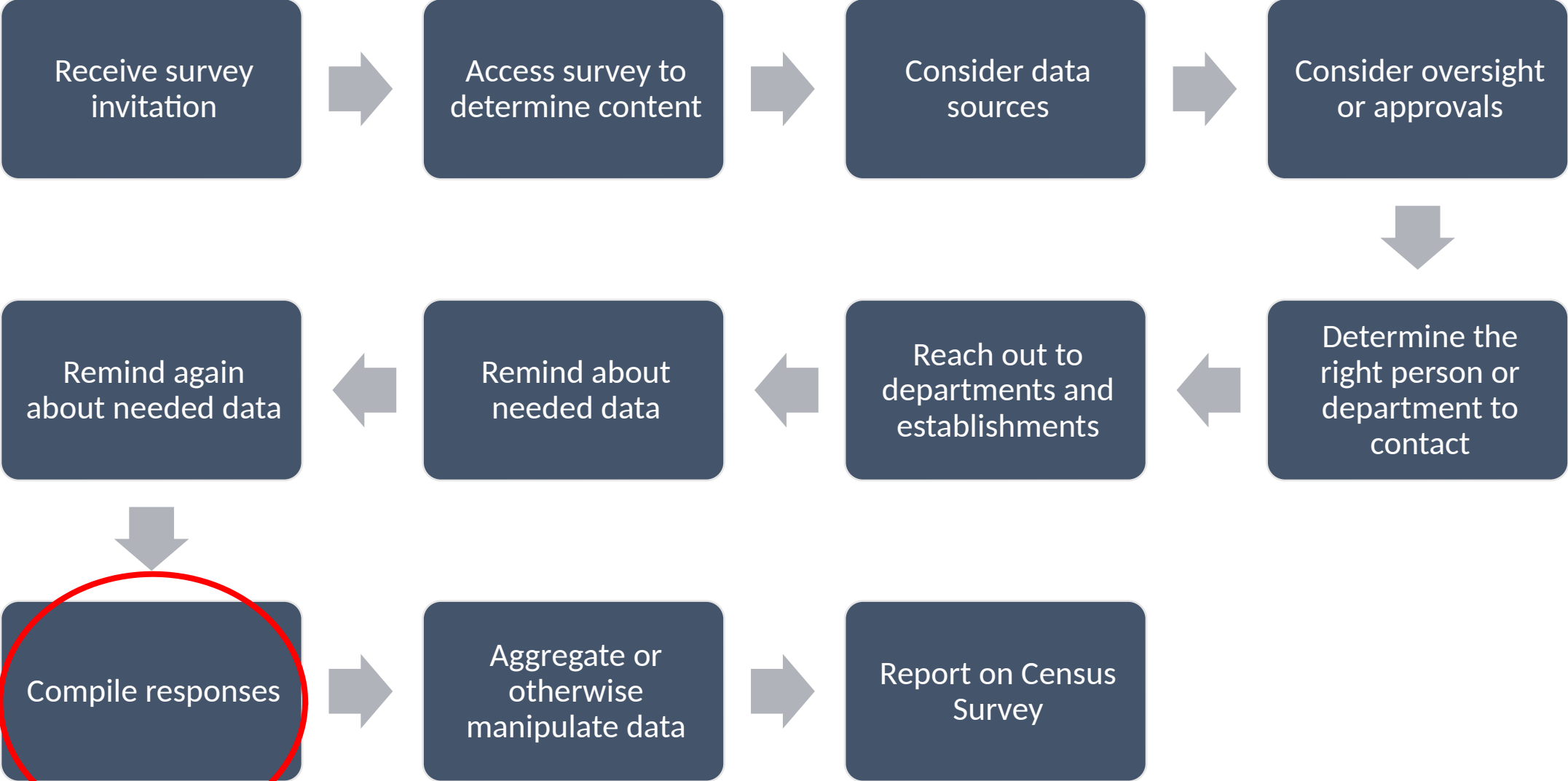
- Restructuring and layoffs
- Staff turnover

“For the most part, [the delinquent surveys are] due to COVID and everything -- **we've had departments let go** and its increased workload. Things have fallen behind.”

“We had some **layoffs and organizational changes** -- they don't have the resources and they're busy, so it is so much harder to ask for the data.”

“We had a lot of restructuring over the last year, so some of the surveys we respond to, they're not even up to date given our new structure. **It's confusing for us to try to find the information.**”

# Data Dispersion





# Internal Factors

Things we can change....

# Instrument Misalignment

- “For some reason there are a number of locations [listed on our survey] that **have been closed for several years**, so long that our systems don't have any info on them. Of our [more than 150] locations listed, probably 50 to 60 [of them] are no longer active.”
- “If the questions are very particular, asking in a way we don't report on, I can't access those data easily, so I need someone from tech to build a report to give us that information. **We might not break our reporting down to the level that you are asking...** and IT has a bunch going on [integrating] new companies.”

# Unit Misalignment

“When we received the notification [about the annual surveys], they mixed...*the enterprise and incorporation in one survey*. I was in contact, and they fixed something in the system to split the two, but we received a notification this year that they were combined again.”

“One [business unit] has the same name as the wider company name, so we end up filling out [the survey] more than once. **We are getting duplicate requests**, and we've called in to have it changed, but I have no idea if that is fixed.”

# Instrument Topic(s)

“**Mixing the questions** on the survey makes life a little harder. When we get a mixed survey, there's not going to be a single person with access to the data, so I'm usually coordinating with multiple departments to get the information...I have some of the other data ready, but I can't submit [the survey] until I get these [requested] data [back]. It is more helpful to **make the surveys about each type of information** you're looking for, so we wouldn't have to wait for the rest of the data to come in.”

# Communication Challenges

- “Yeah - I received the [survey]. I was under the assumption - it was three different ones, and I assumed that I submitted them fully. The annual wholesale one - that's not me. That's another department.”

# Fisher Revisited

## External

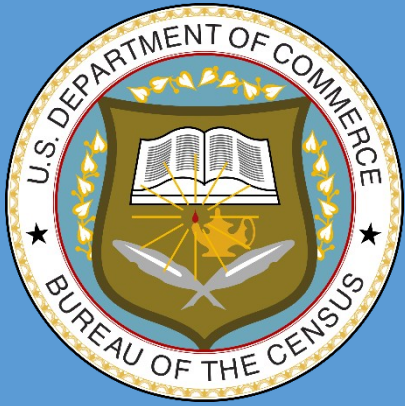
- Environmental
- Business
- Respondent

## Internal

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### And:

- Instrument misalignment
- Unit misalignment
- Communication mishaps



# Thanks



Melissa Cidade



[melissa.cidade@census.gov](mailto:melissa.cidade@census.gov)



Kelsey Drotning



[kelsey.drotning@census.gov](mailto:kelsey.drotning@census.gov)