

Of course we can!

- an evaluation of the effects of the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project

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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND, METHOD AND MAIN FINDINGS

This report presents the results of an evaluation that ideas2evidence has carried out on assignment from the Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD). The purpose of the evaluation has been to measure effects of the measures taken in the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project in order to see whether they have resulted in changes in the government agencies¹ that have participated in the project. The evaluation encompasses government agencies that have received support from the project in order to improve the use of language in their own agency.

The goal has been to detect external and in-house changes. Externally, this mainly involves detecting changes in the users' assessments of and responses to information from the agencies that have implemented the clear language effort. Internally, it involves examining whether the clear language project has helped facilitate changes in the writing culture and attitudes in the same agencies.

This chapter begins with a more detailed description of the background for and main content of the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project. In addition, we present the theoretical and methodological basis for the design of our evaluation and describe the sources of data that form the basis for the evaluation. At the conclusion of this chapter, we present a summary of the most important findings from the evaluation.

"CLEAR LANGUAGE IN NORWAY'S CIVIL SERVICE" - BACKGROUND

In 2008, the Ministry of Administration, Reform and Church Affairs at that time took the initiative to launch a comprehensive effort to improve the use of language in the public sector through the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project, which was launched in 2009. The goal of the project is *"to pay greater attention to clear language in the government administration and pave the way for government agencies to improve the language in their written communications with citizens"*.¹

The efforts to make the language in agencies more user-friendly and comprehensible are nothing new. However, it is mainly through the clear language project that the State has taken a truly proactive role in the area of language policy. At present, clear language is an established concept, not only in Norway, but also internationally. The Norwegian clear language effort also has many international counterparts. Both in the USA and in Sweden, clear language has been on the authorities' agenda since the 1970s, and in both countries the effort has resulted in a separate clear language act. The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has also found much inspiration

¹ Translator's note: the Norwegian term 'virksomhet' is a broad term that can mean everything from "activities" to "business enterprise". In this context, the term refers to a public sector organisation. I have translated it as "government agency", but this is not entirely correct because the term may also refer to a ministry, which is not an agency. I am aware of no appropriate term in English with the same breadth. The reader should keep in mind that in this context, "agency" may also refer to a ministry.

internationally, especially from Sweden, where the authorities had already established a clear language group in 1993.²

¹ <http://www.sprakradet.no/nb-NO/Klarsprak/Diverse/Toppmeny5/Om-oss/>

² <http://www.sprakradet.se/2058>

The Soria Moria Declaration of 2005 emphasised the need for a pro-active language policy. This was further clarified in the Report to the Storting on Norwegian language policy from 2008 (Report no. 35 (2007-2008) to the Storting),³ which specifically emphasised the need for plain and clear language in the public sector. The report states that:

"The public authorities have a special responsibility to set a good example when it comes to using well-chosen, clear language."

In the Report to the Storting, two justifications are emphasised for concentrating on clear language: 1) Economic considerations and 2) democratic considerations.

To summarise briefly, the economic considerations deal with the fact that clear language is cost effective. An unclear and incomprehensible language results in increased costs for both the public and the authorities. The public risks missing out on benefits and welfare programmes because they do not understand the information. In addition, they have to spend more time trying to understand unclear information.

For the authorities, increased costs will accrue as a result of the need for more follow-up of users. Some studies have shown that simplification of websites, forms, instructions for forms, brochures and letters can reduce the number of errors and deficiencies in the interaction between government agency and user and hence the need for manual follow-up in the individual case as well. This can potentially give substantial savings effects, both in time spent and costs.

The democratic considerations involve ensuring all users equal opportunities and an equivalent treatment by the authorities regardless of their resources, level of knowledge and language qualifications. The Report to the Storting from 2008 indicates that 1/5 of the inhabitants have problems understanding the content of general public-sector texts. This is a democratic problem because it prevents a welfare programme from being equivalent for everyone. It is a particular problem because it creates a disparity between users who have ample resources at their disposal and users who have few resources. Plain, clear, user-oriented language will reduce the disparities that result because some users are better equipped to understand complex information than others.

An unclear language is also a democratic problem in the sense that it widens the gap between the authorities and the citizens. If the public does not understand what the authorities are trying to communicate, their confidence in both the authorities and the democratic control of those in power is diminished. From this perspective, clear language can have a legitimising effect by increasing the citizens' confidence in the authorities.

The objective of communicating with the citizens in a clear and user-oriented language is also incorporated into the central government's communication policy, which was approved in October 2009. One of the three goals of that policy is that "the citizens shall be given clear and correct information about their rights, duties and opportunities."⁴

³ <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kkd/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2007-2008/stmeld-nr-35-2007-2008-.html?id=519923>

⁴ http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/FAD/Vedlegg/Informasjonspolitik/Statens_kom_pol_plakat.pdf

" CLEAR LANGUAGE IN NORWAY'S CIVIL SERVICE " - CONTENT

The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has been conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD), the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) and the Language Council of Norway, where FAD is in charge of the project. Difi has been responsible for the project management, administration and communication, whereas the Language Council of Norway has had the linguistic responsibility. Initially, the project was supposed to be completed in 2010, but it was extended for two more years up to 1 January 2012.

The project has been organised with a project group composed of four representatives from Difi and three representatives from the Language Council of Norway. In Difi, this amounted to two FTEs per year, whereas the Language Council of Norway used between one and two FTEs each year during this period.

Table 1.1 gives an overview of the resources that have been used in the project measured in both the number of FTEs and in budgeted funds.

Table 1.1.: Use of resources in the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project ⁵

Year	Posted in FAD	Posted in Difi	Budgeted Language Council of Norway	FTEs FAD ⁶	FTEs Difi	FTEs Language Council of Norway ⁷
2008	75 761	1 050 000	35 000	0.4	2	1.5
2009	4 776	2 579 164	35 000	0.3	2	1.5
2010	9 225	3 498 265	35 000	0.4	2	1.5
2011	303 635	3 078 938	35 000	0.3	2	1.5
2012	214 474	3 317 965	35 000	0.3	2	1.5
Total	607 871	13 524 332	175 000			

The project has been allocated a total funding of about NOK 14.3 million (for FAD, Difi and the Language Council of Norway taken together). As a directorate under FAD, Difi has received its budgeted funds from the Ministry, and most of the aggregate budgeted funds have been spent in Difi – to be more specific about NOK 13.5 million. Over half of these funds have gone to the allocation of project funding and support to the government agencies and to the purchase of clear language courses through the support scheme (see table 1.2 below). In addition, Difi's budget has covered the purchase of open clear language courses (Difi courses), the Clear Language Conference, the development of klarsprak.no, seminars, scholarships to students, surveys, etc.

The in-house use of resources in FAD only amounts to a marginal share of FAD and Difi's total budget. The budget in the Language Council of Norway has also been limited. Other than payroll costs, the annual use of resources in the Language Council of Norway has amounted to about NOK 35,000. The funds have gone to the development of the website, klarsprak.no, and to seminars.

⁵ The figures presented here for FAD, Difi and the Language Council of Norway do not include payroll expenses.

⁶ The figures are FAD's own estimates. Since the job tasks were delegated to already existing positions and the workload has varied over a period of time, it is difficult to specify the exact number of FTEs.

⁷ For similar reasons, it is difficult to specify the exact amount of resources spent in the Language Council of Norway, but they themselves estimate that the use has been between one and two FTEs per year.

The main clear language project has established a number of measures to assist agencies that want to start clear language projects in their own organisation. Among other things, this includes:

- ◆ Project support scheme: professional advice, clear language courses and/or financial support for language work
- ◆ The web site www.klarsprak.no, which has a language tool box with language advice, tips and information on the implementation of the language project
- ◆ Clear language courses under the direction of Difi, open to all government employees
- ◆ Customised courses from the Language Council of Norway held in the agencies
- ◆ The Norwegian government's Plain Language Prize: an annual prize to an agency that has done much to improve its written communication
- ◆ A sub-project concerning language in laws and regulations, established in November 2011

More than 60 government bodies have received financial or other support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service" during the period 2009-2012. Difi has been in charge of the allocation of these funds, which have primarily gone to the purchase of various consulting services in connection with the development of language profiles or language guidelines, work on texts, lectures, clear language courses, the preparation of e-learning courses, document analysis and surveys, evaluations, user testing and the development of templates. In addition, the project has distributed clear language courses worth about NOK 1.1 million, which Difi has purchased. Table 1.2. presents an overview of the annual allocations in the project.

Table 1.2.: Annual project funding and expenses for clear language courses through the support scheme⁸

Year	Project funding	Clear language
2009	1 999 750	
2010	1 766 000	350 000
2011	1 411 000	405 000
2012	1 318 000	410 000
Total	6 494 750	1 165 000

⁸ These figures include only clear language courses in the workplaces for which Difi has paid. In addition, Difi has also spent funds on open clear language courses.

EVALUATION OF CLEAR LANGUAGE MEASURES

There are surprisingly few published evaluations of clear language projects, nor is there any international methodological literature that describes the challenges that we face when we shall try to measure results and effects in a sound, scientifically based way. Joseph Kimble is one of the few who have made an attempt to systematise the knowledge that exists in this area. He has this to say:

“To most non-lawyers, the benefits of plain language are intuitive... But - and here is the irony - for the very reason that these benefits are so apparent, companies and agencies are not inclined to try to measure them.”⁹

In other words, most people agree that the efforts to promote a clearer and more distinct language are sensible. However, few have tried to measure whether this work gives the expected results, whether the effects are so great that they outweigh the costs and whether some of the measures that we initiate work better than others. Despite the fact that many countries have initiated ambitious public sector clear language projects, there are few examples of systematic and targeted attempts to evaluate the results and the effects of these measures. Kimble's article gathers the findings from a large number of clear language projects in both government agencies and private enterprises, but the findings and the results that are presented in most of the cases are based on anecdotal observations and random, fairly unsystematic data.

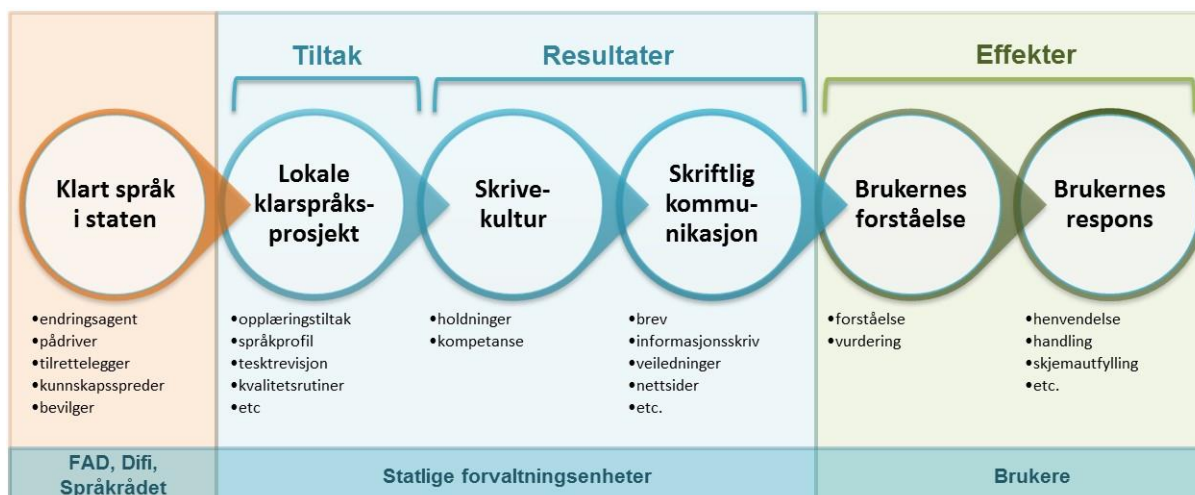
Essentially, there are two different approaches to observing and assessing the results of clear language efforts:

- ◆ The first of these approaches focuses on properties of the texts that are produced and assesses the quality of these texts from a linguistic and communication theory perspective. This is primarily a linguistic and qualitatively oriented approach, where the focus is on the ability of the texts to communicate a message as simply and easily understandable as possible.
- ◆ The second approach to the problem looks instead at the ways in which the texts were created, perceived and assessed by the recipients. In other words, it is not the texts' clear language quality that is evaluated directly here, but the effect of these texts on the recipients and the recipients' responses. If the texts are understood and do not lead to misunderstandings or the need for further clarification, we can conclude that the texts are based on a sufficiently clear and comprehensible language. This is a more quantitative tradition with roots in organisational and communication theory and to some extent economics (cost-benefit), where the conclusions are based on characteristics of the communication process that are measurable by means of simple indicators.

In our evaluation of the Norwegian clear language project, it is the latter approach that has formed the basis for the choice of analytical design and data gathering strategy. This approach is based on the following causal chain model, which shows how we can visualise the propagation of the effects of the main project through the government administrative pyramids and out to the users.

⁹ Kimble, Joseph: Writing for dollars, writing to please, Volume 6 of *The Scribes Journal of Legal Writing* (1996-1997). An Internet version is available at: <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/kimble/dollars.htm>.

Figure 1.1: Causal chain model - clear language project



The Clear language in Norway's civil service project was administered by FAD and implemented by Difi and the Language Council of Norway. In this context, Difi and the Language Council of Norway can best be described as agents of change. They functioned as promoters, sources of inspiration and facilitators and also have a function as a knowledge base on which other government agencies can draw. Through the project support scheme, Difi and the Language Council of Norway can influence the organisation of the agencies' clear language efforts, but without any form of authority to issue instructions.

The scope of the local clear language projects has varied, and they have had highly varying levels of ambition. A common feature of the projects has been that they have had the goal of getting the agency to communicate with the outside world in a simpler and more user-oriented way. In order to achieve this, the projects have implemented a number of measures. This partly involves developing tools, guidelines and quality assurance routines that can be used in the writing work. It partly involves measures for attracting attention, changing attitudes and building competence - briefly stated, changing the agencies' writing culture. Most of the agencies have also commenced the toilsome and extensive effort of revising existing texts, e.g. standard letters, forms, instructions or websites.

The results of these measures may be observed as:

- a change in the agencies' clear language capacity, i.e. in their willingness and ability to write in clear and user-oriented ways, and
- changes in the written communication from the agency, i.e. revisions of the agencies' handed-down portfolio of texts or recently written texts that are based to a greater extent than before on the clear language principles.

In the next step, letters, informative documents, guidelines and websites encounter their readers and users who try to understand and relate to the information they receive. First of all, this encounter deals with the extent to which the users understand the received message. Secondly, it deals with how the language in which the message is formulated affects the users' assessments of and confidence in the agency that has sent it out.

As a provisional final step in the causal chain, the users act on the basis of their own interpretation of the information they have received. If the information is formulated in such a way that the users understand the message correctly, their actions will be in keeping with the agency's expectations. If the message is not understood, or even misunderstood, this will result in other actions. For example,

the user may contact the administrative body's first-line support in order to have them clarify what the letter or the informative document is actually about. It may also result in the recipient not acting in keeping with the intention in the message, e.g. that the user does not meet deadlines, does not give the government administration the information that it has requested, or perhaps makes mistakes in the forms that are to be filled out. By measuring how often these unforeseen responses occur, we can indirectly determine the extent to which the written communication from the government administration has been formulated in a plain and clear way.

Thus, the model distinguishes between *results* and *effects*. The results are the changes that occur in the agencies that implement the clear language project, primarily in their willingness and ability to write plainly and clearly. The effects are the changes that occur in the recipients when the information that they receive becomes clearer and more comprehensible, partly because the message is perceived to be simpler and partly because the ongoing communication between the government administration and the users becomes more effective.

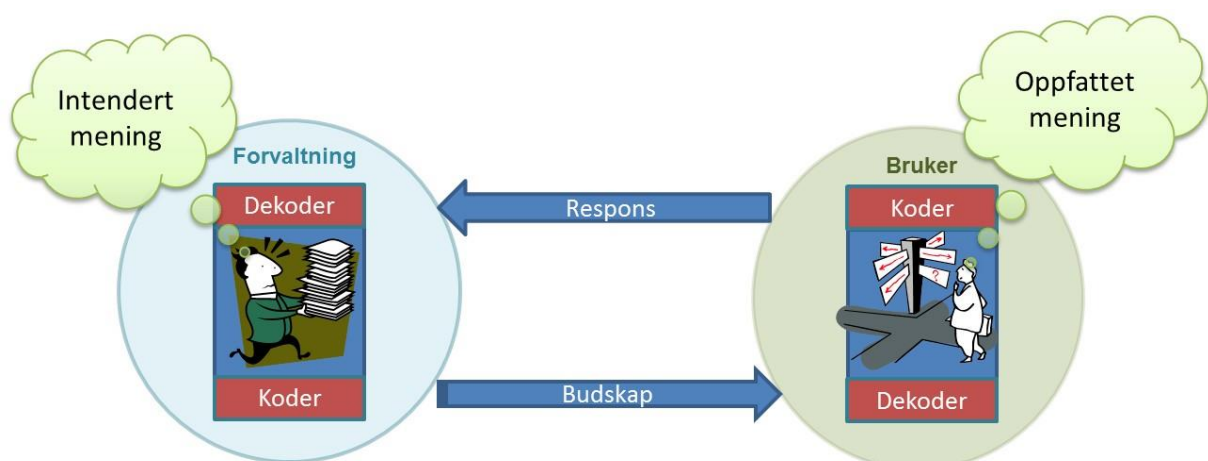
It is these effects that are the final goal of the clear language efforts and that can be deduced from the two justifications for clear language:

- 1) the democratic argument, which involves ensuring all users equal opportunities and equivalent treatment from the authorities regardless of their resources, level of knowledge and language qualifications, and
- 2) the economic argument, which involves reducing the users' and the government administration's costs by making the communication more efficient.

Or as Joseph Kimble says: «writing for dollars and writing to please».

This way of assessing results and effects of clear language efforts is also illustrated in the following simple communication model.

Figure 1.2: A simple model for communication between the government administration and the users



It is a long, involved process before the work that has been performed in the main project in order to spread knowledge about and interest in clear language to other government agencies gives rise to effects that can be detected among the recipients of letters and other information from the central government. First of all, FAD and Difi have not had an opportunity to order other government agencies to begin clear language efforts, only to spread knowledge, seek to inspire and offer guidance and support. Secondly, government agencies administer large portfolios of text that

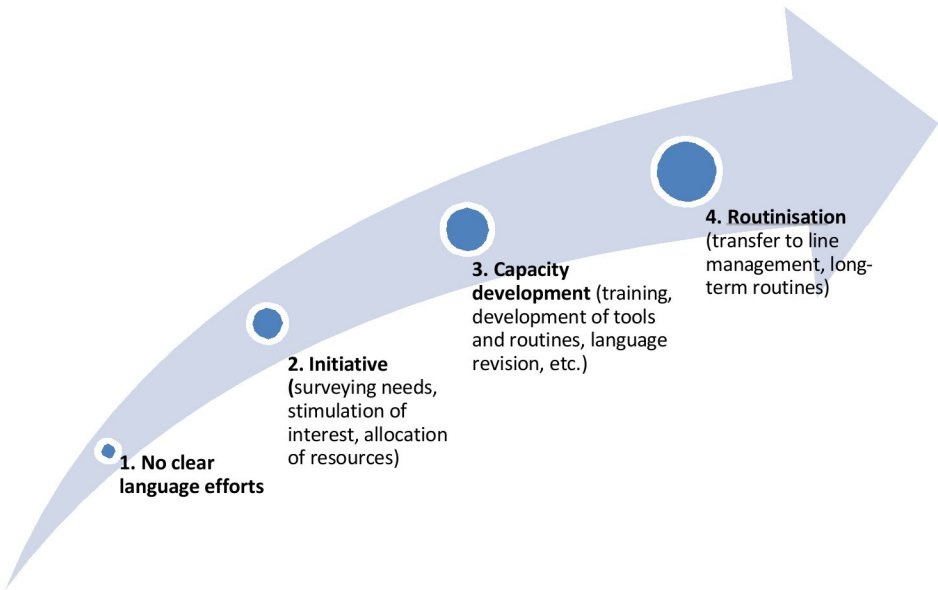
have been handed down that cannot be replaced or revised overnight. Therefore, it will necessarily take some time before the users of the government information will perceive that thorough changes have occurred in the way the employees in the government administration write.

FROM PROJECT TO ROUTINE

Clear language projects are normally an effort to induce change and develop capacity over a limited period of time. The main clear language project took place in the period 2008-2012 and has now been completed. The majority of the local projects had a shorter duration than this and in most cases have also now been completed. Therefore, the real litmus test of how successful the effort has been is what happens when the extra attention, enthusiasm and resources that are mobilised in an intensive project phase are toned down and the results are to be incorporated into the daily operations of the agencies. Will the agencies manage to transfer responsibility and develop competence and capacity in the line organisation? Or will the prioritisation of the efforts to write clear and user-oriented language eventually lose in the competition with all of the other important tasks that are delegated to the government administration?

Figure 1.3 gives a simplified and stylised picture of the phases through which an agency that implements a clear language project will normally pass. Phase one describes an agency that has not yet given priority to clear language efforts. In phase two, an initiative has been taken and a number of introductory activities have been implemented that are necessary in order to initiate a project. In phase three, the work has entered into a more targeted capacity building phase. The agencies conduct training, develop tools and routines and have commenced the work on specific revisions of language. In the fourth and final phase, the project phase is completed, the responsibility has been transferred to the line organisation and the objectives have been incorporated into the main governing document. At the same time, long-term routines have been developed that ensure that the results that have been achieved in the project phase are sustained and further improved.

Figure 1.3: Phases in the clear language efforts



In order to be able to assess whether the clear language projects have yielded the expected results and effects, it is necessary to study what happens over a period of time. Therefore, an ideal evaluation programme involves conducting studies before the projects are initiated (a baseline measurement) and after they have been completed (an effect measurement). Only by comparing the

condition at two different points in time will we be able to decide whether the efforts have resulted in the expected changes. Normally, this will also be compared with what happens in comparable government agencies that do not implement similar projects; i.e. in a control group of agencies that are in phase one throughout the whole period.

Our evaluation of "Clear language in Norway's civil service" is based to a great extent on this kind of scheme. As far as possible, all data collection has been carried out two times. The first data collection took place in the spring of 2011. This happened at a time when the majority of the agencies had initiated their clear language projects, but were in an early phase of these efforts. Therefore, they are not pure baseline measurements, but nevertheless they were taken so early that the changes had not progressed very far. The analyses of this data material were presented in a separate report that was issued in December 2011.¹⁰

The second data collection took place in the spring of 2013. At that time, the majority of the projects had been completed and the efforts to transfer the results to the line organisations were under way. The surveys in 2011 were also conducted on a control group of agencies that were not participating in any clear language project. Correspondingly, the analyses of the population's and the users' assessments of the written communication were conducted for the agencies that were participating and those that were not participating in any clear language project.

¹⁰ Ryssevik, Jostein and Malin Dahle: Evaluering av prosjektet «Klart språk i staten» - Rapport fra underveisevaluering, (Evaluation of the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project - Report from the formative evaluation) ideas2evidence report 10/2011.

SOURCES OF DATA

The evaluation is based on a combination of data gathered by ideas2evidence and by government agencies that are participating in their own clear language projects. In addition, we make use of Difi's national surveys of inhabitants, which give a picture of the population's and the users' assessments of public sector communication.

FOUR CASE STUDIES

We have selected four agencies that are participating in clear language projects for more in-depth surveys. These are:

- The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (*BLD*)
- The Norwegian Tax Administration
- The Norwegian Public Roads Administration
- The Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund

Taken together, these four agencies constitute a broad and varied range of clear language projects, with regard to the management tier, size, target group and experience with clear language efforts.

We considered it important to include a ministry here. The ministries do not have as much direct communication with the citizens, but nevertheless they set the premises for much of the language that is used in the government administration through formulations in laws, regulations, sets of rules, etc. The Norwegian Tax Administration was selected because they are a large agency focused on the general public that administers an extensive and complex set of rules. One of the most important reasons for including the Norwegian Public Roads Administration was that this was a newly initiated project with reasonably high ambitions at the time when the evaluation commenced. On the other hand, the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund had been involved in the project for a while and had already derived a substantial amount of experience.

The data collection in these four agencies has been carried out as qualitative interviews in the spring of 2011 and the spring of 2013. In 2011, we interviewed the project owner or project manager and a person who was more closely involved in the practical implementation of the project. In 2013, we also conducted interviews with middle managers and executive officers who had not been directly involved in the work in the project. The last round of interviews has put particular emphasis on changes in the writing culture and in the extent to which the goals that the projects have achieved have had permanent effects on the agencies' working methodology and writing style.

The objectives of the case studies have not been to conduct separate evaluations of these agencies' clear language projects. On the contrary, the goal has been to obtain a more in-depth picture of how the clear language efforts have gone with particular emphasis on the transition from project to line organisation.

QUESTIONNAIRE TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN AND NOT PARTICIPATING IN CLEAR LANGUAGE PROJECTS

Ideas2evidence has also carried out questionnaires to all government agencies that have received support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service". These have been aimed at the persons who have been responsible for the clear language projects in the government agencies. The first survey was conducted in the spring of 2011 and repeated in the spring of 2013. A considerable share of the questions has been included in both surveys in order to get a picture of changes in activities,

assessments and results that have been experienced. In addition, the survey in 2013 includes a number of questions about what the agencies have done to continue the clear language efforts after the project phase was over. In 2011 we also conducted a survey in a control group of agencies that were not participating in any clear language project. This was answered by the head of the communications department. The participation in the surveys has been good with response percentages between 75 and 80 per cent.

The objective of these surveys is to get a more comprehensive picture of the clear language projects that the agencies are implementing than it is possible to achieve through a small number of intensive case studies. It is important to emphasise that the surveys have been answered by individuals with a special interest in and commitment to clear language. It is natural to assume that this may bias the responses in a somewhat positive direction. In addition, it may be difficult for an individual to make qualified assessments of some of the questions, e.g. how well clear language is incorporated into and accepted by various parts of the organisation. In other words, the assessments of the person in charge of the clear language project cannot be regarded as absolute truths, but rather as indications of the developments in the clear language efforts of the agencies.

DATA GATHERED BY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN A CLEAR LANGUAGE PROJECT

Since there was not room within the constraints of this evaluation to conduct separate surveys among the employees in the government agencies and their users, we have had to make use of the data that the agencies themselves gather for local evaluation efforts. In order to coordinate the local evaluation efforts in the best way possible and to simultaneously ensure that the efforts were conducted according to sound methodological principles, we prepared a methodological brochure that the agencies could make use of in their own work. The methodological brochure includes specific programmes for surveys and measurements and offers guidelines on how these should be put to use.

The methodological brochure consists of three specific programmes:

SURVEYS AMONG THE EMPLOYEES:

First, we have prepared a complete questionnaire for a survey among the agency's employees. Here the objective is to measure the employees' attitudes to clear language, their views on their own use of language and their views on the use of language in the agency in general. The survey also takes a closer look at the employee's knowledge about the clear language measures that have been initiated and the extent to which the measures have been useful for the individual and the agency as a whole.

SURVEYS AMONG THE USERS:

The methodological brochure also includes two specific question modules that can be incorporated into the user surveys that the agencies are conducting. This enables the users to tell how a letter or informative document is perceived and understood. It also enables them to explain what they do if they do not understand what the letter or the informative document is about. The latter is important if we want to know anything about the costs of unclear communication. The first module is intended for situations where the agency shall test the users' understanding of a specific letter, informative document, etc. The second is developed with a view to agencies that want to conduct a more general survey of how the users perceive and understand the written communication they receive.

MEASUREMENTS OF THE INTERACTION AMONG THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND THE USERS SUBSEQUENT TO MAJOR SENDINGS:

Effects of clear language measures can also be measured by gathering data about the users' answers or responses to the information they receive. First of all, the users may inquire with the government agency because they do not understand all or part of a letter or informative document that they have received. Second, many letters or documents that are sent out require that the user shall give a response or do something in particular (e.g. submit an application or a form, receive or pay money, meet a deadline, etc.). These responses may be correct or relevant, or they may contain errors, be received too late, etc. Both inquiries to get a clarification of the content of a document and incorrect responses to documents that have been sent out result in extra costs for the agency and the user. Measurements such as these will normally be conducted in connection with censuses or record-keeping in the first-line support, at telephone-based contact centres and the like. The methodological brochure contains definitions and instructions for a number of these indicators.

In addition to disseminating the methodological brochure to all agencies that are participating in clear language projects, two information meetings about local evaluation efforts were conducted in the autumn of 2011 and the spring of 2013. The meetings were arranged by the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD) with a substantial number of agencies attending. At the meetings, the agencies were urged to make use of the three evaluation programmes and to give the main evaluation project access to the data that was gathered. In addition, several reminders were sent out in order to get the agencies to submit data.

Unfortunately, fewer agencies than we had hoped for completed surveys in keeping with the guidelines in the methodological brochure. That was especially true of user surveys and measurements of the interaction between the users and the government administration. Moreover, only a small number of agencies have conducted both baseline measurements and effect measurements.

The lack of good data from a sufficient number of agencies that are participating in local clear language projects has complicated the evaluation efforts. First of all, this applies to the analyses of the ways in which the writing culture has changed during the project period. We have surveys among the employees in a small number of agencies, but would have liked to have had data from more in order to be able to draw sounder conclusions. Secondly, the lack of user surveys and record-keeping of the interaction between the users and the government administration have made it more difficult to measure the effects of the clear language efforts. Even if the data that we have gained access to provides a basis for unambiguous conclusions, the material is scattered and insufficient to estimate the magnitude of the savings that may be achieved.

DIFI'S NATIONAL SURVEY OF INHABITANTS

In the analyses of the inhabitants' and the users' assessments of public sector communication, we have also made use of Difi's national survey of inhabitants. On two occasions, Difi has conducted major surveys of inhabitants, which take the pulse of the Norwegian people's assessment of the municipal and central government administration. These surveys are composed of two parts – a part for inhabitants, which deals with the relationship between the inhabitants and the political system in general, and a part for users, which focuses on the users' experiences with and assessments of a number of municipal and central government services and administrative areas. We have made use of data from both of these parts, but mainly data from part 2. The data for the first of these surveys

was gathered in 2009, i.e. only a short time after the clear language in Norway's civil service project commenced. The collection of data for the second survey was carried out in 2012, i.e. three to four years after the clear language efforts picked up speed. Even though it will probably take a longer time before we see the full effects of this work, this is a long enough time so that it ought to be possible to detect the effects. In these analyses, we also compare the users' assessments of government agencies that have implemented the clear language project with agencies that have not been so strongly involved in the clear language efforts.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 in this final report contains a description of the clear language projects in the four government agencies where separate case studies have been conducted.

In chapter 3, we take a closer look at the ways in which the clear language efforts have been organised and conducted in all government agencies that have received funds from the Clear language in Norway's civil service project. These analyses are based on the surveys of the persons in charge of the clear language project in these agencies, and particular emphasis has been given to the changes that have occurred in agencies that were involved in both 2011 and 2013.

Chapter 4 deals with the transition from clear language project to ordinary operations. What have the agencies done to ensure that clear language will become an integral part of the agency's routines and culture and how well is clear language integrated in the organisation? We defined this integration as both a structural integration, e.g. in the agency's governing documents, and a cultural integration in the form of acceptance of clear language by the managers and employees. We also take a closer look at the biggest challenges in the process of transferring the clear language efforts from project to line or operational organisation. This chapter too is based to a great extent on the surveys of the persons in charge of the clear language projects and on the interview material from the four case-studied agencies.

In chapter 5, we take a closer look at the agencies' in-house writing culture and substantiate any effects that the clear language project may have had on its development. Among other things, we take a look at the employees' and managers' attitudes to and knowledge about clear language and the extent to which the project has contributed to a greater prioritisation than previously of clear language in the daily work. The chapter is based on interviews with managers and employees in the four case-studied agencies, in-house surveys in selected agencies and the questionnaires to the persons in charge of the clear language projects.

In the sixth and final chapter, we focus on the effects of the clear language efforts. First, we examine the extent to which the users' assessments of how easy it is to understand information from various agencies have changed during the period when the clear language project was being conducted. Second, we assess whether any improvements in language have resulted in a more effective exchange of information and in savings in the form of working hours or other resources. The conclusions are based on analyses of Difi's surveys of inhabitants and on user surveys conducted and records kept by selected agencies that have participated in the clear language project.

Each individual chapter is introduced with a summary of the most important findings. A comprehensive summary of the whole report is presented below.

MAIN FINDINGS

The goals of "Clear language in Norway's civil service" were first to attract attention to clear language in the government administration and to help the various government agencies to initiate a targeted clear language effort. The grounds for these efforts were partly to ensure equal opportunities to all inhabitants and an equivalent treatment from the public authorities and partly to make the dialogue between the civil service and the users more efficient.

This evaluation shows that a substantial clear language effort has been invested during the project phase, both by the main clear language project and in the individual agencies. The efforts have been carried out with energy and enthusiasm and have reached a broad range and large number of different agencies. The main clear language project has been an extremely important driving force for achieving this. Therefore, there are many indications that the main project has achieved its comprehensive goal of attracting attention to clear language and helping government agencies to initiate the work. When considered relative to the resources that have been used, the level of activity and the number of government agencies involved have been considerable.

First and foremost, the agencies have given priority to the efforts to build competence and develop tools for the on-going efforts, e.g. language profiles. More than 5,000 persons have attended courses and seminars during the period in which the projects have taken place. The work of revising specific texts has not gone as far and has partially stagnated after the projects were completed and the more collective voluntary phase came to an end.

The evaluation shows that the clear language efforts are considerably better integrated into the agencies at present than they were a couple of years ago. Among other things, many more of the agencies have incorporated objectives regarding clear language into their comprehensive strategic documents.

In order to ensure that clear language becomes a permanent part of the organisation's working methods and priorities, the agencies have put strong emphasis on measures relating to the organisational culture. A substantial number of the agencies have incorporated clear language into the organisation's competence building programme. On the other hand, there are relatively few agencies that have integrated objectives about clear language into the agencies' management by objectives and reporting regimes. In other words, greater emphasis has been given to developing the organisation's clear language capacity than to incentives and controls.

Only half of the agencies have allocated dedicated resources to further clear language efforts, and of those that have done so, the funds have been limited. This means that the ongoing efforts to promote specific text work, for example, will have to compete with all other important tasks that the government administration has imposed. According to the persons in charge of the clear language projects in the agencies, it is precisely the lack of time and dedicated resources that are the most important impediments to the ongoing efforts. In addition, many people are concerned that the absence of clear language goals in the agencies' management-by-objectives regimes will make the prioritisation of these goals even more difficult.

We also find that the senior managers' role as the principal supporters, and to some extent promoters, has been enhanced during this period. At the same time we observe an increasing tendency for the middle managers to find it difficult to give priority to clear language in their daily work. It is reasonable to interpret this in light of the challenges that the middle managers in particular are facing with regard to taking care of clear language considerations in the daily

operations of their departments without any dedicated resources and without the enthusiasm and attention that distinguished the project phase. Without a doubt, the middle managers' ownership of the clear language goals will be crucial to the success of the ongoing efforts.

The government agencies' achievement of their goals has increased markedly since 2011. This applies to both the in-house goals regarding the ways in which the clear language capacity in the organisation should develop and the external goals about the ways in which the users should regard and experience the results of these changes. At the same time, our analyses show that the integration and acceptance of the clear language efforts are crucial to whether or not they succeed. Agencies in which the efforts are strongly supported and promoted in the organisation have a higher achievement of goals than agencies in which there is insufficient acceptance.

The evaluation does not give any grounds for maintaining that any drastic change has occurred in the agencies' writing culture, but several signs point in the right direction. First and foremost, it appears that the awareness of clear language has increased during the period of the clear language project. Surveys among the employees show that more people are aware now of the clear language project than before and that more people have become more conscientious about writing clearly. We also find more clear evidence that the project has helped increase the knowledge about clear language. This is particularly true of those who have participated in activities such as courses, seminars and writing workshops. We also see examples that employees are becoming more critical of their own clear language skills after they acquire more knowledge about what it entails to write clearly and in a user-oriented way.

However, a somewhat deficient data base makes it difficult to detect any extensive change of attitudes. Even if the awareness and the skills have increased, this does not mean that many people have developed a more positive attitude to clear language in all of the agencies. Nevertheless, we can register one important change. The view of clear language and a legally correct language as two incompatible opposites appears to be less dominant now than it was before.

We find similar ambiguous results with regard to working habits and the prioritisation of clear language in the work day. Even if a reasonably large percentage in many agencies state that they use clear language tools, such as language profiles, in their daily work, we also find examples of agencies where employees give less priority to clear language than they did before. It also looks as if the middle managers find it more difficult to give priority to clear language after the project period is over. That is food for thought, given that it is precisely the middle management that is responsible for giving priority to different tasks in the departments.

We find reason to believe that the changes we have observed have mainly occurred in the parts of the agencies that have been most involved in the clear language efforts through courses, writing workshops or revisions of specific texts. That applies at both the individual and departmental levels. Thus, a challenging task for the agencies in the time ahead will be to include the parts of the organisation that have not been engaged in the project phase. This applies not only to many departments at the top of the civil service pyramid, but also to many tiers in these pyramids.

Most of the clear language efforts so far have been concentrated in the directorates and at the top of the civil service pyramids, where many of the standard letters and the key information material are formulated. Yet in agencies with a regional and local presence, much writing work aimed at the users also takes place in their more peripheral offices. Up to now, these tiers in the organisations have

been less involved in the clear language efforts. Extensive changes in attitudes and culture will naturally take a longer time and be more demanding in this type of agencies than in smaller ones. Among other things, we find that fewer people are familiar with the clear language project in the Norwegian Tax Administration than in smaller agencies. We find similar differences in prioritisation of clear language and the use of clear language tools.

The long-term justification for the clear language efforts has been to simplify and improve the communication with the users. Therefore, the questions we must ask are whether most people feel that letters and other information from the public authorities have become easier to understand and whether this has resulted in a more precise and effective dialogue between the individual user and the government administration. Analyses of data from Difi's surveys of inhabitants give no evidence for claiming that the clear language projects have changed the population's and the users' general assessments of how easy or difficult it is to understand information from government agencies. Even though the trend in people's assessments is headed in the right direction, this trend is weaker in agencies that are participating in clear language projects than in other municipal and central government agencies.

Nevertheless, user surveys conducted in connection with specific language revisions show that the efforts have an impact and that the users find the new texts to be simpler and easier to understand. However, there will have to be a substantial amount of this type of user feedback before the more general assessments of the government administration's ability to write comprehensibly will change. After initiating a clear language project at the top of a civil service pyramid, it takes a long time before the results of these efforts materialise to a sufficient extent and in such a way that the users take notice.

Surveys of specific language revisions show that the clear language efforts also give effects in the form of a more effective exchange of information between the government administration and the users. Clearly formulated letters and informative documents do not just result in more people understanding the messages that are sent out. They also reduce the time and resources that the recipients and the recipients' communities must spend on understanding the message. In the next round, this leads to savings in the government administration, both because fewer users have a need to get in touch and because more people will respond correctly to the message they have received.

The clear language projects have developed capacity and facilitated change in many government agencies, but first and foremost in small parts of these agencies and above all at the top of the civil service pyramids. The question is whether this trend will come to a halt with this development or whether the seed that has been sown will spread elsewhere in the organisations.

An equally important question is to what extent the clear language capacity that has been developed will result in a marked increase in the volume of text that is written in a clear and user-oriented language. There is good reason to believe that the production of new text will benefit from both the skills and the tools that the clear language projects have developed. Yet many government agencies have an extensive portfolio of text that is handed down and that requires revision. Until this mountain of text has been greatly diminished, it is uncertain that the users will notice the changes that have actually taken place. Many agencies got a grip on this task during the project period, and it is crucial for the project's success that these efforts be continued and intensified after the clear language efforts have been transferred to the line organisation. It remains to be seen whether this will occur in a situation where the majority of the agencies have not allocated any dedicated

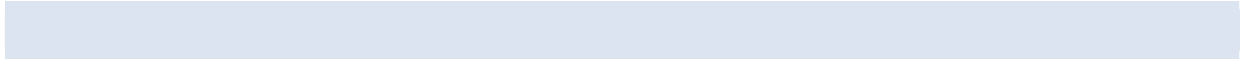
resources for clear language and where only a few have introduced clear language goals in the agency's reporting and management-by-objectives regimes. Like Sweden, Norway does not have a clear language act that specifies requirements in this area either.

The evaluation shows that clear language efforts take time and must be judged in a long-term perspective. The clear language project has attracted attention, built competence and developed tools to an extent that is proportionate to the resources that have been available during the project period, but at the same time it is crucial that the pressure be maintained and that all of the basic efforts that have been carried out in the agencies during the project phase result in a more extensive production of letters and other information in a plain and clear language. Only when the clear language reaches the users to a sufficient extent will the actual benefits of the effort become apparent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results from the evaluation work, we will make the following recommendations for the ongoing clear language efforts:

- ◆ The efforts to attract attention and spread knowledge about clear language ought to continue. It is appropriate that this task continue to be delegated to Difi and the Language Council of Norway.
- ◆ The efforts ought to be focused on government agencies that so far have not initiated a clear language effort, but also agencies in which the efforts have stagnated after the project was completed.
- ◆ For the individual government agency, it will be crucial to spread the awareness and the knowledge about clear language to more of the organisation than the parts that were engaged during the project phase.
- ◆ Particular efforts should be made to get the middle management tier to take ownership of the clear language objectives.
- ◆ The efforts must be intensified to increase the volume of text that reaches the users in clear, user-oriented language. This particularly applies to the large user-oriented agencies with an extensive portfolio of text that has been handed down.
- ◆ In addition to developing the organisation's clear language capacity, the agencies ought to put more emphasis on incentives and controls. Among other things, more agencies ought to integrate objectives about clear language into their management by objectives and reporting regimes.
- ◆ It ought to be assessed whether clear language shall be incorporated more explicitly into the legislation, whether through a separate (clear) language act as in Sweden and the USA or as a supplement to existing laws, e.g. the Norwegian Public Administration Act.





Chapter 3

CLEAR LANGUAGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In this chapter, we describe the ways in which the clear language efforts have been organised and implemented in all government agencies that have received funds from the Clear language in Norway's civil service project. The analyses are based on a survey that was sent to all government agencies that have received funds from "Clear language in Norway's civil service" since the project commenced.

In the survey, we distinguish between "old" and "new" government agencies that have participated in clear language projects; i.e. agencies that have received support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service" and that participated in the interim evaluation in 2011 and agencies that were not covered by that evaluation, but that have received support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service" after 2011. Most of the "old" agencies have now completed their clear language projects.

The survey is a repetition of a corresponding questionnaire that was sent out in connection with the interim evaluation in 2011, so it functions as a final measurement. Since the same survey has been conducted two times on the same group of agencies, it makes it possible to detect changes in the agencies' clear language efforts over a period of time. Comparison of agencies that are and that are not participating in clear language projects is less relevant, so we have decided not to include a control group of agencies that are not participating in clear language projects as we did in 2011.

The survey was sent out to contacts for the agencies' clear language projects, who in most cases were also the coordinators for the clear language efforts in the respective agency. It is natural to expect that to some extent this will affect the responses and give a more positive picture of the agency's project than a more neutral observer would have given. The survey was conducted electronically with one reminder. The response percentage was satisfactory. 42 out of 52 agencies have responded to the whole survey (i.e. 80 per cent) and three agencies have answered part of the form.

It is evident that "Clear language in Norway's civil service" has helped stimulate an extensive clear language effort in the public sector. More than 60 agencies have received support to implement clear language efforts in their own organisation. Inspiration, incentive and support from the main clear language project have clearly been the most important individual motivating factors for the agencies that have initiated their own projects. All in all, they have done a great deal of work to improve their written communication. Many of them have developed a language profile or language guidelines for the agency's written communication; more than 5,000 persons have attended clear language courses and seminars and a great number of texts have been revised in keeping with the principles of clear language. Standard letters, letter templates and Internet texts are the documents on which most people have worked.

However, the total volume of revised text has stagnated since 2011. For all user-oriented text genres, a smaller percentage of the agencies state that they have revised a substantial percentage or more of their total number of texts in 2013 than in 2011. Even though more agencies than before

have commenced the effort of revising texts within several genres, the great majority of the agencies still have a long way to go to improve their text portfolio.

Moreover, we find that most of the agencies have concentrated for the most part on mobilisation and production-oriented activities. Far fewer have implemented measures to integrate clear language into the agency's daily work after the project was completed. Even though a language profile and guidelines can be regarded as such a measure, only a small percentage have made other organisational or procedural changes, such as establishing an in-house language service or introducing routines for the quality assurance of text. Introducing this type of routines is an important part of the process of gaining acceptance for clear language in and integrating clear language into the organisation and a necessary condition for being able to generate lasting changes. From this perspective, it is food for thought that so few government agencies have given priority to this now that the projects are mostly completed.

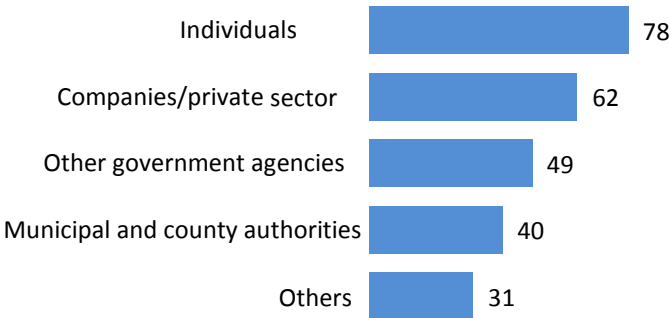
THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN CLEAR LANGUAGE PROJECTS

Government agencies in a number of different sectors, areas of expertise and management tiers have received support from the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project. Among those who have responded to the survey, we find four ministries, 23 directorates or other central administrative bodies, eight administrative agencies with special powers, seven county governor's offices and three institutions of higher education.

USER PROFILE

In the interim evaluation, we saw that it is primarily government agencies that focus on individuals that have initiated clear language projects. Since the need for clear language is often justified from a perspective of democratic theory, where the goal is to fulfil the citizens' democratic rights, it is not surprising that there is a preponderance of the agencies that are oriented toward the general public that have initiated clear language projects. The same finding shows the measurements for this year, which also include the new agencies that are participating in clear language projects. Figure 3.1 shows that a preponderance of the agencies that are participating in clear language projects focus all of their communication on individuals and companies.

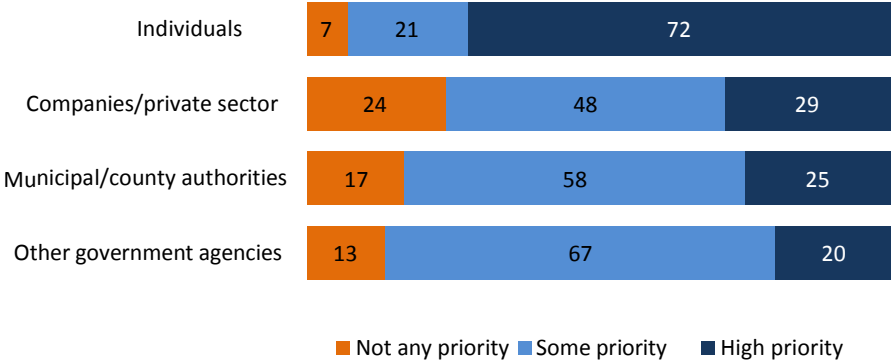
Figure 3.1: User profile – Percentage of government agencies that are participating in clear language projects that have extensive communication with various user groups (per cent)



We also requested that the agencies list the target groups to which they have given the highest priority in their clear language efforts. Figure 3.2 shows that most of them have given priority to communication focused on individuals. Three out of four agencies respond that they have given high

priority to this group. By comparison, fewer than one in three of them have given high priority to private business enterprises, despite the fact that over 60 per cent of the agencies that are participating in clear language projects focus their communication on this group. Other government agencies are the target group that is given least priority.

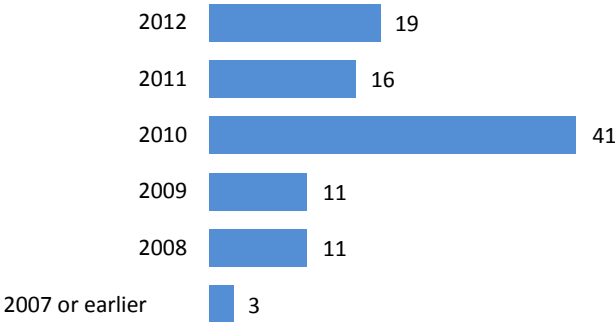
Figure 3.2: Target groups that have been given priority in the clear language efforts (percentage of the government agencies)



INITIAL YEAR

When "Clear language in Norway's civil service" was launched in 2009, some government agencies had already started working systematically to make their written communication with users and partners simpler and more comprehensible. Three agencies respond that they had already commenced their clear language efforts in 2007 or earlier. However, the majority of the clear language projects have started up in 2010 or later.

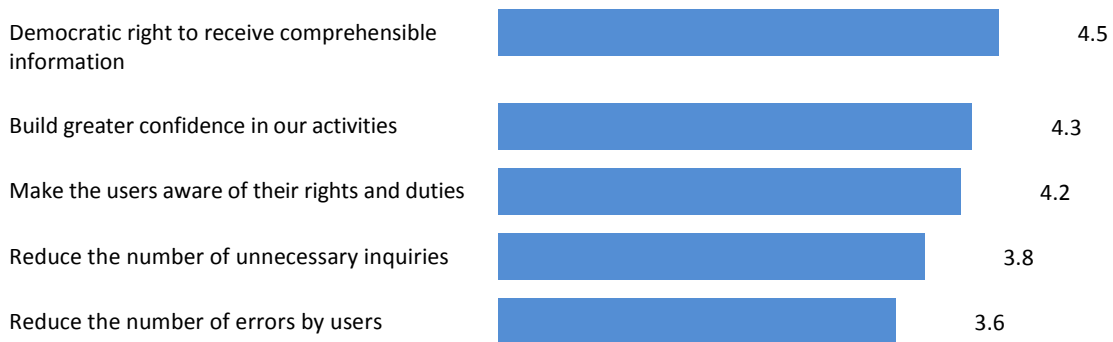
Figure 3.3: Year in which clear language efforts commenced in agencies that have received support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service" (per cent)



WHY CLEAR LANGUAGE ?

Figure 3.4 shows how the government agencies assess various reasons for conducting clear language efforts. These assessments are given on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very unimportant and 5 means very important, and the figure shows the average value of the responses. The higher the average value, the more agencies that have responded that this is important or very important. Of the two reasons for clear language that were described in chapter 1, the political and democratic arguments appear to weigh heaviest in the agencies that have initiated a clear language project.

Figure 3.4: How important are various reasons for conducting clear language efforts? Average value on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is very unimportant and 5 is very important



Clear language deals first and foremost with ensuring that the users understand the information they receive and ensuring that they be made aware of their rights and duties. Even though clear language can potentially have a strong effect on the government agency's bottom line by reducing the number of errors and unnecessary inquiries from users, as we shall see in chapter 6, these arguments are only of secondary importance. There is extensive acceptance among senior managers, middle managers and other employees in the case-studied agencies that the economic effects may primarily be regarded as positive side effects of the effort.

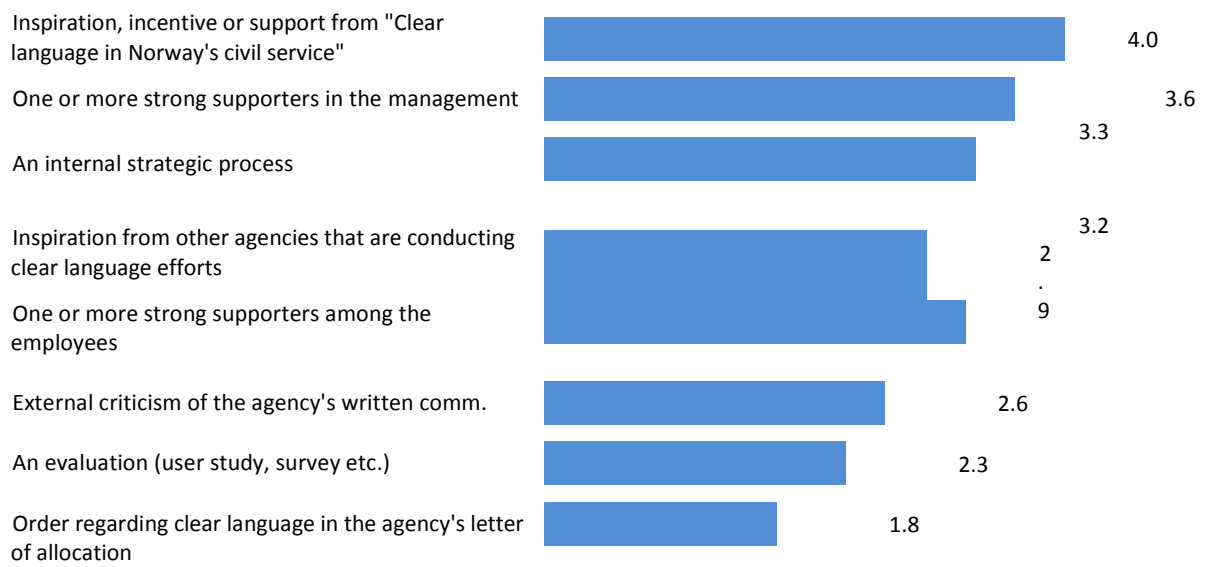
Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the economic arguments weigh especially heavily in agencies that have a lot of direct contact with users and where a more comprehensible language may potentially have major direct effects on the bottom line; e.g. in the form of fewer inquiries.

A senior manager has this to say:

"A senior manager must consider what's in it for me. If I had not seen that this had a specific benefit, I would probably have been more sceptical. It is not assured that all government administrators who do not see equally impressive results on the bottom line in the form of a lot of user inquiries will have the same attitude."

However, according to the persons in charge of the clear language projects, most of the clear language projects are operated on the basis of clear democratic considerations; but which specific factors have been decisive in inducing the agencies to actually initiate a clear language project? We asked the agencies to indicate how important various factors have been for initiating a clear language effort in their agency. Figure 3.5 shows the average value on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means *very unimportant* and 5 means *very important*.

Figure 3.5 The government agencies' assessment of how important various factors have been in inducing them to initiate the clear language project



"Clear language in Norway's civil service" can accept much of the honour for the clear language efforts in many government agencies. Inspiration, incentive and support from the main clear language project have clearly been the most important individual motivating factors for the agencies that have initiated their own project. Three out of four agencies respond that this has been important or very important. "Clear language in Norway's civil service" has been especially important for agencies that have initiated projects after 2011. Nine out of ten of these state that the main clear language project has been important or very important. That is probably related to the growing awareness of the main clear language project over a period of time.

The management's commitment has also been an important motivating factor for initiating clear language projects. They have functioned as supporters, decision-makers or initiators. In 80 per cent of the agencies, the senior management has made the decision to initiate a clear language project. The senior managers in the four case-studied agencies express great commitment to clear language. All of them have been involved in the start-up phase of the project to one extent or another, either by directly urging the agency to apply for support from the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project, or by allocating resources for the efforts. Moreover, acceptance in and promotion by senior management is not only regarded as important in the start-up phase, but is also the individual factor that the person in charge of the clear language project considers most important in order to succeed in the actual implementation of a clear language project. A senior management that supports clear language will tend to increase the commitment of the rest of the agency at the same time as it ensures that the project is allocated the necessary resources.

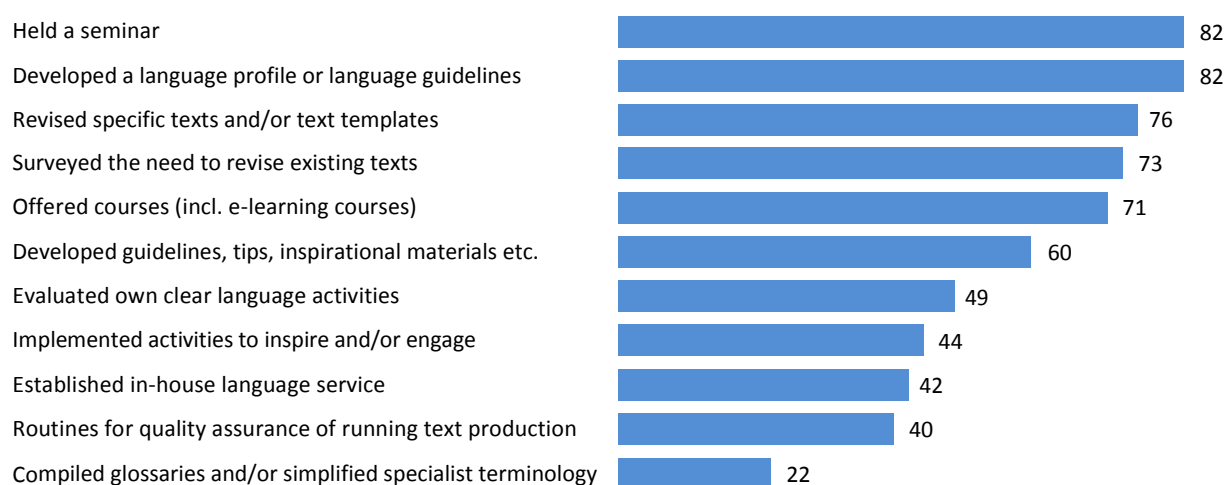
For many agencies, clear language has been a result of an internal strategic process, and some agencies would have probably initiated a clear language effort independently of the main clear language project. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that external criticism of the agencies' written communication has been of relatively little importance to the decision to initiate a clear language project.

THE CONTENT OF THE "CLEAR LANGUAGE IN NORWAY'S CIVIL SERVICE" PROJECT

There are a number of measures and activities that a government agency can initiate in order to make the written communication with the users and partners clearer and easier to comprehend. Some of these activities that will normally come under an early phase in a clear language project deal, among other things, with mobilising employees through training and writing texts in clear language. Others are measures that will probably be initiated when the project has been under way for a while, such as preparation for a more permanent integration into the agencies' organisational structure and working procedures.

Moreover, some activities are so typical that they recur among most of the government agencies. For instance, we saw that all of the case-studied agencies had concentrated on three main activities: formulation of guidelines or a language profile, revision of specific texts and competence building in the form of courses and seminars. Figure 3.6 shows that the findings from the case-studied agencies are also reasonably representative for the other agencies. Almost all of the agencies, 82 per cent, have developed a language profile or language guidelines, and just as many have held seminars. Very many, three out of four agencies, have worked with specific texts.

Figure 3.6 Percentage of government agencies that have implemented various clear language activities (per cent)



Yet the overview also reveals a clear pattern. Whereas most agencies have gone in for mobilising and production-oriented activities, far fewer have implemented measure to also integrate clear language into the agency's daily work after the project was completed. A language profile and guidelines may be regarded as such a measure, and most agencies have introduced them. Among other organisational or routine changes, a little over 40 per cent of the agencies have established an in-house language service or introduced routines for quality assurance of running text production. It is important to specify that the figure covers all government agencies that are participating in clear language projects, including agencies that started up after 2011, and which can therefore be assumed to be in an early phase of the clear language efforts. Yet the pattern is just as clear if we only look at the agencies that also took part in the measurement two years ago ("old" agencies) and that we could expect would have come furthest in integrating clear language into the organisation. The percentage of "old" agencies that have established routines for quality assurance of running text production is stable at about 40 per cent from 2011 to 2013. One positive development is that the percentage that has established in-house language services has increased

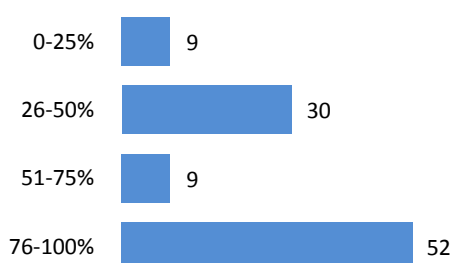
from 30 to 40 per cent.

COURSE ACTIVITIES

A total of 5,342 persons have attended various types of courses about clear language. Just since the previous measurement in 2011, 2,307 persons have been offered a course. The extent of the course attendance is greatest in the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, where a total of 1,000 employees have taken a clear language course.

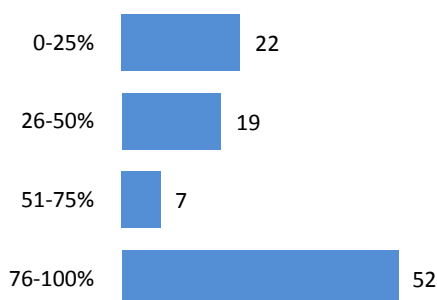
Since the size of the government agencies varies, the number of participants does not tell us very much about how much priority has been given to holding courses in the individual agencies. Therefore, we also asked how high a percentage of the relevant target group have attended a course and how high a percentage of all the employees this amounts to. (cf. figures 3.7 and 3.8):

Figure 3.7: Percentage of the relevant target group that have attended a clear language course (per cent of the government agencies)



Over half of the agencies have held courses for more than three-fourths of the relevant target group (i.e. employees that have text-producing tasks) The same applies if we count the number of course participants out of the total number of employees. In both cases, the course participation must be said to be high.

Figure 3.8: Percentage of all employees who have attended a clear language course (per cent of the government agencies)



The clear language courses are mainly aimed at employees at lower tiers of the organisation (cf. figure 3.9). At the same time, far more in the management tier have attended a course since 2011. Whereas only 36 per cent of the senior managers had attended a course in the government agencies that are participating in clear language projects two years ago, senior managers in 60 per cent of those agencies have attended such a course as of now.

Figure 3.9: Employees in different tiers who have attended a clear language course (per cent of the government agencies)

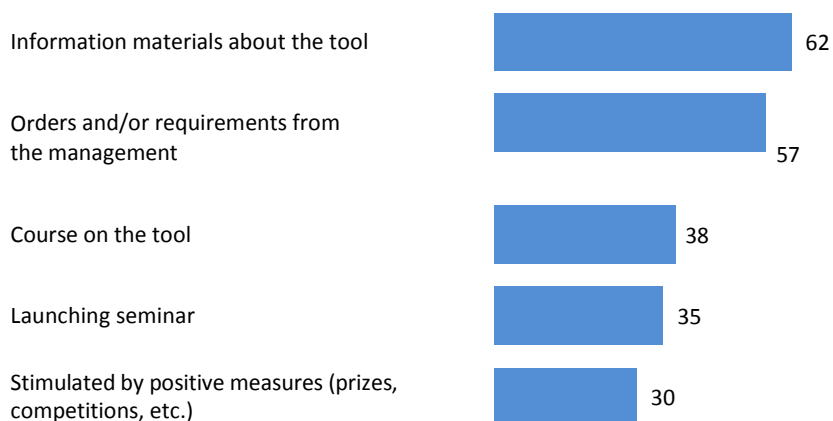


Moreover, eight of the agencies respond that they have established a so-called "train-the-trainer" scheme. This is an arrangement where they first provide training to selected employees who can then hold courses in the next round for others in the agency. The decision-making supervisors whom some of the Norwegian Tax Administration's regions have trained are an example of this.

LANGUAGE PROFILE AND LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

The purpose of a language profile or language guidelines is to establish a common framework for the government agency's written communication and instruct employees about the writing process. From this perspective, the language profile can help promote the development of a common language standard in keeping with the principles of clear language. Over 80 per cent of the agencies have drawn up a language profile or guidelines for the agency's use of written language, but if the language profile shall function as intended, it demands active use. We asked the agencies to state what they had done in order to get employees to make use of the language profile or guidelines. Figure 3.10 shows the results.

Figure 3.10 Percentage of the government agencies that have introduced measures to induce employees to make use of a language profile or language guidelines (per cent)

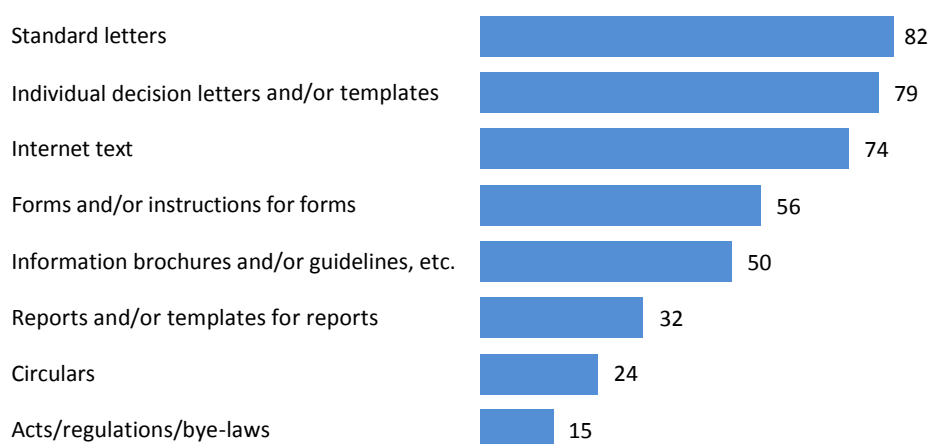


The most effective way to familiarise employees with the language profile and/or guidelines is probably to ensure that they are given training in its use. However, only 38 per cent of the agencies have used the language profile in internal courses. Most of them have gone in for less targeted measures, such as distributing information materials about the tool to all employees (62 per cent), followed up in many cases by orders from the management to make use of it (57 per cent of the agencies).

REVISION OF TEXTS

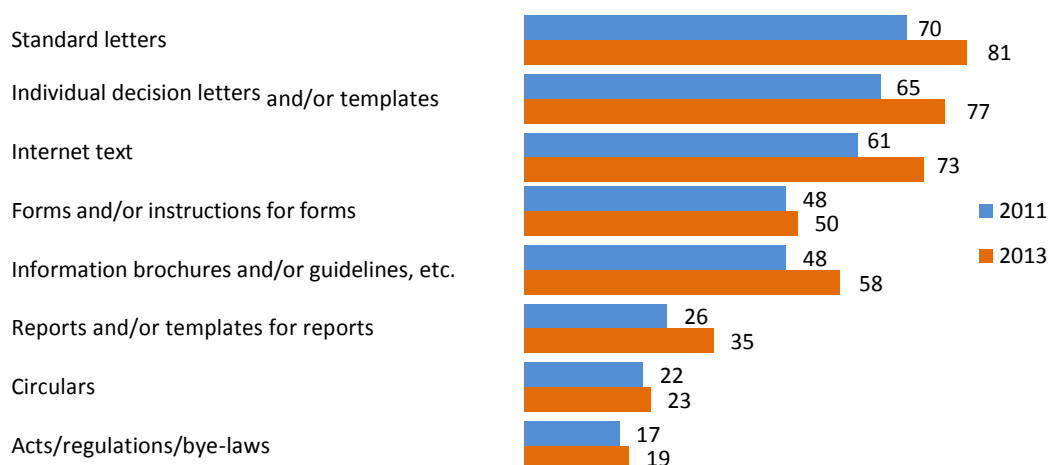
Three out of four government agencies have revised specific texts as part of the clear language project. Figure 3.11 shows which genres have been given priority. The agencies have first and foremost concentrated on texts that typically are intended for the general public and business enterprises – standard letters, individual decisions letters and Internet text. Only five agencies (15 per cent) have concentrated on statutory language. Since this effort is first and foremost intended for the ministries, this is not a surprisingly low number given that only six ministries have received support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service".

Figure 3.11: Percentage of government agencies that have revised text within various genres (per cent)



If we compare the results from 2013 with the 2011 measurements (see figure 3.12), we find that there has been an increase in the number of government agencies that have revised texts within all genres. That also applies to genres that are not necessarily aimed directly at the general public, such as reports and information brochures. This is a signal that the clear language efforts are also continuing in the agencies that have completed their projects and that attention is focused on new areas of the agencies' text production.

Figure 3.12: Percentage of government agencies that have revised text within various genres in 2011 and 2013 (only "old" agencies).¹⁴

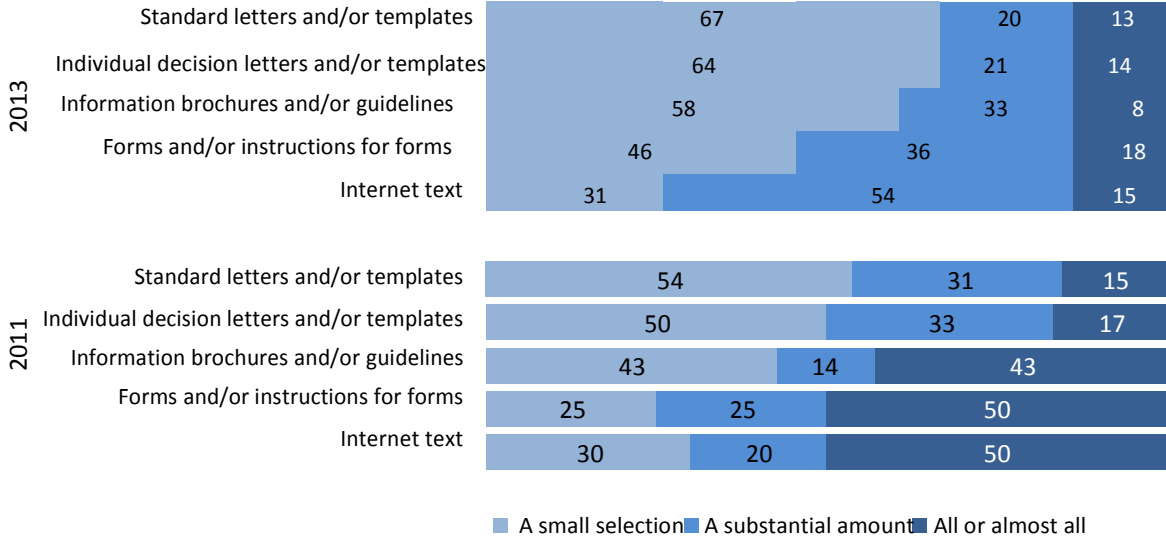


¹⁴ Agencies that also took part in the interim evaluation; i.e. that have received support from "Clear language in Norway's civil service" before 2011.

It is also interesting to see how much of the volume of text within each genre the government agencies have revised. Figure 3.13 gives a rough estimate of how far the agencies have come. Some genres are omitted from the figure because there were too few responses;¹⁵ i.e. only the genres that are normally intended for the users, i.e. the population and business and industry, are presented in the figure. In order to make the group of agencies more uniform, the figure also includes only user-oriented agencies that were included in the survey in both 2011 and 2013. In other words, ministries and other government agencies that do not have direct contact with users are omitted.

We see that Internet text is the genre where the government agencies have come furthest in the efforts in 2013. A total of 69 per cent of the agencies have revised a substantial amount or more of all relevant texts within this genre. The efforts with other important genres intended for the general public, such as letters and information brochures have not come this far, nor is it surprising given the large number of letters and forms that many of these agencies have, e.g. the Norwegian Tax Administration and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav).

Figure 3.13: Extent of text revision in various genres (per cent of the government agencies)



What is more surprising is that the trend has apparently gone in the wrong direction since 2011. A smaller percentage of agencies stated in 2013 that they have revised a substantial amount or more of their user-oriented texts than in 2011. This is basically a self-contradictory result and can only occur if the amount of relevant text has increased faster than the volume of text that the agencies have managed to revise. One exception is Internet text, where the agencies' volume is increasing in step with the tendency of the Internet to become an increasingly more important channel for disseminating public information and services. However, it is difficult to determine whether this is the case for other types of text.

The result may be attributed to the fact that the categories are a little diffuse and that those who have responded may have used different assessments as a basis when they have distinguished between "a small selection" and "a substantial amount". Another contributing explanation may be that the agencies have conducted more thorough surveys of the relevant volume of text and thereby come up with a more realistic picture of how far they have come in the effort. It should also be noted that slightly more agencies have responded to these questions in 2013 than in 2012.

¹⁵ That applies to reports and/or report templates, circulars and acts/regulations/bye-laws

Moreover, it is important to emphasise that text revision is not an end in itself. One possible explanation of why the percentage of revised texts has not increased may obviously be that the agencies have determined through in-house surveys of the volume of text, that there is not a need for their own clear language revisions of the texts.

Given the large volume of text that exists in these agencies, it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that there is still a substantial volume of text that is not in keeping with the principles of clear language. The volume of text that potentially requires clear language revision may therefore become a challenge now that the actual project phase is over and the clear language efforts must compete with other pressing tasks without access to dedicated resources and without the same amount of attention. In the final instance, it is the percentage of text that the users encounter in a clear and comprehensible language that determines how successful the clear language projects have been.

ROUTINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEXT

Forty per cent of the government agencies have introduced routines for quality assurance of running text production. Some of these routines are more extensive and formalised than others. Perhaps the most sweeping scheme may be found in the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, where a separate interdisciplinary body, "the Letters and applications team", reviews all letters, forms, etc. that are going to be sent out to the users. A somewhat similar arrangement has been established at the Norwegian National Collection Agency. Others have established fixed routines for quality assurance of individual procedures and for some types of text, and some note that they encourage colleague mentoring and/or quality assurance.

Most also note that the language profile and the language guidelines are important in order to pave the way for plain and clear language in the running text production.

IN-HOUSE LANGUAGE SERVICES

In many cases, the routines for quality assurance of text entail establishing a language service that provides guidance and assistance in the writing process to employees. Forty per cent of the government agencies respond that they have established this kind of service, but there is also considerable variation here in the extent and focus.

Many agencies have their own person responsible for language or interdisciplinary language groups. For instance, the Consumer Council of Norway has a language reviser who quality assures all Internet text and press releases, whereas the Ministry of Education and Research has established a resource group that can assist its departments in major jobs such as Reports to the Storting.

The Norwegian National Collection Agency has also established its own language group, composed of four persons divided among two FTEs, who answer questions and review texts. The County Governor of Østfold, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Health Economics Administration (HELFO) each have their own persons in charge of clear language or language ambassadors in each unit, but the employment percentage of these positions varies.

In other government agencies, this function is less formalised and is usually handled by the communications department.

ACTIVITIES TO INSPIRE AND GENERATE COMMITMENT

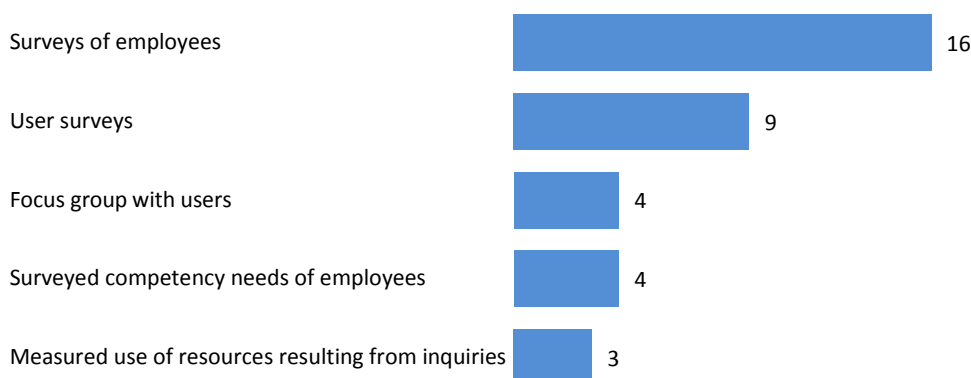
The government agencies have made use of a number of different policy instruments to inspire the employees and generate commitment with regard to the clear language efforts. Many of them state that they have arranged lunch meetings, breakfast seminars or lectures with well-known language personalities. Many have also established their own clear language websites on their Intranet. Among other things, the County Governor of Nord-Trøndelag has come out with a weekly column called "Ka sa du?" (What did you say?), where they have gathered unclear formulations, e.g. from their own or others' documents and transformed them into a clearer language.

Competitions, language quizzes and Christmas calendars with clear language as the theme are examples of other activities to attract positive attention to clear language. Some have also introduced their own clear language prizes in order to encourage employees to actively use clear language. One example is the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, which has introduced an annual language prize that goes to an employee who has shown a desire and willingness to work actively with clear language in his/her daily work.

EVALUATION

Around half of the government agencies, 21 in all, have conducted evaluations of their clear language efforts. That is far more than two years ago, but still few given that the great majority of the agencies have completed their projects. At the same time, we find that many of the agencies that have evaluated their activities have done a thorough job, making use of many types of measurements or surveys. Thirteen agencies have performed two or more types of evaluations.

Figure 3.14: Number of government agencies that have conducted various types of evaluations



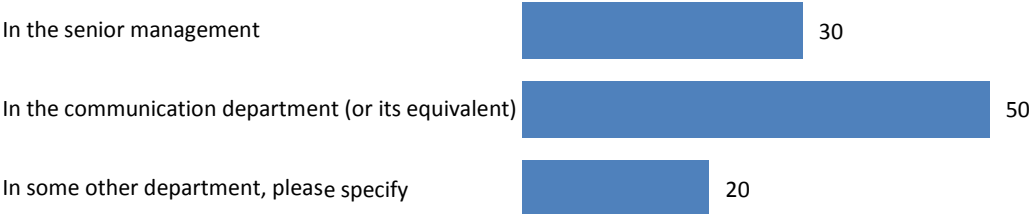
Most of the agencies, 16 in all, have conducted a survey of employees in order to map out their awareness of and attitudes to clear language. Almost just as many have conducted surveys of users, either in the form of quantitative user surveys (nine agencies) or focus groups where the aim is to obtain qualitative assessments of how easy or difficult it is to understand a specific text. For example, the Norwegian Public Roads Administration and the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund have established a permanent system for user testing of letters and forms – an important routine for attending to clear language considerations.

ORGANISATION OF THE CLEAR LANGUAGE PROJECTS

The organisation and the use of resources in the clear language projects vary considerably. Half of the government agencies have delegated the responsibility to the communications department,

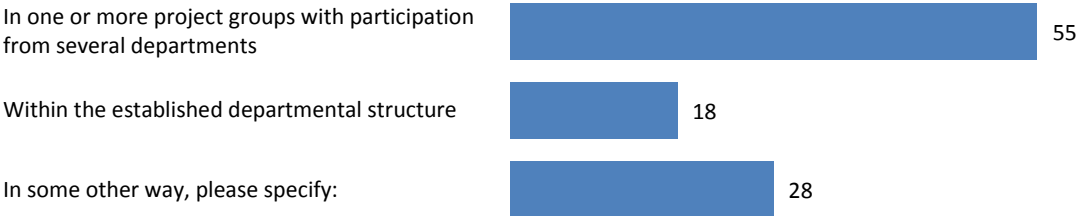
whereas in one out of three agencies the senior management has overall responsibility. Among the agencies that have chosen some other department, four of them have delegated the responsibility to the human resources department.

Figure 3.15: Responsibility for clear language during the project period (percentage of the government agencies)



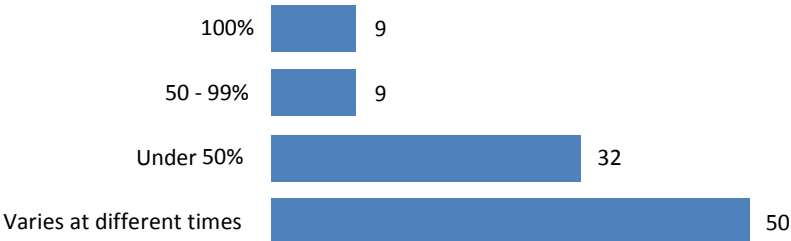
Most of the government agencies have chosen to organise the projects as interdisciplinary groups with representatives from several departments in the organisation. Not quite one in five agencies have organised the project within the established departmental structure. A closer analysis of agencies that have stated that the project has been organised "in some other way", reveals that many of these agencies utilise a kind of project group model, whereas others have incorporated the project to a greater extent into the established line organisational and departmental structure, e.g. in the communications department.

Figure 3.16: Organisation of the clear language project (percentage of the government agencies)



Figures 3.17 and 3.18 show how the government agencies have prioritised their personnel resources in the projects. Only a tiny number of the agencies have had a full-time project manager. The most common solution appears to be a project manager who has a variable effort over a period of time rather than a fixed employment percentage.

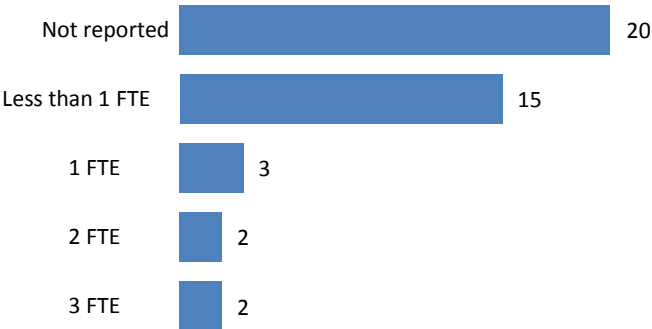
Figure 3.17: Percentage of hours worked in the capacity of project manager (percentage of the government agencies)



Some government agencies have also delegated dedicated personnel resources in addition to the project manager in their clear language projects, most of them with low employment percentages. Fifteen agencies have delegated less than one FTE, whereas seven agencies have made a more

extensive effort and have delegated from one to three FTEs to the project. Twenty agencies have not answered this question. We do not know whether that is because they have not delegated any personnel resources or whether they have chosen not to specify this.

Figure 3.18: Personnel resources delegated to clear language efforts in addition to the project manager (number of government agencies)



EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

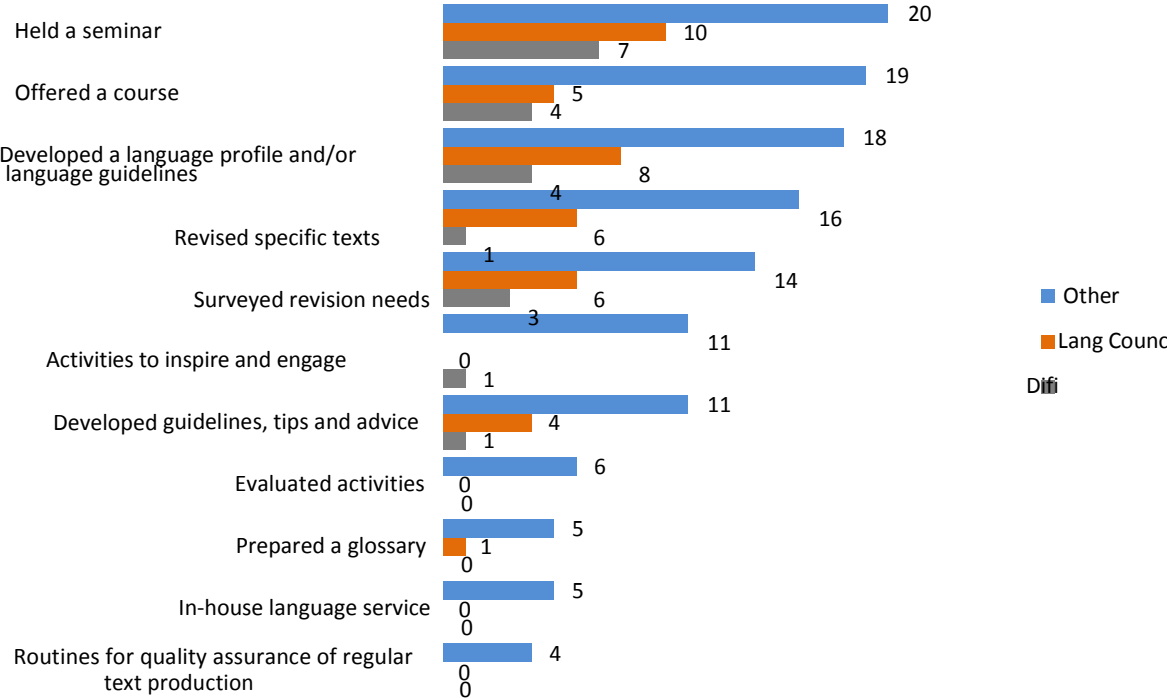
Most of the government agencies have received assistance from external experts in their clear language efforts, from Difi, the Language Council of Norway or other external language consultants. Difi and the Language Council of Norway have functioned first and foremost as process consultants¹⁶ and language experts, but have not implemented many specific measures in the agencies. In addition, there are several private enterprises that offer language services, among other things. Through the project, the government agencies that are participating in clear language projects have been able to apply for financial support in order to purchase services of this kind from private providers, so these providers have been used to a greater extent to implement specific measures in the agencies, such as offering courses, work on texts, etc.

Figure 3.19 shows how many agencies have made use of external assistance in connection with specific clear language measures that have been implemented in the agency. This figure does not include project consulting, which has been one of the most important tasks for Difi and the Language Council of Norway.

External experts have primarily been utilised to hold seminars and courses, as consultants in the work of developing a language profile or language guidelines and for specific revisions of texts. We see that a number of agencies have taken advantage of the opportunity to purchase services from private providers. It is somewhat surprising that so few have utilised external assistance to carry out evaluations since this is something that the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has emphasised in its later phase.

¹⁶ I.e. guidance about how the agencies can organise and implement a clear language project

Figure 3.19: Overview of local clear language measures where the government agencies have made use of various external experts (number of agencies)



We asked the government agencies to give a general assessment of the assistance they have been given from Difi, the Language Council of Norway and other organisations. This includes both support for specific measures and consulting. Figure 3.20 shows that the agencies are very positively inclined. All of the average values lie between 4 and 5, which means that almost all of the agencies have responded that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they have been given.

Moreover, the figure compares the agencies' assessments this year with the assessments given in the measurement two year's ago. Among other things, it is interesting to see that Difi and the role they have played as consultants were assessed as more positive this year than in the previous measurement. However, both Difi and the Language Council of Norway are assessed as marginally weaker than other providers.

Figure 3.20: The government agencies' satisfaction with the expert assistance they have been given from various providers (average on a scale from 1 to 5)



THE IMPORTANCE OF "CLEAR LANGUAGE IN NORWAY'S CIVIL SERVICE"

The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has been of great importance for the local clear language efforts in the government agencies. Figures 3.21 and 3.22 reflect this. The agencies have been positively inclined in most cases to the role that the main clear language project has played. More than 80 per cent think the project has been important or very important for the clear language efforts in their own agency (cf. figure 3.21).

Figure 3.21: How important "Clear language in Norway's civil service" has been for the clear language efforts (percentage of the government agencies)

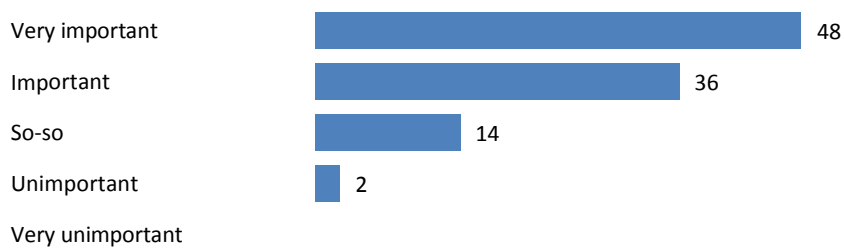
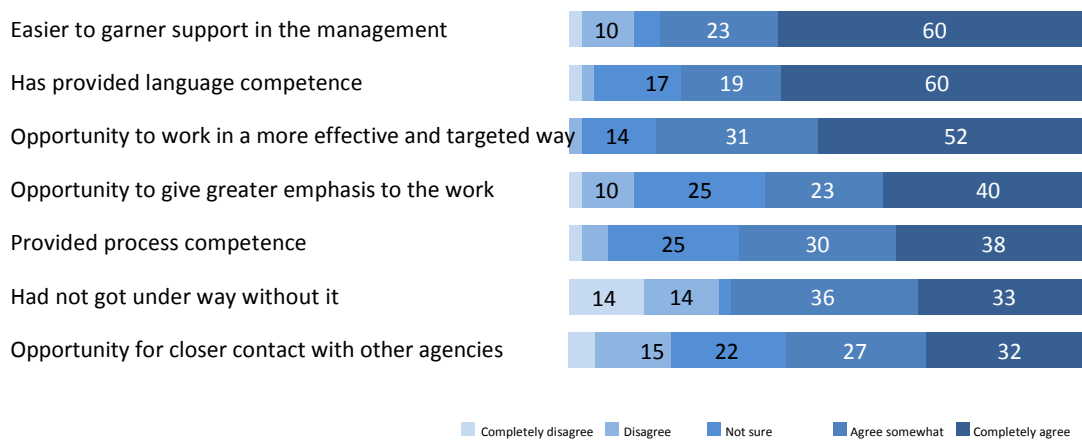


Figure 3.22 shows the ways in which "Clear language in Norway's civil service" has contributed to the government agencies' own clear language efforts. Here the agencies have expressed their opinion about a number of statements about the importance of the main clear language project:

1. If it had not been for the Difi's and the Language Council of Norway's "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project, we would not have gotten started at all.
2. We also worked with clear language before, but the main project has given us opportunities to put more emphasis on the clear language efforts.
3. The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has given us an opportunity to work in a more effective and targeted way with clear language.
4. The main "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has made it easier to garner support in the management for our local activities
5. The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has provided opportunities for closer contact with other agencies that deal with the same type of challenges in their work.
6. The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has provided us with expertise about how to write and communicate clearly (i.e. language competence).
7. The "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has provided us with expertise about how we ought to organise the work in order to achieve lasting changes in the ways in which we communicate clearly (i.e. process competence).

Figure 3.22: The importance of the main "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project for the government agencies' clear language efforts (percentage of the agencies)



The main clear language project has primarily been an important legitimising factor in-house in the organisation. Just over 80 per cent of the agencies agree that the project has made it easier to garner support for clear language efforts in the management, partly because they can refer to the efforts of others. Others specify that the project has made it easier to gain acceptance from the technical departments and that it has been important for the internal cooperation.

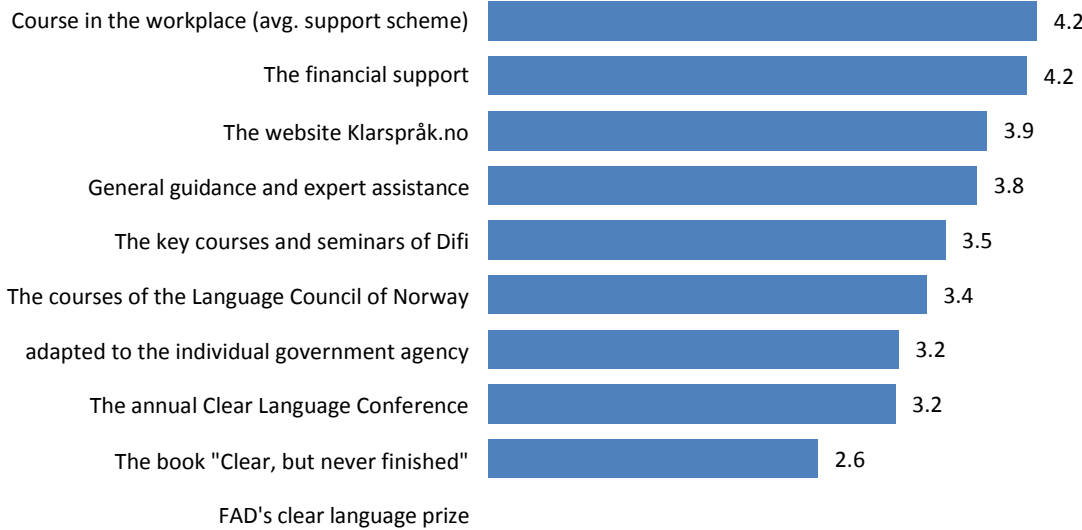
Roughly just as many agencies think that the project has provided important language competence (79 per cent) and made it possible to work in a more effective and targeted way (83 per cent). For one out of three agencies, "Clear language in Norway's civil service" has played a completely critical role in the sense that they would not have initiated clear language efforts without support from the project. Even though very few agree that the clear language project has offered opportunities for closer contact with other government agencies that are working on clear language, many agencies call attention to this point when they are asked to specify other important effects of the clear language project. They feel that the opportunity to discuss ideas and learn from the experiences of and good examples set by others is very important. One of them points out, for example, that being able to refer to the efforts of others has been important for garnering support in the management.

Others emphasise that the clear language project has made it easier to do interdisciplinary work on clear language with other departments and that the project has been important for the in-house cooperation. A person in charge of a clear language project has this to say:

"Persons attending courses and seminars have been assembled from different parts of the organisation. This has increased the knowledge beyond what the various departments work with. In other words, this has increased the professional understanding and been an important measure for developing the culture."

The various policy instruments in the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project are also found to be positively inclined to an overwhelming extent. Figure 3.23 shows how important the various measures in the project have been for the local clear language efforts. The figure shows the average value of all responses on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very unimportant and 5 means very important. The higher the average value, the more agencies that have responded that this measure is important or very important.

Figure 3.23: The importance of various measures in the main clear language project. Average value on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means very unimportant and 5 means very important



The financial support and the support that is given in the form of clear language courses that are held in-house in the government agencies are the most important. The courses that are offered by Difi and the Language Council of Norway are found to be less important. As we saw in figure 3.19, fewer agencies have made use of them. The agencies put least emphasis on measures that are meant to inform and inspire, such as the book "Clear, but never finished" and FAD's clear language prize.

Chapter 4

FROM PROJECT TO SERVICE – INTEGRATION OF CLEAR LANGUAGE IN THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

If we look at the number of government agencies that have initiated clear language efforts during the period that the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has been in operation and at the extent of the work that has been done, it is reasonable to say that the concentration on clear language has contributed to an improvement in language in some parts of the government administration. However, the goal of this kind of effort must be to help facilitate lasting changes by ensuring that clear language will be an integral part of the agencies' communication.

The fact that clear language is given high priority on the agenda and attracts a lot of attention in a project period is to be expected. A project is often characterised by high intensity, targeted measures, a clear division of responsibility and dedicated resources. It is natural that some of the incentive diminishes when the project is completed and goes over to an operational phase, as is the case now in most of the agencies.

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the transition from clear language project to ordinary operations. What have the agencies done to ensure that clear language will become an integral part of the agency's routines and culture, and how well is clear language integrated into the organisation? We defined this integration as both a structural integration, e.g. in the agency's governing documents, and a cultural integration in the form of acceptance of clear language by the managers and employees. We also take a closer look at the biggest challenges in the process of transferring the clear language efforts from project to line and/or operational organisation.

This chapter is based on a questionnaire to the persons in charge of the clear language projects in the agencies that initiated a project before 2011 (if nothing else has been specified) and an interview with employees and managers in the four case-studied agencies. By comparing the results from the questionnaire with the results from 2011, we can also see whether the agencies have come further in integrating clear language into their own organisation.

The analyses show that the clear language efforts are much better integrated into the agencies at present than they were a couple of years ago. Among other things, many more of the agencies have incorporated objectives regarding clear language into their comprehensive strategic documents. In order to ensure that clear language becomes a permanent part of the organisation's working methods and priorities, the agencies have put strong emphasis on measures relating to the organisational culture. A substantial number of the agencies have incorporated clear language into the organisation's competence building programme. On the other hand, there are relatively few agencies that have integrated objectives about clear language into the agencies' management by objectives and reporting regimes. In other words, greater emphasis has been given to developing the organisation's clear language capacity than to incentives and controls.

Only half of the agencies have allocated dedicated resources to further clear language efforts, and of those that have done so, the funds have been limited. This means that the ongoing efforts to promote

text revision, for example, will have to compete with all other important tasks that have been imposed on the government administration. According to the persons in charge of the clear language projects in the agencies, it is precisely the lack of time and dedicated resources that are the most important impediments to the ongoing efforts. In addition, many people are concerned that the absence of clear language goals in the agencies' management-by-objectives regimes will make the prioritisation of these goals even more difficult.

We also find that the senior manager's role as a supporter, and to some extent as a promoter, has been strengthened during this period. At the same time, we observe an increasing tendency for the middle managers to find it difficult to give priority to clear language in their daily work. It is reasonable to interpret this in light of the challenges that the middle managers in particular are facing with regard to taking care of clear language considerations in the daily operation of their departments without any dedicated resources and the enthusiasm and attention that distinguished the project phase. Without a doubt, the middle managers' ownership of the clear language goals will be crucial to the success of the ongoing efforts.

The agencies' achievement of their goals has increased markedly since 2011. This applies to both the in-house goals regarding the ways in which the clear language capacity in the organisation shall develop and the external goals about the ways in which the users shall regard and experience the results of these changes. At the same time, our analyses show that the incorporation and acceptance of the clear language efforts is crucial to whether or not they succeed. Agencies that have managed to thoroughly integrate the work into the organisation have greater opportunities to achieve their goals than agencies where the work is less integrated.

STRUCTURAL VERSUS CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Integrating clear language into an organisation entails improving the government agency's clear language capacity and ensuring that this will be lasting. That requires both formal structures that take care of clear language and an in-house culture that supports clear language. It is difficult to determine which of these is the most important for the agency's clear language capacity. In some cases, they can be mutually dependent on each other. In-house structures and routines, such as quality assurance routines or a management-by-objectives regime for clear language, are often quick and easy to introduce, but risk becoming empty formalities if there is not also an in-house culture for clear language. Without a clear language culture, the work will be demanding even if the right structures are in place. At the same time, in-house cultures are complex phenomena that can take time to change, perhaps many years. Until the organisations have succeeded in establishing a clear language culture, formal structures will be completely necessary in order to ensure that clear language is followed up in practice. In this way, the agencies may help speed up the cultural changes by taking structural measures.

ORGANISATION OF ONGOING CLEAR LANGUAGE EFFORTS

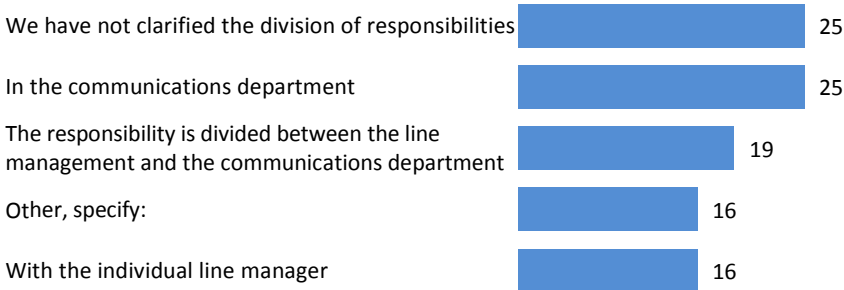
One structural measure may be to set aside fixed resources (in the form of positions and/or budget funds) to continue to execute the clear language efforts. During the project period, most of the agencies have had dedicated project managers who have kept the attention focused on clear language and ensured progress in the work. When the clear language efforts are completed as a project, the responsibility for attending to clear language in the agency is transferred from a project

organisation to a line or operational organisation. This kind of transition can be demanding, especially in large organisations, and there will always be a certain risk that there will be a diffusion of responsibility.

Clearly defined divisions of responsibility are necessary in order to keep this from happening. It may also be an advantage to allocate resources for further clear language efforts, in any case for a period of time, in order to make the transition less abrupt. These may be resources both in the form of dedicated personnel and of funds to implement measures.

However, Figures 4.1 and 4.2 indicate that many agencies have not got this far yet. One out of four agencies has not yet clarified the division of responsibility, and 44 per cent have not allocated resources for ongoing clear language efforts.

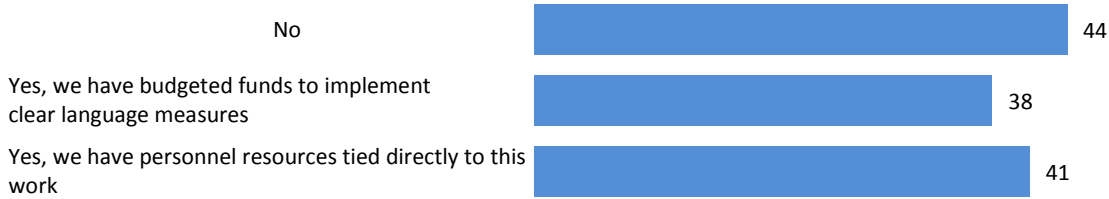
Figure 4.1: Operative responsibility for clear language efforts after end of project period (per cent of the government agencies)



Among those who have clarified the division of responsibilities, only 16 per cent have delegated the responsibility in the actual line management. Many of the government agencies, one out of four, have delegated the operative responsibility for clear language to the communications department. Some agencies have chosen a compromise solution and divided the responsibility between the communications department and the line management. This may occur, for instance, with the County Governor of Østfold where the communications consultant is responsible for planning and implementation of general measures such as courses, seminars, external assistance, etc., whereas the line managers have responsibility for seeing that clear language is utilised in all texts that are produced and for assessing and conducting revisions of their own templates. The Ministry of Education and Research has chosen a similar solution, but there the responsibility for development and competence building has been delegated to a team in the administration department, whereas the actual follow-up responsibility has been delegated to the line management and the individual manager.

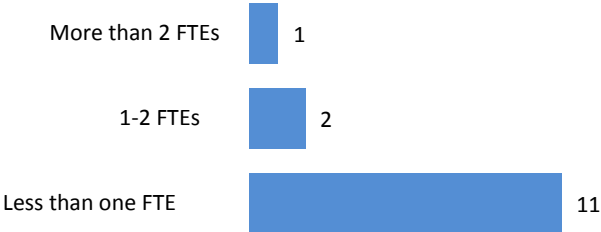
The majority of the agencies, 66 per cent, have allocated resources for further clear language efforts, whether in the form of funding, personnel resources or both. Only 15 per cent, or five agencies, have gone in comprehensibly and allocated both budgeted funds and personnel resources.

Figure 4.2: Allocated resources for clear language efforts after end of project period (per cent of the government agencies)



In most of the fourteen agencies that have allocated personnel resources to continue the clear language efforts, there are relatively small employment percentages (cf. figure 4.3). Only three agencies have allocated a whole FTE or more. Eleven agencies have allocated less than one FTE, the employment percentage among these agencies varies from 0.5 per cent to 75 per cent.

Figure 4.3: Allocated employment percentage for ongoing clear language efforts (number of agencies)



INTEGRATION AND ACCEPTANCE

In order for an effort such as clear language to result in lasting changes in an organisation's conduct and practices, it must be thoroughly integrated and accepted. On the one hand, this entails that the new practice be integrated into the agency's structure through strategies, objectives and routines. On the other hand, it entails changes in the agency's culture. It entails a broad acceptance of and knowledge about clear language among employees and managers.

We asked the government agencies to state the measures that they so far have implemented in order to ensure that clear language will become a lasting part of the organisation. Some of these entail integrating clear language into formal structures, such as the agency's management by objectives and reporting regimes. Other measures are aimed more at what we can call the organisational cultural factors, such as attitudes and knowledge.

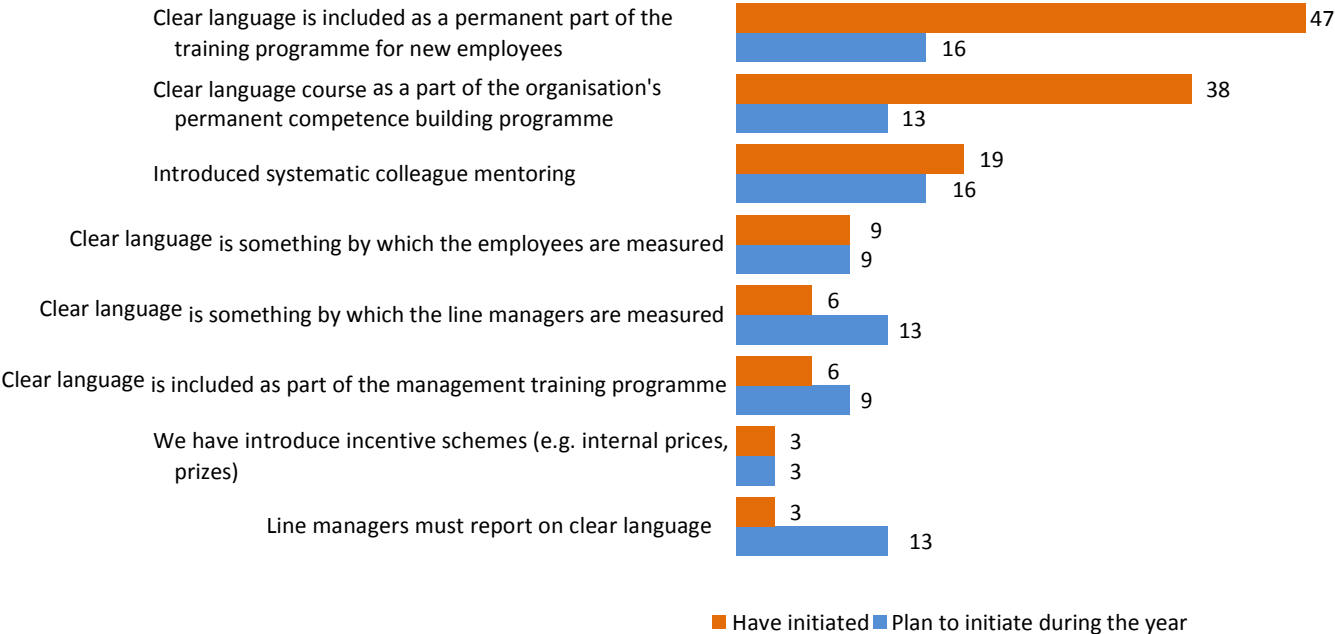
Figure 4.4 shows that so far the agencies have concentrated on the latter. Sixty per cent of the agencies have already incorporated clear language into the organisation's competence building regime, whereas 25 per cent have specific plans to do so. Almost half of them have introduced clear language as a part of the training programme for new employees, and 16 per cent plan to implement such a programme during the coming year. Many have also introduced clear language courses as a fixed part of the organisation's competence building programme or have specific plans to do so. However, the competence building programme is aimed to a lesser extent at the management tier. Only 14 per cent of the agencies have introduced clear language as part of the management development programme or have immediate plans to do so.

By comparison, there are relatively few agencies that have integrated clear language into the agency's

management by objectives and reporting regimes. A total of 16 per cent have introduced or plan to introduce reporting requirements on clear language for the line managers. One agency explains that they have not introduced management by objectives or reporting requirements because they are afraid that a formalisation of this kind may have a demotivating effect and reduce the positive attention to clear language that the project has attracted in the agency.

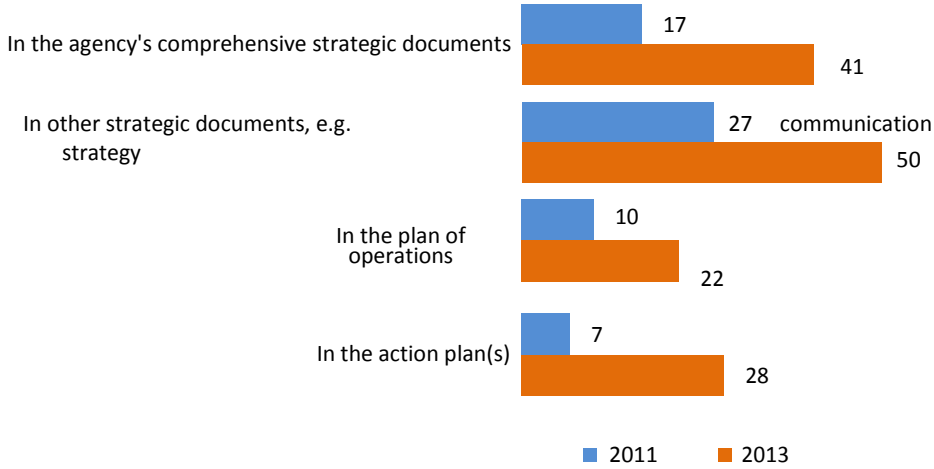
One routine that many agencies have gone in for is systematic colleague mentoring. A little more than one out of three agencies have introduced this kind of measure or are planning to do so.

Figure 4.4: Measures to ensure that clear language becomes a lasting part of the organisation (per cent of the government agencies)



Clear language may also be incorporated at a more strategic level, by integrating it into the government agency's strategies and governing documents. Figure 4.5 shows that far more agencies have integrated clear language at a comprehensive strategic level compared with 2011. A total of 75 per cent of the agencies have incorporated the objectives for the clear language project into their main governing document, compared with only one third two years ago. Forty per cent have integrated objectives for clear language into the agency's overall strategic documents, whereas half of them have integrated clear language into other strategic documents, such as the communication strategy.

Figure 4.5: Objectives for clear language in the government agencies' governing document in 2011 and 2013 (per cent of agencies)



As mentioned, integrating clear language into the government agency requires broad support from managers and employees. One expression of how well clear language is integrated into the agency's management is how often issues related to clear language are on the agenda in the agency's management meetings.

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 show that clear language is a topic for discussion in management meetings in many agencies at present, even though it is discussed less often than during the project period. It is first and foremost in management meetings in the departments that clear language is on the agenda more often than before. Almost no agencies respond that clear language is never discussed in management meetings in the departments.

Figure 4.6: Clear language is a topic in meetings in the government agency's senior management group (per cent of the agencies)

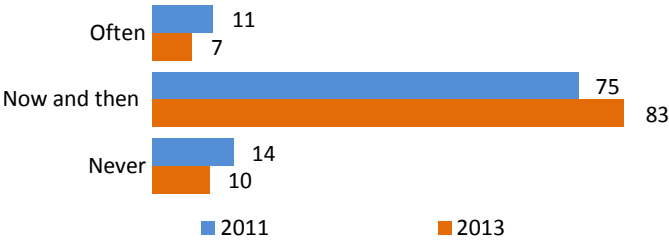
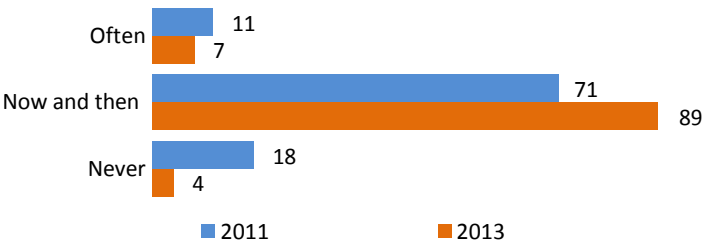


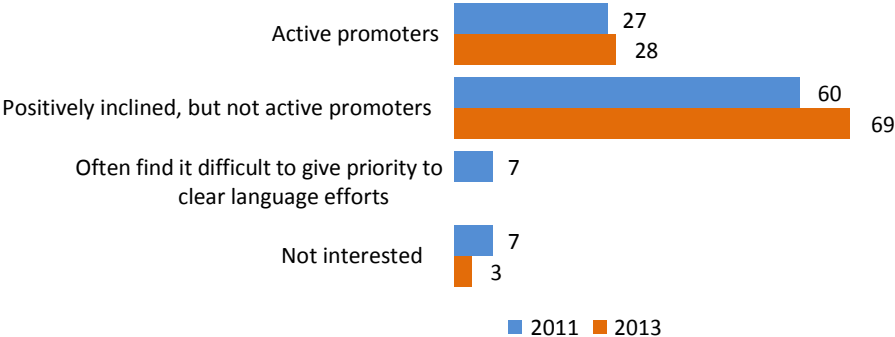
Figure 4.7: Clear language is a topic in management meetings in the departments (per cent of the agencies)



In order to get a better impression of how committed the agency's management is in the clear language efforts, we asked the persons in charge of the clear language projects to choose between four different levels of commitment, ranging from "active promoters" to "not interested". The

results are shown in figures 4.8 and 4.9. Here too, we have compared the results with the status two years ago.

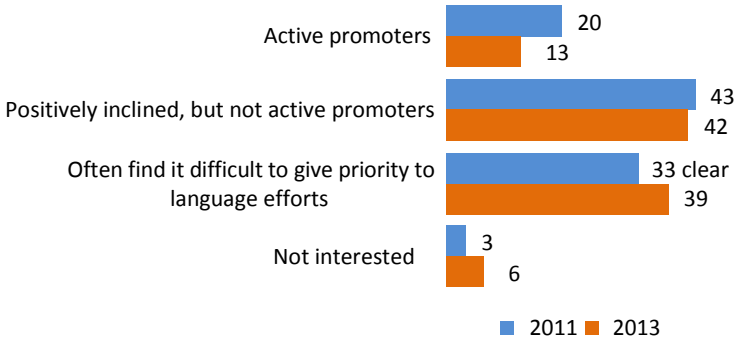
Figure 4.8: Support for clear language in the senior management in 2011 and 2013 (per cent of the government agencies)



We see that the support among the senior management has increased somewhat during the last two years. Many agencies respond that the senior management is positively inclined, and fewer respond that they are not interested in clear language or that they find it difficult to give it priority. The senior managers in the four case-studied agencies have all been important supporters for the clear language efforts that have taken place in-house. Even though they have not been directly involved in the efforts, they have fronted the project to the employees and allocated resources to the work. Some of them have also taken the initiative for specific measures in order to root clear language in the organisation, e.g. to integrate it into the training system.

Among the middle managers, the situation is somewhat different. Whereas more than one government agency in four has senior managers who are active promoters of the clear language efforts, the middle managers act as promoters in only 13 per cent of the agencies. This is fewer than during the project period. Moreover, more agencies than before find that the middle managers either find it difficult to give clear language priority or are simply not interested in doing so.

Figure 4.9: Acceptance of clear language among the middle managers in 2011 and 2013 (per cent of the government agencies)

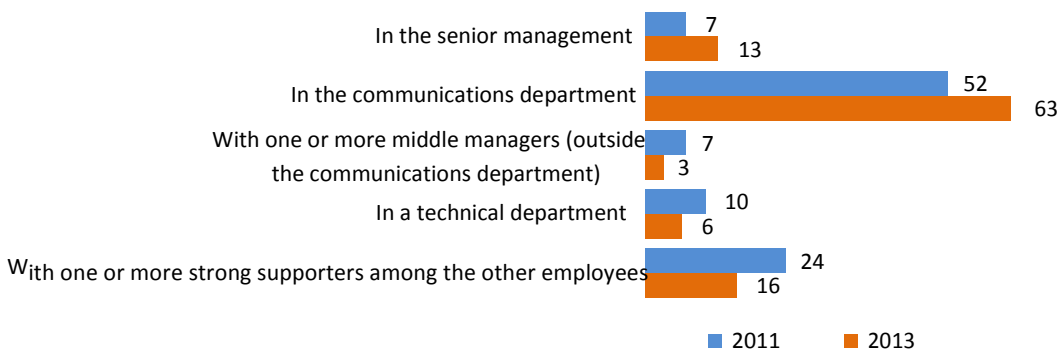


Thus, all in all there are many indications that the senior managers are still more strongly committed and more positively inclined to the clear language efforts than the middle managers. Given that much of the practical prioritisation and implementation of clear language is at the middle management tier, it may not be surprising that the commitment is not as great there as among the senior management. A middle manager has this to say about the acceptance among his managerial colleagues:

"It probably has a relatively low priority for most of us. There was a strong focus when it was introduced, and then it was given less focus and a lower priority than other tasks."

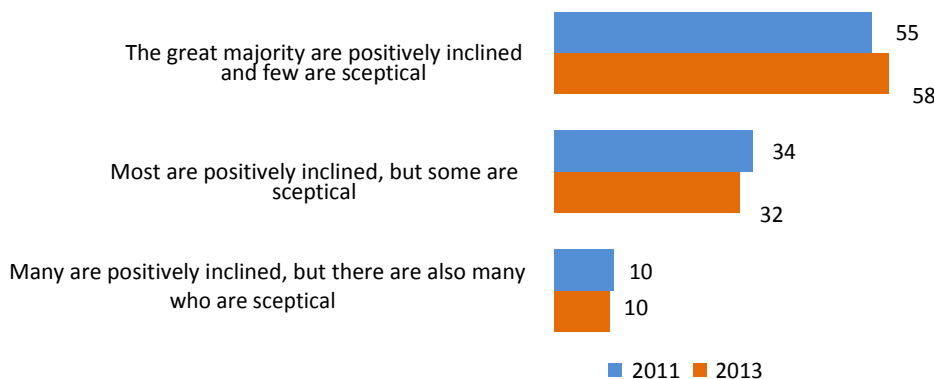
Figure 4.10 elaborates somewhat on this picture. It shows where in the organisation the motivating factor for the clear language efforts is located. In most of the government agencies, the communications department is the most important promoter and that applies to more agencies than before. The senior management has also become more important, whereas the middle management acts as a promoter to a lesser extent than before.

Figure 4.10: Where the promoter in the clear language efforts is located (percentage of all government agencies)



The acceptance among the other employees is still reasonably large, even if only a slight change can be noted from the previous survey. Fifty-eight per cent of the government agencies find that most employees are positively inclined to clear language and that few are sceptical to it, compared with 55 per cent two years ago. However, one out of three agencies find that some of their employees are sceptical to the clear language efforts.

Figure 4.11: Acceptance of clear language among the employees in 2011 and 2013 (per cent of the government agencies)



If we consider all of the above-mentioned factors together, it is reasonable to conclude that clear language is better integrated into the government agencies at present than it was two years ago, at any rate in some parts of the organisation. Many agencies have integrated clear language into their strategies; clear language is on the agenda in meetings in more agencies than before, and both senior management and the other employees accept clear language for the most part. In addition, a number of agencies have introduced permanent clear language measures, such as courses and competence building.

The challenge is still to get the middle management tier sufficiently committed. Support at this tier is completely crucial to further progress in the clear language efforts. Not only does middle management set guidelines for prioritisation and use of resources at a lower tier in the organisation, but in many agencies they also play a very specific role in the quality assurance of texts that are produced in the departments. Therefore, they have a potentially great influence on the way the organisation expresses itself in language.

In order to get a comprehensive picture of how far the agencies have come in integrating clear language in the organisation, we have calculated an index that gathers information from most of the questions we have considered above. The table below shows how this is calculated.

Component	Point sum
Incorporation into strategy document	Incorporation into an overarching strategy document gives 2 points, incorporation into other strategy documents, a plan of operation or an action plan gives 1 point each.
On the agenda in meetings	Frequently on the agenda gives 2 points, occasionally on the agenda gives one point. The points are calculated for the two management tiers separately and in aggregate.
Integrated into the management	Managers who are active promoters give 2 points, positively inclined managers give 1 point. The points are calculated for the two management tiers separately and in aggregate.
Acceptance among the employees	Few sceptical gives 2 points, some sceptical gives 1 point

The calculations were made in such a way that each component counts equally (normally by dividing by the maximum attainable point total for the component). Finally, the four components are added up and the total is divided by four. The maximum value for the integration index is therefore 1.0, which can only be achieved through a maximum point total for all four components.

The government agencies score consistently higher on the index this year than they did two years ago. Whereas two out of three agencies had an index value of 0.5 or lower in the previous measurement, only 37 per cent of the agencies have a correspondingly low score in this year's measurement. Twenty agencies achieved more than 0.5 points in the integration index. These are shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Value of the integration index, 2011 and 2013. Theoretical maximum value = 1.00

Government agency	Value in	Value in
Norwegian National Collection Agency	0.88	0.73
The County Governor of Østfold	0.81	--
The Norwegian Tax Authority	0.75	0.38
The County Governor of Rogaland	0.73	0.63
The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav)	0.70	0.38
The Norwegian State Housing Bank	0.69	0.38
The Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority	0.65	0.84
The Health Economics Administration	0.65	--
The Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund	0.64	0.76
The Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board	0.63	--
The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD)	0.61	0.13
The Brønnøysund Register Centre	0.59	0.50
The Norwegian Media Authority	0.59	--
The County Governor of Nord-Trøndelag	0.55	0.44
The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education	0.55	0.78
The Ombudsman for Children in Norway	0.55	--
The County Governor of Aust-Agder	0.55	0.44
The Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund	0.55	0.49
The Directorate for Education and Training	0.54	0.38
The Norwegian Maritime Directorate	0.53	--

According to the index, the two government agencies where clear language is most strongly integrated are the Norwegian National Collection Agency and the County Governor of Østfold. Moreover, almost all of the agencies on the list show progress since the last measurement. The exceptions are the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund and the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), which each scored somewhat lower compared with the previous measurement. We find the greatest improvement in the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD).

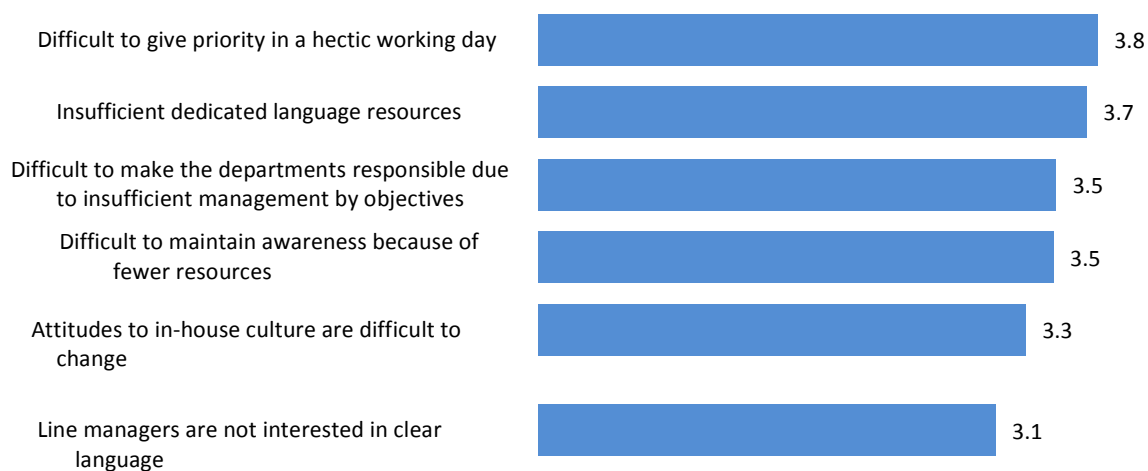
It is important to point out that these measurements are based on the discretionary assessments of individuals and not on objective observations. Especially in large government agencies, it may be difficult to make qualified assessments of how well clear language is integrated into various parts of the organisation. As we shall see in chapter 5, there is much that indicates that the integration of clear language, in the sense of acceptance and awareness of and knowledge about clear language, varies considerably internally in the organisations. For instance, we find that some parts of the organisations have little or no knowledge about the clear language project that was implemented in their own agency. In the Norwegian Tax Administration, as many as 60 per cent responded in a survey conducted two years ago that they were not aware of the project. In other words, the assessments of the person in charge of the clear language project cannot be regarded as absolute truths, but rather as indications of the developments in the clear language efforts of the government agencies.

CHALLENGES WITH INTEGRATION AND ACCEPTANCE

Ensuring a continuing focus on clear language after the conclusion of the project period can be a demanding task. We have already seen that many government agencies face challenges integrating clear language into all tiers of the organisation, not least at the middle management tier. Moreover, when the clear language efforts are completed as a project, the responsibility for ensuring clear language in the agency is transferred from a project organisation with dedicated resources to a line or operational organisation where clear language is one task among many.

The risk that clear language will be given a lower priority in a busy workday is all too real, as we can see in figure 4.12. Here we have asked the agencies to rank potential challenges in the transition phase from project to line and/or operational organisation and requested that they indicate the importance of each individual statement on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very unimportant and 5 is very important. The figure shows the average value of the agencies' answers.

Figure 4.12: Challenges in transferring the clear language efforts from a project to a line and/or operational organisation (average value)



The majority of the government agencies regard time pressure and insufficient dedicated resources as the most important challenges. The agencies are most concerned that a hectic workday makes it difficult to give priority to clear language in their daily operations. Thirty per cent regard this as a very important challenge, whereas 25 per cent regard the lack of dedicated resources for further clear language efforts as a very important challenge. With fewer resources for specific clear language efforts, whether it be text revision, marketing or holding courses, less attention will be devoted to clear language. The risk is that the topic will take a back seat in people's awareness, both in the organisation as a whole and among the individual employees and that they will end up reverting to "old habits". A majority of the agencies find that it is difficult to maintain a focus on clear language because they have fewer resources.

Insufficient management by objectives in the clear language area is also regarded as a challenge. Fifty-five per cent respond that this is an important or very important challenge. Nevertheless, as we saw in figure 4.4, only a few agencies are planning to introduce this measure. Only thirteen per cent of the agencies are planning to measure the line managers in clear language. This is an important balancing act. Management by objectives obligates the various tiers in the organisation to follow up clear language, but too much formalisation in the form of measurement and reporting can easily give rise to a negative attitude to clear language and thereby work against its intentions.

All of the above-mentioned factors can probably partly explain the poor integration and acceptance of clear language at the middle management tier; cf. the previous paragraph. The middle management is usually the tier in an organisation where the capacity is most squeezed. On the one hand, they are responsible for initiating and implementing measures that have been approved by the senior management. On the other hand, they are supposed to follow up and quality assure the efforts that are made by employees at the tiers below them. A poor integration or insufficient acceptance among middle managers is not necessarily attributable to a lack of interest, but rather a lack of time and resources.

We see this in the responses in figure 4.12 as well. Insufficient interest in clear language among line managers is perceived to be the least important challenge in the agencies. We saw the same tendency in figure 4.9, which showed that 40 per cent of the persons in charge of the clear language projects reported that the middle managers found it difficult to give priority to clear language, whereas only 6 per cent reported that the middle managers had no interest in doing so. In other words, it is insufficient time and resources that appears to most markedly slow down the process of transferring clear language to the line organisation.

A majority of the agencies also find that in-house attitudes and cultures make clear language efforts demanding. Around 55 per cent think that in-house attitudes and cultures that are difficult to change are an important or very important challenge for the clear language efforts in the transition from project to operations. One of the respondents gave an apt description:

"People think that they themselves write terrifically well and clearly. So they are very positively inclined to clear language, but do not actually write very clearly."

Among other challenges, one of the ministries mentions, for example, structural conditions to which they are subject. For instance, it is difficult to rewrite a document in clear language after a long, thorough consultation round if clear language has not been a part of the writing process from the very start, plainly and simply because of time pressure.

ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS

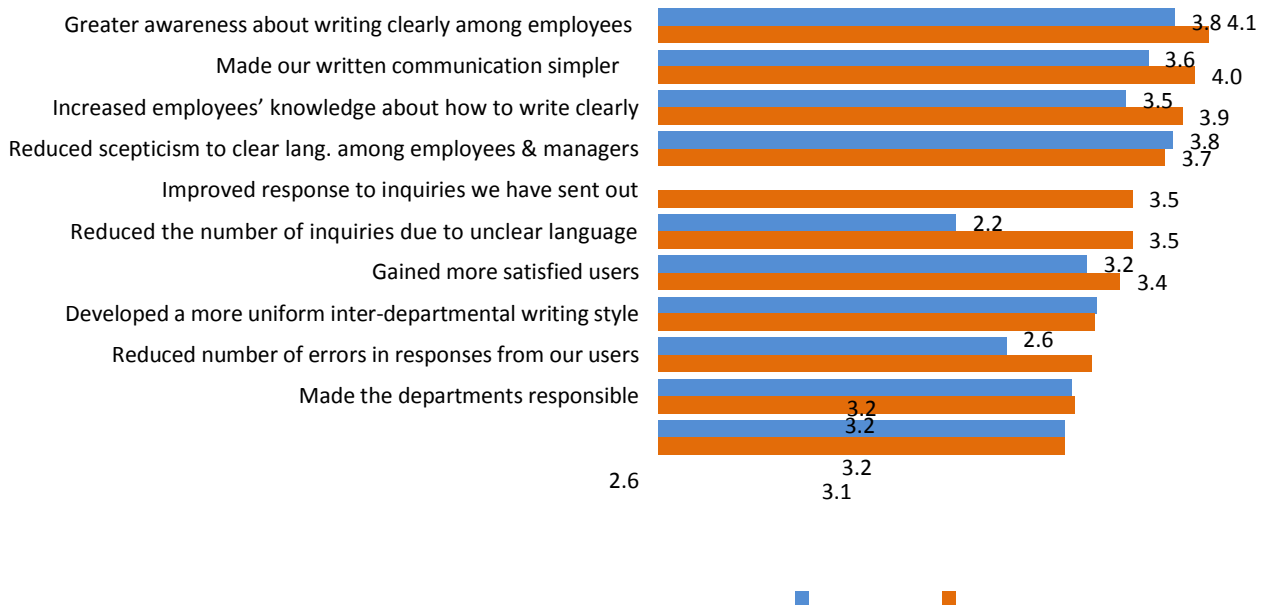
Figure 4.13 shows the assessments by the persons in charge of the clear language projects of how far the government agencies have come in achieving various goals for the clear language efforts. Many of the goals are related to in-house cultural changes, such as greater awareness, increased knowledge and less scepticism about clear language. Other goals concern changes in responses from users, i.e. external effects.

The figure shows the average value of the government agencies' assessments on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that the goal has been achieved to a very little extent and 5 means that the goal has been achieved to a very great extent. By comparing these results with those from 2011, we can also assess the extent to which the achievement of goals has improved as the agencies have come further in the clear language efforts. Here too, it is important to point out that the results are based on the discretionary assessments of individuals. In other words, they are not objective measurements of the agencies' achievement of goals. Moreover, the persons in charge of the clear language projects are often the "strong supporters" in the clear language efforts, which to some extent may have influenced the responses in figure 4.13 in a positive direction. At the same time, the persons in charge of the clear language projects are the ones who are most familiar with the efforts that the agency has made and who are most capable of making a comprehensive assessment of whether the goals for the work have been achieved.

Even though cultural factors may be the most difficult ones to change, most of the agencies find that these are the goals they have achieved best. Of the four objectives that have the highest achievement of goals, three may be characterised as cultural changes: greater awareness of, increased knowledge about and less scepticism to clear language. Sixty-eight per cent of the agencies responded that they have achieved the goal of increasing the employees' awareness of clear language to a great or very great extent, and almost just as many think they have increased the knowledge about clear language equivalently. Around half of them also think that they have succeeded in reducing the scepticism to clear language among both employees and managers to a great or very great extent. Here, however, there has been a regression since the last measurements.

On the other hand, it is in the external response that we see the biggest *changes* since the previous survey. That applies not least to the goals of reducing the number of inquiries that are due to unclear language and reducing the number of errors in responses from the users. Both of these had a reasonably low achievement of goals in 2011 with the majority of the responses at the lower end of the scale. This year, many respond far more positively to these two objectives.

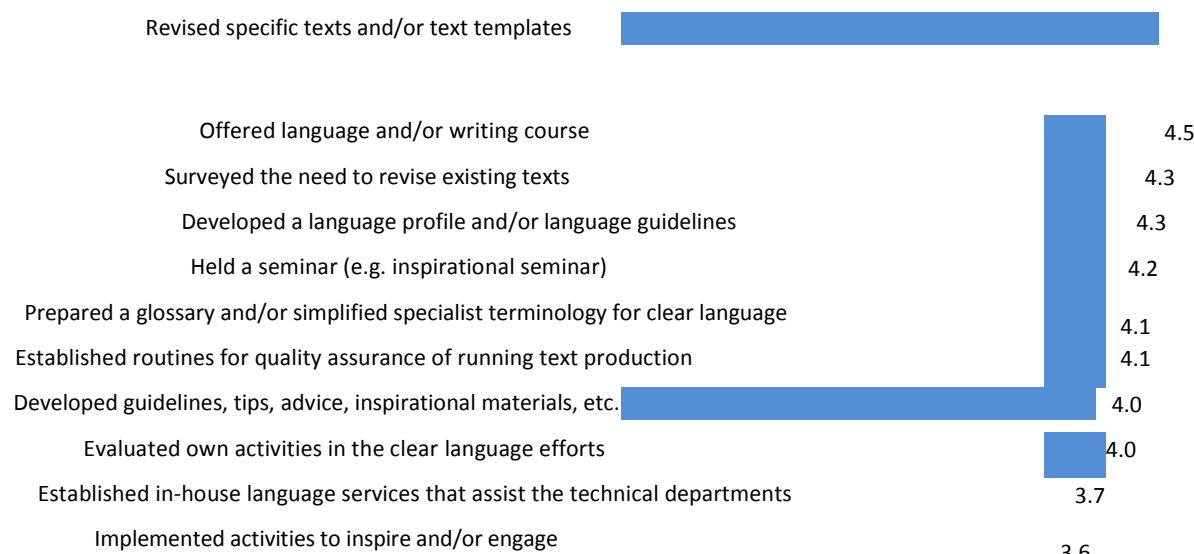
Figure 4.13: Assessment of achievement of goals (average value)



3.1
3.0
3.0

Figure 4.14 shows how important the various measures in the project have been for achieving the goals of the clear language efforts. The higher the average value, the more important the measure has been.

Figure 4.14: Assessment by the persons in charge of the clear language projects of how important various clear language measures have been for the achievement of goals. Average value on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means very unimportant and 5 means very important



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6

Text revision and courses are regarded as the most important policy instruments. Many of the employees in the case-studied government agencies particularly emphasise the utility of adapted and targeted courses where employees are also allowed to work on their own texts. The language workshops in the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD) and the writing workshops that some of the regions in the Norwegian Tax Administration have implemented are found to be especially useful and relevant. As one middle manager put it:

"I have been given an opportunity to try out clear language with assistance instead of merely taking a course and picking up useful tips that I try to remember when I am going to write."

Least important according to the persons in charge of the clear language projects are activities that are meant to generate increased acceptance and to inspire employees to make use of clear language. These are activities that do not give the same immediate and tangible results as text revision or the development of a language profile, for example. If we compare the results with the previous survey, we find that inspirational activities of this kind are assessed as even less important than before. On the other hand, a specific aid, such as a glossary or simplified specialist terminology, has become considerably more important.

INTEGRATION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS

Finally, in this chapter, we shall take a closer look at the relationship between integration and the achievement of goals. We ask the question of to what extent the clear language efforts integration into the organisation affects the chances of achieving the goals that have been set. As an expression of integration, we employ the integration index that was described earlier in this chapter. Moreover, we distinguish between in-house and external goals. We define in-house goals as goals that involve changes within the organisation; i.e. the following specific objectives:¹⁷

1. Created greater awareness about writing clearly among the employees
2. Increased the knowledge among the employees about how to write clearly
3. Created a more uniform and standardised inter-departmental writing style
4. Simplified the written communication
5. Ended up with more satisfied employees

We define external goals as goals that involve the ways in which the users perceive and react to communication from the government agency; i.e. the following specific objectives:¹⁸

1. Reduced the number of inquiries due to unclear language
2. Reduced the number of errors in answers from the users
3. Gained more satisfied users

We have calculated the agencies' average response to each individual question that involves the in-house and external objectives. These averages will also vary between 1 and 5. The higher the value, the greater the achievement of goals. In the calculations of the external goals, we have only included agencies with contacts among users. In table 4.2, we show these average values for three groups of agencies called agencies with a slight, moderate and thorough integration. The calculations were made both for 2011 and 2013.

Table 4.2: In-house and external achievement of goals for agencies with a slight, moderate and thorough integration, in 2011 and 2013.

	2011		2013	
	In-house goals	External goal	In-house goals	External goal
Slight integration (index < 0.5)	3.4	2.4	3.3	3.2
Moderate integration (index 0.5-0.7)	3.3	3.5	3.9	3.5
Thorough integration (index > 0.7)	3.7	3.8	4.0	3.7

¹⁷ Note that the goals of reduced scepticism among the employees and delegation of responsibility to the departments have not been included because they lie conceptually closer to the concept of integration as we have defined it here.

¹⁸ The goal of improved response to inquiries has not been included because this question was not included in the survey in 2011.

The results give a clear confirmation that the integration of the clear language efforts in the organisation has an effect on the achievement of goals. At both points in time and for both external and in-house goals, agencies with a thorough integration of the clear language efforts had a markedly higher achievement of goals than agencies with only a slight integration.¹⁹ The way in which the efforts are organised and incorporated into strategies and leadership are thus important if we want to succeed.

¹⁹ We have also run correlation analyses between the integration index (not grouped) and the two indicators for achievement of goals. They are all strongly positive, but are only significant for the data material from 2013. This is mainly because the number of agencies that have answered all of the relevant questions was lower in 2011 than in 2013.

Chapter 5

A WRITING CULTURE IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE?

The overarching objective of the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project has been "to pay more attention to clear language in the government administration and pave the way for government agencies to improve the language in their written communications with citizens".

In other words, the goal can be said to be two-part. On the one hand, a clear language effort involves making specific changes in the agencies' text products. Yet an improved standard letter is not necessarily finished once and for all, and since much text is also produced individually, the language quality of parts of the volume of text will often be dependent on the skills and assessments of individuals. On the other hand, a clear language effort is just as involved with influencing the organisation's culture of writing; e.g. through increased attention and increased competence.

To a great extent, clear language involves continuous improvement efforts. It assumes a culture that supports clear language. In this chapter, we take a closer look at the agencies' in-house writing cultures and substantiate any effects that the clear language project may have had on their development. Among other things, we take a look at the employees' and managers' attitudes to and knowledge about clear language and the extent to which the project has contributed to a greater prioritisation of clear language in the daily work than before. The chapter is based on interviews with managers and employees in four agencies that are participating in clear language projects, in-house surveys in selected agencies and questionnaires to the persons in charge of the clear language projects.

The data material does not give any grounds for maintaining that any drastic change has occurred in the agencies' writing culture, but several signs point in the right direction. First and foremost, it appears that the awareness of clear language has increased during the period of the clear language project. In-house surveys conducted at two different times show both that more people have an awareness of the clear language project than was previously the case and that more people have become more conscientious about writing clearly. We also find more evidence that the clear language project has helped increase the knowledge about clear language. This probably applies first and foremost to those who have taken part in clear language activities such as courses, seminars and writing workshops. At the same time, we see examples that employees become more critical of their own clear language skills as they acquire more knowledge.

However, a somewhat deficient data base makes it difficult to detect any extensive change of attitudes, in the sense that many have developed a more positive attitude to clear language. Nevertheless, we can register an important change. The view of clear language and a legally correct language as two incompatible opposites appears to be less dominant now than it was before.

We find similar ambiguous results with regard to working habits and the prioritisation of clear language in the work day. Even if a reasonably large percentage in many agencies state that they use clear language tools, such as language profiles in their daily work, we find examples of agencies where employees give less priority to clear language than they did before. It also appears as if the

middle managers give priority to clear language to a lesser extent than before.

We find reason to believe that the changes we have observed have mainly occurred in the parts of the agencies that have been most involved in the clear language efforts through courses, writing workshops or specific text revisions. That applies at both the individual and departmental levels. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that extensive changes in attitudes and cultural changes will take longer and be more demanding to implement in large agencies than in smaller ones. We also find evidence for this in our analyses. Among other things, we find that fewer are aware of the clear language project in a large agency such as the Norwegian Tax Administration than in smaller agencies. We find similar differences in prioritisation of clear language and the use of clear language tools. An important task in the future must therefore be to ensure that the positive changes we have observed will be distributed throughout the whole organisation, including to the units that currently have insufficient knowledge about clear language.

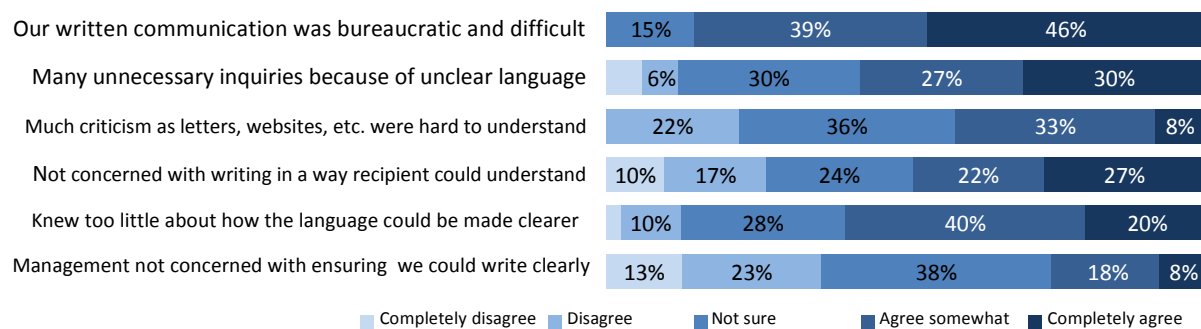
THE WRITING CULTURE PRIOR TO THE START OF THE PROJECT

A government agency's writing culture may be regarded as the sum of the individual employees' expressions in writing. This in turn is affected by factors, such as educational background. Yet the individual's writing style will also be shaped by the language traditions, expectations and standards that the agency has developed over many years. For example, there are a number of expectations and standards for what are suitable and correct forms of expression for a government authority. Many are likely to have a conception that information from the public authorities shall be more formal and impersonal in its style than information from other types of senders. This may be regarded as a way to show respect for the user, or it can be a virtue of necessity because the content does not make it possible to be too direct and specific. As a middle manager in a government agency put it:

"The administrative system is characterised by individual quirks, e.g. exaggerated use of the passive voice. Of course, there are reasons for this. We may rarely be very clear unless we have money to follow it up with."

Figure 5.1 shows that the writing culture in the agencies that have initiated a clear language project has been characterised to a great extent by a difficult and bureaucratic language. We asked the agencies to rate a series of descriptive statements about the in-house language situation. The responses were given on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means *fully disagree* and 5 means *fully agree*. We see that there is great agreement that the agencies had a bureaucratic and difficult language before they initiated their clear language project. Among many, this also resulted in a number of unnecessary inquiries. The great majority of the agencies also acknowledge that they had only a limited knowledge about how they could work to improve their communication.

Figure 5.1: The language situation in the government agencies before the clear language project was initiated (per cent)



In-house surveys that some of the government agencies that are participating in clear language projects have conducted also indicate that many employees in the agencies feel that the writing culture has been bureaucratic. For example, employees are requested to rate the following statements:

1. In my opinion, the communications department in the agency is both simple and clear
2. I find that we are often criticized by our users because of the way we write
3. I find that we get too many unnecessary inquiries because of a lack of clarity or language that is too complicated

The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD) is one of the agencies where the written communication is perceived as bureaucratic and difficult. In an Internet survey that was conducted over one year after the initiation of the project (2011), only 17 per cent of the employees say that they agree that the communication with the users is simple and clear. The same percentage responded that way when the survey was repeated in 2012. One of the more recent government agencies that are participating in clear language projects, the Norwegian Industrial Property Office, conducted a similar survey when they initiated their project in 2012. In this case, one out of three employees felt that a complicated language resulted in too many unnecessary inquiries (agree or completely agree).

CHANGE IN THE WRITING CULTURE

Cultural changes are time-consuming processes, and it will usually take several years with targeted efforts before we can begin to see results. Moreover, it involves qualitative phenomena that may be difficult to quantify. Both of these factors make measurement of cultural changes demanding. In order to assess whether there has been a cultural change, the following questions may be relevant:

- ◆ Has the attitude to clear language changed?
- ◆ Has the awareness of clear language increased in the organisation?
- ◆ Is clear language given priority in the daily work?
- ◆ Has the employees' knowledge about clear language increased?
- ◆ Has the agencies' communication become simpler?

Admittedly, a simpler communication must be mainly regarded as a result of a change of language in the organisation rather than a goal of cultural change in itself. Moreover, simpler communication can further manifest itself in changes in the external response. It may be a matter of unnecessary inquiries or errors in responses from users as a result of unclear language or of criticism of the agency's use of language. We will take a closer look at this in chapter 6, which deals with the measurement of effects.

ATTITUDE TO CLEAR LANGUAGE

To a great extent, changing a writing culture entails changing people's attitudes to what is good written language. This applies not least because much of the written material that comes from government agencies is produced by individuals. If an organisation shall try to make the language in its written expression clearer, that assumes an attitude among the individuals that clear language is both *important* and *correct*.

In general, the basic attitude to clear language appears to be positive among employees in government agencies. Among other things, chapter 4 showed that the majority of the persons in

charge of the clear language projects feel that most employees are positively inclined to clear language at present (cf. figure 4.11). Findings from both interviews and in-house surveys support this opinion.

In most in-house surveys, employees' attitudes are measured by requesting that they rank the following statements:

1. Writing clearly and comprehensibly is often incompatible with writing with legal or technical precision.
2. It is a democratic right to receive information from government agencies in a language that everyone has the qualifications to understand
3. It is our responsibility as employees in government agencies to write so clearly and distinctly that our users do not miss out on benefits or misunderstand their rights and duties
4. Given other important challenges that government agencies are facing, it is not correct to give priority to efforts to develop a clearer and more easily comprehensible language
5. We could have saved substantial resources in government agencies by expressing ourselves more simply and clearly in our communication with the users
6. The current focus on clear language in written communication from the civil service is excessive

The surveys reveal a clear pattern: Whereas a majority of the employees say that they agree with the positive statements about clear language (2, 3 and 5), only a minority agree with the negative statements (1, 4 and 6). In BLD, for example, nearly 9 out of 10 respond that it is a democratic right to receive information from government agencies in a comprehensible language. In NOKUT, 8 out of 10 completely agree that it is their responsibility as employees in a government agency to write so clearly and distinctly that the users do not miss out on benefits or misunderstand their rights and duties. We find similar results in other Internet surveys.

It is more difficult to determine whether the attitude has become more positive during the project period. The data material is too deficient to determine that. Many of those whom we interviewed in-depth feel that they have changed their own views on the use of language, e.g. the clear language project has clarified how important it is to utilise an accessible language. Many more than before also see clear benefits of enabling as many as possible to understand their language.

However, this only involves a few individuals and says little about changes at an overarching tier. Among those in charge of the clear language projects, the survey gives a more representative picture. They perceive precisely these changes of attitude as the most demanding part of the

"I feel that those who would previously have tried to cover every angle have become bolder." - Middle manager, agency 3

"They are enthusiastic now, but some of them were a little sceptical at first because they were afraid of a tabloidisation of the language. Before we started the workshop, there were some who said that they had been very sceptical beforehand, but that they understood afterwards that this was useful and good." - Middle manager, agency 2

work. Around 55 per cent of them think that attitudes and in-house cultures that are difficult to change are an important or very important challenge in the process of

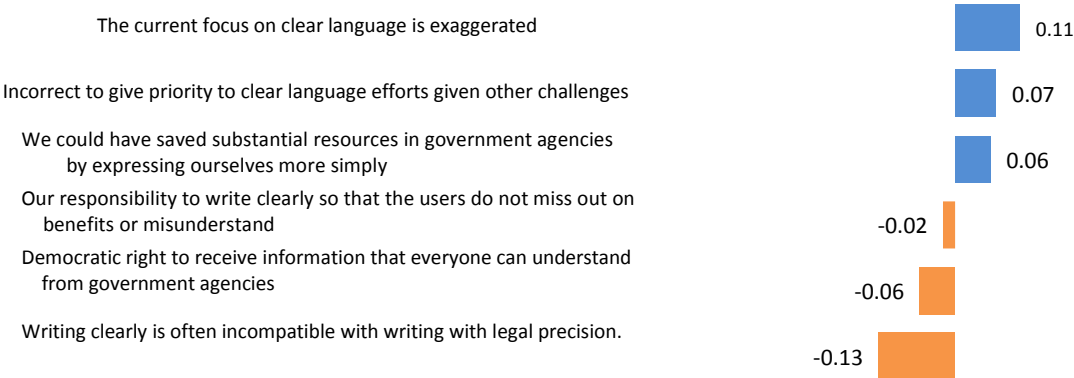
transferring clear language from the project to operations (cf. figure 4.12). Moreover, the goal of reducing scepticism to clear language among the employees and managers was achieved at a marginally lower rate this year than two years ago (cf. figure 4.13).

In-house surveys that were conducted at two different times in the Norwegian Health Economics Administration (HELFO), the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, Nav Administration Akershus and BLD also make it possible to assess whether there has been a change of attitude. Whereas the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, Nav Administration Akershus and to some extent BLD have undergone relatively large changes of attitude in a uniformly positive direction, HELFO's employees have developed a more critical attitude to clear language. At the same time, we find that in three of the agencies there is a greater acceptance for balancing clear language with a legally precise language. Only in BLD do employees regard clear language as incompatible with legal precision to a greater extent than before. The average value has increased by 0.15 points; i.e. more employees agree with this statement. Perhaps that may be related to the fact that many employees in BLD have been involved in refining texts through so-called clear language workshops during the project period. Specific experiences with combining these two considerations may give a more realistic picture of how demanding it is. Moreover, employees in a ministry have a closer relationship to the legislation and are themselves involved in formulating the laws.

◆ HELFO

Figure 5.2 shows how the employees' assessment of the various statements about clear language has changed from the first survey in 2012 to the last survey in 2013. The change is represented by a change in the average value on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means *fully disagree* and 5 means *fully agree*. A positive value means that more employees agree with the statement than before, and a negative value shows that more disagree.

Figure 5.2: Change in employees' attitudes to clear language, HELFO. The figure shows change in an average value on a scale from 1 to 5 between 2012 and 2013.



Essentially, the changes in the employees' attitudes to clear language in HELFO were relatively small, but the changes that have occurred have mainly gone in a negative direction. It is primarily the middle managers who lower the overall acceptance. That is especially true of the statement that clear language involves the public's democratic right to receive comprehensible information from government agencies. The average value here changed by -0.4 points among the middle managers, i.e. fewer agree with this statement than before. There are also fewer middle managers than before who agree with the statement that it is the employees' responsibility to write clearly so that the users do not miss out on benefits or misunderstand their rights. The organisation as a whole has not changed its opinion about this.

At the same time, more employees than before think that the current focus on clear language is exaggerated and that it is incorrect to give priority to clear language efforts given other challenges that the agency is facing. Here too, it is primarily the middle managers who have developed a more negative attitude.

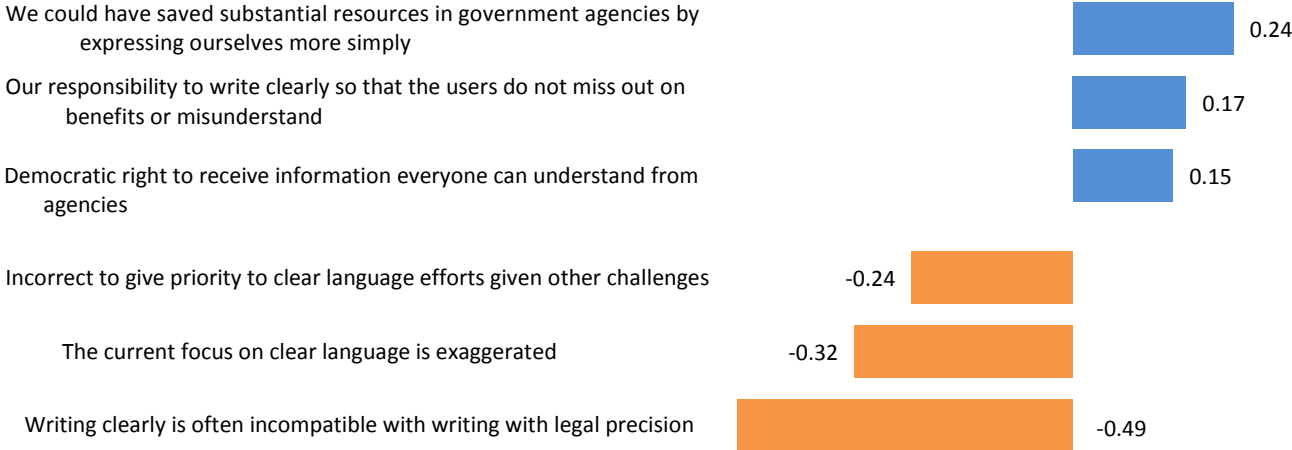
The only positive change involves the balance between clear language and legal precision. Fewer employees than before think that clear language is incompatible with writing with legal precision. In the first year, 30 per cent of the employees agreed or completely agreed that the two considerations were not compatible; one year later, only 19 per cent gave the same response.

On the other hand, the senior management appears to have developed a more positive attitude to clear language. For instance, there are more senior managers who agree with the statement that clear language can help save resources. There are also fewer senior managers who think that the current focus on clear language is exaggerated, in contrast to the rest of the organisation.

◆ The Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority

In the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, the pattern is uniformly positive, and the changes are also greater than in HELFO. Basically, the employees had a very positive attitude to clear language. For example, 9 out of 10 responded already in the first survey that they agreed or completely agreed that it is a democratic right to receive comprehensible information from government agencies. Figure 5.3 indicates that the employees have become even more positively inclined to clear language. Among other things, it looks as if more of them have grasped that clear language can help save resources. This may be related to the fact that the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority has performed measurements that reveal specific changes in the use of resources in the first-line support (cf. chapter 6 for more details). More employees than before also think both that it is their responsibility as a government agency to write clearly so that the users do not misunderstand and that it is a democratic right to receive comprehensible information. At the same time that more of them support the positive statements about clear language, fewer of them agree with the negative ones. The biggest change concerns the statement that clear language is incompatible with legally precise language. The average value here has declined by almost a half a point, i.e. far fewer persons than before support this view.

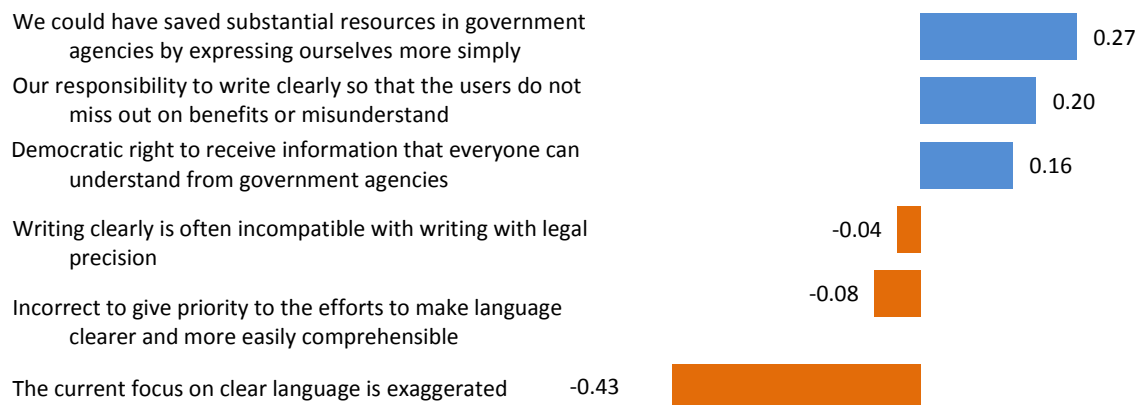
Figure 5.3: Change in employees' attitudes to clear language, the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority. The figure shows change in an average value on a scale from 1 to 5 between 2011 and 2012.



◆ Nav Administration Akershus

Employees in Nav Administration Akershus have also developed a more positive attitude to clear language. More of them support the positive statements about clear language in the survey after the project than in the first survey. That applies in particular to the view that clear language can help save resources. At the same time, there are far more who disagree with the negative statements, especially the statement that the current focus on clear language is exaggerated.

Figure 5.4: Change in employees' attitude to clear language, Nav Administration Akershus. The figure shows change in an average value on a scale from 1 to 6 between 2011 and 2012.²⁰



In general, we find reason to believe that the changes in attitudes have mainly occurred in the parts of the government agencies that have been most involved in the clear language efforts. When the persons in charge of the clear language projects and the middle managers are asked to assess whether they have noticed a change of attitude in the organisation, they focus mainly on the departments or the units where there have been great efforts to promote clear language, as the following quote serves to illustrate:

"A unit may have been somewhat sceptical at first, but we have made big changes there, so I have the impression that they have become more aware and are more positively inclined to clear language." - Middle manager, agency 3.

AWARENESS ABOUT CLEAR LANGUAGE

It is natural that the awareness of clear language increases during a project period involving targeted efforts and dedicated resources. The question is whether the government agencies succeed in subsequently maintaining this awareness.

We find many indications that there is a greater awareness about clear language in the agencies after the conclusion of the project period relative to before. For example, we saw in chapter 4 that the goal of creating greater awareness about clear language among the employees is the goal that the persons in charge of the clear language projects in the various agencies think that they have achieved best. That is also one of the goals that has reported the biggest change since the previous survey in 2011.

The surveys in HELFO and the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority support this finding.

Employees are asked to evaluate whether the clear language project has contributed to the following:

1. I have become more aware of how important it is to write clearly and comprehensibly
2. The clear language efforts have created greater awareness about writing clearly among the employees
3. The clear language efforts have created greater awareness about writing clearly among the managers

Figures 5.5 and 5.6 show that the awareness has grown among employees in both government agencies, but the increase has been especially great in HELFO.²¹ This may be somewhat surprising given that the attitude to clear language has trended negative (cf. figure 5.2). At the same time, it is important to distinguish between being aware of a phenomenon and appraising that same phenomenon. Increased awareness about clear language gives a better basis for forming an opinion about clear language, whether it be positive or negative.

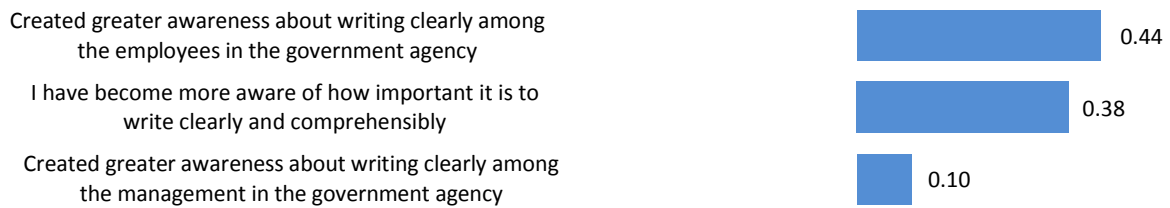
Figure 5.5 shows that a much higher percentage of the employees in HELFO find that the clear language project has given them a greater awareness of clear language to a great or very great extent (81 per cent in 2013 compared with 58 per cent in 2012). There are also far more persons who find that the clear language project has contributed to a great or very great extent to their becoming more aware of clear language. The average value has increased by 0.38 points.

In addition, more thorough analyses show that the managers (senior and middle managers) have changed their views on their own awareness of clear language to a greater extent than the other employees. The average value among the senior managers and middle managers has changed by about 0.6 points compared with 0.36 points for other employees.

Interestingly enough, however, employees appear to have a different opinion about the management's clear language awareness than the managers themselves have. Employees' view of whether the clear language project has resulted in greater awareness among the managers has only changed by 0.1 point.

²⁰ Nav Administration Akershus has not used the same scale as the other two agencies, so the results cannot be compared.

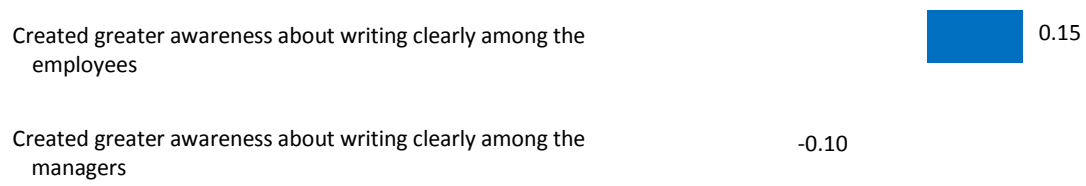
Figure 5.5: Change in employees' assessments of awareness of clear language in HELFO. The figure shows the change in the average value on a scale of 1 to 5 between 2012 and 2013, where 1 means to a very little extent and 5 means to a very great extent.



In the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, there are also many employees who think that the clear language project has increased the awareness about clear language among employees. At the same time, there are fewer than before who feel that the project has helped increase the awareness among the managers. Here the average value decreases by 0.1 points. The survey did not cover the question of whether the clear language project has changed the employees' view of their own language:

21 We see this when we convert the average values in the two agencies to a scale that runs from 0 to 1. The two agencies have not used the same scale, so the results cannot be directly compared.

Figure 5.6: Employees' assessments of awareness of clear language in the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority. The figure shows the change in the average value on a scale of 1 to 5 between 2011 and 2012, where 1 means to a very little extent and 5 means to a very great extent.





Interviews with employees and managers in the four case-studied government agencies support these findings. Many middle managers feel that the awareness of clear language in their own department has increased, and more of the employees state that they have clear language in mind when they write more often than before.

«In the daily work, I notice it most in that the employees are more inculcated with clear language. They ask me more often if it is plain, clear and comprehensible. Greater acceptance for writing simpler and clearer.» - Middle manager, agency 3

"Clear language is more to the fore in our awareness, and we talk about it often, e.g. if we see the e-mails of others that are unclear or when we read the newspaper. We see all texts now from a different perspective than before." - Employee, agency 4

Another way of assessing the awareness about clear language is to look at the employees' knowledge about the clear language project. The results clearly show that this has increased in BLD, HELFO and Nav Administration Akershus. In the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, all of the employees had already answered in the baseline measurement that they knew about the project.

- ◆ **The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD):** In 2011, 92 per cent responded that they were very familiar with the project or that they were familiar with the main features of the project. In 2012, 97 per cent had this response.
- ◆ **HELFO:** In 2012, 12 per cent responded that they were very familiar with the project whereas 64 per cent were familiar with the main features of the project. In 2013, these percentages had increased to 16 and 72 per cent respectively.
- ◆ **Nav Administration Akershus:** In 2011, only 1 per cent responded that they were very familiar with the project. In 2012, 29 per cent had this response.

However, the in-depth interviews may indicate that the awareness and familiarity have mainly increased in those parts of the organisation that have been most involved in the project. Employees who have not taken part in any clear language activities or who work in departments that have not been directly involved in the project have less knowledge about it. They do not feel that there is a great awareness of clear language in their own department either. An employee has this to say:

"I feel that little attention is paid to clear language and it is rarely discussed in my department. I feel that I am the one who is interested in clear language. It is not a topic for section meetings or departmental meetings, nor have I been urged by any of the managers to focus on clear language." - Employee, government agency 3

Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that it is more difficult to arouse awareness about clear language in large agencies than it is in small ones. We see, for example, in the survey that was conducted in the Norwegian Tax Administration after completion of the project that a majority of the employees state that they are not aware of the clear language project that the agency has implemented. Fully 60 per cent respond that they either have not heard about it or that they have heard about it but do not know very much about what it involves. Forty per cent also state that they are not familiar with the language profile that they agency has developed. This may be an indication that cultural changes take longer in large agencies.

Many of the interviews in the agency indicate the same thing, which the following quotes illustrate:

«There was great awareness during the period when the project was under way, but it is easy to revert to old habits when the work pressure picks up. There is little time to take on board the things we have learned. There is an element of risk that we will not have enough time to give this priority." - Middle manager

"I have the impression that it is given priority higher up in the Norwegian Tax Administration, but little attention has been paid to clear language locally except for the course and brochure that we were given. In general, a rather small focus." - Employee

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CLEAR LANGUAGE

An important part of the clear language projects has been increasing the knowledge about clear language among the employees and improving their writing skills in keeping with clear language principles. Seventy per cent of the government agencies have sent a total of more than 5,000 employees to various types of clear language courses. Moreover, most of these agencies have developed aids such as guidelines and language profiles with precisely this objective.

The data does not provide a basis for stating that there has been a substantial knowledge boost in the government agencies that are participating in clear language projects, but there are many indications that knowledge about clear language has at any rate increased in some parts of the organisations.

First of all, the persons in charge of the clear language projects think that they have achieved the goal of increasing the knowledge about clear language among the employees to a greater extent at present when compared with two years ago (cf. figure 4.13). Many of the employees also state in in-depth interviews that participation in courses, seminars or writing workshops under the direction of the clear language project has given them new, valuable knowledge that they have made use of in their ongoing written work. Specific writing tips and the possibility of working with their own texts in these courses are perceived as especially valuable.

Many of the in-house surveys support this finding. Employees are requested here to assess the extent to which the agency has achieved the goal of increasing the employees' knowledge about how to write simply and clearly. In HELFO, there are many who feel that the agency has achieved this goal to a great extent after completion of the project relative to the survey from the year before. The average value increases by 0.5 points on a scale of 1 to 5. In agencies that have only implemented an in-house survey after the project was completed, the majority also feel that the agency has achieved this goal to a great or very great extent. That is the case, for example, with the County Governor, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Norwegian Tax Administration.

Many findings from HELFO indicate that the agency has succeeded in increasing the employees' knowledge about clear language. Among other things, they are asked to assess the following statements:

1. I have gained greater insight into the ways in which I can write clearly and comprehensibly
2. I have been given tools and guidelines that make it easier for me to write clearly and comprehensibly
3. I have been given tools and guidelines that speed up the writing

Figure 5.7 shows how the employees' assessments have changed in the course of one year. The percentage who feel that the clear language efforts have contributed to greater insight into clear language has increased considerably, with a change in the average value of +0.5 points. Far more employees also think that they have been given tools and guidelines that make their writing both easier and faster.

Figure 5.7: Change in the HELFO employees' assessments of the importance of the clear language project for their own writing. The figure shows the change in the average value on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means to a very little extent and 5 means to a very great extent.

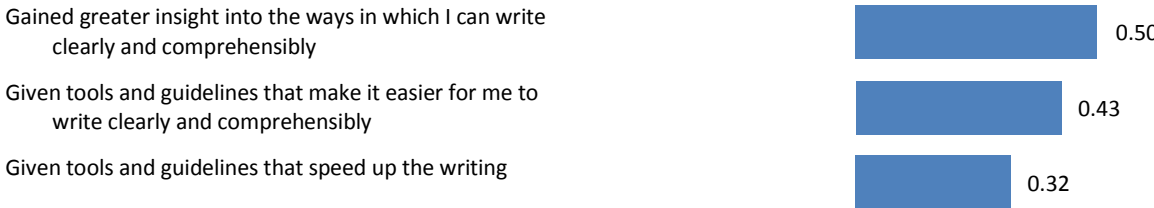
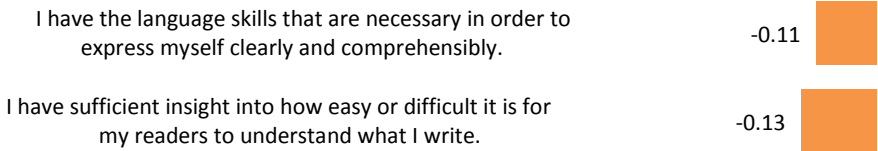


Figure 5.8 indicates nevertheless that the increase in knowledge to which the clear language project has contributed is not sufficient. After the project was completed, there are actually fewer employees than before who feel that they have the language skills that are required in order to express themselves clearly and comprehensibly. There are also fewer employees who state that they have sufficient insight into how easy or difficult it is for the readers to comprehend what they write.

A natural explanation of this may be that the increased knowledge about clear language has given employees more insight into their own language skills and thereby made them more critical about those skills. This can be compared with other learning processes, where the need for knowledge usually increases the deeper you go into the field.

Figure 5.8: Change in HELFO employees' assessments of their own use of language. The figure shows the change in the average value on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means to a very little extent and 5 means to a very great extent.



CLEAR LANGUAGE IN THE WORKDAY

So far, we have considered the more general and less measurable aspects of a change in culture, such as attitude, awareness and knowledge. Yet a change in culture can also be measured more specifically, by looking at possible changes in work habits and priorities in the work day.

Although we find that many employees in the government agencies that are participating in clear language projects give priority to clear language to a greater extent than before, it is difficult to ascertain that there has been a thorough change in working habits and language routines. Among other things, we see that it is still a challenge to get the middle managers more involved. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that the changes primarily occur in the parts of the agencies that have been most closely involved in the clear language efforts, among both middle managers and employees. Individual findings also indicate that it is easier to implement changes in smaller agencies.

One indication that clear language is given priority in the organisation is that the employees actively use clear language tools that the agency has developed during the project period. These may be tools such as a language profile, guidelines, a language service, websites about clear

"After we were given the language profile and after the course, I have changed the way I write a little. Before, we used many standard phrases that were inherent in the system without thinking so much about who was going to receive them. At present I write much more using my own formulations." Employee, agency 4

language etc.,
In-house
surveys show
that a large
proportion of
the employees

in many of the agencies make active use of clear language tools. At the same time, we find certain difference between small and large agencies.

- ◆ In the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, with its roughly 70 employees, 80 per cent respond²² that they use the language profile actively or at times. At the County Governor of Rogaland, just as many respond that they have made use of the language guide, whereas three out of four employees in the Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority state that they have made use of language guidelines and/or rules for writing in their work.
- ◆ In a big organisation like the Norwegian Tax Administration, the percentage is lower. Only thirty per cent of the employees respond that they have made use of the language profile in their work. In the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, another big organisation, half of the respondents state that they frequently follow the guidelines for language.

We find a similar situation when we compare the changes that have occurred in the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority with the changes in the Norwegian Health Economics Administration (HELFO), which is a larger agency. The clear language project in the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority appears to have helped promote changes in writing style and work habits that tend more toward clear language. In HELFO, the changes have trended negatively.

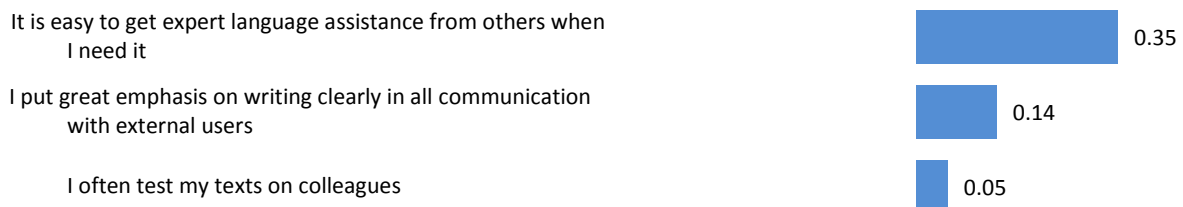
Figures 5.9 and 5.10 illustrate the changes in these two agencies. The figures show the change in the employees' assessments of the following three statements about their own and the organisation's use of language:

1. I put great emphasis on writing clearly and comprehensibly in all communication with external users.
2. It is easy to get expert language assistance from other agencies when you need it
3. I often test my texts on colleagues in order to ensure that they are clear and comprehensible.

²² In the measurement of effects conducted in 2012

The change is represented by a change in the average value on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means *fully disagree* and 5 means *fully agree*. Positive numbers mean that more respondents agree with the statement than before.

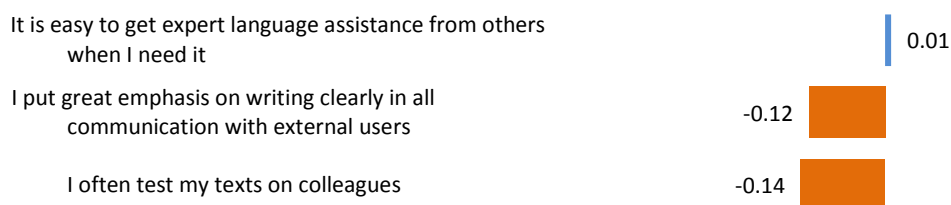
Figure 5.9: Changes in employees' assessments of their own and the organisation's use of language, the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority. The figure shows change in an average value on a scale from 1 to 5.



The employees in the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority often find it much easier than before to get language assistance from others when needed. Many also respond that they put emphasis on clear language when they write, and it has been somewhat more common to test their texts with colleagues. In other words, it looks as if the project has helped the organisation to give higher priority to clear language efforts.

In HELFO, the project does not appear to have had the same effect, as far as we can conclude from figure 5.10. Employees put less emphasis on clear language than they did before. Given that the percentage who feel that they are better equipped to write clear language (cf. figure 5.7, which showed that more respondents had gained increased insight into and more tools that simplify the writing process), this is somewhat surprising. It does not appear as if the clear language project has contributed to increased interaction among colleagues with regard to clear language either. Fewer respondents think that it has become easier to obtain expert language assistance, and fewer test their texts with colleagues.

Figure 5.10: Changes in employees' assessments of their own and the organisation's use of language, the Norwegian Health Economics Administration (HELFO). The figure shows change in an average value on a scale from 1 to 5.



Also in Nav Administration Akershus, the results trend negative. Fewer respondents test their texts with colleagues than before, and fewer feel that it is easy to obtain expert language assistance. There is also a marginally lower proportion who respond that they put great emphasis on clear language when they write.

In order to maintain the awareness about clear language and ensure that it will be integrated into the organisation's working and writing habits, it is crucial that this not be something that must only be given priority by the individual executive officer, but also at the management tier. The middle managers are especially important here. However, the data indicates that middle management in particular gives less priority to clear language than it did before.

Among other things, more persons in charge of the clear language projects efforts than before feel that the middle managers either find it difficult to give priority to clear language efforts or that they are not interested (cf. figure 4.9).

The in-house surveys in HELFO and Nav Administration Akershus support this opinion. Employees there were requested to rate the following statement:

- ◆ I find that my supervisor gives priority to the efforts to promote a clear and comprehensible language.

In both of these agencies, there are fewer respondents who think that their supervisor gives priority to clear language in the survey that was conducted after the project was completed than in the survey the year before. In HELFO, the average value declined by 0.2 points in the course of one year. In Nav Administration Akershus, it declined by 0.1 point.²³ Many of the interviews in other agencies support these findings. Both employees and middle managers feel that the attention given to clear language at the middle management tier has declined after the project was completed. An employee has this to say:

«Everyone in the department was given an offer of a course and was urged by the management to take part, but little attention was devoted to it after that. I would have liked to have seen it ranked a little higher on the agenda.» - Employee, agency 4

In the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority and in BLD, on the other hand, the survey indicates that the management gives priority to clear language to a greater extent than before. The average value increases by 0.15 and 0.18 points respectively; i.e. far more respondents agreed with the statement that supervisors give priority to clear language in the survey after the project was completed.

Moreover, the interviews may indicate that the project has especially affected the work habits and the priorities of those who have actively participated in clear language activities such as courses, language workshops, etc. That is true at both the management and the executive officer tiers. Where clear language is perceived as having become an integral part of the daily work, many justify it precisely because so many worked with clear language during the project period. One of the senior managers put it this way:

"Many people have been involved in the work, and that is the most important thing, not that someone talks about it in a general meeting."

SIMPLER COMMUNICATION

We find it difficult to expect that the individual employee is capable of assessing the whole range of an activity's communication, not least with a view to the scope of individual agencies' portfolio of texts. When we use the assessments of individuals in order to say something about the government agency's communication, it deals first and foremost with the part of the part of the agency's communication with which the person in question is daily involved. By obtaining assessments from persons in various parts of the organisation, the picture becomes more complete and credible.

The persons in charge of the clear language projects in each agency are probably the ones who have the best qualifications for providing a comprehensive assessment of the agency's communication since they have been closely involved with various parts of it during the project period. Their assessments of the agency's communication after the clear language project are very positive. To

²³ Note! The two agencies have used different scales, so the results cannot be directly compared. On a standardised scale, 0.05 points in HELFO are equivalent to 0.02 points in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav). Thus, the change is greatest in HELFO.

questions about how they assess the achievement of goals in the clear language project, three out of four respondents answer that the clear language project to a great or very great extent has achieved the goal of making the written communication simpler (cf. figure 4.13 in the previous chapter). Moreover, that is the objective they regard as having the next highest achievement of goals.

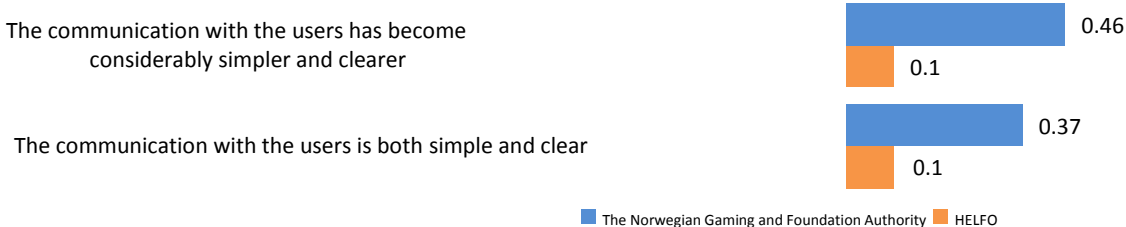
In the in-house surveys, employees are also asked to assess the extent to which the clear language efforts have contributed to making the written communication simpler and easier to understand. In the surveys that HELFO and the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority have conducted after the project was completed, more respondents than before think that the clear language efforts have achieved this goal to a great or very great extent. Also in the government agencies that have conducted only one survey, a majority respond that they think the clear language efforts have helped simplify the communication to a great or very great extent.

In addition, employees were asked to assess the following:

1. To what extent they perceive the communication with the users to be simple and clear at present,
2. To what extent the communication has become simpler and clearer than it was a few years ago.

Figure 5.11 shows that there has been a positive change in both HELFO and the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority. Far more employees regard the communication as simple and clear after the project was completed.

Figure 5.11: Change in view of the use of language in HELFO and the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority. Change in the average value on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means fully disagree and 5 means fully agree.



At the same time, the surveys show that the majority of the employees think that the communication is not nearly simple and clear enough, even though they feel that it has become simpler in recent years. A much smaller percentage agree with the first statement than with the latter. Some examples can illustrate this:

- ◆ In the Norwegian Tax Administration, only 21 per cent agree or fully agree that the communication with the users is simple and clear at present, whereas 57 per cent think that the communication has become simpler and clearer in recent years. The survey was conducted two years after the clear language project commenced.
- ◆ In *the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)*, only one out of four agree that the communication is simple and clear, whereas no one fully agrees with this. On the other hand, two out of three employees agree or fully agree that the communication has become simpler. The survey was conducted after two years with the clear language project.
- ◆ In *Nav Administration Akershus*, 25 per cent of the employees responded that they perceive the agency's communication as simple and clear (fully or partially agree), whereas 40 per cent fully or partially agreed that the communication with the users had become simpler and clearer than it was a few years ago.

The interviews lend support to this impression. In all four government agencies, both employees and managers feel that the communication has changed for the better, and some offer specific examples of this:

"I think we write better now. More precisely, more concisely, more reader-friendly, more aware of the target group."

At the same time, most respondents specify that this mainly concerns texts that the agency has specifically worked on during the project, such as letters, forms and Internet texts. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration, the Norwegian Tax Administration and the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund all called attention to the improvement of texts on their websites. Some employees have also received positive feedback about the websites from users.

Chapter 6

EFFECTS OF THE CLEAR LANGUAGE EFFORTS

The justification for the clear language project has been to simplify and improve the communication with the users. Therefore, the questions we must ask are whether most people feel that letters and other information from the public authorities have become easier to understand and whether this has resulted in a more precise and effective dialogue between the individual user and the government administration.

These are the effects that we will be taking a closer look at in this chapter. First, we examine the extent to which the users' assessments of the information from various government agencies have changed during the period when the clear language project was under way. Secondly, we assess the extent to which any improvements in language have resulted in a more effective exchange of information and in savings in the form of working hours or other resources. This chapter is based on analyses of Difi's surveys of inhabitants and on user surveys and records kept of the interactions with users conducted in certain agencies that are participating in clear language projects.

Analyses of data from Difi's surveys of inhabitants give no evidence for stating that the clear language projects have changed the population's and the users' general assessments of how easy or difficult it is to understand information from government agencies. Even though the trend in people's assessments is headed in the right direction, this trend is weaker in agencies that are participating in clear language projects than in other municipal and central government agencies.

Nevertheless, user surveys conducted in connection with specific language revisions show that the efforts have an effect and that the users find the new texts simpler and easier to understand. However, there will have to be a substantial number of these user experiences before the more general assessments of the government administration's ability to write comprehensibly will change. It is a big step from initiating a clear language project at the top of a civil service pyramid until the results of these efforts materialise to a sufficient extent and in such a way that the users notice it.

Surveys of specific language revisions show that the clear language efforts also give effects in the form of a more effective exchange of information between the government administration and the users. Clearly formulated letters and informative documents do not just result in more people understanding the messages that are sent out. They also reduce the time and resources that the recipients and those close to the recipients must spend on understanding the message. In the next round, this leads to savings in the government administration, both because fewer users have a need to get in touch and because more people will respond correctly to the message they have received.

All of our analyses in this chapter show that clear language efforts take time and must be considered in a long-term perspective. At the same time, they emphasise the importance of maintaining the pressure and ensuring that all of the basic efforts that have been completed in the agencies during the project phase will result in a more extensive production of letters and other information in plain and clear language. Only when clear language reaches the users to a sufficient extent will the actual

benefits of the effort become apparent.

MEASUREMENT OF EFFECTS

The specific goals for the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project have been to attract attention to clear language and to help various parts of the government administration get under way. So far in this report, we have looked at the results of these efforts; i.e. what has actually happened in the government agencies that have initiated clear language efforts and to what extent this has resulted in changes in attention, priorities, organisation and writing culture. Yet it is not these changes in themselves that are the final justification for the efforts. The observed changes are only means to an end and a necessary condition in order to achieve the final goals that we have set.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the Norwegian clear language efforts have been justified in two ways:

- ◆ A democratic justification, which entails that clear language in government communications will give all users equal opportunities and an equivalent processing regardless of resources, level of knowledge and language conditions.
- ◆ An economic justification, which entails that clear language will result in a more effective dialogue between the authorities and the users and that this will yield savings in time and use of resources for both the authorities and those who receive the information.

These are the two overarching objectives that we will focus on in this chapter. First, we examine whether the population has found that letters and other information from various government agencies have become clearer and easier to understand during the years when the clear language efforts have been under way. Secondly, we assess the extent to which any language improvements have resulted in fewer misunderstandings, fewer unnecessary inquiries and thus also a more effective use of the employees' working hours.

Measuring effects such as these is difficult. First of all, the steps are many and long from the initiation of the clear language measures to the users' perception of letters and other communications from the State. Changes in the users' perceptions and reaction patterns will take time and probably require a broad, massive improvement of the information that is received. At the same time, the user's perceptions and reaction patterns are affected by a number of other factors and circumstances, e.g. events or movements that affect people's general confidence in "the public sector". Therefore, it can be difficult to detect the effects of the efforts that are made and to isolate these effects from all other factors that affect the users.

To study the users' assessments of the information that they receive from the government authorities, we first use the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment's (Difi) national surveys of inhabitants. On two occasions, Difi has conducted major surveys of inhabitants, which take the pulse of the Norwegian people's assessment of the municipal and central government administration. These surveys are composed of two parts – a part for inhabitants that deals with the relationship between the inhabitants and the political system in general and a user part that focuses on the users' experiences with and assessments of a number of municipal and central government services and administrative areas. Whereas the inhabitant part is focused on a representative sample of the whole population, the user part is only answered by inhabitants with direct experience from the different administrative areas. Therefore, they are a reasonably precise expression of the specific user groups' experiences and assessments. It is mainly data from this part of the surveys of inhabitants that we use in this chapter. The data for the first of these surveys was gathered in 2009, i.e. only a short time

after the clear language project in the civil service commenced. The gathering of data for the other survey took place in 2012, three to four years after the clear language efforts picked up speed. Although it will probably take more time before we see the full effects of these efforts, enough time has already passed so that it ought to be possible to detect the effects.

Secondly, the users' assessments will also be clarified by means of surveys and evaluations conducted by the government agencies themselves. These are surveys that have been conducted in accordance with the methodological brochure for evaluation efforts that was drawn up as a part of this project.²⁴ Unfortunately, fewer agencies conducted these surveys than we had hoped. In particular, there were few who conducted both a baseline measurement and a measurement of effects, which are necessary in order to be able to assess the direct effects of each individual project. Nevertheless, the surveys provide many valuable insights that can supplement the more general conclusions that we can draw on the basis of the surveys of inhabitants.

We also base our conclusions on the data gathered by the agencies themselves when we measure possible economic effects of the clear language efforts. These are quantitative measurements of what happens after a government agency sends out a letter to a large number of recipients. If the message that is sent out is one hundred per cent clear and comprehensible, we may expect that the recipients:

- a) do not have any need to inquire with the sender in order clarify the content of the message
- b) will not take actions or make mistakes because they have problems understanding the content of the message.

Both of these expectations can be measured by studying the ways in which the recipients relate to the messages that are sent to them. Expectation a) can be tested by counting the number of inquiries that the agency receives from users after a message (a letter, form or informative document) has been sent out. Expectation b) can be tested by studying the users' responses to this kind of message; e.g. if they actually do what the message requests that they do or if the responses that the users give are relevant and correct. The latter applies in situations where the message contains a requirement or a request that the users shall give a response; e.g. by filling out a form, complying with a response deadline, etc.

Unfortunately only a few agencies have conducted these measurements. Therefore, it is impossible to give a comprehensive estimate of the economic effects of the clear language project.

Nevertheless, the results give clear indications of the savings that can be achieved through various types of measures.

²⁴ Ryssevik, Jostein and Dahle, Malin (2011): *Evaluering av prosjektet «Klart språk i staten»*. Rapport fra underveisevaluering. (Evaluation of the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project. Report from the formative evaluation.) Ideas2evidence report 10/2011.

HAS THE INFORMATION FROM THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION BECOME EASIER TO UNDERSTAND?

THE POPULATIONS' ASSESSMENTS

In part 1 of the survey of inhabitants, a representative sample of the Norwegian population is asked to rate a number of statements about the government authorities. Many of these statements deal with how easy it is to understand various aspects of the government authorities' communication. The responses were given on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "fully disagree" and 5 means "fully agree". In table 6.1 below, we have gathered the responses to some of these questions in 2010 and 2013. The table shows how the population has responded on the average. The higher the average value, the more the population agrees with the relevant statement. Average values over 3.0 mean that the population as a whole tends to agree with the statement.

Table 6.1: The population's agreement with statements about the government authorities, the surveys of inhabitants in 2010 and 2013, part 1 (average on a scale from 1 to 5).

	2010	2013	Change
Public authorities' decisions in individual cases are easy to understand	2.83	2.87	+0.04
Public authorities' letters, brochures, etc. are easy to understand	3.12	3.12	0.00
Public authorities' forms are comprehensible and easy to fill out	2.97	3.00	+0.03
Public authorities' services are adapted to the users' needs	2.83	2.82	- 0.01
The public authorities offer services of good quality	3.45	3.50	+0.05

The first three of these statements deal with various measures of how easy it is to understand communication from the public authorities. For two of these statements a slight improvement can be registered. The population agrees a little more that decisions in individual cases are easy to understand (+0.04) and that forms are comprehensible and easy to fill out (+0.03). On the other hand, no change can be detected in the statement that it is easy to understand the government authorities' letters and forms.

The last two statements in table 6.1 are included as a check in order to be able to decide the extent to which the population's assessments of the government authorities' use of language has changed more or less than their assessments of other aspects of the relationship between the government authorities and the users. The results do not give an unambiguous answer. The assessments of the quality of the public sector's services in general has trended positive (+0.05), but no noticeable changes can be detected in the assessment of user adaptation.

In other words, part 1 of the survey of inhabitants gives no grounds for asserting that the population's assessments of communication from the public authorities have been assessed as more positive during the years when the clear language project has been under way. The trend is in the right direction, but is weak and about at the same level as the changes we find in other areas.

Nevertheless, there are many reasons why we cannot use this result as a confirmation that the clear language efforts have not had any effect. First of all, this survey went out to a general sample of the population, not just to the actual users of various government services. It is the actual users who will first feel that letters and other communication become clearer and who will probably also

express this opinion. The general assessments of the population will probably be more difficult to affect. Secondly, and probably even more important, this is an assessment of government communication in general; i.e. communication from municipalities and county authorities as well as the central government. Even though municipalities and county authorities may have also improved their use of language during the period, it is primarily agencies in the public sector that have conducted systematic clear language efforts. As such, data material from part 1 of the survey of inhabitants gives an imprecise test of the effects of these efforts.

THE USERS' ASSESSMENTS

The data material from part 2 of the surveys of inhabitants meets both of these objections. First of all, these surveys are aimed at real users of the individual government agencies and services, not at the whole population. Secondly, the users have been asked to assess the communication from each agency separately. Among other things, this gives us an opportunity to distinguish between agencies that have implemented a clear language project and agencies that have not done so.

Altogether, 23 agencies have been included in these surveys. Ten of them are central government, the rest are municipal or county. Of the central government agencies, four have implemented major clear language projects and received grants from the main project. The other six may also have worked for clear language, but have not applied for support for a major project or been significantly involved in the main cooperation. It is also possible that individual municipalities or selected agencies within these municipalities have worked for clear language, but this is probably less extensive than at the central government level. The placement of agencies in the four boxes in table 6.2 is therefore not absolute, but based on a discretionary assessment of where they best belong.

Table 6.2: Overview of agencies that are included in the surveys of inhabitants, part 2.

	Municipal/county	Central government
Clear language project		Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, Nav, Norwegian Tax Administration, Norwegian Public Roads
Not clear language project	Day care centre, library, regular GP, primary school, domestic help service, home nursing, health clinics, sheltered accommodation/retirement home, Agency for Planning and Building Services, day-care facilities for school children, nursing home, accident and emergency unit, upper secondary school	University college, church, police, hospital ²⁵ , the the Customs Service, university ²⁶

²⁵ Within the health sector, for example, the Health Economics Administration (HELFO) has implemented a clear language project

²⁶ Two of the universities, the University of Bergen and the University of Tromsø have implemented a limited clear language project and received support from the main project, but we have chosen nonetheless to not include the university sector among the agencies that are participating in clear language projects

Also part 2 of the survey of inhabitants includes questions about how easy or difficult it is to perform various tasks. The responses are given on a scale of -3 to +3, where -3 means "very difficult" and +3 means "very easy". The average values for some of these questions for the four agencies that are participating in clear language projects are presented in table 6.3. The higher the average value, the easier the users think it is to perform the various tasks. Average values above 0.0 mean that the population as a whole is trending toward perceiving the task as easy.

Table 6.3: The users' assessments of how easy or difficult it is to perform various tasks, the surveys of inhabitants 2010 and 2013, part 2 (average on a scale from -3 to 3).

Finding information	Understanding information	Understanding what is said	Understanding how forms are to be filled out
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The Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund	2010	1.35	1.20	1.06	1.38
	2013	1.63	1.29	1.10	1.50
	Change	0.28	0.09	0.04	0.12
The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav)	2010	0.63	0.27	0.84	0.20
	2013	1.39	0.44	0.96	0.28
	Change	0.76	0.17	0.12	0.08
The Norwegian Tax Administration	2010	1.02	0.53	0.98	0.59
	2013	1.20	0.70	1.09	0.58
	Change	0.18	0.17	0.11	-0.01
The Norwegian Public Roads Administration	2010	0.78	0.95	1.22	0.93
	2013	1.16	1.14	1.36	1.02
	Change	0.38	0.19	0.14	0.09

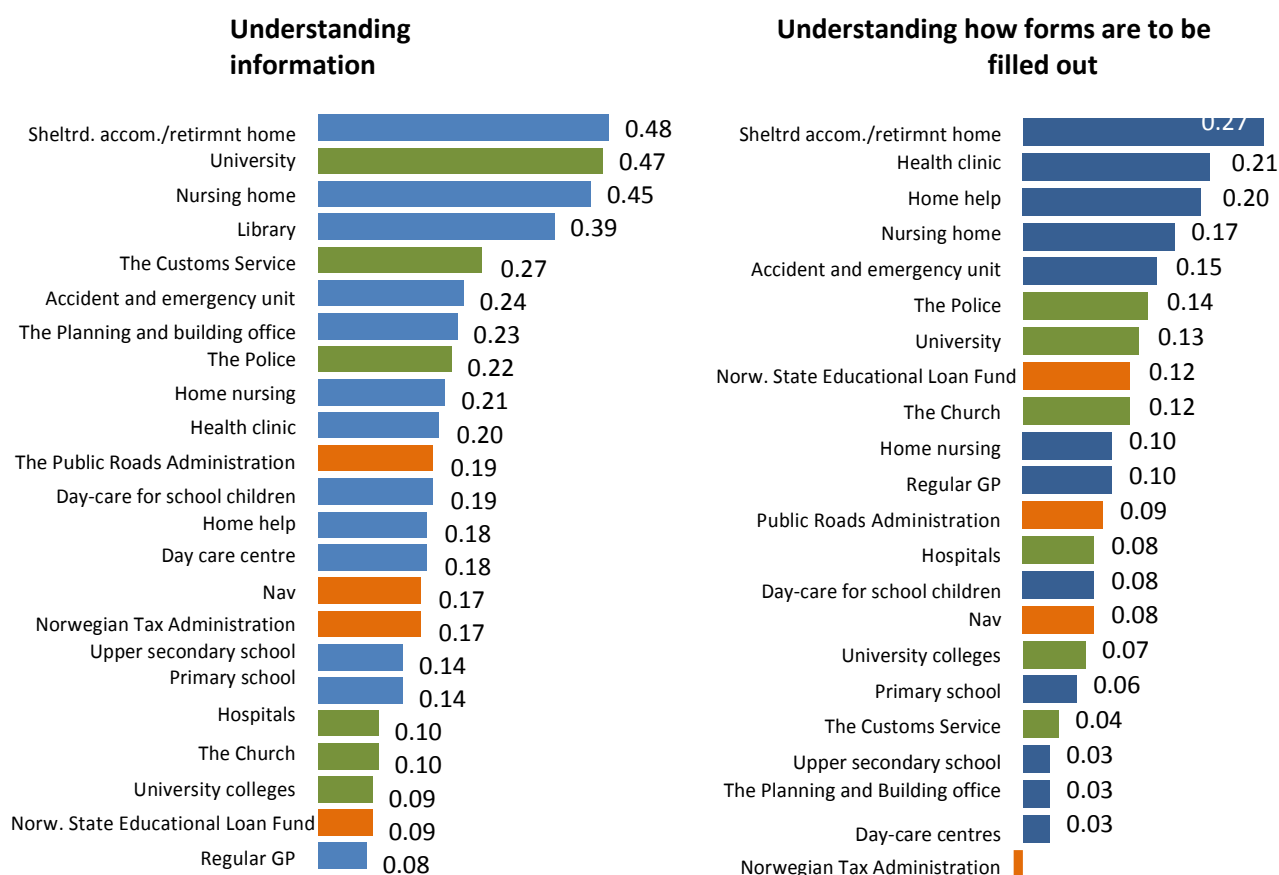
It is the questions about understanding information and about understanding how forms are to be filled out that are most closely affiliated with clear language. The two other questions are also relevant, but the relationship is somewhat looser. Finding information will be easier if the clear language principles are followed, but this is still a task with a somewhat broader content than language comprehension. Among other things, it involves which channels are to be used to convey information and how easy it is to find what you need on the agency's website. The same applies to information that is communicated orally in meetings or by phone. If the agency's language information material becomes clearer, there is reason to believe that this will gradually also make the oral exchange of information simpler and easier to understand. Yet, whereas the written information is standardised and equivalent for everyone to a certain extent, the oral communication is much freer and decided to a great extent by the individual executive officer's ability to formulate language. Therefore, the relationship is loose.

The results in table 6.3 show that all average values are positive; i.e. that there are more users who feel that the tasks are easy than those who feel that they are difficult. We also find that the trend on the whole has been positive. The users found the various tasks easier in 2013 than in 2010. The only exception is the filling out of forms in the Norwegian Tax Administration.

In all four of the agencies, the task is "to find information" had the most positive trend. This is probably because the agencies have improved their web-based information resources. It is also worth noting that the task of "understanding information" has undergone a more positive trend on the whole than "understanding what is said". In other words, the agencies' written communication of information has improved more than the oral. Seen in isolation, this can be interpreted as a confirmation that the clear language efforts in the four government agencies have had an effect.

In order to be able to decide whether this is really the case, we must also look at the trend in activities that have not had a clearly defined clear language project. If the targeted clear language efforts so far have had an effect, we will expect a greater positive change in the users' assessments of agencies that are participating in clear language projects than of agencies that are not participating in any such project. The trend for the two questions that have the clearest association with clear language is shown in figure 6.1. The two figures show change in the average value from 2010 to 2013 for all agencies that are included in the second part of the survey of inhabitants. The higher the value, the more positive the trend has been during the period.

Figure 6.1: The users' assessments of how easy or difficult it is to perform various tasks, the surveys of inhabitants 2010 and 2013, part 2 (change in average from 2010 to 2013).



The positive trend that we registered for the four agencies that are participating in clear language projects can also be observed for the other agencies. In fact, many of the municipal agencies (blue bars) show a more positive trend than the central government agencies that are participating in a clear language project (orange bars).²⁷ The same applies to the central government agencies that are not participating in a clear project (green bars), e.g. the universities, the Customs Service and the Police. This is summarised in table 6.4, which shows the average change in the three groups of agencies. The municipal agencies have undergone the most positive trend both for the question of "understanding information" and "understanding how forms should be filled out", closely followed by central government agencies that are not participating in a clear language project. Consequently, the weakest trend has been in agencies that are making a systematic clear language effort.

²⁷ It ought to be noted that many municipalities are concerned about and have worked with clear language. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this work has had a scope that may affect the results in a national survey of inhabitants with respondents from the whole country.

Table 6.4: The users' assessments of how easy or difficult it is to perform various tasks, the surveys of inhabitants 2010 and 2013, part 2 (change in average from 2010 to 2013).

	Municipal agencies	Central government agencies not participating in a clear language project	Central government agencies participating in a clear language project
Understanding information	0.24	0.21	0.16
Understanding how forms are to be filled out	0.12	0.10	0.07

It is difficult to determine the fundamental causes of this observation. A highly reasonable interpretation is that clear language efforts take time. After initiating a clear language project at the top of a civil service pyramid, it takes a long time before the results of these efforts materialise to a sufficient extent and in such a way that the users take notice. First of all, there are many tasks that must be performed before the agency gets so far in the efforts that new letters and new information material are actually put to use. Secondly, many of the agencies are large and complex and have a very big portfolio of text that requires revision. Among other things, this applies to the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav) and the Norwegian Tax Administration, about which we have data here. Even though agencies like this have gotten well under way with the work, there is probably still only a small part of the total volume of text that has been revised. Thirdly, many agencies have encountered technical challenges in the implementation of the clear language efforts. For example, Nav has revised a great number of standard letters that have not yet been put to use because the agency's outdated IT systems do not permit it. In this way, the clear language projects may have paved the way for a positive trend, but without any of the effects of the efforts having yet become apparent to a sufficient extent to affect the users' assessments.

The fact that the users of all of the agencies think it has become easier to understand the information that the agencies send out, can perhaps be interpreted as an expression of a general improvement of the language in letters and other information from the government authorities. The users do not usually clearly distinguish between information from different agencies, but have observed that the trend is going in the right direction. Therefore, the variations that we have observed among the agencies may be attributed to the composition of the various user groups more than any real differences in improvement in language.

It is also possible that the variations among the agencies are an expression to a greater extent of how the general reputation of the individual agencies has developed during the three year period. If this is the case, it is not the language improvements in themselves that determine how the users have responded, but the more general perception of each individual agency.

It is possible to test the validity of this explanation. We can do so by looking at how the assessments of the agencies' language have evolved in comparison with the more general assessments of the agencies. Here, we have employed a question where those who were questioned were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the various agencies all in all. The trend in response to this question has also been positive. In fact, no agencies had a lower average value in 2013 than in 2010. The biggest improvement came in the Customs Service where the average value has increased by 0.46 points. We find the least improvement in the day-care centres, the university colleges and the hospitals, where the assessments were the same in both years.

In table 6.5, we have started with the change in the average for the two clear language questions and subtracted the change in the average value of the general reputation question. Agencies where the assessments of the language have trended more positively than their reputation will therefore have a positive value. If the assessment of the language trends less positively than the general reputation, the value will be negative. The higher the value, the more positive the assessment of language relative to the general reputation.

Table 6.5: The users' assessments of how easy or difficult it is to perform various tasks compared with the agencies' general reputation, the surveys of inhabitants 2010 and 2013, part 2 (change in average from 2010 to 2013).

	Municipal agencies	Central government agencies not participating in a clear language project	Central government agencies participating in a clear language project
Understanding information	0.13	0.07	-0.06
Understanding how forms are to be filled out	0.00	-0.04	-0.15

When we compensate for changes in the general reputation, government agencies that are participating in a clear language project do worse than the two other groups. Indeed, to questions about understanding information only the agencies that are participating in a clear language project trend less positively than the general reputation. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration, the Norwegian Tax Administration and the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund all trend negatively, whereas the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav) trends slightly positively.

Government agencies that are participating in a clear language project also do worst in the question about understanding how forms are to be filled out, although the other government agencies also trend negatively in this area. The Norwegian Tax Administration and the Norwegian Public Roads Administration trend most negatively.

Thus, the analyses of the data from the surveys of inhabitants give no evidence that the clear language projects have had any effect so far. Even though the results suggest a positive trend in the users' assessment of the agencies' written communication, this trend is weaker in government agencies that are participating in clear language projects than in other municipal and central government agencies.

However, it ought to be noted that only four central government agencies that are participating in a clear language project have been included in the survey of inhabitants (part 2). Moreover, two of these, the Norwegian Tax Administration and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, are very complex agencies with extensive amounts of text and a large number of letters and forms that require revision. Therefore, it is uncertain to what extent the results from these analyses are representative for the total group of agencies that are participating in a clear language project. It should also be regarded as positive that the users of all agencies find the communication easier to understand in 2013 than in 2010. This may be because language and the use of language have attracted more attention in the government administration in general and because that has made communication with the users easier to understand, regardless of whether or not the agency has implemented a targeted clear language project. This more or less agrees with an observation that was made in the formative evaluation of the project in 2011. We found at that time that a number of government agencies that had not received funding from the main project nevertheless carried

out a substantial clear language effort and that the agencies gave particular priority to text revision and competence building.²⁸

Some of the agencies that are participating in clear language projects have also conducted surveys that can be used to measure the effects of the work that has been performed. The Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, for example, conducted user surveys in 2011 and 2012. This happened in a period where the Authority had revised over 100 letters and letter templates in addition to all of the information on their website - all of which was in keeping with a new language profile that was put into use in 2011. Some of the results of these surveys are shown in table 6.6:

Table 6.6: The users' assessment of the language in the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, 2010 and 2011, the agency's own user surveys (per cent)

	The agency writes with plain and clear language (% who agree)		The agency's employees use simple and comprehensible formulations (% who agree)	
	2011	2012	2011	2012
The Gaming Authority	72%	78%	76%	79%
The Foundation Authority	71%	74%	74%	76%
VAT compensation	67%	76%	78%	81%

The results show a marked improvement in both written information and ability to formulate orally. In addition, the trend is positive in all three of the departments.

Similar surveys have been conducted by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration in connection with clear language revision of three standard letters, one with a reminder about EU inspections, one about re-registration and one about removal of number plates from cars. The surveys were conducted here on two groups of users, a group that received the revised letter and a control group that received the older letter. In addition to questioning the users, the Norwegian Public Roads Administration also conducted parallel surveys of the employees in first-line support; i.e. at the district offices and in service of the public. Employees in first-line support are often in the role of intermediary between agency and user and help the users to understand and relate to the information they receive. Therefore, they are well placed to know the extent to which the users understand the letters that the agency sends out. It is also the first-line support that gets the extra work when the information that is sent out requires clarification.

²⁸ Ryssevik, Jostein and Dahle, Malin (2011): *Evaluering av prosjektet «Klart språk i staten». Rapport fra underveisevaluering.* (Evaluation of the "Clear language in Norway's civil service" project. Report from the formative evaluation.) Ideas2evidence report 10/2011.

Table 6.7: The users and the first-line support employees' assessment of old and new letters in the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, the agency's own surveys (per cent) ²⁹

	EU inspections		Re-registration		Removal of number plates	
THE USERS: Percentage who fully agree that...	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
... the language in the letter is easy to understand	42%	60%	36%	43%	48%	53%
... the text answers my questions	40%	55%	30%	38%	35%	53%
... it is easy to find relevant information	37%	57%	39%	33%	39%	47%
... it is easy to understand what the Norwegian Public Roads Administration wants me to do	52%	71%	42%	43%	52%	59%
	EU inspections		Re-registration and removal of number plates			
THE EMPLOYEES: Percentage who state that the users rarely have questions about the letter because...	Old	New	Old	New		
... the language is difficult to understand	24%	29%	23%	28%		
... the text does not answer my questions	16%	25%	16%	21%		
... it is difficult to find relevant information	16%	25%	19%	25%		
... it is difficult to understand what the Norwegian	15%	29%	13%	24%		

The results from the surveys are convincing and show that the three revisions of letters have had a marked effect (cf. table 6.7). The percentage of users who fully agree that the letter is easy to understand has increased considerably and especially for the letter about EU inspections. The percentage that fully agrees that it is easy to understand what the Norwegian Public Roads Administration wants them to do has increased by fully 19 percentage points. The employees in the first-line support have also noted the changes. These employees have started with the reasons why users contact the first-line support after the letter is sent. The percentage of employees who say that the users very rarely contact them because it is difficult to understand what the Norwegian Public Roads Administration wants them to do has increased from 15 to 29 per cent for the letter about EU inspections and from 13 to 24 per cent for the other two letters. As we shall see later in this chapter, the number of inquires because of the letters has also decreased significantly after the revision.

The two examples from the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority and the Norwegian Public Roads Administration show that it is possible to trace the effects of specific clear language revisions when the precision in the surveys is high enough. This particularly applies to the surveys from the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, which are aimed first of all at recipients of specific letters and which also include questions that relate directly to two different versions of these letters. It is at this level that the users see the specific results of the language efforts that are under way in the agencies, and there will probably have to be a substantial number of these user findings before the more general assessments of the government administration's ability to write comprehensibly will change. If this is a correct observation, it strengthens the hypothesis that it will still take time before the clear language efforts will yield marked changes in the users' assessments. Yet at the same time,

²⁹ The questions to the users are rated on a scale of 1 to 6 where 1 means "full disagree" and 6 means "fully agree". It is the percentage who have chosen alternative 6, "fully agree", who are reported in this table. Likewise, the questions to the first-line support were rated on a scale of 1 to 6 where 1 means "very rarely" and 6 means "very often". It is the percentage who have chosen alternative 1, "very rarely", who are reported in this table.

it emphasises the importance of maintaining the pressure and ensuring that all of the basic efforts that have been implemented in the agencies will result in a more extensive production of letters and other information in plain and clear language.

Unfortunately, we have not had access to other similar surveys from other agencies that can support this conclusion more clearly. Many agencies have conducted user tests, but only at one point in time and without a similar "before/after" design such as the Norwegian Public Roads Administration has employed. The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav) has conducted user testing of old and new letters, but based on qualitative methods. The results of these user tests are positive, but the effects cannot be quantified.

HAS THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND THE USERS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE?

Clear language does not just involve giving all of the users equal opportunities independent of resources, level of knowledge and language conditions - the democratic argument. It also involves the effectiveness in the dialogue between the government administration and the users, and the fact that a clear and comprehensible language will result in savings of time and resources for both the government administration and the users. This is the argument that we shall take a closer look at in the rest of this chapter.

When a government agency sends out information to its users, this very often entails informing them about rights and duties. If the recipient has to spend an extra long time interpreting the message or needs to seek assistance from friends and family, this results in extra costs for both the user and those who provide assistance. If the user chooses not to seek assistance, even though he/she has a need for it, this has other potential costs; e.g. loss of rights, need for follow-up and reminders, etc.

Unclear communication also has economic consequences for the administrative unit that sends out the information. First of all, the users may inquire with the government agency's first-line support because they do not understand all or part of a letter or informative document they have received. For a standard letter with many thousand recipients, this may entail a substantial use of resources. Secondly, many letters or documents that are sent out require that the user shall give a response or do something in particular; e.g. submit an application, fill out a form, receive or pay money, meet a deadline, etc. These responses may be correct or relevant, or they may contain errors, come too late, etc. Both inquiries to get a clarification of the content of a letter and incorrect reaction to letters that have been sent out result in extra costs for the agency and the user.

FROM THE USERS' POINT OF VIEW

Surveys that have been conducted by the government agencies give us a possibility of studying these effects. We begin with the users. In the Norwegian Public Roads Administration's user tests of old and new letters, the recipients were asked how much time they spent on the letter from the time it was opened until they fully understood what the Public Roads Administration wanted them to do. The results are shown in table 6.8:

Table 6.8: Time spent understanding the content of old and new letters from the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, the agency's own user surveys

	EU inspection		Re-registration		Removal of number plates	
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Less than one minute	46%	69%	30%	33%	48%	72%
1-2 minutes	35%	29%	27%	48%	19%	25%
3-5 minutes	15%	2%	33%	13%	23%	3%
6-10 minutes	4%	0%	6%	3%	6%	0%
More than 10 minutes	0%	0%	3%	5%	3%	0%
Average number of minutes ³⁰	1.50	0.72	2.67	2.16	2.28	0.73
Number of hours for 100,000 letters	2 500	1 192	4 450	3 592	3 800	1 217
Number of hours saved for 100,000 letters		1.308		858		2.583
Time savings in per cent		52%		19%		68%

We see that all of the three revised letters have given considerable time savings compared with the old letters, from 19 per cent for the letter about re-registration of cars to 68 per cent for the letter about removal of number plates. Since many letters from the government administration go out to very large groups of users, we have estimated the total time savings for the three letters for 100,000 recipients. For the letter about removal of number plates from cars, this entails a total savings of 2,583 hours; for the letter about re-registration it entails a savings of 858 hours.

A more important question than the actual time spent is whether the users understand the content of the letter and what they may do if they do not understand it. In a survey conducted by Nav, two types of letters were tested on a large number of users. These were letters in their original form before language revision. The first letter was an individual decision about the work assessment allowance; the second was an individual decision about parental benefits. Both of the letters distinguished between users whose applications were granted and users who received a rejection.

The first interesting observation from this survey is that a relatively large percentage of the recipients have not read the whole letter. About 22 per cent had only read part of the letter about parental benefits and one per cent had not read the letter at all. The corresponding numbers for the letter about the work assessment allowance look somewhat better: seven and one and a half per cent respectively. The two most important reasons that are given why the whole letter has not been read are that it is too long or that the language is too difficult. In other words, the letter had a form and a language that caused a substantial percentage of the recipients to put it aside without reading the whole content. One of the recipients of the letter about parental benefits pointed out in an in-depth interview: "The letter does not encourage reading at all. 'Don't read me,' is what it actually seems to say."

The survey also shows that many of those who read the whole letter had a difficult time understanding what it was about. Only 59 per cent stated that they understood the content after having read the letter one time. Fully 32 per cent had to read the letter several times before they understood the content, and 8 per cent reported that there was still a lot that they did not understand even after having read the letter many times. In other words, the formulation and language of the letter not only caused many recipients to choose not to read the whole letter, but

³⁰ The average is calculated by means of the mean numbers for each interval weighted with the percentage that have chosen this interval. The alternative "under one minute" has been set at a half minute; the alternative "over 10 minutes" has been set at 15 minutes.

also among those who have read it, there was a considerable number who had not understood the whole content. That may mean that as many as 30 per cent (22 + 8) have not been aware, or understood, what the parental benefits letter was about. For the users, this may mean that they miss out on important information about what they should probably do as a result of the decision in the letter. Among other things, 14 per cent of those whose application for parental benefits was rejected state that it was not clearly stated in the letter whether or not the application had been approved.

Around 17 per cent of the recipients stated that they needed help in order to understand the content of the letter. This percentage is obviously especially high for recipients who do not speak Norwegian (42 per cent), but even among those who have Norwegian as their mother tongue, 11 per cent stated that they needed help. About half of those who had a need for assistance (56 per cent), received assistance from friends, family or others they know. Yet we also see that 38 per cent went to the Nav office, 27 per cent called the office and around 4 per cent sent an e-mail. In other words, the two letters gave rise to a considerable traffic in Nav's first-line support (cf. below). Although there will always be a need for this type of assistance, some parts of this traffic could probably be avoided if the decision letters had a clearer and simpler formulation.

However, the letters also give people a feeling of powerlessness. Just under five per cent of those who need assistance in order to understand the letter say that they do not know what they are supposed to do. There are also one and a half per cent who do not think that they will do anything.

All in all, Nav's user survey of the old letters about the work assessment allowance and parental benefits shows that an unclear and difficult language has significant consequences for both the users and the agency itself. Many do not understand the content of the letters, spend a lot of extra time trying to understand what they are about and need help and assistance from family and friends as well as from Nav's first-line support. Unfortunately, Nav has not conducted equivalent quantitative user surveys of the revised letters, which would have given us opportunities to quantify the savings that can be achieved. However, qualitative surveys confirm that the revised letters have become considerably easier to understand.

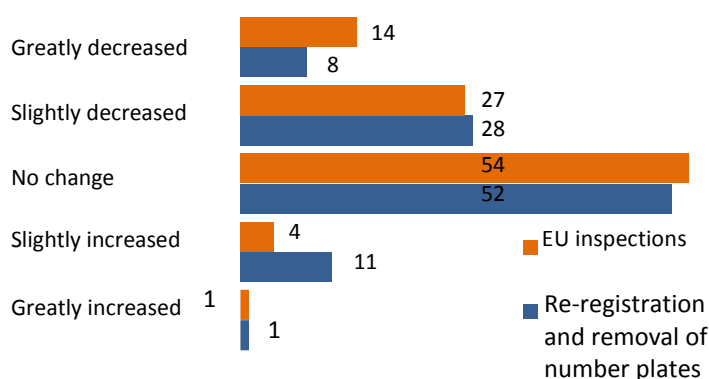
FROM THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION'S POINT OF VIEW

For the government administration, unclear communication results first and foremost in extra demands on the first-line support. However, it also results in the need for further follow-up because the users do not always respond to decisions as expected or because they give incorrect or insufficient information in the ongoing communication with the agency. It is extremely difficult to quantify the costs that unclear communication imposes on the government administration or alternatively the savings that can be achieved if the decision letter and other information from the agencies are formulated in a clearer and more comprehensible way. The methodological brochure that was drawn up as part of this project includes procedures for measurements among users and in the first-line support in order to measure the potential for cost savings. Unfortunately only a few of the agencies have conducted measurements of this sort in a way that enables us to use them in this study. However, the small amount of empirical evidence that we have is unambiguous.

The previously mentioned surveys of the Norwegian Public Roads Administration give clear indications that the inquiries to the first-line support have decreased after the new letters were put into use. Although a few employees at the district offices and in service of the public think that the number of inquiries related to the letters has gone up, the trend is clearly in the direction of reduced traffic. For the letter about EU inspections, 41 per cent of the employees state that the number of inquiries has

gone slightly or considerably down. For the letters about re-registration and removal of number plates, the corresponding number is 36 per cent.

Figure 6.2: Changes in the first-line support's time spent on servicing inquiries after old and new letters are sent out by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, the agency's own user surveys (per cent)



The Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority has also made attempts to assess the effect that a number of revised letters and a new website have had on the traffic in their first-line support. Here, the measurements were made by logging the number of inquiries and the time spent in connection with them before and after the most extensive text revisions were carried out. The results are unambiguous. In the administrative team, the number of inquiries was reduced from 382 to 271 per month; i.e. a reduction of 29 per cent. Even for a small agency like the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, which serves a limited number of users, this amounts to a monthly time savings of 18.2 hours.

Table 6.9: Logged time spent on servicing inquiries in the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority, 2011 and 2012, the agency's own surveys

	Number of inquiries per month	Conversation time per month
2011	382	57.8 hours
2012	271	39.6 hours
% reduction	29%	31%

Many agencies have conducted surveys among their employees with questions about the extent to which they have felt that the communication with the users has become more effective and resulted in smaller workload in the form of inquiries and errors. The Health Economics Administration (HELFO) has conducted these surveys twice, so this gives us opportunities to measure changes. The employees were asked to assess the extent to which they had achieved different goals for the clear language efforts and the responses were given on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "to a very little extent" and 5 means "to a very great extent". The results, which are summarised in table 6.10, are average values on this scale for some of the most relevant questions. The higher the value, the greater the achievement of goals. Values above 3.0 mean that the agencies on the average are trending positively.

Table 6.10: The employees' experiences of effects of the clear language efforts in HELFO, 2012 and 2013, the agency's own surveys (average)

	Made the written communication simpler	Reduced the number of inquiries	Reduced the number of errors in responses from the users
Average (2012)	3.45	3.01	3.06
Average (2013)	3.72	3.36	3.37
Change	0.27	0.35	0.31

We can make two interesting observations from this table. First of all, the employees are more in agreement that the clear language efforts have made the written communication simpler than that it has resulted in fewer inquiries and fewer errors in the responses from the users. In other words, the farther along the causal chain we come, the more difficult it becomes to observe the results of the efforts that have been made. Secondly, the table shows a marked improvement in the achievement of goals from the winter of 2012, when the first survey was conducted, to the spring of 2013 when the survey was repeated. We also see that this improvement is somewhat higher for the two questions that measure the effects of simpler communication than for the question that measures whether the language has actually become simpler. It is reasonable to interpret both of these observations as a new strengthening of the hypothesis that the clear language efforts take time and that it is necessary to work slowly and objectively and achieve a significant improvement in the written communication before we can expect to harvest the socio-economic rewards.

The survey that we have conducted among all of the government agencies that are participating in clear language projects in 2011 and 2013 strengthens this train of thought. Here, as mentioned, it is the persons in charge of the clear language projects in each individual agency who have answered on behalf of their agency. Table 6.11 shows the results for the same questions that were asked in HELFO's survey. The results for both years only include responses from agencies that had initiated a targeted clear language effort at the time when the first survey was conducted. In other words, agencies that have initiated clear language efforts after 2011 are not included. This means that for the most part it is the same agencies that are included at both points in time and that the surveys give a picture of the achievement of goals at two different levels of maturity in these agencies' clear language efforts. The agencies are still at different stages of these efforts, but all of them have come two years further since the last time they were measured.



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