

Paper 150-30

Expansion of Existing “Journal Club” to Include Internal SAS® Training Sessions: Considerations for Establishing Internal SAS® Training Sessions

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To share a working format for internal SAS training and user support

Concept: Within any organization, one can create opportunities to share information and technical expertise. We have identified ten main considerations for establishing internal training sessions based on our experience of utilizing an existing monthly meeting as a format for internal SAS training:

- Determine the number of SAS users within your organization
- Establish a commitment from management that internal training is worthwhile
- Determine the skill level of current and potential SAS users
- Organize meetings on a set schedule
- Keep meetings short
- Pick a date and time that work for most SAS users' schedules
- Pick topics based on interest
- Present specific, work-based examples
- Find other resources for SAS information like SAS users' groups
- Create a common code library

This paper generally refers to all SAS products and operating systems and is written for all skill levels.

INTRODUCTION

Within any organization, one can create opportunities to share information and technical expertise. Our organization has created such an opportunity in our monthly “Journal club” meetings. This monthly meeting began as a format to discuss scientific literature relevant to our research team; however, the format is dynamic based on what is of interest to the participants at the time. A current need is to enhance the SAS skills of members of our research team. Therefore, the “Journal club” has become a format for internal SAS training and user support. We outline ten main considerations that we have found useful for establishing internal training sessions.

TEN MAIN CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING INTERNAL SAS TRAINING SESSIONS

The knowledge gained from learning a tool like SAS with data and examples that are specific and relevant to users is invaluable. As such, a strong case can be made for internal training. Unfortunately, a strong case does not guarantee actualization. We have identified ten main considerations for establishing internal training sessions based on our experience of utilizing an existing monthly meeting as a format for internal SAS training.

DETERMINE THE NUMBER OF SAS USERS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION

One consideration is to determine how many SAS users there are within your organization. For some organizations this is as simple as looking around the room. For others, this may include programmers on different continents or at least in different offices and different time zones. Large organizations or companies that have gone through recent mergers may have SAS users that are not aware of each other. A great place to start is to check with your SAS Account Executive to see if there are other SAS product users within your organization. Your SAS Account Executive can tell you what SAS products they are using and what kind of system they have established. Not only can such investigation lead to finding others who are using SAS in similar applications, but also if license consolidation is possible, it can lead to cost savings.

ESTABLISH A COMMITMENT FROM MANAGEMENT THAT INTERNAL TRAINING IS WORTHWHILE

A second consideration is to establish a commitment from management that internal training is worthwhile. With a commitment from management, attendees can feel validated in participating - especially if SAS is not currently part of their job description. Knowing how many current SAS users are in your organization, or demonstrating how employees could potentially benefit from SAS software are good points to present to management when making a case for internal training.

DETERMINE THE SKILL LEVEL OF CURRENT AND POTENTIAL SAS USERS

A third consideration is to determine the skill level of current users and potential users within your organization. We conducted an informal survey by asking people to rate themselves on how often they thought they could use SAS and whether they thought they were beginners, intermediate, or advanced users. Another idea would be to distribute an e-mail survey to gauge interest, current use and projected use. Including potential users can add more people to a training group, lead to greater topic diversity and better meeting attendance. A diversity of user skill levels is great for internal training. Teaching new users helps seasoned users remember the basics, and the tips and tricks of seasoned users are invaluable for new users. Plus, there is always at least one instance where a new user finds something that a seasoned user never knew!

ORGANIZE MEETINGS ON A SET SCHEDULE

When organizing your meeting, consider a schedule that is likely to be consistently met and how the meeting will be organized. Without a set meeting, there is a propensity for people to be too busy or let other work take precedence. We found that a monthly meeting, scheduled for the end of the month works for us. Try to meet in a place that will be consistently available and has the necessary equipment to make your meeting interactive. Scheduling recurring meetings is easy in the office software programs currently available. Pick one or two people who can consistently coordinate the meeting.

KEEP MEETINGS SHORT

A fifth consideration is the length of your meeting. More people will attend if they do not have to reorganize a considerable part of their day to participate. Also, new information takes time and concentration to absorb. Keeping meetings to a short duration will allow people to pick up some information without negatively impacting all the other tasks they need to accomplish during the day. We find that an hour is an appropriate duration to present information and still have time for discussion.

PICK A DATE AND TIME THAT WORK FOR MOST SAS USERS' SCHEDULES

Consider a date and time that work for many people and that most people will be able to consistently attend. We settled on a bring-your-own-lunch lunchtime meeting. This keeps the meeting very informal and at a time that most people can attend. Friday afternoon from 4:00-5:00PM is probably not an ideal choice for consistent attendance.

PICK TOPICS BASED ON INTEREST

Consider topics based on interest and invite everyone in the group regardless of SAS experience to present something. We have solicited volunteers to present at each meeting, but if the same people always volunteer, consider establishing a rotating schedule in which everyone presents something. Be flexible and allow new users to present topics together or encourage two people to present related topics in the same meeting. Decide what the next topic will be at the end of each meeting and get a commitment from someone to present it. Topics can be anything from a PROC SQL® example to debuting your latest and greatest SAS macro – whatever is of interest or relevance to the group.

PRESENT SPECIFIC, WORK-BASED EXAMPLES

An eighth consideration is to make an effort to show how SAS can meet a current need of other users in each presentation. Presenting material pertinent to work needs with current work examples will help others understand and use new SAS skills quickly. This point is probably the most important. SAS is a wonderful tool, but if it is not applicable to the work you do everyday, you will not find it useful and training will be a waste. Current examples of SAS applied to answer specific questions within your organization will hold interest and help others learn by doing.

FIND OTHER RESOURCES FOR SAS INFORMATION LIKE SAS USERS' GROUPS

There is a wealth of information available about SAS. Consider creating a list of your favorites and ask your colleagues to do the same. You may be surprised to find a valuable reference that you never knew existed. Check online for a SAS users' groups and other resources. If there is a SAS users' group in your area, consider attending a users' group meeting instead of your internal training meeting. These are excellent formats for meeting other SAS users in your area. Besides local SAS users' groups, there are regional SAS users groups and international SAS users groups.

CREATE A COMMON CODE LIBRARY

Finally, consider creating a common SAS code library for SAS users within the group. Post presented topics within a shared file space to become a reference for the group. Working code that is applicable or specific to an organization is a valuable resource for experienced and new SAS users. Sharing code may have the added benefit of encouraging coders to document their code so everyone in the group can understand it. Consider a system with version control if you modify code frequently for use in several

projects. Version control allows coders to know that the version they are working with is the most current and creates a version history to make debugging easier.

CONCLUSION

Every organization is unique, and internal training is a great way to ensure that SAS users continue to learn from each other and find efficient ways to complete assigned tasks. Establishing and maintaining a meeting for internal training can be a significant challenge, but careful consideration can ease some of the obstacles to successful internal training and user support.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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