The response process in large businesses

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Statistics Netherlands

My statement

In business surveys, starting pre-tests at the stage when a draft questionnaire has been developed, is too late:

> Conceptualisation > draft Q > pre-testing > adapting Q

Studying the business context should start earlier:

> Conceptualisation **> study business context**
> > draft Q > pre-testing > adapting Q

CBS-DNB Survey on Finances of Enterprises & Balance of Payments: A new e-Questionnaire

How to test this questionnaire?

www.cbs.nl/balanceofpayments

Steps in the Q development process

1. Conceptual data model   2014-2015
2. **Feasibility study (business visits)**   2015
   - 5+5 businsess visits -> full response process
   - Results: - insights in response process,
     - Q design + survey comm. requirements (paper)
3. 'Paper' schedule of questionnaire   2016
4. Visual design   2015-2016
5. Web questionnaire design   2016-2017
6. **Testing (usability pre-tests)**   2017
   - Pre-testing -> usability testing
7. **Pilot year (incl. business visits)**   2018
   - business visits -> full response process
8. Start survey   2019

General conclusion

o data according to the pre-defined **definitions**
o data about the right pre-defined **consolidated unit**
o in a **timely manner**

To get data of good quality:

what counts is:

- not just the questionnaire design itself,

but what is even more important:

- how businesses can work with the questionnaire
  ➢ organising the response process
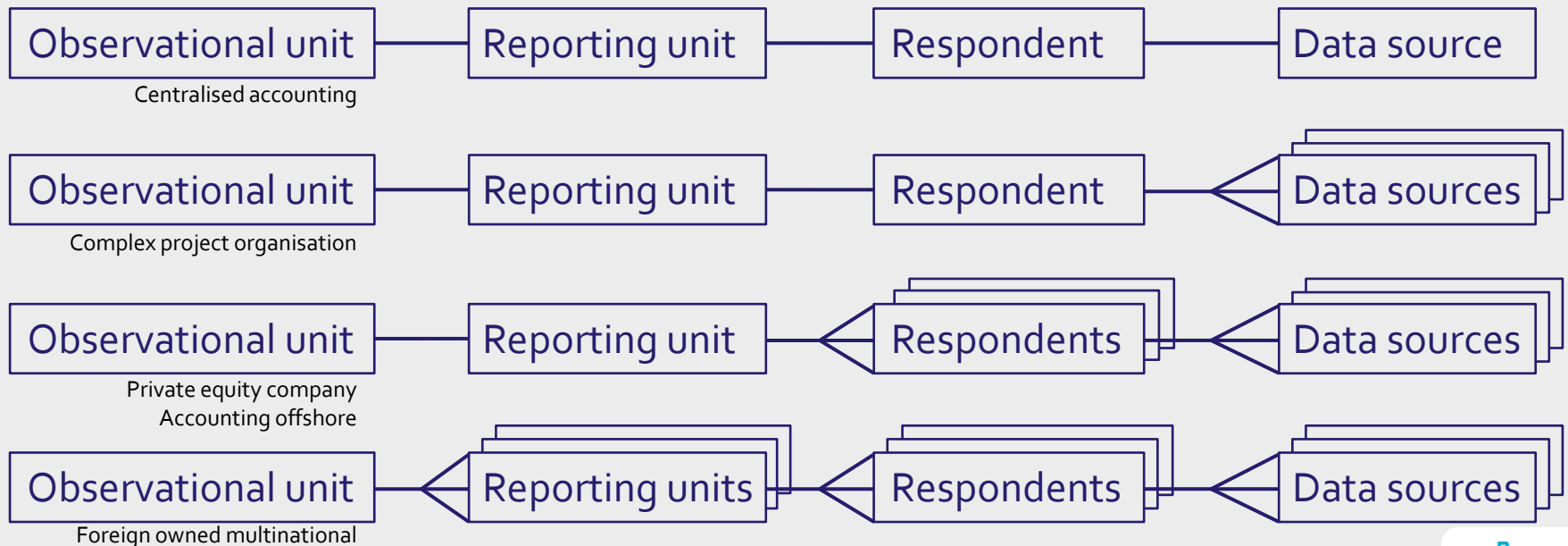 ➢ getting prepared

Insights in this process?
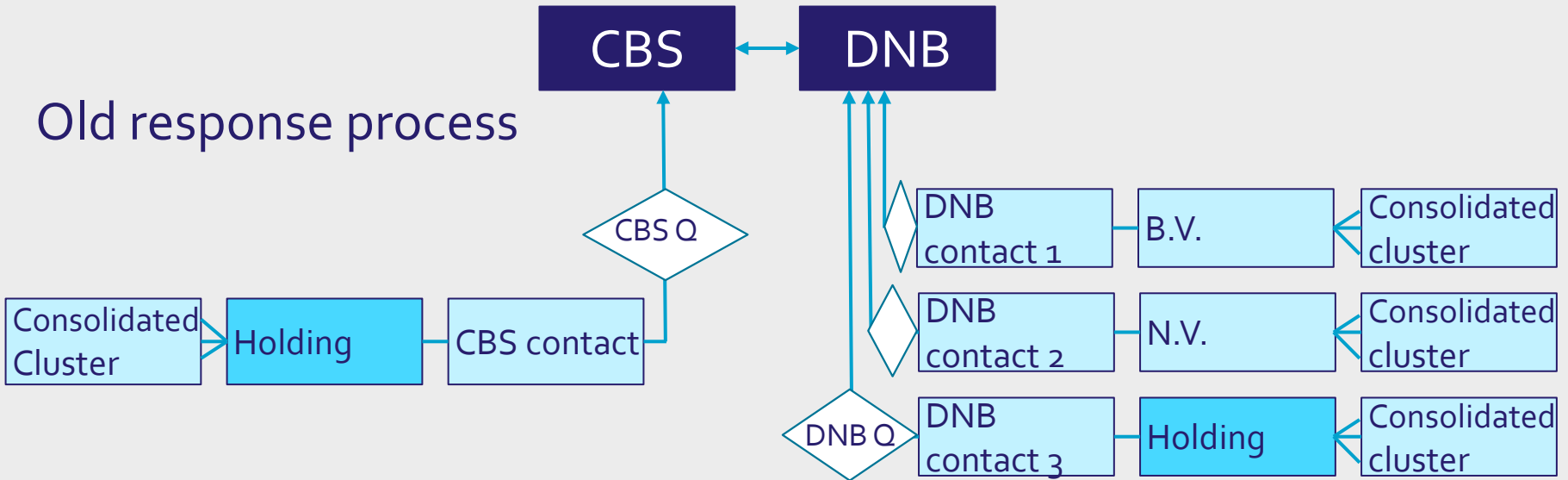
"Give me one year to get prepared"

Complexity of response process

- Many data sources, at various locations ⎤
- Many people, at various locations   ⎥— or a combination ⎤
- Many sub-units   ⎦   ⎥ **All structures apply!**
- Time: when data are available, and businesses have time ⎦

| Observational unit | — | Reporting unit | — | Respondent | — | Data source |

Centralised accounting

| Observational unit | — | Reporting unit | — | Respondent | ◁ | Data sources |

Complex project organisation

| Observational unit | — | Reporting unit | ◁ | Respondents | — | Data sources |

Private equity company
Accounting offshore

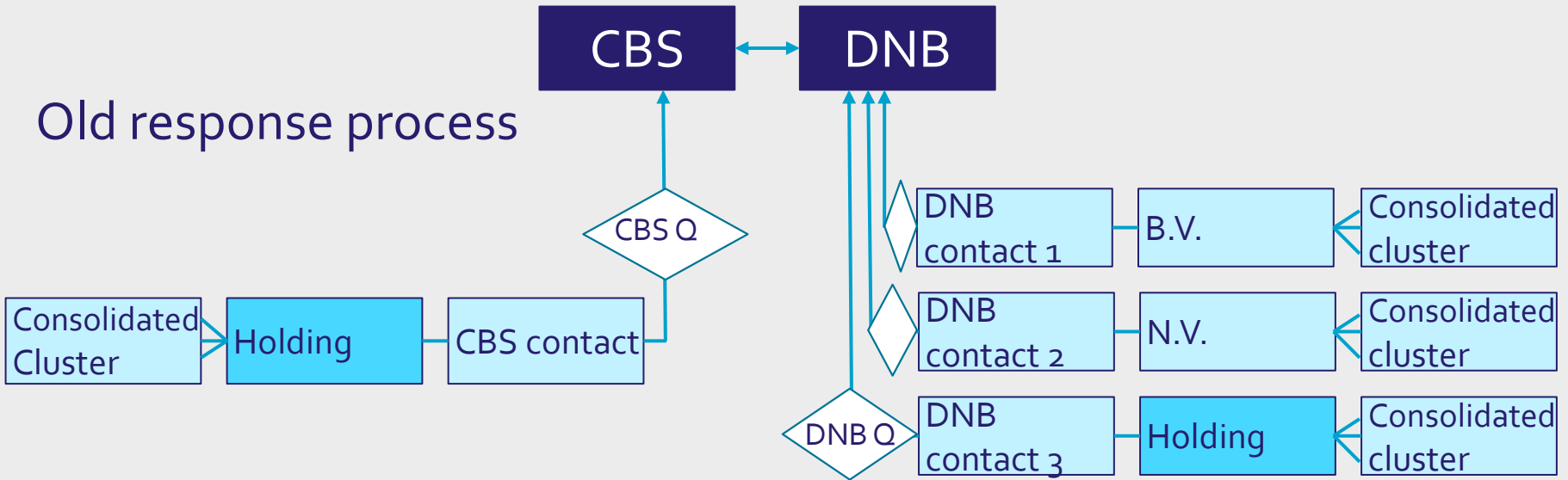| Observational unit | ◁ | Reporting units | ◁ | Respondents | ◁ | Data sources |

Foreign owned multinational

Complex response process: example

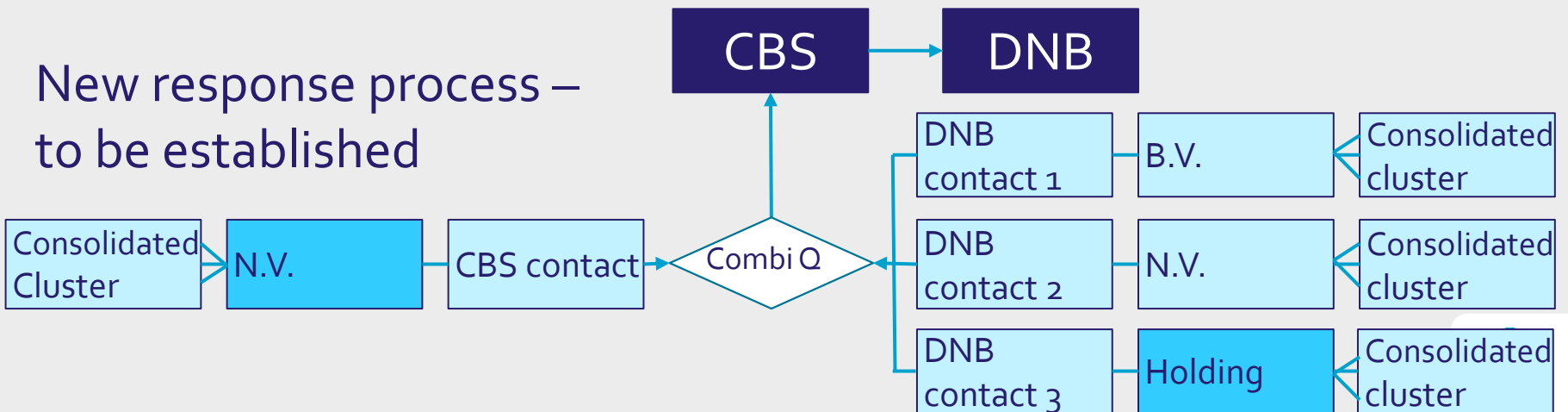**Old response process**

Complex response process: example

Old response process

New response process – to be established

Getting ready in 3 steps
Business information day in Amsterdam

reporting
CBS DCB

1. Get overview of requested information
   - Download list of variables and definitions ✓ ✓
   - Match with own sources ✓ ✓
   - Be aware of: ✓ ✓
     - correct unit/entity: Consolidation cluster
     - differences in definitions
     - periodicity: quarterly data
2. (If needed) Integrate the various individual rapporting processes for CBS and DCB using the new questionnaire
3. Implement one new rapporting process

Complexity of response process

- Many data sources, at various locations ⎤
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Observational unit — Reporting unit

Information distributed…
– Between people
– Between sources
– Between departments
– Over time

We would have missed this information if we would have done a first pre-test AFTER we had developed a first draft

Observational unit — Reporting units — Respondents — Data sources

Foreign owned multinational

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> Conceptualisation > **study business context**
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See: Snijkers, Haraldsen, Jones and Willimack, 2013,
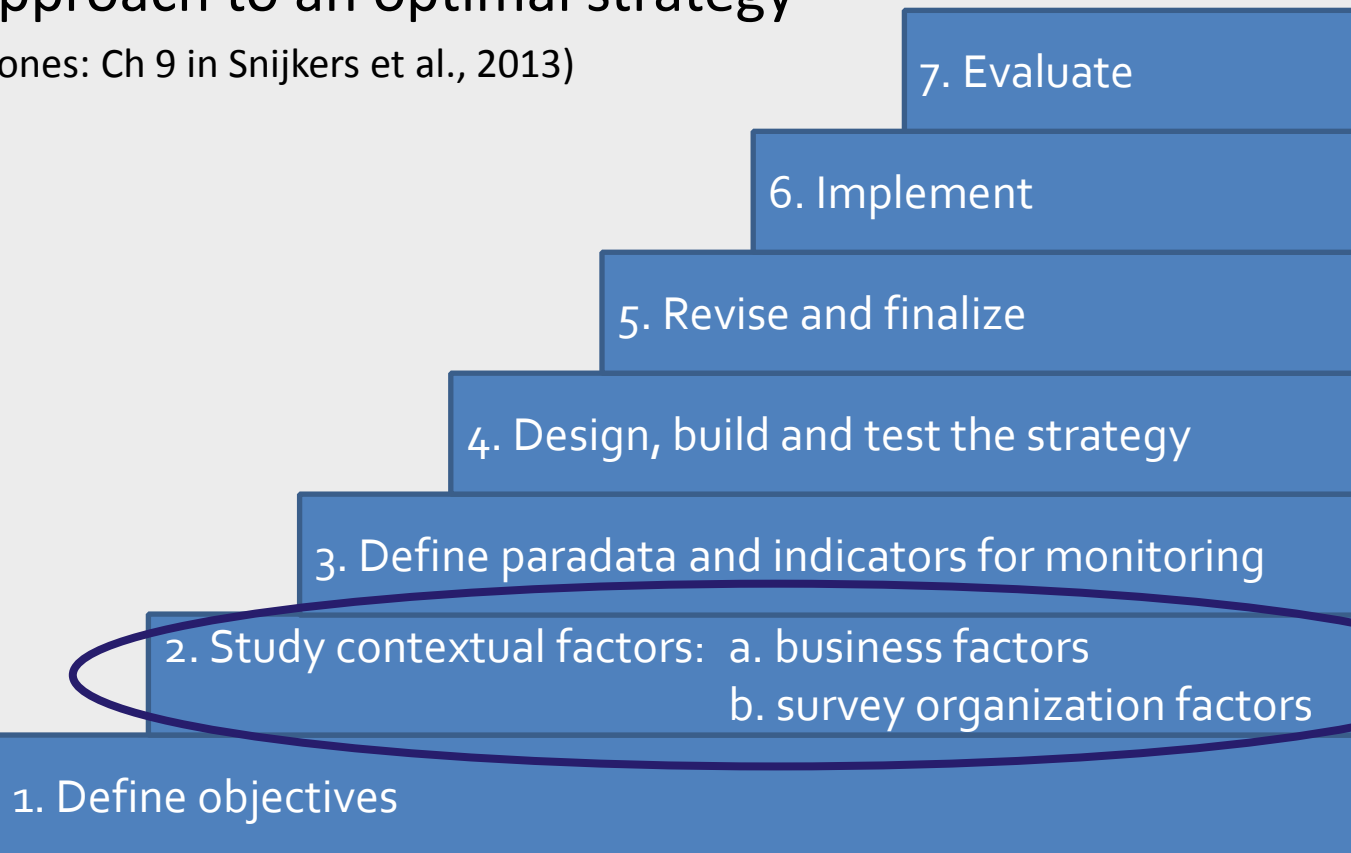Designing and Conducting Business Surveys. Wiley, Hoboken.

Planning an effective Business Survey Communication Strategy

7-step approach to an optimal strategy

(Snijkers & Jones: Ch 9 in Snijkers et al., 2013)

7. Evaluate

6. Implement

5. Revise and finalize

4. Design, build and test the strategy

3. Define paradata and indicators for monitoring

2. Study contextual factors: a. business factors
                                              b. survey organization factors

1. Define objectives
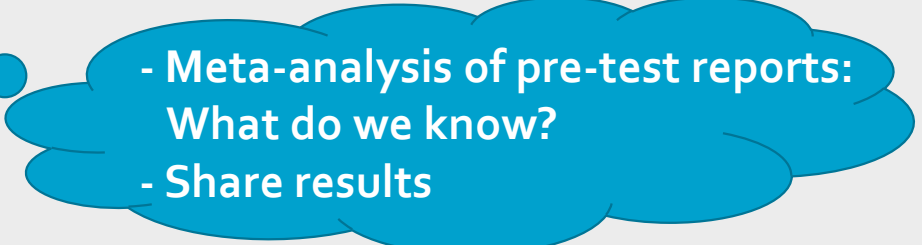
Adapt pre-testing methods to business context

Tucker (1997):

"Successful generalisation from the laboratory will depend upon the researcher's ability to create realistic conditions in the laboratory or, at least, take into account the differences when drawing conclusions from laboratory experiments."

Discussion on scientific characteristics of pre-testing, like generalizability, a decade after CASM (1984).

Do we need adapted methods?

1. Methods (or a combination of methods) that take into account:
   - the complex response process
   - practical considerations
   - available quantitative (para)data
   - "new" methods used by other professionals, like web designers

   - Rethink our practices
   - Start here; not with the methods
   - Collaborate in pre-testing

2. Careful selection of businesses: representing the various situations in the field:
   - insights in these situations

   - Study the complex response processes

3. Analysis and reporting:
   - Quick-and-dirty, or
   - Slow-and-thorough ?

   (CIRF: Cognitive Interviewing Reporting Framework; Willis & Boeije, 2013)

   - Meta-analysis of pre-test reports: What do we know?
   - Share results