

**Re-thinking what you do**

**Case study: stepping outside your comfort zone**



# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators  
Spring 2013

**My first year as a technical communicator**

**Recruit a technical communicator**

**Volunteer in a mechanical role**

**Read about MadCap Flare 9**





## President's view

### Being in a team does not protect you

I have been recruiting technical communicators for customer teams and building Technical Communication (TC) teams for 18 years, and it never ceases to amaze me how complacent individuals within teams tend to become the longer the team is in place. Sole and freelance technical communicators are much more likely to be ISTC members, or active in the TC community than those who are part of a team. You may feel less exposed in a team; not such an imperative to know what's going on elsewhere. But TC teams are always vulnerable.

Many bosses imagine that a smaller team could get the same job done, or that a team twice the size, but costing half as much in the Philippines would fit better with their global supply chain strategy.

My 3di colleagues and I often receive CVs from technical communicators made redundant after years in the same TC team. They emerge, blinking into the light to find the TC world has moved on and they feel unprepared. Are you a member of the ISTC, I ask? I used to be but let it lapse, they say.

Sole technical communicators made redundant are typically better prepared because they have spent time being the only expert and have had to keep abreast of developments. Team members feel safe and protected and so do not make the effort. Caricatures I know, but not without foundation. This is one key reason why the ISTC has introduced a new group membership discount scheme.

### New group membership discount

We introduced this scheme as part of this year's subscription renewal and

I am pleased to say we have had a number of teams sign up. Groups can sign up at any time through the year and existing members can transfer at any time. There are discounts to reflect how many join at the same time and for how many years they commit.

### Now's a good time to get together

Are you a member of a TC team? Or are there several of you spread throughout your organisation? Maybe you are the only one who is an ISTC member (as far as you know). Or maybe you're not a member but you know a colleague who is and you keep borrowing their *Communicator* journal!

This new offer from the ISTC might provide the ideal opportunity to encourage your colleagues and your bosses to invest in the benefits that the ISTC has to offer. The savings are significant, as are the benefits of being part of a professional membership organisation.

### A shared framework makes you stronger

Our experience of helping teams around the country suggests that you need to try and get people engaged individually, and use the combination of shared ISTC membership, and the team environment, to start discussing wider issues and development. When two or more of you attend area group meetings, conference, a training course, or even a webinar together, it helps to encourage open discussion and a sense of being in a team.

It also helps to smooth the rough edges between individual technical communicators that have joined a company with radically different backgrounds. ISTC membership will provide more opportunities to understand and appreciate unfamiliar perspectives, and help establish agreement on standards, process, priorities and value.

### You benefit, and so does your employer

The benefits for the employer can be significant too. For example, would they like to encourage a more outward-looking perspective? Although you may have opportunities to share what you are all working on with each other, and although some of the team may make a point of seeking out what's going on with the TC community outside, would they like this to happen significantly more than it does?

Maybe they would also like to see a

more focussed approach to developing technical communication-based professional skills, in addition to the ones about your company's technology or business practices. The ISTC has a fast evolving Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme (see article on page 10), providing a framework for learning that can complement what your company's HR department may be trying to achieve.

### A boost to your reputation

Finally, there are benefits to your employer of its skilled staff being visible and active in the wider TC community; for reputation, recruiting, and being seen to be leading, or at least part of, the debate, and the continuing development of the TC profession.

Within the UK, the ISTC is the best-positioned forum and professional environment for delivering these benefits to your TC team.

### It costs less, and we make it easy

We understand organisational budgets are tight, and time is short. So naturally, we have structured this offer so it is significantly cheaper than individual membership, and we will help the process along as follows:

1. We will provide you with a briefing pack for your team, and a Council member will be happy to visit and explain the benefits at your next team meeting.
2. When the company submits a list of initial applicants - these could be based anywhere in the world, and be existing, lapsed or new ISTC members; we will provide a simple form to capture the information.
3. Individuals will be contacted directly by the ISTC with a Welcome Pack and receive the appropriate membership grade for their experience.
4. The company pays one invoice for all the initial applicants at the discounted rate.

The ISTC now provides a framework of individual membership, discounted to reflect the numbers of potential members in your organisation. A team that learns together has a stronger sense of pride, is better able to protect itself, and the individuals are better able to thrive beyond it. **C**

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