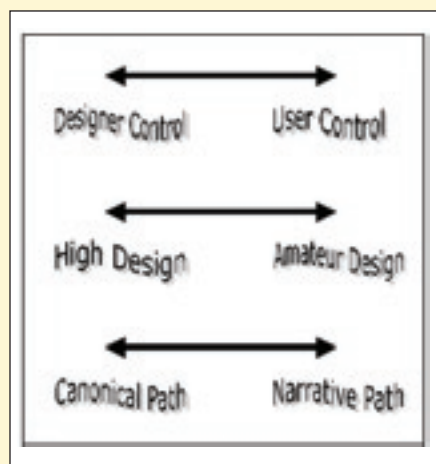
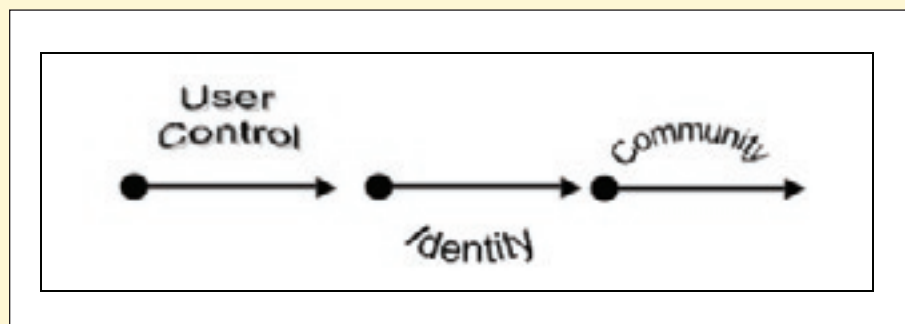


**Figure 1. Usability tradeoffs moving from a document-based world to a mediated world.**



user collaboration, many of the traditional areas of high design—text and graphics—are left to the user, and the work of the designer moves behind the scenes, to functionality that will allow that user input and the orchestration of

**Figure 2. The process underlying tech-mediated communication.**



an increasingly complex set of media.

The third tradeoff we encountered was between a universal, canonical path and a contextualized, often personal, narrative. In particular, digital storytelling is an emerging motif in tech-mediated communication: for example, consider a technology review that opens with a story of a friend's need to upgrade; an exploration of indigenous Australian culture that highlights the stories of in-

*(continued on page 33)*

## Editing in the Workplace

By ANGELA EATON, Senior Member

Much has been written about editing in the workplace from the editor's point of view, but little is known about author preferences. Funded by a \$10,000 STC research award in 2005–2006, a research project on the topic of author preferences included a survey of more than 350 authors who had been edited by STC members. Research project team members were Angela Eaton, Ph.D., Texas Tech University; Pamela Estes Brewer, Murray State University; Cynthia Davidson, Texas Tech University; and Tiffany Craft Portewig, Ph.D., Auburn University.

Respondents, both native and nonnative speakers of English, were asked about their experiences, including the best and worst attributes of their editors; their conceptualization of editing and the role of the editor; their preferences regarding the phrasing of comments and editorial modes; and the likelihood that they would accept comments based on time, phrasing, topic, and the position of the editor in the company hierarchy. Responses were then examined to determine if differences existed due to authors' native language, country of birth, or self-assessed English writing skills.

The results of the survey should help editors better understand their authors. Project findings are being submitted to *Technical Communication*. ❶



A Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute faculty team has been awarded STC's largest research grant for its Tech Mediated Communication project. From bottom left going clockwise are Cheryl Geisler, Jan Fernheimer, Audrey Bennett, Jim Zappen, Roger Grice, and Pat Search. Not pictured is Bob Krull.

## Tech-mediated Communication

(continued from page 27)

dividuals; or a search for information about an ice-skating rink that brings you to a picture of your own daughter. Underlying this use of contextualized narrative is the growing prominence of identity and community in tech-mediated communication. If the underlying document process could be seen as involving the construction of a canonical path that will help the user avoid error, the tech-mediated communication process might be conceptualized quite differently, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 articulates what seems to be a common underlying movement in tech-mediated communication. First, we need to begin by asking ourselves, Why do users want control? What will they do with it? The answers will involve an exploration of identity. The users of our exemplary tech-mediated communication are not so much engaged in getting information or completing a task as in using system-offered choices to explore their own identities.

Second, we need to ask ourselves, for what purpose are such identity quests supported by tech-mediated environments? The answer to this second question is clear: to build community. Motives for community building are various, of course. The designer of a non-profit communication material might aim to help those suffering from neurological disorders. A distance-learning environment might be designed to provide a good educational experience to working professionals. A sociology Web site might be designed to offer “a window into the remarkably diverse worlds of indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world” ([www.aptn.ca/content/view/21/31](http://www.aptn.ca/content/view/21/31)).

For whatever motive, the technical communicator who aims to create tech-mediated communication, moving users from *control* through *identity* and toward *community*, clearly faces a different task than traditional document design. Traditional metrics of usability—efficiency, accuracy, and satisfaction—no longer provide an adequate yardstick

with which to measure the tech-mediated communication. Instead, we must ask questions like:

- How much control does this tech-mediated communication provide the user? Is it enough? Is it too much?
- In what ways does it afford the user's search for identity? How well does it succeed in allowing this exploration?
- How does this tech-mediated com-

munication build community? What kinds of interactions does it allow? What kinds of networks are built?

These questions, meant to be suggestive, clearly require a new body of knowledge on what makes technical communication usable in a mediated world. Over the next two years, the TMC project will be working with STC to provide some answers. **i**

## Moving? Let Us Know!

If you will soon be moving, please remember to update your address with STC. The easiest way to do this is to access the address change form on the STC Web site at [www.stc.org/formAddressChange.asp](http://www.stc.org/formAddressChange.asp).

To use the address change form, you'll need to enter your STC membership number—the same number you use to log on to the members-only section of STC's Web site. Your membership number appears on STC membership cards and on the address labels of all correspondence from the Society office. If you need to be reminded of your membership number, contact the STC membership department at (703) 522-4114 or [membership@stc.org](mailto:membership@stc.org).

# KNACK

(năk)

Etymology: Middle English: *knak*.

**1:** a special ready capacity that is hard to analyze or teach;  
“an incredible *knack* translating manufacturer  
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