Collaborative development of a new complex survey

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Abstract

The Annual Survey of Goods and Services (ASGS) was developed and implemented using a collaborative approach by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) and IFF Research (external supplier).

In 2016 a comprehensive review of economic statistics within the UK highlighted that greater detail was needed on the service economy as this accounted for 80% of gross value added (GVA) in 2015. Data that had previously been collected for the service industries were far less detailed than that for the production industries and this missing picture of the economy was identified as a significant area of interest.

The ASGS now collects data online from over 30,000 contributors for the whole service economy (excluding government and finance), with turnover data collected for each 4-digit SIC (standard industry classification) into 6-digit CPA products (statistical products of production by activity).

Within a wider ONS transformation program, elements of the statistical production, e.g. data collection, initial processing and validation, was outsourced to an external contractor (IFF Research). This was the first time that ONS had outsourced a statutory business survey of this scale.

IFF collected data using an electronic questionnaire with layout and questions designed lead by ONS in collaboration with the contractor. Users received support through a new IFF-led call centre and webchat, and data was validated using rules specified by ONS and implemented by IFF. Results processing and publication of the outputs was carried out by ONS.

The paper and presentation will discuss how:

- teams from two different working cultures were brought together to work as one
- a strong collaborative strategic partnership was built
- the unknowns of the collaboration affected the project and were resolved
- practices and solutions to develop a complex collection were exchanged

In addition, an outline of the resulting survey will be provided and consideration of the advantages of this approach for National Statistics Offices in terms of flexibility and speed of delivery.