

SuperScript



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION



Ethics in Technical Communication—Definition and Understanding

- Lois Hamilton, STC Member

Dr. Glenn Ruhl, an instructor with Mount Royal College's Centre for Communication Studies, presented the April Thursday Program. He opened by noting that ethical behaviour has been discussed since the time of the early philosophers and remains very important in today's business environment.

Terms

Glenn began by defining terms central to a discussion on ethics. He defined *ethics* as doing what is right to achieve what is good. *Interest* is the regard for one's own benefit or advantage. A *value* is a principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable. Many core values are collectively considered to be important within a society or profession; however, the adoption of a particular value, and the relative importance assigned to it, is an individual decision. There are three types of values: *ethical values* are moral and are based on what is right, *unethical values* are amoral and are based on what is wrong, *nonethical values* are not intrinsically right or wrong.

Types of Ethical Conflicts

Dr. Ruhl explained that ethical conflicts occur when values and interests differ. Ethical conflicts can be divided into three main categories: black and white conflicts, greatest good conflicts, and least of all evil conflicts. A black and white, or right vs. wrong, conflict occurs when the choice must be made between one or more values that are ethical, and one or more

values that are not. The greatest good, or right vs. right, dilemma occurs when two or more ethical values conflict and the values must be ranked. The least of all evils, or wrong vs. wrong, dilemma results when all values are unethical. In this case, the preferred course of action is the one that will minimize the amount of damage caused.

Ethical conflicts often feature two or more possible alternatives that are best described in terms of shades of gray; one solution is not clearly preferable to another. Solid gray situations occur when basic ethical values conflict and difficult choices must be made. Chameleon gray situations occur when decision-makers resolve ethical conflicts to satisfy their own interests; they rationalize their decisions by altering their ranking of previously held values. This is known as situational ethics. Conflicts in ethical gray areas are resolved by carefully reviewing the situation, listening to your inner voice, and then acting appropriately.

Value Analysis

Glenn outlined a six-step assessment model that can be used to solve ethical conflicts called the value analysis model. The six steps of the model are:

1. Identify the issues and the stakeholders.
2. Identify the stakeholders' positions.
3. Identify the relevant values.
4. Determine which values and interests conflict.

5. Apply a model to rank the values.
6. Resolve the conflict.

Values can be ranked using the concentric-ring model. This model places values into three categories: core, authority, and peripheral. Placement of a value varies between individuals and cultures; however, important values are placed in the core of the circle. Core values, for many Canadians, might include love of family and respect for others; authority values might include corporate loyalty and patriotism; and peripheral values might include favorite leisure activities and foods. According to this model, conflicts are resolved according to their relative ranking. For example, if the conflict situation involves an authority value and a core value, the ethical response will reflect the core value, not the authority value.

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A Word from our President

- Mai-Ann Sprung

Chapter Leadership and a Code of Conduct

Last summer, I attended a Leadership Workshop in Seattle hosted by our Director-Sponsor, Ellen Fenwick. One of the highlights of the day was learning all the tips and hints about running an STC chapter, and for providing strong, sustainable leadership. In earlier articles this year, I've discussed different initiatives that this year's Executive Council has undertaken to solidify a leadership structure that would become self-sustaining. Many of these initiatives have been about involving more people in the day-to-day function of the Chapter; but, one task I learned of in Seattle, and that our Executive Council has decided to consider, was the introduction of a Code of Conduct.

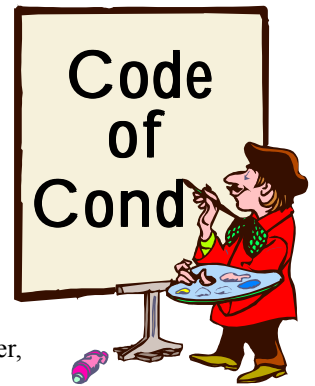
During the workshop, Andrea Ames, Region 8 Director-Sponsor, related an incident where a member of a chapter's Executive Council was asked to leave and voted out of the Council because of inappropriate actions. This individual then threatened STC with legal action because he felt that his removal from the

Council would prove to hurt his career as an independent contractor. When this incident was resolved, STC International advised the chapter to develop a Code of Conduct that each member of the Executive Council and volunteers in significant roles would sign.

Ms. Ames strongly recommended that other chapters follow this lead in protecting chapter interests. The Code of Conduct is a simple agreement between the chapter and the volunteer, guaranteeing that the individual will not act inappropriately while conducting chapter business, and providing for their removal from Council in the chapter by-laws. As each new Council member takes over a leadership role, a Code of Conduct agreement is signed and kept on file.

My first reaction to this suggestion was probably typical: it felt like overkill. We've never encountered this sort of action in our 20-year history. Another chapter's experience with volunteers who have acted inappropriately, doesn't, on the surface,

appear to have anything to do with sustainable leadership. So, why bother, right?



Without this safeguard, executive members may be concerned about personal liabilities or "guilt by association", if one member of a committee behaves in a way that compromises the other members. In the absence of a clearly defined process, the Executive may feel helpless to address this sort of an incident, detracting from the work they can achieve throughout the year, increasing stress, and raising concerns about personal reputations. It also makes filling our important leadership roles increasingly difficult. With a carefully thought-out Code of Conduct and policies in place, the entire Executive and their year's work do not have to be dragged down by the inappropriate

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Alberta STC Executive Council 2000-2001

Mai-Ann Sprung
President
maianns@merak.com

Suzanne Scott
Vice President
suescott@telusplanet.net

Blair McNaughton
Secretary
final.draft@home.com

Ian Hawkins
Treasurer
ihawkins@telusplanet.net

Leila Meyer
Past President/Membership
leila.meyer@olantra.com

Fena Maucieri
Mentorship
fena.maucieri@windriver.com

Angela Wiens
Liaison, Edmonton
wiens@telusplanet.net

Grant Sorenson
Archivist
wallis@telusplanet.net

Ken Schatzke
Education Programs
Hospitality and Registration
ksschatzke@home.com

Brian O'Malley
Competitions
Membership Survey & Directory
omalley@nucleus.com

Darren Tenor
Coffee Night/Special Events
tenor@nucleus.com

Glenn Ruhl
Canadian Issues Committee
Mount Royal College Liason
gruhl@mtroyal.ab.ca

Andrew Donegan
Webmaster
adonegan@sprint.ca

Allison Strilchuk
Webmaster
AllisonStrilchuk@smarttech.com

Bonnie Schott
Webmaster
bonnieschott@netscape.net

Peter Adamski
Webmaster
Peter_Adamski@adc.com

Laurie Holtby
Volunteers
holtby@cadvision.com

Lucinda Yaworski
Jobline
yaworski@cadvision.com

Jessie Channey
SuperScript Editor
jessie.channey@hyprotech.com

Helen Schleedoorn
SuperScript Editor
hschleedoorn@visto.com

President's Message (cont'd)

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actions of one person. Hopefully, we never have to act upon this in our day-to-day chapter operations, but these policies provide direction and security in the event that significant issues do arise.

Later this month, we'll be making a copy of a Code of Conduct available through our Web site. This document is an example of what we'd like to initiate, and will also require changes to our chapter by-laws, both of which will require a membership vote.

And now on to our 2001 AGM!

This year marks a couple of firsts in recent AGM activities.

This is the first time in recent years that we've been able to bring in an internationally renowned presenter, Joe Welinske of WinWriters. The Executive Council is very excited about this opportunity, and if the response to his visit is positive, we'll look at bringing in other big-name, corporate speakers for future chapter events. We're doubly fortunate this year, as our Director-Sponsor, Ellen Fenwick, will also be joining us for a meeting with the Executive Council and the AGM dinner.

The other "first" is the circulation of Affirmation ballots at the AGM. Although we usually have only one candidate for each of the elected positions (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer), it is required that the membership have the opportunity to vote or affirm the candidates who step forward for these positions.

If you are not planning to attend the AGM dinner and presentation, you can still drop by the Village Park Inn during the AGM meeting and fill-out an Affirmation ballot at the Reception table in our meeting room. There is no charge to attend the AGM meeting.

AGM Meeting

June 9, 2001 7-8 pm

Best Western Village Park Inn

1804 Crowchild Trail NW

Calgary, AB

Look for signs at Hotel Reception for our meeting room. 

STC Annual Region 6 Conference

**September 30 -
October 2, 2001**

The 11th Annual STC Region 6 Conference will be held at the Hilton North in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The conference theme is "*Channels of Communication: Sharing the Knowledge.*" The conference will focus on how technical communicators efficiently manage large amounts of information from diverse sources and then synthesize and deliver that information to meet user needs. For more information, please contact:

Mollye Barrett
1661 North Farwell Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Mollye@iversonlang.com
414-217-1144 x24

Tootin' Our Own Horn!

The Alberta Chapter received two awards in the 2000-2001 STC Newsletter Competition.

The *Superscript* earned awards of **Excellence** and **Most Improved** for the 151-300 member chapter category.

The award-winning entries were prepared by our dedicated editorial team; Jessie Channey, Helen Schleedoorn, and Roger Baumgarten.

Way to go team!



Ethics Session Summary (cont'd)

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Business Ethics

Dr. Ruhl noted that the concept of ethics extends beyond us as individuals into the business world. Business ethics result from the employees' personal integrity and the current social values. Good business ethics are good business for two reasons: prudence and virtue. Prudence means it is the smart thing to do and considers the practical factors of the situation. Virtue means it is the right thing to do and considers moral beliefs. Prudence and virtue are not mutually exclusive.

Glenn stated that law and ethics are not the same thing. Behaviour that is lawful is not necessarily ethical. Businesses (and individuals) must operate within the laws of their jurisdiction; laws are based on fairness while ethics are based on what is right.

The Society for Technical Communication has developed ethical guidelines for technical communicators. These guidelines include the principles of legality, honesty, confidentiality, quality, fairness, and professionalism. *Intercom*, the society's magazine, provides a forum for discussion of

ethical matters. The 'Ethics Case' column, edited by John G. Bryan, periodically describes a fictional, ethical conflict related to technical communication. Readers' comments on the scenario (which do not represent STC views) are published in a subsequent issue.

Although guidelines differ between professional organizations, most share core values. The ten basic values for professional communication are: honesty, legality, privacy, quality, teamwork, avoiding conflict of interest; cultural sensitivity, social responsibility, professional growth, and advancing the profession.

Guidelines for Dealing with Value Conflicts

Technical communicators can use the following guidelines when dealing with value conflicts in the workplace.

1. Communicate – Ensure that your understanding of the situation is correct. Seek the opinion of others (colleagues, if they are not part of the conflict, or trusted professionals).
2. Analyze – Organize the information. Identify stakeholders and their interests. Identify and rank the values.



3. Personalize – Trust your judgement. Listen to your inner voice.
4. Escalate – Act accordingly. Communicate your concerns appropriately if you feel the situation is not ethically acceptable. For example, if a colleague's decision or behaviour caused the conflict, talk to your boss. Elevate the responsibility for an ethical resolution up in the chain of command until acceptable actions are taken.

Conclusion

The presentation provided a thought-provoking overview of some of the principles governing ethical behaviour and provided a framework for technical communicators to use when dealing with ethical conflicts in the workplace.

When: Saturday, June 9, 2001
3 - 9 pm

Where: Best Western Village Park Inn
1804 Crowchild Trail NW, Calgary

Guest Speaker: Joe Welinske, President of WinWriters will be speaking on the Evolving World of Software User Assistance

Cost: Member: \$55
Student Member: \$50
Non-Member: \$60

AGM 2001

Schedule of Events:

- | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|
| 3 pm | Registration |
| 3:30 pm | Joe Welinske's Presentation |
| 6 pm | Dinner |
| 7 pm | AGM |

Vacant Executive Council Positions 2001-2002

Vice President

Interested in building your management and facilitation skills? The Vice President of the Alberta Chapter is involved in a variety of tasks, including helping to formulate policy and long-term goals for the Chapter and Chairing the AGM Committee in the second half of the year. Other miscellaneous tasks include editing the newsletter and monitoring the Chapter message line.

This position can also be a "President-in-waiting" position. Get some preliminary training before putting your name forward as a Presidential candidate in later years.

Chapter Events Coordinator

This is a new position for 2001-2002. This is a great position for someone who has already volunteered as a Coffee Night, Special Event, Programs, Education, or Registration/Hospitality Coordinator. In keeping with our goal of reorganizing Council positions to reduce volunteers' time commitment, this position will reduce the administrative functions of each of the positions listed above. This position will be filled only after the Special Events, Programs, Education, Coffee Night, and Registration/Hospitality positions have been filled. If this position is filled, the Chapter Events Coordinator will attend the monthly Council meetings and will ensure coordination of all chapter events.

Coffee Night

Consider yourself a good facilitator? Have a plethora of ideas for technical communications discussions? The Coffee Night Coordinator is a fun position that allows you to network with both senior members and new or potential members by leading informal discussions on a variety of topics—the sky's the limit!

Competition Judging Coordinator

The Judging Coordinator is a limited-term position, so it's ideal for someone who can devote a little time between September and November. This Coordinator assembles teams of judges, assigns entries to the teams, and organizes the consensus judging required for any entries who are deserving of a Best of Show award. Then you get to attend the Competition reception, enjoy some food, and hand out the awards to our deserving members.

Jobline

Our Jobline Coordinator posts positions sent in by local (and sometimes distant) employers looking for technical communicators. In this position, you'll get the opportunity to:

- maintain contact with businesses who hire technical communicators and with employment agencies publicizing the resource available to our Chapter members.
- broadcast technical communication job opportunities through the STC Chapter Web site and telephone message system.
- update the Jobline page of the Chapter Web site by adding new positions and deleting old ones.
- maintain a database of all postings to the Jobline.

People holding this position in the past have also maintained a scrapbook of technical communications-related jobs from the Herald during the year (including calling Herald advertisers and offering to post TC jobs on the Jobline for free!).

Newsletter Editors

If you're interested in gaining desktop layout skills and the opportunity to learn Adobe PageMaker, this is an ideal position for you.

In 2001-2002, *SuperScript* will be coordinated by Helen Schleedoorn and Jessie Channey, two of the Editors for the 2000-2001 *SuperScript*. This team requires 2-3 more individuals to perform layout and editing duties. As part of a team, your time commitment can rotate on a monthly basis to best fit your schedule.

Programs

This position offers you one of the best networking opportunities through the coordination of interesting and timely events that can benefit your fellow technical communicators. Use your current contacts in the industry to add speakers for our regular Thursday programs. You will be working with the Registration/Hospitality Coordinator to run these events.

Registration/Hospitality

Congenial personalities wanted! The Registration and Hospitality Coordinator assists the Programs and Education Coordinator(s) by handling advance and door registrations, and organizing refreshments for the events.

Public Relations

A great position for someone who wants to flex his/her PR/Marketing muscles. This position requires someone who can publicize Chapter events and establish liaisons with other Chapters and organizations to help promote the

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More Executive Council Opportunities

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services we offer technical communicators. This may also include writing and producing promotional materials.

Special Events

This is the perfect position for someone who is looking for the chance to volunteer on a limited basis but still wants a solid networking opportunity. Duties include booking a venue for the January Pub Night, working with the Competitions Coordinator to host the Competition reception, and helping out with the annual Wine & Cheese in September.

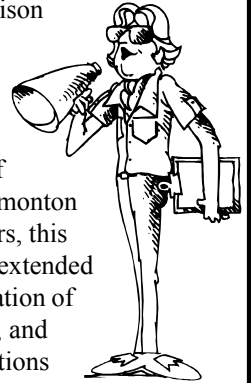
Volunteers

The Volunteers Coordinator works to match those generous individuals who come forward during the year with upcoming events or vacant Council positions. This job has a low demand for regular work, and gives you the opportunity to meet and greet new volunteers while helping to fill the needs of the Executive Council. Your primary duties are:

- encouraging members to volunteer, even if for only a few hours.
- determining the volunteer needs of the Executive Council and filling those requirements with the appropriate volunteers.
- organize the volunteer appreciation effort at the end of the year.

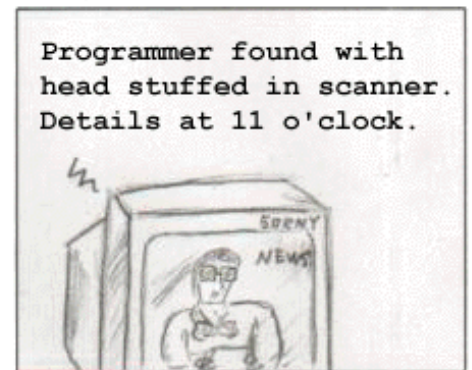
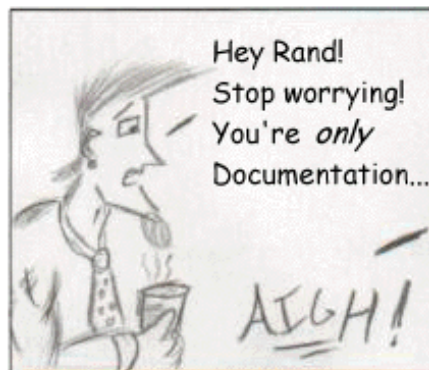
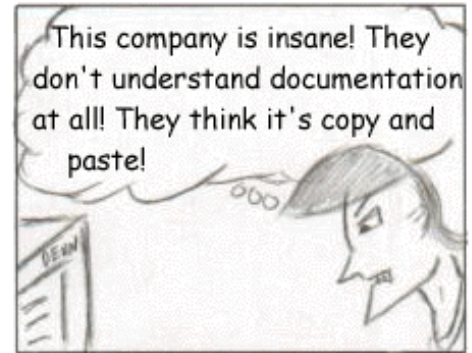
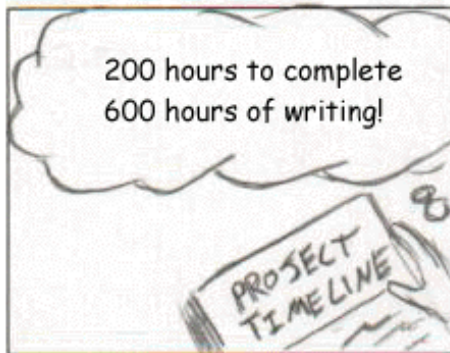
Edmonton Liaison

The Edmonton Liaison provides a contact point between the Executive Council in Calgary and the large contingent of members in the Edmonton area. In recent years, this position has been extended to include organization of regular gatherings, and soliciting contributions from Edmonton members for *SuperScript*.



Please contact Laurie Holtby at holtby@cadvision.com for more information.

Bitter Ink.



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Mark Your Calendars!

Thursday Programs

Attend Thursday programs to discover the ideas and technologies that affect today's technical communicators.

Location: MacDougall Centre
455-6 Street SW, Calgary

Time: 7pm to 9pm
Please arrive by 6:30 pm for registration.

Pre-registration: **Recommended.** Pre-register by the Monday prior to the program.

Fee:	Pre-register	Drop-in
Members	\$7.00	\$10.00
Student Members	5.00	8.00
Non-members	10.00	13.00

Saturday Programs

Attend Saturday programs to gain in-depth knowledge and skill in areas such as editing, Microsoft Word, and Adobe FrameMaker.

Location: Mount Royal College (Room E141)
4825 Richard Road SW, Calgary
\$8.00 parking passes can be purchased from the parking office located by the West Gate.

Time: 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Pre-registration: **Required.** Pre-register at least ten days prior to the program. **Note:** Registration must be cancelled one week in advance of the program or registrant will be billed for course fees.

Fee:	Members	\$75.00
	Student Members	50.00
	Non-members	110.00

Coffee Nights

Attend coffee nights to meet with your fellow technical communicators and discuss a monthly topic in a casual setting.

Location: Annie's Books (Literary Salon)
912-16 Avenue NW, Calgary
Parking is available behind Tim Horton's.

Time: 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Pre-registration: Not required.

Fee: Free for both members and non-members.

Executive Meetings

Location: Merak Building
600, 322-11 Avenue SW, Calgary

Time: 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm (Building doors are locked after 5:30 pm)

May 2001

Monday, 14 Executive Meeting (New night)

Thursday, 17 **Quality Assurance**
Jim Armstrong

June 2001

Saturday, 9 **Annual General Meeting and Special Presentation** by Joe Welinske,
President of WinWriters

Monday, 18 Executive Meeting

To pre-register...

To pre-register for Thursday and Saturday programs, e-mail Ken Schatzke, our hospitality coordinator, at ksschatzke@home.com, indicating your name and the program you wish to attend.



Membership News

The Alberta Chapter grew by 10 members in March 2001. Welcome to the following new members:

Theresa Agnew, Edmonton
Shauna Dobson, Calgary
Karen Harrison, Edmonton
Kate Logan, Calgary
Diane Miller, Calgary
Lucy Rachynski, Calgary
Sandra Sterling-Weicker, Calgary
Jenny Whittome, Edmonton
Angie Wilton, Calgary
Ted Wong, Calgary

SuperScript

Editors:

Jessie Channey jessie.channey@hyprotech.com

Helen Schleedoorn h schleedoorn@visto.com

SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta Chapter of STC, the Society for Technical Communication, and is published 10 times annually, including double issues in July-August, and December-January.

Submissions: The Editors invite readers to submit articles, news, reviews, and other items of interest. Articles may be edited for size.

Reprints: Original articles appearing in *SuperScript* may be freely reprinted, provided that the author and source are acknowledged, and a copy of the reprint is promptly sent to the Editors. Reprints may not be edited for content, or used for commercial or morally repugnant purposes.

Distribution: *SuperScript* is distributed to members in Alberta and Northwest Territories, to all Canadian chapters and Region 7 chapters of the STC, and to interested companies and individuals upon request. Circulation is 275.

Advertising: *SuperScript* accepts advertising of interest to our readership, and

which furthers professional development. We reserve the right to limit or refuse advertising.

Rates:

Full page \$160.00 Quarter page \$50.00
Half page \$100.00 Business card \$20.00

To place an advertisement: send your cheque, payable in advance to Society for Technical Communication, Alberta Chapter, Attn: Treasurer, at:

STC Alberta Chapter

Box 2947, Station M
Calgary AB T2P 3C3
Web site: www.stc-alberta.org
Phone: (403) 230-6072