# Professional Development
In the Real World

How professional development has influenced the careers of technical communicators and their teams

Curated by Alyssa Fox and Alisa Bonsignore
STC Roundtable
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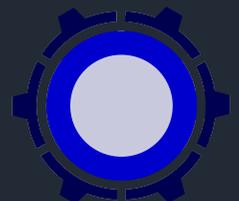
What are the **tech comm trends** you're seeing in your role? Are you prepared for them?

70% of tech comm team managers cite the need for continuing education as a critical factor in their employees' future success.[1] More than 40% of respondents to a census conducted for STC indicated that the employers provided sufficient resources for professional development.[2]

Top Tech Comm Trends

- ■ Enterprise content strategy
- ■ UX writing
- ■ Data visualization
- ■ Docs as code
- ■ Expanded content roles
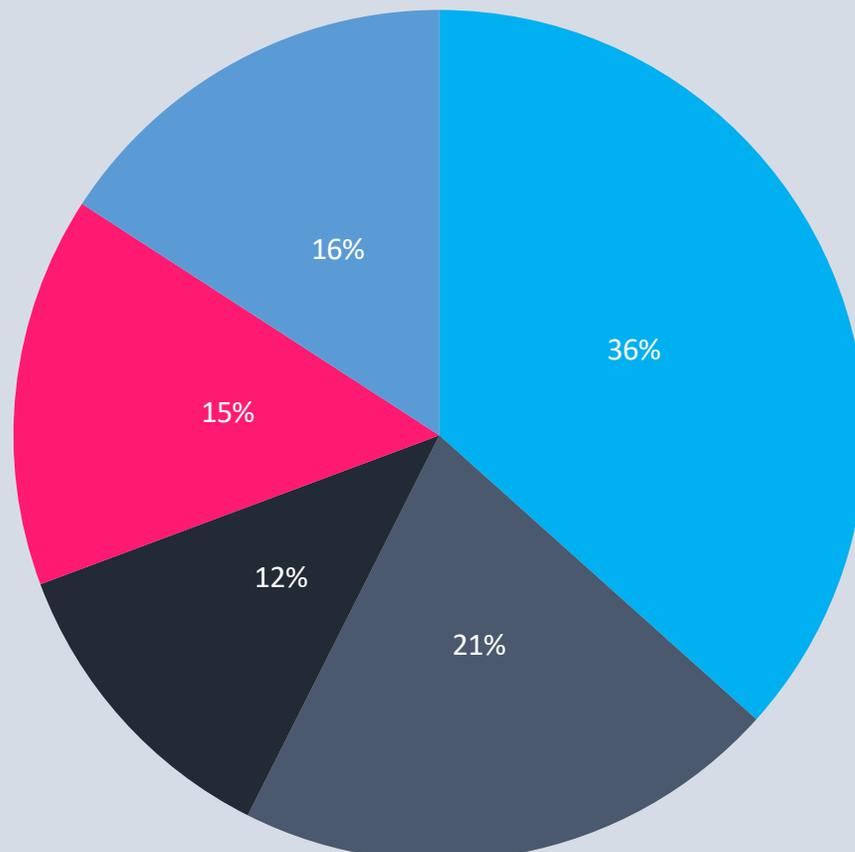
1. The Content Wrangler. "The State of Technical Communication" report. Produced for STC Roundtable. March 2019.
2. Carliner S, Chen Y. "The State of the Technical Communication Industry: A Census of Technical Communicators." *Intercom.* 2018;65(8).

16%

36%

15%

12%

21%

What are the new **tech comm trends** you're seeing in your role, and do you feel like you're prepared for them?

Expanding our roles further into UX.

—Meredith Kramer, Information Development Manager, Micro Focus

Standard tech comm deliverables being owned by other functional areas.

—Michelle Despres, Director of Customer Experience, Modern

On the publishing side, I am seeing docs following development workflows and using development tools (Docs as code…).

—Senior Information Developer at large enterprise software company

The convergence of marcomm and techcomm.

—Jack Molisani, President, ProSpring Staffing

One thing I am hearing clients ask for are infographics…so data visualization beyond slide decks (PowerPoints) and posters are a popular topic.

—Kelly Schrank, Editor and Writer, Bookworm Editing Services

If you're a manager, how do you encourage your employees to develop?

> I secured STC memberships for my entire team…. I also encourage and seek support for participation in the STC Regional Tech Comm Competition to receive feedback on our work.
>
> —Bobbi Werner, Manager, Technical Communication, Welch Allyn/Hill-Rom

> We put together a career development plan tailored to each person's individual goals and check in on progress regularly. We encourage everyone to keep learning, experimenting, and sharing what they've learned with others.
>
> —Jonathon Colman, Senior Design Manager, Intercom

> [This development for my team] is a grass roots effort. We try to find free training, invite ourselves to meetings, become part of discussions, and share any knowledge gained by a team members with the general group. I also give folks up to a week off to attend training that they have paid for.
>
> —Meredith Kramer, Information Development Manager, Micro Focus

> I find out what they love, tell them what expertise I'd like for the team, and provide the time and money for them to train.
>
> —Michelle Despres, Director of Customer Experience, Modern

How does your manager encourage you to develop?

> My previous manager allowed me to attend the STC Summit, volunteer for things related to my own professional development, and would have supported me if I needed to take a course or webinar to either refresh my skills or learn new skills.
>
> —Liz Herman, Knowledge Manager, Senture

> My manager has encouraged me to expand my skill set. For example, to learn how to document APIs, which has two sides: writing the docs, as well as learning the tool used to build and manage those docs.
>
> —Senior Information Developer at large enterprise software company

> I'm independent, so that doesn't apply, exactly. I never really had a manager who encouraged my development. I'd ask to take classes or go to conferences, but never got approval to do so. It's been a while, though, so I don't know if it was a lack of budget or a lack of foresight.
>
> —Alisa Bonsignore, Strategic Communicator, Clarifying Complex Ideas

What **professional development resources** have you used to position yourself to be valuable to your organization?

Resources

Horizontal bar chart titled "Resources" showing Number of respondents:
- Other: ~4
- Professional organization membership: ~2
- Conferences: ~3
- Volunteering: ~10
- Webinars/online courses: ~12
- On-the-job skills development: ~15
- Networking: ~15
- Reading: ~16
- Certificate: ~6
- Degree: ~9

X-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20

■ Number of respondents

Additional thoughts on professional development—
Breadth of opportunity

> Professional development occurs in many different ways - sometimes reading books, blog posts, articles, attending webinars, meetups and conferences, but other times it's also trying something more tangential to your core role that provides insights into improving yourself and your work.
>
> —Kirsty Taylor, Manager of Product Internationalization, RPMGlobal

> I see folks who view their professional development based solely on their current role or a role they'd like to have within their company. The happiest folks I see are the folks who broaden their career based on their interests and then try to incorporate that back into their current job.
>
> —Meredith Kramer, Information Development Manager, Micro Focus

> For techcomm in particular, I think the best folks work beyond their roles and volunteer to do tasks, such as QA, customer advocacy, training, speaking, and more. In addition, such people also learn the language of business and have a perspective of what's reasonable for their roles and where they fit into the bigger picture of the business's value.
>
> —Gavin Austin, Principal Technical Writer, Salesforce

> Professional development isn't just learning more about tech writing. It's also about learning the field you're documenting. You don't need to know everything, but you should know the basics.
>
> —Cindy Pao, Senior Technical Writer, Apex Systems

Additional thoughts on professional development—
Support and resources

> I'm a bit frustrated that the leadership in my organization doesn't fully appreciate the value of professional development as shown by how tightly it holds its pocketbook. While it invests lots of money in PMI certifications, it has yet to extend the same favor to the CPTC or specialized tech comm training.
>
> —Bobbi Werner, Manager, Technical Communication, Welch Allyn/Hill-rom

> It's not always clear to me where to turn for more general business development, such as hiring, developing incentive comp plans, best practices for onboarding and training, etc.
>
> —Michelle Despres, Director of Customer Experience, Modern

Additional thoughts on professional development—
Learning from experience

> People learn by doing.
>
> —Pam Noreault, Principal Consultant, Senior Manager, SDL

> There's so much noise out there on the Web that it's hard to know which blogs or groups to pay attention to. Start with the big, established organizations that represent your industry, talk to people (not just leaders but also day-to-day practitioners) in those organizations to get a feeling for where they get the best insights, and who they listen to.
>
> —Michelle Gardner, Lead Information Developer, Micro Focus

> I have spoken at conferences where I learned something in my own session! There is nothing as valuable as tapping into hundreds of years of combined experience when you get professionals in the same room at the same time!
>
> —Jack Molisani, President, ProSpring Staffing

Additional thoughts on professional development—
The drive to learn

> Being self-driven is critical to professional development - whether seeking out and reading articles related to your profession or desire, or receiving formal education via certification program or degree. Plus, you don't have to devote a huge chunk of time to developing professionally. You can find five minutes to read an article; all these times add up.
>
> —Jamye Sagan, Rx Communications Advisor, H-E-B

> As a freelancer, I would stagnate if I didn't actively seek out opportunities to cross-pollinate ideas and find broader contexts. I use conferences and volunteering to network— both within my comfort zone and outside of it. I think there's a balance to be struck between keeping core skills sharp and "stretch goals" of taking things to the next level.
>
> —Alisa Bonsignore, Strategic Communicator, Clarifying Complex Ideas

> You have to take professional development into your own hands. I think too many people think it's solely their company's responsibility and I'm not in agreement with that. It's great if a company supports one's professional development goals, but if one wants to be a lifelong learner, he/she has to take the reins and make it happen.
>
> —Liz Herman, Knowledge Manager, Senture
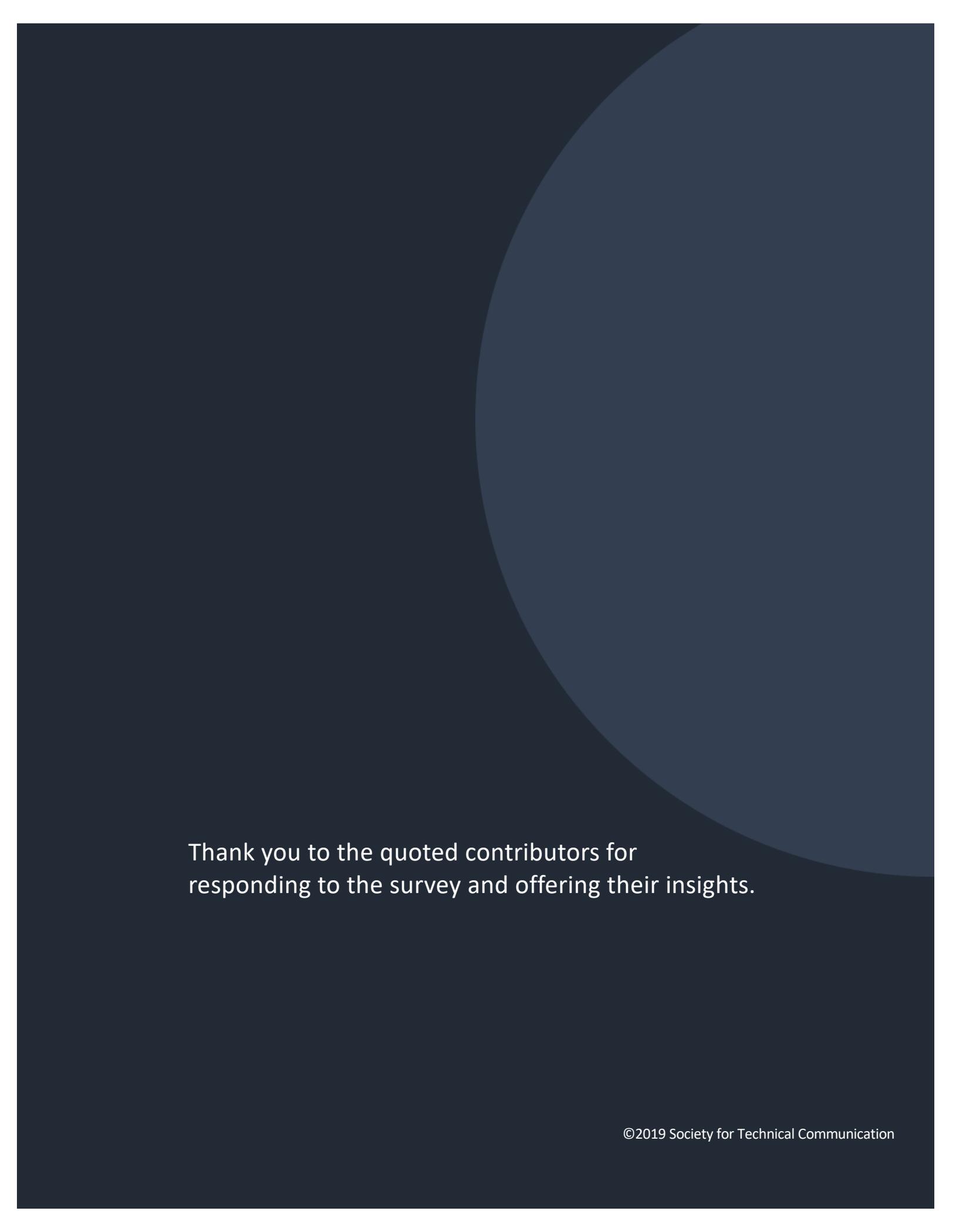
Thank you to the quoted contributors for
responding to the survey and offering their insights.