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Steps & Specs

The Newsletter of the STC Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group

STC SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

P&P SIG Sponsors Two Sessions at the 51st Annual STC Conference

By Dawnell Claessen

If you're going to the STC conference this year, don't miss our P&P panel discussion and progression sessions.

Panel Discussion: Life Cycle Management of Policies and Procedures

Five panelists will discuss the challenges and opportunities of Policies and Procedures work. "Best practices" in origination, review, approval, search, retrieval, use, storage, distribution, obsolescence and disposal will be explored.

Schedule: Session WE 10R Wed., May 12th 10:30-12 Rm 329
Moderator:
Nicole Y. Wycislo,
Verb Consulting, Inc.
Speakers:
Julie Biel, *Schwab*
Dawnell K. Claessen, *Science Applications International Corporation*
Harold B. Gill, *Zen Technology, Inc.*
Katherine J. Vivirito, *Brookhaven National Laboratory*

Progression Session: Topics in Policies and Procedures

Twelve speakers from various areas of practice will host tables with a variety of topics directly relevant to Policies and Procedures practitioners.

Progression sessions are a great way to learn a little more about so many topics! Attendees hear a twenty minute presentation about one topic, then move to another table to hear the next twenty minute presentation, and so on.

These sessions are among the best attended at the conference. Come and see what all the fuss is about!

Schedule: Session WE 7A Tuesday 2:00-3:30 PM (Room: Ballroom I)
Moderator: Dawnell K. Claessen, *Science Applications International Corporation*
Topics:

- Content Management for Policies and Procedures
- Policy and Procedures: Together or Separate?
- The Tech Writer's Role in Information Security Policy and Procedures
- Documentation Lifecycle Management Systems.
- Capability Maturity Model Management Software--Process Max Requirements
- Writing Policies and Procedures for Compliance
- Document Control Basics
- Make It Easy - Buy-in Is Likely
- Assessing Your Career in Policies and Procedures Communication
- Who's the Writer Here: SMEs v. the Professionals
- Adapting your Policies and Procedures for Online Availability

In This Issue

Don't Miss These P&P Conference Activities!

Policies and Procedures SIG Business Meeting

Tuesday, May 11 from 7 – 8 AM
Baltimore Convention Center, Room 345.
All are welcome to attend.For more information, contact Raymond Urgo at 323-957-9317.

STC's SIG Networking Luncheon

Tuesday, May 11 from 12:15 – 2:00 PM
Several tables are reserved for the P&P SIG. $20 per person (tickets purchased in advance).

Steps & Specs is published quarterly by the Society for Technical Communication's Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group.

SIG Leadership Team

SIG Manager and Information Request Coordinator:
Raymond E. Urgo
323/957-9317 (office)
rurgo@urgoconsulting.com

Conference Proposal Coordinator:
Dawnell K. Claessen
210/520-2558 (office)
mail@dawnell.com

Membership Coordinator:
Candie McKee
405/974-5628 (office)
405/919-1305 (home)
candiemckee@sbcglobal.net

Listserv Coordinator:
Eddy Frost
800/949-6753 ext 206 (office)
603/234-2711 (home)
EddyFrost@ringwood.com

Webmaster:
Janice Haskins
jhaskins@logic.bm

Newsletter, Editor:
Lois Marsh
416/359/6751 (office)
lois.marsh@bmonb.com

Newsletter, Layout Specialist:
Position Open

Newsletter, Assistant Editor:
Kelli L. Pharo
407/740-8143 ext 189 (office)
407/886-4031
klpharo@pbsj.com

Newsletter, Proofreader:
Gem Smith
713/780/4676 (office)
713/461/5105 (home)
gem@facetscom.com

Society for Technical Communication

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
703/522-4114 (office)
703/522-2075 (fax)
http://www/stc.org

Manager's Report:

We are like the 'living' documents we create

By Raymond E. Urgo, P&P SIG Manager

It was the best of times.
It was the worst of times.
It was, "the times, they are a'changin'."

These words are from Charles Dickens and Bob Dylan. They describe the essence of what I am hearing lately from fellow policies and procedures specialists with whom I consult, teach, coach, and meet, both in my P&P practice and as the SIG's Manager.

P&P specialists are seeking assistance and speaking about changes in careers, work roles, types of employment, ways of promoting their talents and services, and balancing their work lives with family, health, and recreational interests. Some are responding to changing circumstances due to shifts in the economy, termination of employment, or health issues.

Others are stretching to grow and prepare for new challenges just to be more fulfilled, such as a second career or new focus within our profession. Still others are perfectly satisfied with their life and career, yet sense a need for continuous improvement to avoid the loss of their present state of fulfillment.

Most policies and procedures documents that we develop are "living" documents. They require maintenance to capture the changes in systems, operations, and organizational practices they reflect. Some P&P documents require changes only to improve the communication of information within the documents.

How ironic: we are like the living documents we are responsible for; forever changing to reflect the needs and circumstances of which we are a part. And sometimes only for the sake of continuous improvement in ourselves.

Looking forward to seeing you at the upcoming STC Annual Conference in Baltmore!

Education Corner

Introduction to Policies and Procedures Communication

A Web-Based Course

University of California, Los Angeles Extension

Dates:	July 15 to September 9, 2004
Fee:	$550
Course No.:	439.19
Instructor:	Raymond E. Urgo
Contact:	UCLA Extension 310-825-4192 or www.uclaextension.edu

Member Profile: Vicki J. Wade

S&S: Can you briefly describe your background for our readers?

VW: A graduate of two-year (Des Moines Area Community College) and four-year (Drake University) institutions, I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in English before starting a career at Grinnell College in 1997. I recall my first experience with technical writing at the community college level – I was asked to instruct the class, through rhetoric and illustration, on how to create an origami model. As a detail-oriented individual, the assignment was love at first attempt!

S&S: Tell us about your responsibilities.

VW: I'm a Service Specialist in the Office of College Services at Grinnell College, where I work with all levels of staff in the departments of Human Resources, Information Technology, Dining and Mail Services and the College Bookstore. Together, we create and evaluate department policies and procedures, refresh or develop documentation for internal and external audiences, and use surveys to gather feedback about our services and publications.

S&S: What do you like most about your job?

VW: What I like most about my current position is the opportunity to blend the best of two worlds – publication development (print and online resources) and team collaboration.

S&S: How do you define P&P?

VW: I'm hoping that officers and other members of STC, including my local chapter, will assist me in forming a personal definition of policies and procedures. I'm excited to learn more about the organization's standards for effective P&Ps and check the STC Web site often for articles and resources. I've found the newsletter, Steps & Specs, to be of tremendous value to me as a professional communicator.

S&S: How did you become involved in P&P communication? Was it by design or by default (by accident)?

VW: With my early interests in writing and technical communication, I sought out opportunities to improve and showcase my skills in both areas – by design.

S&S: What advice would you give someone who wanted to get into P&P documentation?

VW: Join the Society for Technical Communication and any of the designated Special Interest Groups that target your interests. I'm also a member of STC's Usability Special Interest Group. Communicating with others in the industry is important, as is talking with workplace colleagues who are willing to share your organization's history of policy and procedure creation and enforcement.

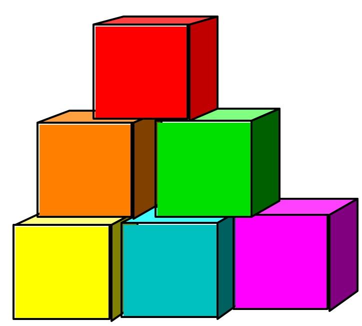
S&S: What do you like to do outside of P&P?

KP: When I'm not at work, I enjoy reading (especially biographies and historical non-fiction), traveling around the country with my husband and sons, a 13-year-old and 20-month-old, and all-day shopping trips. An avid animal lover, I live on an acreage outside Newton, Iowa, where I spend most of my free time with the loves of my life – a Miniature horse and a National Show horse.

Vicki Wade is a member of the Des Moines chapter of the STC.

Vicki can be reached at WADEV@Grinnell.EDU.

We're Building a Fresh New Look for Steps & Specs…



Thanks to all the P&P SIG members who sent in entries to the Steps & Specs "new name" contest.

The winning entry will be announced at the STC conference in Baltimore.

Our next step is to incorporate the new name with a new publication format. Watch for our progress in the next issue!

Hot Issues from the ListServ: Implementing a New P&P Process

Recently, Hillary Russak of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center posed an interesting question on the P&P ListServ.

Although there were many great responses to Hillary's question, we felt the answer from Chris Anderson of *Bizmanualz* was so informative, we should share it with all *Steps & Specs* readers.

Hillary: I'm implementing a new process for policy and procedure creation and I'd like feedback about how that process went for you. I know that policy and procedure creation processes vary greatly from organization to organization, but I'm wondering how long it took you to roll out a new process once it was developed. What's been your experience in your organization?

Chris: We have found that when a company does this for the first time, it takes longer than anticipated, involves more people than planned, and grows in complexity. To control this trend, we strongly advocate breaking the process into five phases with clear objectives set for each phase:

1. Discovery
2. Planning
3. Development
4. Implementation
5. Analysis, Review, and Optimization

Discovery starts by clearly identifying the mission, objectives, and the action plan. We like to include clear business objectives with agreed upon effectiveness criteria beyond compliance. Otherwise, the procedures look like overhead and an administrative waste of time to everyone else, making it more difficult to get their buy-in and participation. Once everyone agrees to the objectives and action plan, then we can start planning. This takes two to four weeks.

Planning starts with a gap analysis to determine the difference from reality to the objectives. It then takes the gap results, objectives and action plan, and produces the management materials needed to control the project and set the budget/expectations. This includes the project roles and responsibilities description, organization chart, MS project plan (activities, resources, dates, milestones, etc.), structure review, status reports, document control and format, process map, compliance requirements, training, implementation, testing, and audit planning. This stage takes two to four weeks to complete.

We are now one to two months into the project and have not written a single procedure. But, everyone understands the scope of the project, its relationship to the company objectives, and what their roles are in development. If we don't get buy-in by now we are in trouble.

If we start writing procedures without completing the Discovery and Planning phases, we can expect delays, cost overruns, scope creep, and a lot of re-writes once the missing elements are discovered. This eventually leads to the feeling that nobody wants to work on the project anymore due to the lack of organization and increasing levels of frustration. But if we spend the time to plan well, the development and implementation phases run a lot smoother.

Development starts with identifying a group of related processes and completing just that group. Follow the document control and format, use the review structure, perform a walk through of the related processes, test it for compliance and effectiveness, and then move on to the next group until finished. This takes two to four months but depends on the number of processes, compliance requirements, resource constraints, and the skill and knowledge of the writers/reviewers.

Development also includes the creating of supporting documents such as job descriptions, forms, training plans, or collection of technical manuals, references, etc, for document control and later implementation.

As a rule of thumb we find that the Discovery, Planning, and Development phases take up 50 percent of the total project time but consume 80 percent of the project cost. We include the time of all personnel working on the project and not just the cost of the project leader (P&P specialist).

We are now three to six months into the project. We have completed the procedure writing and are ready for a complete document review. We do not recommend implementing a smaller group of processes until all processes are documented and reviewed as a whole system. Otherwise, there are re-writing and re-implementing processes and it takes longer to complete development. We will have a chance to improve the processes later.

Implementation starts with an assessment of employee skills and competencies to determine training gaps. Then training begins introducing the job descriptions, processes, procedures, and the relationship of people/tasks to objectives/effectiveness.

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This takes three to six months or about 50 percent of the project time to complete. We are working toward a stable system of processes and this takes time.

Implementation includes assessment, training, and auditing of the entire system against the objectives and compliance requirements. The length depends on number of employees, locations, and processes. We are now six to twelve months into the project and almost finished.

The last step is to **analyze** what's been done, review the lessons learned, and look for ways to improve performance, compliance, or effectiveness. The result is a new set of objectives and an action plan for the next period. Then we begin again. This phase overlaps with or replaces the discovery phase of the next year. It is a never-ending process.

Staffing for this depends on the number of employees, locations, compliance requirements, and processes involved. We suggest at least one full-time project leader that drives the project, manages document controls, leads the audits and reports to management on the overall effectiveness of the P&P process. Others are needed to create documents or perform audits. Obviously, there are a lot of variables to staffing requirements.

Using these five phases, we believe you can complete a project in six to twelve months. Less than six months is unrealistic for any size company and more than twelve months indicates a problem with scope (planning). If the organization is big and complex, then the problem should be broken down into smaller projects that focus on core processes. Another options is to use outside contractors to import the experience and "bandwidth" required.

How do you agree on your objectives, core processes, and effectiveness criteria? Well, that's a whole other story!

Chris Anderson is Managing Director of ***Bizmanualz, providing*** *companies worldwide with management tools to improve their effectiveness through well-written policies and procedures.*

Chris can be contacted by e-mail at chris@bizmanualz.com.

Editor's Survey - What Industry Do You Work In?

Recently, subscribers to the P&P ListServ were asked what industries they work in. The purpose was to find out if we should focus on specific industry issues when soliciting articles for the newsletter.

Several respondents said they would like to contact others in their field to discuss mutual challenges. The P&P ListServ is a great place to start! The instructions for subscribing are included elsewhere in this issue.

So what's next? I would like to hear from some of the large group of P&P members who work in Financial Services. Tell me what topics interest you, or even better, send me an article at lois.marsh@bmonb.com.

The survey results are shown below and are based on 49 responses.

Industry	# Responses	% of Total
Financial Services	16	32.7
Technical	9	18.4
Legal/Government	6	12.2
Human Services	6	12.2
Manufacturing	4	8.2
Business Services	3	6.1
P&P Consultants	3	6.1
Sales	2	4.1
Creative	0	0.0

Working in a Virtual Team

By Lois Marsh

Just over a year ago, I joined a group of writers and editors formed by uniting two teams – one in Southern Ontario and the other in Northern Alberta. We're about 1,000 miles and two time zones apart.

Each team initially served a different group of clients, and there were significant work culture differences. I think we all knew it would be challenging, especially since budget constraints meant we wouldn't have a chance to meet face-to-face in the foreseeable future. So what did we learn in this first year?

Well, we all mastered the time zone difference pretty quickly. Our e-mail system was set up to automatically convert Mountain Time to Eastern Time and vice versa for meeting requests, and we all learned to respect different starting, quitting and lunch times.

Much harder, though, was avoiding misunderstandings due to the limitation of the written word. E-mail just isn't a substitute for "face time", and building team synergy took many months.

Because our manager is located in Edmonton, the Toronto team sometimes felt the Edmonton gang had more influence on policy-making and strategic decisions.

The solution? She instituted regular conference calls with each of the Toronto team members. We got to set the agenda and could use the time any way we liked – to blow off steam, brainstorm, ask for help in resolving differences, or just run creative ideas by her. These meetings have continued, and we all appreciate getting the opportunity for some quality, even if virtual, time with our manager.

Team meetings presented a different challenge. These took the form of weekly conference calls, and it took us several weeks to overcome some unexpected barriers.

Because there were no visual cues, it became more important than usual to facilitate meetings effectively so everyone's comments and concerns were heard.

In addition, our speakerphones are "single-phase", meaning they can only pass voice signals one way at a time.

Some of our faster speakers had to learn to leave pauses instead of speaking quickly without breathing for several sentences. After all, listeners at the other end can't "hold their hands up" to get the speaker's attention!

We also had to remember to introduce ourselves each time we started to speak, since some of our voices are similar. And of course, cross-conversations are a definite "no-no" on conference calls!

Resources

While researching virtual teamwork issues, I came across a great website that offers inexpensive "Virtual Teamwork Tips" booklets.

It's http://www.YouCanWorkFromAnywhere.com, the site of Phil Montero, "The Mobile Man". And kudos to my Manager: she had already incorporated many of the suggestions!

Here are some pointers from Phil's booklet, "2-Minute Virtual Team Tips" to keep in mind:

Remote Staff

- Your Manager can't see your body language, so learn to escalate effectively (and early!)
- We take a lot for granted (our virtual Manager may need coaching). For instance, if your Manager is the type of person who relies on visual cues to alert him/her to trouble, you need to be proactive about expressing frustration or unhappiness with his/her decisions.

Remote Managers

- Time zones aren't the only issue. You can't see when your remote staff is stressed-out or unhappy. Make time for regular, one-on-one phone meetings with your virtual staff where they can set the agenda, or just "pick your brains or vent".

Lois Marsh is a P&P writer and editor with BMO Bank of Montreal in Toronto, Canada.

Lois can be contacted at lois.marsh@bmonb.com.