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STC

STEPS & SPECS

Vol. 4, No.4 The newsletter of the STC Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group (SIG) December 1998

Documenting Procedures to Bill $4M a Month—A Memorable Project

By Raymond E. Urgo

The dilemma. I had been working three months as the only business systems and procedures analyst in a division when my boss (I'll call him Ted, the controller,) called me into his office. He was faced with a timely dilemma. The accounts receivable (A/R) clerk (I'll call her Betty) who reported to him had given notice to take retirement in three weeks.

For the previous 36 years, Betty was the only person who had handled accounts receivable duties for the division. In her last year, she was invoicing approximately $4 million per month for the division. Ted's concern was finding a suitable replacement in three weeks to learn and perform the job. Betty was unable to extend her employment.

No one else in the accounting department was interested in the position. And because the division was located in a depressed area that was undesirable for employment, Ted was now expecting difficulty in finding a replacement from the outside. As for transferring knowledge of the job, Ted specifically wanted me to find out and document the methods and procedures of Betty's A/R job, for which he knew little about, before Betty retired. I agreed to assist—a wise decision I supposed, since my pay and future depended upon accounts receivable revenues.

The constraints. As I began my new project, I discovered several constraints:

- Betty was my only information source. The existing A/R procedures were 12 years old and already outdated by two generations of information systems.
- I had no previous experience with A/R.
- I was a novice to the division and the manufacturing industry.
- I had very little time to wind down other current projects and tackle my new one.

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25 Topics Posted to SIG LISTSERV over Five Months

By Audrey Cielinski Kessler

Since the first posting to the Policies and Procedures LISTSERV in June of this year, a total of 25 topics have been brought up for discussion. During its first few months of operation, LISTSERV topics have ranged from generating a policy on Web-site development and the standardizing of procedural documentation to soliciting volunteers for SIG leadership positions and recruiting presentation participants for the society's 1999 conference.

Here's a recap of topics posted from August through October of 1998:

- Help in writing a proposal for a policies and procedures manual
- Software for documenting processes and procedures in "a standardized, user-friendly manner" to be

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Inside . . .

52 Join P&P SIG from August through October

By Jerry A. Laing

From August through October, the P&P SIG gained 52 new members, bringing the total membership count to 549. This report reflects membership totals through October. We welcome the following new members:

- **Mark Adams** *(TX)*
- **Cynthia Belk** (NC)
- **Kenneth Brod** (CA)
- **Charles Burzalow** (MA)
- **Athena Chiladakis** (CA)
- **Kenneth Clark** (OH)
- **Julie Conlon** (IN)
- **Marilou Cook** (MN)
- **Ann Davis** (OH)
- **Michael DeFilippo** (TN)
- **Tuesday Devin** (IL)
- **Lief Erickson** (MN)
- **Brenda Ernst** (IL)
- **Toni Ferguson** (GA)
- **Zyppora Goldberg** (PA)
- **Pauline Graf** (Canada)
- **Eileen Hartwig** (IL)
- **Tonya Haynes** (GA)
- **Georgann Henderson** (TX)
- **Stephen Henson** (LA)
- **Tracy Hill** (IL)
- **Kristen Imler** (CA)
- **Caroline Jarrett** (UK)
- **Debbie Karcher** (FL)
- **Kathy Kirkbride** (FL)
- **Linda Kirsch Baum** (AZ)
- **Steve Maarestad** (IA)
- **Deena Madnick** (MA)
- **Nancy McDonald** (OH)
- **Peter Niebergall** (Germany)
- **Debra Nyberg** (CA)
- **Vanessa O'Neil** (WI)
- **Teeoh Otten** (MN)
- **Nancy Pearson** (PA)
- **Stephen Perrin** (CA)
- **Audrey Putnam** (MN)
- **Diane Resop** (NJ)
- **Tamara Savino** (GA)
- **Suzanne Searby** (CA)
- **Damita Shaw** (TN)
- **John Smietan** (CA)
- **Erin Stanley** (TX)
- **Heather Stehney** (PA)
- **Linda Stiles** (Canada)
- **Ardeth Taber-Dudas** (VA)
- **Angela Taylor** (GA)
- **Heather Toma** (CA)
- **Margaret Vanell** (TN)
- **Letitia Walker** (OH)
- **Linda Winning** (MN)
- **Ann Wyman** (CA)
- **Neil Yates** (Australia)

***Jerrold A. Laing** is the P&P SIG membership team leader and a member of the San Gabriel (CA) chapter of STC. He can be contacted via email at jal_docs@pacbell.net or by phone at (626) 445-0100.*

Deadline for the March 1999 issue:
February 15, 1999 !!!

Please email articles to Michelle_1962@yahoo.com

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Articles accepted for publication are subject to editing for clarity, style and space.

Book Review:

How to Write Policies, Procedures & Task Outlines

By Tom Tomasovic

The goal of any effort to document policies and procedures is to provide complete, clear, and current information in a timely manner to those who need it. Any text that addresses this issue should speak clearly to that goal.

How to Write Policies, Procedures & Task Outlines, subtitled "Sending Clear Signals in Written Directions," was written in 1983 by Larry Peabody with contributions by John Gear (STC P&P SIG member and frequent contributor to the P&P SIG's LISTSERV). Its content is derived from the author's policy/procedure/task writing workshops. The second edition was published in 1996, to address advances in technology.

This is a workbook designed to provide tools to produce three types of related documents: policies, procedures and task outlines. As such, it is targeted toward those who are new to the discipline and are not professional writers. How then should professional technical communicators receive it?

I have seen several requests from professional writers (and have been approached myself) for advice on how to produce policies and procedures documents. In most cases, these requests come from writers who have no experience documenting corporate policies and procedures. Writing policies and procedures requires an emphasis on clarity and brevity, and the task can be daunting. A workbook like this one can be a valuable aid to fledgling or experienced procedure writers.

The book clearly defines and separates each of the areas and suggests a standard method for their production. You might choose to take issue with the author's distinction between a procedure and a task outline (the two are very similar), but he makes a good case.

Throughout the book, thorough planning, analysis and review are emphasized.

"It provides a succinct review of the writing process, including specific guidelines and checklists for producing efficient, effective documents."

Each of these processes is divided into a planning phase and an execution phase. Most of the book's suggestions aim at helping the writer with planning the task.

Does this book hold value for experienced procedure writers?

It provides a succinct review of the writing process, including specific guidelines and checklists for producing efficient, effective documents. Those with experience might choose to adopt its methods as a way to make their own processes more efficient. It can provide overworked and understaffed writing groups with a way to make better use of their "nonwriter" colleagues.

Do I have any significant reservations about this book? Only one. The second edition was written to incorporate advances in technology, and I am not sure that issue has been adequately addressed.

The author indicates that "[m]ost changes driven by the computer revolution don't affect the content of this book ..." The point is well taken. He goes on to say, "Where they do, this new edition suggests how to apply the material, regardless of the form your finished products take." Here, I do not see clear evidence. For example, clear directions are given for the physical layout of pages of 8-1/2 x 11 inch hardcopy manuals. Are there any directions (or guidelines) for presentation online? None that I could find. Techniques such as underlining headlines, clearly from the typewriter age, are

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PROCEDURES
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In those days, I hand wrote procedures from scratch and then was fortunate enough to key them into one of the few personal computers that we shared in the division.

Working with the A/R clerk. Betty was the subject matter expert. Undoubtedly, she knew her job inside and out. She was cooperative but not always patient when relating aspects of her job to me. Learning experts would probably describe her as an unconscious competent—someone who performs expertly but can't explain it. She and her job were so integrated that she performed her tasks almost blindly and with a rhythmic pattern. Like most procedure analysts, I spent time asking Betty lots of questions about methods and tasks in her job. I had to take notes very rapidly, and I collected samples of invoices, debit and credit memos, forms, logs, reports, computer screens, and letters. I ceased asking her to review my drafts when I saw she had no interest in doing so. As her termination date neared and no replacement was found, I think she began to realize how critical her services were to the livelihood of the division.

After the A/R clerk left. When Betty left, I had most of the key A/R procedures written but not tested. After two weeks with no replacement and no A/R activity, Ted contracted with a temporary agency for an accounting clerk. One day, Ted asked me to join the temp and himself to do the first invoicing since Betty's termination. Using the newly documented procedures as our guide, we successfully billed and mailed invoices and balanced accounts for several weeks of business. Ted eventually found and hired a permanent replacement. I gave the new person a set of the documented procedures and received some minor feedback about them. By the time this new A/R clerk was hired and began the position, my latest written A/R procedures were becoming outdated—a new information system was being implemented. Now I would need to revamp the A/R procedures to suit the new system.

...Concerning procedures analysis, I learned that it's one thing to study and document procedures for a job and another thing to use the procedures to do the job...

Results. While following the written procedures, we discovered areas for streamlining certain methods and tasks that Betty had been performing unnecessarily. In some instances, she had been performing tasks to manually check the accuracy of computer output. In other instances, she was performing tasks to accommodate previous information systems and manual invoicing methods. Eventually, we eliminated the use of a 1950s mimeograph machine used to create special invoices for certain customers.

Lessons learned. This project is memorable for the knowledge I gained about procedures analysis, work performance, accounts receivable and business. Concerning procedures analysis, I learned that it's one thing to study and document procedures for a job and another thing to use the procedures to do the job. Regarding work performance, I learned how a person in the same position for a long time has a tendency to use routines that are no longer relevant. Accounts receivable understanding of communication between companies with their debit and credit memos can be a nightmare. Concerning business, I learned everyone is replaceable, even if it initially takes three people to do one person's job. I have one key recommendation to offer: never overlook the importance of having well-written methods and procedures in place where one person's job has critical bearings on the organization's livelihood.

***Raymond E. Urgo**, Principal of Urgo & Associates, is a consultant specializing in policies and procedures communication for organizations. He is an instructor at UCLA Extension. He is the founder and first manager of STC's Policies & Procedures Special Interest Group.*

LISTSERV
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used in hardcopy and online formats

- Frustrations with formatting problems in Word 97
- (In)compatibility of FrameMaker and Word when importing Word documents into FrameMaker
- Experiences of others with service level agreements that are used between internal departments
- How to assign chapter headings in a Word document without needing to do extensive formatting
- Software suggestions for writing online tutorials
- Experiences of persons who have worked in the European marketplace
- Help with converting a policies and procedures manual with a topical index using section numbering to an online manual using a modular format
- Resources on "knowledge management"
- Incorporating Word documents (e.g., forms) into the text portion (rather than in a separate appendix) of a policies and procedures guide for administrative staff
- Suggestions for development of a job description for a policies and procedures writer/editor
- Feasibility of using a desired page-numbering format in the text and table of contents of a Word document
- Recommendations for flowcharting software
- Help with development of a job description for a policies and procedures writer
- Experiences of others who have used AuthorAssistant, the document management system for FrameMaker
- Experiences of others with Documentum's EDMS 98 as a document management tool

Of the 25 topics posted since June, most (nine) came during September. July and October each had six topic postings. June and August each had two topics posted.

Discussion topic possibilities are virtually endless. The only restriction is that they be pertinent to some aspect of policies and procedures. If you have an idea, question or comment that's important to you, share it with your fellow P&P professionals by posting it on the SIG's LISTSERV.

To post a message to the list, address your e-mail to **stcppsig-l@stc.org**. Specify a subject, and type your message in the body.

If you have not subscribed to the LISTSERV, you can do so by addressing an e-mail message to **majordomo@stc.org.** In the body of the e-mail, type the following: **subscribe stcppsig-l <your e-mail address>.**

***Audrey Cielinski Kessler** is the owner of The Write Hand, a writing, editing and desktop publishing company in Kent, Ohio, a senior member of the Northeast Ohio chapter of STC and manager of the Policies and Procedures SIG.*

P&P Progression Approved for STC Annual Conference

A six-topic policies and procedures progression has been approved for presentation at the STC Annual Conference next year in Cincinnati. The progression topics and presenters are as follows:

- Stephanie H. Copp, "Publishing Policies and Procedures on an Intranet"
- J. Richard Fleming, "Writing Clear Policies and Procedures on an Intranet"
- Jerri Houdayer, "Maintaining Policy and Procedure Authenticity on an Intranet"
- Audrey Cielinski Kessler, "Documenting Procedures After the Subject Expert Has Left the Organization"
- Elizabeth R. Turpin, "Policies and Procedures for Protecting Image and Accuracy in Company Publications"
- Raymond E. Urgo, "Contracting and Consulting for Policies and Procedures Engagements"

The progression moderator is Leanne Logan. More details about the P&P progression topics will be provided in the March issue of STEPS & SPECS.

P&P Happenings

Introduction to Policies & Procedures Communication. University of California, Los Angeles Extension

Instructor:
Raymond E. Urgo, principal, Urgo & Associates, Los Angeles

Dates:
January 26, 1999 (on-line, distance learning course)

February 6, 1999 (on-campus learning course)

For more information, please contact UCLA Extension at (310) 825-4192 or **http://www.unex.ucla. edu**.

BOOK REVIEW
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no longer regarded as "necessary" in the word processing environment, and may be counterproductive online.

Does this outweigh the significant value of the book? Probably not. The writing and planning principles presented here are sound and worthy of consideration. There is good information to be had here, and I would recommend this book as a primer on the P&P process. Experienced writers would do well to look for it in the library and give it a read before adding it to their own collection. Those teaching courses (or instructing colleagues) in the task could certainly use it as a text. Anyone who owns (or sees) the first edition should certainly consider carefully before upgrading to the new edition.

This new edition reminds (all of) us that the process of producing documents that instruct others in the performance of their tasks is ongoing and important, and it deserves to be done well.

For five years, ***Tom Tomasovic*** *worked in the P&P Unit of NatWest Markets, both as a writer/editor and a supervisor/developer. He previously reviewed* Nimble Documentation *and* Establishing a System of Policies and Procedures *for* STEPS & SPECS. *He created and presented a word processing system for the production of policies and procedures at the 1998 STC conference.*

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The mission of the Policies and Procedures special interest group is to assist STC members in developing, implementing and managing policies and procedures communication through educational and networking opportunities, STC conference sessions and publications, and communication with other STC SIGs and professional organizations in areas of common interest.