

than trifling amounts to maintain this level in current operations. On the other hand, many of the recurring annual and decennial operations need explicit support for the improvement of file management practices. The 1960 population samples are examples of the latter situation. An assessment of these costs is outside the scope of this survey and, in fact, should be considered a part of the cost of the survey without regard to a proposed Federal data centers.

Then, there was the comment by the larger agencies, heavily stressed by the Census Bureau, that funds to improve the files would not necessarily generate the desired results. The argument was that only present staff members had the background and professional experience needed to do the job. Since these people were already fully occupied, could not be diverted, and new staff could not do the job, it would not be done even if money is supplied it was asserted. I do not concur with this view. The work can be done if it is properly phased; that is, if sufficient time is allowed, new workers under the supervision of experienced personnel can do the job in the long run (the 5-year span I have suggested). I believe the reaction cited above assumes a crash effort to organize the files on a high-priority basis. I agree that it cannot be done this way and advise against such an approach.

Agency representatives seemed excessively concerned with the confidentiality question. Turning data over to a Federal center would be a breach of contract with respondents who have been assured that none but agency personnel would view their reports, it was said. I tried to convey the assurance that, if a data center were established, it would assume the obligation of protecting both the agency and the respondent. Since feelings on this matter run quite deep, some steps should be taken at the outset to vitiate them or discussions beyond this narrow consideration could founder.

One constructive suggestion was made in regard to confidentiality. Mr. Robert Menke of the Securities and Exchange Commission expressed the view that corporate concern dealt mainly with current affairs. It was his feeling that, after a period of 5 to 10 years, back data could be exposed to public view without serious objection by respondents. There would be difficulty perhaps in applying such a rule retroactively but a notice to this effect on future collections of data might serve to make the problem less troublesome in the years ahead.

CONCLUSION

I have a final comment. I found the evident loss of data because of the failure to support good file management distressing. Immediate steps ought to be taken to stop this erosion of a national resource. The costs indicated above measure the deficiency of not doing it before, and they will grow as time passes. It is difficult to argue that these losses have immediate meaning. The tools, techniques, and intellectual attitudes needed for their useful exploitation are not yet reflected in our institutions. But, as you know, changes are already underway. And even though we are unable now to predict how the store of data might be used. I am convinced that actions to preserve this national resources will be appreciated by those who follow.