



Institute of Adult Education in Helsinki, Finland

Plain-language training for employers and staff responsible for job orientation at the workplace

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How does it work?

The plain-language training for workplaces is targeted particularly at mentors, who are responsible for the job orientation for new employees. Mentors need to be able to introduce new employees to their work and also include them as part of the group of colleagues.

Delivering the job orientation and introducing migrants to a workplace can be challenging when their language skills are still insufficient. The mentors should introduce the policies and practices of the workplace in a clear and understandable way, during face to face communication as well as in written form. Language-related obstacles can be tackled via training in which mentors can get some specific tools to support these migrant employees with regard to language and possibly also some aspects of culture-linked communication differences.

The training for mentors consists of two parts:

- 1) Lectures, which concentrate on the theoretical basics of plain language as a notion and as a way of communicating
- 2) Workshops, which provide practical tools for the mentors' development of their communication at work.

It is crucial to not only be aware of the ways mentors communicate but also practise plain language in written and oral form at the workshops.

The preferable way of conducting lectures and workshops is to organise the first session (90–120 minutes / 2–3 hours) to include an introductory lecture and discussion about the materials and the methods of communication in this particular workplace. The lecturer may not need any workplace-specific materials at this point, but it may help to have an overall picture of the most common and relevant job-orientation needs of that workplace. The main point is to get familiar with plain language, its purpose, and the possibilities and to become aware of the ways people usually communicate at this particular workplace.

The second session (again, 90–120 minutes / 2–3 hours) can be held later, whenever suitable, and it may then start with just a short introduction or revisiting the subject. The lecturer should now be more familiar with some written materials that are used for orienting workers to the job, along with the means and ways of communicating (presentations, papers, pictures, videos, platforms, applications, etc.) at this workplace. The lecturer points out some examples or crucial materials from job-orientation manuals or other important materials. It is beneficial to work together for a while but then continue by dividing the participants into smaller groups. The groups then can have a closer



look at some examples (text, notes, manuals, instructions, messages, phone calls, etc.), and afterward share their findings and how they would make the language clearer and simpler in those example cases. The materials need to be motivating and serve the purpose of being useful for everyone, either mandatory rules (for example, rights and responsibilities) or everyday language use in a work setting.

After becoming familiar with ways to use plain language and the benefits that plain language produces and provides, the mentors are more knowledgeable, motivated, and confident so are more able to receive migrants in their workplace. The migrants will receive better job orientation – that is, more precisely focused orientation aimed at them – and therefore will be more easily included and integrated into that workplace. The workplace will get more committed and motivated workers.

The trainer needs to be ready to get familiar with some of the materials that the workplace uses and make those materials a part of the training. The materials from workplaces are always confidential, and therefore the trainer is to use them only during the training.

The trainer charges for the number of training hours, possibly also some hours for the preparation work done in advance. The total number of hours will likely be less than 10, and the salary for a trained professional may vary between 90 and 150 euros/hour. The materials can be largely files and presentations, so there are no expenses for materials as such.

When organising these training sessions, the implementer should take into account some aspects of the materials and ways of providing training: Lectures are to give information, understanding, and motivation. They also serve as a way to start looking at communication from a migrant's point of view. Discussions and workshops need to be emphasised more than the lectures, but lectures need to be effective in order for participants to see the need for plain language. Authentic and workplace-specific materials are most motivating and of greatest use. Moreover, authentic cases and sharing of experiences are more relevant and helpful than theory or examples.

Some practical challenges are work schedules at a place of work and the possibilities for providing the mentors with some time to participate in training – i.e., include training in their work schedule. Another challenge may be the variety of tasks and materials at the workplace, which can lead to an imbalance in the importance of the materials used. Also, there may be companies or other organisations that are reluctant or even not allowed to give materials to anyone external to their staff.