Jan den Holder *Confronting the 'information tsunami' with summary reporting*"

Intersteno – Ghent, 2013

Speech to accompany the PowerPoint presentation "Confronting the 'information tsunami' with summary reporting".

Slide 1 (Opening)

Music, start of the song "bad media": the news bulletin.

Slide 2 (Photo of tsunami)

Music, idem.

Slide 3 (Newspaper headlines)

Music, idem.

Slide 4 (Photo's of computers)

Music, idem.

Slide 5 (Meeting photo's)

The kind of information that is exchanged in meetings depends on the subjects they tackle and on the agenda of a meeting. Even then, especially when the chair is not fully in control, subjects and information may pop up in the discussion that are not relevant to the item on the agenda...

Slide 6 (Writing hand)

The secretary has to be selective, both when taking notes and when drawing up the meeting report. He or she can sit back, when speakers ride off on a side-issue.

Slide 7 (Hongkong minutes)

There are, of course, all kinds of meeting reports. It may be only a list of decisions; but a meeting report may also record the essence of everyone's interventions.

The extent to which the minutes of a meeting can be time saving for those interested in the information, depends largely on the secretary: how concise and accurate can he or she report on the meeting?

Slide 8 (Clock)

So the benefits of summary reporting are: a brief report of perhaps a long meeting but with all the relevant information in it, and needing only a short reading time to peruse the information. This certainly helps us in coping with an information tsunami…

<u>Slide 9 (Court reporters at work)</u>

Here is a big difference with the work of professional stenographers and typists, the traditional target groups of Intersteno. Their work mainly concentrates on the full transcription of the spoken word.

<u>Slide 10 (What note taking and minute taking are about)</u>

Besides verbatim reporting there is concise or summary reporting. Summary reporting is useful for business meetings, staff meetings, consultations etc. This is the secretarial sphere of work.

<u>Slide 11 (Despite a new name, the transcription and reproduction…)</u>

Now for something about our organisation,Intersteno.To do justice to the concept of "information processing" attention should be given to the substantive treatment of information, as is the case with summary reporting.

<u>Slide 12 (Contest room)</u>

As you can see, the summary-reporting contest is part of a long list of Intersteno contests. This list of current Intersteno contests, taking place during its biennial conventions, reflects the tradition of verbatim transcription and document reproduction. On the basis of the history of Intersteno this is understandable, but… suppose we allowed computers to take part in our contests as independent competitors, who would then be the next world champion?

<u>Slide 13 (For many years only…)</u>

In a way Intersteno adapted its competitions in the last 30 years to new demands and developments. The multilingual shorthand contest was added, introducing the element of one's knowledge of foreign languages. Then, when typewriters were replaced by personal computers, it was time to introduce word-processing techniques in the Intersteno competitions. But can these adaptations be characterized as information and communication processing?

<u>Slide 14 (With one exception…)</u>

The correspondence and summary-reporting contest was introduced on the occasion of the Intersteno convention in Hannover, in 2001. This happened with the consent of former Intersteno secretary-general Dr. Karl Gutzler. Using shorthand to take notes – instead of writing down every spoken word – proved to be a challenge for competitors…

<u>Slide 15 (This competition consists of two parts…)</u>

First there is the dictation of the letter, to be transcribed verbatim (dictation, spoken by Mrs. Biggers.)

Then follows the dictation of the text from which the summary report is to be made. Here competitors have to transcribe title and paragraph headings verbatim, but they have to summarize in their own words the content of each dictated paragraph or section (dictation, spoken by Mrs. Biggers.)

<u>Slide 16 (Title, paragraph headings and paragraph summaries…)</u>

The mix of verbatim transcription and summary reporting is typical for secretarial functions. Verbatim recording and transcription may occur where it concerns instructions and decisions. Note taking and summary reporting may suffice for business meetings, telephone conversations etc.

<u>Slide 17 (Example of a summarized paragraph)</u>

A summary contains the gist of a longer text or speech. When making a summary it helps to know what is the central element. Here the paragraph or section heading gives you the clue: arranging a job interview.

<u>Slide 18 (Cat searching on the Internet)</u>

Unfortunately there are no ready-made texts available for this contest. So, when preparing the competition text, you also have to choose a central element, a main theme or subject. This is your point of departure in the search for text material. The material itself will suggest several subtopics for the individual paragraphs of the dictation text.

<u>Slide 19 (Also well structured…)</u>

The comparison with a building is appropriate. There is the roof of the building and there are its floors, to be compared respectively with the title and the paragraph headings of the dictation text.

<u>Slide 20 (Logical structure of a paragraph)</u>

We are talking about the dictation text from which the summary report is to be made. Both this text as a whole and its individual paragraphs or sections need to be comprehensible and well-structured. This makes it possible for the competitor to distinguish between major and minor issues: the first ones to be included in his summary, the others to be neglected.

Slide 21 (For each paragraph a model summary is made)

To guarantee a uniform assessment of the summaries of the competitors, a model summary is needed as a guideline for correctors. To simplify its application the model summary of each paragraph is divided into key phrases.

Slide 22 (The text of the letter)

Correspondence is an important part of secretarial work. Most of the subjects discussed in meetings have already been put forward in the many letters that pass a secretary's desk. That is also why the dictation of a letter precedes the reporting dictation in this contest: introducing the subject matter to be reported on. The marking or grading of the transcription of the letter is a matter of comparison with the original text. The same goes for the marking or grading of the title and subheadings in a competitor's summary report.

Slide 23 (Summarizing is new territory)

A challenge for Intersteno as an organization for "information and communication processing" is summarizing as part of a contest, and assessing the competitors' summaries afterwards. Forget about computerizing these activities of the human brain that have everything to do with: understanding, insight, creativity and judgement, just as a good secretary should possess these qualities!

Slide 24 (It is all about meaning…)

Now for the technicalities of the summary-reporting contest. Competitors summarize in their own words, and to assess their work a simple comparison with the model summary will not do. For each of its key phrases the question is: is the meaning of this key phrase represented in the competitor's summary? To simplify the assessment procedure only three answers are possible: fully present, partially present and not present. Credit points are awarded accordingly.

Slide 25 (Determining to what extent a key phrase is present.)

The judgement whether the meaning of a key phrase is present for 80% or more, less than 80% or even less than 20%, can be done at first glance. When in doubt, especially about the 80% border, take a closer look at the key words in each key phrase. All these key words have to be present – according to their meaning – in a competitor's summary, otherwise the 80% mark for this key phrase will not be reached. And in that case not more than half the credit points can be awarded!

Slide 26 (In a competitor's own words)

At the left are the key phrases and key words of the model summary, at the right the summaries of two competitors. The first summary represents all the key phrases of the model summary, so all the credit points are awarded. The second summary is imperfect and does not reach the 80% mark. So here only half the credit points are awarded.

<u>Slide 27 (The auxiliary form)</u>

Alas, marking and assessing the work of the competitors causes some paperwork. In this too the correspondence and summary-reporting contest shows its relationship with the secretarial profession… For each competitor's summary the obtained credit points and the superfluous words have to be administrated in an auxiliary form.

<u>Slide 28 (In the evaluation form are listed…)</u>

And yes, still another form is needed, the evaluation or assessment form, registering all the data concerning a competitor's performance, including the transcription of the letter and of the headings in the summary report. The transcription of the letter does not influence one's place on the results list; it is a threshold competitors have to cross before their summary reports can be assessed. When there are more than 30 penalty points for the letter, the competitor is disqualified and his work is not considered any further. This compensates for the fact that typing and spelling errors are disregarded in the assessment of the summaries.

<u>Slide 29 (Calculation of the number of net points)</u>

To a contest also belongs a results list, and that is where the calculation of a competitor's net points comes in view.

<u>Slide 30 (Final results)</u>

The results list makes it possible to compare competitors not only in terms of net earned points, but also concerning their abilities as to verbatim transcription (letter and headings) and summarizing. A rough percentage (the acquired credit points out of a maximum of 100 for the paragraph summaries) measures the ability to summarize.

<u>Slide 31 (Jar with gold coins)</u>

Yes, there certainly is an abundance of information, but that is not as threatening as an uncontrollable "information tsunami". By being selective in choosing from the available information, you can avoid an information overload. Summary reporting gives you the opportunity to do so.

<u>Slide 32 (The useful selectivity…)</u>

Intersteno should be an organization that inspires to communicate information purposefully, especially through text handling, allowing citizens in a democracy to inform themselves in a meaningful way.

<u>Slides 33 en 34 (Letter and credits)</u>

(Music)