CBT vs INSTRUCTOR-LED CLASSES

Margaret K. Schrempf - Health Information Reporting Company

- ABSTRACT:
Since the introduction of Computer Based Training (CBT) as an alternative to Instructor-led classes, trainers like myself have had to re-evaluate our Adult course curriculum. Has CBT been worth the cost? Does the user or student get solid data processing fundamentals? Do CBT students perform better or worse than students who take instructor-led courses? Should there be a marriage of the two? Where does CBT really fit in? This paper will explore the cost of vendor supplied CBT vs instructor CBT development. CBT course curriculum vs Instructor-led curriculum, and the cost of PC based CBT. Finally this paper will discuss the effect of CBT and Instructor-led training on our own students, and some of the solutions that we think work.

- Historical Background
Each Information Center in every company does not perform the same functions. The Information Center at the City of Chicago was originally created to assist the end-user to produce ad-hoc reporting from their mainframe production systems. At that time, all reporting was done using MARKIV and the user was not exposed to JCL. That was provided for them. The Information Center was staffed by two people whose main function was to provide the JCL and submit the jobs for the user. Of course every job was punched on cards. As time passed, the users become more sophisticated and submit the jobs for the user. It was my task to evaluate them.

- CBT comes to CHICAGO:
Because of the number of students and courses we teach CBT seemed to be "manna from heaven". This would allow me to free up some of our better instructor's so that they could write applications and concentrate on consulting. My first task was to search for the illusive MAINFRAME CBT Vendor.

- VENDOR SUPPLIED SOFTWARE:
I quickly realized that I had limited choices. I had to choose between DELTAK® or SRA® for all mainframe programs such as JCL®, FILEAID®, RAMIS®, and I had the SAS® Institute to call for SAS®. I called all three. I requested sample courses in JCL® from DELTAK® and SRA® companies. It was my task to evaluate them. I learned more about JCL in that month then I care to talk about or do I think I will ever use. I also quickly learned some very hard facts which I hope to share with you!

- LESSON 1
Vendor Software is not site specific and users shouldn't know certain parameters.

- LESSON 2
I never thought that what our M.I.S. shop did was very different, until I looked at the lesson on the JOB CARD. It was too general. I would have had to sit down and write out a handout on our in-house requirements for the JOB CARD. After talking with other M.I.S. personnel, I thought that they would have heart failure because they thought that our system would fall to its knees if our users were ever told about the time parameter in JCL. Just think they could move their job to the top of the queue without the intervention of the scheduler or the information center.

- LESSON 3
In-house CBT development
I went to the next CBT conference to learn how to design our own CBT courses. At that conference I was shocked to learn that optimally it took about fourteen individuals to create one course. To give you some idea of my shock, let me list some of the titles: Project Manager, Program Sponsor (the one who wants the development), Instructional Designer, Subject Matter Expert, Writer, Editor, Data Entry Specialist.
It was no longer a wonder to me why CBT was expensive! I was desperate at this point. I could not even get our management to agree to a CBT contract for $10,000.00 a year, how in the world was I going to get them to agree to hire 14 people? As I went through the exhibits I found an authoring language for $79.95...I bought it.

Bound and determined to free some of my instructors, I learned the authoring language and produced my first CBT course, alone without a committee of fourteen. This course was our "INTRODUCTION" to data processing on the mainframe and PC. We REQUIRE our users to take this course so that they will understand what software languages we support and what hardware support they can expect. We gave our users the choice of taking an Instructor-led course or the CBT course and monitored the results.

The only other courses available on CBT were the courses that were leased through the SAS Institute. We offered four out of the five CBT courses that SAS has written as options to our Instructor-led SAS courses. We monitored those students that took the CBT course with students who took the equivalent Instructor-led courses. Our observations were startling.

- CBT vs INSTRUCTOR-LED

We monitored ten different users and found that the users who took the SAS Instructor-led courses needed less assistance from the Information Center than the students who took the SAS CBT courses. Each student will learn differently, but learning is a two stage process. In the first stage a student first absorbs knowledge, in the second stage the student will begin to form questions it is that stage that a student will need their own particular questions answered. No CBT course that I have evaluated has been able to address the question problem.

- Where does CBT fit in?

The other user's that we monitored used the SAS CBT as a means of review. For example if the user did not use a PROC FREO for a while the CBT course was a means to sharpen their skills. It is with this kind of user that we have had our success, the user who needs to hone their skill in a particular proc.

During the next two years I will be developing some in-house CBT for SAS using SAS/AF. I will concentrate on individual PROC that are used infrequently so that our users will be able to review the PROC so that they can use it successfully.

SAS®, SAS/FS®, and SAS/AF® are registered trademarks of SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA.