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2010 CENSUS PLANNING MEMORANDA SERIES

No. 183

MEMORANDUM FOR The Distribution List

From: Arnold Jackson *[signed]*
Acting Chief, Decennial Management Division

Subject: 2010 Census Issues Management Process Assessment Report

Attached is the 2010 Census Issues Management Process Assessment Report. The Quality Process for the 2010 Census Test Evaluations, Experiments, and Assessments was applied to the methodology development and review process. The report is sound and appropriate for completeness and accuracy.

If you have questions about this report, please contact Ralph Corson at (301) 763-7796.

Attachment

March 29, 2011

2010 Census Issues Management Process Assessment Report

Final

U.S. Census Bureau standards and quality process procedures were applied throughout the creation of this report.

Ralph Corson

2020 Census Research and Planning Office

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Executive Summary

This document is an analysis and assessment of the formal 2010 Census Issues Management process and how it was used to manage issues that arose during the U.S. Census Bureau's efforts to prepare and implement the 2010 Census. The conclusions from this assessment are derived chiefly from the comments of people who worked on that census program.

The 2010 Census program defined an issue as a point or matter in question or in dispute, or a point or matter that is not settled and is under discussion or over which there are opposing views or disagreements. Issues may occur when no strategy exists to achieve objectives, when essential information is not communicated effectively, or when unanticipated events occur which require plans to be changed. Some issues result from known risks that are realized despite efforts to prevent and mitigate them. Issues were escalated to the program level for resolution from integrated project teams following specific criteria that were outlined in the 2010 Census Issues Management Plan.

Decennial program-integrated project teams were resourceful in dealing with issues, which resulted in a census that ended on time and below budget. The issues management process instituted for the 2010 Census outlined the methodologies used by teams to achieve resolution of issues at the program level, including the escalation of issues, when appropriate. Although an assessment of issues management at the project level was not in scope for this assessment, a lesson learned for the 2020 Census program is to gather more information about how project teams dealt with project issues. This knowledge may provide a means to better deal with future issues as they occur, and a clearer understanding of their nature.

Issues management was not formally implemented in the 2010 Census process until 2006, and little record remains of the issues that teams had to engage during the planning years (prior to 2006). This lack of historical accounting diminished management's ability to effectively assess risks and allocate resources, and diminished the agency's ability to identify patterns that might lead to better methodologies and avoid future issues.

This assessment advocates early planning informed by subject matter experts and regular inter-team exchanges to prevent conditions that can lead to issues. It advocates strategies that maximize enthusiastic engagement with sanctioned policies and practices by returning benefits to the persons who have been given the responsibility to resolve issues.

This assessment recommends the following actions for managing issues during the 2020 Census program:

- Start planning efforts early in order to have a well-established process early in the decade that addresses both project-level and program-level ("Key") issues management.
- Provide integrated project teams with training to help team members recognize risks that are becoming issues and familiarize them with issue escalation procedures.
- Improve integration of issues management with the related risk and change management processes, and integrate issues management planning with governance planning to ensure clear roles and responsibilities are documented so that issues are resolved.

- Install issues management software that facilitates communication, records issue characteristics and process events, provides direct access for users, permits categorically retrievable data, and facilitates timely sharing of current issues statuses.
- Implement a simple automated tool to make it possible for project teams to better manage their own issues.
- Produce regular issues metric reports and ensure that governance plans include a process for issue status reviews.
- Improve integrated team communication structures to facilitate the sharing of technical information between teams when they are working on common issues.
- Assign an issues manager for each project team to monitor and record issues, and serve as a point of contact for the program-level issues manager.
- Provide issue process facilitators as resources to teams who can help accelerate access to issue decision makers and help assure that issues are well documented.
- Analyze past issues data to discern patterns of risks and conditions that have led to issues.
- Enlist team member input to better tailor issue-related services to their perceived needs.
- Establish a quality control process to continually monitor the management of issues.

1. Introduction

The first purpose of this study is to assess the formal 2010 Census issues management process which tracked and documented program issues arising in the 2010 Census integrated project teams (IPTs). This formal process begins with the submission of an issue and ends with the recording of decisions made to resolve the issue, and is described in the 2010 Census Issues Management Plan (IMP) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a). This assessment will provide information on how well issues were managed, where program needs were or were not served by this process, and how closely escalated issues followed the IMP guidelines.

The second purpose of this assessment is to gather information on the nature of issues outside of the formal process and to understand the ad hoc lines of communication and processes that were used. Although the assessment focuses on program issues, an awareness of how teams manage internal issues can suggest ways in which services can be extended to teams to enhance those processes. This may provide insight into why so few issues were formally processed, and if the needs and practices related to issues management within the integrated project teams can inform planning for the 2020 Census program. IPT issues that could be resolved within the team and key program issues communicated at https://opcenter.2010.census.gov (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b) were not managed by the IMP guidelines and are therefore out of scope for this assessment.

2. Background

The 2010 Census program defined an issue as a point or matter in question or in dispute, or a point or matter that is not settled and is under discussion or over which there are opposing views or disagreements. Essentially, an issue is an unexpected condition that creates a temporary obstacle to achieving a specific 2010 Census objective and that requires a decision and a set of actions in order to achieve that objective. It is a decision point at which there is a branching of possible actions and where the way forward is not immediately obvious. Often it is a point of contention within a project team that may need management direction or approval in order to proceed. It may relate to specifications, scope of operations, schedules, requirements, how to achieve objectives, action ownership, or needed resources. When there is a known potential for disruptive events to occur these are cataloged in the census risk register and contingency plans are written so that rapid action can be taken to restore a path to project and program objectives. When those events do occur, they become issues, which must be monitored. However, many other issues result, not from known risks, but from unknown risks. Also, a decision is made in response to an issue to take actions that may require changes or enhancements to existing plans. Thus, there is a relationship between the risk management, issues management, and change management processes, and issues may be thought of as the decision phase in a progression from event risk to corrective action.

There are at least two levels of issues, depending on the scope of operations impacted: project-level issues and program-level issues. Project-level issues are those that affect team objectives with no impacts outside a work team. Some project issues may become program issues when wider impacts are uncovered, when there is no team consensus on how to resolve the issue, or when resources are needed which are not available within a team. The IMP does not attempt to structure the management of project issues.

This study assesses issues management during the 2010 Census. Sources include an Issues Management Database, which was created in 2006 and contains limited material; and comments collected from team leaders and members, census managers, and project management personnel through three lessons learned sessions and in one-to-one contacts.

2.1 Assessment Criteria

The following issue process requirements were compared to actual 2010 Census issues management activities to assess the 2010 Census issues management process:

These requirements are:

1. Collects real-time information about the status of issues as they go through the decision-making process. This information is of value to individuals on IPTs whose work is affected by the issue and contingent on the decisions made, and to team leaders and census managers who need a wider view of multiple issues to maintain schedules and distribute resources.
2. Facilitates the process of making decisions by guaranteeing that responsible actors are notified quickly, and that required actions are performed in a timely manner.
3. Promotes effective decisions by supporting a methodology to analyze obstacles and objectives, explore alternatives, and assess impacts.
4. Enforces census governance standards and facilitates escalation of issues to the bodies authorized to make decisions.
5. Provides an easily accessed repository of structured information that can be retrospectively examined to identify new risks and assess the management of known risks.
6. Supports an analysis of recurrent conditions that might lead to future issues by maintaining a structured volume of issue characteristics.
7. Accommodate the diversity of issues and circumstances that are likely to be encountered.
8. Achieves acceptance by the Census community by delivering benefits to users without unduly added burden. Initiatives that are not supported by the persons they are intended for may fall into disuse.
9. Provides for continuous monitoring and improvement.

2.2 Formal Issues Management Process for the 2010 Census

Prior to 2006, there was no formal process to manage issues in the census. In 2006, a process was established to prescribe how program issues should be managed. This process tracked, facilitated resolution, and documented program issues that arose during efforts by subject-matter teams to prepare and implement the 2010 Census. The process of resolving an issue entails collaboration between individuals, and often between groups. As such, there is a need for a schema to clarify the sequence of actions to be taken by individuals, and for a collective memory of the actions taken. The IMP documents the existing formal methodology for managing issues. This document lists three rationales for an issues management system, a) to control the process, sequence activities, and specify stakeholder roles, b) to document issues and how they are resolved, and c) to communicate issues to all stakeholders. The IMP also details the governance roles of individuals in the issues process.

The Issues Management Database is a Microsoft Access-based tool completed in May 2006 to store, track, and monitor issues formally escalated by teams to the census management groups for resolution. This database was designed to support the issues management methodologies prescribed in the IMP. The IMP prescribes that team issues which require collaboration should be submitted by a team member using a Decennial Census Issues Form and mailed to the Decennial Management Division (DMD) Program Management staff. The Program Management staff verified the submission for completeness and clarity and transcribed the information on the form into an issue object in the issues database. All relevant persons were notified that an issue had been opened. The initiator designated one or more "Points of Contact", or persons responsible for resolving the issue, including the originator and the team leader. When an issue was resolved, a Point of Contact provided the resolution information to the DMD Program Management staff and the issue was closed in the database. Throughout this process, the Program Management staff produced reports that tracked the status of open issues for communication to both teams and management.

If an issue was urgent or critical, or if team members were unable to arrive at consensus, a Point of Contact was able to escalate an issue to DMD management. In turn, DMD management might choose to escalate an issue to the primary census management groups, the Census Integration Group (CIG)[1] or to the Decennial Leadership Group (DLG)[2]. Optionally, an issue might have spawned one or more actions to be performed before an issue could be closed. Each action, which remained linked to the issue, was then assigned to an individual and assigned a due date. At the discretion of the DMD Chief, an issue that had an immediate and profound impact on the operation's integrity was passed to a Rapid Response Team (RRT) to lead efforts to devise effective plans of action. For example, issues generated by triggered program-level risks are passed to an RRT. Membership of an RRT was determined by the DMD Chief or the Risk Manager, as appropriate. Concurrently, an issue referred to an RRT was escalated for oversight by the DLG. Figure 1 diagrams the escalation process, and Figure 2 diagrams the RRT process as depicted in the IMP. As mentioned earlier, this background describes the processes agreed to midway through the 2010 decennial cycle and documented in the IMP, but does not necessarily describe how 2010 Census issues were actually managed.

[1] The Census Integration Group was a cross-organizational governing body of Census divison chiefs and assistant division chiefs that provided the leadership, structure and processes to monitor and control the integrated teams, monitor performance and risks agains the program objectives, and address issues.

[2] The Decennial Leadership Group consists of executive staff responsible for high-level decision-making and oversight of the Census program.

Figure 1. Issues Management Escalation Process
(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a, p. 7)

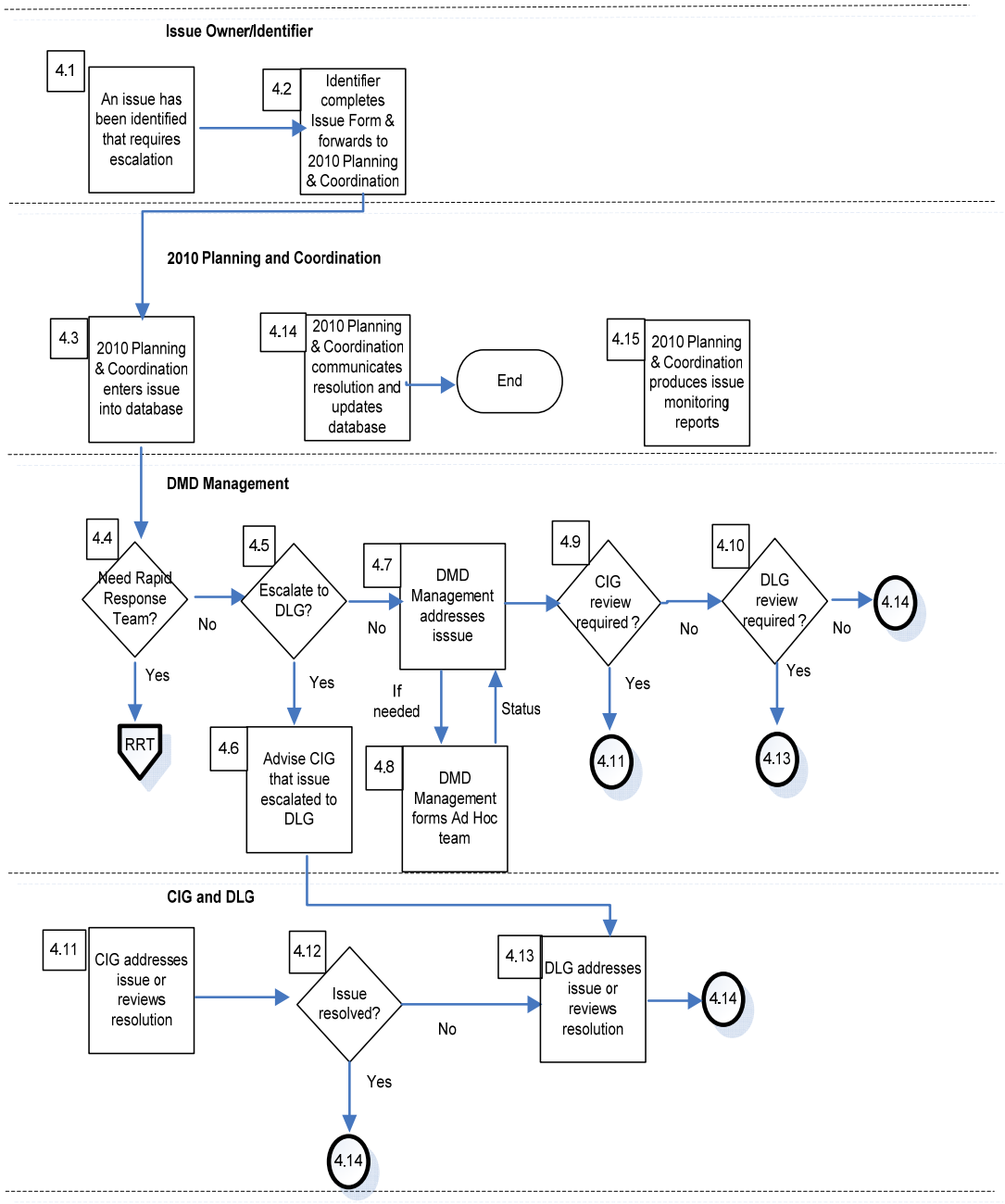
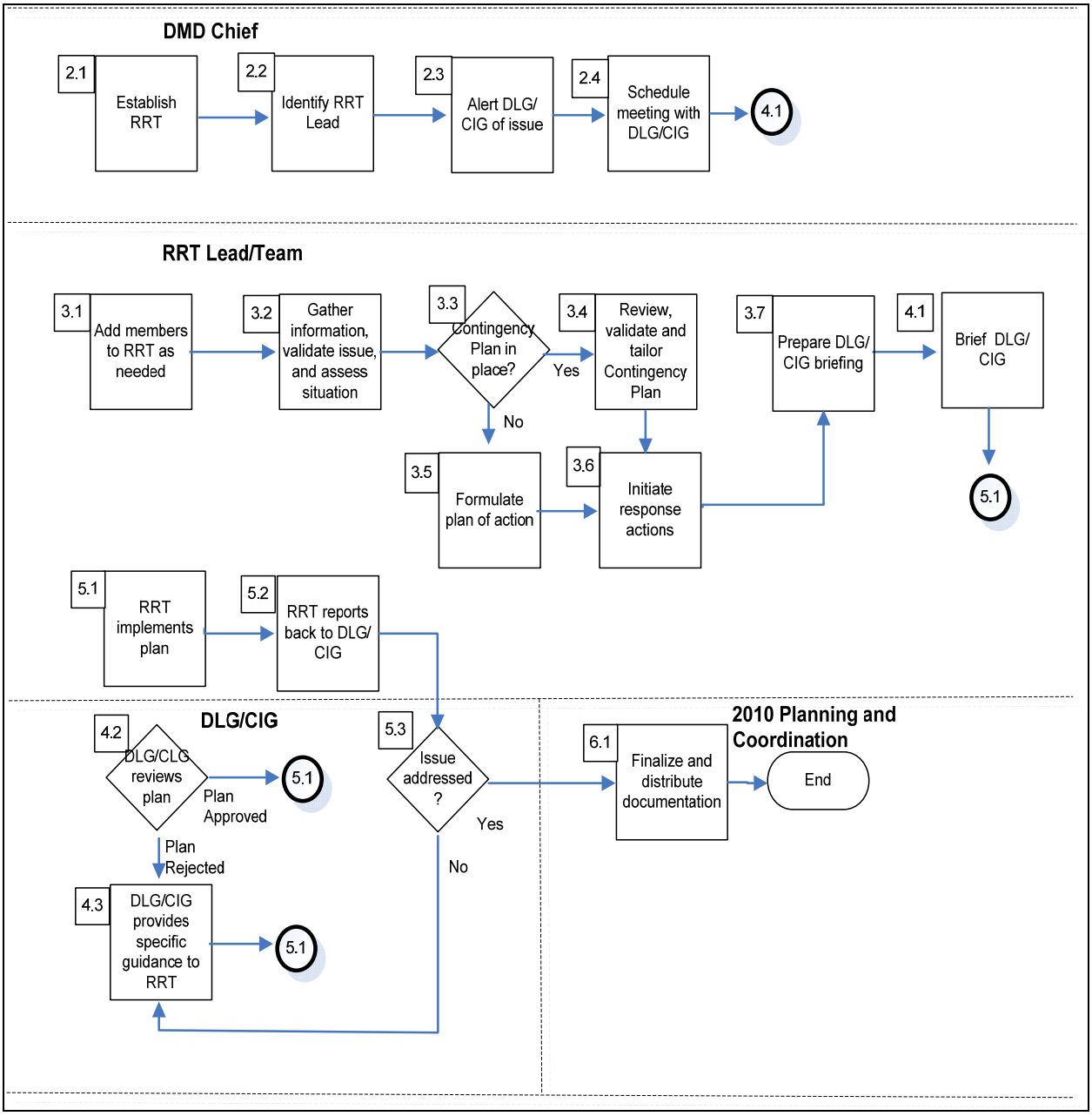


Figure 2. Rapid Response Team Process
(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a, p. 18)



3. Questions and Methodology

This assessment set out to determine the nature of issues that were addressed during the 2010 Census, strategies for dealing with issues, the usual inputs to and outcomes of the management process, how teams dealt with their own issues, how well the Issues Management Database met user needs, how effectively the issue process enforced rules governing issues management, and ways of managing program issues more efficiently. The primary sources for this assessment are comments made by individuals who had a variety of roles during the 2010 Census. The author conducted two interactive sessions with groups of project team leaders. One of these sessions was conducted by a facilitator from the Human Resources Division who did a root cause analysis; a second session was a less structured conversation among a similar group of participants. A group of CIG members met in a third lessons learned session to look at issues management from the perspective of the division and other office chiefs. In addition, the author communicated individually with several key project leaders, census managers, and process facilitators. Finally, the author looked at the repository of issues in the issues database.

Responses to the study questions are categorized by their sources in this report:

1) Project team leads who actively managed the census and who were involved in some aspect of issues management (assessing, resolving, or reporting issues);

2) Decennial senior managers who had divisional management responsibilities, and who heard and helped to resolve escalated issues;

3) Key managers and issue process owners who oversaw and integrated the work of IPTs and who facilitated the review and resolution of issues raised to the program level; and

4) Final issues repository data.

These comments were supplemented with comments obtained from one-to-one communications with key managers and program management process facilitators. The data collection was guided by the following questions, but the respondents were allowed considerable latitude to share their own impressions derived from their personal experiences with decennial issues.

Questions for members of project teams

Categorization of kinds of issues being addressed, matching problem-solving strategies, and integration with other processes and activities.

a. How can risks be better linked to issues to improve documentation and accountability?
b. How often do issues result in changes to requirements, schedules, or documents?
c. How would team members categorize issues they dealt with? How often do issues impact budget? Schedule? Scope?
d. Did the nature of issues or of issues management change over the last decennial cycle? If so, what are the implications for issues management in the next cycle? Why were no issues opened in the database in over a year?
e. How does issues management interface with other monitoring and management processes? Is there an advantage in integration?

f. Are personnel aware that there is a formal DMD issues management process? Do they understand it and find it easy to follow? Are they aware that the process works as an appeals process for minority team positions? What are the motivations for not engaging the process described in the IMP document? What mechanism is there to inform staff of the IMP process?
g. Which scenarios motivated teams to escalate issues? The IMP specifies several scenarios of issues escalation.

Analysis of issues management within teams.

a. Did teams meet regularly to discuss issues?
b. How broadly within a team are issues communicated and discussed and what roles do team members take?
c. What is the form and frequency of communication between team members while solving an issue and can the process be operationalized as discrete, sequential steps?
d. What other communication devices are being used in lieu of the Issues Database?
e. Are team meetings to resolve issues being documented? Do they need to be?
f. Is there a need to be better apprised of issues in other teams?
g. Are there within-team questions that are being dealt with outside the formal issues management process? If so, could these issues be further facilitated without the encumbrance of a formal management process?
h. How does formal issues management facilitate or hinder communication and problem solving? What about the RRT?
i. Did each team have a documented process for dealing with issues and did it follow its own process?

Utilization of the Issues Database

a. How is the Issues Database being used to report information about past issues?
b. What needs are the database not serving?
c. Is database information accessible to stakeholders?
d. Is database information being shared with everyone with a reasonable stake in the process, including initiators, resolvers, and management?
e. Do the standard reports provided by the Issues Management tool satisfy the needs of the user community? If not, what are those needs?
f. Are we asking the right questions when an issue is opened? What are we not asking that would be useful to help resolve or track issues? Which information is superfluous?
g. Should the multiple sub-tasks feature be removed or can the feature be improved or better advertised to make it more useful than it now is?

Questions for the Census Integration Group

a. Do current practices conform to DMD issues policies?
b. How can a formal issues management process contribute to more rapid issue resolutions? Does adherence to DMD issues management procedures create bottlenecks?
c. Is there any aspect of the management process that could be eliminated without adversely affecting the quality of issue resolution?

d. How did the RRT facilitate issues management? Did it achieve its intended oversight role?
e. Is the management of issues within teams sufficiently visible for effective oversight?

Metrics from the Issues Management Database

a. How long does it take to resolve an issue?
   How long does it take to resolve an escalated issue?
b. How many issues were opened and how do periods of heavy issue identification correlate with census activities?
c. What percentage of issues is escalated to DMD management, to CIG, and to DLG?
d. How frequently was a rapid response team formed to deal with an issue?
e. From the text of issues identified, what types of issues are being addressed, and how are they resolved?
f. Which teams are the most active?
g. Which components of the Issues Management Database were used?

4. Limitations

Metrics for this study are limited to data retrieved from the Issues Management Database, which was not developed until 2006; consequently, there was no mechanism to capture early decennial issues. Since it was not possible to extract metrics over an entire decennial cycle, anecdotal reports of how issues needs changed over the cycle were used. Because of retirements and reassignments some individuals who had encountered and managed issues were no longer available to interview. This assessment is necessarily limited to the period of time for which information is available. In particular, 2010 Census activities occurring after the publication of this assessment will not be reported. This assessment does not attempt to address the management of "Key Issues" that were tracked on the electronic Census Operations Center page (U.S. Census Bureau , 2009b) since the Key Issues were set up as a reporting tool rather than as an active issues management methodology. Finally, because purposes and expectations for project teams are not identical, this study's conclusions cannot apply to each of them in the same way.

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5. Results

All comments from contributors to this study are organized by their source in the appendix with comments from census managers, process facilitators, and team leaders cataloged separately. With the exception of some differences of opinion over the Team Leaders meetings, which will be addressed later, the comments of these groups differed in emphasis, but tended to agree in substance.

5.1 Team Members and Leads

The author asked each of the two groups of team members where they believed management of issues in the 2010 Census had been successful, where there were deficiencies, and solicited their

suggestions for improvement. These contributors emphasized that teams are work-focused and under schedule pressure. They were eager for tools to help them better manage internal issues. When it was necessary to seek help outside of their group for decisions or resources, they found that the process was burdensome and slower than what they were able to achieve internally. Because issues were obstacles to achieving their team objectives, they became aware of, and expressed concern for, the origins of these issues. They identified incomplete planning and unclear requirements as two related sources of issues, which had hindered their work.

By definition, a realized risk becomes an issue. The author asked study participants if issues could be more definitively linked to risks. A number of them expressed a concern that the risks they were responsible for might be morphing into issues that would require a more active intervention. They were not sure whether they were looking at risks or issues. Here are a few of their remarks.

"Issues with risks sometimes overlapped. It was hard to tell which one we were dealing with. We figured it out: there was training and we talked to those who did the training for the risks and clarified what we had."

"At the program level we had risks that became issues, but senior managers were still mitigating it."

"We really don't want things to become an issue, because we can't wait until it really happens. Decennial moves at too fast a pace with too many people involved. We have to try and stop it. So even though it's actually a 'risk', we have to treat it as an issue. At what point does it transition from 'risk' to 'issue'?"

One participant said that teams could benefit from additional "coaching" to distinguish risks from issues. Several felt that there should be a common tool for both risks and issues so that definitions are consistent across all teams. A theme of these responses was that teams need clear standards to be productive and avoid rework.

When issues occurred on teams, dedicated RRTs were often formed to deal with them. Meetings were documented, and issues were recorded and tracked. In most cases the range of team skills allowed issues to be dealt with internally. When necessary, teams reached outside for the information and guidance needed to resolve them, and occasionally to escalate them for program-level decisions. The strategies which teams used were dictated by the exigencies of the issue and objectives of the team, and were flexible and varied. Teams did what worked best for them, rapport was generally strong, and communication within teams was effective.

The leads of teams thought all issues impacted budget in some way, and usually impacted schedule and scope. There was a strong sense that the character of issues management changed over the decennial cycle – teams initially attempted to establish processes to manage issues, and these processes were subsequently overtaken by the DMD methodology developed later in the decade. It was apparent that none of the leads in this study had a grasp of all details of that methodology. For example, few team leaders knew that there was a database to collect program issues.

At least two participants expressed a desire for project management tools that they could use internally. In order to maintain an overview of multiple issues they would like to receive reminders of their open issues in the form of periodic reports.

5.2 Senior Managers

Senior managers, including several members of the Census Integration Group (CIG), were questioned to understand if and how management's perspectives might differ from that of team members. They were asked their views of whether the processes they had approved were being implemented, whether they felt they were sufficiently informed about issues, whether the processes facilitated issue resolution well, and for their insights on how the process could be improved. They were also asked for reactions to the earlier observations of the team leaders. A focus of concern for senior managers seemed to be that they sometimes lacked sufficient visibility of issues to manage them effectively and prevent future threats to program objectives. Some managers expressed an opinion that a free flow of information between teams and from teams to management was important to the decennial census effort. It was noted that managers were aware that the established issues management process was not being strictly followed.

5.3 Process Facilitators

Project management staff helped to design the issues management methodologies used for the 2010 Census, observed meetings in which issues were raised and discussed, assisted in recording a number of issues, and shared responsibility for an effective issue process. These process facilitators noted that project teams often preferred to disengage from the formal program management process. They speculated that outside scrutiny made teams uncomfortable and that they believed raising issues outside of the team frequently increased their work. They expressed the opinion that designed processes should be descriptive of the methods which have been working best for teams and advocated for more open communication of team issues which have impacts across teams. Several facilitators noted a need for more regular passing of critical information between teams.

5.4 Metrics from the Issues Management Database

The Issues Management Database is a repository of 157 issues captured between February 2006 and June 2009. The majority of these issues were entered prior to May 2007. The significant number of issues raised during this time was a direct result of several major planning conferences. Those issues raised during the meetings were tracked using the IMP. Although these 157 issues do not come near to representing the entirety of issues encountered during the 2010 Census, it is the most substantial single body of recorded issues available. Teams did attempt to document their issues in other places, but those data are scattered and difficult or impossible to retrieve.

One hundred twenty-four issues were selected for analysis because they had both start and end dates. Eleven of these issues were escalated to the CIG, and of these, five were further escalated to the DLG. The mean resolution time for issues which were not escalated was 138.0 days, against 80.9 days for issues which were escalated. This difference is not statistically significant ($p=.95$). The author coded issues in the database as referring primarily to process ("how to" questions), work allocation (specify which team is responsible for work), schedule, requirements,

and cost. With some overlap, 36 percent of the issues referred primarily to process, 14 percent to work allocation, 24 percent to schedule, 31 percent to requirements, and 3 percent to costs. Key issues on the "Status of Key Issues" page of the operations center (https://opcenter.2010.census.gov/issues.html) were open for a mean of 147.0 days.

Thirty-seven major decisions were made and recorded on the DMD portal between January 2003 and February 2012. Twenty-six of these were recorded after the Issues Management Database was available for use. Decisions are the outputs of issues. It is reasonable to expect that these twenty-six decisions were also recorded as issues. Two of the twenty-six decisions recorded after June 2006 were also recorded as issues (decisions 22, -"Choice of Count Imputation Methodology for the 2010 Census" and 1035 – "Decision on Implementing an Internet Channel for the 2010 Census"). It should be noted that the decisions, which were recorded, did, in general, capably describe the issues that led to the decisions.

5.5 Additional Observations

The paragraphs that follow represent the opinions of participants of lessons learned sessions as they reviewed the management of issues during the 2010 Decennial Census. The author has organized the responses by topic and has summarized their observations where it seemed appropriate. The responses are paraphrases of comments made by participants that have been extracted from recorded notes. The complete set of comments is found in the appendix. A number of observations were repeated by multiple contributors. Nevertheless, there is no way to be sure how representative these observations might be. Some of the comments, such as those about communication, planning, and organizational structure, are ancillary to an analysis of issues management. They are likely to appear in related process assessments. These comments are included because the persons who shared their concerns thought they were salient, and because it is meaningful to follow causal links in order to fully understand the nature of issues and their management.

Planning

Issues can occur when planning fails to elaborate the details of requirements or when plans fail to fully account for risks or misalign resources.

Participants to this assessment said,

"I don't remember a process where we had a walk-through of the budget. It was 'here are your hours'".

"Contracts usually start early in the decade and the processes came mid-to-late in the decade."

"The contracting was really rushed. They just put out guidelines quickly instead of really thinking things through. Contractors cannot react fast enough when requirements change mid-stream."

A number of contributors believed that issues had arisen because planning had not been sufficiently detailed or had not sufficiently accounted for risks. Key people charged with carrying out the decennial census reported their belief that they held knowledge critical to realizing plans that had not been utilized in program planning. That is, they felt excluded from early planning efforts and their potential input may have reduced some issues raised during program implementation.

In the view of a number of participants, if planning had been started earlier, there would have been fewer issues to contend with. Work began on the 2010 census before all measures and requirements had been defined. In their view, while planning has to begin at a high level, content needs to be added to planning as early as possible. Although strong project management is needed at inception, no common system was developed until 2006. Contracts were sometimes written with unclear requirements and without sufficient regard for risks.

Inter-Team Communication

A number of contributors stressed the need for project teams to communicate freely. Issues on one team can easily impact other teams. A Team Leader meeting was initiated at the end of 2006 to promote communication between teams. Contributors also stressed that these meetings became increasingly infrequent and failed to achieve this objective.

"The teams were supposed to talk to one another, but they didn't. Team leads were supposed to be [GS]14's or 15's for making decisions, but ultimately it was 13's, 9's, and in the end it didn't work."

"We stove piped teams and didn't cross-pollinate. Interaction between teams was non-existent."

"There is no integration between teams: Who owns an issue? The Team Leaders meeting was a disaster because DMD gave them extra work as a reward for going, and nothing was documented."

While there was a general disappointment in the Team Leader meetings, there was more than one opinion of why these meetings did not achieve their purpose. The team leaders believed that the meetings could be used as a forum to share technical information, but felt that they were being used as a management tool instead. It was an opportunity to pressure teams to do scheduling and give them additional work. Consequently, the team leaders began to delegate attendance to other team members or did not attend at all.

An alternate view was expressed that the team leaders could have taken the opportunity to share issues, but chose not to because they had little propensity to share issues openly. The suspicion is that, regardless of what they say, teams are unlikely to share their issues in any environment. It is plausible that both views are correct. Regardless, it appears that a meeting in which teams are managed, directed, or held to commitments is not conducive to sharing issues, and should be attempted in another context. Furthermore, since the meetings were not well attended , they were not effective management vehicles either.

This assessment finds that inter-team communication is valued and face-to-face meetings are seen as an efficient and effective means of sharing critical information. Regular meetings between GS-14 or higher representatives are needed to assure adequate knowledge and authority

to achieve agreements between teams, meetings should have agendas, and discussions should be documented and retrievable.

Lines of Authority

Based on comments received, team members experienced conflicts between their allegiances to their teams and to their divisions. The 2010 Census IPTs achieved a successful 2010 Census (on time and under budget), and did so with latitude to function relatively autonomously. Although this structure can be effective, there is a possibility that a team can unwittingly cause an issue for another team. There is a need for both good communication between teams and oversight of their work to prevent unnecessary issues and promote the coordination of their efforts. This assessment finds that divisions do not want to give up their influence, nor do teams wish to give up their autonomy, yet there are concerns about how to coordinate a complex activity such as a decennial census with shared leadership. Some managers felt that teams lacked accountability. Because no single entity had the authority to enforce process controls, such controls were inconsistently applied. Both teams and management would like to reduce uncertainty through greater clarity in the lines of authority.

Issue Escalation

When a team was unable to solve an issue on its own, the issue was escalated to other individuals or groups for resolution. There is an escalation process prescribed in the Issues Management Plan that was developed at the project level through the team leaders, at Team Leaders meetings, and with contributions from the CIG. Although the IMP had been disseminated after being approved, almost no one remembered reading this document or remembered what it contained. Teams understood "escalation" and practiced a form of it, but may not have understood the escalation roles. To most people, escalating an issue meant taking it to the CIG meeting. There was a tendency to view the CIG decision and approval process as necessary but tedious.

Participants to this study made the following points:

1) The escalation process was not well understood.

2) While critical issues were always escalated, marginal issues were not. Escalated issues sometimes went directly to persons able to make decisions rather than following the formal process.

3) Preparation for escalating issues was seen as burdensome.

4) The process took too long for critical issues. The CIG had regular weekly meetings, and issues deemed emergencies had to be heard within three days, but even this was seen as too long for some issues.

5) The CIG lacked leadership and often deflected decisions to other decision makers or back to the teams themselves. As one manager said,

> *"In CIG we were good listeners – we just passed issues along for executive staff to make decisions".*

6) Division managers welcomed the CIG meetings as a means to be apprised of issues and to meet directly with DMD officers.

7) In the opinion of some participants, both team members and management occasionally sought undocumented methods to avoid a permanent record.

At least three factors (exposure, time, and amount of labor) biased teams against escalating marginal issues. The earlier discussion of communication mentioned a reticence to expose local issues to persons outside the work group. Time was a second factor: an issue had to be scheduled in advance if it could be considered by the CIG group. The third factor was the expectation that escalation would require considerable time and effort to prepare materials for presentation to the CIG.

CIG members, who are division and office chiefs, found CIG meetings useful for learning the status of critical work in other divisions. It was useful to CIG members to learn about issues, and it was not their intent to discourage teams from bringing issues to CIG meetings. Although teams regard the CIG as a decision-making body, CIG members do not generally see themselves as decision-makers. They listened, and then passed information to the individuals best placed to make decisions, sometimes to the teams themselves. This could be frustrating to a team which had escalated an issue in hope of achieving a judgment which would let them move on.

The CIG membership had specialized knowledge that makes it a valuable resource. It was capable of, and did, provide advice in CIG meetings. Division chiefs also had a legitimate need to be aware of current issues. Some participants expressed a wish that the CIG took a more active part in making decisions. One participant who participated frequently in CIG meetings thought that issues management could be enhanced with stronger leadership, with one person dedicated to following current issues, and empowered to make decisions, form focused teams, speed resolutions, call meetings, and press action.

Visibility

While we recognize that issues were a constant presence during the conduct of the census, there seems to be a consensus that issues were not widely visible, were left unrecorded, and were not a regular topic at senior management meetings. Not one cataloged risk ever entered the issues management process. This not only makes it difficult to assess the quality of our management of issues, but being unable to see issues makes them difficult to manage, diminishes opportunities to allocate resources equitably, and leaves little institutional memory to guide succeeding censuses. As one manager said,

"How can you manage a program without issues visibility?"

In general, issues have been narrowly visible within work groups and to others with a "need to know". According to our contributors, there are at least three reasons that issues have not been better documented:

1. Resources are limited. Documentation may not be the first priority when teams are confronted with issues; rather, the first priority is to resolve the issues quickly, and when issues are resolved interest in documenting them is diminished. One contributor said,

"... I have seen plenty of instances where senior management says they want proposed solutions and not just to hear the problem. That statement may encourage people to hold their issues until they figure things out."

2. There is a pervasive defensive posture that makes people cautious to expose information that might invite criticism or unwanted oversight. One person described it in this way:

   "In team meetings when we'd start talking about issues or risks, there would be hesitance to suggest anything because it would suggest a weakness on the part of the division. So underlings would not want to bring up risks or issues because the supervisor structure might not appreciate it."

3. The requirement to record issues was not well enough disseminated.

6. Related Assessments

Two other assessments relate to this one. The 2010 Census Risk Management Assessment assesses management of risks and overlaps with a number of concerns of this study. The 2010 Census Change Management Assessment also addresses concerns which are a topic of this study. Although risks, issues, and change control were managed under separate control processes, it may be useful to think of these processes as phases in a single problem resolution process.

7. Lessons Learned and Conclusions

The 2010 Census attempted to introduce a formal methodology for dealing with issues, where no formal methodology existed before. This methodology was followed to the extent that it described habitual practices such as analyzing issues, forming issue-focused teams, recommending actions, escalating decisions to decision-makers and obtaining approval before taking action. However, the details of that methodology and the governance roles were not widely understood, and some aspects of the process, particularly that of registering the issue and recording the history of its resolution, were not generally followed. Because of that, the success of issues management during the 2010 Census needs to be assessed anecdotally, and a number of assessment questions remain unaddressed. For example, we have no metrics to tell us the characteristics of issues or where they occurred most frequently, and we have almost no comprehension of the variety of experiences encountered by teams as they contended with issues.

Based on the data available, this study found that individual issues were generally well managed during the 2010 Census, and teams were diligent in seeking out decision-makers who could approve needed actions. This is because teams were task-focused and flexible in achieving their ends. A broader perspective of the issues management process, however, suggests some areas of concern.

We have learned that issues can arise from unclear or late requirements, or from failure to communicate events that have potential impacts to other work groups. All levels of management at the Census Bureau recognize the need for cross-team communication to align assumptions and coordinate work. A lesson from the 2010 Census is that this communication works best in

dedicated meetings which are not confounded by other purposes such as administrative objectives to assign or monitor work.

Most issues are dealt with entirely within teams, and teams would like help to manage those issues. Teams would welcome self-managed project management software to help them track assignments and maintain an overview of multiple issues.

This study suggests that we could do a better job of communicating process expectations to teams. Those processes should conform to the customary practices which have led to a successful census, including rapid access to persons authorized to make decisions. Contributors to this assessment indicated that the time and labor expended in gaining access to decision-makers was burdensome, slowed resolution to issues, and biased teams against sharing issues with management. Some frustration was expressed that the CIG group, which was prescribed to hear escalated issues, did not have leadership or take a greater role in finding solutions. One contributor suggested that issues need an advocate with the time and authority to find resources, make decisions where appropriate, bring people together to study alternatives and recommend dispositions of issues, disseminate information, and shepherd issues through the process of their analysis and resolution.

Records of issues and how they were managed were typically captured in local files, often with no intent to share them or preserve them for later study. As a result, the status of team issues was unavailable outside teams, teams managed their issues without the features of mature project management tools, management was deprived of knowledge needed to recognize program risks and allocate resources, and no record was left with which to enhance the management process, assess the management of risks, or identify conditions likely to lead to future issues. While risks and their mitigations and contingencies were well documented, as were the changes made to program requirements and schedules, no documented issue ever resulted from a realized risk, and there is little record of the actions or actors, the options considered, or the rationales for the decisions which led to successful interventions.

A number of assessment criteria were posited in this paper to evaluate the management of 2010 Census issues. These include availability of real-time information to guide management decisions; methods to facilitate communication; thorough analysis of the nature of problems, response alternatives and their impacts; adherence to standards for vetting and approving decisions; identification of risks through an analysis of past issues; and analysis of patterns within data to inform strategies to prevent future occurrences of issues.

Observing that contingencies are diverse and require varied approaches, the governance objective may have been adequately achieved during the 2010 Census. Issues were analyzed, resolutions were proposed, and actions approved by escalating decisions to the appropriate decision-makers using the strategies best suited to the issue. Despite some uncertainty about what process to follow, no one complained that decisions were inadequately analyzed or vetted. However, it is apparent that the range of issues encountered during a census is unknown in advance, and issues governance must be flexible enough to accommodate the variety of issues the census encounters.

Of the assessment criteria, there is room to improve communication and real-time visibility of issues. In particular, the sequence of communications which support the resolution of an issue

are a record of how that issue was dealt with and who the actors were, yet the 2010 Census methodology left no such record. Persons working on an issue had to use ad hoc methods, such as email or office visits, to disseminate information, and were given no means to review the status of an issue or obtain an overview of issue collections. Managers had to rely on and summarize information gleaned in meetings or by electronic mail.

Lessons learned from the 2010 Census identified obstacles to capturing issues, including reporting burden and concerns about exposing problems. To circumvent these obstacles, a system might be designed which creates incentives for individuals to capture and record the information which is needed to manage issues, support decisions, and devise strategies to minimize future disruptions. A mature issues management system should evolve together with the expectations of both team members and management. It may be reasonable to expect that issue actors will be most responsive in providing complete issue descriptions and analyses when they are most in need of decisions and approvals to act on those issues. Therefore, those decisions and approvals need to be contingent on thorough data collection. In addition, it is possible to collect transactional information effortlessly by integrating communications and recording tools such that information is recorded at the time it is transmitted. Information that is collected as it occurs is not attenuated by forgetting. Finally, regular issues metrics can create expectations in managers and their direct reports for current issue data.

Issues management software can facilitate each of these strategies of incentivizing issue data collection. It can also assist in categorizing, storing, and retrieving issue information, and can help enforce governance by preventing implementation without full documentation and proper review.

Program changes are documented as a part of the change control process, and a change cannot be implemented without first recording the nature of the change and identifying the approving authority. There is an opportunity to enhance this requirement to capture a richer report of the thinking and exchanges of information that would inform of the nature of the issue that necessitated a change and logic that excluded alternatives and led to the actions that were taken.

The retrospective analysis of issue data is easily overlooked. Retrospective analysis can inform improvements to the issues management process itself, can be used to identify new risks, and can help identify preventable problems by disclosing issues, which repeat. To be effective, these analyses rely on a consistent data structure and a significant body of information, and can be enhanced by correlating issue data with related schedule, risk, and change data. When the outcomes of decisions are also known, future decisions can be gauged from past choices. These options become available only when there is a record to assess.

The general lack of understanding of the escalation process uncovered in this study implies that is has not been effectively communicated, yet it is not clear that this has had significant practical impact - people did what they needed to resolve their issues with or without process rules. Actions were approved; work got done. The real loss in this informality may be the possibility that information is misplaced when actions are not recorded, and that it is not shared with others who have a need to know.

Census management has made a distinction between project and program issues, and governs them differently. Teams were allowed to devise their own procedures to resolve project issues.

No one in this study expressed doubt about whether an issue was a project issue or a program issue. Yet project issues can become program issues, and a project issue is a program risk. If program managers are not aware of project issues they are not able to manage their risks. In fact, census managers expressed a concern that they may not be as fully informed as they would like to be. Project teams value their autonomy and may guard their own issues from outside scrutiny. They are also the gatekeepers of their own data, and dictates to be more open have the potential to make information less, rather than more, accessible. Rather, teams may be expected to be more open to sharing when they discover that the greater visibility afforded by openness benefits their own projects.

8. Recommendations

1. Reduce the occurrence of issues with early planning.

2. Training and regular coaching should be provided to teams to help them cope with risks as they show tendencies to become issues, and to distinguish between the two.

3. Issues management should be integrated with governance planning, and with the risk and change control processes.

4. Issues management software should be utilized to record, store, and track program issues. This capability should

    a) Provide direct read and write access to anyone directly impacted by an issue;
    b) Accelerate issue outcomes by promoting better communication and issue awareness;
    c) Integrate with the change management system to assure that issues have been recorded prior to making changes and to avoid a duplication of effort in reporting data;
    d) Integrate with electronic mail to solicit and receive information and approvals, and to share issue status while recording all transactions chronologically;
    e) Link issues to risks, and where this is not possible, store information about the conditions which brought the issue about and, where appropriate, how the issue might have been avoided;
    f) Store information about alternative approaches to resolving issues, assessments of the cost and schedule impacts of those choices, the current status of each issue, current responsibility for taking action, a multifaceted categorization of the nature of the issue, its urgency, and the actions taken in resolution;
    g) Store a transactional history of changes to responsibility, action status, and actions taken;
    h) Automatically produce and distribute metrics which summarize open issues and notify individuals when actions are over-due;
    i) Enforce adherence to business rules by restricting actions to those which have been prescribed and by validating their approvals by reviewers.

5. A simple automated utility should be made available to teams for their internal management of issues.

6. Regular metrics of current issue status should be produced, and the status of issues should be reviewed regularly.

7. Team representatives should meet regularly to share information which could have common impacts and has the potential to create issues.

8. Each team should designate an individual with responsibility to record and communicate issues. The program managers should specify the roles and responsibilities for this position.

9. Process facilitators and decision-makers with the time, skills, and authority to locate resources to analyze and speed the resolution of issues should be designated and identified to teams.

10. A phased approach to issue data collection should be adopted to promote user acceptance and participation, and to build a platform capable of quantitative analysis. The initial phase should collect descriptive information for pattern analysis to inform a better categorization of quantifiable data as a foundation for more mature quantitative analyses.

11. The issues management process should be baselined and assessed periodically to ascertain if it is meeting its objectives. This assessment should look for improvements in user satisfaction with the process, including questions about user burden, speed and quality of issue outcomes, facilitation of communication, utility of the information captured, ease of data access, and utility of its metrics. It should also measure the rate of issue capture and speed of resolution, with the expectation that these measures may vary naturally over the decennial cycle. To be complete, the assessment should count the risks identified through issue analysis and note the observations derived from an analysis of issue patterns and their correlates.

9. References

U.S. Census Bureau (2006), Decennial Management Division, Program Management Branch, "2010 Census Issues Database Requirements", Aug 22, 2006.

------ (2009a), Decennial Management Division, "2010 Census Issues Management Plan", Apr 28, 2008, Rev May 14, 2009.

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Appendix: Comments Captured from Issues Management Lessons Learned Participants

The following is a compendium of paraphrases of comments from contributors to this study which were captured in session notes, emails, and interviews.

Comments from Census Managers

When I took this position I wanted to see the risk registers to mitigate any risk before it became a problem.

Issues management was under-utilized. It was not embraced by team leads as a tool to resolve problems. Senior managers didn't embrace it either, and it could have been promoted better.

When "the process" was utilized it was an effective mechanism for getting people together and for documenting. Teams managed issues, but we had no visibility of it.

The connection between Team Leader meetings and CIG was not bridged well. Team leaders should have participated more. There was an agenda. The leads held back – they didn't want to share. There was a need for more direction in these meetings.

There is no documentation with 'end-around' solutions.

CIG needed a leader but didn't have one, managing by consensus.

I see no problem with the present linkage between program and project issues. Project issues which need to be escalated are escalated, and mid-level managers are responsible for the linkage.

There is an incentive to work out issues to avoid CIG.

There was an opportunity to document issues in PMR and OS [Operational Status] meetings – no one wanted to admit to having an issue. If it's a team issue and teams are able to resolve the issue then there is no need for visibility and no need for documentation.

How can you manage a program without issues visibility?

Teams need to be held to greater accountability.

[…] was attempting to manage and coordinate team contributions, but had no authority, and CIG gave little support.

Teams wouldn't fill out CRs or provide detailed operational plans. They didn't care. Get anything from them at all and it's one sentence long.

Rapid response teams were formed as needed. [...] had one. Decisions were being made by Census managers in both ad hoc and regular and frequent meetings, but outside CIG. Groves has had the 4:30 risk review meeting for a long time with all areas participating on the Census and the [...] Directorate.

Another every day meeting at 12 was held. Some over the weekend as well.

In CIG we were good listeners – we just passed issues along for executive staff to make decisions. CIG was acceptance by acclamation – people didn't care.

I liked having CIG because it's outside of the directorate. That's where outside divisions could bring things up. It's nice to have direct access to the DMD Division Chief.

"Issues" and "management" don't go together. CIG is not a good decision-making body.

If there was an issue, it was brought up to the decision-maker.

It was supposed to be left to teams. We expected teams to solve their own problems. And then bring up issues to CIG.

What's the point in just bringing stuff to CIG to report on? We need to pull decision managers out.

People are afraid to bring stuff to CIG.

We need a process to answer requests quickly, but a virtual CIG wouldn't work. We need to have communication.

In 2000 the DLG was more active in facilitating and resolving issues brought up by division chiefs.

The Team Leaders meetings were not a good structure to really learn about the issues, they would discuss schedule,...The teams were supposed to talk to one another, but they didn't. Team leads were supposed to be 14's or 15's for making decisions, but ultimately it was 13's, 9's, and in the end it didn't work.

The collaboration, coordination with team leaders didn't occur.

Team Leaders [meeting] was not a forum for technical discussions. Who put this structure in place? I complained about the team structure from the beginning. They put 13 different programs into one team – it's ridiculous.

We need <u>one</u> person responsible – co-team leads doesn't work. They used to have a point of contact for each division for tests, DR and census – to coordinate and disseminate things.

Cooperation between teams was non-existent. There were so many teams we couldn't get work done. People didn't talk. We couldn't get people to do schedules.

The Team Leader process didn't work. It can work. Too much process was laid on teams. We added process and that loaded teams with burden. We made teams do schedule.

Team Leaders was the right place to share to share information. "Push-back from organizers" on having Team Leaders meetings. These meetings were helpful at first but became complaint sessions. It would be good if [...] could attend occasionally. We had to push people to attend. They turned out to be assignment meetings – not helpful. The Census manager idea was better. We should have done what we did in 2000.

[...] couldn't find a schedule. It was buried in operations – "deliverables" – they didn't have control of their schedule.

In 2020 we are developing a high-level schedule and adding specifics as time passes. This is the right way to do it. We need to be agile.

We stove piped-teams and didn't cross-pollinate. Interaction between teams was nonexistent.

Division chiefs were taken out of cycle and things were supposed to get to us from the teams. It wasn't smooth. Divisions need to be engaged rather than just the teams. The matrix [division x team parallel structure] didn't work either.

I saw teams as vehicles for management control stuff; divisions are responsible for their aspect of that work. Teams released divisions from a lot of that bureaucracy.

Too much process was laid on teams.

Offline meetings is where work got done.

We should have an Operational Status meeting before the operation started. Then maybe we could avoid issues.

Planners are making mistakes now by not including content in planning. Early planning now is a good thing.

The lockup concept wasn't very effective, but Congress pushed us to have a schedule and what we did was use the DR schedule and push it two years ahead.

In 2000 we were locked up for weeks. We ironed things out in lockups. Fourteens and 15s are needed to make decisions. Lockups were successful – we did lockups to resolve issues but we didn't have all the right players to make decisions.

What about IOE processes that don't work in decennial processes?

A lot of issues were hidden until the end.

Our division archives issues.

We do too [archive issues]. Older stuff – I don't know where it might be. There is some material we don't want to share.

The [DMD] Division Chief made decisions on funds. If it's a budget impact it would be brought up and would be on the list. It was being reviewed by the chief every month. There was contingency funding for unforeseeable things. We used little of it. We had surplus built up.

We are not allowed to have management reserve because it's an OMB thing. Risks and issues have costs, but we are not allowed to define and hold money for these, especially with IT projects. With a little bit of management reserve, we could resolve the issue without a huge public crisis.

DMD leads. Expenditures needed to be controlled, so teams can't just have free rein especially if it's substantial costs. This is the right way to do it, but we needed faster resolution.

The way to get funds was to go thru your manager, but some people didn't know how to go about it.

Specific recommendations:

- *End-around solutions need to be stopped; to stop them management has to refuse to feed them.*
- *Perhaps a contingency fund for unplanned events could be used as a reward for more openness.*
- *Every team should have a designated documentation person.*
- *All team leads should report to the same manager, probably under PMO. This would make them more accountable.*
- *We should go back to the Census managers concept.*
- *Different management personnel and different processes may be needed to manage issues which constrain resources, from those which do not.*
- *In order to better engage teams in the process of issue documentation and management, tailor issues management services to teams which teams have themselves identified as needs; prepare an illustration of how issues collection can serve needs; ask teams how to effectively collect essential issues data.*
- *Devise a quality control process to evaluate the process of managing issues so that corrective measures can be taken early.*

<u>Comments from process facilitators</u>

I don't know what it would take to get teams to talk to each other. [...] had a communication time in front of his door because people said they wanted it. That lasted one month – no one came. People have other priorities.

Issues Management was developed at the project level through the team leaders, team leaders meetings, and the CIG. Once the team leaders approved the plan, it was presented to the CIG members, approved, and issues in a 2010 Census Info memo series. After about a year or so, the plan was revised and revisited with Team leader's in face to face meetings, and then approved thru CIG and issued and distributed. The team leaders were responsible for utilizing the process when needed. Each team had a Team Management Plan that had a section on handling issues.

Census Managers was a precursor to CIG; they listened to reports and made decisions. Census Managers Operational Coordination SubGroup (CMOCS) was a sub-group of Census Managers – Apparently some issues were shunted to CMOCS that couldn't be solved immediately in Census Managers.

There were risks which became issues (for example, FDCA), but no one ever created an official issue because they didn't want to draw attention to the problem.

We probably have a good issues management process in place. People didn't know about it and generally dealt with issues informally. The "piddly" team issues we don't care about and shouldn't impose process on people for those; people can smell the difference. For the major issues we should understand the 'back door' processes people used and document them. If those processes worked then let's use them.

There needed to be a gate keeper between teams and the DMD chief.

We had a database for issues that would produce reports for "open" issues. This was a good thing. This was a good tool: it gave us a repository for everything and produced reports for senior managers to deal with.

I opened a couple of issues. They weren't the sensitive kind of issues people like to keep close, just decisions that had to be made by management. As for the more sensitive issues it's a cultural thing here – I'm not sure what has people frightened about being open

People may [...] and moan about requirements but they understand that some documentation is needed to take an issue to CIG or DLG, and they may like the structure. We need better documentation of when risks become issues to improve issues management. Is it worth the extra effort? – I don't know.

There is no integration between teams: Who owns an issue? The Team Leaders meeting was a disaster because DMD gave them extra work as a reward for going, and nothing was documented.

Tools can help people manage issues, but tools aren't the answer – we are lacking a process, and the process is the answer. Which process? Whichever is working for people.

Comments from team leads

Issues with risks sometimes overlapped. It was hard to tell which one we were dealing with. We figured it out: there was training and we talked to those who did the training for the risks and clarified what we had.

It gets blurry whether something is a risk (going to happen) or an issue (happening already).

We really don't want things to become an issue, because we can't wait until it really happens. Decennial moves at too fast a pace with too many people involved. We have to try and stop it. So even though it's actually a 'risk', we have to treat it as an issue. At what point does it transition from "risk" to "issue"?

At the program level we had risks that became issues, but senior managers were still mitigating it.

Confusion on risk vs. issues caused confusion within the teams.

Some issues were not originally documented as risks, which is not necessarily poor risk identification. We also have crisis management (which is issue and risk management).

The relation of issues to change requests is important because it can help better planning next time. Link thru the tool – did a risk or issue result in a CR?

In the [...] team we had a lot of issues dealing with process, but there were also issues dealing with the estimation process and we had to split it into 2 lists because it became so much.

We don't plan for every "thing". We don't plan for disconnects, for miscommunications.

Issues are nebulous – at your discretion, not black and white.

Issues almost always entail budget, schedule, and scope.

I have not seen a change in the concerns with issues over the decennial cycle. Many of our issues came from external audiences on scope and budget.

I don't remember a process where we had a walk-through of the budget. It was "here are your hours".

DMD's Issues Management process did not start early enough in the process.

We put requirements into our contract for our contractor to follow and when DMD comes along with a new process, we have to change the contract and it costs money to change it. And now DMD is starting down this same path for 2020.

Contracts usually start early in the decade and the processes came mid-to-late in the decade.

The contracting was really rushed. They just put out guidelines quickly instead of really thinking things through. Contractors cannot react fast enough when requirements change mid-stream.

We put out contracts with unclear requirements.

There are always money issues. The contract process was bad. And the whole letting of the contract took place too late and was outside Census's hands by the time we got approved. So the same amount of money would not do the job.

There were a lot of different processes involved and we required a contractor to work for all of them. And instead of looking for what was different or what was most difficult, we put out what was the easiest to put in place.

Back when the contracts were set, there was not Risk Management or Issue Management. Those came on when contracts were already in.

Subject matter experts who really know the work were not involved in the contract process.

Executive Management does not think that project management process is a priority, at least in the past. Internal Census subject matter experts who get promoted are not necessarily trained in Program Management.

A lot of the processes were a reaction to finding problems with contracts in place (e.g. FDCA).

We did not put Program Management as a priority early enough.

The design for 2010 was not decided early enough. The DMD PM Branch did not form until 2008. It was "Planning and Coordination" before then. Before then it was managed by working groups and around 2006 it was not working. That's when they decided on the team's structure and kicked off the teams.

We never actually got formal charters for all the teams. The Team Management Plan had protocols about dealing with Issues. There were two plans that dealt with how to manage issues: Team Management Plan and Issue Management Plan. Team Management Plan was more like a Project Management Plan. Issue Management Plan was more like a Program Management Plan. It was a detailed component of the larger Program Management Plan. These came about after 2006 when we switched from working groups to teams.

Our team was doing issues management one way and then DMD came in with a new process causing changes and some confusion.

The PMO looks at things from the acquisition viewpoint, but others look at it from a requirements perspective.

It's not clear to parties high enough up what is the true cost of a delay in the decision on a budget.

The decennial model assumes everyone starts at a certain point, but things have started already for 2020.

The 2020 Plans seem to be very focused on PMO Roles and responsibilities.

One constraint to this is that there has been a lot of 2020 Planning so far already. And these lessons are not incorporated into that.

The assessments are not completed yet, nor the projects to complete those assessments and these lessons learned are not considered for 2020.

Each team had its own tool and this led to differing views and concepts of risks vs. issues.

[...] needed to know when materials would be available – it wasn't in detail in the schedule. No one was willing to change the lines. That was a request in 2008. We did a lot of lockups, but there was no status on delivery of material.

We can't use Primavera is a reason why we don't have a schedule.

It was new for 2010...we were not able to do a dress rehearsal and so we didn't have an idea of how much time it would take for this [...] operation.

There is no Dress Rehearsal planned for 2020. Just a series of end-to-end tests. And this is driven by money.

Face-to-face communication is the most efficient.

Face to face with written documentation as we do when presenting to CIG is the best venue for sharing information. The truth is that cross team communication relying on reading documents is not the best when time is limited-- probably not a good answer.

I personally have never seen anyone get in trouble for airing dirty laundry. But, I have seen plenty of instances where senior management says they want proposed solutions and not just to hear the problem. That statement may encourage people to hold their issues until they figure things out. But, I am guessing on this one, I am really unsure about what it is that makes us react this way.

In team meetings when we'd start talking about issues or risks, there would be hesitance to suggest anything because it would suggest a weakness on the part of the division. So underlings would not want to bring up risks or issues because the supervisor structure might not appreciate it. They'd bring things up, but it wouldn't sound like it needed any attention.

We didn't know that travel time was to be included in the budgeted hours.

Each entity interpreted the number of training hours in a slightly different way, and each was "right", but in the end it caused a crisis at the last minute. Training was written when it was communicated what the training hours were. We had to strip out hours because we couldn't re-write the training.

A team needs to be informed of issues on other teams because sometimes issues are inter-related. And sometimes we need a message if there is a public facing issue. We don't need to track issues on other teams, but need a way to get status on those that are relevant to my team.

Teams have trouble getting all stakeholders involved. Better communication would promote better problem solving.

We started talking about hours and realized travel was not being calculated.

The definitions between DMD and [...] were different. They eventually got together and defined what those hours really meant. And our team checked the training.

It took so long to see this as an issue. It goes back to both parties thought the definition was clear, so they weren't asking questions. They were totally missing each other.

There was a disconnect between DMD and [...] concerning the number of training hours budgeted for decennial operations.

We didn't have a regular team leaders' meeting. It got canceled every week because it was not a mandatory meeting, so if there was nothing to talk about, it got canceled. The objective of this meeting was not correct. It should have been set up to be a sharing meeting.

We'd go to this meeting [Team Leaders'] and it would just be a series of assignments, on top of everything else we are already doing. So folks stopped coming! It only added more work and they weren't held accountable.

My guess is that no one knows about the features of the Issues Management Database.

I didn't know there was an Issues Management Database.

I was unaware that the formal process dictates putting issues into a database and the availability of formal rapid response teams.

Teams are deficient in documenting issues resolution.

No one is available to keep records when an issue hits.

Redesign of decennial operations removed some very important software and reports functionalities that later made it more difficult to monitor operations. For example, when we

redesigned from stripping things out, we had high level HQ views of information that showed the regional view. And the low level was at the person level out in the field. So regions had to put 50 reports together to get their averages for the 'middle' level.

There is a need for greater awareness of concurrent activities in other teams, better visibility of tasks versus schedule, and a need for a reliable repository for decisions made, for actions, and for reasons for actions.

We need an historical record and knowledge of work in other teams.

I doubt that teams would use a project management tool in a uniform way.

Having created a list of issues and having to report on them at the monthly meetings was good because it helped us keep track and ensured that we closed them. Or that if we had a new one, we would report it.

The bi-weekly report was a place to put high level issues and this forced us to keep track and could see it across the board. It allowed us to get people's attention when we needed to.

We did document our process.

A common tool to track and link risks to issues could be helpful. Such a tool is needed to remove uncertainty about expectations, but this is related to communication in general since multiple teams are reporting to the same overarching group.

A database would help us manage issues. We would need access to it.

Emails have cut down on documentation.

We did escalate this to CIG in order to get overtime and money for travel. Once we said we needed to do this, it was pretty quick to get the approval.

Some issues required additional funds or resources to resolve. For example, we just finished [...] and 7 staff spent the last 2 weeks in NPC making sure we could finish this operation. And this was not part of the original plan.

Some issues required additional hardware to resolve. We needed to replace the servers so that software would run appropriately and fast enough. It took forever to get the blade server in place for 2010. I don't know the details per se, but it was affecting the traffic. We needed other areas to make this a priority and to a certain degree it involved budget to buy the hardware.

We had money issues.

We didn't have the budget for a DR.

There are budget reserves, but they are held in DMD.

They don't allow us to have management reserve.

Teams have no access to funding. It took a long time to get an answer to get funding.

Our team's rapid response team met every day for five months. It had representation by high levels of management. This meeting was to talk about the hot topics/issues, including participation rates. Members also gave updates on politically sensitive situations. [...] gave updates about what was happening in the regions or other concerns they were having. DMD usually gave updates about what was happening globally on the census, particularly hot issues on operations. Also, info from meetings with Groves often came up. Then we would discuss if there needed to be a [...] response the issue or crisis. If yes, then we determined right in the meeting the course of action that we should take and assigned it to the appropriate people to implement immediately.

We had key issues that were not necessarily within the scope of the Issue Management Plan. They were higher level. The Assistant Associate director took ownership of these and this helped to resolve these (fingerprinting issue, for instance). This created a shepherd for forwarding to the higher level. This helped that someone at this level takes ownership.

Did this issue get escalated? To be honest, we stayed late to figure out a way to re-package. Not sure if it actually went to CIG.

We had weekly meetings with status updates.

Our rapid response groups met daily.

We relied on rapid response teams when immediate decisions were required.

Issues were solved when you got the right persons in the same room.

Each team has its own issues management process.

The team members across divisions, once an issue was recognized, were very reactive to come together.

There was a work-together kind of spirit. The team members understood very well what their role was and the importance of their role. Roles and Responsibilities were well defined. It's a culture phenomenon.

The creation of sub-teams was very important. When we had an issue, we could put a smaller group together to deal with the sub-team and then bring it back to the larger group.

The fact that we had a written plan was good. It included detail to Rapid Response to things that became an issue. And this was approved at the highest level (CIG).

Within our IPT and all the way up, issues are at different levels. Sub-team issues may not be big enough to report up, so we kept separate lists of issues. Things got elevated when the team could not handle it. When sub-team handled the issue, it never rose up. There were multiple issues lists. Some were risks that turned into issues and teams needed to know when and to who to elevate the issue.

We didn't have folks whose job it was on the team to focus on issues and risks.

Teams dealt effectively with team issues. Teams developed idiosyncratic cultures for dealing with issues. Actual problem-solving was often done by core team members, and issues were typically tasked, and sometimes sub-tasked, to work groups. Real work was generally accomplished outside of team meetings.

We had a process, but it was not the formal process.

Each work group addressed its own issues.

We teleconferenced our meetings, had an agenda, and action items.

We reported our issues to our ADC weekly.

We kept minutes and had an agenda at our meetings.

Our team met once a week during the lifecycle of the project. Issues too big for the regular team meeting may have been brought up and then assigned follow-up.

You may start down one (standard) problem-solving path, and find you have to back-track.

My team met weekly and attempted to follow customized team procedures.

Issues are typically settled outside of [the] process.

Sub-team leaders kept us on-task.

Issues were kept under the risk umbrella.

Team members weren't told of the process as a tool to handle issues.

I have been unaware of the documented procedures for issues management. Often our issues got hashed out and resolved by our associate director mainly because of the very public nature and pressures from external audiences.

Since the Communications Director was not represented at CIG issues were handled outside of the process.

We did not bypass CIG. We kept CIG in the loop but chartered a group to resolve problems.

None of our issues went all the way to CIG.

Having a process was good.

Big "I" [major] issues went to CIG.

OITs felt out of the loop in decision making.

It was not a well-defined process, so there was confusion.

Both sides thought the process was defined well. Everyone made assumptions.

Sometimes issues come so fast, you don't have time for process.

The issues management process, using the required forms, was not utilized often. Overall, very few "issues" came to the CIG for resolution. This might indicate a problem.

Nobody wants to go to CIG because it's too much trouble and they won't make a decision. Folks don't want to air their dirty laundry. Teams want to keep their stuff away from CIG until absolutely necessary.

Once it got to CIG, things went fine. But going there was 'last resort'.

It was too much trouble to use the forms and schedule with CIG. It took too long.

It took so long because the process was time consuming. There was an emergency process, but even that could take up to 3 days. And to go through the emergency process, there were steps to get that designation (getting ADCs approval). CIG met weekly, but were available every day at 8, yet there were exceptions. And sometimes folks didn't get in until 9 a.m. or so. And when you got to CIG, they would say "You could have handled this yourself".

Some of the teams did not want to fill out the issue form. DMD revised the plan so folks did not have to fill out the form. But the intent was to come to CIG with everything documented and options and recommendations outlined. But by the time the team created the options, they had done the work. CIG became a checkbox, rather than a real governing body.

The 2010 Issues Management Plan was scoped to disagreement among the teams; only then would the issue get escalated. The scope of Issue Management was too narrow for 2010. It was defined this way because they wanted to empower the integrated teams to do all the work. CIG group would make a decision if there was disagreement on a topic within a team. Then it would be escalated to CIG. CIG did not want to 'solve' anything, only take data from a team and make the decision based on the team's recommendations.

Issues that were not from disagreements across teams were out of scope for CIG.

Major issues are escalated when persons working on an issue are unable to reach a consensus, and resources not available to teams need to be requested.

We are reasonably happy with the formal issues management process. We value the decisions CIG makes and feel that CIG has been useful in mediating conflicts. Rapid Response Teams are good vehicles for accelerating issues resolution.

The amount of preparation required to take an issue to a CIG meeting is a reason to not do so. Any issue that needed to go to CIG did.

There are 'informal' processes that get things done around the formal process and executives are fond of those 'back doors' because it's fast and it minimizes the airing of dirty laundry.

We care about the work assigned to us. We are less concerned about how project level issues relate to program level issues. We had no idea that there was a 'Key Issues' link on eCenOC.

Internally we used issues to get upper management's attention when we had something going on that was out of our control and we needed their attention. For us, it was issues pushing the contractor that were outside of the IPTs, specifically new requirements and issues originating in the IT Directorate. We were less likely to use the process for IPT coordination because in general everyone was willing to work things out.

Divisions had to work out issues.

Division representatives did crisis management.

There were conflicts between membership in division and in OIT.

Someone needs the authority to manage and coordinate team contributions.

Team and divisional loyalties may conflict.