

**2494-7**

**Workshop on High Performance Computing (HPC) Architecture  
and Applications in the ICTP**

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**User oriented documentation**

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# User oriented documentation



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# Overview



- Introduction
- Challenges
- Documentation
- Conclusion

# introduction



# Quote



Good documentation is important but is not regularly or effectively used.

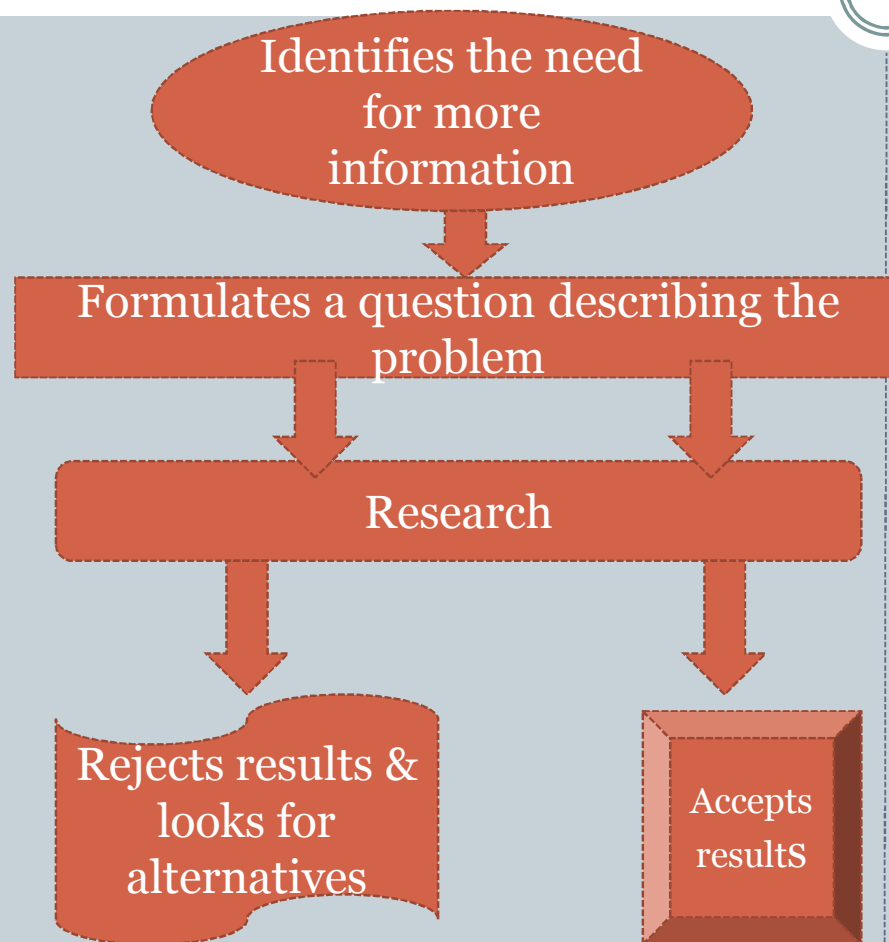
- *William Hoy, Brunel University, 1993*
- ✦ Effectively implies competent and proper use.
- ✦ Paper based context.
- ✦ Today, less documentation, emphasis is for on-line documentation.

# Status quo



- People & documentation
  - Prior dissatisfaction with (bad) documentation
    - ✦ Poor quality implies difficult to find the needed information (indexes & toc, bad references)
  - Alternative sources of information
    - ✦ INTERNET (on-line)
  - General dislike for manuals
    - ✦ Documentation is only consulted or used when “all” alternative sources have failed.

# People & information



- **Linear nature**
  - Simple nature/approach
  - Limited scope/field
- **Cyclic (Expert)**
  - To Research stage
    - ✦ Identifying sources
    - ✦ broader research fields
    - ✦ Fuzzy match
  - To Question stage
    - ✦ Re-formulating the question or conditions

# challenges





## Quote



“Users want to be independent but are also afraid of being independent”

# Broad scope to document



- Site specific (personalised):

- HPC technology

- ✦ Introducing
    - ✦ Educating on usage
    - ✦ Communicating changes

- HPC applications

- ✦ Informing
    - ✦ Educating on usage
    - ✦ Communicating changes

# It's not all about users



“IT staff want users to be dependent but are also afraid of too much dependency”

# Pre-conceptions about users



- User knows it all already.
- Users will always ask.
- Users can do better than I can (at documenting).
- User status/position is important

# It's not all about users



“In the IT field, generating or creating solutions is not easy but hiding knowledge/solutions is easier”

# Misconceptions



- I cannot share my know-how/solution(s)
- I don't know how to write.
- I must do it all myself
  
- *Common reasons:*
  - Ridicule
  - Job security
  - Territorial

# documentation



**USER ORIENTED**

# What users would like



- **Good documentation that is**
  - easy to read and to the point
  - Not too technical in nature
  - Not in text-book style
  - Oriented towards their practical (hands-on) situation and circumstances.
  - Includes their feedback & view points



# Good & effective documentation



- **Documentation should**
  - Builds/creates a positive attitude
  - Serve as an educational interface (avoids need for additional/subsequent training).
  - Reduce errors & wastage of resources
  - Improves productivity as less time is spent looking for information
  - Provides understandable & useful information in an easy to access manner

# Types of documentation



- When introducing something new or informing & communicating changes
  - guides
- When educating (on usage):
  - FAQs & how-to
  - Templates & examples
  - Training materials/tutorials

# How to document



- Identify the right type
- Collaborative/informal effort
  - Teams need users especially for applications
  - Teams need a lead person
  - Collect from multiple sources
  - Encourage voluntary contributions of bits & pieces
- Nothing is ever completed in one day
  - Use an incremental strategy
- Use on-line tools
  - Wiki style (maybe with authentication, restricted)

# User Guides



- Short and simple style
- Introduce
- state advantages
- Highlight limitations
- Offer pointers & references

# FAQs and HOW-TOs



- Questions and answer style
- Very focused
- Give step-by-step procedures
- Avoid links or pointers to external objects

# Templates and examples



- Style includes some meta-information: short description (from the view point of the user)
- Show input and expected output, when possible.
- Provide downloadable samples

# Training materials



- Tutorial style
- Includes/show expected or intended learning outcome
- Short description
- Step-by-step procedure
- Include questions

# Conclusion



- Good & effective documentation is important.
- Getting started with collaborative documentation is easy and makes it harder to go wrong.
- Start today