PLAIN LANGUAGE LAMENT

BY

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A imagine a movie with point/counterpoint scenes following a frustrating boardroom episode during which an expert expressed something important to the boss's rebuff.

Crowded cubicle. Certificates and degrees pinned up. Motley team huddling.

EXPERT

This is important. It's complicated… and can't be even slightly off. All the complexity's gone: just basic inputs and outcomes. How could anybody who knows this category be confused? How do we innovate if we don't do the complicated stuff?

Spacious executive office. Paneling with framed pictures of celebrities. Natty subordinates gathered.

BIG BOSS

We got where we are because we're smart, not stupid. But we can only make decisions we understand. The market won't accept confusing innovations. I've

had enough of his nonsense. From now on plain language *only! No buzz words.*

No technical jargon. Clear and simple.

Tension and confusion would build with each subsequent encounter, the protagonists dredging themselves deeper into their own ruts.

Scott Adams found Dilbert™ fame and fortune because we all know these people and we know how this plays out in all but a rare few organizations. The boss draws the Plain Language bludgeon, giving authority to layers of protective human shielding from technical crap.[1] The expert becomes ever more disheartened until (s)he leaves.

The problem is not abstruse techno-jargon

The source of tension is they're both right. The solution is wrong, but the false wisdom of accessibility makes Plain Language alluring.[2] Advocates raise the spirit of Einstein, who allegedly said everything should be as simple as possible. Or, they refer to Ockham's Razor, that tells us that of two explanations the simpler is to be preferred. In both cases, plain language advocates overlook inconvenient context.

1. The second part of Einstein's sentiment is: "and no simpler."

2. *In his domain*, Einstein could deal with something that at its simplest was still mighty complicated. He did not say, "Make it persistently simpler so the untrained pretend to understand what has become nonsense to those who do."

3. Ockham's Razor is actually refers to failure of dependencies. Faced with a clear and simple explanation revealing dependence on three critical outcomes and a techno-babble option relying only on one, Ockham would support the latter.

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[1] I will continue to use Plain Language to represent an executive demand for plain language.

[2] Ironically, this brief essay exposes the tension between precision and accessibility. Opting for accessible, I dulled the technical language and buried various psychological principles in metaphors, anecdotes, and descriptions. Some will claim it is insufficiently academic/technical to be authoritative. Had I sharpened the technical precision, one could expect claims of opaque, impenetrable prose.

The point is that Plain Language has limits and may not hurt anything, but it won't necessarily help. It is but one blunt solution among others that may be more effective and valuable. Specifically, education and personal responsibility would go a long way.

Where did Plain Language come from?

Make no mistake: Plain Language is a juggernaut of social conformance with at least three distinct international organizations and a full-fledged policing organization in every US federal government department complying with the *Plain Writing Act (2010)*. These organizations are dedicated to propositions about plain language such as:

> A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.[3]

Plain language, itself, is…

> Writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.[4]

The genesis of this movement is usually attributed to convoluted and opaque government language (Bureaucratese), or to the indecipherable language of the law (Legalese). Both cases tend to stray far from achieving the communication goals outlined in the preceding quotations. Both areas, never mind the medical profession and so many other specialties, could stand a shake up.[5]

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[3] Plain Language Association International (plainlanguagenetwork.org)

[4] Plain Language Action and Information Network (plainlanguage.gov)

[5] On a separate note, my search yielded an exceedingly small number of hits for organizations that are not American or Canadian in origin. It may be a filter bubble, with DuckDuckGo inhibiting my search. That said, perhaps the literacy legacy of Orwell and the persnickety French simply means more people are more able to write (and read) proper prose.

Plain Language, for those objectives, is what some of us were taught in grade 7 and compelled to do in post-secondary study: be clear. But there is such a distressing shortfall in language skills, especially in written form, that the more-recently and less educated are stymied by any complication while the over-educated recede into tribal tongues. Both speak to the state of our society that we have neither the time, space, nor franchise to explore here.

This is, however, the crux of the problem. Just as left and right pull excessively in response to an unbalancing force from the other, so do many of those now raising the Plain Language standard. It has become an all-purpose complaint beyond its original intent. As one leading light of the movement says, "Language that is clear, or plain, for one group of people may be nonsense for another." That statement continues, placing the burden is on the communicator: "We must consider the readers' cultural context, vocabulary, and expectations…"[6]

That's reasonable as far as it goes. It just doesn't go far. No doubt, the communicator has the control, the ability, and the obligation, really, to manage communication efficacy by doing what Ms Stephens suggests. By contrast, it suggests no obligation on recipients of communication preparing for it. For instance, by being sufficiently educated for the communication not to be nonsense.

A stated principle of the Plain Language movement is to achieve complete and full communication. Fabulous. But could everyone understand a clear and simple communication about a complicated or sophisticated subject? Undoubtedly not. And this is precisely where Plain Language is abused by too often being rallied to aid incompetence or ignorance as though more clarity could magically make the unschooled understand.[7]

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[6] Plainlanguage.com Cheryl Stephens <retrieved Jan 2018>
[7] It reminds me of when I travelled by train through the Alps with my mother. When the people sharing our

How did we get here?

This regressive condition has evolved in response to four developments: the expanding scale of business organizations, the rise of the professional manager, the hollowing out of middle management, and the ascendance of consumer culture.

Scale

Enterprise organizations long ago grew too large and their many necessary specializations too diverse for any single executive to be expertly proficient at many, let alone all of them. And every functional specialty continues to become ever richer and more sophisticated. This is inevitable and the same path trod by militaries since the Roman Empire. In enterprises as in the military, the complexity of organization and purpose, let alone the tools, techniques, and relevant battlefields are so varied and vast that bureaucracy of expertise is not optional.

In civilian organizations that are somewhat immune to "P" politics, senior leaders are typically chosen based on what's most important to the organization at the time. For the most part, overlooking "transformational" leaders in desperate times, enterprises have historically elevated Finance, Operations, and Legal people to the executive heights.[8] Regardless and never minding the peculiarities of company and industry, the breadth of sophisticated specializations has made enterprise organizations unwieldy for any individual. It is inevitable that a senior leader will come to his/her chair with a particular mindset and "language" preference that makes all other preferred Plain Language "nonsense" as it were.

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cabin shrugged incomprehensibly at her request to watch our luggage while we went for lunch, she over-enunciated a loud, mono-syllabic repetition of the words… in English… to Italians. Sometimes clarity is not enough.

[8] A generation of "marketing, marketing, marketing" and the prevailing customer-centricity fetish has given lift to marketing and sales people too. But when push comes to shove, knowing the numbers and rules tend to win.

Of course, size and diversity is the result of massive scaling of enterprise organizations through 1960s conglomeratization, 1980s merger mania, and most recently by radical globalization. Consider that by 2016 the 50th largest company in the world (HP) employed about 287K people across five continents in several business lines. It's a situation neither atypical nor wrong economically: the argument for scale can be strong. A consequence, though, is communications complications perhaps as important as the transaction costs and externalities of Coase's theorem.[9] As firms get larger and more complicated, the ability to communicate clearly as needed at the necessary level of sophistication diminishes.

The Professional Manager

Complementing or even driving this fractalization of specialties, our generation mainstreamed the 1960/70s notion of the professional manager. Giving an actual birth date to the idea is challenging. For argument sake, Theo Haimann's 1962 book, *Professional Management: theory and practise*, is as good a claxon as any other.[10] Haimann's collaborations alone single-handedly expanded the breadth and depth of the literature over the following decades. But it is probably Peter Drucker who is best associated with the idea. His seminal 1973 work, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, set the benchmark and started the race to professionalize management.[11] This self-help genre continues to generate billions of dollars annually and gives post-graduate purpose to management trade schools.

The idea itself is solid: certain skills and functions of management are universal and timeless. If these are identified, assayed, smelted, transmuted into discipline and taught, the result will be professionalization of capability and incremental efficacy of managers.

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[9]   Ronald Coase. "The Nature of the Firm." *Economica 4* (November): 386-405. 1937.

[10]   Theo Haimann. *Professional Management: theory and practise*. Houghton Mifflin. 1962.

[11]   Peter Drucker. *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*. HarperCollins Publishers Inc. Ithaca. 1973.

Since management is *the* critical element of effective operation of any organization, the thesis has a glittering surface. As with all promised alchemy though, it's critical to scratch the gold.

A key, implicit expectation, common at the time, was that managers and executives tended to be experts in "the business" who showed aptitude and skill for motivating ever larger groups of personnel.[12] An imaginative capability to anticipate the organization's coming needs sealed the promotion. But *always* there was core expertise in "the business." Because this prerequisite wasn't explicit, maybe accidentally or by design, the notion of professional management (at least as practiced now and evidenced by statistics of industry-hopping at senior levels) seems to presume expertise as secondary (if at all necessary) to training in distilled management technique. Sadly, there is not space to explore details of why this is a poor foundation.

Hollowing out the middle management communications channel

The analytic ink of academics and think tanks pondering successive waves of organizational fat rendering is deep. Suffice to say that the cost-cutting, bottom-line value is decidedly more powerful than any alternative logic challenging the wisdom of doing more with less.[13] Technologies have been very helpful. Email may be singly responsible for the decimation of administrative support. And let's not forget the power of incantations like "the flat organization," which quite explicitly culls away "middle" people in the name of agility and directness (and whatever other "goals" can be reasonably named as the opposite of layered hierarchy). There can be no dispute that throughout the economy enterprise organizations (even government) are more efficient, i.e., smaller.

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[12]   That epoch seems to coincide with Haimann's and Drucker's oeuvres. But that's for another time.

[13]   Superficial and misguided understanding of Price's Law, for example, encourages but does not help the situation. Price's Law, of course, postulates that the square root of the people generating some output are responsible for half that output.

It may sound like it, but this is not meant to litigate employment efficiency measures. The unintended consequence of doing so is, however, germane to the rise of the cries for Plain Language. That is, much more direct contact between "in the weeds" experts and "in the clouds" executives is the resultant context, forcing these two ends of the spectrum to communicate directly more frequently. One end is concerned with the commercial aspects of the (use of) technology at a strategic or even visionary level, which colours his/her view. At the other, tactical, end the same issues are seen through the instant cause/effect lens of precision. In the worst of cases, the twain do not meet: neither gets what they want.

Say what you will, but there is genuine value for that middle of the organization that was "disintermediated" in the name of efficiency, flatness, agility, economy, or what have you. If nothing else, it was the people in the middle that translated and provided the error space essential to any endeavor.[14] Effective translation is in no uncertain terms what Plain Language is meant to address. Rather than an expert on the path to the executive suite, being elevated to provide the seamless, easy translation, a host of once-removed guardians rise to sanitize and defend by cleaning upward communications with Plain Language.

Consumer ascendance

Finally, and again rooted in the 1960s, the rise of pervasive North American consumerism, has contributed to the situation. I take no position on the good or bad of consumerism. Irrespective, it *is*. That's important because the consumer mentality is for everything to be available and accessible to anyone (who can pay) simply and

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[14]   The loss of error space may be one of the most unfortunate consequences of digitization. But that's for another day.

immediately. The expectation applies to even the most sophisticated and complex things in life.

Consumer goods and services provide ever-greater utility with clear intent to strip away any barriers created by knowledge or skill. WYSIWYG renders computer instruction language as a picture interface. Long division? There's an app for that. And to say we've hardly scratched the surface of the complexities simplified for consumers is to understate the meaning of 'surface.' Machines take care of the hard bits based on the knowledge and expertise of those who created them, of those who designed interfaces to accept ignorant input, of those who simplify to remedy the failures of consumer incapability. Our technologies have always embedded and hidden the expert knowledge of others so that we can fool ourselves into believing we are ourselves expert. This is not new. But it is more precarious now.

How could this atmosphere not pervade expectations at work? It would be asking for Herculean displays of compartmentalization for anyone to come to work, used to the ignorance ignoring utility of consumer innovations and *not* expect the same. If our products make us bakers, movie makers, sound technicians, and otherwise skilled on weekends, obviously they should do the same 9-5, M-F.

Enter: digital confusion

If these four conditions inadequately support the improbability of an enterprise senior executive having sufficient expertise in every functional aspect of "the business" beyond people management and communications, add digital technology's upending impact to the mix. As McKinsey notes, "a surprisingly large number [of companies] underestimate the increasing momentum of digitization, the behavioral changes and

technology driving it, and, perhaps most of all, the scale of the disruption bearing down on them.[15]

Digital evolutions, which have been happening for at least forty years, create misunderstanding of existing standards. And, particularly now, more of every organization is affected every day. With every functional area impacted relearning and adjusting to new digital foundations—including vocabulary, the senior executives who must understand these changes holistically suffer a multiplying knowledge challenge. Digitization is persistently destabilizing not only because the technology itself makes certain basics obsolete and can be complicated to understand, but the incessant developments are *terra incognita* even to experts.

Finessing plain language is translation; translation is a risk

Obviously, the complication associated with digital and its jargon is inherent in its novelty. But like any evolving language, inaccessible to the average (executive) person, it is for experts to remain precise in a domain where inaccuracy is quickly and ruthlessly penalized. Using cybersecurity for example, every successive breach and hack demands innovative response. In this domain, it is common for solutions to break from the previous path. Such changes warrant a unique name and description, at the very least so as not to confuse it with what is now effectively obsolete.

Finessing expert language and its explicit meaning to facilitate plain language understanding is essentially a translation. That's fine, but all interpretations and translations risk escalating inaccuracy and bias error. Even when the language is not "adjusted" to suit plain understanding, metaphor and loose parallels often facilitate comprehension. This is normal; it's how learning usually happens. Except most learning

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[15]   Bughin, Jacques, T. Catlin, M. Hirt, P. Willmott. McKinsey Quarterly. *Why digital strategies fail*. Jan 2018.

isn't done with the more powerful, learning party asserting dominance to extend a metaphor or parallel beyond where it breaks down. When social relations and power relationships affect choices, trivial inaccuracies can turn into false premises, assumptions, etc. It takes a lot of fortitude to obstinately disagree and refuse to allow the more powerful party not to put words in one's mouth.

Abuse of plain language thus actively increases risk to the organization. In digital, specifically cybersecurity to puruse the example, these risks tend to have instant, asymmetrically devastating impact when realized.

The most important reason plain language is bad for business

Of the countless reasons the Plain Talk solution is suboptimal, including increased risk, the most important to any business should be the cost. There is, of course, the opportunity cost to errors of misunderstanding for which the case studies are deep and fill our memories. Such misunderstandings can be tragic: overlooked innovations that could change corporate trajectories and fortunes; millions sunk into fundamentally wrong and doomed actions because of critical complexity lost to simplification of "techno-jargon."

But it is the invisible, every day, hard costs that add up. Consider only the wasted time and money securing corporate approvals. A one-hour senior-level meeting may cost $5,000-10,000 depending on who is involved and how well senior employees are paid. This does not include the $5,000-30,000 spent preparing for that meeting as people scurry about sanitizing and clarifying for each stakeholder. This, too, is atop the six or seven-figures invested to arrive at the purpose of the meeting. And that is just one meeting, for one innovative initiative. Multiply those numbers by regular recurrences and the volume of initiatives being reviewed.[16]

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[16] It would be safe to say that key initiatives get monthly attention and there are at least a double-digit number

Some readers will be mentally riposting that it is the confusion sewn by jargon and unclear language that creates these costs. True. Perhaps the same arithmetic could be applied to unclear language, proving that the cure is no better than the illness. But, as we see, because the cure creates new risks and puts undue constraint on the expert layer, it might actually be worse.

What is this plain language thing—really?

At one level the Plain Language movement is as good as its word: it focuses on ensuring communication is clear. And as long as there are marketers, sales people, lawyers, and technical people, a plain language counter-balance is good. At another level though, this purpose is veneer.

Plain Language demands are often the response of a person in a responsible position who feels out of control. (S)He is concerned and feeling prevented from full understanding by opaque language. (S)He hopes to restore the certainty needed to make weighty decisions by compelling *Plain* Language. It's the same frustrated reaction of a language learner unable to speak with native facility. Any of us would do the same, even without the same pressures. But this reasonable—if misguided—demand for plain language simplicity to resolve more fundamental issues is Pyrrhic at best.

Is there an alternative?

It is certainly not my intent to suggest clear communication is bad. Far from it. But the pendulum has swung too far. Powerful receivers of communication are using this otherwise appropriate intent to cover for an unfortunate shortfall in specific competence.

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of initiatives followed at any given time. Do your own math. Mine gets this into the range of $2.4-9.6-million/year at only 20 initiatives, not including development costs. An enterprise managing less than 20 such initiatives is probably avoiding bigger problems by focusing on language choice.

Doing so, they not only impede organizational capacity to invent, innovate, and develop, they actively create risk.

None of these obviously unintended outcomes is desirable or supports those executives' fiduciary duties to the organization. Whether an organization persists with or recants abuse of Plain Language, the underlying causes continue. So, what then?

Trust and Learn

There are two obvious action for an executive can take to ameliorate the situation.

1. ***Trust*** that those around you are making things as simple as can be. This can be difficult for the typical executive personality type—especially if office politics are strong. Professional management does, however, dictate that, at some level, detail and functional expertise are not the executive's concern. Give in; embrace your ignorance and refocus on the logic, reasonability, and commercial sense. Challenge assumptions.

2. ***Learn*** at least some of the functional—especially digital—fundamentals. With regard to digital, that goes well beyond the advertising and retail lingo of eMarketing and eCommerce. Accept, understand, and internalize not only the digital reality that's upended so much of what we *know*, but also the instability and dynamism it brings.

It is important here and good advice generally that executives judiciously rein in their consumer mentality. On the spectrum of complex to simple, representing initial conception through to user experience, the executive must keep everyone close at the right level. Pressure to put the user at the centre is sensible but in the wrong hands is too often used to avoid, ignore, or obviate the complex, precise, and decidedly not simple

discussions and thinking needed to take on the complications products (and services) are meant to erase.

How?

All of this turns on education and trust, and falls at the feet of the boss. Nobody expects an executive to enroll in a community college for practical education (though that might not be a totally bad idea…), but formal education is not the only way to learn. Doing all one's learning from business periodicals has critical deficiencies, not least of which is an unwarranted over-estimation of knowledge that can amplify self-assurance for mistranslating to Plain Language.[17]

As for trust, who am I to tell you who, what, or how to trust in your role. That is personal and situational. The mistrust you may have of those with specialty vocabulary probably arises out of your not having immediate access to the knowledge being communicated. Plain Language will not change that. You need enough domain knowledge to satisfy yourself you're not being duped. Because this is what leadership is about, it is incumbent upon the senior executive to understand and be conversant with the expert domain. It may require trust in the skill, knowledge, and best intentions of those same experts—even if they are not 100% comprehensible.

A CFO turned COO of a $5-billion enterprise is an excellent example of how this is done in real life. When it came to digital, he learned enough to challenge technical staff and had the patience to get them to make him understand their world. He forced explanation of concepts, logic, and language—being schooled—during every meeting for every important initiative. I assume he augmented his avid consumer understanding with the information I saw him gleaning from sources typically reserved for domain experts.

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[17] On this, I recall a CEO who regularly treated (digital) staff to not merely inspirational but directive guidance based on the wisdom of Thomas Friedman's latest 700-word *Times* column or mass market trade book.

The technical people were often more annoyed than appreciative, which is unfortunate because he ultimately could and did confidently make commercially sensible decisions—ever faster—within a complex environment not in his expert domain *without* insisting on oversimplifications to suit his prior comfort.

Another old school executive I know received private tutelage from a digital expert even as she insisted the expert's work being reviewed was incomprehensible. She had been moved into the most senior role over the digital product offered by a decidedly non-digital organization. Solid past performance in roles where she was functionally responsible without functional expertise precipitated this move. But digital is different: change and instability, even for experts, made this unlike any of her previous roles.

Slowly, as she gained familiarity with the digital domain, she became aware of the limits of simplicity (and the clarity of "jargon") and more confident within her new context. This growth had nothing to do with intelligence or stupidity, Plain Language or jargon. It had everything to do with domain familiarity and comfort. In this case, the executive found a trustable expert to coach her through her own transformation.

These are only two among other executives I've seen learn about their new domains and gain comfort even with embedded special language. They achieved the goal differently. In both cases, early demands for Plain Language settled into a focus on clarity about commercial intent, which is, of course, where executive attention ought to be.

Course of action

Whether a recent arrival or old hand at the senior level, you really should insist on clear language from yourself and your organization. (That includes exorcising business buzzwords from your own vocabulary. Flabby language often hides muddled thought, poor understanding, and political posturing. No good comes of purposeful opacity. That said,

the next time a Plain Language decree comes to mind, please stop, take a breath, and consider whether clarity is really the issue. Or, is it covering insufficient knowledge? If it is the latter (and there's no shame in it), go ahead and ask for clarity. But take responsibility to learn enough to make you the relevant and purposeful part of the decision that you are and should be.

Here are a few other, easily implementable actions.

1. **Achieve statement clarity**

Even if you don't know the exact import of a message, is it understandable and specific? Is the meaning attainable by context? For instance, even if you don't know what "fallout" means, "Seek a fallout shelter immediately," is clear. Any problem lies not in the plainness of the language but in ignorance of the meaning. A layer more plain wouldn't necessarily improve the situation: "Seek shelter that prevents airborne radioactivity from a nuclear explosion from entering." Do you know the meaning and import of radioactivity?

2. **Stick to the commerce**

In this age of TED talks, technology seductively beckons smart people toward superficial understanding. So many things have been made so ridiculously simple, it's easy to ignore being unprepared for the depths of understanding. We overlook the hours of painful education that come before desired (or expected) facility. Fortunately, the farther removed from the expert domain, the less one is expected to get into the weeds. But, the greater the expectation for placing it into a commercial context and weighing it all there.

3. **Ask for explanation**

This is frustrating because it is time consuming and exactly where Plain Language is most relevant. If something is confusing, ask for an explanation. At least two valuable outcomes are possible.

i. The expert's transparent explanation will open your eyes. If so, great. Do not, however, presume you have escaped the discomfort of ignorant uncertainty. It has merely been deferred.

ii. The expert's explanation will be opaque—again—and you will be none the wiser. Also good. Judge the confidence and apparent logic of the response. You can also assess others' responses to gauge whether it makes sense and what would have to go right for it to work out. Maybe someone else will elaborate better.

4. Do some research

No doubt, it's been a long time and you're accustomed to others researching and synthesizing complexity into bullet points. If you want to change the dynamic, inform yourself. There's no need to study like a dissertation depends on it: selecting results to reputable sources on the 2nd or 3rd Google page is about as little as you can do. Even Wikipedia can be fine. But remember: three articles do not make you an expert.

5. Find a teacher

Teachers come in all shapes, sizes, and ranks. Find one. Learn from him/her. In the earlier anecdotes, I described how two executives found teachers in their midst. In one case, the presenters became the teachers. In the other, a trusted subordinate became a private tutor. Some people don't want to show "weakness" by displaying that they are learning (or even that they have something to learn). An alternative, for those with (political) trust issues or disregard for internal experts, is an external tutor. Because deep knowledge is probably not your goal, be sure your guide can sufficiently contextualize the expert knowledge within your commercial interests.

6. Get an advisor/counsellor

This is neither new nor unique advice. The trusted advisor is a staple for every senior executive. The relationship's essence is trust, which should not be construed to necessarily mean friendship. For expert domains—especially digital, the best external advisor has six qualities at a minimum. Ideally, you are looking for:

1. Expertise *at least* to the depth to which you aspire.

2. Independence and disinterest in what you do.

3. Interest in your clear understanding, comfort, and confidence in your role/decisions.

This counsellor, a cross between a therapist, teacher, and lawyer with appropriate functional expertise, ought to be able to explain and contextualize your situation. (S)He:

4. should be able to guide you to where to focus your concerns;

5. will bridge the technicalities you depend on and the commercial realities you deal with.

Such people are near at hand and far away. It can sometimes be wise to acquire counsel based on reference or recommendation—or even from an ad. Try the person on for size: engage the counsellor for something limited in his/her domain. See how (s)he works with you and the quality of the support. Confirm the guidance with others as it's happening. If you are lucky, the counsellor you select will be friendly while guiding you in opportunistic bits and pieces.

You may want to avoid internal personnel if you have political concerns. Definitely stay away from technology vendors and global advisory firms for this role. They probably have a horse in your race and could (unconsciously) direct you toward decisions that benefit them. Besides, the most likely resources from these firms tend not to be experts— except in selling and managing client relations. Look for well-regarded independent individuals.

The end

The take-away, such as it is, for (digital) experts is that complexity must be reduced to its absolute minimum and specialty language limited to where it is specifically needed. If it is essential to use, it must be fully explained. In representing your expert

area to executives, your job is as much about teaching as anything else. Plain Language—as far as reasonable—should always be a goal.

For executives, the hopefully obvious conclusion is that no matter the column inches business periodicals dedicate to your talent and acumen, you are no more likely to turn the tide of (digital) knowledge and language than was Canute, as sea water swelled up the legs of his throne. With the rising tide of digitization affecting more of your business in more ways, learning is not optional. It is the best bet to help you deal with potentially existential risk to your organization.

I trust that the plainness of my language has made my message sufficiently clear and actionable.

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