Direction

The Newsletter of the STC Policies & Procedures Special Interest Group

1st Quarter 2005

Welcome to Direction

As you can see, our P&P newsletter has a whole new look! As previously announced, Adrienne Escoe provided the new title, *Direction*. The newsletter also has a great new logo, the “P&P signpost”, courtesy of our designer, Leslie Schoenecker. Leslie also worked with Webmaster Janice Haskins to produce a user-friendly page design.

Janice and Leslie worked hard across several time zones to produce the final product – Janice is located in Bermuda, and Leslie’s in Washington State, U.S.A.

Steps and Specs, the original newsletter, has an honorable past. Check out the archives to read issues from the first ten years. *Direction* has the same important mandate for our SIG: to provide information that helps you develop your skills in the P&P field of communication.

We hope you like the new format. It has a lot more flexibility than the old PDF format. And of course, we still offer a print version for you long-distance commuters!

A special thank you to Macromedia Corporation for generously donating RoboInfo as a gift to Adrienne Escoe, the winner of the P&P SIG’s newsletter renaming contest. And last, but not least, thanks to the rest of the redesign team for their input: Gem Smith, Kelli Pharo, Candie McKee, and SIG Manager, Raymond Urgo.

If you have comments or suggestions about the new format, send a message to the Editor at: *lois.marsh@bmo.com*. And of course, articles and announcements are always welcome!

Here’s to the next ten years!

About *Direction*

Direction is a quarterly publication of the STC Policies & Procedures community.

We invite announcements, articles, and other items from the technical communication community for publication. Send copy in MS Word or plain text format to the editor at: lois.marsh@bmo.com. Reprints from *Direction* are permitted on request.

The newsletter team hopes you enjoyed reading this newsletter. Please send us an e-mail about issues with resolution, formatting, contents, or anything else that is of concern, no matter how small.

We would also like to hear positive comments: Which article did you find useful? What worked for you? What would you like to see more of?

If you or a P&P member you know has been published or recognized, let *Direction* know by e-mailing us and we'll make an announcement.

Please address all newsletter correspondence to lois.marsh@bmo.com.

P&P News and Announcements

Introduction to Policies & Procedures Communication (Web-based course)
University of California, Los Angeles Extension
Dates: April 28 through June 23, 2005
Fee: $550. ($500 for STC members)
Course# 439.19
Reg# not yet available
Instructor: Raymond E. Urgo (rurgo@urgoconsulting.com)
Contact: UCLA Extension 310/825-4192 or www.uclaextension.edu

Volunteer needed as Membership Coordinator
The P&P SIG seeks a volunteer to serve as Membership Coordinator.
Responsibilities include:
- Receive monthly membership reports from STC Office.
- Send e-mail welcome messages to new members
- Monitor and report membership statistics to SIG Manager.
- Submit a news brief about membership to SIG's newsletter, "Direction".
- Upon request, coordinate searches to link fellow members of common interests and locales.

Estimated time commitment: 1-2 hours per month
Contact: Raymond Urgo at rurgo@urgoconsulting.com

Manager's Report: Transformation, the P&P SIG, and P&P

By Raymond E. Urgo, P&P SIG Manager

Many of us have already read or heard that STC is undergoing a transformation to provide greater value to our members. I define transformation as a radical change in the structure and function of something, in this case our organization. STC's Transformation Team has a vision of what STC should look like in the future. That vision came from members in all communities and all levels of involvement within STC.

One part of the transformation effort is for each STC community (chapters and SIGs) to recharter itself. With participation from more than a half dozen participants, our SIG is in the final stages of rechartering itself for approval by the STC Board in May. The proposed charter calls for expansion of our SIG's mandate into information and research on and about policies and procedures as a means of producing new resources on our specialty. Although not part of our formal rechartering, the unveiling of our new newsletter name, logo, and digitized media in this edition reflects the foresight of Lois Marsh, our Editor, and her newsletter team in transforming the newsletter to better reflect our SIG and our members' needs (see Welcome to Direction). I plan to report more about our rechartering in the months ahead.

If approved by a vote of the STC membership, another proposed change will involve transforming the structure and function of each SIG to more closely resemble those of STC chapters. For example, SIGs would be required to have elected, rather than appointed, leaders. We would have our own bylaws and other practices for financial accountability. STC will be providing information about these proposed changes to its membership.

The proposed changes have important implications to the future existence and operations of the P&P SIG. I am not advocating a position at this time; rather, I am urging each of us to stay tuned to STC's announcements of these proposals for further details. If the proposed changes are approved, I believe there will be enormous opportunities for volunteers to develop or revamp policies and procedures information in the form of guidelines, bylaws, and other operating practices throughout the various STC communities including our own SIG. As many of us know, restructuring and other transformation endeavors in organizations usually require new or revised policies and procedures. If anything, it sure is nice to know that organizational transformation requires our policies and procedures talents...so please stay tuned. For further information on STC's transformation, see http://www.stc.org/transformation/.

Information: It's All About Retrievability, Part 2 - Writing Policies

by Melanie G. Flanders

This is the second of two articles by Melanie that re-cap her presentations at last spring's STC Conference in Baltimore.

The Information Mapping® structured writing methodology identifies seven basic categories of information, or *information types*. All information, depending on its purpose or function for the reader, can be placed into one of these categories. The seven information types are:

- Procedure
- Process
- Structure
- Concept
- Principle
- Fact
- Classification

A *policy* is classified as a principle in that it is a statement of what should or should not be done. A policy is often a statement that expresses an organization's rules, its operating philosophy, its ethics and values, and its plans for its employees and for the organization itself.

Before You Begin

Policy documents, like most pieces of writing, require planning and organization of the information before you begin. Consider the following:

- What is the context for the policy? Why is it being implemented?
- Who is your audience?
  - What is their educational background?
  - Is English their native language?
  - Who does the policy affect?
  - Will they be receptive to the policy?
- How complex is the policy?
  - Does the policy need examples to illustrate its implementation?
  - Are there procedures associated with the policy?

Using a Structured Writing Methodology to Write Policy Documents

Sometimes a policy is simply delivered in a memo. One of the more common types of policy documents is the employee handbook. Often, a policy document is a combination of policies and procedures or a series of policies, decision tables, and procedures based on the decision or option taken.

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When developing a policy, include an example that presents a situation in which the policy is correctly implemented when appropriate. If there is room for confusion or misinterpretation, include an example of incorrect implementation. Never bury the important information; always label important information clearly so that it stands out.

When presenting information as a principle or policy, apply these guidelines:

- Create a separate block for information that contains rules or similar information.
- Label the information so that it clearly indicates the type of information in the block.
- Use active, imperative voice.
- If the policy or rule is complex or abstract, include an example.
- Use examples that are highly visual.
- When a clear exception or violation exists, create an exception or violation block.

Policy Statement Examples

When using a structured writing methodology to create important policy statements, you may want to use the policy sentence as the map title. For example, the map title for a policy concerning use of a community swimming pool might be "Swimming Is Permitted Only When a Lifeguard Is on Duty."

In FIGURE 1 (see below), the policy is stated as the map title and reiterated in the first block, which is labeled Policy, to emphasize the importance of the policy statement. Because people are inclined to disobey the rules, or feel that simply being in a pool is not swimming in it, the policy clarifies the term "pool use" so that there is no room for hedging or misinterpretation. The next two blocks provide addition, yet important information concerning the hours of operation for the pool. The last block contains an exception statement; since the policy is for the pool to be closed on Mondays and the opening and closing dates for the pool are Mondays, the policy clarifies any confusion that may arise for people.

FIGURE 1:

Swimming Is Permitted Only When a Lifeguard Is on Duty

Policy	No one is allowed to use the community pool unless a lifeguard is on duty.
Definition: pool use	Use of the pool includes swimming, wading, sitting, dangling one's legs in the water, putting one's face in the water., or having any part of the human body come in contact with the water contained in the pool.
Seasonal pool time	The swimming pool area opens on Memorial Day each year and closes at 8 p.m. on Labor Day.
Pool hours of operation	Although residents can use their keys to access the pool area at any time, the pool is available for use from 12 noon until 8 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. The pool is closed on Mondays. **Exceptions:** The pool is open on Memorial Day and Labor Day.

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In FIGURE 2 (see below), the policy content is obvious from the map title. Because having pets on a leash is critical, the label for the policy contains that information rather than simply “policy.” To help clarify the policy, the second and third blocks contain examples of types of pets that are allowed and types of pets that are not allowed. The fourth block lists the animals that are native to the park, and the last block explains the consequences of not following the policy.

FIGURE 2:

Policy Concerning Animals in the Park

All pets must be leashed

All pets must be on a leash at all times and the owner must be able to control the pet. *No exceptions!*

Types of pets allowed

You may bring the following types of pets into the park:

- dogs of all sizes
- small pigs that do not weigh more than 70 pounds
- domestic cats that do not weigh more than 20 pounds

Types of pets not allowed

The following animals are ***not*** allowed in the park:

- chickens
- wolves, coyotes, or foxes
- lions, tigers, cougars, or other wild cats
- monkeys, chimpanzees, and apes
- alligators or crocodiles

Animals that live in the park

The following animals live in the park and may ***not*** be leashed or removed from the park:

- squirrels
- rabbits
- raccoons
- opossums
- ducks, geese, swans, and other assorted waterfowl
- turtles
- armadillos

Penalties for failure to comply with this policy

Owners who do not keep their pets on a leash will be issued a citation and fined $50.

Anyone bringing any type of animal that is not allowed in the park will be fined $200. If appropriate, the animal in question may be confiscated.

Anyone who removes a live animal that is native to the park will be fined $100 and the animal will be confiscated.

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FIGURE 3 (see below) shows a document that includes both a policy and a procedure. The initial block states the policy. Subsequent blocks provide an example and additional important information concerning the policy, such as the timeframe for submitting assignments and the policy for late assignments. The last block is a procedure that describes how to actually attach a file and upload it to the assignment drop box.

FIGURE 3:

Submitting Assignments

Policy	You must submit all assignments that are to be graded through the appropriate WebCT assignment dropbox. The instructor cannot provide you with a grade unless you submit your files to the appropriate box.
Example	To submit the Activity 1 assignment, locate the Activity 1 Web Comparison assignment dropbox and follow the instructions for submitting your file(s).
Timeframe for submitting assignments	All assignment dropboxes have been given a date when you may start submitting assignments to it. The assignment dropbox will accept your files until 11:55 p.m. on the date that the assignment is due. You may submit assignments up to 48 hours after the assignment due date, but WebCT will flag your assignment as "Late."
Due dates for assignments	To determine the due date for an assignment, consult the Course Schedule page.
Late assignments	Once the 48-hour grace period has passed, the assignment dropbox closes and you will be unable to submit an assignment.
Procedure: submitting an assignment to an assignment box	To submit an assignment to its corresponding assignment dropbox, perform these steps:

Step	Action
1	Log onto WebCT and enter this course.
2	On the Home page, click the dropbox icon or the text **Click to submit assignments**.
3	From the list of assignment dropboxes that are displayed, select the one that corresponds to the assignment you want to submit. • If the dropbox is accepting assignments and the due date has not yet occurred, a pencil icon is displayed to the left of the box label. • If the assignment is due within 48 hours, a pencil and a clock are displayed. • If the assignment due date has passed but the cut-off date has not, a wristwatch is displayed. • If the assignment dropbox is unavailable, no icons are displayed.
4	Click the **Upload File** button.
5	Navigate to where your file is located, select the file, and click **Open**.

Although the examples are short, they contain enough information to demonstrate good constructs for policies. The advantage of using a modular, structured writing methodology is that the information jumps out at you rather than being buried in a series of ordinary paragraphs.

Melanie G. Flanders, a senior STC member, is Chief Information Architect for KnowledgeMasters, Inc., which is based in Houston, Texas. She was certified in the Information Mapping® methodology in 1984, and has been a practitioner in structured writing technology for over 20 years.

Are Printed Manuals History?

By Pastor Cordero, Caracas - Venezuela

For a long time, printed manuals were the primary medium for distributing procedures to an organization´s staff. These were formal documents that described the “must do’s” for tasks, control mechanisms, and even policies used for decision-making. Probably, it was this formal character that made readers complain that procedure manuals were “boring”, “hard to use”, “difficult to keep it up to date”, etc. Any information developer will concede these complaints were often justified, however, there is no question that we all accept the principle that it is convenient, even necessary to have manuals. That is why it is necessary to find a way to resolve problems inherent in printed manuals.

The answer seems to be moving them from paper to the web. I recently conducted an informal survey of our P&P SIG members through the Listserv. The results revealed that 70% of users expect to find their policies and procedures on a website. And why not? For a P&P user, it is easier and more fun to navigate through a website, instead of checking out a book, which is sometimes thick and heavy. Another result from the same survey shows that most users can access a website nowadays. If we add the benefits of developing “on-line” manuals, like keeping the content up to date and delivering it to the user faster and easier, there seems to be no question about the web being the best medium for P&P manuals.

So, can we leave the old printed manual behind us? Is it definitely part of history? To answer those questions, we have to answer another one first: What are we going to do with those users who prefer their job specifications in paper format? As the survey shows, a considerable number of users still prefer paper instead of screens (more than 33%). Some interesting comments collected through the survey indicate that some organizations have an on-line manual with “printing options”, because most of their users demand this. Another result of the survey points to the role of printed manuals as a back-up for the on-line version. For all these reasons, printed manuals are not completely out of the picture.

In conclusion, we can say that the old printed P&P manual and its three-ring binder has lost its leading role to the web medium, but it is still around. Printed manuals are still necessary as backups or just because some people hate to read on-screen. After all, humanity has used paper for ages, and is not easy to eradicate such an old habit. The detailed results of the survey are shown below.

Survey Results

1. When you talk about P&P manuals, do your users expect:	
a) A three-ring binder with printed P&P	26.7%
b) A website with P&P	73.3%
2. Are your organization's P&P manuals on-line?	
a) Yes	86.7%
b) No	13.3%
3. Does your organization have the required IT for on-line manuals:	
a) At every location?	66.7%
b) At most of the locations?	33.3%
c) Only at headquarters?	0%

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4. How many employees can access on-line manuals:

a) More than 75%	86.7%
b) Between 50 and 75%	13.3%
c) Between 25 and 50%	0%
d) Less than 25%	0%

5. Are you running any software applications for on-line manuals?

a) No	75%
b)Yes	25%

6. Your printed P&P manual has:

a) More content than its on-line version	9.09%
b) Same content as its on-line version	54.5%
c) Less content than its on-line version	36.4%

7. Descriptions in the printed P&P manual have:

a) More details than on-line manuals	9.09%
b) Same details as on-line manuals	72.7%
c) Less details than on-line manuals	18.2%

8. In your opinion, using a printed P&P manual is:

a) Easier than on-line manuals	33.3%
b) Harder than on-line manuals	66.7%

9. Nowadays, the printed P&P manual´s role is:

a) Main source for job specifications	12.5%
b) Backup for on-line manuals	43.8%
c) No role at all	43.8%

10. Your users will need printed P&P manuals for:

a) Another year	41.7%
b) At least another 3 years	16.7%
c) Permanent	41.7%

References

- Web Delivery of Corporate Policies & Procedures, Jeanette P. Evans (Proceedings, STC 2002)
- Page Stephen: Establishing a System of Policies & Procedures, page 111
- Media of the Future: Web? Paper? by Janice C. (Ginny) Redish, Intercom – January 2005

Pastor Cordero teaches P&P writing at Simon Rodriguez University and manages documentation projects as an independent consultant in Caracas, Venezuela. He has worked in various roles as Procedures Analyst, Project Manager and P&P Manager for companies and government agencies since 1988. Pastor Joined STC in May 2002.

Ralph Robinson Honored with SIG Service Award

At the recommendation of the Policies and Procedures SIG leadership team, the STC Board recently voted to honor Ralph E. Robinson with the STC Distinguished SIG Service Award for his contributions to the P&P SIG and STC's SIG program.

Ralph has contributed to the P&P SIG and its discipline in a variety of capacities since the mid 1990s. He is among the foremost experts in the SIG on developing and managing policies and procedures for organizations seeking ISO (International Organization of Standards) certification.

He authored articles for Steps & Specs, our SIG's newsletter, and contributed resources on policies and procedures to our website. At STC Annual Conferences, he delivered presentations and moderated panel sessions and networking table discussions sponsored by the SIG on policies and procedures communication.

Ralph led the committee for STC's SIG Program to create recommended guidelines for recognizing the distinguished services of SIG members. This resulted in the present "Distinguished SIG Service Award."

Ralph is someone who we have come to count on to assist and support the P&P SIG and the STC SIG Program in a variety of ways.

The citation for Ralph's award, to be presented during the STC Annual Conference in May, reads: *For dedicated contributions since the mid 1990's to the Policies & Procedures Special Interest Group – as an author of articles, conference speaker, and supportive volunteer.*

For further information about Ralph, see Member Profile: Ralph E. Robinson.

Member Profile: Ralph E. Robinson

Direction: Tell us about your business background and how you got into technical communication.

RR: I started out in the security department of Garrett Manufacturing which ultimately became Honeywell Engines Systems & Services of Mississauga, Ontario in Canada. I became friends with the Manager of the Engineering Publications Department and during a conversation, I expressed my desire to find a more challenging opportunity. One thing led to another and I ended up being transferred into his department in 1987 as a technical writer (I had never heard the term before then). I entered this wonderful profession with only a love of the language and a proficiency in writing articles about motor racing that had been published in local newspapers.

I'm now employed by Appendix Publishing Inc., the suppliers of technical writing services to Honeywell. I have managed all the documentation required to support Honeywell's ISO 9001 registration since 1994 and their ISO 14001 registration since 2002.

To increase my skills, I began taking tech writing courses at local college and universities and during one of the sessions the subject of ISO 9000 and its requirement for documentation came up. I talked with my then Manager and he allowed me to investigate the company's efforts in this regard and I became involved with the initial implementation of ISO 9000 at the company in 1993. When our first attempt at registration failed and document control was identified as a major weakness, I was given the opportunity to take on this responsibility and have done so since that time.

Direction: What's the biggest P&P challenge that you face in your industry or specialty?

RR: The greatest challenge has been getting people to recognize the importance of "properly written" procedures and work instructions and the need to follow them. For many organizations, just putting something on paper was sufficient and "operator customization" (doing it their own way) was a fact of life. In the early days of my work, it was surprising to hear mid-management question the need for procedures and work instructions and even more shocking to hear them question whether anyone ever followed the ones that did exist.

Direction: Tell us about your audience and how it has changed over the years.

RR: My audience includes all the 1,000 or so employees at the Honeywell site in Mississauga. It's a very diverse group with education levels from incomplete high school to PhD, and language proficiency from barely able to speak English to university-trained engineers. English is not the mother tongue of a significant number of our employees. Initially many of the employees felt they knew how to do their jobs properly (and often they did) but there was quite a difference from one to another on how tasks were actually accomplished. We also had an environment where Quality Inspection was a major force in ensuring our products met requirements.

Now, many of the employees expect to find fully documented procedures and work instructions for any new processes they come in contact with, and, I'm pleased to say, take an active role in suggesting improvements to both the processes and the documentation that supports it. Today, we no longer have Quality Inspectors per se; instead, each person takes ownership of his or her own work. Our focus now is on developing processes and documenting them in a manner that inherently assures a quality outcome.

Direction: Ralph, you've had such a distinguished career. Tell us about some of the highlights.

RR: I have written three books on the subject of ISO documentation and was invited to contribute to an edited work by Drs. Peter Hager and H. J. Scheiber titled Managing Global Communications in Science and Technology that was published in 1999.

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I joined the STC in 1988 and am a Senior Member of the Toronto Chapter, which honored me in 2000 with a Distinguished Chapter Service Award for my work within the chapter and the community. I have spoken at STC Conferences for ten years on subjects dealing with documenting ISO standards, policy and procedure writing, quality, and developing online learning courses. I was a member of the Quality SIG for five years and served as its Manager for two. I joined the P&P SIG in the mid-1990s.

In early 2000, Raymond Urgo, as Assistant to the President for SIGs, approached me and asked if I would be interested in helping develop a recognition award system for SIGs. I was honored at the invitation and completed the project last year. We now have a recognition awards program for SIGs and SIG members at the Society level.
In 1998 I became involved with the joint ISO/IEC Subcommittee that is trying to develop international standards for Software and Systems Engineering as a member of Working Group 2. This group deals exclusively with documentation issues and I was asked to serve as the Canadian delegate for the group in 2002.

From 1993 to 2001, I served on the Faculty Advisory Committee of the Technical Manual Writing Course at Humber College in Toronto. For the last two years, I chaired the committee. I have taught the Documenting Management Systems module of a post-graduate course on Quality in Manufacturing at Sheridan College in Brampton, Ontario for the past seven years and hopefully have passed on an appreciation for accurate, clearly written, and useable P&P documentation to over 135 students.

Ralph Robinson can be reached by email at: r2inovatns@look.ca.

2005 Conference Update

by Dawnell Claessen, Conference Proposal Coordinator

Last Summer I submitted three proposals to the Seattle Conference Committee on behalf of the Policies and Procedures SIG. Our plan was to put on two progression sessions and one panel discussion. A number of you volunteered to present or speak as part of our group.

Regrettably, none of the three proposals that were submitted on behalf of the Policies and Procedures SIG were selected. This means that, unfortunately, none of these programs will be presented and there will be no SIG-sponsored sessions at the Seattle conference.

The Stem manager told me that my proposals were not selected for three main reasons:

- The proposals I submitted were lacking sufficient detail and supporting materials.
- There may have been a problem with the electronic submission process, especially with the uploading of supporting materials.
- Stiff competition – less than half of the proposals submitted were selected.

As the conference proposal coordinator, I have taken these comments to heart. I plan to get an early start on the Las Vegas 2006 submission package.

If you would like to present in Las Vegas next year, please drop me a short e-mail. I will contact you as I start to put together our proposal later on this spring. At a minimum, the P&P SIG would like to put on one "Progression Session" *covering Topics in Policies and Procedures.*

To everyone who volunteered to speak as part of the Policies and Procedures SIG in Seattle, I thank you. I look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas!