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The Microsoft Office Fluent User Interface: IT Decision-Maker Perception Of Productivity, Training, And Support Requirements

A Commissioned Study Conducted By Forrester
Consulting On Behalf Of Microsoft Corporation

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Introduction

In November 2006, Microsoft made its new version of the Microsoft Office system, including the popular suite of applications that includes Excel, Word, Outlook, and PowerPoint, available to the public. This release represents the most significant change to the company's Office productivity package since Microsoft Office 1997. Changes include the new Microsoft Office Fluent user interface, improved integration of desktop tools, and the introduction of a host of Microsoft SharePoint-based collaboration and enterprise content management server capabilities.

While the Fluent user interface promises significant benefits to the end user, the changes that have been made to the UI may raise questions among IT managers evaluating or planning Office migrations. IT managers not familiar with the new user interface may ask questions such as:

- What kind of benefits can I expect end users within my organization to receive?
- What impact will the Fluent user interface have on the productivity of end users?
- What IT help desk and training support capabilities do I need to have to support the Fluent user interface?

Microsoft commissioned this study to provide answers to these questions, and to help IT organizations considering Office 2007 adoptions anticipate the impact that the Fluent user interface may have on their end users.

The primary findings from the study include:

1. IT decision-makers report that users react positively to the benefits of the Fluent user interface.
2. Many organizations experience a short-term decline in end user productivity, but believe the benefits outweigh the challenges.
3. Most IT decision-makers did not see a substantial increase in IT desktop resource demand.
4. The majority of IT decision-makers use in-house training and self-service to support their deployments.

Study Methodology

In this study, Forrester Consulting conducted an online survey of 749 IT decision-makers from companies piloting or deploying Microsoft Office 2007. These decision-makers qualified for the survey based on their role in defining IT strategy, choosing IT vendors, and authorizing IT purchases. All respondents identified themselves as having requisite knowledge to comment about their company's general use of Office programs, including the approximate number of end users working on Office 2007, the overall experience with the Fluent user interface, end user training and support requirements, and potential productivity gains experienced by the company.

Additional information about the study methodology and interview respondents is provided in the Appendix.

Study Findings

Overall, the survey results show that IT decision-makers express positive sentiments about the Fluent user interface benefits. Respondents cite the “greater access to features and functions,” the “improved look and feel,” and the ease in creating “high-quality documents” as the most recognized benefits. For most organizations, end user productivity falls slightly for a period of a few weeks and returns to previous levels or improves as end users become familiar with the new user experience.

IT organizations experience limited increases in help desk call volumes and IT support staff requirements associated with the new Fluent user interface. While just more than half of all organizations surveyed experienced an increase in help desk call volume, the majority of these respondents characterized the volume increase as “minimal” or “moderate.” More than two-thirds of respondents had not added IT staff to support end user transitions to the new user experience.

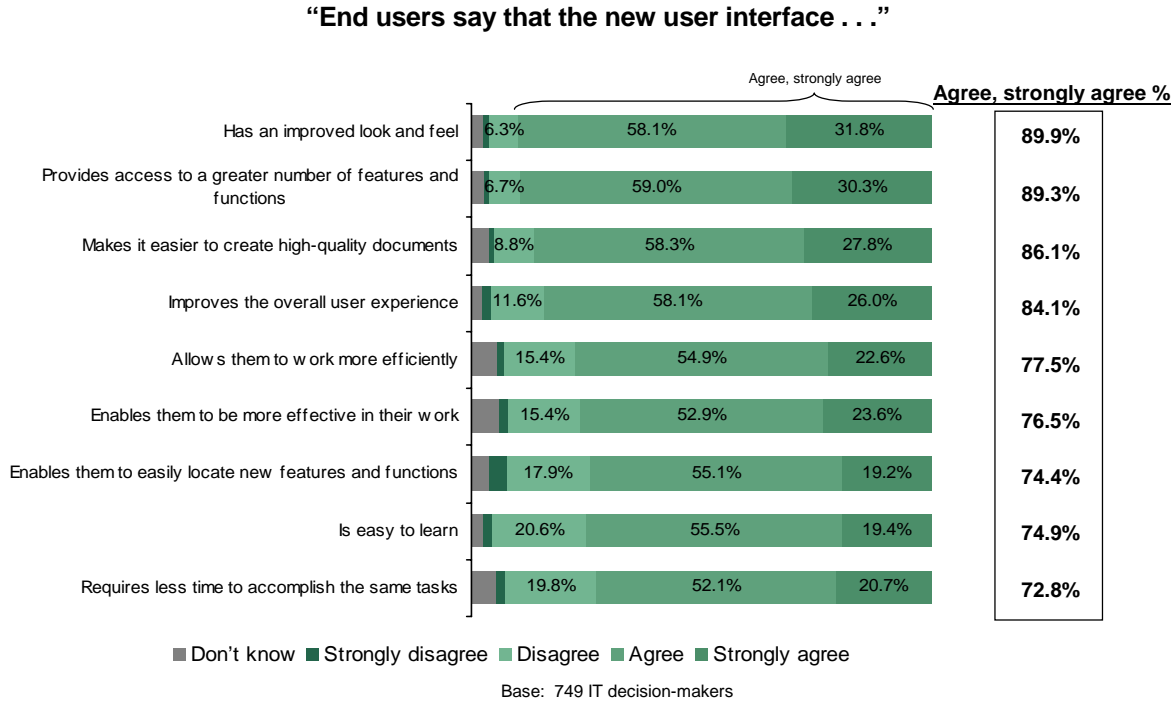
Companies rely primarily on in-house and self-service training methods, such as online training, to support end users. The majority of companies do not require their users to take mandatory training. Though most respondents were not distinguishing between “general” and “advanced” users in their training programs, Forrester Consulting believes that this may be a beneficial practice for organizations considering Office 2007 deployments.

1. IT decision-makers report that users react positively to the benefits of the Fluent user interface.

Forrester Consulting asked respondents to indicate the level at which they agreed with a series of statements about the Fluent user interface. The strongest agreement among survey respondents related to access to new features and functions, the improved look and feel of the interface, and the ease with which respondents are able to create high-quality documents. More than 86% of respondents agree or strongly agree with statements related to these benefits (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Benefits Statements About The Office 2007 User Interface

“Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement(s) about the new user interface.”



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

Forrester Consulting believes that the improvements users have experienced in terms of functionality are primarily a result of the new “Ribbon” — the banner at the top of the desktop applications — that consolidates the toolbars and menus found in previous versions and displays functions and commands. The Ribbon allows users to more easily access a number of common and high-value commands related to document publishing, spreadsheet formatting, and graphics creation. This effectively exposes users to functions and commands that, while available, may have been less accessible to the average user in previous versions of Office.

In addition to the Ribbon, Microsoft has made several changes to the core functions applicable to more advanced users, such as Excel pivot tables and PowerPoint charting. The value of these new features and functions is likely reflected in the positive responses to the statement about the end user’s ability to more easily create high-quality documents.

2. Many organizations experience a short-term decline in end user productivity, but believe the benefits outweigh the challenges.

Though respondents were generally positive about the benefits associated with the Fluent user interface, the data show that there may be a short period of reduced productivity in which end users

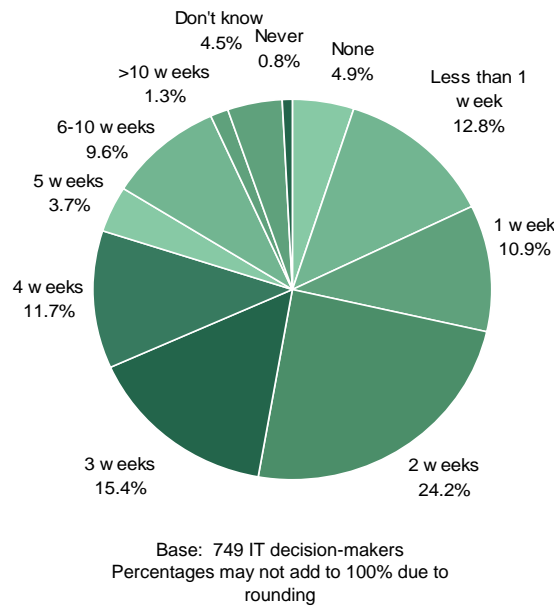
adjust to the changed user experience. Commands that have become second nature to some users may be in new locations, resulting in an initial period of relearning. As a result of the user-interface-related changes, it was not surprising to see “Is easy to learn” and “Requires less time to accomplish the same tasks” at the bottom of the list of benefits listed in Figure 1.

Despite the time required to adjust, however, Forrester Consulting believes that the learning curve will be short term for most end users. When asked how long it took for the average worker to become as productive as with previous versions of Office, 52.8% of respondents indicated that it took two weeks or less, and 4.9% of respondents said that end users did not experience a decline in productivity at all.

A small group of respondents believe that the relearning process will take longer: 11.7% of respondents said that it has taken longer than six weeks for the average user to become as productive as with previous versions.

Figure 3: Productivity Among New Users

“Please estimate the number of weeks it has taken the average worker at your company to achieve the same level of productivity he or she had with the previous version of Microsoft Office.”

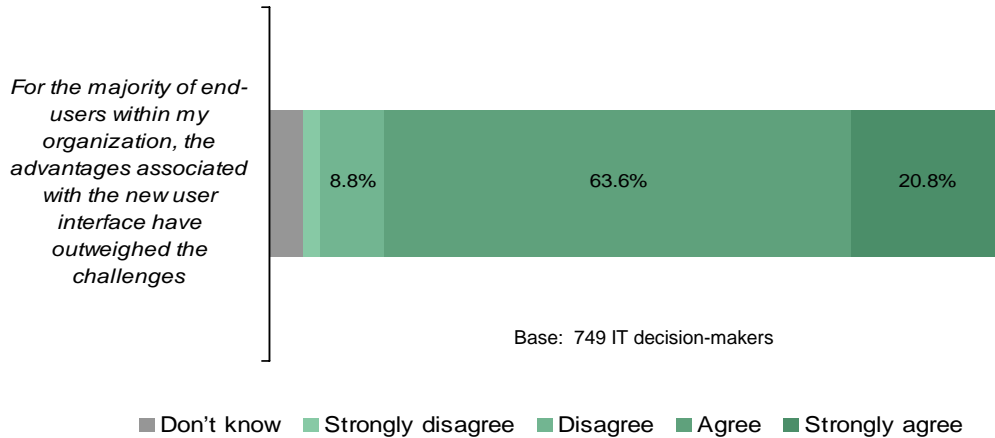


Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

While the exact time frame for attaining previous levels of productivity will vary by end user, the vast majority of respondents are positive about the overall benefits of the new user interface. When asked whether the benefits of the new interface outweigh the challenges, 84.4% agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Benefits Versus Challenges

“Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement about the new user interface.”



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

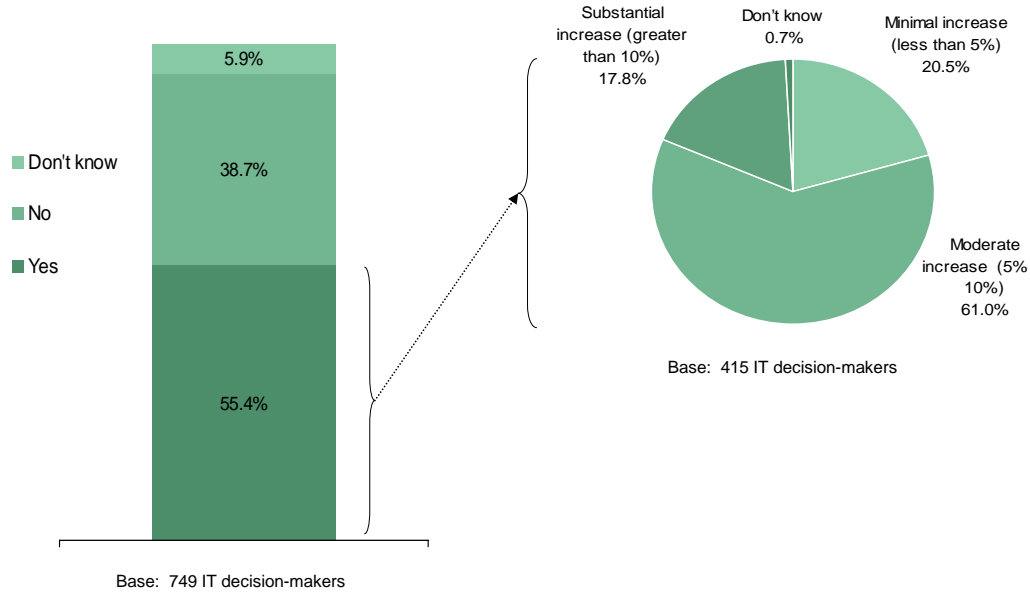
3. Most IT decision-makers did not see a substantial increase in IT desktop resource demand.

To understand the impact that the Fluent user interface changes had on IT organizations, we asked a series of questions related to help desk call volume, IT support staff, and ease-of-deployment compared with previous versions of Microsoft Office.

Forrester Consulting found that most organizations did experience an increase in help desk call volume, but this increase was not typically characterized as significant. Of the 55.4% of respondents who said they experienced an increase in help desk call volume, 81.5% characterized the increase as “minimal” or “moderate” (less than 10%) (see Figure 5). Almost 10% of the overall respondent set characterized their increase in help desk call volume as “substantial” (greater than 10%). While Forrester Consulting did not specifically ask how long the increase in call volume lasted within organizations, we can infer that help desk call volumes rise primarily during the initial period of reduced end user productivity (zero to four weeks for most organizations), as highlighted in Figure 3.

Figure 5: Help Desk Call Volume Requirements

“Has your organization seen an increase in IT help desk call volume related specifically to use of the 2007 Office user interface among end users? Please assess the level of increase in IT help desk call volume your organization has experienced.”



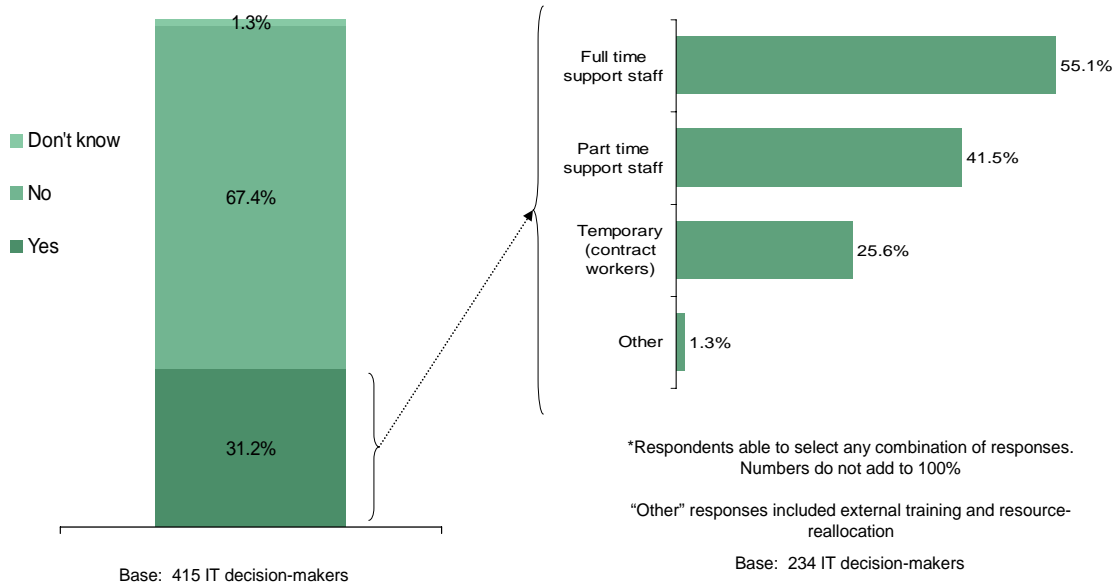
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

The level of IT staff support that organizations added to support the new UI varied. More than two-thirds of respondents indicated that they had not added staff specifically to support the new user interface (see Figure 6). For those companies that had added staff, Forrester Consulting asked respondents to characterize the type of staff that had been added. 55.1% indicated that they had added full-time staff, while 41.5% indicated that they had added part-time staff (multiple responses could be selected).¹

¹ Based on experience in previous research regarding Office 2007, Forrester believes that some respondents may still have had difficulty distinguishing between staff added to support installation/integration and staff hired specifically to support the new user interface.

Figure 6: Additional IT Staff Requirements

“Has your organization added IT staff (temporary or full-time) specifically to support users as they begin using the new user interface? Please indicate the type of staff your organization has added to support the transition to the 2007 Office user interface.”



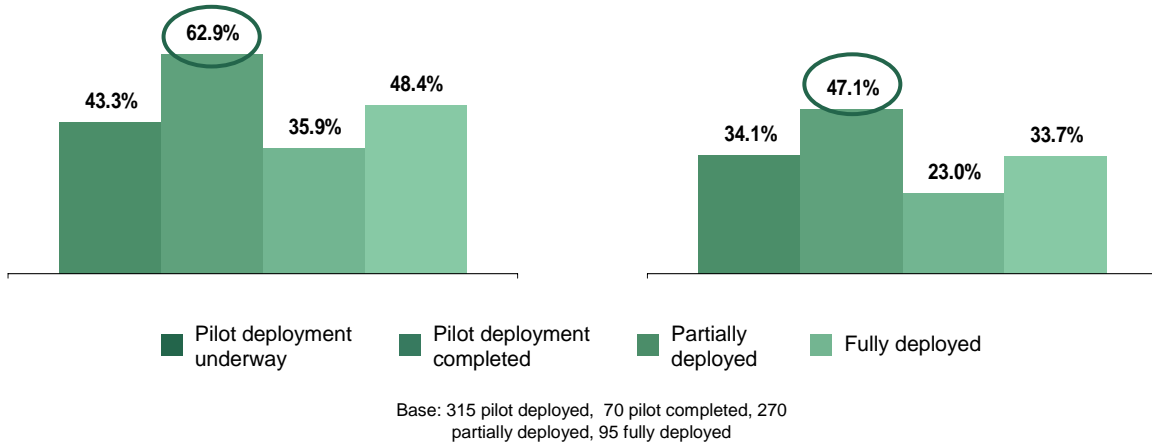
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

To examine the impact that stage-of-deployment has on IT support requirements, we cut the data responses to several help-desk-related questions by the company's stage of deployment (pilot underway, pilot completed, partially deployed, fully deployed). We found that respondents from companies with pilots completed were more likely to say that the new user interface requires extended IT support staff hours and additional IT staffing requirements than other respondents (see Figure 7). The percentage of respondents saying that extended hours were required was more than 14.5% higher at companies with pilots completed than at companies that had completed their full deployments. A similar trend is apparent among companies that have added IT staff specifically to support the transition to the new user interface. In this case, the percentage of respondents that indicated they added IT support staff was 13.4% higher for companies with pilot deployments completed than for the fully deployed companies.

Figure 7: IT Support Requirements By Stage Of Deployment

“Has the transition to the new user interface required extended IT support staff hours (temporary or full-time)?” (“Yes” responses)

“Has your organization added IT staff (temporary or full-time) specifically to support users as they begin using the new user interface?” (“Yes” responses)



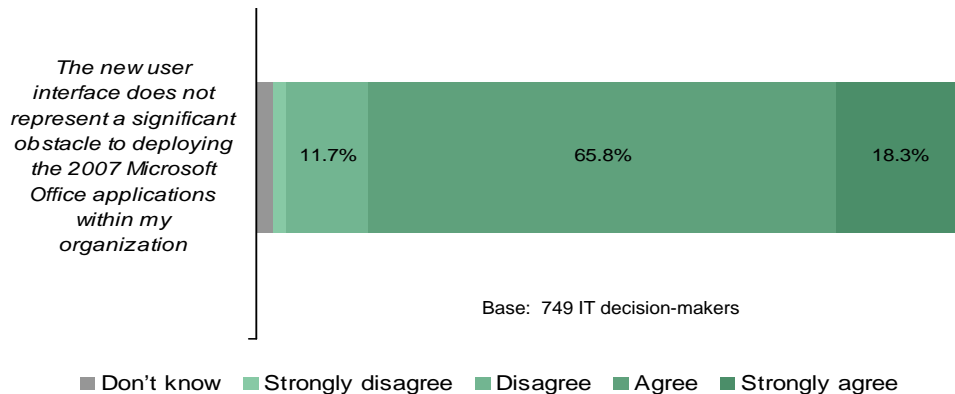
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

These findings are not surprising when put in the context of other findings from this study, particularly the findings related to initial productivity declines. It is likely that companies with pilots completed experienced some user-interface-related disruption during their pilot programs and are now planning for a higher level of disruption as they prepare their companies for deployment. These companies may be in the process of adding resources to support their organizational deployments and are likely to be conservatively estimating their support needs. As highlighted in Figure 3, the period of disruption with the Fluent user interface is typically short-term in nature, which may explain why the percentages in Figure 7 fall among companies that have completed their deployments. The data suggest that as companies deploy Office 2007, they find that they do not need as much additional IT resources as planned and so scale back accordingly.

Overall, the results show that IT call volume increases and changed staffing requirements were not substantial enough to give respondents a negative impression of the new user interface. 84.1% of respondents indicated that the new user interface “does not represent a significant obstacle” to the deployment of Office 2007 (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: The Fluent User Interface And Deploying Office 2007 Applications

“Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement about the new user interface.”



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

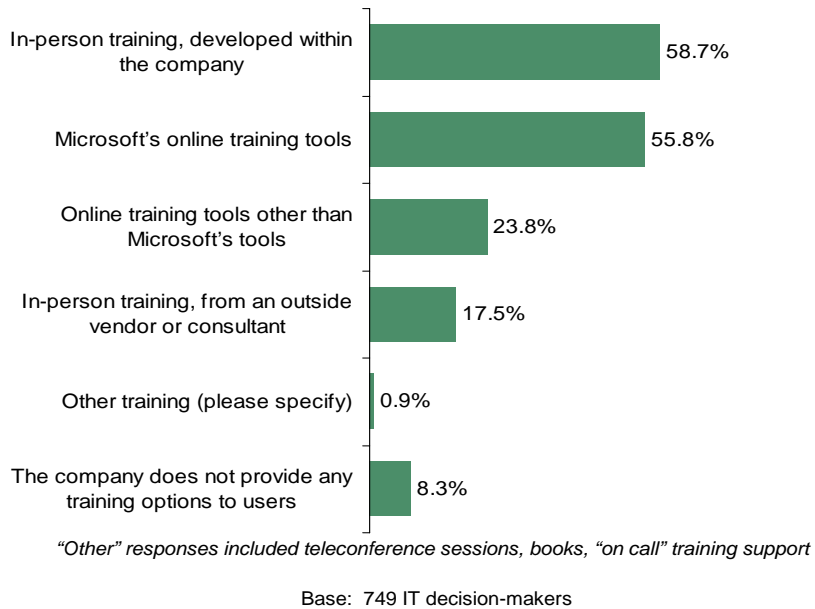
4. The majority of IT decision-makers use in-house training and self-service to support their deployments.

Forrester asked several questions to understand what kind of training programs were most used, whether training programs were mandatory, and how training programs differed among employees with different levels of experience on Office.

The questions revealed that, for the most part, companies do not rely on mandatory training. Of the companies that do provide some training to their end users, 55.4% say that training is not mandatory for any end users within their companies. For companies with mandatory training, we asked what type of training they provided to employees (see Figure 9). “In-person training, developed within the company” was the most popular response, selected by 58.7% of respondents. Almost 56% of respondents said that they rely on Microsoft’s online training tools (multiple responses accepted). Less popular on the list of training options were training options from third-party sources, such as online training tools other than Microsoft’s, and in-person training from outside vendors.

Figure 9: Type Of Training Used By Survey Respondents

“Please indicate which of the following types of training your company provides to 2007 Office users: (select all that apply).”



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

Differences Between General And Advanced Users

As a follow-up to the more general questions about training requirements, Forrester Consulting asked whether training varied by the level of experience of end users. In previous research concerning Office 2007 adoption, we have found that “advanced” end users may be the most affected by the new user experience, since many commands that have become second nature to these advanced users may be in new locations and will therefore require some relearning among end users. In this study, Forrester Consulting asked a series of questions in which respondents were asked to distinguish between the training required for “general” users² and the training required for “advanced” users.³ While we expected to see some noticeable differences between the types of training used for these different types of end users, there was little distinction in the data between these user groups (see Figure 10).

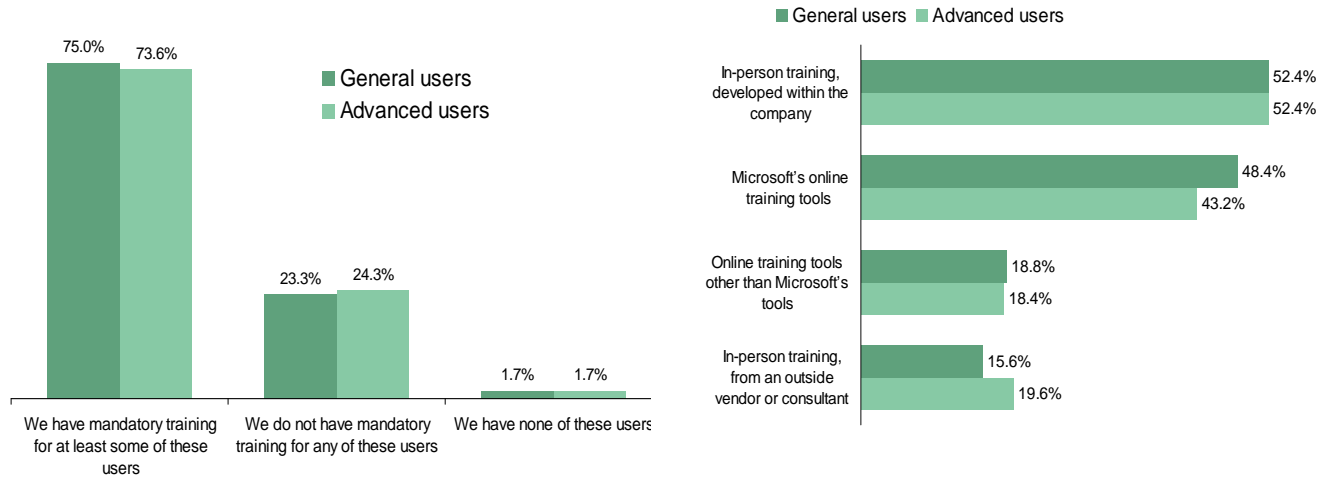
² In this study, Forrester Consulting defined “general” users as including basic or intermediate 2007 Office users who use a variety of Office applications and basic Office applications and features. This group may use some advanced features, but expert proficiency with the Office applications is not a job requirement.

³ In this study, Forrester defined “advanced” users (also considered “production” users) as those users who generally use one or two Office applications as a primary tool to get their work done. Examples include financial analysts using Excel, PowerPoint production staff, technical writers, or legal assistants using Word. High levels of competency with one or more Office application is considered a key job requirement for these users.

Figure 10: Training Among “General” And “Advanced” End Users

“For each of the following user types, please select which describes your organization’s use of mandatory training programs.”

“Please indicate which types of training are mandatory for the following user types.”



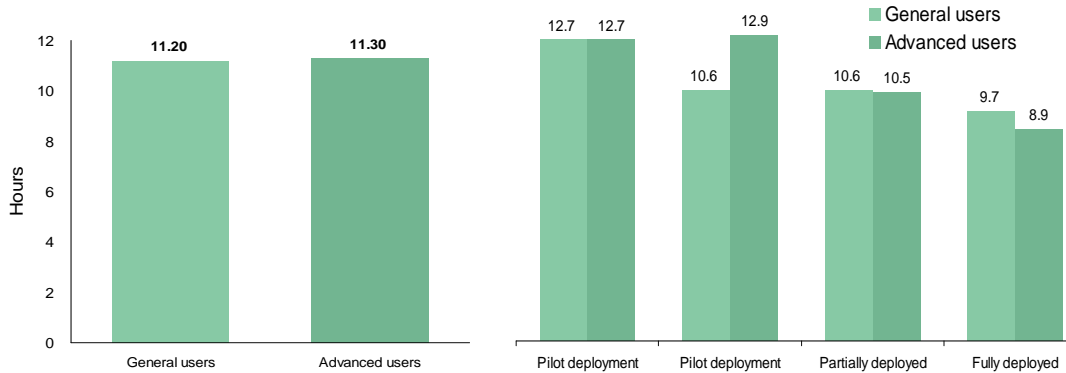
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

While there are several explanations for the similarity in the data related to “general” users and “advanced” users, it is not clear that organizations are distinguishing among types of end users in their training programs. Since more advanced users may have the most to gain from structured training sessions (due to their heavy reliance on Microsoft Office), we believe distinguishing between “general” and “advanced” users, and designing training accordingly, is a potential best practice for organizations considering deployments.

To understand whether stage of deployment has any impact on a company’s perception of training requirements, we cut the amount of training time recommended by each respondent company’s stage of deployment (see Figure 11). The results show that as companies move through their deployments, the hours recommended for mandatory training falls.

Figure 11: Recommended Training Time, By Stage Of Deployment

“On average, how many hours of training do you expect general and advanced users to need as they transition to the new user interface?”⁴



Base: 177 general users, 179 advanced users, IT decision-makers (asked only to respondents with mandatory training for these user groups)

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft

More research is required to fully understand this decline, but the finding is consistent with the primary findings in this study. IT decision-makers that are piloting or have just completed pilots of Office 2007 may initially be concerned about the level of disruption that the new user interface will cause. Consistent with the other data in this study, however, the length of this disruption is typically short-term in nature and limited to a few weeks. Companies that have partially deployed or deployed Office 2007 may have benefited from the return to productivity, and may consequently have a higher level of confidence that fewer hours of training are required.

Differences Between Mandatory And Non-Mandatory Training Time

Forrester noticed a significant difference in the hours of training recommended by companies with mandatory training programs and companies without mandatory training. As Figure 11 indicates, the average amount of recommended training time at companies with mandatory training is 11.2 hours. When Forrester asked respondents at companies *without* mandatory training programs how many hours they recommended their users take to get used to the new user interface, the average response was only 6.9 hours.

The amount of hours recommended by IT managers is higher than Forrester Consulting expected going into this study. Forrester Consulting believes that with some preliminary orientation and access to some reasonable self-service training programs (such as online training) in place, the average end user is not likely to need a full day or more of structured training to become accustomed to the Fluent user interface. Survey respondents may have been conservative in their estimates of hours (overestimating training requirements for the average user within their company), or may have cited the *total* hours required to adjust to the new user interface, including all troubleshooting, and extending over a period of more than several weeks.

⁴ Any responses of more than 40 hours removed from this analysis.

Still, the difference between companies with and without mandatory training is significant: The hours of training recommended by companies with mandatory training programs in place is 62% higher than the companies without mandatory training. While there are several possible explanations for this difference (i.e., companies without mandatory training may be underestimating how much time is required to train their end users, and vice versa), Forrester Consulting believes that companies without formal training programs are likely to expect their users to “learn by doing.” Training is not a high priority for these companies, and therefore fewer hours are recommended.

Conclusions

The data gathered in this study indicate that the Fluent user interface represents an improvement for most organizations. Respondents cite the improved look and feel, greater access to features and functionality, and the improved ability to create high-quality documents as primary benefits. The vast majority of respondents said that the benefits of the new user interface outweigh the challenges, and that the new user interface does not represent a significant obstacle to Office 2007 deployment.

Still, the improvements to Office 2007 depended on substantial changes to the user experience, and the UI-related changes may present some initial challenges for individual end users. IT managers considering deployments of Office 2007 can expect to experience a transition period that is short-term in nature but requires a moderate level of additional resources. This study showed that the majority of companies saw an increase in call volume related to the new user interface, and almost one-third of organizations had added staff to support the transition. For most organizations the period of transition appears to be temporary — approximately zero to four weeks — and the increase in help desk call volume is minimal or moderate.

Forrester Consulting believes that organizations can learn from the experiences of those surveyed to help reduce the level of disruption their organization may face in Office 2007 implementations.

- By carefully assessing the company’s reliance on the Microsoft Office Suite, and segmenting end user groups accordingly, IT managers can create training programs that are more efficient and effective. Companies that think a large segment of their user base is heavily reliant on Microsoft Office for daily business activities may want to consider more structured, in-depth training.
- By making self-service tools, such as online training, available to end users, IT organizations can help users address many of the UI-related questions that they will face in the first weeks of use. Integrating Microsoft’s tools into your own custom training materials will allow your organization to provide training that is relevant and effective, and does not cut into the daily productivity of employees.
- By creating clear consistent communication about upgrade plans and benefits of the new user interface, companies can prepare users and generate excitement about the changes to the interface. Users who understand the challenges they will need to overcome, and who can envision the long-term benefits to be gained, are likely to be better positioned to address challenges and move forward without heavy reliance on the IT organization.

Careful planning is the key to success in any transition. Companies that anticipate some short-term challenges related to the new user interface, communicate the benefits of the transition to end users, and create self-service training and support programs can keep the impact of the transition to a minimum. For these organizations, the challenges associated with deployments of Office 2007 user interface should be minor in comparison to the benefits.

Appendix: Methodology Details

Methodology Overview

- The survey was conducted online through an online survey panel generated by Forrester Consulting. No sample lists were provided by Microsoft.
- Forrester Consulting and Microsoft prepared study questions. Both Microsoft and Forrester Consulting made efforts to keep survey questions objective. To provide objectivity, Forrester maintained editorial control of the survey questions.
- Forrester Consulting maintained editorial control over presentation of results.

Respondent Overview

- Respondents in this study are defined by Forrester Consulting as “IT decision-makers,” meaning that they have responsibility for defining IT strategy, choosing IT vendors, and authorizing IT purchases.
- Panel respondents were invited to participate in this study based on their match with a description of IT decision-maker characteristics created by Forrester Consulting.
- All respondents self-selected as having requisite knowledge of their company’s Microsoft Office deployments to talk about their company’s approximate number of end users, experience, training and support requirements, and productivity gains.
 - 44.8% of respondents characterized themselves as the primary person in charge of MSFT Office deployments at their companies.

Demographics And Other Respondent Detail

- Survey quotas were set based on company size:
 - 25.2% from companies with 25 to 49 PCs.
 - 25.8% from companies with 50 to 249 PCs.
 - 49% of companies from 250+ PCs.
- Companies represented were at various stages of Office 2007 deployment:
 - 41.9% of respondents were partially deployed.
 - 9.3% had completed their pilot.
 - 36% were partially deployed.
 - 12.7% were fully deployed.

- To participate in the study, participants needed to be from companies with users of the Microsoft Office 2007 outside of the IT organization (self-selected).
 - 17% had fewer than 10 users.
 - 31.5% had 10 to 49 users.
 - 18.4% had 50 to 99 users.
 - 17.1% had 100 to 1,000 users.
 - 16.0% had 1,000+ users.
- Forrester Consulting asked all respondents how long their organizations had been using Office 2007:
 - 16.7%: less than one month.
 - 41.8%: one to two months.
 - 22.0%: two to three months.
 - 9.3%: three to four months.
 - 10.1%: more than four months.
- A cross-section of industry verticals was represented:
 - Primary production and raw materials: 2.5%.
 - Consumer products: 5.9%.
 - Chemicals and petroleum: 1.7%.
 - High tech products: 13.4%.
 - Industrial products: 2.8%.
 - Retail: 4.0%.
 - Wholesale: 4.0%.
 - Transportation and logistics: 3.1%.
 - Professional services: 17.4%.
 - Construction and engineering: 5.1%.
 - Media, entertainment and leisure: 4.4%.

- Utilities: 1.5%.
- Telecom: 1.9%.
- Financial services: 8.1%.
- Insurance: 2.5%.
- Public services (healthcare, education, social, nonprofit): 14.7%.
- Public services (federal, state, and local government): 7.1%.