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Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Autumn 2012

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President's view

Anecdotes are no basis for strategy

Those of you familiar with my writing style will know I have a habit of making reference to specific examples of customer or author situations I know. These help me make sense of what's going on, and the combination of these and the stories I hear from others I meet do indicate patterns or trends that are emerging. But they are no basis for strategy on their own. They need context and that can best be provided by data.

We need data

Data can be compelling, be much easier to communicate, and fit our instinctive needs for certainty and absolutes. There's nothing like some stark percentages or a graph at the start of a presentation to encourage the audience to believe you are an expert and to trust what you say. If we trust the independence of data, we are likely to use it to help make sense of our world, and to help us make big decisions.

For individuals: data about salaries, job roles, tools, processes, and qualifications help inform decisions about career progression. For employers and department managers: comparisons with their wider industry help with planning strategy, resources and budgets. For tools vendors and services companies: data about the industries they sell to, their technical resource base, prices, geographic distribution, and their competitors help with growth strategy, product development, and investment.

Some data is out there

There is data available about our profession in the UK but it exists only in silos and it is currently impossible to get an overall picture, or to identify patterns or trends with any degree of confidence. For example, some of the web-based jobs boards provide data about volumes of advertised jobs, salaries and day rates – but it's easier to find data about authoring jobs in IT than it is in engineering.

There is a great deal more data available about related professions, such as translation, testing, and training, than there is about technical authoring.

In recent years, a few of the services and software companies within our profession, notably Cherryleaf and SDL, have surveyed specific groups within our profession. The focus has tended to be on their working practices and the role of technology in what they do. The surveying companies have provided their interpretation and shared their results at conferences, through journals and through their websites and customer workshops.

There is data available about the technical communication profession in other countries. For example, Tekom in Germany and the STC in the US have been carrying out surveys for many years, and have a very different picture of their world from Government-sourced data than we do here in the UK.

What the ISTC can do

The ISTC (led by Emma Bayne) has re-started to survey our members on a regular basis for the first time in many years but our scope of understanding of our profession needs to be much wider than that.

I will be leading an ISTC project to understand what data the ISTC could and should be providing about our profession in the UK, to establish a sustainable research programme, that will pull together existing, third-party, and new data, and begin communicating that data to its members, and a wider audience.

Your chance to get involved

Do you have questions about this project? Do you have an opinion about what the ISTC can and should be doing in this area? Is there one question about our world that you would like to know the answer to? Do you have ideas about how this project could work?

Does your company or organisation already have relevant data or do you know someone who does? If you would like to help with any stage of this project, let me know.

Also, if you're attending TCUK in Newcastle, I would welcome anyone wanting to discuss this to see me. **C**

Paul Ballard FISTC

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Member news

New Members

Members

Gareth Bowen	Lancashire
Raymond Cox	Northampton
Martin Daker	Northamptonshire
Craig Davies	Hampshire
Jacqueline Le Bourhis	Ireland
Stephen Phillips	Bridgend
Bernard Pilkington	Lincolnshire
Paul Puckering	Snaith
James Russell	Bristol
Janine Weightman	Tyne & Wear
Morris Young	West Midlands

Associate

Mathilde Gervais	Altrincham
Brian Walker	Staffordshire

Junior Members

Liz Atkinson	Reading
Adrian Hannam	North Yorkshire
Debbie Lee-Bartlett	Surrey
Andrew Peck	Nottingham
Anthony Potter	Isle of Wight
Irene Spence	Newcastle upon Tyne
Monika Stachowiak	Hertfordshire

Transfers

Fellow

Antoni Dzumaga	Kidderminster
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Junior

Ashleen Premjit	Switzerland
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Rejoiners

Member

Blair Charles	Netherlands
Christopher Hanley	Lancashire
Richard Savage	Kinross

Associate

Sonia Cutler	Hertfordshire
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Student

Garry Appleton	Surrey
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