Section A. Interviewers and other Data Collection Issues

Experience of the Norwegian CAI-system
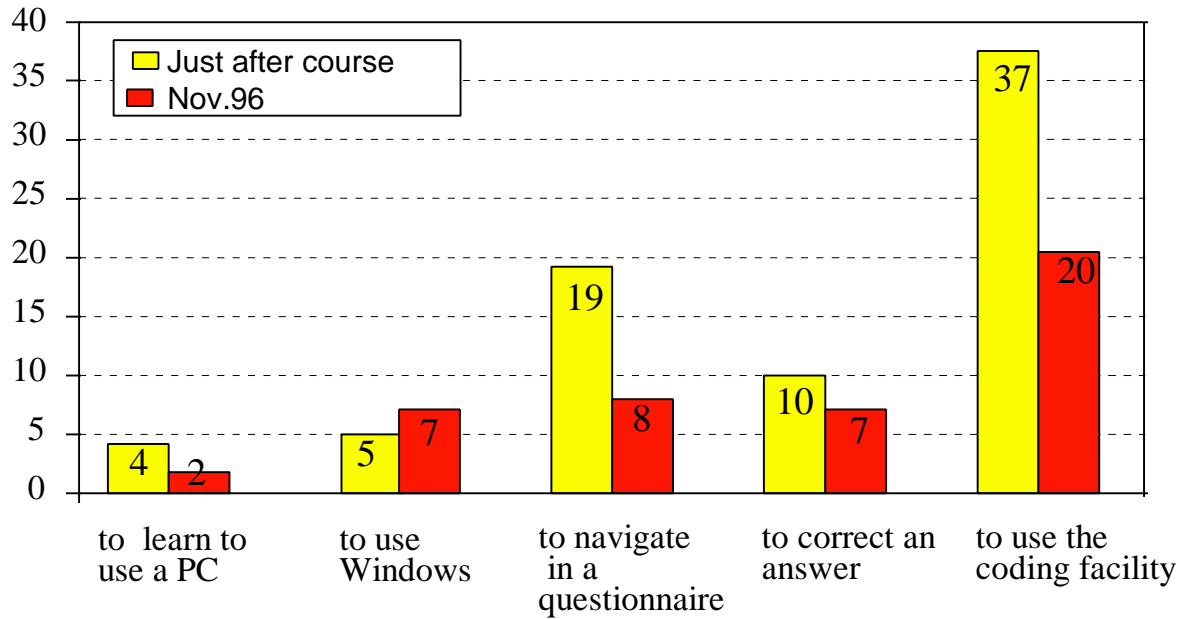
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The Norwegian system of Computer Assisted Interviewing was implemented in 1995. Then it differed from most other solutions in two main ways. Our interviewers had laptops with a full Windows version on, and it also offers, a opportunity to send e-mail between the interviewers. The main concern of our solution was to use standard programs with slight modifications. We chose Windows because it seemed certain that Windows would become the computer environment in the future, and we thought that the interviewers could get familiar with this from the start. Giving them a full Windows version also gave them the opportunity to use the laptops as a computer, not only as an «interviewing machine». In this paper I will describe our experience of this.

Windows

To look back to 1995, of course we were worried about how to train 150 interviewers to use Windows. Our interviewerstaff consists of people in different age, 36% of them have no experience in use of computer at all. For the interviewers that already were trained as interviewers, we held separate 4 day's computer courses. They learn to know their laptops, they were trained in Windows, the mail and Blaise. We divided the courses into two parts, so that they had some training time home by themselves. In this period they had some exercises to do, and they got familiar with the equipment.

Even though 60 % of those who attended courses for interviewers in 1995-1996, had used Windows before, we gave them all the same training. We found it just to difficult test their skills.

Those who were trained in the two first years got a questionnaire to fill in a couple of weeks after the course. The data from this tells us that 5% find it difficult to use Windows. As a comparison 19% find it difficult to navigate in a Blaise questionnaire and 37% to use the coding facility. So just 5% finding it difficult to use Windows is quite surprising. In November 1996 we send a new questionnaire to the interviewers. Then we repeat some of the questions.

Obviously Windows is not the most difficult part. They all go through the windows training well. I think mostly because they find it interesting and fun.

The bars to the left tells us that not more then 4% find it difficult to learn to use the computer all together. After a while less then 2 % remembered that they found it difficult to learn. So to conclude about training, it was not at all as hard as we were afraid it could be.

In a questionnaire filled out by the interviewers in June this year, we asked if they use the laptop for other tasks than the interviewer work. Even though 57 % of the interviewers told that their household had an other computer as well, 66 % of the interviewers also use their interviewer laptops to other tasks than interviewing, mostly for games, 46 %. We do not equip the interviewers with printers, but some of them have bought it themselves. So also 15 % report that they use the laptops for writing.

All togheter the interviewers are happy about the Windows solution. Knowing Windows gives something that is becoming a part of common knowledge in society. Even though it costs something with one day's training on the courses and some hours of support, the conclusion must be that Windows was the right way to go for us. As I said it gives the interviewers a computer, not just an "interviewing machine" , it is more "fun" to use, that make it easier to learn, and they appreciate to get this kind of common knowledge, and of course we also hope that having experience in a Windows environment will make our interviewers better prepared for Blaise 4 Windows.
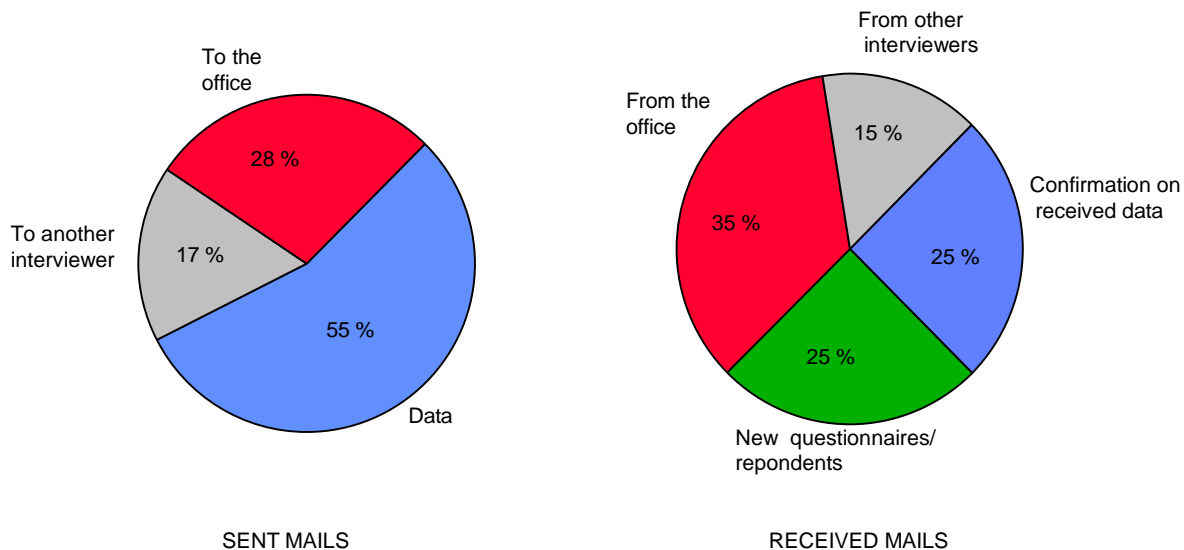
The Mailsystem

The communication part of our CAI-system is a slightly modified version of Microsoft Mail. The modifications consist of facilities to receive interview tasks at the laptops and to return interview data. These facilities work almost automatically. The regular functions of the MS Mail are not influenced by the modifications, so it is open for sending mails between all users of the system. It means between interviewers and the office, and also between one interviewers and another.

We are contented with this solution. E-mail is a convenient way to communicate. The mail system offers an efficient and cheap way to send messages and questions to the interviewers, and vice versa.

If we take a look at the logs for the remote mails for a period of 500 days, they show that most of the mails sent by interviewers are interview data, 55%. Some more than a quarter of the mails sent by the interviewers are addressed to the office, so the part of the mails addressed to another interviewer is 17%.
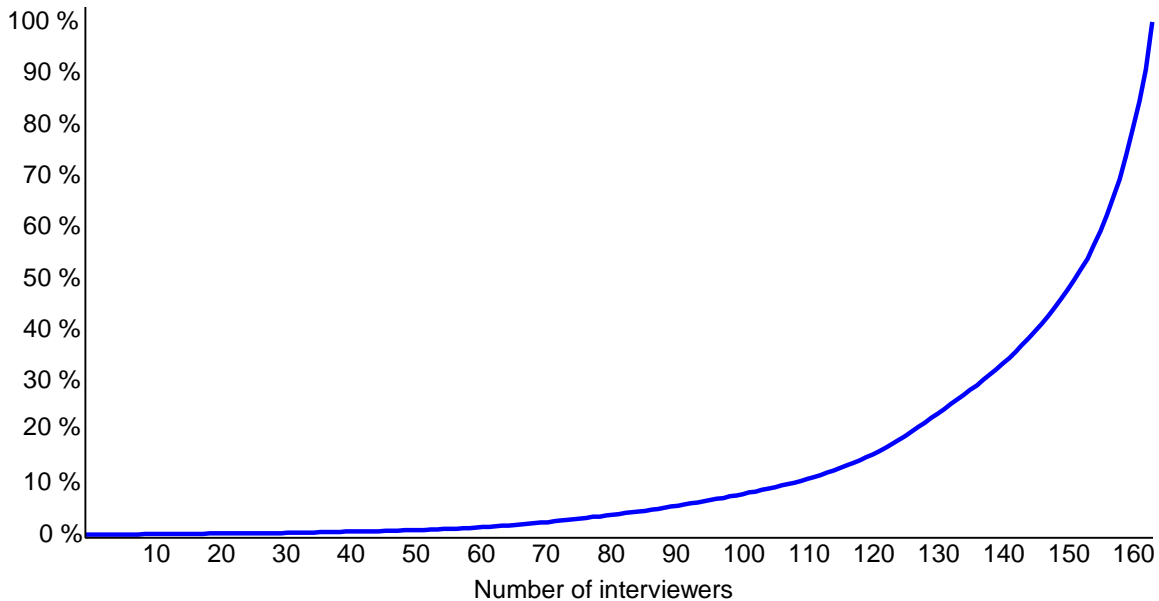
They receive in average some less than two mails each per day. Most of it is ordinary mails from the office, 35%. Receiving data at the office automatically produces a mail to the interviewers as a confirmation. Of course this it quite a large part of the mails, as well as new tasks and respondents.

SENT MAILS   RECEIVED MAILS

A closer look to the mails sent from one interviewer to an other shows that during the period almost all of the interviewers had sent at least one mail to an other interviewer.

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The frequency of use differs very much. One fourth had sent more than 150 mails to another interviewer. They have as you can see produced 80 % of the mails. The same size of part had sent less than 5 such mails.

Percentage of mails between
interviewers

Number of interviewers

To work from home as an interviewer is a lonely occupation, with very poor contact with colleagues. So in the questionnaire in June almost everybody said they prefer to have this opportunity to keep in touch, for example with people that they got to know on the courses, or that work in the same area.
Even though 97 % of the interviewers want the possibility, less then 2 % gave the answer that they use this way of contacting colleagues very often. Nearly 70 % said they never or seldom do. Those who send mails to other interviewers, usually send it to somebody they learned to know on the courses.

Of course the content in a mail from one interviewer to another is not known by us in the office. It can be a little worrying not to know what is going on out there. But often when they are mailing, they also send a copy to someone in the office. Some of the mails are just social talk, jokes, cake recipes and things like that, but sometimes also more useful topics like sharing experiences, giving hints, discussiongroups and so on. Mostly we find the mails harmless. But we also have got to know some cases of undesirable use of the mail system. From time to time you have interviewers that are not too happy about their working conditions When they start to discuss those matters by sending mails to all the interviewers, somebody wants to say they agree or disagree, and then it sort of "takes off". Most of the interviewers do not like that sort of public grumbling at all. And we certainly do not like it. But it is not easy to stop, because then they complain that we are not letting

them discuss matters in mails, that we ourselves have the possibility to discuss during the lunch breaks. But we do not feel that those few cases actually represent a problem.

The interviewers are not exactly paid for the time used for mailing. Even though our system of payment is based on hours used, time used for mailing and other administration tasks, has been paid as four hours work each month.

So to conclude about the experience of having a mailsystem that offer a possibility of mailing among the interviewers; it is something that the interviewers benefit of, they can keep in contact with colleagues, it gives a way of sharing experiences, discussions of working conditions, sometimes useful and sometimes not. And it does not cost much.