

Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Winter 2024

Open Theme

- TCUK24 conference in detail
- UKTC Awards winners
- ISTC survey results



President's View

Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.



I am finding it difficult to appreciate that we have nearly reached the end of the year already. I will be talking about ISTC news later in this column. But since we are here, I'd like to say how good it has been this year to have had extra volunteers from among the membership helping Council with projects. What a difference to the energy, enthusiasm, and progress we have been making. More of this later.

Working methods - home and away

As through the rest of the year, I have been tracking changes in the working world, trying to keep up if possible! I am concerned about what 2025 will bring. It was looking as though the employee would in many cases have the right to hybrid working with selection effectively of their choice (assuming of course this is appropriate to their role). Now we learn that from the start of 2025, Amazon for one will be insisting on five days a week in the office as standard. Also, the Civil Service will be requiring their employees to spend 60% of their time in the office! What happened to the recognition of improved productivity through hybrid flexibility! We will see how this unfolds!

And this month, Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at the University of Manchester felt impelled to write to

The Guardian newspaper with a warning about the insidious growth of 'presenteeism'. Cooper coined the term in the 1980s and it became common currency in the 1990s. The danger he identified was the compulsion for employees to be in the office. This can be despite 'burn-out,' contagious illness and other limits to effective working. The recent news items of large corporations now insisting on the widespread return to the office, led Cooper to accuse the CEOs of being 'dinosaurs. He accused them of 'holding back the economy,' flying in the face of the overwhelming evidence of improved productivity through hybrid working.

Fashion note: Is there always someone on the make? John Lewis is adapting to the trend for a return to the office. They have introduced a new office-wear range entitled 'nine to thrive' to mark the change!

Recruitment

And before we leave the subject, there are more serious difficulties in the world of work. It is increasingly common for prospective employers to forgo the courtesy of informing candidates when they have been unsuccessful in their job application. This lack of etiquette is more surprising given the attention to detail required in recording interviews supposedly as a mutual protection for candidate and employer.

Retirement?

For some years, there has been no statutory retirement age provided the worker can still be seen to fulfil the requirements of the job description. And now we are reading of workers of over eighty and maybe older but why not? The only drawback I guess is that these workers will be subject to the stresses and time constraints of the role instead of as in former times when such staff could be retained as experts for consultation.

And finally.

After some years working with a standing desk following all the advice for a healthy and mobile physique, it is

now being reported that use of such equipment can lead to circulatory problems in later life. Help!

Coaching and Development

I have been following up some of the positive ways of developing less experienced staff through hybrid meetings and the daily stand-up agile meetings. An extremely useful book for these and for more experienced staff is 'Fearless Social Confidence. The author Patrick King is a social interaction specialist based in San Francisco, in fact a social interaction specialist as well as a prolific writer of books. There is a multitude of practical advice of value to workers of little or considerable experience.



There is strong encouragement for individuals to assess the areas where they are lacking in self-confidence. They can choose a safe situation to try strategies to overcome the issue. Importantly a specific event or subject can be selected to work through the prospective problem.

At various stages this can be used to make positive progress to advance a career. Some advice is as follows:

- Clarity: understand what you want to say and why.
- Total ownership: take responsibility and don't deflect to others.
- Immediate and consistent action - be kind to yourself.
- Start: I am going to ask that question at the meeting and go for it!

There is plenty more positive and realistic 'bite-size' advice and encouragement.

I have been working through a 'general' coaching book, which through positive real-life examples and exercises for the reader which start from a base of successful experience. This is 'Coach Yourself Confident' by Julie Smith (Reference 2). The book's straplines are 'ditch the self-doubt tax' and 'unlock humble confidence'. This is not a 'sprint' with quick answers. The reader does



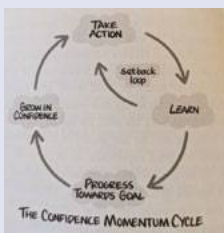
need to work through the practice sessions assigned. These can be related to a current work scenario (or from the past if more relevant and helpful). The author has a proven track record of coaching

for success with large companies and staff at a high level. The book sets out to be balanced and objective emphasising the mantra: "I am good enough and I can be better." The following points are stressed as one works through the exercise sessions:

- "My strengths are clear to me. I know what I'm good at.
- I know what I'm not so good at and I'm OK with that.
- I know that I can add to my strengths through focus and effort.
- I've navigated some tricky situations, and I've come out the other side.
- If need be, I can navigate adversity again.
- I can face the unknown with a sense that I'll find what's needed within myself."

In isolation, these points may seem to be self-evident. However, the author is very effective in ensuring that the reader is always relating to real-life situations and potential issues where the individual may expect to struggle.

Julie Smith introduces the Confidence Momentum Cycle:



She also includes 'historical' references such as a quote from Roman poet Virgil, "Possunt quia posse videntur", which translates as "They can because they think they can."

ISTC News

TCUK24

It was good to have our AGM and our UKTC Awards Ceremony at TCUK24 on 24 September. It was great too to have the two extremely popular and topical presentations from our two guest speakers:

- Ellis Pratt: 'Technical Communicators and Generative AI: What's going on?'
 - Scott Kubie: 'It's all UX Content.'
- There is plenty of content on these topics throughout this issue of *Communicator*.

ISTC Volunteers

We have a number of initiatives on the go this year which have been enhanced by our committed and enthusiastic volunteers, who have been collaborating with our Council members to promote initiatives and progress projects. All of these will have been described previously and mentioned in the reports provided for the AGM. I wanted to list them today to acknowledge again the value of the commitment of our volunteers:

- Membership group assessing and advising on applications.
- ISTC website update and re-design.
- New Mentoring programme (with improved CPD opportunities).
- Review panel for ISTC course accreditations.
- ISTC Meets - regular sessions with expert speakers and attendee discussions.
- Career diversity and widening of scope for group memberships.

Plans for 2025

Traditionally the ISTC Council has held an in-person (or hybrid post-Covid) day to establish and develop a strategy and priorities for the coming year. For 2025 we feel it is more important to be proactive and make progress month-on-month with detailed plans. We must ensure that we can grow our professional association for the benefit of our current membership and to increase our scope in age and diversity of roles! There is so much changing in the world of technical communication, we mean to be there for you all and our wider prospective membership. ■

References

- Fearless Social Confidence' by Patrick King: Amazon (2018); ISBN 978-17277-56746.
- 2 Coach Yourself Confident' by Julie Smith: Practical Inspiration Publishing (2024); ISBN 978-1788-605175.

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ISTC Business Affiliates

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 as of December 2024



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