

INTEGRATED WRITERS, INTEGRATED WRITING, AND THE INTEGRATION OF DISTRIBUTED WORK

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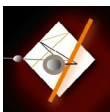
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In our studies in Europe and the US, we have seen three interrelated trends in professional writing: towards *integrated writers*, *integrated writing*, and the *integration of distributed work*. We believe that these three trends will accelerate and broaden throughout the industrialized world due to developments in knowledge work and digital technologies, as well as corresponding changes in work organization. Yet the third trend has begun developing in different ways in the different contexts of the US and Europe.



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Integrated writers are knowledge workers who own processes and who routinely combine knowledge, methods, and information with their work on those processes. Such integrated writers (e.g., engineers, general managers, accountants, health technologists) do not see themselves as writing professionals, but nevertheless integrate writing with their other tasks across the organization. They often demonstrate deficient problem-solving strategies in their writing (e.g., intensive text planning, but weak revising and a weak addressee orientation; see Jakobs, 2008). In their perception, writing is a less important and unloved part of their work, yet these writing tasks are often vital (Jakobs, 2005), especially as work becomes increasingly textualized (Jakobs, 2008).

As organizations continue to combine production and documentation chains, they will require integrated writers who can combine knowledge, methods, and information with their work on the processes they oversee. This trend seems to be proceeding in both European and US contexts.

In *integrated writing*, products are customized for specific customers through textual information to create specific value for that customer (Castells, 2003). For instance, in one study (Spinuzzi, 2010), workers integrated professional and private networks—even reaching out to friends and relatives with special expertise—to provide deeply customized products for specific clients. As workplaces become more networked and internal work becomes more accessible by external actors—customers, clients, contractors—, writing will become more integrated, involving more boundary-crossing, more interplay among activities, and more cross-functional teamwork.

Writers must also manage their integrated writing across distributed texts. This entails automating parts of writing, integrating streams of information to quickly generate and manage documentation and other forms of textual knowledge (Mirel, 1996; Pullman & Gu, 2008), then assembling, recombining, and customizing elements (Swarts, 2009). Again, we see strong evidence of this trend in both US and European contexts.

Finally, the *integration of distributed work* involves tying together distributed, disparate people and systems so that information can flow through and bring value to different contexts. This integration involves mapping genre systems across contexts. Just as software developers create applications programming interfaces (APIs) to allow different programs to interoperate seamlessly, people and products can establish common protocols for sharing and integrating information (see Spinuzzi, 2008, Ch.7).

The integration of distributed work is currently quite undeveloped, and promises to be a difficult problem that spans several domains. Intriguingly, we have seen indications that it will develop somewhat differently, given the different contexts in the US and Europe. For instance, Europe's population growth is well below the US', leading to the "greying" of the population and thus more need for public sector efforts such as tightly bundled, coordinated emergency services (Beul, Mennicken, Ziefle, Jakobs, Wielpütz, Skorning, & Rossaint, 2010) and ambient assisted living services. In the US, such services are less urgent focuses, but we see many temporary services developing (Castells, 2003), especially services that pull together comparatively small providers in the private

sector (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2004). As this trend develops, we expect to see it further adapt to each context as well as other international contexts. ■

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