An In-House SAS® Users Group: Facilitating the Transition to Version 6
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Overview
With the announcement of the release of Version 6 of the SAS System, users of the software at the American Cyanamid company viewed the event with a mixture of anticipation and apprehension. On one hand, Version 6 would feature some much desired enhancements and offer consistency across platforms with multi-vendor architecture; on the other, the task of converting systems and educating SAS users about the new features was going to be a challenge. The SAS System was licensed on multiple platforms for which the responsibility for maintenance and user support was distributed among different divisions and IS organizations. As a result, no central group would be coordinating transition activities and information across the company.

The response to this situation was the formation of a Cyanamid In-House SAS Users Group. It serves as a forum for disseminating information about Version 6 products and enhancements, provides tutorials and coordinates training, and serves as a vehicle for providing improved user support. This paper will discuss the activities of the group and its role in facilitating the transition to Version 6 of the SAS System.

Company Structure
Although SAS is widely used at Cyanamid, the corporate structure is such that responsibility for the software and its support is dispersed over different divisions of the company.

Multiple IS organizations
American Cyanamid has a corporate structure organized into several business groups (Medical, Agriculture, and Chemicals), each with their own support organizations. As a result, multiple IS organizations exist, one for each of the business areas, in addition to a corporate IS department and an IS organization to handle the company's international IS needs. The directors of the individual IS organizations report organizationally to the head of their business group, not to the Corporate IS Director.

Multiple platforms/Multiple sites
Across Cyanamid, the SAS system is licensed on four different platforms: a corporate IBM mainframe, several VAX mini-computers, a UNIX workstation, and over 40 personal computers running SAS under the DOS operating system.

Adding to the logistical difficulties, the facilities are scattered across multiple states with seven different locations in the Tri-state (NY,NJ,CT) area alone. Collaboration takes place as well between the US sites and Cyanamid's international affiliates who are also users of SAS

Limited SAS support structure
The existence of multiple sites and platforms implied that multiple user support facilities, i.e., "Help Desks," also existed. This made it difficult to share the identification of problems and solutions, not to mention the development of a knowledge base for SAS support. The designated SAS support personnel that the Institute has each user site identify were often not functioning in that role because that role was intentionally or unintentionally not publicized. The bottom line was that formal SAS support was limited.

Among the SAS user community, users from different business groups were often unaware that others in the company were using the software. In several cases, individuals met at a SUGI, looked at each other's name tags and realized that they worked for the same company. Within business groups, the opportunities for interactions between users and the IS staff were often limited because of the organizational structure and politics, and the fact that IS personnel were often not involved in user projects.

With the arrival of Version 6, improving the communication and interaction among SAS users at Cyanamid would be a significant aid in making the transition more effective. Trying to develop and promote an institutional solution did not seem to be the way to go, however, given the organization of the company.

A Solution: An In-House Users Group
Discussions of these issues began to arise among SAS users within the Medical Group who were making the first efforts to convert systems to from 5.18 to 6.06. The idea of an In-House SAS Users Group surfaced as a possible solution and informal polling of known SAS users indicated that the idea was worth pursuing. Although the idea was conceived within a single business group, it was decided the benefits of cross-business group
communications would warrant presenting the concept to the entire company.

Management support
The idea of a Cyanamid SAS Users Group was presented to the management of the Medical Group IS organization who agreed to initially underwrite the commitment and allocate staff resources to implement the proposal. A steering committee seemed to be the most effective way of establishing and coordinating the activities of a User Group and its membership should ideally reflect the various SAS users from around the company. The first task was to identify individuals who would assist with the organization.

Announcing the formation of the group
With the concept sanctioned by IS management, a memorandum was prepared and officially distributed announcing the formation of a Cyanamid SAS Users Group and asking for participation. The memorandum explained the purpose of the group and the need to have cross-business group and cross-divisional participation. This memorandum was sent to all IS Directors and to their counterparts on the research side who represented the end-users. With the help of SAS Institute a list of SAS site contacts was developed. Many of these were found to be out of date, symptomatic of the problems with SAS support at Cyanamid in the first place. The memorandum was sent to these individuals as well.

Frankly, there was no way of knowing what kind of response the memorandum would generate. By directing the memorandum to the heads of each area, it was hoped that management approval would accompany the identification of interested individuals. If all went well, the Steering Committee would comprise representatives of the business groups, as well as users of the software on all platforms. The response was better than expected and the first meeting was scheduled.

Start-up
When the steering committee held its first organizational meeting in March of 1991, fourteen individuals were present. They represented all the business groups and came from three states and five different Cyanamid facilities. They included several site consultants and software representatives, statisticians and programmers from both the research and IS areas, and several end-users.

Enthusiasm for the project was high. An extensive list of ideas for possible activities that the Users Group could undertake was developed. The number one goal was improving communications and the steering committee decided to plan for a company wide Users Group meeting. However, planning an appropriate program was difficult as it was apparent that the committee did not have a good idea of the areas of interest of the "typical" Cyanamid SAS user.

Several members of the Steering Committee developed a user survey to identify the products being used, past training history, and interest in a SAS Users Group. The surveys were distributed using lists of user IDs from each system on which the SAS system was licensed. Response was quite good and most users expressed an interest in a Users Group. The results were tabulated and were placed in a database which could continue to be updated.

Because of the multiple platforms and uses of SAS software throughout the company, a single portrait of the typical Cyanamid SAS user did not surface but a set of general interests could be identified. In fact, the multi-vendor architecture of Version 6 lent itself well to meeting these objectives since we could downplay the role of the operating environment and focus on the software. The results of the survey indicated interest in Base SAS, SAS/AF® and SAS/GRAPH®, as well as macro language. Receiving more training was also a major concern. Interestingly enough, little mention was made in the surveys regarding interest in Version 6, a finding that the Steering Committee felt indicated a lack of awareness and further supported our belief that exposure and education of our users to the functionality of Version 6 was important. The Steering Committee felt that with the increased emphasis on interactive functionality in Version 6 this would be an appropriate opportunity to begin to change our users' psychology from primarily batch processors to interactive users of the software.

Kick-Off Meeting
The Kick-off meeting program was critical to the birth of the Users Group. It had to showcase the Version 6 software and address the interests of the user community. In addition, we wanted to further our goal of converting our "batch" users to interactive ones. We wanted to encourage interaction among users so the program, held in June 1991 at our corporate headquarters in NJ, began with time for coffee and danish. The formal program lasted about 2 hours and concluded with an opportunity for users to talk to the presenters and look at the materials featured in the program.

Agenda
The program featured members of the Steering Committee who gave 15-25 minute presentations.
Two were presented on-line in order to showcase the interactive capabilities. A SAS/AF application and an introduction to the windows in Display Manager gave the user community, many of whom were still using Version 5.18, a look at Version 6. PROC SOL, a new procedure with this release of SAS, was introduced and discussed, complete with a preview of expected enhancements due with the release of Version 6.07. A short presentation on PROC Summary was given, as was a summarization of the survey results of the user profile. Following the formal program, the presenters remained available so that users could have an opportunity for a hands-on session.

User resources
Since one of the objectives of the Users Group was to provide more effective user support, available support resources were presented. Many users were unaware of the new publications that the Institute had released, including the new format of much of the documentation. The replacements for the "Big Blue" Version 5 Base SAS Manual were introduced and the new format of the SAS Language and Procedures guides was discussed. Institute publications, such as SAS Communications®, were discussed and subscription requests were provided for users. An announcement of the new journal, Observations™, was also made with cards available for users as well. After the formal program ended several Steering Committee members remained available for questions about the publications and documentation which were available for perusal.

User reactions
Over 50 users attended the Kick-off meeting. We wanted feedback on the program, so we offered "bribes" in order to get attendees to complete our short evaluation form. The Institute's User Group Liaison department was helpful in providing several T-shirts and mugs for use as door prizes, which helped us motivate the collection of the needed feedback. Both the topics and format of the meeting were reviewed positively and we received requests for future topics.

Second User Group Meeting
Given the success of our first meeting, the second had to live up to high expectations. Held in September, it featured a look at Version 6 on multiple platforms. Hardware was setup to display SAS software running on a UNIX workstations, a PC with the DOS operating system, and under MVS®, displayed on a dedicated IBM terminal. The formal program featured a demonstration of the UNIX environment running Version 6.07 of the SAS system, an interactive presentation on SAS/GNAPH, and a discussion of the macro facility and its function.

The program ended with an opportunity for users to take a closer look at the various environments with a knowledgeable user available to answer questions. A new feature of the meeting was the availability of a "panel of experts" to answer SAS-related questions. Announced in the meeting flyers, users were asked to come with questions or issues to discuss.

1992 Goals
At the end of 1991, with two successful meetings in place, the Steering Committee revisited their list of objectives and decided to identify several that would be focused on during 1992. These included: identifying/coordinating training, introducing Version 6.07, and encouraging the use of interactive tools. The User Group meetings would continue to be the primary vehicle to implement these objectives. However, the most challenging objective was identified as a need to change management's opinion of the value of the SAS System as more than just a statistical/analysis tool.

Management presentation
Perhaps as a result of the organizational structure of the company, perhaps because of the history of the SAS System with its roots in statistical analysis, the Steering Committee perceived management, particularly in the IS departments, as not giving credence to the value of SAS software as an important information delivery tool. In some instances its presence on a given hardware platform was grudgingly accepted because "the statistics department needed it." In others, the SAS system was not even considered when looking at tools for development projects. As an example, on one system SAS software was made available to users only in batch mode which limited the usability of the new features in Version 6.

The Steering Committee decided it was time to change these attitudes. Approaching the Institute's Marketing staff, the problem was explained and a possible solution sketched out: a customized presentation of the potential for the use of SAS software at Cyanamid. The opening of the New York City office offered the perfect opportunity to see the Institute's presentation styles and identify the elements that would lend themselves to a customized presentation to Cyanamid's management. An agenda has been developed and the presentation is planned for later in the Spring. An interested IS manager has agreed to sponsor the forum at which this presentation will be made. It is hoped that this will begin to make managers
aware of some of the possible solutions that the SAS system can provide.

Training
Users have continued to state that training is a high priority but given the scattered nature of our users as well as the lack of communication among them, it has been difficult to gather a critical number for on-site training. The User Group meetings offer short tutorials but a need exists for more extensive offerings. The various IS training departments in Cyanamid have been willing to offer SAS training but have not had the information needed to identify specific classes and no impetus to pursue the issue. The Steering Committee decided it could serve as a training broker to identify and facilitate what would be considered consortium training particularly when done outside of the company.

This spring, a training survey which is being used to identify SAS training needs was developed and distributed in conjunction with the Users Group and two of the IS training departments. The Steering Committee assisted in reviewing the survey results and providing recommendations on selecting courses. The responsibility for the scheduling, course arrangements, enrollment, etc. will be handled, appropriately, by the training organizations. We expect to begin offering scheduled training in early fall. In addition, the improved communications among our users has meant that when an individual area sponsors training on its own, as occurs from time to time, the availability of extra space may be communicated to other users as well.

Introduction of Version 6.07
Cyanamid has been a beta site for Version 6.07 on the IBM under MVS and has in fact "gone production" with this release. The Users Group will be used as a vehicle to formally introduce this release on the IBM as well as on the other platforms. The first step in this process was to feature a look at Version 6.07 at the most recent Users Group held in March of 1992. The Regional Marketing Support Manager from SAS Institute's New York City office gave overviews on a number of SAS products including SAS/CALC®, SAS/CONNECT®, SAS/ENGLISH®, SAS/GRAPH, SAS/LAB®, SAS/ACCESS® and PROC Report all via SAS/ASSIST®. It is hoped that interest generated from this exposure may encourage users to want to utilize these 6.07 features.

Encouragement of Interactive tools
The User Group meetings have been our primary vehicle for encouraging the use of interactive tools. Not only have on-line presentations shown how the interactive capabilities can make the process of developing SAS routines more efficient but it has exposed our users to functionality that they were unaware was even available. SAS/ASSIST has been showcased in order to demonstrate the increased interactive functionality available with Version 6.

Cyanamid has offered to be a beta site for the experimental release of SAS/ENGLISH in order to offer another interactive tool to our users. With more of our users being exposed to graphical user interfaces and "point and click" capability, there is a need to continue to offer more user-friendly interfaces to the SAS system or risk losing them to alternative packages.

Conclusions
What makes it work? The success of the group has been a result of several factors. The composition of the Steering Committee has been critical. The types of applications and varied platforms with which members of the Committee have experience have been the key to the variety of programs and initiatives that have been offered through the Users Group. Although the members of the Steering Committee serve in that capacity for a very small percentage of their Cyanamid job function, management approval for that activity has led to a feeling of empowerment. The commitment of the volunteers, many of whom are not members of the Steering Committee, has been valuable. Whenever possible, this effort has been recognized and rewarded which provides positive reinforcement for their contributions and helps ensure continuing support.

The size of the user base and the variety of applications for which the SAS system is being used at Cyanamid also contributes to the vitality of the Users Group. Lastly, a little glitz and a lot of attention to details makes the difference in establishing the credibility of such a group, whether it consists of offering door prizes, presenting slick graphical displays, or making sure the presentation equipment works.

In conclusion, an In-House SAS Users Group can be a useful vehicle in helping users make the transition to a new version, particularly in companies where formal SAS support is limited. We found that several types of needs were especially well met by such a group.

These included introducing the release and presenting new features and functionality. In our case, this also covered encouraging the use of the interactive facilities. Another need addressed by
the group was in identifying and facilitating the offering of on-site training.

A third area was developing the Users Group's role in identifying and synthesizing the needs of SAS users and working proactively on their behalf. This included activities such as volunteering to serve as a beta site for new products and ensuring that users are aware of their availability. The Users Group is also lobbying towards defining the strategic role that the SAS System can play at Cyanamid.

Finally, the most important role was that of providing an avenue for communication among SAS users, both in terms of providing information about SAS software as well as encouraging discussion among SAS users with regard to their experiences. At least one current project under development is the direct result of a demonstration given at the first Users Group meeting. If no other activities had resulted from the Cyanamid SAS Users Group's formation, the improved communications would have made the effort worthwhile.

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