

00:00:09:25 - 00:00:34:29

Nadja

Hello PLAIN members, and welcome to our first Ask Expert event. The topic of today's event is Building the Case for Plain Language in Organizations. My name is Nadia Green and I will be your host for this discussion. For those of you who don't know me, I'm a plain language consultant from South Africa, and I'm also the chair of PLAIN's Professional Development committee.

00:00:35:02 - 00:00:58:21

Nadja

Please feel free to introduce yourself in the chat. There are also some other board members joining us today. Could I ask a little bit more board members to put on their cameras and to give us a wave? I see Florida Michelle Carr and.

00:00:58:23 - 00:01:28:19

Nadja

And also Torunn right after our panel discussion. Stay connected if you can, because Torunn and Karin will give you an update on our new strategic plan. And you will have the opportunity to give some input. Today we have an exciting lineup of panelists who bring a wealth of experience and diverse perspectives on the topic of building the case for plain language in organizations.

00:01:28:21 - 00:01:58:25

Nadja

I'm delighted to introduce Louise Stait, who is the head of corporate affairs for one of England's 42 NHS integrated care boards. She says plain language is integral to good governance and effective service delivery. Pushing the Pen is Louise's passion project outside of work, focusing on ideas and approaches to drive up the standards of writing within public sector organizations.

00:01:58:27 - 00:02:28:15

Nadja

Secondly, we have Mary Jane Nirdlinger,, who is the deputy town manager in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Advocating for plain language in local government brings together two of her passions: writing and public service. And then lastly, we have Chantale Audet,, a medical anthropologist. She's the co-founder of Autrement dit, a plain language consultancy firm based in Quebec, Canada.

00:02:28:17 - 00:02:48:25

Nadja

Many of this company's projects relate to health care, the environment and public health and they aim to promote health literacy. Together we will explore three themes today. themes are based on the excellent questions that you sent us.

00:02:48:27 - 00:03:17:06

Nadja

Firstly, we will explore what are the arguments to convince colleagues, management or clients to implement plain language. Next, we will take a look at different approaches one can follow to implement plain language effectively in our organizations. And lastly is how to measure the success of plain language implementation. While we are discussing these themes, you're welcome to join the conversation in the chat.

00:03:17:09 - 00:03:46:00

Nadja

If we have time, we'll open the floor for your questions and comments at the end of the third theme's discussion. So let's dive into the first theme. To kick off theme, we are going to use a poll, for a reader, if you can, please. But the poll on the screen.

00:03:46:02 - 00:03:48:03

Farida

Hang on just a minute.

00:03:48:06 - 00:03:58:23

Nadja

No problem.

00:03:58:25 - 00:04:07:11

Farida

00:04:07:14 - 00:04:10:16

Farida

00:04:10:18 - 00:04:50:20

Nadja

Okay, the poll is now on the screen. It's a question about the common objection to plain language in the sector working. There are a number of object you can choose from. So we'll give you some a few seconds to submit your answers to.

00:04:50:22 - 00:05:10:15

Nadja

But let's give it 15 more seconds, and then we can close to pull things.

00:05:10:17 - 00:05:17:00

Nadja

Okay. It's a three to win a case in the code.

00:05:17:03 - 00:05:18:08

Farida

All right.

00:05:18:10 - 00:05:19:04

Nadja

Poll is.

00:05:19:04 - 00:05:20:26

Farida

Closed.

00:05:20:29 - 00:05:28:16

Nadja

I'll just share the results now. Perfect.

00:05:28:18 - 00:05:56:13

Nadja

Okay, so I see that, the top result is "we have other priorities, and we don't have time for this." So, Louise, I'm going to ask you, how did raise such objection that an organization does not have time to implement plain language? What what would be a good argument in the sector that you working?

00:05:56:15 - 00:06:16:15

Louise Stait

Okay. So there's a lot of theoretical arguments you can make and people will accept most of them. So we can talk about efficiency. We can talk about better use of resources. And so there's all the arguments that we know. But what I've found is that sometimes these arguments don't really capture people's hearts. So as you know, you talked about this a lot.

00:06:16:15 - 00:06:34:28

Louise Stait

So we, we do this sort of, interpersonal kind of change agent approach. And that's how that's how the work started. So it was by first of all, recruiting people who were really excited about this work and wanted to do it. And then what you find is that other departments see what's happened. Senior people can see what's happening in other people's departments and everyone wants a piece of it.

00:06:35:01 - 00:06:41:27

Louise Stait

So it's more that sort of emotional persuasiveness. I would say rather than using logic all the time.

00:06:42:00 - 00:06:54:08

Nadja

Thank you. Louise. Mary Jane is is appealing to people's hearts and emotional response also something that will work in local government.

00:06:54:10 - 00:07:19:04

Mary Jane

I would think so. We really focus on the community and public service. And so one of the things we really hit home is that this is all about transparency. You want the people in your community to understand what you're offering. You want them to be able to access services they need. And that's that's usually pretty compelling, because most people who work in local government feel that connection to the community.

00:07:19:05 - 00:07:47:16

Mary Jane

So really bringing it back to that heart, works. And then also talking about how it does save time because we are strapped for resources. And it's it also appeals to the practical nature of folks in our organization. If I know that I can send something out and you'll understand it, and I won't have to spend a lot of time answering questions repeatedly, that's a time savings for me.

00:07:47:18 - 00:07:52:18

Mary Jane

So I think both of those go, you know, it's practical and it's heartfelt.

00:07:52:21 - 00:08:21:06

Nadja

Perfect. Thank you. And Chantale you, like I said, you work with different organizations and different sectors, another objection that receive a lot of votes is that plain language is not professional or people won't take us seriously or it's dumbing, dumbing down information is is that something some of the things that you've heard and how do you counter these objections in in the health sector.

00:08:21:09 - 00:08:49:06

Chantale Audet

We do hears those kind of objections sometimes. I think we have to go through demonstration. Of course, like Louise said, there are a bunch of theoretical, arguments that we can bring about, you know, having in some public and, and, plain language, democracy needing to have informed people so they can make a good decision and be in charge over their lives.

00:08:49:08 - 00:09:19:01

Chantale Audet

When we are with, with, objections such as, dumbing down, what we like to do is to try to go through demonstration and so sometimes, like, as simple as a before and after and show how even the answer is not oversimplified. So, usually it can work. One objection that we get most is that "we already do it."

00:09:19:01 - 00:09:47:01

Chantale Audet

"All our work is and is already clear, and, we don't really need to do that." Right. So I'm sure some of you have heard that, too. And when that happens, we like to bring people to reflect themselves on their own piece to so they can come to realize themselves that perhaps some more work is needed and that we don't have to kind of criticize or, or bring about negative comments.

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Chantale Audet

But it has been really like having, take this, bring them to have a look at their piece so that they, they can realize that, you know, they it could go further.

00:09:59:24 - 00:10:20:17

Nadja

Thank you, thank you. Chantale. Mary Jane, you work in a large public facing organization with so many role players and stakeholders at play, what strategies have you found to work best for convincing these different stakeholders and role players of the value of plain language?

00:10:20:20 - 00:10:41:14

Mary Jane

I think the best thing we've done is customize our training to meet the needs of different departments. So we have, you know, a public works department. We have a fire department, a police department, library planning and development, and they each communicate with different audiences and about different content. And some of them are really much more internally focused

00:10:41:16 - 00:11:04:16

Mary Jane

in their communications. So what we've done is developed town wide training that hits on the basics of plain language. But then we do interactive workshops with each department. So when we train our fire

staff, we focus on incident reports and how to make that easier for them to do, you know, more effective, clearer, so they see the value because that's what they're doing every day.

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Mary Jane

And when they look at the before and after, like Chantale was saying, and then they can see an immediate value in the work that they do, it just becomes practical. It becomes that little light bulb goes off. And I think that's been the quickest way to convince people when they see that value in their work. Through the workshops.

00:11:27:00 - 00:12:01:04

Nadja

Thank you. Louise, you spoke about using the change agent approach, and really targeting people that are already interested in plain language and already want to implement plain language. How do you find people like that in, let's say, a large organization? What are some kind of the strategies to get the attention of these people, especially if you're not very strategically positioned doing something of this nature.

00:12:01:06 - 00:12:01:22

Farida

00:12:01:24 - 00:12:21:26

Louise Stait

So before I answer that, I was thinking I should have clarified in the first answer, that I think the plain language in organizations, I think there's two levels of it. So there's the sort of out with the patient facing communications things for the public. And I think generally, although I can't speak on behalf of the whole public sector, I think we're very good at that.

00:12:21:26 - 00:12:42:21

Louise Stait

So patient leaflets, things on websites, anything that's for the general public. We tend to be very good at that. Where my interest is been is the more sort of corporate documentation. So the board papers, you know, the risk registers, the strategies, research documents. So that's the context we're talking, and so there's not necessarily much work to be done on the patient facing side of things.

00:12:42:23 - 00:13:03:15

Louise Stait

Yeah. So with the corporate, things, what we've really tried to do is create a sense of excitement about it all, because we know that if we send something out to the newsletter saying, you know, this is a style guide, everybody's got to start using this for,

00:13:03:18 - 00:13:04:23

Nadja

00:13:04:26 - 00:13:10:11

Louise Stait

And.

00:13:10:14 - 00:13:20:06

Nadja

The ways. Can you. So yeah, that's.

00:13:20:08 - 00:13:49:01

Nadja

I think let's just move on. And we will come back to Louise. Chantal, in in some context, the term plain language might not resonate with your clients or will with, a particular, role player. What alternative terminology or framing can be used to build the case without using the term plain language?

00:13:49:04 - 00:14:18:03

Chantale Audet

Well, we try to use it so that people get used to the idea, the idea, the concept. But you're right, we have that problem in French too. Its "language clandestine". For one thing, the ISO standard was translated into French, which was wonderful, and it it has used "language clandestine" because we see all different ways of, of referring to plain language in French.

00:14:18:06 - 00:14:55:18

Chantale Audet

And we believe that we should, you know, put forth that terminology and be consistent. But when it doesn't resonate, which happens often, we usually try to and to add to our language clandestine something like, so that your, understood that the first meaning or, you know, we, we tried to, to add, like, a whole sentence to, put into context, what this means, so, and even, you know, the name of our company is "Autrement dit" which means said "otherwise".

00:14:55:18 - 00:15:19:16

Chantale Audet

So sometimes we use that as a way to just, you know, and usually people kind of say, okay, we understand what you're doing or what it means, but unfortunately, plain language is not a thing yet. You know, for many people. So it's we have to explain and still like, have like that make that 30 second speech.

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Chantale Audet

So. Yeah, finding the right word that will resonate.

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Nadja

Sorry, Louise, you cut off there for a moment. Please take a time to finish your thought.

00:15:32:03 - 00:15:48:19

Louise Stait

Yeah, sorry. I don't know what happened there. So I think one of the things about the engagement. So, you know, this is more to the law of diffusion of innovation. And what theory is that people's engagement in change follows the normal distribution. So most people don't like change and they don't want things that can be different.

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Louise Stait

But there's a tiny little group of people, who love it and then the people you want to target. So yeah. So we put stuff in the newsletter to say we're trying to, you know, do this as a pilot. We're not sure what we're doing. We need some volunteers to help us develop it. And that's how you get those people.

00:16:02:25 - 00:16:07:17

Louise Stait

And then of course, they start talking. Then it spreads and you get the ripple effect.

00:16:07:19 - 00:16:24:16

Nadja

And Louise, just to get back to Chantal's point is, is plain language something that resonates in your sector, the organization you deal with or did you have to, to alter that terminology but to, to relate to people?

00:16:24:19 - 00:16:43:21

Louise Stait

It's okay "plain language", I think it doesn't really grab people that terminology, being honest. They know it's a good thing, but I think "patient centered" is the best word. So the argument I'm trying to make is that, you know, when we have corporate documents, the general public have got a right to see them and find out what's going on inside the organization.

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Louise Stait

It's not all about medicines and sort of, you know, hospital waiting times to do the rest of it. It's about, getting people up to that high level of development and engagement, as I think Mary Jane said. So. So yeah, people respond to that.

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Nadja

That, say, thank you so much. I think let's let's move on to the next theme. Our next thing theme is all about approaches to implementing plain language. Yeah. We will discuss strategies for embedding a plain language culture in our organization. But comparing a top down versus a middle management versus a bottom up approach. And again, let's start with a full just to get your take and your experience on this.

00:17:30:05 - 00:17:33:23

Nadja

So Farida please fire up the poll. Thank you.

00:17:33:26 - 00:17:36:21

Farida

For.

00:17:36:24 - 00:18:25:08

Nadja

Second I'll we'll give you a few seconds just to get your answers in.

00:18:25:10 - 00:18:32:28

Nadja

Just give it seven more seconds and then we can pull.

00:18:33:00 - 00:18:38:18

Nadja

It perfect for you. I think you can pull things.

00:18:38:21 - 00:18:56:22

Nadja

So the results are in. And share the results. Please. It seems like most of you follow a combination of these three approaches.

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Nadja

Louise, can you tell us more about your experience for following a middle management approach? What are the benefits and challenges of of following such a work?

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Louise Stait

Yeah. Thanks, Nadia. So it was a conscious decision to focus on that group. Because the feeling was, was that they are team leaders. They can disseminate things, in a much more hands on way than perhaps the top leadership can. So I think you need all the levels involved. But for me, that is the key, that it's got to be done in a very methodical way.

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Louise Stait

There's got to be some methodology wrapped around it, and we use quality improvement. And if you like, I can send you a link. There's lots of, free training resources and quality improvement. And that's the way to sort of make sure it's not random people, not just going off doing random little initiatives, but it's things that are wrapped up into something that's got a direction to it.

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Nadja

Next. Yeah, it would be absolutely great if you can share that, that link in the chat if you have access to it. Yeah, I have.

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Farida

This right now.

00:20:01:15 - 00:20:08:16

Nadja

And, Mary Jane, could you give us an example of an approach or initiative that worked well in local government?

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Farida

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Mary Jane



For sure. And I'd like Louise Link as well. So we we started with a pretty grassroots approach, almost like a pilot. And that was a good way to convince people, the value of embarking on a much broader organizational effort. So the pilot was really just finding those people who were already doing good, clear writing, educating ourselves, ourselves about plain language.

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Mary Jane

And then we created a plain language team and basically said, if you have something that you're working on and you want help, we will help you. And it was very informal, but it created those those documents that were very clear before and afters, and they were people who came to us and asked for help. So we weren't forcing it on people.

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Mary Jane

And then they would use their document, they would show it to other people, and then they would come and ask for help. So it became this kind of word of mouth effort. And it was really about five of us who were willing to just hop on a call or get together and brainstorm with somebody who wanted to improve something.

00:21:17:05 - 00:21:37:07

Mary Jane

And, that pilot approach, I think is really useful in the public sector, especially because you can test it out and then if you get some traction, you have good data. You know, a good argument to say, this is why we ought to do it at a higher level. And you have built in cheerleaders. So I like that pilot approach.

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Mary Jane

And we've used that at different levels. We piloted the training. You know, we're going to do some more data metrics. So it's something you can adapt to whatever stage you're at in.

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Nadja

Thanks, Mary Jane. Let's get the consultant perspective on this, because of course, you work with many organizations and each organization is different. What have you seen works best to make sure that plain language doesn't stop at like one project and that it builds throughout the organization. What approach works best for you?

00:22:18:12 - 00:22:54:06

Chantale Audet

Thank you for the question, because it gives me the opportunity to tell you that, what we like, to do and we see that works well is when we're able to, present plain language as a solution to the problems that the organization faces. And then when we do that, it just kind of changes, the, the way people engage, the way the vision that the people within the an organizations, see plain language because then it becomes part of the solution.

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Chantale Audet

And it's not like one more thing that they have to add to their, share of work or, another approach that somebody kind of picked on and would like to bring to the organization. So if we are able to identify

problems that needs to be solved and, introduce or present plain language as a solution to, that that problem usually, it's, it gets people on board and we, we are able to, really take the time to apply the plain language process and, and go through, a whole set of, you know, to really, like, go through the problem and, and evaluate and, and try to

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Chantale Audet

accompany, the, the organization in, in that process.

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Nadja

Thanks for that. Louise, I think you mentioned, board papers and focusing on, on internal documents is the approach where you focus on solving a business problem. Is that something that will also resonate in in the public sector?

00:24:07:15 - 00:24:14:05

Louise Stait

So when you say solving a business problem, you mean like trying to think of a better way to deliver care?

00:24:14:07 - 00:24:43:17

Nadja

Yes. Yeah. For example, I can give a corporate example. Let's say, there is a drop in income retention. And, you pinpoint that the drop in retention is because of, a customer journey being insufficient. They're not doing enough communication. Then you can can almost position plain language as a way to solve that retention problem.

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Nadja

So do you think that is something that that can also work in public sector organizations?

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Louise Stait

Possibly. I think the link I've just given you for the quality improvement approach, it's all about having hypotheses and not necessarily jumping right to the answer. And the whole philosophy is you sort of get under the skin of the problem and then come up with what you think the solutions might be, and then you test them so you don't go in, right to start saying, plain language is going to be the answer to this.

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Louise Stait

So I think, yeah, you'd keep plain language obviously was one of the tools that you might apply once you get to the problem.

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Nadja

Yes. And to add to that, I think, when you look at something like the ISO standards and having those four principles that the first principle is all about gaining user insights and, you kind of almost position that as a way to, to make hypotheses gather information and really get to the bottom of the problem.

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Nadja

And then with the, the following principles suggest, a solution where plain language is almost at the heart of that, or how to use plain language as one way to solve that problem.

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Louise Stait

Yeah. That's what I would say is more natural. It comes out more organically, rather than you just coming up with your agenda and trying to impose an perfect.

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Nadja

Now, I think, Mary Jane, you also spoke about, about this, a bit, what role does training and other ongoing support play in ensuring that plain language, is successfully adopted throughout the whole organization?

00:26:32:13 - 00:27:12:03

Mary Jane

That's a great question. And I think it actually relates to one that I just saw pop up in the chat about how you move from pilot to permanent, especially if there's funding involved. So I'll try to answer both of those together. When we did the pilot program like I described and we knew we wanted to make this institutionalized, so we did identify one time funding where we hired a consultant to work with us to really just do the heavy lift because everybody had, you know, full time jobs and all that.

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Mary Jane

So what we what we did is we made the pitch that this would save us time and money if we could get everybody using it. And we hired a consultant. She helped us, map out a program, script the training and the. It was based off of the kind of homegrown work that we had developed in the pilot, but it just gave it a more professional touch.

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Mary Jane

It all looked better. We paid someone to do to record the training videos and, to help us think about metrics and how to roll out a program. So create just a timeline for the next two years. So it wasn't a ton of funding, but it was actually really critical at that transition point. And then we said, we are going to train every employee that works in communications in any way, shape or form, within about six months.

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Mary Jane

And that was a huge push. It was just a time commitment, though. It wasn't extra funding. And by doing that intensive training in a short period of time, we really saw it go from a few people talking about plain language through the entire organization having this common notion that that's the way we communicate and our communication staff really got on board.

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Mary Jane

We had a couple of personnel changes. People who were really excited about it joined the team. And so we have really taken that thinking from internal communications to external communications to how we do

our visuals and our presentations to the members of the town council. So it's like all of a sudden there's just this conversation about plain language happening everywhere.

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Mary Jane

I think the next challenge we're going to have is how do you maintain that over time? And I think it's just going to require consistent revisiting and promoting what people have done, and showcasing some of the work. So we're also tying it into our AI efforts, you know, trying to understand how that's going to influence our communications.

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Mary Jane

So I think that I think that answers the question in the chat and what you were asking.

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Nadja

That's perfect. Thank you, Mary Jane. Chantale, tell us a bit about the types and the levels of training that you offer to your clients.

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Chantale Audet

The level of trainings? Yeah. Most people that, wish to have training are people that have to write, in their work, but that we're not really trained to do so. And they have to, to advance ideas and, and planning and all kinds of different, writing. So, sometimes, like, we have people who are like, you know, totally paralyzed in front of their, writing, work because they, they don't know where to begin.

00:30:02:29 - 00:30:36:27

Chantale Audet

And they, they want the perfect version on the first draft. So we really, really try to, bring them to, the steps before you sit down and write and, and really, like, again, try to, simplify the, the plain language process, have them reflect on who exactly they want to write to, who, you know, really like, describe as much as possible their target audience has developed personas if they if that helps.

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Chantale Audet

So they can have somebody in mind like, we, we do it in our own work as consultants anyway, and, and then, you know, have them like, go through the process, the plain language process, like what is your objective, your, you know, the organization's objectives and also, of course, the user's objective. And then we have them like, really like, plan as a key message and all the now and then and then I think when they are ready to start writing, you know, they have cleared up their ideas about what they want to, communicate.

00:31:11:12 - 00:31:39:21

Chantale Audet

And, we, I have the feeling that, this kind of approach for that type of people is, is helpful because, we sometimes we do get feedback and we manage to get them to develop tools to take on the writing task in their work.

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Nadja

Thank you for that, Chantale. Now let's move on to the last theme, Ways to Measure Success and Failure. This is a very important part of plain language, but it's often very, very difficult to achieve. So let's see what you have to say.

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Nadja

Let's give it another five seconds.

00:32:59:17 - 00:33:28:08

Nadja

Hey. Let's share these results. Thank you. So, nine of you say that: "Yes. You do measure the success of the plain language initiatives." 15 said "no" and 17 said "sometimes". That is very interesting. Louise, let's move on to you. What metrics in general can be used to measure the success of kind of, initiatives?

00:33:28:10 - 00:33:46:08

Louise Stait

Yeah. So this is metrics that I'm aware of, which is things like numbers of inquiries about things, number of misunderstandings, so that I don't use any of that stuff because we don't really have the resource to get into that. And I'm not sure how much valuable data we get. So. So I'm all about the sort of the board member surveys, and that's how we measure it.

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Louise Stait

So, what we'll do is we'll ask the committee members some questions, but I don't tend to ask them things like "do you feel the papers are written in plain language?" I'll ask them some higher level questions like, "what is your understanding of good governance?" "Do you think that you're discharging your role as you should be on this committee?". And then get them some free text after that as well.

00:34:04:26 - 00:34:15:21

Louise Stait

And that really sort of teases out how they're feeling about the paperwork. And then you can go back in a year's time and you can see the difference in that. So so that's why I'm using lots of dimensions.

00:34:15:23 - 00:34:47:24

Nadja

Yeah. That's interesting. Following a more like a qualitative approach really getting people's qualitative inputs on different things and also using a projective technique where you don't directly ask someone if they understand something, but rather test it in another way or measure something else that, that that's very interesting. Chantale, how do the metrics vary by sector and organizational goal, the ones you've come across or used in your work?

00:34:47:26 - 00:35:10:20

Chantale Audet

Well, as consultants, we're rarely part of that part. But metrics are important. As you know, I think we we have to seize we have to grasp every opportunity to collect any type of data that will kind of like tell us if we, we hit the mark, what we need to improve, you know, and if it makes any changes, whatever we've done.

00:35:10:23 - 00:35:39:01

Chantale Audet

So I think each organization should try to develop metrics that will really set the goals that they set for using plain language. And, sometimes the first goals can be just be like "Did we manage to lead the project to the end?" to measuring statistical metrics. Of course, quantitative metrics can be interesting as well.

00:35:39:01 - 00:36:09:09

Chantale Audet

Like, did we, manage to convince or whatever, like it's whatever related. And I think it's very important to always include a few metrics that will talk to your senior management, you know, if they want they need sometimes to talk about money, time saved or whatever that you know, speaks their languages. It will be useful for, you know, getting their commitment for implementing plain language.

00:36:09:11 - 00:36:34:01

Chantale Audet

It's very difficult to say this one metric works well. Or this other one, it really, you know, has to is related to the type of, project that you are on the field you are in. In Quebec, Canada, the government has moved on to a platform like, is having all its government content migrate to one platform called quebec.ca.

00:36:34:02 - 00:37:05:04

Chantale Audet

And I invite you to, to visit it because to us, it's a very, telling, a way of, putting forth, plain language. And they collect all kinds of data and they're more on the number of clicks and, and how many time people return and what, pages are well used. And that is very supportive for them to, convince the whole, you know, government bodies to move on to that platform.

00:37:05:04 - 00:37:13:20

Chantale Audet

So I think, we have to really, really take every opportunity to collect data. It's very important.

00:37:13:23 - 00:37:36:17

Nadja

Perfect. Thank you. Mary Jane, I know you have shown me the post some interesting quantitative numbers in terms of cost savings and time savings. Tell us a bit about that and how you can use, how can quantitative data speak towards the value of plain language?

00:37:36:19 - 00:38:05:02

Mary Jane

I think it was most powerful for us in making the argument that we should make this a town wide initiative, because I could look at how much we pay our staff and how much time we were spending on certain activities, like editing and revising council memos and I could assign a dollar value to that time, and then we could say, if we could reduce this by, you know, X, we'll save this much money.

00:38:05:04 - 00:38:31:22

Mary Jane

And so just acknowledging how much money we were spending on writing and creating materials was helpful early on. It is harder for me to capture, I think, like what Chantal was saying, the value of that

revised website or that revised memo, because once we put the effort in to revise all of our town council presentations, for example, we now have that template.

00:38:31:24 - 00:39:00:19

Mary Jane

We know that meetings are going faster and decisions are taking less time. And, you know, we know that we're getting good anecdotal feedback that these are better presentations. That's hard to monetize or track. Because there's so many variables. It's not just the presentation. We've been doing other training and there are other factors at play. So, I think that if you're just trying to say this is the time, this is the value of our time, and we know we can reduce some of that.

00:39:00:21 - 00:39:06:25

Mary Jane

That is one really effective way of using money as a metric.

00:39:06:27 - 00:39:24:00

Nadja

Perfect. Thank you. Louise, what are the signs that a plain language initiative is failing? And what can organization do to course correct and to, you know, if they notice these signs.

00:39:24:02 - 00:39:44:24

Louise Stait

Yeah. So so just to recap, obviously coming from the corporate side from the governance point of view. So this is not about anything patient facing or public facing because that's not part of what I do see on the corporate side. It's actually quite easy to see because it's about compliance. So if people aren't complying with a certain process or what you find sometimes is everybody's doing it wrong.

00:39:44:24 - 00:39:53:25

Louise Stait

Most people are making mistakes in the process. That sort of thing. You've got the poor quality compliance and that's a really good indicator that it's not working.

00:39:53:28 - 00:40:04:04

Nadja

And Chantale, the kind of signs that you've noticed in in the organizations you work with where something is just failing.

00:40:04:06 - 00:40:32:03

Chantale Audet

Well, one of them that we've been through lately was that, within the organization – this was a small team – they had really different vision of the production that we were working on, and we're not agreeing. And somehow it was really hard to rally everybody to one vision. Another one is, when, you have external collaborators that are not, you know, into are not trained in plain language.

00:40:32:03 - 00:41:04:27

Chantale Audet

So you may have, worked really hard, like the whole thing. And then you have like, either graphic designers that come from, you know, outside of the organization or web development people and that, you know, you will have difficulties in, convincing or having them, you know, applying whatever the information,

design your principles, you want to, apply so that, you know, you really have like, a clear production or clear piece.

00:41:05:00 - 00:41:39:10

Chantale Audet

So some of them and then the one that a lot of people probably are familiar with is like when you have teams working in silos, you know, then you may be working on the content, but the web development team, doesn't collaborate with the content people and you see your nice piece of work being put on the web and you wish you could have a bit more influence. But people haven't learned or don't work in collaboration.

00:41:39:10 - 00:41:43:18

Chantale Audet

So that's very difficult.

00:41:43:21 - 00:42:16:13

Nadja

Thank you. Chantale. And, then to end of the this this part of the discussion, one of the most common questions and requests that we've got is for case studies or for, for resources to show the impact of plain language or to show how it work works in a different organization or different organizations. I'm going to give each of you to if you have an interesting case study to share or interesting resource, please tell us a bit a bit more about that.

00:42:16:15 - 00:42:20:26

Nadja

I'll start a few Mary Jane.

00:42:20:29 - 00:42:24:22

Farida

00:42:24:25 - 00:42:49:19

Mary Jane

Well, I was just I was looking at the chat and answered a question about AI. One thing that we've done is we did put a style guide together, and you can see that online. I dropped the link in the chat earlier. That was really an effort to just take our materials and put them in a place where everyone in the organization could use them.

00:42:49:22 - 00:43:12:28

Mary Jane

And behind that, there is software that sits on your desktop that can prompt you to use the style guide. I think that the case study piece here is by putting that on people's computers, we are encouraging everyone to become better content producers. There was an earlier question about do you have a few people monitoring or enforcing this?

00:43:12:28 - 00:43:35:06

Mary Jane

And we're really trying to create a culture of plain language instead of, I'll just write my bad first draft and let someone else clean it up. So we haven't really documented it as a case study, but I would say that



mentality is why we hear lots of people talking about plain language, and we haven't just made it the responsibility of a few people.

00:43:35:08 - 00:43:56:22

Mary Jane

And thinking about AI, I think we're trying to take the same approach. We don't want it to become something a few people use or just a few people are thinking about. So we're trying to have an organizational conversation about what is the role of AI, how do we use it? You know, we don't want a misstep where we're putting information out that's been AI generated that gives our community bad information or bad direction.

00:43:56:24 - 00:44:12:18

Mary Jane

So I think for us not putting this in a small group of people, but trying to make it really a democratic approach to how we create content, has been a little bit of a twist on how some organizations have gone about institutionalizing plain language.

00:44:12:20 - 00:44:21:25

Nadja

Thank you, Mary Jane. Louise, I know you already shared some some links in the chat, but is there anything else that you want to share with the audience?

00:44:21:27 - 00:44:40:01

Louise Stait

And yeah, so in terms of case study, I think my favorite one to talk about is some work I've done with risk management, and I should have thought of this earlier, but sometimes in this kind of thing, you're thinking of it ten minutes later, what you should have said. But you asked about alternate ways to sell plain language and I very much talked about storytelling, and that's gone down really well.

00:44:40:01 - 00:44:55:16

Louise Stait

So you all know what a risk register is, and it can be a very dry kind of document. So so I've done the work to reframe that as a storytelling document. And I explained to the specialist subcommittee is, is "that you're telling a story now. This is a story that's going to go up to the board. What story do you want them to see?".

00:44:55:24 - 00:45:13:17

Louise Stait

"Look at what you've got in this document. Is it telling any story at all? Is it telling the story you want?", and that's been really powerful. I'm happy to talk about AI as well, I don't want to hold down conversation but and I'm part the national pilot at the moment which is testing the use of AI for committee minutes for the NHS.

00:45:13:17 - 00:45:18:22

Louise Stait

And it's very, very interesting. But I've written about it on LinkedIn. If anybody wants to read that.

00:45:18:25 - 00:45:37:07

Nadja

Yes. Louise, please share a link to your your blog because you have really interesting articles on on your LinkedIn blog, so please share that link. And then lastly, Chantale, any resources, case studies, information that you can share with us.

00:45:37:09 - 00:46:07:17

Chantale Audet

Maybe a quick, story of a case study, just to show that success is measured differently depending on the project. And depending on the objective, we accompanied a consultant who has a firm and had a website that really needed, like, some love and, we just rewrote the whole thing, took out a lot of information, work on the information design.

00:46:07:19 - 00:46:55:24

Chantale Audet

And, within a few months after the website was on its business, which just went up. He had to hire a few people. And even if it's seven years later, he still gets regularly comments about, you know, how people needed their service, came online, saw different website and felt that they could trust him and had confidence in his work because, the information that was put on the website really catered to the needs of the of clients. And it's not like, you know, showing, for instance, how, well educated or experienced, but what people are looking for. And for him, success

00:46:55:24 - 00:47:24:06

Chantale Audet

was you know, a good business, a flourishing business with lots of clients and notoriety and, so it's just to give you an example that, you know, depending on what you're doing, success is, is, is, can be measured differently and, that's a good, you know, positive example there as we can, you know, for our part, as consultant.

00:47:24:09 - 00:47:46:24

Nadja

Thank you so much, Chantale. So we do have some time for, for questions. So, I'm going to give over to, to Michelle and Farida to select some questions from the chat, to us to the panelists or, you also to, to raise your digital hand if you have a burning question.

00:47:46:26 - 00:48:21:24

Michelle

So there was a question in the chat for Chantalel, asking her, to talk more about the connection between, website analytics and plain language. So he says, this is Vince says we have access to a lot of website analytics, but I've struggled to connect that to plain language. Other than making the argument that if a certain number of people are visiting our website, then we better make sure that what they need is easy to find, understand, and used.

00:48:21:27 - 00:48:35:21

Michelle

So how, Chantalel do you connect the numbers of people visiting the websites and how long they stay and so on to, the success of using plain language on the website?

00:48:35:23 - 00:49:03:10

Chantale Audet

That's a great question. We don't do it much because we don't collect. I was just giving an example from the government of Quebec. But I think if you have before and after, data, you know, then then at least you can, you know, maybe make some assumption that because you simplified your, your content that, more people are visiting and coming back to your, your, content or your website.

00:49:03:12 - 00:49:33:09

Chantale Audet

It's it's not, you know, honestly, my area of specialty. So it's I'm not, able to give you a lot of input, but I can put you in contact with, you know, with the person that could, tell you more about it because, for them, it's been very, very, convincing that all the effort that they've made, so people come back and also find the information because they were able to document that before they made the changes.

00:49:33:09 - 00:50:03:09

Chantale Audet

You know, there were so many clicks to, to get to an information, and now there's like much less click. And it's very telling, like it's the difference in the number of visitors is so huge that, probably, there are assumptions, but, they, they, they're pretty fair assumptions. So, so please write to me and I'll try to get you in touch with, people that, can tell you more about.

00:50:03:11 - 00:50:15:22

Michelle

And does anybody else want to add to that? Does anybody have. Experience with using website analytics to make their case?

00:50:15:25 - 00:50:17:24

Farida

00:50:17:26 - 00:50:21:12

Mary Jane

Not any better than that.

00:50:21:14 - 00:50:39:27

Michelle

I think most of the other questions were answered as we went. To do I don't know if anybody other than, Mary Jane wants to talk about I.

00:50:39:29 - 00:50:44:17

Michelle

If anybody else had experience trying to use AI for plain language tasks.

00:50:44:20 - 00:50:46:13

Louise Stait

Yeah, I'm using it.

00:50:46:15 - 00:50:47:04

Farida

Yeah.

00:50:47:06 - 00:51:09:17

Louise Stait

I mean, so there's a national pilot which is experimenting with AI for minutes. It's called Intelligent Recap, which you've come across and it just meeting summaries. So we've been experiments on that for about three, three, four months now. And I think, although you can't generalize, it's not it's not working. It's just not working for committee minutes at all.

00:51:09:19 - 00:51:29:00

Louise Stait

And there's a number of reasons for that. So, what I'm experimenting with is trying to see how we can change our meetings a little bit so that they will be more amenable to AI minute taking, because I think this is big implications here. You know, obviously, the financial constraints and the staffing pressures and the workload pressures, if we can do it.

00:51:29:00 - 00:51:45:08

Louise Stait

So I'm putting together sort of package things we want our chairs to do differently so that the AI will make a better sort of head and tail of what's going on, the committee meetings and our experiments in that. So, watch this space.

00:51:45:10 - 00:52:12:03

Mary Jane

We're using, generative AI. So it's a little different than what you're talking about. It does have some recap, capacities. And that does not always work great. But the generative AI conversation is really interesting because we're, we're able to link our style guide and the gen AI and some of the templates so we can apply our style guide to the generative content.

00:52:12:05 - 00:52:37:23

Mary Jane

I think we're really working a lot to understand how to make it, how to make it produce the kind of content we want. But it's been really helpful for routine. You know, mundane tasks, you know, give me a first draft of this report of a memo, the ability of the software to take, several reports and then give me an executive summary, is quite good.

00:52:37:23 - 00:53:02:11

Mary Jane

So I think that we will see it more often in generative writing and being able to apply a style guide so that it has the voice and the, you know, the word choice and all that that you want will, I think, come along with a lot of that. And, being able to train the staff to think critically because it's easy to kind of turn your brain off when that first draft appears.

00:53:02:13 - 00:53:17:00

Mary Jane

We really want them to think about the content and, use it, use, you know, use their knowledge well and not just push send on something that they haven't thoroughly vetted.

00:53:17:03 - 00:53:19:02

Farida

Go ahead, Louis.

00:53:19:05 - 00:53:38:12

Louise Stait

Yeah. Okay. To just add, I think it's really important the risks of all this as well, and not just the risks of it taking people's jobs, but one thing that's really struck me is this AI hallucination thing. If some of you have come across that so it makes things up. So you'd be looking at a set of minutes that it will literally say something that was not discussed.

00:53:38:14 - 00:54:00:00

Louise Stait

So I think actually, the job of the human minute taker is no easier because of having this AI companion at the moment, because you're going to check every single word it says because it muddles things up in it. It does invent things because apparently it's trying to please us by saying what it thinks we might want to say.

00:54:00:02 - 00:54:24:16

Michelle

So I think that all of the questions that were, put in the chat were, answered either live or just now. So if anybody has other questions, just, raise your hand and we should be able to see.

00:54:24:18 - 00:54:31:06

Michelle

No, everybody learned everything. And even just, Okay, there's a.

00:54:31:06 - 00:54:33:17

Mary Jane

Question about translation in the chat.

00:54:33:20 - 00:55:01:10

Farida

There's a question about translation. So, Thomas Pace says, "do you work with bilingual texts? If you have the source text of a leaflet for the general public, that is not plain. What do you do? Do you clarify technical jargon in the other language, risking that the target text will be considered inferior?" Probably a good question for Chantale.

00:55:01:13 - 00:55:04:22

Farida

Yeah.

00:55:04:24 - 00:55:47:18

Chantale Audet

We work a lot in Canada. Being a bilingual country, we do, have a lot of, work in both languages. That's a good question, because, we do have some land texts that are considered signal in the original language and that we are asked to, revisit so that it is in plain language. So we don't have, like, much, and, and, you know, possibility to, to rework what we try to convince our client to do more and more is that never consider one language final until the other one has been, translated.

00:55:47:21 - 00:56:14:04

Chantale Audet

Because any way, translation in any way will always find, problems in the first original document so that we can, you know, make sure that we can come back, but and then sometimes fix little things in the original document, and it has happened that, you know, sometimes we would have wished to, go further and explain terminology or maybe even restructure some little parts.

00:56:14:04 - 00:56:46:12

Chantale Audet

And it was not possible because of, you know, that being the original language being final, but really we try to, I don't like the word educate, but we try to convince the, our clients that, you know, if you are, going to work in two or more languages, you know, you have to kind of like, make sure that you are always able to come back to the original document because the, the that the work in one language would really feed and improves the work in the other language.

00:56:46:12 - 00:57:22:05

Chantale Audet

Because, you know, you see things when you translate, when you rewrite that you wouldn't not have seen originally. So it's you know, another way we get clients to change, in the, in the way of doing work and, you know, one thing and, and and seizing this opportunity to just mentioned before we go that we are still in an area of social innovation, plain language is a new – and I read what Louise said – you know, that it's a new solution to old problems.

00:57:22:05 - 00:57:58:12

Chantale Audet

I really believe so, too. And we have to really put together all our ideas and our experiences to reinforce, how we can, implement plain language across countries, across organizations, across areas or sectors in our society because we believe that, plain language is a, is a really important way to support democracy. And democracy, as Cheryl

00:57:58:15 - 00:58:30:04

Chantale Audet

Stevens is already written before, needs in from public and needs in from people. And so, I think sessions like today are very important because they help us, you know, put together all our, experiences and questioning and let's be, how should I say, let's be easy on, on each, and on ourselves in, in the sense that because it's so innovation, we don't have answers to everything.

00:58:30:07 - 00:58:41:18

Chantale Audet

And we need to keep gathering data and, and demonstration that plain language can bring about positive changes in our society.

00:58:41:21 - 00:59:07:13

Nadja

Thank you so much, Chantelle. I think that is the perfect note in done. We've covered a lot today. We started at building the case for Plain Language. Then we spoke about implementing it effectively and we ended with measuring its impact. I'd like to thank all our panelists, Louise, Mary Jane and Chantelle, for sharing the insights and experience with us.

00:59:07:15 - 00:59:34:24

Nadja

We are planning several more webinars over the next few months, so please watch out for PLAIN's emails and newsletters. Thank you all for joining today. Hope you will leave this discussion with new ideas and new inspiration for advancing plain language in your organizations. I'm now going to hand over to my plain colleagues to give you an update on our strategic plan for next year.

00:59:34:26 - 00:59:36:07

Nadja

Over to you, Tara.