



## Microsoft Shortens Course, Increases Learning for New Hires

Microsoft

Best Use of a Blended Learning Program

October 2018



### Company Background



<b>Headquarters</b>	Redmond, Washington
<b>Year Founded</b>	1975
<b>Revenue</b>	74.30 billion annually
<b>Employees</b>	100,932
<b>Global Scale (Regions that you operate in or provide services to)</b>	Offices in 96 countries.
<b>Customers/Output, etc. (Key customers and services offered)</b>	Consumers, businesses, manufacturers and distributors.
<b>Industry</b>	High tech
<b>Stock Symbol</b>	MSFT
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.microsoft.com">www.microsoft.com</a>



## Budget and Timeframe

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Overall budget	\$15,000
Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	1
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	8
Number of contractors involved with implementation	1
Timeframe to implement	2 months
Start date of the program	July 1, 2017

## Business Conditions and Business Needs

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Microsoft recruits and hires recent college graduates through the Microsoft Academy of College Hires (MACH) program. While these new hires have technical backgrounds, they often lack a solid foundation and understanding of key Microsoft technologies that are critical to their new roles, such as Windows Server, Office 365 and Azure.

There was an existing onboarding program that consisted of three weeks of in-classroom lecture and labs on Windows Server, Office 365 and Azure designed to provide them with the knowledge and skills needed to perform their jobs. The existing training, however, delivered low participant satisfaction and was very unpopular. Some of the challenges included:

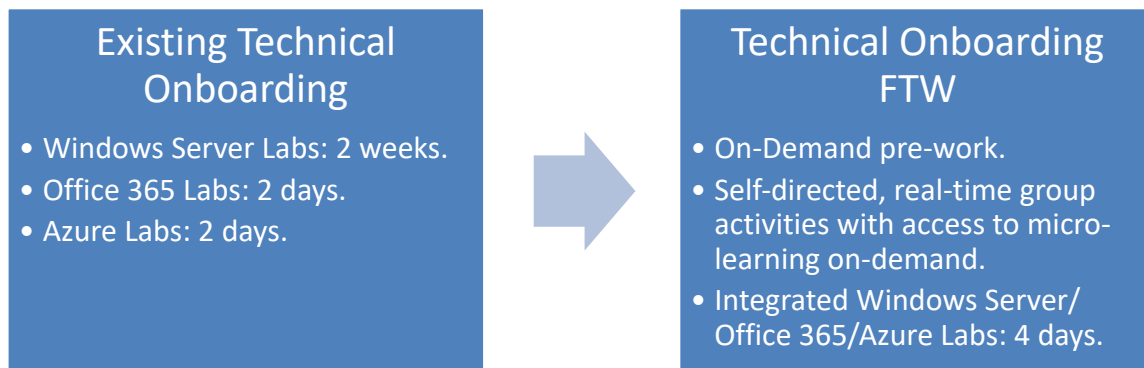
- The labs were disconnected from each other and did not reflect the way that the technologies are used in the real world.
- The labs focused on the tactical aspects of using the technologies without sufficient detail on why customers would use those technologies and what they would use them for.
- The labs did not account for the varying level of participant knowledge and were built as a “one size fits all” solution. Some participants would finish the classes quickly while others would take days longer to move through the content.



- The content was approximately 75% lecture and was not engaging.
- Because the content was covered over three weeks, it was a costly investment of time and travel expenses for both the presenters and participants.

The current format left many areas for improvement. The goal of revamping this training was to make it more practical, shorten the amount of time it would take to get new hires ready to be customer-facing and make the content more engaging and interactive. The course was shortened from three weeks to four days.

**Figure 1: Existing Technical Onboarding and Technical Onboarding FTW**



Source: Microsoft

There also were some limitations on the program as Microsoft had limited time and budget. The company only had two months and about \$15,000 to make it happen. Finally, one of Microsoft's internal priorities for its employees is the strategic reuse of intellectual property, so it was important to leverage and reuse as much as possible in the evolution of this new program.

## Overview

### Goals and Objectives

The Technical Foundations labs are delivered globally to new MACH hires in the Microsoft Services organization. The solution meets organizational objectives of increasing speed to productivity of new hires and leveraging existing intellectual property. The goal of this program was to increase net learner satisfaction (NSAT) and knowledge shift scores and create a program that enabled new hires to have a better understanding of key Microsoft technologies. Those goals were met over the course of seven deliveries around the world to almost 500 participants:

- NSAT: 181 (goal of 160).
- Facilitator NSAT: 176 (goal of 160).
- Knowledge shift of 20 points (goal of 10).

## The Solution

This blended learning solution consisted of:

- **On-demand Pre-Work (OLT)** — Microlearning sourced from existing content, such as existing internal on-demand training and videos, Lynda.com demonstrations and on-demand training, customer and partner facing whitepapers and TechNet articles.
- **Hands-On Labs** from the existing three-week course, reworked and repurposed to fit the needs of the new course structure.
- **Graphic Novel-Style Videos** to tell a story and drive interest and engagement in the journey.
- **Peer-Level Coaching and Teaching** within each group.
- **Lab Activities** that mimicked the way Microsoft customers make their journey to the cloud.
- **Group Competition** to facilitate better engagement and excitement.
- **A Rubric for Facilitators** to validate completion and quiz participants in real time.
- **A Student and Facilitator Wiki** hosted in Microsoft Teams.
- **Real-Time Question and Answer** with facilitators in-person or in Microsoft Teams.

## The Design

The design of this course was modeled after the journey that a typical Microsoft customer makes from using on-premises servers to the Cloud. In the training classroom and using their own laptops, participants built an on-premises Windows environment by creating virtual machines (VMs) with Hyper-V and deploying Windows Server and Windows Client to the VMs. They then completed basic network administration tasks, including configuring DHCP, DNS and IIS. Next, they provisioned their own O365 tenant, created users and performed basic configuration changes before connecting it up with the on-premises environment via Azure AD. And finally, they migrated a web application from the on-premises environment to the cloud.

All of this takes place in the context of a real-world business scenario. The course is highly self-directed and doesn't lay out the step-by-step instructions in a lab manual. Students are expected to leverage resources, facilitators and other students to work through the labs. The intent was to create the exact scenarios that they would encounter on the job — where they don't have a proctor to ask questions and they must find answers themselves.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the labs, participants will have the knowledge and skills needed to:

- Test a deployment or troubleshoot an issue with Windows Server by deploying a VM to a Hyper-V host or a physical server.
- To better help customers deploy or troubleshoot O365, create an O365 tenant, navigate the O365 portal and go through the tenant extension process.
- Set up an Azure subscription and manage it via the Azure portal.
- Provision an Azure AD environment and deploy IaaS and PaaS solutions.

## Design of the Program

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The target audience for this program is the new college hire in the Microsoft Services organization. For them to do their jobs well, it is important that they know the customer's pain. Their jobs are technical in nature and they need to understand the challenges that customers face, especially when it comes to Microsoft's key platform technologies. This lab is designed to educate new hires on the technologies that Microsoft's customers use and experience their journey to the Cloud.

Because they are new hires, it is important to increase speed to productivity and get them customer-facing as quickly as possible. This course was designed to get them the knowledge they need faster and to provide them a safe environment in which to fail and learn from their mistakes.

Outside of work, most people, especially those in the Millennial and Gen Z groups, learn new things as they need them. They search for videos and instructions when they need them and use them immediately. The goal of this training was to maximize microlearning and enable participants to access learning the way they want to. Attendees were presented with a challenge and given access to training and resources to teach



themselves how to overcome the challenge. They used the training they needed — as they needed it — to complete the task at hand.

## Delivery of the Program

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### Pre-Work

Two weeks prior to attending the in-person training, all participants were provided with access to all of the on-demand content using a learning path on the learning management system. They were encouraged to complete as much of it as they could, but there was no requirement that they do so.

### Setting the Stage

Upon entry into the class, participants were divided into groups of four. Each group was assigned an industry (i.e., consumer, public sector or education) and given an assignment to create a company — complete with name, mission, vision and backstory.

The lead facilitator introduced a story that would act as context and motivation for learners to complete each task. All the companies in the class are part of a consortium whose goal is to use their skills and technologies to prevent a cybercriminal from destroying access to all technology.

### The Journey

Each exercise connected to an element of an overarching story. In the first set of exercises, for example, each company was tasked with configuring an on-premises Windows Server-based network so they can create a secure location to build and test solutions to be used in the battle against the cybercriminal. The goal was for them to learn how to deploy Windows Server and configure DNS, DHCP and IIS.

### The Learning

Throughout the four days, the labs built upon each other. Learners were provided with resources so they could teach themselves and each other how to complete each task. At the end of each exercise, facilitators validated participants on a number of factors:

- **Did Each Participant Complete the Lab Successfully?** Participants had to demonstrate in their lab environments that they were able to complete tasks that



would only be possible if they met the goals of the exercise (i.e., ping the IP address of all of the computers on the virtual network).

- **Could Each Participant Explain What They Did and Why?** Facilitators asked the group to provide an explanation of the features and benefits of the technology addressed in the lab exercise.

## The Facilitators

In addition to monitoring completion, facilitators also were there to answer questions and act as coaches to encourage self-discovery. They also helped to put the learning into the context of the jobs the participants would soon be doing because the facilitators are former MACH hires who are currently in the roles the new hires are training for.

## The Bonus

Game mechanics were used throughout the labs to drive engagement. Teams earned points for comprehension and completion of each exercise. A leaderboard was used to track the performance of teams and industries to foster healthy competition. Teams could get bonus points by choosing to complete a harder version of an exercise, completing additional exercises and by helping other teams.

## The Logistics

Pre-work was completed on-demand and asynchronously. The in-person component contained both synchronous and asynchronous aspects. Each day started with context-setting and storytelling, but the exercises were completed on their own time. Teams that moved quickly were deployed to support slower moving teams to ensure that everyone was able to complete the day's objectives. The day wrapped with a short review of the leaderboard.

The ratio of facilitators to participants is 1:25. Communication and sharing was managed using Microsoft Teams.

## Change Management Efforts

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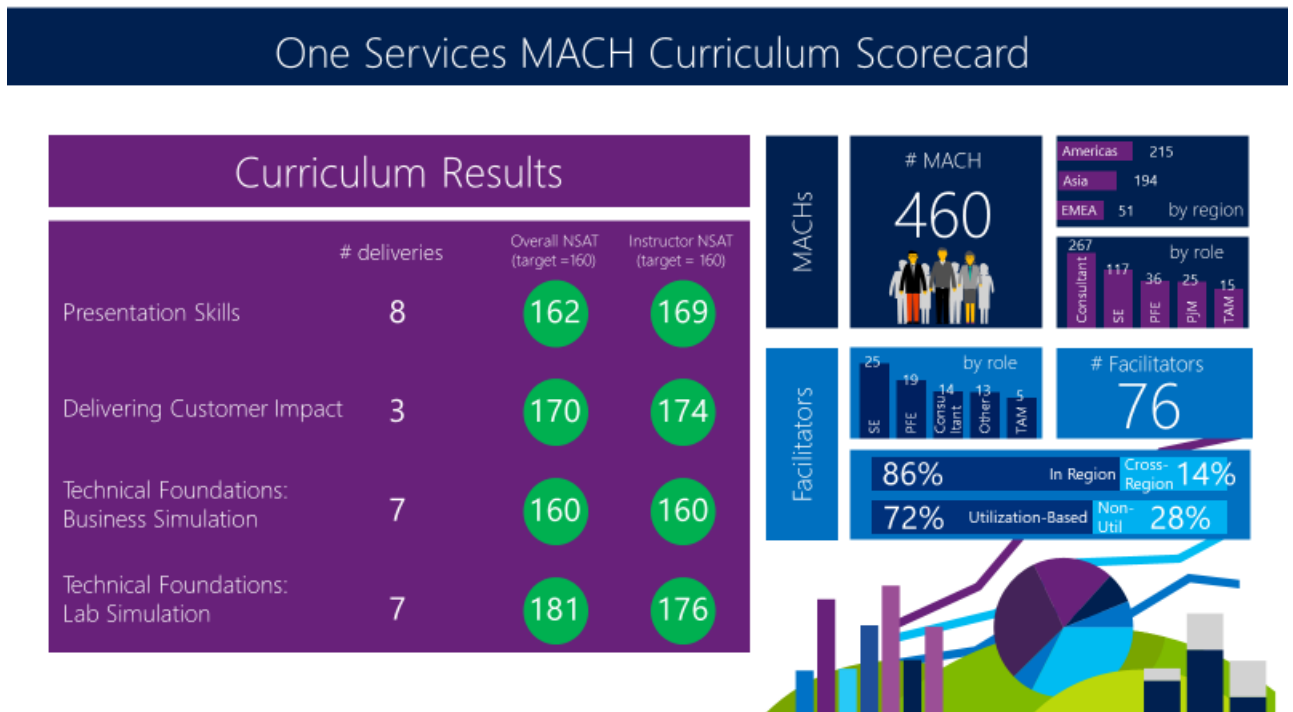
Since this approach is different from traditional Microsoft ILTs, one challenge that had to be overcome was preparing facilitators to support this program. Special care had to be taken to ensure that facilitators know how to coach.

This program is often delivered to groups of over 100, so it is also essential for the facilitators to stay in sync and communicate challenges. Facilitators meet between three and four times per day to address and adapt the course as needed. Because the facilitators are subject matter experts, they often develop new labs to create new challenges for participants.

Daily feedback from learners also is used to adapt the training. If there is a particular technology that is of interest, the modularized nature of the course makes it easy to swap in exercises that are more current and relevant as needed.

## Measurable Benefits

Figure 2: One Services MACH Curriculum Scorecard



Source: Microsoft

Significant measurable benefits:

- NSAT: 181.
- Instructor NSAT: 176.
- Highest rated course of the curriculum.



## Overall

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### Key Findings

Overall, this program was a huge success. Feedback from participants is that they find it relevant and engaging. They appreciate the story and game elements and they see the connection of the content to the real world.

### Lessons Learned

- New hires like it when they can take control of their own learning.
- Understanding why is just as important as understanding how and what.
- Better comprehension occurred when lab instructions were more ambiguous due to the student having to do research and find the answers themselves.

### Future Outlook

- **Reinforcement:** To provide better reinforcement and align with learnings from neuroscience research, reinforcement activities will be added to the program. These activities will ask participants to recall and build on their learnings two weeks and two months following completion.
- **Gamification:** To motivate participants to complete the pre-work, game mechanics will be added to the pre-work. Points will be awarded for completion of the on-demand training so participants can walk into class with bonus points in hand.
- **Grow Facilitators:** To make the most of the experience, it is vital to have strong facilitators. Additional training and support will be provided to grow the current facilitators and incentives will be added to attract new facilitators.
- **Add Missions:** The modularity of the course is one of its strengths. More bonus missions and alternative exercises will be added to create a library of resources for facilitators to choose from.



## About Brandon Hall Group

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