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MEASURING QUALITY IN A NATIONAL STATISTICAL ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

Recent developments--The Data Quality Act of 2001 and subsequent Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directives--have intensified the emphasis on data quality among the U.S. Federal statistical agencies. Under the OMB directives, agencies are now required to formally establish and follow information quality guidelines. In addition, agencies are required to adopt a basic standard of quality ("objectivity, utility, and integrity," in OMB's definition) as a performance goal. Although it is easy to add the word "quality" to a list of strategic goals, it is harder to establish exactly what that means, and harder still to translate that understanding into measurements.

This paper (1) explores the meanings of quality within a national statistical organization, (2) examines the users and uses of the quality measurements, (3) identifies particular issues in the measurement of quality, and (4) argues the need for a balanced set of measures. Among the issues discussed are the roles of customer satisfaction measures, traditional survey quality measures, financial measures, and the reliability of the quality measures themselves. The discussion draws upon the statistical and the quality management literature, and includes examples drawn from a variety of national statistical organizations.

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