

Manager's Report: P&P SIG Leadership — Transitions

By Raymond E. Urgo



During the next few months, I will officially be stepping aside as the manager of the P&P SIG.

As some of you know, in 1993, I spearheaded the founding of our SIG and served as manager until 1998. I stepped back in as manager from 2003 until now. It was always my intention to be manager for a few years.

I feel it is now time to let someone else take over, allowing for new ideas and opportunities to enrich our group and its volunteers.

Dawnell Claessen will be taking the lead with Lois Marsh closely assisting her. Many of you know Dawnell for her loyalty to the SIG and especially for coordinating our P&P sessions at the STC conferences for the past few years. Lois has dedicated her service to the SIG as newsletter editor since 2003, bringing our newsletter to new heights with a new name and an electronic format. Dawnell and Lois are motivated and team-spirited members who have and welcome fresh ideas.

I will remain a member of the SIG and will serve as a mentor and advisor to our leadership team. I plan to devote more time to my policies and procedures consulting practice in researching, publishing, and serving clients, both organizations and individuals.

As this is my last message as manager, I am proud to say that our SIG remains the world's only not-for-profit organization of professionals dedicated to advancing policies and procedures as a technical communication specialty.

Our members are in 24 countries. Our newsletter has continued to be published four times a year for nearly 13 years.

Our Web site has plentiful, up-to-date information, including the recent addition of an extensive collection of summaries of published articles on P&P.

We continue to sponsor educational programs at the Annual Conference. Our members have a listserv to quickly network on P&P issues. We have members who generously volunteer, filling all our positions.

And the STC board recently honored us with the SIG Pacesetter award, which says a lot about our leadership contributions not only to our members, but also to STC at large.

Thank you for the opportunity to lead this group and for the kind support you have given me these past few years.

Should you have a question about the transition or merely want to stay in

contact with me in the future, you can reach me at:

rurgo@urgoconsulting.com.

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Step By Step: Your Greatest Opportunity to Improve Your Procedure Can Be Found in its Smallest Part

By Elizabeth McQueen



We've all had to revisit our documented procedures to implement improvements. Sometimes we do so in the interest of complying with a certain quality standard or model, and sometimes we have found that certain activities were missing in our initial capture of the process.

However, even if we think we're only going to "tweak" the procedure, the best approach is to revisit each step with fresh eyes. It doesn't necessarily have to take much time, and you may be surprised at the opportunities you discover to improve flow and efficiency!

The elements of each step in any procedure include the order among the steps, role, input(s) and output(s). When we consider these elements as described below – especially after a newly defined procedure has been in place for a while – we often find ways to make the process stronger by adjusting aspects of some steps. As you review the steps in your procedure, think of the following tips.

Order of Steps

Does the procedure document describe the steps of the procedure as-is, or as they should be? Do steps, in reality, happen in an order that differs from the official, documented process? If so, why is that?

Would altering the order of steps make the procedure more efficient or effective? Or would consolidating some steps make more sense? For example, if a particular role regularly performs steps out of sequence, it might be beneficial to move those steps next to each other.

Not doing so can lead to "while you're at it" syndrome, in which the players of the roles in the procedure take it upon themselves to reorder the steps. This may backfire and result in wasted time if it means they are skipping steps, and then backtracking to complete them – particularly if it has not been communicated to the other players who are expecting the regular flow.

When is each piece of information needed for the procedure?

If the order of steps does not result in the timely transfer of information, it could actually cost your organization time and money. For example, if Earned Value is calculated with 3 month old information, the results aren't actionable, anyway!

Handing off the same piece of paper, data file or form to a particular role or stakeholder multiple times as an input and/or output for various steps might be a sign of inefficiency; tap into this potential opportunity to save time, money, or effort by adjusting or streamlining the steps' sequence.

Sometimes we define "fast track" or emergency processes that are supposed to speed things up under special circumstances. If these are not carefully designed and executed, they might actually cost you, due to the increased training need. If you don't thoroughly train the participants, it will be even worse, because people will waste time consulting each other about the altered steps!

Roles

Is a specific role designated to perform each step? Could or should the step (sometimes) be performed by a different role under certain circumstances? If so, can you specify what those circumstances would be? If the person playing the role in question is busy or is somehow unmotivated to perform the step in a timely fashion, it could create a bottleneck for this process. If this is the case, could the time required for this step be unreasonable? Even if it is just based on your gut feeling, it can be beneficial to consider, and to explore why the step is so time consuming.

If a step requires that the person playing the role provide certain information, maybe he or she would be more likely to execute if a template were provided for capturing and transferring that information.

Inputs and Outputs

What information is needed to begin each step, and what is its source? The most common type of bottleneck in a process is usually related to input data that are not readily accessible. How do the providers of the input know when the input will be needed? Is the procedure missing a step to request the preparation of the input? If the provider of the input is unable or unwilling to respond to the timely need for the data, is there another potential source, even an automated tool, that could provide the same or comparable, sufficient data for the step to begin? Beyond alternative sources of input data, would the procedure benefit from alternative methods of communication/compilation?

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What form does the input take? If it literally is a form, are all the elements or fields really necessary or critical, or are any just nice to have? Are other necessary pieces of information missing? Does it vary by circumstance? If communication of the input is usually less structured (say, via email), would creating a simple form for the purpose prove more efficient?

Does the output of each step become an input of another step or procedure? (If not, what purpose does it serve?) Is the resulting input sufficient and timely enough to serve that step or procedure? Could the output result in the capture of a metric that could be used to gauge the health of this or other processes within the organization?

Automation

There has been a lot of buzz in recent years about automating steps in repeatable processes. If doing so frees up individuals to do more analytical work, this can be a wonderful time saver; but before you look for ways to automate, consider whether it would really be beneficial:

- Is the step repetitive enough for economies of scale to make up for the cost of setting up the automation? Implementing regression testing for software requires considerable setup efforts. To do so only at the end of a software product's life cycle is probably *not* cost effective.
- Is the input required for the step conducive to automation? A tool used for gathering data might also be capable of automatically creating a report based on that data.
- Does the step's input require human analysis to identify the next step in a branched flow? If selection of the next step is based on the identification of a status state from a finite list, no complicated logic is involved, and automating might be a good option.
- Could automation result in the calculation of meaningful metrics data? Creating an automated report that is produced on a regular basis could be a painless way to spot trends in a procedure's productivity or efficiency.

Taking a fresh look at the various aspects of individual steps each time you revisit a procedure is well worth the small amount of additional effort. The outcome of this effort will be a procedure that achieves the necessary results faster and is easier to follow. This is truly *improving* the process, rather than just modifying it.

Elizabeth McQueen became a process improvement specialist in 2001 after 12 years of technical writing. She lives in Alexandria, VA, with her husband and two "boys" (one canine and one feline). Elizabeth can be reached at elizabeth@process-engineering-group.com.

Member Profile: Abena Edugyan



Direction: Can you briefly describe your business background?

Abena: I have a psychology degree and had originally planned to work in healthcare, but I 'fell' into the investment industry after graduating. I have worked in different capacities there, ranging

from sales assistant to operations analyst. My experience with a specific investment management software application took me from Calgary, Alberta, Canada to San Francisco, California back in 2000. I found that in each position I held, I ended up informally documenting procedures and training co-workers. I've always had an interest in writing, so in 2002, I started taking technical writing

classes at a local community college. Last year, I began coursework towards an online Master of Arts degree in Technical Communication.

Direction: Tell us about your work – responsibilities, challenges.

Abena: I currently work as an investment services analyst for a family office in Palos Verdes Estates, California. I wasn't hired as a technical writer; my official job description includes assessing and implementing software applications, helping the manager use his current applications more effectively, and processing trades and investment reports. However, because it's a small office, I was able to establish informal procedural documentation in the organization. For example, I automated our daily investment reporting processes and subsequently created a procedural manual, numerous reference guides, and job aids for

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the various investment software applications.

Direction: *What do you like most about your job?*

Abena: The variety. My supervisor is involved in numerous endeavors, so I'm always learning something new. It's great, because I'm being exposed to different aspects of the industry.

Direction: *What advice can you give to someone who wants to get into P&P documentation?*

Abena: If you see an opportunity within your current organization, take advantage of it! I found a way to both add value to the company and gain experience in the technical communication field. Although creating reference materials was not initially part of my role, my supervisor now expects a quick reference guide for each function or feature of our software applications that we adopt.

Direction: *What's the biggest P&P challenge that you face in your current environment?*

Abena: My first challenge is presenting information in the most effective and efficient way. My main audience is internal users who have very basic computer knowledge, so I need to ensure there are no gaps in the procedures. Testing the documents is imperative. Secondly, even in a small office environment, it's necessary to have consistent procedures, but not everyone recognizes that.

Direction: *Tell us a bit of personal information about you – e.g., hobbies, where you live, your family, or other information to help us get to know you.*

Abena: I've lived in Redondo Beach, California, for the past two years. The rest of my family is in Calgary, with the exception of my sister, who is currently completing an artist-in-residence program in Stuttgart, Germany. I spend my leisure time either in the gym or outdoors (hiking in the summer and skiing in the winter). Ironically, I didn't learn to ski until I moved to California – I missed the snow too much! I volunteer quite a bit, and recently created the first newsletter for The Wellness Community–Orange County. Since 2002, I've edited anthologies published by *Streetside Stories*, a San Francisco-based non-profit organization. Finally, I'm a first-generation Canadian. My parents are from Ghana, West Africa, and I'm happy to report I'll be making my first trip there in September!

Abena Edugyan is Assistant Editor of Direction and can be reached at aedugyan@yahoo.com.

SOXing it to 'em...

By Justin Baker

Fall 2001. Enron. Bankruptcy. Thousands of Enron employees out of work. Their retirement plans wiped out. And this was just one of many accounting scandals to come...

Summer 2002. Congress. Anger. Thousands, perhaps millions, of American citizens affected by accounting scandals and corporate corruption. It was time to set American corporations back onto the path towards ethical rectitude...

And the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 was born.

The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, otherwise known as SOX, is legislation passed by the United States Federal Government to forcibly set American corporations back onto that path towards ethical rectitude.

The majority of this legislation focuses on the control of organizational finances; one focus in particular is the mandatory establishment of a specific framework of internal controls. Internal controls are the components of an

organization's human and IT processes and infrastructure that control the organization's workflow.

These internal controls ensure that applicable government regulations and industry standards are built into the organization's processes and infrastructure; in general, internal controls ensure that the organization's workflow is structured, controlled, and ethical.

A Contender

In at least one major American organization, software developers are busy building these internal controls into the IT side of the organization's processes and infrastructures while managers are busy building internal controls into the human side of the organization's processes and infrastructures.

And technical writers are documenting all of it into a large policy and procedure framework.

The P&P Pyramid

The policy and procedure framework of this particular organization is modeled into a pyramid structure with five

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layers composing the framework. The first, and top, layer is the **Directives** layer. The Directives layer comprises the legislation, regulations, and standards that are external to the organization; the SOX legislation is an external directive that probably has the most immediacy right now.

The second layer of the framework, or pyramid, is the **Policies** layer. The Policies layer comprises the goals and high-level strategies of the organization; these goals and high-level strategies incorporate and are constrained by the directives in the first layer.

The third layer is **Standards**, which focuses on the internal controls that will provide the boundaries for the fourth and fifth levels (Enterprise-Level Procedures and Sub-procedures).

The internal controls in the Standards layer of this particular organization's policy and procedure framework are derived from a variety of external, authoritative sources including the Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology (COBIT), which is a general framework of IT best practices and internal controls. There are a variety of internal controls in any business including accounting controls and financial-reporting controls; many types of controls are derived from a variety of external authoritative sources.

Enterprise-Level Procedures is the fourth layer in this particular framework and can really be thought of as general processes and standard operating procedures. These Enterprise-Level Procedures are then localized in departments throughout the organization to reflect procedural details as well as procedural deviances. These localized processes and procedures are known as Sub-procedures;

Sub-procedures are the fifth, and bottom, layer of the pyramid-like policy and procedure framework.

The Writer's Role

This particular policy and procedure framework translates into a veritable plethora of documentation work for technical writers. Technical writers are employed at all levels to document the various policies, standards, enterprise-level procedures, and sub-procedures. The majority of technical writers are employed to develop the department-specific sub-procedures, which may number into the hundreds if not thousands.

In this particular policy and procedure framework, templates are used at all layers. The templates contribute to document-development efficiency, particularly with enterprise-level procedures and sub-procedures. The templates for the sub-procedures have a considerable number of internal controls built into the template text. This keeps the technical writers from having to become experts in internal controls, especially the types of internal controls that the SOX legislation focuses on.

And because the sub-procedures are primarily localized enterprise-level procedures, a considerable amount of the process and procedure is built into the sub-procedure template text as well. The primary goal of the technical writers developing the sub-procedures is to define the procedural details and procedural deviances.

The Writer's Value

In this policy and procedure framework, the value of the technical writer is in interviewing subject matter experts to define the process details and process deviances. The value of the technical writer in this situation is also in managing the document-development process; as any policy and procedure technical writer knows, many SMEs are difficult to mine information from.

For emerging policy and procedure frameworks there is the additional value of creating the templates that are used at all levels of the frameworks. And in a larger context, technical writers are contributing to an ethical restoration in American business that will benefit employees, stakeholders, and society in general. And while the SOX legislation may be new, the internal controls the SOX legislation mandates are not. These internal controls are controls that existed before the SOX legislation; the SOX legislation is just a legal force to ensure that the internal controls that are supposed to be in place *are* in place.

The Outcome

SOX legislation is a slap on the hand from the Federal Government for behaving so badly.

The force and immediacy of SOX legislation may eventually fade from view, but the need to institute and document internal controls in the form of policy and procedure frameworks never will, thereby ensuring plenty of work for policy and procedure technical writers for a long time to come.

Justin Baker has been a technical writer and editor for nine years. He currently works with a major American corporation documenting SOX-related procedures. He can be reached at bakerjustin@earthlink.net.



Developing P&Ps for Emergencies

Compiled by the Editor

These days, many of us face an array of security threats and the fear of new diseases such as Avian Flu and West Nile Disease.

The fifth anniversary of "9/11" will have passed around the time of this newsletter's publication, so emergency procedures should be front and centre in all our minds.

Has your role in communicating policies and procedures been affected?

Many organizations have disaster recovery and business continuity plans in place, but are they effectively written and presented?

How can your own emergency documentation be improved? What resources are out there?

Direction presents a compilation of web links and a suggested checklist you might want to adapt for your own emergency documentation.

But this is just a starting point: you can find a wealth of information on the internet, including links to government organizations in your own country to support your research on emergency procedures.



Links to Useful Resources

Emergency Procedures: Writing for Maximum Results - 10.27.05 Sam Mullen, Principal, MPS Consulting Services" at the following URL:

<http://topics.energycentral.com/centers/workforce/view/detail.cfm?aid=1128>

Effective Emergency Response Plans (anticipate the worst, prepare for the best results) by Carl Griffith, Trench-It, & Rick Vulpitta, National Safety Council Utilities Division Manager – 1999 at the following URL:

<http://www.nsc.org/issues/emerg/99esc.htm#TOP>

Checklist for a home emergency survival:

http://ww3.psepc-sppcc.gc.ca/info_pro/checklists/bef_eskit_e.asp

Virginia Business Emergency Survival Toolkit:

http://www.vaemergency.com/business/preparing/prep_main.cfm

Tune Up Your Business Continuity Plan

<http://www.continuitycentral.com/feature0344.htm>

Suggested Emergency Checklist

The table on the following pages will give you some ideas for your own organization's emergency checklist. It is based on one being developed for a policing organization in Canada.

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Suggested Emergency Checklist		
Situation	Possible Indicators/Symptoms	Employee Guidelines
Suspicious Letter or Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No return address • Restricted markings, e.g. Personal, Confidential, Rush • Excessive postage • Misspelled words • Addressed to title only • Rigid or bulky • Badly typed or written • Strange odor • Protruding wires • Excessive wrapping • Oily stains on wrapping <p>Lopsided</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave the package where it is. Do not open, shake, smell or empty it. • Isolate the article and leave it where it is. • Evacuate the immediate vicinity, close the door and notify your supervisor. • Call 911 (or the emergency response number in your area). • Do not permit anyone to enter the room until the appropriate responder arrives. • Wait in a safe place until the responder arrives. • If you touched the package, remove all clothing that may have absorbed any substance and seal it in a plastic bag. Wash your hands or shower with soap and cool water. Seek medical attention and advise your physician that you may have been exposed to a hazardous agent.
Avian (Bird) Influenza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical flu-like illness, e.g. fever, sore throat, cough and body aches • Pneumonia, difficulty breathing and other serious complications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not handle or eat sick game. • Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves or use a doubled plastic bag. Avoid contact with blood, body fluids and feces. • Thoroughly wash hands and all knives, equipment and surfaces with hot, soapy water and then disinfect the area using a household disinfectant. • Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling birds and animals. <p>If you observe wild birds that are ill or you find dead wild birds, contact your local wildlife authority.</p>
West Nile Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever, headache, tiredness, and body aches, • Occasionally a skin rash (on the trunk of the body) and swollen lymph glands. • While the illness can be as short as a few days, even healthy people have reported being sick for several weeks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure screens and windows are installed or repaired to prevent mosquitoes from entering. • Cut long grass around dwelling to reduce moist, cool places. • Turn off outside lights when not necessary. • Wear light colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants. • Apply a small amount of insect repellent to cuffs and collars.

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Suggested Emergency Checklist, continued

Situation	Employee Guidelines
Bomb Threat Received By Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen. Be calm and courteous. • Do not interrupt the caller. • Obtain as much information as possible <p>Ask the following questions:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">What time will the bomb explode?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Where is it?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">What does it look like?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Where are you calling from?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Why did you place the bomb?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">What is your name?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate call trace action (if available) while the call is ongoing. • Using a pre-arranged signal, notify your supervisor

Announcements

New Resources for P&P Professionals

By Linda Kenny Sloan - P&P SIG Information and Research Team



The P&P SIG's Information and Research team announces the public availability of abstracts and links to P&P articles published by STC.

The subject listing can be found in the Resource section of the P&P SIG's web site at <http://www.stcsig.org/pp/>.

Both Intercom and STC conference proceedings articles are included and range from 1993 to present.

The Information and Research team consists of Linda Kenny Sloan and Maria I. Christophel. Maria researched and prepared the abstract writing for this project. As a retiree from P&P work, Maria has both the expertise and time to devote to this project. Linda provided document management expertise to the effort.

The topics included are:

- Annual meeting agenda and minutes
- Career opportunities
- International profession
- Methods and models
- Tools and techniques
- Trends and the future
- Writing and editing.

These cover material not only for novices but also for those who wish to increase their expertise in this discipline. This new tool is an addition to the already public newsletter archive available on the SIG's web site.

SIG manager and P&P guru Raymond Uργο declares this new offering an important and unique resource. "It is the world's only comprehensive collection of summaries to P&P resources."

Future plans for the Information and Research team include a newsletter index, a listing of non-STC publications, and the monitoring of the Intercom and STC Proceedings for adding abstracts on a continued basis.



Announcements, continued...

Upcoming Web-Based Course: Introduction to Policies & Procedures Communication

University of California, Los Angeles Extension

Dates: October 5 through November 30, 2006

Fee: \$550. (\$500 for STC members)

Course #: 439.19

Registration #: S4315

Instructor: Raymond E. Urgo (rurgo@urgoconsulting.com)

Contact: UCLA Extension 310/825-4192 or www.uclaextension.edu

Got questions?

Or maybe you'd like to submit your own article? Contact the editor at: lois.marsh@bmo.com