

Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Autumn 2022

Career and Recruitment

- When recruiters get interviewed
- Applying for your next job
- Jobseeker Testimonial



President's View

Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.



One advantage of writing this column is that I can take the opportunity to reflect on the year so far as well as looking ahead. I am also aware that I am often caught up with a new (to me) idea of how to work more effectively. It is time to review progress on some of these.

Managing meetings

Back in Winter 2020, I reported on Nancy Kline's 'The Promise that changes Everything', subtitled: 'I won't interrupt you.' (Ref. 1). Nancy Kline is the director of the 'Time to Think' global leadership development and coaching company. The book has a broad aim to encourage independent thinking; the assurance is that a speaker may have the opportunity to explain and develop ideas. The move to online meetings (initially of necessity in lockdown) presented opportunities to adopt new ways of working.



Hybrid working is now emerging as the 'new normal'. It is also likely to continue for the foreseeable future. With this comes the reduction in travel to meetings since these have been shown to work online. Common now in day-to-day activities is the hybrid meeting with some participants meeting in person and others attending virtually.

While reflecting on the positive aspects of this development, I listened to a talk entitled 'Meeting Up' in the Radio 4 'Four Thought' series (Ref. 2): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0019r41>



Laura Simpson, Global Director at advertising and marketing company, McCann World Group investigated and commented on the 'revolution' in the way meetings are now run and managed. She reflects on the changes introduced during lockdown and how some of these have been carried forward. She has considerable experience of meetings worldwide and has been observing the dynamics of focus groups in detail.

Laura shares stories from some of the meetings she has attended and moderated; she explains why she believes this change has created a re-imagining of what meetings could be, and a rebalancing of power within them. She concludes that more people, and in particular more junior people and those who previously felt marginalised, now feel empowered to contribute.

From my own recent experience, particularly while trying to adopt some of Nancy Kline's recommendations, I can endorse the following as improvements in the 'meeting experience'.

- Formality of online presence encourages focus on meeting objectives.

- Lack of complete 'physical presence' deters intimidation of some participants.
- The virtual 'hand raise' feature ensures all can have their say.
- 'Chat' feature ensures all ideas can be captured (so the 'moment' doesn't pass).
- The chair must 'manage' the meeting more obviously since it is hybrid.
- The 'sign-off' of the online element ensures a definite end to the meeting.

It is probably only fair to acknowledge that there are disadvantages to hybrid meetings. Most notable is the almost inevitable staggered start while the virtual attendees battle with technical 'glitches'.

Also the chair must work to ensure that the in-person participants do not hold sway over those attending virtually. I believe though that awareness of this potential issue can actually lead to a more positive outcome. The chair has a duty to ensure fair involvement for all. The meeting configuration makes this the more pressing. Ideally the chair will nominate someone to monitor this and signal (discreetly) any imbalance. In traditional meetings this was probably less well observed.

The scrum meeting in the Agile development environment encourages (in fact mandates) lack of hierarchy; hopefully daily or weekly 'huddles' are the same. All are expected to contribute. Also these meetings present the opportunity to promote mutual recognition of goals, thus encouraging teamwork.

I am very encouraged by the new meeting protocols. Recent surveys indicate that meetings used to be the least popular aspect of office life. The hybrid meeting has changed this view. Those canvassed now consider that meetings boost creativity and allow conclusions to be drawn.

Working more effectively

In the Spring issue, I reported that I had been attracted to a book by Cal Newport, entitled 'A World without email' (Ref.3). The strap line is 'Reimagining work in the age of overload' with the invitation to 'find focus; transform productivity; improve communication'.



I did not see how as an individual I could opt out of email. I still don't, given that most of my working life is managed in this way. But I did recognise the danger of the pressure to respond instantly to the latest arrivals in my Inbox instead of working methodically and according to priorities. Before reading Cal Newport's book, I tended to jump to reply irrespective of the task in progress. Also, the latest email is not necessarily the one requiring attention. These points are obvious but not always easy to adhere to. I am happy to report a sustained improvement in my approach. The changes to my workflow with improved categorising of importance/speed of response required, continue to help my focus and productivity.

ISTC News

UK Technical Communication Awards

At the time of writing the judges were assessing the entries for the UKTC Awards 2022. This is another bumper year for quality entries. The Award winners will be announced at TCUK Metro Online 2022.

The Awards will be presented on the 27 September. Details will be provided subsequently on the UKTC Awards website. We encourage the winners to contribute articles to *Communicator*. We plan to include comprehensive



coverage of the awards presented and the experiences of the entrants in producing their entries, in the Winter issue of *Communicator*.

Details will be provided on the dedicated UKTC Awards website: <https://uktcawards.com/>

Communicator Awards

Details of entry to the *Communicator* Awards 2022 are given in this issue of *Communicator* with the winners to be announced later this year (and publicised in the Winter issue).

TCUK

TCUK Metro Online 2022: Tuesday 27 September.



As advised previously, this year's conference will be online. At the time of writing, plans were in place as follows:

The event is scheduled to include the ISTC AGM and UKTC Awards presentations.

Our theme this year is:

“TechComm State of Flux: where are we going?”

Presentations and discussion on the day were planned to include:

- Conversation designer
- Change management (and how it applies to tech comm)
- Foundation skills in tech comm
- Information Architecture.

Details will be provided in the Winter issue of *Communicator*.

TCUK 2023

No date yet, but looking ahead to 2023



For next year's Conference, the ISTC Council is planning a return to an in-person-conference. So TCUK 2023 will be an in-person event. Planning is underway for an exciting new event; we will build on past experience and make improvements to reflect changes since our last face-to-face event.

We will be seeking support from members interested in helping to make this event happen. More information will be sent out separately; however, you can contact us now via istc@istc.org.uk if you would like to know more.

Other News

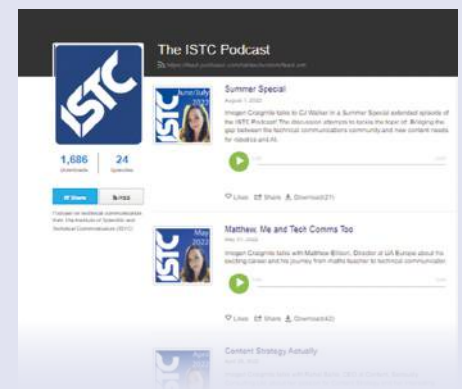
ISTC Meets 2022 –reminder

ISTC Meets presentations are short (half hour, plus questions) and are provided free of charge. It's a good opportunity for members to stay in touch, share knowledge, and practise presentation skills, as well as something to include in your CPD.

Details of previous events are available on the ISTC website at istc.org.uk/events. Please follow ISTC Meets on our Eventbrite page to be notified of upcoming events.

ISTC Podcasts –reminder

The ISTC podcasts are published on the last Friday of each month. Volunteers for interviews are welcomed. Please contact the office (at istc@istc.org.uk) for details.



Please get in touch

We are always keen to hear your opinions on how we are doing and take into account your ideas for improvement.

We always welcome suggestions from ISTC members and all readers of *Communicator*. Please contact me (president@istc.org.uk) or the ISTC office (istc@istc.org.uk). ■

Linda Robins FISTC

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Reference

Reference 1: 'The Promise that Changes Everything. I won't interrupt you' by Nancy Kline Penguin Random House UK: ISBN 978-0-241-42351-6 2020.

Reference 2: 'Meeting Up' in the Radio 4 'Four Thought' series: Laura Simpson (3 Aug 2022)

Reference 3: 'A World without email' Cal Newport: ISBN 978-0-241-34141-4 (2021)