Stasis Theory as a Strategy for Workplace Teaming and Decision Making

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Abstract

Current scholarship tells us that skills in teaming are essential for students and practitioners of professional communication. Writers must be able to cooperate with subject-matter experts and team members to make effective decisions and complete projects. Scholarship also suggests that rapid changes in technology and changes in teaming processes challenge workplace communication and cooperation. Professional writers must be able to use complex software for projects that are often completed by multidisciplinary teams working remotely. Moreover, as technical writers shift from content developers to project managers, our responsibilities now include user-advocacy and supervision, further invigorating the need for successful communication. This article offers a different vision of an ancient heuristic—stasis theory—as a solution for the teaming challenges facing today's professional writers. Stasis theory, used as a generative heuristic rather than an eristic weapon, can help foster teaming and effective decision making in contemporary pedagogical and workplace contexts.

Introduction

Practitioners and professional communication scholars tell us that technical writers face a rapidly evolving and challenging workplace. Experts say these growing pains are sparked by new technologies, remote teaming, and shifting professional responsibilities [1, p. 45; 2, p. 464; 3, pp. 576-80]. Given these obstacles, a problem for professional writers today is the ability to find common ground on which we can cooperate and make decisions. We have at our disposal powerful applications for teaming, which give us the technological means to communicate, but we often lack strategies for cooperation, critical analysis, and discursive knowledge building.

Furthermore, the global business realities of telecommuting and outsourcing continue to challenge work teams [1, p. 45]. Adding to this complex formula is the changing role of technical communicators. Scott L. Jones (2005) reminds us that we now form an important nexus of workplace knowledge building and management [2, p. 464]. Moreover, Cezar M. Ornatowski (1995) asserts that our shifting roles are taking us into new areas of decision making in technology, culture, and public policy [3, pp. 576-80]. Given the obstacles of our multimedia, dispersed workplace, how can we work together to find common ground and make effective decisions?

In this article, I argue that a more proactive use of stasis theory in our professional writing courses and in the workplace can help improve teaming, critical thinking, and decision-making. I argue that the stases can foster these skills in a number of ways outlined below. Briefly defined,

stasis theory is a four-question invention heuristic developed in ancient Greece and refined by Roman rhetoricians, such as Cicero, Quintilian, and Hermogenes. In a contemporary interpretation, moving through the four stases encourages discursive knowledge building important for virtual and remote teaming. Specifically, stasis theory asks teams to agree on the facts (conjecture), the meaning of the issue (definition), the seriousness of the issue (quality), and the stases ask group members to work together to determine what should be done (policy).

I posit that the stases encourage teams to work *with* (rather than against) parties involved in projects. I hope to show we can use stasis theory as a cooperative (and so more user-centered) process to help us integrate all sides of a discussion so that texts emerge as multi-sided, shared artifacts. I also hope to show how stasis encourages teams to develop a critical understanding of rhetorical situations. I argue that taxonomic patterning of information in stasis helps groups focus on the matter at hand so decisions reflect the issues in contention. Critical analysis and focused decision-making are essential skills for technical writers whose responsibilities now include composition, user-advocacy, *and* management in multimedia and remote workspaces.

Challenges for Workplace Teaming

Current scholarship suggests that the ability to cooperate with subject-matter experts and coworkers is the primary skill professional writers must possess as they move into the workplace. However, an increasingly complex (technological and cultural) and dispersed workplace challenges writers' ability to cooperate. This section outlines current workplace collaboration needs and explains some of the challenges facing writers as they attempt to cooperate in a multimedia, global workspace.

In the article, "Do Curricula Correspond to Managerial Expectations? Core Competencies for Technical Communicators" (2005), Rainey, Turner, and Dayton explain their research on current workplace expectations for technical communicators. In their research, they found that the most important skills for professional writers were skills in collaboration and the "ability to write clearly for specific audiences directed by clearly defined purposed" [4, p. 323]. For their study, Rainey, Turner, and Dayton surveyed and interviewed technical communication managers from the United States, Canada, the U.K., and Australia. Based on this research, they find that

> All respondents ranked the ability to collaborate with subject-matter experts as the most essential skill for technical communicators…the second most important skill…is the ability to collaborate with coworkers…other important collaborative competencies are the ability to conduct problem-solving interviews, to address the communication conflicts in groups, and to conduct on-site interviews and observations for user and task analysis (contextual inquiry). [4, p. 327]

To help foster this expertise, Rainey, Turner, and Dayton recommend that undergraduate technical communication programs "find ways to develop students' interpersonal and collaborative skills; to the extent that this instruction is already included in the curricula, assess the effectiveness of the instruction" [4, p. 322]. They also conclude that demands in telecommuting, outsourcing, and technology, as well as shifting job responsibilities, will

contribute to writers' ability to collaborate, conduct rhetorical analyses, solve problems, and make decisions [4, pp. 334-335]. Similarly, in "Organizational Implications of the Future Development of Technical Communication: Fostering Communities of Practice in the Workplace" (2005), Fisher and Bennion outline the need for skills in collaboration given the growing complexity of today's workteams.

In their article, Fisher and Bennion discuss their ongoing survey and assessment research on communities of practice at IBM. They find that "the tools and technologies that technical communicators use are constantly evolving. In this complex and dynamic environment, 'community' is emerging as a critical element both in supporting individual professional development and in defining the future of the profession itself" [5, p. 277]. Specifically, Fisher and Bennion see communities of practice as important for the success of our discipline. Fisher and Bennion explain that

> Communities of practice are emerging as the collaborative and creative space where technical communicators can move the profession forward in new directions, with new technologies and skills while supporting the core added value of technical communication: providing the information people need, when they need it, in a quality and usable manner. [5, p. 278]

Fisher and Bennion also explain that communities of practice contribute to "…a commercial organization's success…decreasing learning curves, helping identify subject-matter experts, enabling employees to understand the context in which they perform tasks, and making the transfer of knowledge easier" [5, p. 277]. Fisher and Bennion point to a number of "mechanisms to nurture communities in the workplace" [5, p. 279]. For the purposes of my discussion of workplace cooperation, I highlight two of these mechanisms: "infrastructure for collaborative communities…consideration of physical proximity" [5, p. 279].

Fisher and Bennion find that "…informal learning and sharing of knowledge is critical to the success of skills-based communities, and to the transfer of knowledge over time…as individuals come and go" [5, p. 280]. These findings point to an interesting facet of collaboration that adds to the complexity of workplace cooperation: turnover. While new workers can introduce new ideas to a project, bringing group members up to speed can muddle the already difficult teaming process. Lastly, Fisher and Bennion find that proximity of workteams seriously impacts communication and productivity [5, p. 281]. So it appears that the collaborative discourse practices called for by Rainey, Turner, Dayton, and Fisher and Bennion can be complicated by the technologies and physical distances so often interwoven in today's project management.

Larbi and Springfield further explain communication challenges facing technical writers working apart in their article, "When No One's Home: Being a Writer on Remote Project Teams" (2004). Based on their workplace experience, they find that "In the global industrial/technological business arena…arrangements are giving way to environments that are simultaneously more accessible and more isolating" [6, pp. 102-3].

Larbi and Springfield also looked at a number of studies and conclude, "…that people tend to feel less safe and less trusting in electronic exchange…remote communication can lead to

paranoia…vocal challenges and spontaneous feedback can be hampered…" [6, pp. 102-3]. To address these challenges, they list a number of elements desirable for remote writers. A successful remote writer:

- Perceives expectations quickly
- Focuses on shared goals and not on personalities
- Plays on the team uncompromisingly
- Resolves problems directly
- Plans in detail
- Stays flexible
- Facilitates communication. [6, pp. 102-3]

The ability to communicate and collaborate with subject-matter experts and coworkers is now paramount to professional communicators. Teams, often multidisciplinary and remote, are becoming the standard practice. However, the technologies and the complex teamwork that allow for such dynamic practices can contribute to the breakdown of teaming so important to 21st century workspaces (*how*ever or *where*ever you define those). Shifting job responsibilities further complicate this cooperation.

Critical Thinking for Important Decisions

A growing number of scholars are calling for students and practitioners who can adjust to evolving workplace writing situations. In addition, scholars articulate a need for students who are better decision makers. Primarily, the exigence for this is twofold:

- Professional writers' roles and responsibilities are shifting due to changes in technology and changes in processes of collaboration
- Professional writers are moving into decision-making and management positions.

Scott L. Jones, in "Technology and Collaboration" (2005), discusses the marked shifts in collaboration between writers and their coworkers at a Midwest insurance company. These shifts, he finds, were caused by changes in technology. For his research, Jones developed an analytical continuum that categorized contextual, hierarchical, and group collaboration on a less to more overt collaborative interaction scale. This continuum helped him study how "…the writers' jobs were significantly transformed by the company's transition to a digital concept of writing" [2, p. 449]. Specifically, the company Jones researched transitioned from a print-based process of document development to an electronic process, and the company integrated a corporate intranet to help compose, revise, and distribute work [2, p. 456]. To develop data, Jones conducted interviews, collected screen shots of the company intranet, and conducted field studies of work processes.

Jones concludes that "…the writing process had changed and that the writers focused less on producing texts and more on developing, coordinating, and structuring the newly adopted corporate intranet" [2, p. 456]. Moreover, he finds that writers at the insurance company shifted

from content developers to "…information coordinators or facilitators…" during the nine years between his original research and his most recent work [2, p. 464]. He attributes this role change to "changes in technology," which sparked modifications in teaming.

Writers' responsibilities are expanding from content developers to facilitators, but writers' responsibilities also now include decision-making and management. Scholars are calling for more training in these areas to more accurately reflect writers' growing responsibilities.

Ornatowski, in his essay, "Educating Technical Communicators to Make Better Decisions" (1995), asserts that pedagogues must help professional writers develop better decision-making skills because writers are now moving into more influential positions, contributing to technology, culture, and public policy [3, pp. 576-80]. Ornatowski states

> Looking at technical communication in terms of making decisions, that is looking at what decisions technical communicators make, what the scope is of those decisions, and what their implications are, provides a new and critical dimension to technical communication education. [3, pp. 576-80]

In addition, Ornatowski highlights the expanding roles of technical writers in management: "Green and Nolan (1984) report that technical communication positions above the entry level often involve communicators in project management and other management-level decision making" [3, pp. 576-80].

Today's technical writers face a number of challenges in contemporary workspaces—the ability to collaborate with multidisciplinary teams that work in high-tech and often remote contexts and the ability to shift roles and responsibilities based on technological and managerial demands. Where do we look for solutions to help us tackle these obstacles? Susan Harkness Regli (1999) sees rhetorical theory as an answer.

In her article, "Whose Ideas?: The Technical Writer's Expertise in *Inventio*," Regli recognizes the growing need for strategies in teaming and the need to develop skills in critical thinking and decision making. She offers rhetorical solutions to address these workplace communication challenges. Regli argues that professional writers must assert their position as workplace knowledge *inventors* rather than passive translators of technical information. Further, she asserts that pedagogues must invigorate this awareness through coursework in rhetorical theory:

> …if we do not work to articulate rich techniques for invention in the education of technical writers, we inadvertently reinforce the myth of the technical writer as a born scribe—a fortuitously gifted communicator who by instinct knows how to 'clean up' the products of the real 'inventors' of technical information. [7, pp. 31-2]

Importantly though, Regli also states that we must resist using only eristic forms of argumentation in our instruction; rather, we should focus on rhetorical strategies of cooperation:

> As rhetoricians, we inherit a tradition that knows a great deal about how to persuade an audience…by contrast, we know much less about how to exchange knowledge profitably, about how to clarify differences of definition and associations while recognizing ambiguities, and about how to identify and solve problems while incorporating many varied perspectives. [7, p. 35]

Regli points to *rhetorical* solutions for improving teaming and decision-making, but she also highlights the challenges we face during the teaming process:

> When experts interact to plan or to write together…the problem spaces are numerous, each mind has its own content spaces, and the expertise is inconveniently divided into these separate content spaces. The reflective rhetor in this communication situation cannot simply move back and forth between the content space and the rhetorical space in his or her own mind; rather, the task of communication is to enable the different spaces in the different minds to interact productively with one another, even as the locus of expertise is shifting constantly. [7, pp. 35-6]

To help tackle these problems, Regli issues a clear request for rhetorical solutions:

> We need to develop more extensive heuristics for how to navigate between these problem spaces—for how to locate sources of misunderstanding, discover the relevant loci of expertise among multidisciplinary specialists, and synthesize the expertise of many into a document or plan of action. [7, p. 36]

Regli outlines specifically what these strategies should contain:

- Strategies for collaborative problem identification and inquiry
- Situation analysis
- Audience analysis
- Analysis of the structure of information
- Production skills. [7, pp. 36-8]

I argue that a more proactive use of stasis theory in our professional writing courses and in the workplace fits Regli's call for more extensive heuristics to help improve teaming, critical thinking, and decision-making in today's workplace. The following sections explain the stases and outline how a new vision of the heuristic addresses the needs of postmodern workspaces.

Stasis Theory in Practice

Stasis theory gives us a practical heuristic to help teams sort out the issues involved in document development while fostering the invention of new ideas. With a few strategic alterations to the classical understanding of stasis theory, we can develop a flexible tool that better aligns with fast-moving, flexible, postmodern technical workplace. We can also develop pedagogical
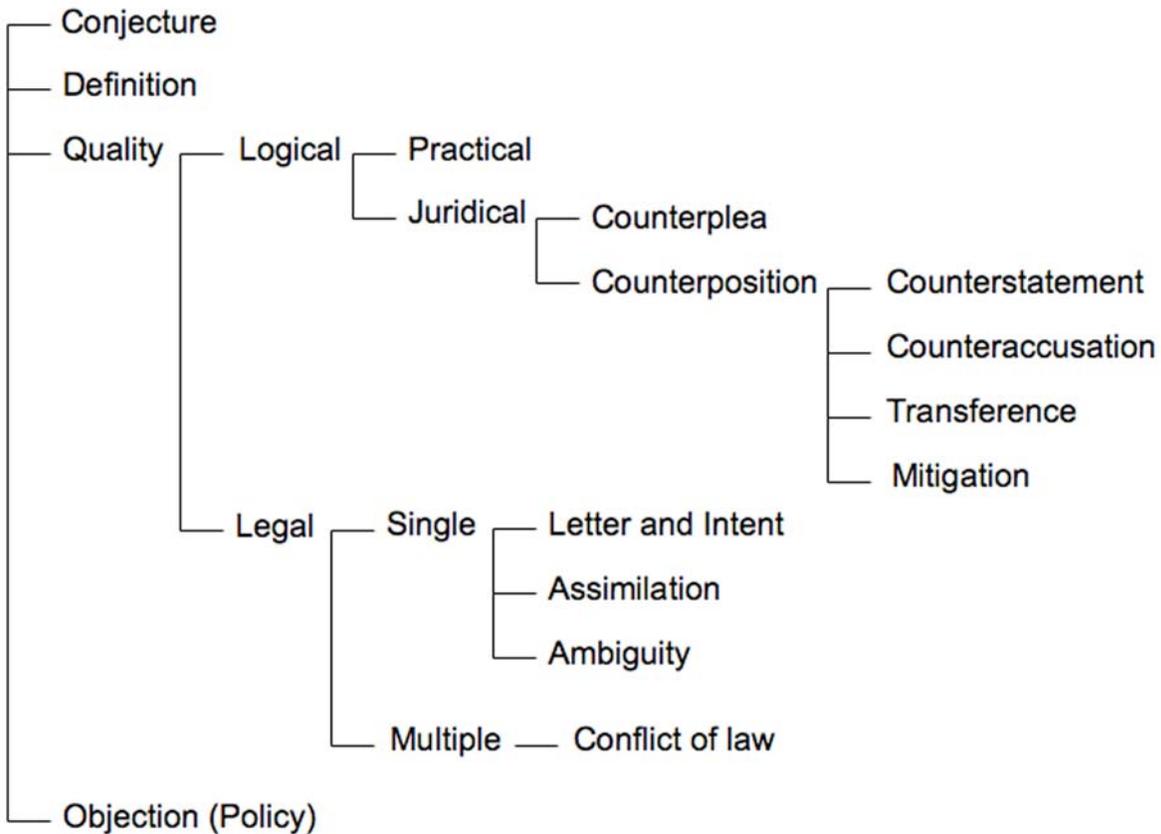
applications of stasis theory that will prepare students in technical fields for these kinds of work environments.

What is Stasis Theory?

Stasis theory is a taxonomic heuristic of inquiry developed in ancient Greece, by rhetoricians such as Aristotle and Hermagoras, and refined by Roman rhetoricians including Cicero, Quintilian, and Hermogenes [8, p. 410; 9, p. 71]. The stases played an important role in classical rhetoric and "…were taken up and refined by every significant rhetorician until the Renaissance" [10, p. 428]. The heuristic assists in collecting information to determine the issue at hand. Stasis may also be used to work toward solutions. The ancients considered stasis a form of invention, but they also used stasis in legal cases, so the heuristic moves between deliberative and legal rhetoric. Legal contestants moved through the stases to argue disputes and settle claims. The traditional approach to stasis worked in a linear process from the first question to the last:

1. Conjecture (*stasis stochasmos*) – Is there an act to be considered?
2. Definition (*stasis horos*) – How can the act be defined?
3. Quality (*stasis poiotes*) – How serious is the act?
4. Policy (*stasis metalepsis*) – Should this act be submitted to some formal procedure? [11, p. 67]

If at any point during the traditional process of stasis one of the disputants did not agree with the presented information, the argument would stop (arrest) and plaintiffs would attempt to agree (achieve stasis or find common ground) within the disputed element. It is often easier to understand stasis theory as heuristic when viewed graphically. The visual below is adapted from Heath [12, pp. 71-2].

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— Conjecture
— Definition
— Quality — Logical — Practical
                  └ Juridical — Counterplea
                              └ Counterposition — Counterstatement
                                                — Counteraccusation
                                                — Transference
                                                — Mitigation
        └ Legal — Single — Letter and Intent
                         — Assimilation
                         — Ambiguity
                └ Multiple — Conflict of law
— Objection (Policy)
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(1) Are the facts of the case in dispute?
    (a) yes: the issue is *conjecture*
    (b) no: go to (2).
(2) Is the correct categorization of those facts in dispute?
    (a) yes: the issue is *definition*
    (b) no: the issue is *quality*; go to (3).
(3) Does the dispute focus on the implications of substantive features of the acts in question, or on the implications of the law under which the charge is brought (or of some other relevant legal instrument)?
    (a) act: the issue is *logical*; go to (4).
    (b) law: the issue is *legal*; go to (9).
(4) Is the dispute concerned with a past or future act?
    (a) future: the issue is *practical*.
    (b) past: the issue is *juridical*; go to (5).
(5) Does the defense deny that the act in question was *prima facie* illegal?
    (a) yes: the issue is *counterplea*.
    (b) no: the issue is *counterposition*; go to (6)
(6) Is responsibility for the act accepted or transferred?
    (a) accepted: the issue is *counterstatement*.
    (b) transferred: go to (7).
(7) Is responsibility transferred to the victim?
    (a) yes: the issue is *counteraccusation*.
    (b) no: go to (8).
	(8) Is responsibility transferred to an accountable third party?
	    (a) yes: the issue is *transference*.
	    (b) no: the issue is *mitigation*.
	(9) If the dispute focuses on the implications of a law or legal instrument, is there one instrument or more than one (or one divided into more than one part)?
	    (a) one: go to (10).
	    (b) more than one: go to (12).
	(10) Is the literal interpretation of the law agreed?
	    (a) yes: go to (11).
	    (b) no: go to (13).
	(11) Is an implied meaning of the instrument substituted for its explicit meaning, or added to it?
	    (a) substituted: the issue is *letter and intent*.
	    (b) added: the issue is *assimilation*.
	(12) If the dispute is concerned with more than one legal instrument (or one divided into more than one part), then the issue is *conflict of law*.
	(13) If the literal meaning of a legal instrument is disputed, then the issue is *ambiguity*.

Figure 1., Stasis Theory Diagram with Attendant Questions

Although stasis *can* be used to argue, it is still not considered "technical logic," as Richard Fulkerson (1988) reminds us: "stasis theory classifies arguments in a wholly different way from logic, not by their form…or by the type of premise used…or even the relationship between premises and conclusions…but by the ontological status of the reality claim the conclusion asserts" [13, p. 448]. Because of its potentially discursive approach to rhetoric, stasis can foster a cooperative work process conducive to professional writing.

Contemporary Uses

Many contemporary rhetoricians advocate using the stases in various contexts: invention, rhetorical analysis, audience analysis. The majority of these scholars work within rhetoric and composition (Dieter, Fulkerson, Crowley, Hawhee, Carter), but a growing number of technical writing scholars recognize the need for stasis theory in professional writing pedagogy and practice (Fahnestock, Secor, Johnson-Sheehan, Ranney). Of these scholars, Fahnestock and Secor have contributed the most work in this area.

"Toward a Modern Version of Stasis" (1985) Fahnestock and Secor outline the close relationship between the stases and professional writing: "stasis theory has always been associated with technical rhetoric because of its forensic genesis…" [14, p. 217]. To better reflect our scientific inquiry beginning with the Enlightenment, Fahnestock and Secor also argue for a fifth stasis question (cause, following definition and preceding quality): "…the overwhelming importance it has acquired since the age of Newton: the question 'What caused it?'" [14, p. 221]. In addition, they underscore the value of stasis as a flexible and analytical tool. Toward these points, Fahnestock and Secor consider contemporary use of stasis as beneficial in three ways:

1. Recursiveness: "…the stases are recursive…a question about any issue can interrupt the discussion of any other, sending the whole procedure…through another round of establishing facts, definitions, evaluations, and jurisdiction…we take this recursiveness as a sign of the theory's flexibility"
2. Complex process of reasoning: "each [element] evokes more refined questions at the same stasis and counter-argument at every stage…any adaptation of the stases should take account of and even value this complexity, for it means that the stases can lead the rhetor to an enriched invention strategy…"
3. Logical hierarchy: "…the stasis questions are hierarchical…questions of fact are logically prior to questions of definition and are subsumed in definition arguments; questions of definition are similarly included in questions of quality; and finally, questions of jurisdiction take in all previous arguments and can set them aside under the rubric of procedural impropriety" [14, pp. 218-9].

Further, they recognize how we can apply stasis in public policy: "…can we use the stases to describe the informal and indeterminate arguing that goes on over issues within disciplines or issues of general public interest? The answer is yes" [14, p. 223]. This last point is especially important given the expanding responsibilities of professional writers in decision-making roles.

In "The Stases in Scientific and Literary Argument," (1988) Fahnestock and Secor find "…the stases not only useful as an invention tactic but also as a principle of arrangement and a probe for

the analysis of audience and context" [10, p. 428]. Specifically, they highlight the heuristic's value as a writing tool, noting how the stasis questions help users fill in knowledge gaps and create content. Moreover, they underscore the use of stasis as a flexible tool of logic, locating the heuristic "…between the general outline of an argument, applicable to all arguments regardless off field, described by the Toulmin model, and the very specific lines of argument engendered by the special topoi preferred by specific disciplines" [10, p. 429]. Fahnestock and Secor describe how writers can use the stases as a guide for arrangement in a wide variety of venues, including "…general-circulation magazines" [10, p. 429]. But they also note the use of stasis in scientific writing: "…scientific articles occupy the first two (or, depending on your scheme, three) stases. They are concerned with matters of fact, definition, and cause" [10, pp. 432-4].

The renewed interest in stasis theory reflects rhetoric's reemergence as a viable and dynamic discipline, and more directly rhetoricians' rediscovery of invention. But there is a gap in scholarship investigating the stases as a teaming process for social knowledge building.

The Social Perspective: A Different Stasis for a Postmodern Workspace

Fahnestock and Secor effectively outline the uses of stasis as a tool for invention, arrangement, and analysis. These are valuable considerations for careful, rhetorically aware authors. But how do we adjust stasis theory to use it as a process of teaming and decision-making? First, we must recognize the discursive nature of stasis when we take it from its traditionally linear process and expand it even beyond the recursive capabilities Fahnestock and Secor outline in "Toward a Modern Version of Stasis" (above). When we break the linear path of the heuristic and embrace its flexibility—seeing disagreement in a stasis as an opportunity for *continuing* discourse—we open up the process and allow involved parties the freedom to avoid the original *arresting* nature of the stases. And when we move stasis from a tool of author-centered invention into a cooperative space, we shift invention from an isolated practice into a firmly discursive space for social construction of knowledge. This approach situates the stases in the "social sphere" Barbara Biesecker outlines in "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of *Différance*," and it places the stasis in a position to answer Hawhee's call in "Kairotic Encounters" for building knowledge "in the turn" [15; 16].

By reviewing some of the tenets of professional writing's social perspective, we begin to see how stasis theory aligns with many aspects of a postmodern workspace. Some elements of the social perspective outlined by Rachel Spilka in *Writing in the Workplace: New Research Perspectives* (1993) include:

- The relationships between social contexts and the composing process in workplace settings
- The cognitive and social behavior throughout the writing process
  - Informal social interactions, formal meetings, writing, and reading protocols
  - Log books of data about social interactions
  - Discourse-based interviews of drafts
  - Evolution of documents. [17, p. viii]

These attributes align with the cooperative workplaces outlined in the beginning of this article. And given its potentially interactive processes, stasis can play an important role in these social processes. Moreover, since social constructionists view the culture and the process of authorship as influential on artifact production, it follows that the discursive process of a postmodern stasis can positively impact writers' social interaction and writing strategies. In turn, stasis can positively impact the outcome of the labor—the text. To return to Fahnestock and Secor ("Toward a Modern Version of Stasis"), it is clear they saw a space for building this sort of cooperative common ground within the stases:

> …arguments outside the tournament situation can frequently deadlock. To resolve conflicts deadlocked in the higher in the higher stases, parties can move down to the anterior stases of fact and cause…to…create that familiar territory known as common ground, the locus that agreement can inhibit…an analysis of conflict according to the stases can show parties where they are in fundamental and permanent disagreement about facts, definitions, causes—no small achievement. [14, p. 223]

So even if parties cannot agree on every element of their discussion, stasis can help identify areas of disagreement to allow participants to build bridges where possible. This process points to the heuristic's value beyond invention and rhetorical analysis. Here we see stasis as a cooperative knowledge-building heuristic and process for decision making and even problem solving, qualities recognized by Michael Carter in "Stasis and Kairos: Principles of Social Construction in Classical Rhetoric" (1988).

In his article, Carter explores social construction in stasis and kairos in response to some scholars' stance that elements of classical rhetoric are "…obsessively individualistic…" [18, p. 98]. Carter asserts, "…classical rhetoric, particularly…the principles of stasis and kairos, offers a rich source for understanding the social construction of discourse" [18, p. 98]. To develop his claims, Carter lists five areas where the stases act to build knowledge socially:

1. "Stasis grows out of the conflict of opposing forces, the initial accusation, the denial, the *kataphasis* and *apophasis*…stasis…represents the place where rhetoric begins, an explicit or implicit disagreement or conflict."
2. "The stasiastic conflict is generative, creating an impetus for rhetorical action. Though stasis has connotations of standing still, the result of the confrontation of two opposing movements or forces, it also bears a strong sense of the potential energy of creation and action."
3. "Stasis is also a doctrine of inquiry. Nearly everyone who has written on stasis has associated it with asking questions."
4. "Stasis also provides a means for resolving the conflict. The principle of stasis not only encompasses the temporary impasse of opposing positions and the action that is sparked to overcome that impasse, but it also provides a *direction* for action—toward the resolution of the conflict."
5. "Finally, stasis is situational. It provides a way of defining the rhetorical situation, particularly the rhetorical conflict, so that the rhetors can respond with arguments that are

appropriate to that situation, arguments found in the *topoi* included within the stasiastic categories" [18, p. 99-100].

Important to workplace teaming, Carter sees the stases a conflict-solving process in this way:

Stasis…was an act of bringing the members of a community of knowledge—a resolution of a conflict of knowledge. And language was at the center of that act: both the method of seeking knowledge and the knowledge that emerged from that method defined the community. [18, p. 101]

Given the discursive, cooperative nature of today's multimedia communication, and given the challenges of finding common ground within multidisciplinary workteams often writing remotely, it seems that a rhetorical heuristic such as stasis finds fertile ground to grow discursive knowledge in the 21st century workspace. There are, however, obstacles to this approach.

The Agony of Stasis

To this point, I have discussed the need for skills in cooperation and the ability to navigate the shifting roles of professional writers. I have offered stasis as a rhetorical heuristic to help skills in teaming and communication given these needs. However, I see two primary obstacles to using stasis as a strategy for workplace teaming and decision-making—the first is theoretical, the second involves training and use:

1. The challenge of shifting stasis theory from its arresting strategy to a generative approach to cooperative knowledge building and decision-making.
2. The challenge of educating instructors and practitioners in the stases.

Moving the stases from an eristic tool to a social knowledge-building heuristic requires a shift from a predominantly Roman concept of rhetoric, rooted in *athlios*, which "…emphasizes the prize and hence the victor…" to a Greek concept of rhetoric rooted in *agôn* and *aretê*, which "…emphasizes the event of the gathering itself—the encounter rather than the division between the opposing sides" [19, pp.185-6,].

The Romans developed the stases from humble beginnings in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* into a forensic system for establishing fact, definition, quality, and policy. (We think the Romans did this because they maintained a complex legal system and a far-flung empire populated with different cultures.) Roman rhetoric differed greatly from Greek rhetoric, however, in objectives and process. Roman rhetoric acted more as a tool for victory, whereas Greek rhetoric worked as a discursive system of inquiry and philosophy.

Stasis can be a tool for victory in tournament settings, but it can also work as a process for cooperation, as Carter points out (above). Specifically, the heuristic can serve as an arresting strategy for identifying weak points in opponents' rhetorical positions, but it can also work as a generative methodology for promoting discourse. Our challenge, then, is using stasis to build bridges rather than dig trenches. I argue that in order to develop the stases as a cooperative process, we must emphasize the Greeks concepts of *agôn* and *aretê*.

In "Agonism and Aretê," Hawhee stresses that Greek rhetoric was influenced by the concepts of *agôn* and *aretê*. She argues that the Greeks saw glory and honor *in the engagement itself* rather than just in victory, subtleties lost on the pragmatic Romans. Hawhee asserts that *agôn*, "the contest, the encounter that produces struggle and change," was vital to the Greeks [19, p. 185]. She also asserts that *agôn* was inexorably tied to *aretê*, the Greek idea of virtue, which was "…bound with *agathos* (good), *kleos* (glory), *timê* (honor), and *philotimia* (love of honor)" [19, p. 187]. Important to remember, then, is that virtuous contests (both athletic and intellectual) had more to do with process than with victory: "What matters for *aretê*…is not the victory *per se* but rather the hunt for the victory" [19, pp. 185-6, 192]. In short, by reviving the Greek ideas of *agôn* and *aretê*, I see the potential for a generative stasis.

In order to integrate stasis into our pedagogy and our workplace writing practices, we must focus on rhetoric as a process for analysis and compromise rather than victory. To do this we must shift the stases out of the zero sum game in which it now sits—our vision of rhetoric is still far more Roman than Greek.

Too often in our use of rhetoric, as Fahnestock and Secor point out (above), we privilege winning by over-emphasizing persuasion. The problem we face is that stasis was perfected by a Roman culture that honored victory and not a Greek culture that valued *agôn* and *aretê*. In order to move stasis from win-at-all-cost to postmodern cooperation, we need to emphasize the glory in the struggle, the honor in the engagement. Hawhee states

> Taking seriously rhetoric's emergence in the context of the *agôn* requires a reconfiguration of rhetoric as an agonistic encounter…for the sophists at least, *agonism* produces rhetoric as a gathering of forces—cultural, bodily, and discursive, thus problematizing the easy portrayal of rhetoric as *telos*-driven persuasion or as a means to reach consensus. [19, p. 186]

Rather than using stasis as a battleground where combatants circle one another to find openings in rhetorical armor, the stases should act more like a puzzle where the parties involved in discussion work together to build facts, agree on definitions and quality, so they can develop policies that emerge as multi-sided, shared processes. Admittedly, this will not be easy. Working with stasis theory demands work, work for the instructor, work for the practitioner. But as Hawhee maintains, the Greeks believed that one could not achieve *aretê* without effort and sacrifice:

> As Hesiod had long before pointed out, there has to be sweat before aretê…what matters for aretê, then, is not the victory *per se* but rather the hunt for the victory. 'Questing,' for Pindar, necessarily entails certain risks and much work, as he writes in an ode for the winner of the mule race at Olympia in 472 and 468 B.C.E.: 'Achievements without risk win no honor among men or on hollow ships, but many remember if a noble deed is accomplished with toil' (*Ol*. 6 9-12). [19, p. 192]

So we need to emphasize for our students and for our work teams the importance and value of using rhetoric to work together for productive ends. That is not to say that working through the

stases does not produce strife. It can and it *should*. Hawhee reminds us that strife is not always negative. She states the Greeks had two kinds of strife, one of which we can adopt as a model for using stasis in professional writing pedagogy and in cooperative work teams:

> The idea of productive strife as a principle of movement is central, for example, in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, as he delineates two kinds of strife…Hesiod's concern is primarily with the *effects* of the two kinds of strife. While one kind of strife can be destructive insofar as it manifests itself in war resulting in death, among other things, the other kind of strife can be productive…. [19, p. 192]

I argue this productive strife begins with showing students and team members how to use stasis as a generative process for building knowledge and solving problems. To this end, I conclude this article with a discussion of stasis-centered work.

Stasis-Centered Work

This section explains *how* we can use stasis theory to help develop skills in cooperation and decision making for teaming in remote, multimedia workspaces. Provided below are strategies I have discovered and adapted during my research of stasis and methods I have developed for teaching stasis in composition and professional writing courses. I also use stasis theory to foster cooperation on professional writing contracts.

I have organized this section to show how stasis can be applied during a 16-week professional writing course. However, with some modification, these guidelines and materials can be altered to work in professional contexts. For a detailed explanation of how to use stasis theory in the workplace, please see the chapter 2 in *Writing Proposals: Rhetoric for Managing Change,* 2nd ed. (2007), "Identifying Problems and Opportunities" [20].

To address the needs outlined in the first half of this article, I begin my courses with an introduction to user-centered theory as conceived by Robert R. Johnson (1998) and Paul V. Anderson (2007)[1] [21; 22]. Then we move into rhetoric and employment documents (for syllabi and other course materials, see http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~hbrizee/Website/hbrizeehome1.htm). After working with the basic concepts of rhetoric, we move to the informational white paper, which students research and compose in groups. Students use the stases to cooperate in teaming. Students are expected to address and deal with as many sides of an issue as possible to work to consensus so projects emerges as socially constructed and multi-sided.

To help build copiousness of information for the white paper, students cast a wide net to explore their topic and to educate themselves and their future audiences for the problem-solution report. Important to the exploration is finding information from *all* sides of the issue, so students' research and solutions best reflect all parties involved in the problem. This research methodology reflects a Platonic exploration. To further explore the rhetorical nature of our work, we hold meta-discussions about the research and the differences between Platonic, Aristotelian, and

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[1] If we are to move to a more user-centered workplace, the methods we use to address problems and compose texts must be more collaborative. Though a discussion of these ideas is beyond the scope of this article, I see stasis offering us a discursive heuristic we can use to move toward a more user-centered workplace culture.

sophistic knowledge building.

For exploratory research, we use the stases as a form of invention and for analysis of the rhetorical situation and audience. We discuss stasis, and to help students appreciate the active role stasis can play in teaming, students work through in-class pro/con exercises described by Thomas O. Sloan in "Reinventing Inventio" [23]. In this way, students use stasis for three of the five canons of rhetoric: discursive invention (research and analysis), arrangement (document organization, see below), and delivery. To assist in these processes, students answer as many of the stasis questions as possible on heuristic worksheets and maps. I advocate using stasis theory in an overt manner primarily because I agree with Ann Brady in "Rhetorical Research: Toward a User-Centered Approach" when she states, "As a technê, or productive art…rhetoric becomes more useful the more it is used—and the more self-consciously it is used. If rhetorical knowledge remains tacit, thus unconscious, it remains largely inaccessible, even to those who possess it" [24, p. 59]. Students arrange and deliver their information in the white paper and then conduct empirical research for the capstone project, the audience analysis and problem-solution report.

For empirical research, we discuss how to use the stases to guide work, and students use an empirical research map to help triangulate their knowledge (observations, interviews, and surveys). Further, students work through additional heuristics, an empirical research worksheet and a stasis worksheet. These exercises help focus inquiry, and they help identify areas requiring research. If groups cannot answer stasis questions effectively, they have located an area needing further research. I believe, therefore, stasis has helped students develop skills in the three areas outlined above as important for today's technical writers:

1. *Discursive knowledge-building*: students use stasis to work cooperatively in groups during the exploratory and empirical phases of the projects. During the exploratory phase, students use stasis to collect a wide range of data, including information about all of the people involved in the issue and their stakes in the process. During the empirical phase, students use stasis, and Stephen A. Bernhardt's Seed Document[2], to ask critical questions about their project and about stakeholders whose beliefs and/or needs may not align with the group's conclusions [25, p. 25].
2. *Critical thinking*: students use stasis during invention to help conduct research on all sides of a topic/problem without privileging data that supports a thesis—there is no thesis to support at this point. The research is exploratory.
3. *Decision-making*: students use stasis during exploratory and empirical research, as well as during the audience analysis, to develop an in-depth understanding of the rhetorical situation. Therefore, solutions (decisions) better reflect the situation at hand and better reflect the needs of everyone involved with the problem: decision makers, secondary readers, shadow readers, stakeholders, those who may not agree with students' solutions.

Important also are the instructor's efforts in reminding students to shift rhetoric, and the stases,

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[2] To aid with this critical questioning, I use Stephen A. Bernhardt's Seed Document from "Knowledge Management and Pharmaceutical Development Teams: Using Writing to Guide Science" as an assignment to help students analyze their research and conclusions.

away from the eristic Roman concept and align their efforts with Greek notions of *agôn* and *aretê*. Instructors can help this process by asking students to focus on what has changed recently that contributes to the exigence of the issue rather than focusing on who is to blame for the problem. When dealing with civic issues in a problem-solution approach, inexperienced writers like to point fingers rather than trying to work cooperatively with decision makers and stakeholders. Focusing on what has changed rather than who is to blame is a key difference between deliberative and forensic rhetoric. The list below provides a clearer picture of the assignments I use during the semester (please see my Website for assignment sheets):

- Employment documents (audience analysis, résumé, cover letter)
- Exploratory white paper
- Seed document
- Problem-solution report

The stasis worksheet provided below is one heuristic students use during their semester projects.

Stasis Worksheet	Resolution through teaming
1. Fact Is there a problem? How did it begin and what are its causes? What changed to create the problem?	
2. Definition What exactly is the problem? What kind of a problem is it?	
3. Quality How serious is the problem? What are the costs of the problem?	
4. Policy Who should be involved in helping to solve this problem? What should we do about this problem? What do the clients need?	

Figure 2., Stasis Worksheet: Resolution Through Teaming

The graphic below illustrates how the stases inform and guide invention, research, and collaborative work throughout the semester. The research maps below the stasis graphic work into the semester overview where noted.

Stasis-Centered Work: Using the Stases for Invention, Arrangement, and Delivery
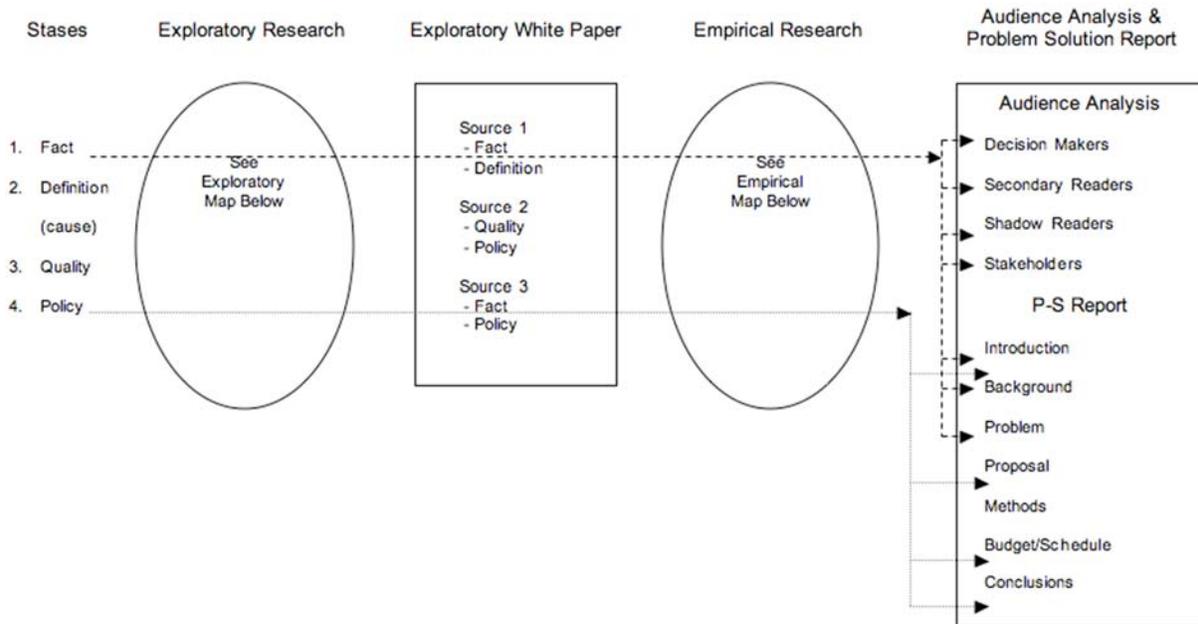
Figure 3., A Stasis-Centered Semester: Using the Stases for Collaborative Invention, Arrangement, and Delivery

The stases help guide exploratory and empirical work for critical inquiry and cooperative professional communication. In the semester overview graphic above, students begin with the stases and use them to help explore a topic (see Exploratory Map below). The map illustrates how two of the stases, fact and policy, might move through research and invention and be applied to arrangement and delivery in student work. Using the stases helps students conduct in-depth rhetorical analyses. Students build an awareness of context and audience, and they study the discursive nature of writing, decision making, and problem solving as they work with the heuristic. Frances J. Ranney's workshop handout, "*Really* Using Classical Rhetoric to Enhance to Teaching of Technical Communication," from the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication helped me develop these processes [26, pp. 1-15].

Mapping Your Research Methodology: The Exploratory Method

Use this map to explore your topic. By mapping your research, you can plan how you will investigate your topic, decision makers, stakeholders, and possible solutions.

Issue

Don't support a thesis, just explore, inquire

Initial research to determine interest / feasibility

Use library website and databases

Decide on topic, gather as much information as possible

Research topic as it affects U.S. and state

Research topic as it affects local community

Use stasis questions for group work and research

To do / Stasis Questions
1. Record tasks and time in log
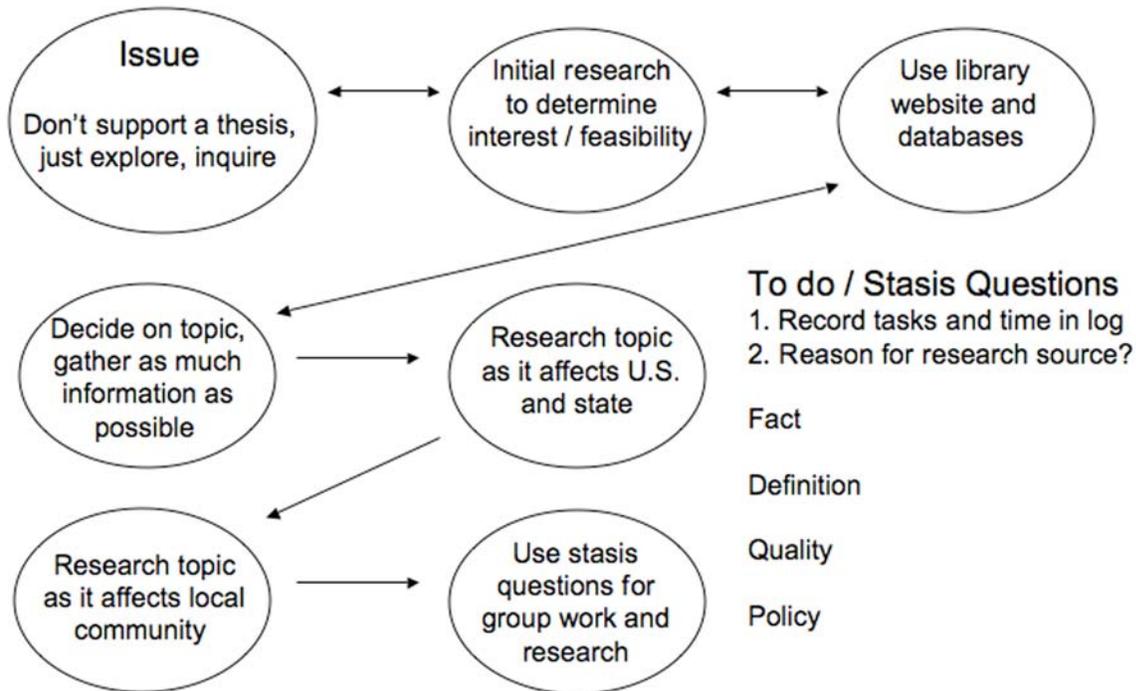2. Reason for research source?

Fact

Definition

Quality

Policy

Figure 4., Stasis Theory and Exploratory Research

When research focuses from exploratory to empirical, the stases continue to inform work (see Empirical Map below). Students working in groups interact to move through the stases as they compose team deliverables, such as the exploratory white paper, audience analysis, and problem-solution report. Students also generate a greater awareness of stakeholders and their positions to better address the issue at hand and help work toward stasis. In addition, covering stasis openly, rather than including elements of it in assignments, promotes an understanding of the cooperative process of knowledge building, decision-making, and problem solving they can use when they move in the workplace.

Mapping Your Research Methodology: The Empirical Method

Use this map to refine the research on your topic. By mapping your research, you can plan how you will investigate your topic, decision makers, stakeholders, and solutions.
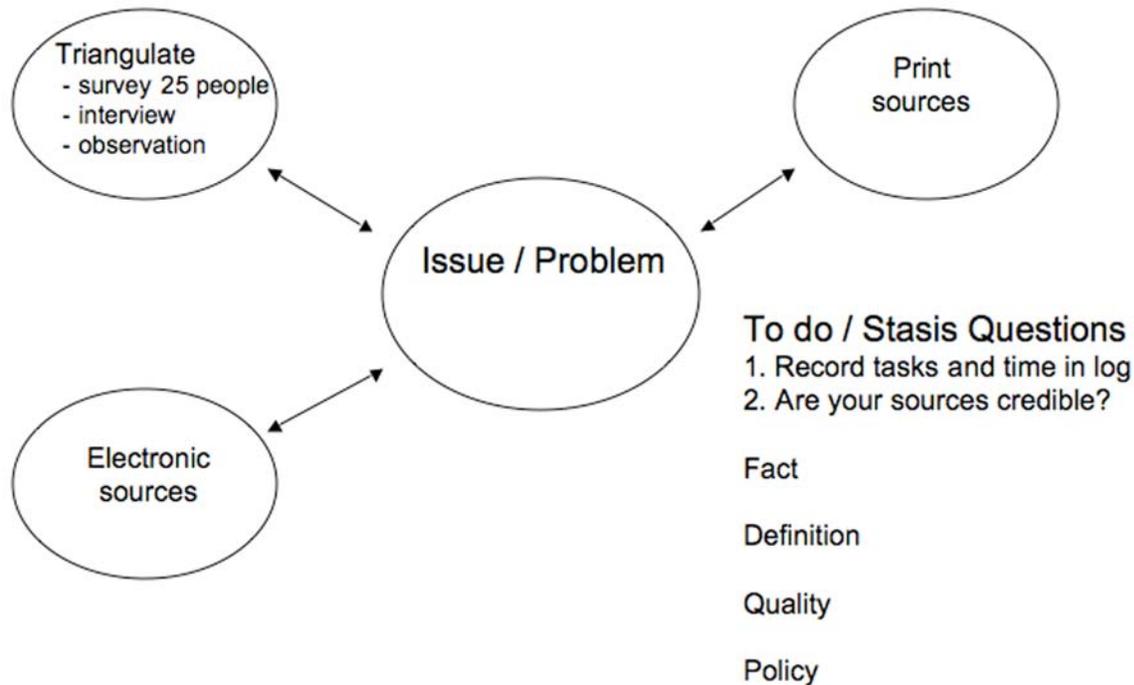
Triangulate
- survey 25 people
- interview
- observation

Print sources

Issue / Problem

To do / Stasis Questions
1. Record tasks and time in log
2. Are your sources credible?

Fact

Definition

Quality

Policy

Electronic sources

Figure 5., Stasis Theory and Empirical Research

Conclusion

Current scholarship shows that skills in teaming and decision-making are essential for students and practitioners working in multimedia and remote contexts. Scholarship also suggests that students and practitioners must be flexible enough to handle expanding roles and responsibilities as professional writers move from developing content to facilitating information, advocating for users, and managing projects. Challenges to cooperation and flexibility include rapidly changing technology, multidisciplinary teams, and distance work.

In this article, I have shown that integrating a postmodern approach to stasis theory can help answer the call for heuristics that foster workplace teaming and decision-making. Stasis theory helps promote social knowledge building and cooperation because it situates work in a purely discursive space. Stasis enables people to work *together* to build facts, definition, quality, and policy. Stasis can also help us foster critical thinking and better decision making because it is a rigorous yet flexible analytic process. Stasis helps professional communicators conduct rhetorical and audience analyses, which can help them make informed decisions for writing and project management. Used as a generative heuristic rather than an eristic weapon, the stases can aid teamwork between remote, multidisciplinary workers using a battery of quickly changing technologies in the 21st century workplace.

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