

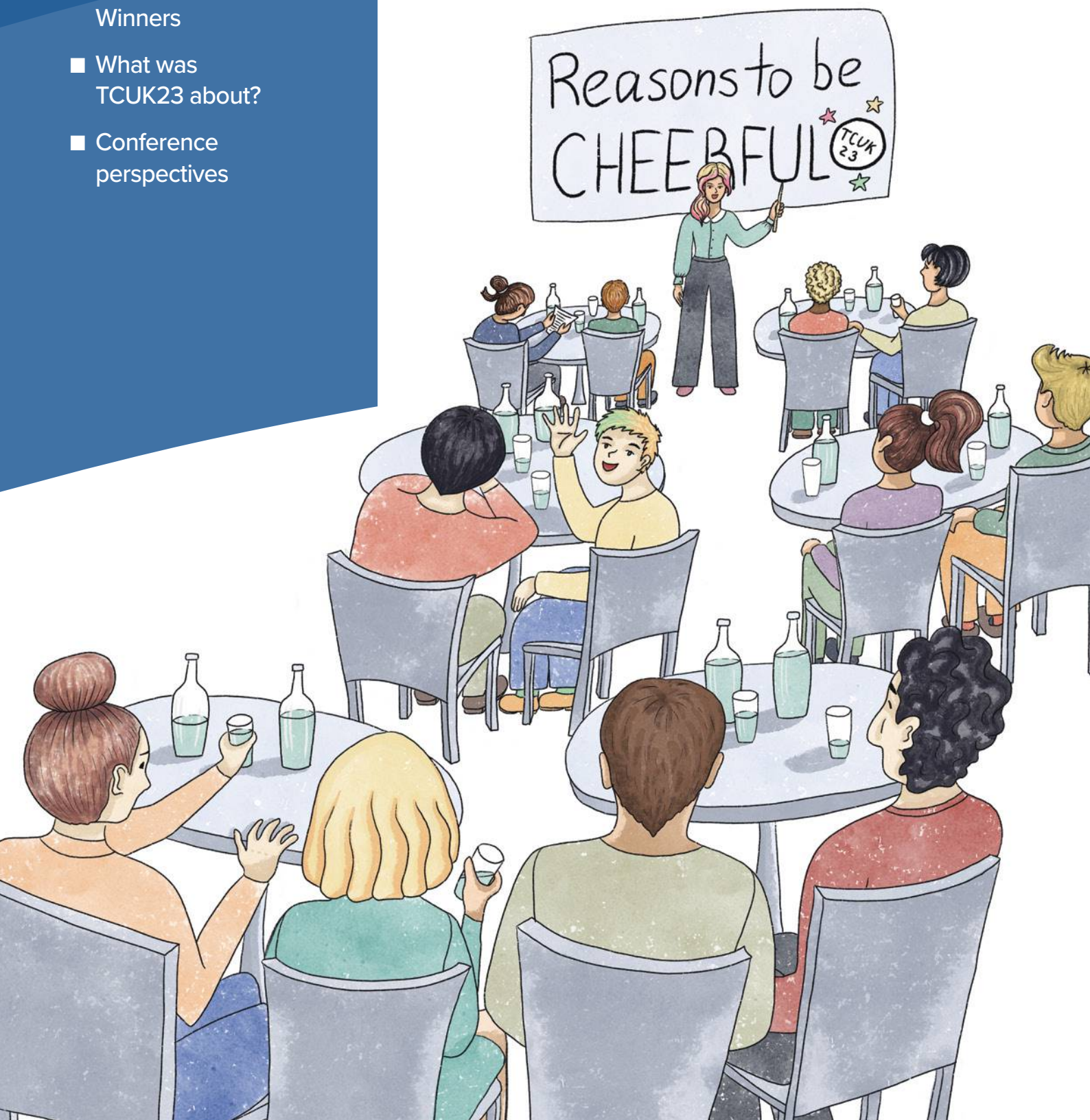
# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Winter 2023

TCUK Conference 2023

- UKTC Award Winners
- What was TCUK23 about?
- Conference perspectives



# President's View

Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.

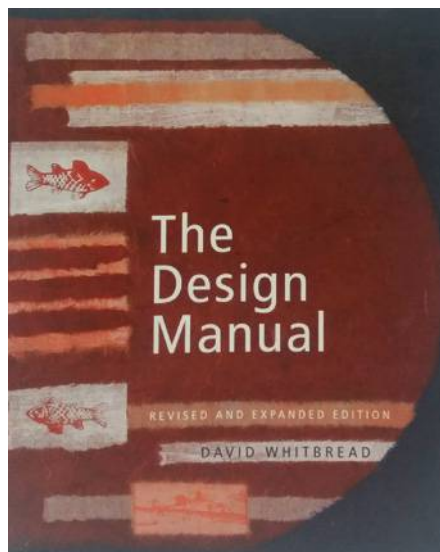


After much anticipation, we were able to get together for TCUK23 in September. We had a positive and stimulating two days; sponsors, speakers, and delegates alike were enthusiastic and engaged at our first in-person conference since 2019. All were determined to make the most of the occasion and we have plenty of ideas and recommendations to take us forward in our profession. I would like to add my personal thanks to the team of volunteers and to all participants for making it such a positive experience. Please read on in this issue of *Communicator* for details of the event, including the UKTC and Professional Awards recipients for 2023.

Grant Noble, President of the Australian Society for Technical Communication (ASTC) invited ISTC members to attend the ASTC's Annual Conference (in person or online) in October. I was able to join the conference online for Day 1; it was a very worthwhile experience and I plan to attend on both days next year. I will report on the presentations I attended in the Spring 2024 *Communicator*. In this President's View, I can tell you about a book I am now reading following up on one of the presentations.

## The Design Manual

David Whitbread was the first speaker at the ASTC Conference. His subject was 'Focusing on readability in writing, editing and design.' David runs his own design consultancy and has worked extensively for the Australian Government. In his engaging and



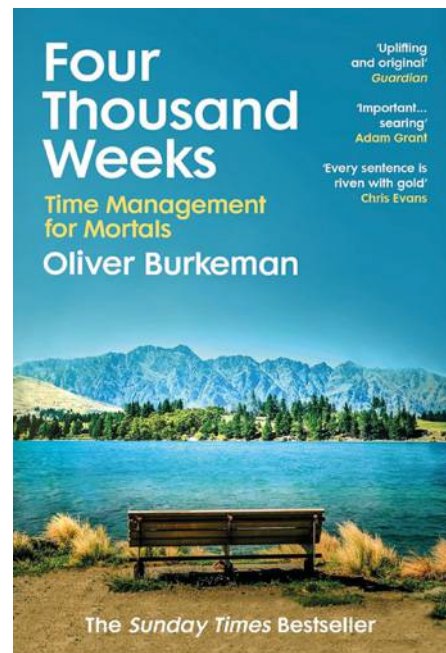
practical presentation, David gave examples from the new edition of his comprehensive reference book, *'The Design Manual'*<sup>1</sup>. David writes,

"Effective design is the organisation of material which communicates information to a selected person – the 'audience' or 'receiver.' It uses the visual language most appropriate to that person, the information itself and the information source – the 'author' or 'sender'."

In his presentation and in the book, David gave examples of how to make design decisions that best use the processes described. All aspects are covered with extensive and compelling examples, with guidance and checklists at each stage from traditional publication to web design, presentations, graphics, effective writing tips, and video projects. There are 656 pages; it is one for the 'ready reference' shelf with a strong recommendation as a 'go-to' book at the start of a commission.

## Working Methods

My investigations into 'smarter' working methods have taken me in several directions in recent months, particularly as the post-pandemic workplace has brought the subject of work-life balance to the fore. My latest find is entitled, *'Four Thousand Weeks'* with the attractive strap line, 'Time Management for Mortals'<sup>2</sup>. The author, Oliver Burkeman takes as his start point that the average life only lasts four thousand



weeks; that life is short; and "time management is all life is." He believes the problem of human existence is that we have "the mental capacity for almost infinitely ambitious plans, but practically no time to put them into action." Where most 'self-help' books offer tips on how to get even more done in a day, Burkeman is telling readers that there will never be time to do everything they want or feel they need to; accept this, then make a conscious decision on how to make best use of the time available. He recounts how a Dutch study recently concluded that surveys on work-life balance underestimate the scale of 'busyness' because the busy people are too busy to complete the surveys. There is also a tendency for the 'super-busy' to refer to working to excess as 'hustling' and pretending that it is exhilarating rather than exhausting.

We all have a chance to choose how we use our time; the pandemic created an unusual moment where there could be a collective taking of stock; most people had a chance to re-evaluate the way we live, with the opportunity to work more effectively instead of trying to be 'on duty' full time.

## ISTC News

### ISTC Council update

At the AGM (held during TCUK23) we

welcomed two new members to the ISTC Council:

Joaquim Baptista and Edward King.

In addition, three members who had completed their respective three-year terms were elected for a further term:

James Bartley, Andrew McFarland Campbell, and Warren Singer.

### **Council priorities 2023 and for 2024**

#### **During this year**

The ISTC Council has been working on the following while managing regular activities as usual:

- Boost membership: focusing on age profile, benefits, and reach.
- Review and update communication policy and implement improvements.
- Explore affiliations with other organisations.
- Expand our community – including discussion forums and special interest groups.
- Enhance the digital version of *Communicator*.
- Hold an in-person TCUK event.

#### **For 2024**

In November, the ISTC Council met to review the activities this year and to make plans for 2024. This will be a full day hybrid meeting. I will report findings and priorities for next year in the Spring 2024 issue of *Communicator*. We are focusing on giving best professional value to our members while seeking to grow our membership, which in turn should benefit all members.

#### **Volunteers**

TCUK23 has demonstrated the tremendous value of volunteers in bringing a project to fruition successfully. We will be reviewing these activities to see how we can use the model more widely. Our objective is to increase the opportunities for our members by giving more value to your membership while extending professional development.

#### **Survey from TCUK23 – ideas for future events**

We have gathered feedback from the TCUK23 delegates to guide us in what we should do for future events. We are also going to survey ISTC members who did not attend to see if we can find out your views – what would we need

to do for you to attend? It could be that shorter events are favoured as well as the TCUK conference. It will be your chance to make suggestions and for us to listen.

#### **Boosting membership**

We know that there are many technical communicators in newer roles who do not necessarily know about the ISTC or that it is the professional organisation for them. This is an important opportunity for outreach. I have just been following up on the now widely known acronym, STEM:

“Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is an umbrella term used to group together the distinct but related technical disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The term is typically used in the context of education policy or curriculum choices in schools.”

So far, so good. But when I search for career opportunities online, the message is:

“STEM careers are jobs that require knowledge and skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. These fields are rapidly growing and offer a wide range of exciting and rewarding career opportunities. Here are some examples of STEM careers: Software Developer; Data Scientist; Civil Engineer; Environmental Scientist; Mathematician. These are just a few examples of STEM careers that you can pursue. There are many more options available depending on your interests and skills.”

I am now on a mission to see that Technical Communicator appears in such lists – with elaboration on roles and sectors to show how we are embedded in STEM!

#### **New online digital publications platform**

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communication (ISTC), Australian Society for Technical Communication (ASTC) and TechCommNZ have been working together to launch a new online digital publications platform. The platform will be available to our members and subscribers, and will feature online articles on topics relevant to technical communication.

This new platform, once launched, will run independently of *Communicator*,

and we have no plans to discontinue *Communicator*. The new platform is a collaborative, inter-organisational initiative, which will provide an additional resource for you.

We are looking to launch the pilot platform soon. Members of the three organisations have been invited to help decide on the name for our new platform. The survey offers a selection of names designed to best reflect its international and collaborative flavour, targeted at technical communicators in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries.

#### **Horace Hockley Award**

The Horace Hockley Award is presented to a person or organisation that in the opinion of the ISTC Council has made a considerable contribution to the technical communications industry over a sustained period. This year our recipient is a Fellow of the ISTC whose influence spreads beyond the Institute to the wider technical communications community. This year the recipient is **Relly Annett-Baker**, Google Corporate Engineering’s Head of UX Content Strategy and keynote speaker at TCUK23.

Relly’s influence in the world of User Experience content design is inspirational and far reaching. She has over 20 years’ experience in UX content design as a consultant, content designer and content strategy manager. This includes work with the Financial Conduct Authority, Crown Commercial Service, and other agency clients. Relly also gives presentations and runs workshops on the subject.

We are pleased to recognise the importance of Relly’s success and her influence in the technical communications industry at such an exciting time. ■

#### **References**

1. ‘The Design Manual’: David Whitbread: W: Whitbread (third edition: 2023); ISBN 978-0-646-86312-2.
2. ‘Four Thousand Weeks’: Oliver Burkeman: Penguin Random House (2021); ISBN 978-1-70400-1.

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