

Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Summer 2024

Education and Training

- Making learning easier
- Why training and CPD never get old
- The end of Education



President's View

Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.



The year so far

This is proving to be an absorbing and fast-moving year in the world of technology. Every day introduces a development with the potential to influence the way we work in scientific and technical communication. I realise there are difficulties associated with the rate of change; also, too in assessing the impact on our respective careers.

Strengthening our community – roles and interests

The roles that we associate with the profession are changing; they are expanding; new roles are being created; the ISTC is working to ensure that we are reaching these practitioners. It is important though that we do not neglect the classic roles; the tools used have changed dramatically over the years, but the fundamental skills are ever present and vital to include in our remit.

Recently long-term *Communicator* reader, Douglas Newton reached out to our editor. An ISTC member (and former ISTC Council member) Douglas enjoyed a career as a technical illustrator in the days before computer aided design. He recalls that articles on technical illustration featured regularly in *Communicator*. He also contributed some of these himself. Now we rarely cover this aspect despite the continuing significance and importance of illustrations to our work. This then is an invitation to you, our readers, to

contribute if you can. And if there are other areas you would like to us to feature, please get in touch.

Working methods - the workplace

The speed and extent of the return to the office continues to evolve around the world. The main factors seem to be:

- Length and cost of commute
- Space at home and in the office
- Corporate culture
- National character

In the UK, large corporations and government departments have been pressing for a return to the office for three days out of the five in the typical working week. So 'the commute' is under scrutiny again. In her 'Work watch' column in the *Financial Times* (Reference 1) Miranda Green was considering this for those who use public transport to get to and from the office. I was interested to find that Miranda alluded to Oliver Burkeman's book, 'Four Thousand Weeks (Time Management for Mortals)' (Reference 2). I had mentioned this book in the Winter 2023 and Spring 2024 issues of *Communicator*. The focus of the book is the imperative to make best use of the four thousand weeks (on average) of life.

Miranda Green admits that the commute for her used to be an integral part of the working day, managing emails and reports on a laptop with the railway carriage as an (uncomfortable) extension of the office environment. Following the adoption of new habits during and post-pandemic, she now recommends a change of approach:

- Where practical, start the day working day at home, managing the overnight email in-tray in relative calm and comfort.
- Travel later in the day in a less constricted space and amid more relaxed fellow passengers.
- Use the journey to let your mind roam freely – without pressure and constraint.
- This should see you arrive in the office well prepared to make the best of the working day.

Managing change

Another aspect of the change to working environment is the difference in

relationships with other employees; bosses and colleagues; both in-person and remote.

I have found useful material in a book designed for use when an organisation is undergoing change: 'Coaching people



through organizational change': Sue Noble and Amy Tarrant (Reference 3). Fundamentally the guidance and worked examples cover changes in the workplace in

relationships at different levels and in different environments.

AI – behind the scenes in recruitment and career development

In amongst the plethora of Artificial Intelligence stories, a new book delivers a cautionary note about the effects of use of AI in the workplace; this covers recruitment of staff, assessment of performance and professional development. Journalist Hilke Schellmann's book, 'The Algorithm:



How AI can hijack your career and steal your future' (Reference 4) is the result of her evaluating the use of AI for these practices. AI is being used, on a massive scale, to decide who

gets hired, fired, and promoted. Initially Hilke's reading on the subject led her to wonder about the pitfalls and mistakes that could arise. Hilke went on to develop test cases and to share the experiences of whistleblowers.

From the start of the process such factors are:

- How do we become aware of a job?
- Who gets to see your CV?
- What is being assessed in video interviewing software?

The individual may never know what is going on 'behind the scenes' and may seem to be powerless to influence or respond. But there is an appendix

advising jobseekers, for instance, on how to make their CVs machine readable. There are also useful observations on prospective improvements in design and ideas for regulation.

ISTC News

First a reminder of our tagline for 2024: "The ISTC supports the community of Technical Communicators".

The ISTC Council is focused on developing our community with a reminder of the elements we are concentrating on:

- Sharing expert knowledge
- Building connections between members
- Helping you decide what learning to undertake

As the year progresses, we will be reaching out to you to let you know how we are making changes, seeking your advice for future projects, and asking if you can help us achieve our goals. To this end we are already building project teams to help make things happen.

TCUK Conferences

TCUK24

Our online conference for TCUK24 is planned for Tuesday 24 September. TCUK24 will be similar in format to our online conference in 2022, including the following:

- ISTC AGM (for members)
- UKTC Awards
- Speakers' presentations followed by Q&A sessions.

TCUK25

Planning is underway for next year's in-person conference. At this stage, we are researching prospective venues.

The International Journal of Technical Communication (IJTC)

Our joint online digital publications platform, the International Journal of Technical Communication (IJTC) was launched mid-May. This is our collaborative venture, between the ISTC, the Australian Society for Technical Communication (ASTC) and TechCommNZ. The platform is now available to our members and subscribers; it features online articles on topics relevant to technical communication.

This new platform runs independently of *Communicator*, and we have no plans to discontinue *Communicator*. The platform is a collaborative, inter-organisational initiative, providing an additional resource to participants. There is also scope for collaboration on features and topics of mutual interest. We have some material in preparation now and ideas for future articles.



We are now taking entries for UK Technical Communication Awards 2024. The established guidelines apply again this year. They are open to any individual or team, whether employed, self-employed, contracting, volunteering, permanent, temporary, full-time, or part-time. We continue to encourage entries of all types, from traditional documentation, to those demonstrating technical innovation.

Details for entry to the UKTC Awards can be found on the ISTC website UKTC Awards.

This year the Awards presentation ceremony will be held at TCUK24 online in September. See the Winter 2023 issue of *Communicator* for articles by last year's winners.

Closing date for submissions is 30 June. Please contact the office (at istc@istc.org.uk) for details.

Community

Local Area Groups continue to meet in various forms: in-person, online and as hybrid sessions. We are expanding these groups, and plan to establish Special Interest Groups. We are now making more use of social media to publicise activities and raise our profile.

Professional Development

We are reviewing our CPD framework and our mentoring scheme to ensure that all members can benefit and contribute effectively.

For guidance on our current CPD framework, check the website CPD information for members. It is never too late to start your record. Once you have established a routine, you will find the process straightforward. It is also a valuable personal record for performance reviews and for your CV.

Also, we continue to assess courses

for ISTC accreditation. Details of these are given on the ISTC website.

Resources

We are investigating ways to promote the use of discussion forums and a jobs board on the ISTC website. We plan to promote use of these facilities, particularly during this year.

ISTC Meets

Our online monthly meetings continue this year with an interesting line-up of speakers. Details of earlier events are available on the ISTC website at istc.org.uk/events.

Postscript

Recently I came across this quote from the American theoretical physicist, Richard Feynman (populariser of physics through lectures and books): "If you can't explain something in simple terms, you don't understand it." ■

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References

1. 'Zen and the art of the zoned-out commute helps beat the crowds': Miranda Green: Financial Times (1 April 2024)
2. 'Four Thousand Weeks': Oliver Burkeman: Penguin Random House (2021); ISBN 978-1-70400-1.
3. 'Coaching people through organizational change: Sue Noble; Amy Tarrant: Kogan Page (2022); ISBN 978-1-3986-0702-6.
4. 'The Algorithm: How AI can hijack your career and steal your future': Hilke Schellman: Hachette Books (2024); ISBN 978-1805260981.