

**Budgets, business cases and more**

Creating a business case for technical communicators



# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators  
Summer 2016

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OBASHI and Lean

Expanding possibilities  
with MadCap Flare 12

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data secure?

Taking care of  
your health





## Robert Scott-Norton describes his day...

Sage is the market leader for integrated accounting, payroll and payment systems. I've worked in their software development teams for eighteen years, the last ten have been as a technical writer, but after a few changes at Sage, I find myself as team leader of a small author team.

I get to work by 7am. I'm early as I prefer to avoid the worst of the inbound Manchester traffic, and it gives me an hour to work on my novel<sup>1</sup> before the day starts proper.

Looking at my personal dashboard (this is what I've started to call my to-do list), I pick the three most important things to accomplish today and jot them down in my notebook.

Every day, I remind myself that it's not possible to complete my to-do list. Finding the important tasks is a practised skill.

There are four authors in my team: two in Newcastle, and two in Manchester. When Matt, a Manchester technical author comes in, we grab a coffee then have our daily stand-up.

As we're across two sites, and we work on different projects, we maintain two backlogs in TFS<sup>2</sup>. Matt and I are working across nine projects and this is the reason we have a separate backlog from the development teams.

The stand-up shows we're on track but Matt has a problem with the online authoring tool. We establish together that it's not user error so fire an email to the development team in Newcastle.

My first important thing is to finish the request process for Project X.

Because we're not fully allocated to a development team, we need to keep a keen eye on our capacity and availability. To make sure teams consider our availability, we've gone formal and introduced a request form.

I complete my part of the form then send it to the project's business analyst to complete. Once that's filled in with dates, we'll sit down together and walk through the scope. But for now, this task is done.

At 10am, I go to Project Y's sprint review meeting. It clashes with the sprint review for Project X but they're three sprints away from release so I decide this is more important. Good job I did as during a demo I notice they've changed the name of a menu label and delayed some functionality. I make a note to update the help project when I get back to my desk. It's not one of my three most important tasks so might have to wait until tomorrow, but I'm keen to do the work whilst talk of it is still fresh.

Back to my desk. I've received an email from one of our writers in North America. She's noticed some of the web help that the Newcastle team has produced and wants help to implement analytics in a similar project of hers. I point her to Dave (in Newcastle), then make a note to catch up and ask her about sharing resources for our online solutions.

Lunch is soup at my desk. We've got a few nice walks around the office but it's raining and I'm lazy and I want to edit another chapter of the work-in-progress novel before this afternoon.

After lunch, I move on to task two - one-to-one prep. We're big on people development and are all working within a structured personal development cycle. As team leader, I'm accountable for my team having monthly one-to-ones where we review progress against objectives and achievements. I'm still getting used to this. I love personal development and have been keeping my own learning plans and journals for years. Keeping records is invaluable in bringing together my ISTC CPD. Helping others with their development is new for me and I'm finding it interesting working with different people with different aims and aspirations. I enter some ideas into the online development system then book appointments with the team for their one-to-ones.

Task three is to book travel. As part of our new office refit, we've invested

in lots of telepresence gear. I've a cubicle by me that I can use for face time with my Newcastle team and we do use them for our weekly meetings, but when it comes to one-to-ones, I need to spend time with them in person. I've also been planning to arrange a meet up with the technical authors based in our Newcastle customer service department to catch up and share our plans. So Newcastle it is. We've got new travel booking systems, and hotel and rail tickets are sorted in five minutes.

That's the third task done. I plant a nice big tick next to the item in my notebook.

I have an hour before I finish work so I open Madcap Flare and make the changes to the project needed from that morning's review meeting. The changes are simpler than I thought but it will mean recompiling the help and PDF guides. I make the changes and check it in, triggering an automatic build of the main software project. They'll be able to review those changes in that build tomorrow morning. The PDF changes mean a quick round of proofreading and sanity checking, but my head is telling me that that can wait until morning. Instead, I use my Lynda.com<sup>3</sup> licence (thanks work) and finish watching the Todd Dewett management video I'd started last week. [www.lynda.com/Todd-Dewett/1516963-1.html](http://www.lynda.com/Todd-Dewett/1516963-1.html)

And that's it. Work day over. Tomorrow is one of my twice weekly work at home days so I divert the desk phone, put my cup in the dishwasher and head home where the kids are waiting. The day's not nearly over yet. **C**

### References

<sup>1</sup> I'm writing a connected series of novels called The Tombs Legacy. See [www.robertscottnorton.com/p/books\\_23.html](http://www.robertscottnorton.com/p/books_23.html) for more information.

<sup>2</sup> Team Foundation Server (TFS) is used for sharing code and tracking work.

<sup>3</sup> lynda.com is a leading online learning company providing video training on a subscription basis.

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