SHARE SESSION REPORT

61	M373	The Information Center - A Case Study	118
SHARE NO.	SESSION NO.	SESSION TITLE	ATTENDANCE
Information Center		Keith J. Sours	SPH
PROJECT		SESSION CHAIRMAN	INST. CODE

SPSS Inc., 444 N. Michigan Avenue/Chicago, IL 60611/312-329-2400

SESSION CHAIRMAN'S COMPANY, ADDRESS, AND PHONE NUMBER

The Information Center at AMP Incorporated - A Case Study

Sharon E. Woelfling

AMP Incorporated
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Installation Code: AMP

Information Center Project
Session M373

The Information Center at AMP Incorporated - A Case Study

The AMP Incorporated Information Center was established in January of 1981 with a staff of one (1) supporting three (3) user departments, ten (10) individuals and three (3) software products. An IBM 4341 Group I, VM/CMS operating system, A Departmental Reporting System (ADRS), Query-by-Example (QBE), and APL-Data Interface (APL-DI) were selected for the startup environment. As of January, 1983, the center had grown to thirty (30) user departments, over 250 individuals and six (6) software products on an IBM 3032. The support staff had been increased to four (4) individuals. In 1983, the staff will increase to six (6), an IBM 3033 will replace the 3032 and a comprehensive graphics package will be added. Approximately 125 new individuals will be educated to use the facilities.

The objective of the Information Center is to increase the end-user productivity and improve the decision-making process by providing end-users with tools to allow them to access their data on their own terms.

The AMP Environment

The Information Center (IC) CPU is a dedicated, stand-alone device. Corporate data files are extracted for users by the application development or data administration staff and loaded to the appropriate IC software product by an IC staff member. Data transfers are done via tape. End-users can also enter their own data or obtain external (e.g., market survey) data to be loaded.

By providing this service to non-data processing professionals and their support staffs, AMP can better address on-demand, variable, unpredictable and often one-time requests. These often require fast response, capability for easy modification and re-execution on request which is not easily accomplished in the traditional data processing environment. The intent is to supplement, not replace traditional development efforts.

The Information Center department provides tools, education, support and assistance, and product knowledge, and coordinates acquisition of corporate data. The end-user provides application knowledge, development resources, justification (they are charged for services), maintenance and documentation for their applications.

Software products currently offered include:

1. A Departmental Reporting System (ADRS)
2. APL-Data Interface (APL-DI)
3. APL
4. Query-by-Example (QBE)
5. RAMIS
6. SAS

The AMP Environment (cont'd)

Staff support is available for ADRS, QBE, RAMIS and, to a limited degree, APL-DI. Users of APL and SAS are encouraged to obtain outside education before using these products. Some of the more experienced users make use of the CMS EXEC language and editor, XEDIT, to support their requirements.

Getting Started

It is important for end-user departments considering use of the Information Center to clearly understand their responsibilities. Department managers or other responsible individuals provide the following:

1. The cost justification through their own departmental budgets. They are charged as they would be for outside time-sharing and must also budget for whatever hardware devices (CRT's or printers) they require.

2. Security requirements must be defined by the department manager and conveyed to the Information Center staff to determine whether available security features are sufficient to meet the requirements of the department.

3. Disaster planning must be addressed to assure there is a clear understanding of the need for cross-training, documentation and a back-up method of operation within the user department. As non-data-processing professionals, end-users often are unaware of the dangers inherent in automation, or of the techniques which can be used to reduce their vulnerability.

4. Controls over resource usage require some attention to continue to avoid abuse and continue to justify use of the service. Benefits derived must be identified by the end-user for their management as requested.

The steps a prospective user must follow to become an IC user are:

1. Define data and function desired.

2. Review requirements with an IC Analyst who will help identify correct software and data availability.

3. Budget.

4. Order equipment through the Data Communications department.

5. Assign appropriate level personnel.

6. Schedule education. A Concepts Class is a prerequisite.

7. Request a USERID.

The Charge-Back System

Charges are actually transferred to user departments from Systems Services. This is the key control mechanism over use of the services. Items charged for are, links to shared files (corporate data shared in read only mode by several departments is owned by an IC USERID), connect time, CPU resource units, permanent disk storage, tape drives per minute of use, and printing done on the central IC printer. There is a minimum charge of $200.00 per month. All costs associated with the operation of the department including hardware, software, support personnel and administrative costs are covered by the revenues from the charge-back system. The intent is to break even, not produce a profit.

Potential Pitfalls

1. Insufficient staff/underestimating demands:

   There should be sufficient staff members to support the number of users and number of products available. Do not confuse ease of use with requirements to support the department. Staff members should have the opportunity to develop a level of expertise sufficient to satisfy most users. In addition to supporting and assisting existing users, staff members could be testing new releases of software, reviewing new software products, introducing new users and designing and loading new files. All of these activities are time-consuming.

2. Competition from Data Processing staff:

   It is essential to maintain an open and positive line of communication between the Information Center and traditional data processing functions. Their support and cooperation is critical to the successful operation of the Information Center.

3. Differing goals and priorities between Information Center and supporting Data Processing functions:

   If the Information Center relies on other departments for support and service, their priorities may hinder the ability of the Information Center to provide the desired service to end-users. It may be helpful to assign tasks required to properly support the user community directly to the Information Center rather than other functional areas. A bottleneck is likely if the staff must rely on other departments to install new product releases or obtain file extracts. A request to tailor the environment to enhance the ease of use should not have to go to the bottom of someone else's priority list.

Potential Pitfalls (cont'd)

4. Uncontrolled growth:

   A charge-back system is essential for controlling growth. Other mechanisms include:

   a. Establishing prerequisite education.

   b. Requiring user forecasts.

5. Insufficient user training:

   Provide education and be sure user departments allocate time for it.

6. Users automating the wrong things:

   A charge-back system can help control this if the department manager is aware of their responsibilities for monitoring activities. Proper education can also reduce the problem. A good rule of thumb to recommend is, "how long does it take manually vs. how long does it take to do in an automated fashion". Also, many tasks require expertise beyond the level available within a department.

7. User departments assigning inappropriate level personnel:

   The Information Center provides decision support and analysis tools. An analytical tool requires an analytical person. User departments must understand there is no single button to push to get all the answers. The computer is only as smart as the person who is using it regardless of the simplicity of the software or language.

A53

Checklist for starting an Information Center:

1. Obtain a commitment from top management of the company.
2. Obtain a commitment from top data processing management.
3. Define the environment.
4. Select a staff.
5. Select hardware.
6. Select software.
7. Educate the staff.
8. Orient the data processing staff.

Checklist for starting an Information Center: (cont'd)

9. Select pilot users.
10. Educate pilot users.
11. Support the Information Center department.

What the Auditors might say:

An audit of the Information Center may be similar to any other EDP audit. The auditors may look at:

- The philosophy and definition.
- Policies and procedures.
- Internal administration.
- Security
- Controls over operations processing.

Documentation should include the general philosophy or charter, operating policies and procedures, corporate files available and file load instructions. Users should have documentation for their own applications.

Controls should be established for testing new software and releases, problem tracking and insuring accuracy of extracts loaded. Users should be able to justify their usage and should have a back-up and disaster plan defined.

Education should be available to convey concepts to all levels of personnel. User management personnel must understand policies and procedures, their responsibilities, and availability of security and disaster planning facilities.

Security should be administered by a function outside the Systems Programming or Information Center departments. It should be consistent with policies and procedures in the traditional data processing functions. There should be an authorization process for use of corporate files. A mechanism should be in place to monitor or prevent invalid access and invalid password attempts. There should be security measures to control the flow of data between systems.

In summary, the key to a successful Information Center is education. Educate the Data Processing staff, the Information Center staff, user management, end-users, and the auditors.

SEW:kf2260