



# Advocacy for Data Stewards

# Hello!

Damian McCourt

Get in touch: [damian@dcmlearning.ie](mailto:damian@dcmlearning.ie)

# Today

- 10:00 to 12:00
- 10-minute break halfway
- Time for questions at the end, but feel free to interrupt
- Session is being recorded

# Outcomes

---

*By the end of this session, you will be able to:*

- Build your 'business case'
- Listen and question effectively
- Persuade across power differences
- Present your case in Plain English



# **Build your Business Case**

# Business Case?

- A document used determine if a project is worth doing
- Clarifies the challenge, problem or opportunity
- Details the (measurable?) benefits
- Output  $\neq$  outcome



# Perspective matters!

**Tell me why you need their data (what's the challenge?)**

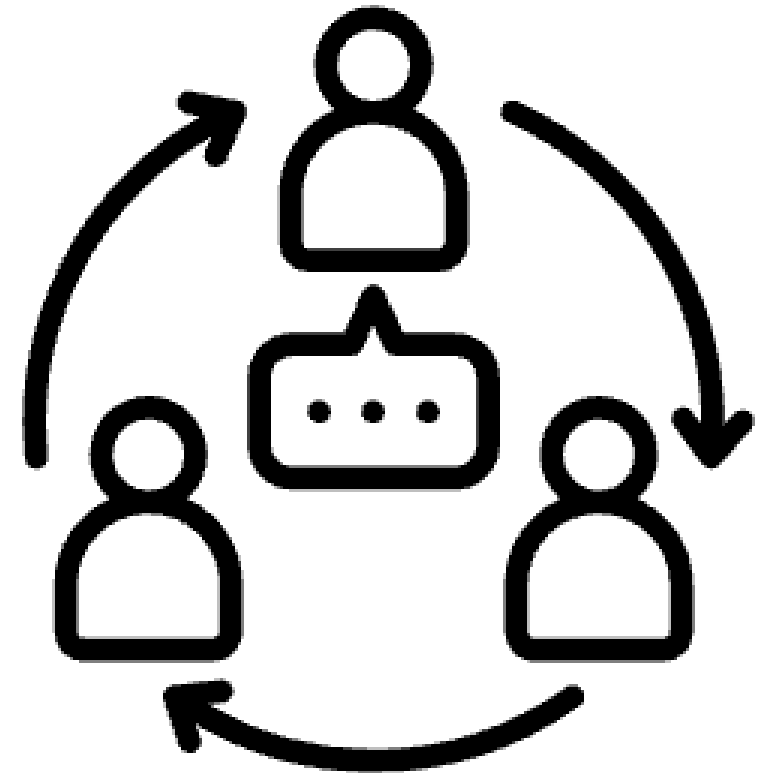
**Tell me (the researcher) how I will benefit!**

**Tell me in practical terms what will happen**

**Genuinely listen to my concerns (next)**

# Iterate!

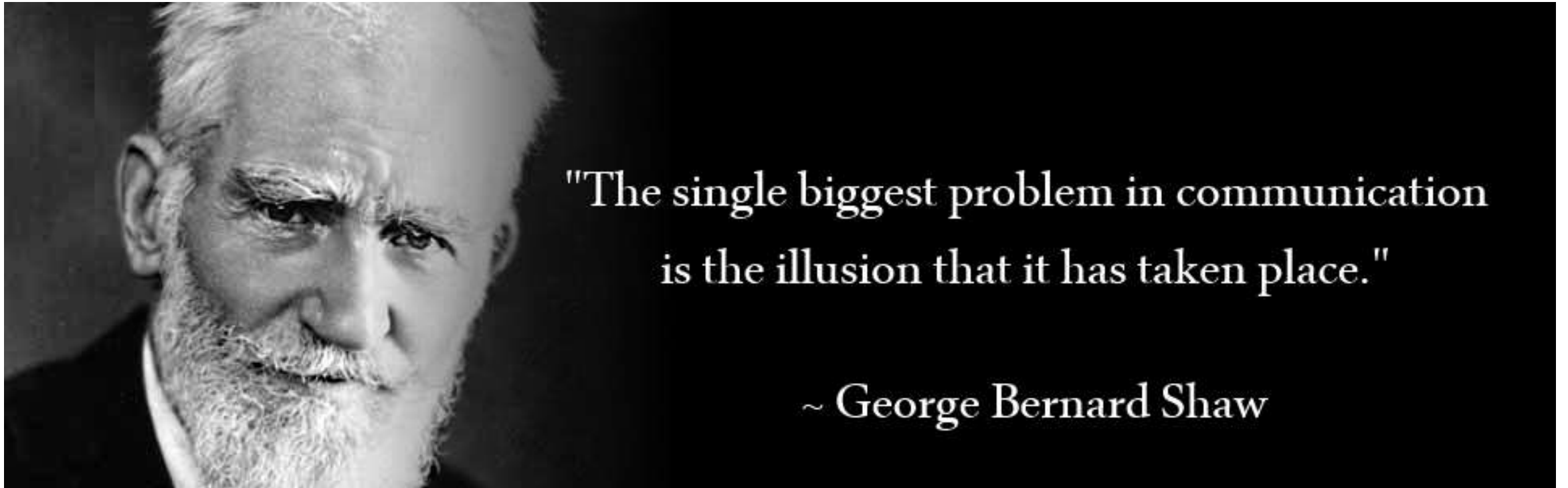
- You will see the same issues, concerns and complaints over and over
- Collaborate, review, figure out what works...
- ...what the pitfalls or danger signs are
- Continuously refine your approach





# **Listening and Questioning Skills**

# Effective communicators?



"The single biggest problem in communication  
is the illusion that it has taken place."

~ George Bernard Shaw

# Effective communicators?

Listening takes energy, so:

- ...your brain takes shortcuts: assumptions
- How much we already know about a topic
- Whether we like or dislike the speaker
- How tired, distracted or stressed we are
- Time of day!

# Summarising

“Can I just make sure I understand this correctly...”

“Am I right in thinking that...?”

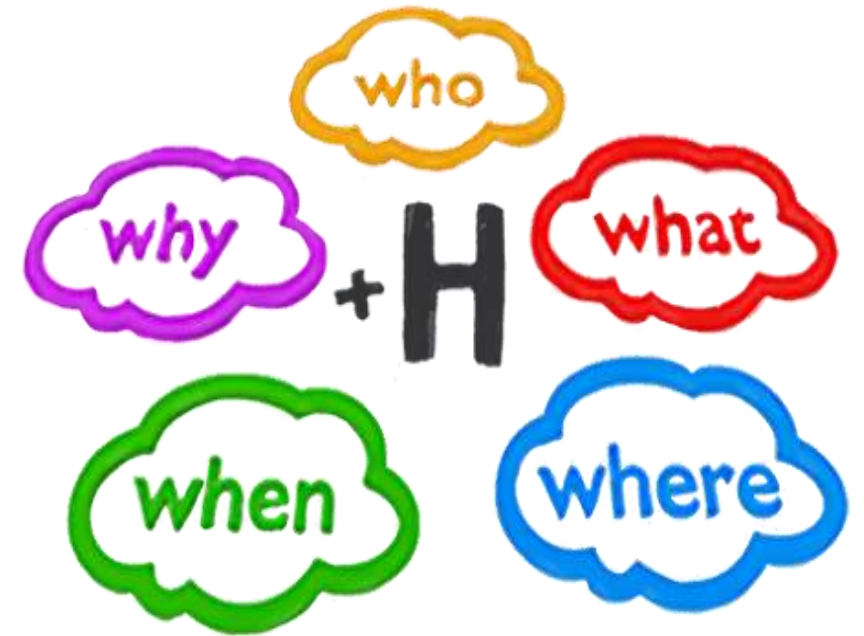
“So, are you saying that...?”

“Can I just make sure we’re on the same page here...”

- *I’m making a genuine effort to listen and understand your point of view*

# Open Questions

- Requests for more information
- Can be iterated for root cause analysis
- Stops you addressing a symptom
- Experts and buy-in
- Never get stuck on the same open question twice!





**Persuade across  
power differences**

# Behaviour and power level



# Behaviour and power level

ACCEPTABLE  
BEHAVIOUR FROM A  
POSITION OF POWER



# Behaviour and power level

ACCEPTABLE  
BEHAVIOUR FROM  
A POSITION OF  
WEAKNESS

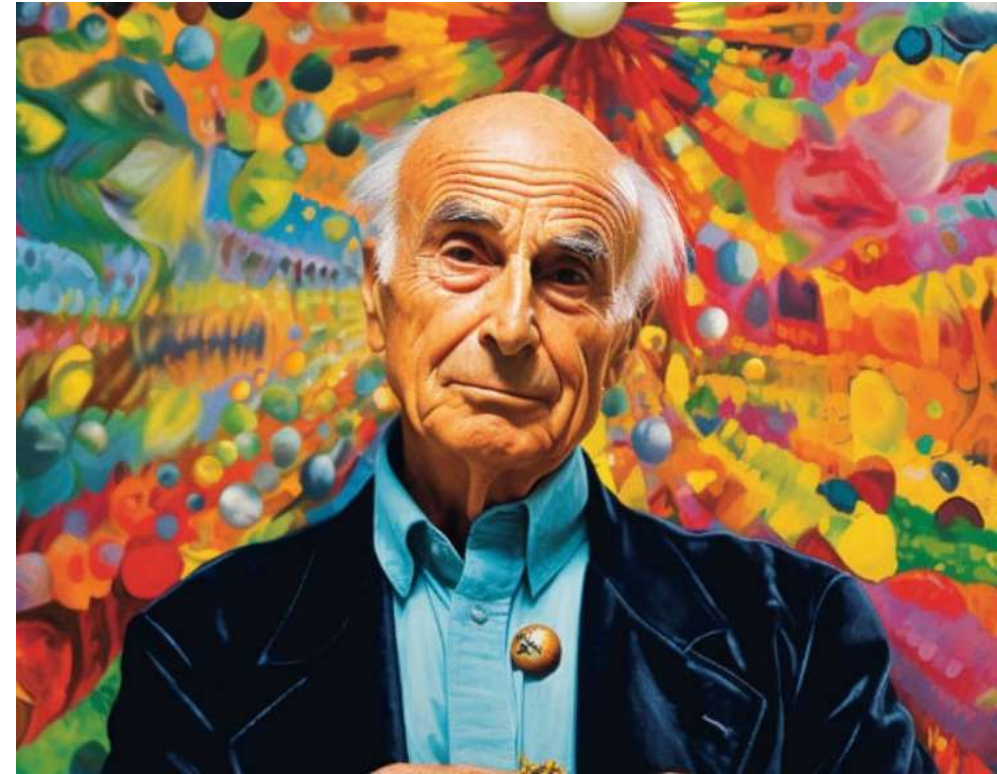


# Increasing your perceived power?

- Be passionate about your cause
- Have strong allies (can you tell a story?)
- Advocate for others
- Have a high level of expertise...
- ...combined with the ability to explain yourself (Plain English)

# Story use

- Stories demonstrate practical outcomes and benefits
- Has to be true, doesn't have to be yours!
- More effective if it's unusual



The background features three curved, overlapping bands of color: a dark blue band at the top and bottom, a teal band in the middle, and a red band at the very top and bottom edges. The text is centered in the white space between the teal and red bands.

**Use Plain English**

# Plain English?

- A way of getting your message across first time
- Without any ambiguity
- With the reader / listener in mind
- Not about using over-simplified or patronising language
- Several straightforward rules, can be used spoken or written
- Lots of guides

# Plain English?

- You're not trying to impress!
- Academic writing 😞
- Dense technical language, acronyms
- Can alienate your listener
- Especially if they're more senior than you!

# 1. Sentence Length

- Use short, single-idea sentences

“Keep your sentences to a maximum of between fifteen and twenty words. Be concise.

Vary your writing by mixing longer sentences, like this one, with shorter ones. Follow the

basic principle of having one main idea per sentence, plus perhaps one related point”

# 1. Sentence Length

FAIR stands for findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. These principles are intended as guidelines for best practice in the management and stewardship of research data as open as possible but as closed as necessary. A FAIR data landscape recognises, facilitates, and rewards sharing and reusing valuable research data and various types of outputs.

# 1. Sentence Length

However, while we have made great progress in addressing our unemployment and competitiveness challenges, and in building a new, sustainable enterprise economy driven by skills, innovation and success in markets, we need to sustain the momentum and stretch ourselves further if we are to achieve sustainable full employment by 2018 and ensure that all parts of our regions benefit from the recovery.

## 2. Active Voice

- Most 'action' sentences consist of three parts:
- Subject
- Verb
- Object



## 2. Active Voice

- Most 'action' sentences consist of three parts:
- Subject                      The cat
- Verb                              sat
- Object                          on the mat

## 2. Active Voice

- Passive voice reverses the order
- Object                      The mat
- Verb                         was sat upon
- Subject                     by the cat

## 2. Active Voice

- Longer, clumsier, less direct
- With passive voice you can drop the subject, because it's at the end

- Object

The mat

- Verb

was sat upon.

## 2. Active Voice

- Passive voice with no subject can sound very cold and bureaucratic

“Forms must be returned by July 15<sup>th</sup>”

“A confirmation will be issued by email”

“All data stewards are required to attend”

# 3. 'You' and 'we'

- Forces you into active voice
- Highlights relationship with the researcher / data owner
- Highlights the fact that you're doing something!
- Easier to make requests

### 3. 'You' and 'we'

"You should return your form before July 15<sup>th</sup>"

"We will confirm by email that we have received it"

"We would ask you to attend in person"

# 4. Imperatives

- Commands: “do thing”
- Imperatives place the verb at the start of the sentence

“Tell me what your concerns are”

“Let us know how we can work around them”

“Call us if you have any other questions”

“Please think seriously about this”

# 5. Abstract Nouns

- Creating a noun from a process
  - Certification, professionalisation, requirement, submission
  - Often hide the fact that you're making a request
- “Submission of proof of certification is a requirement for admittance”
- Can often be replaced with 'you' and 'we', an imperative or a mixture of both

# Plain English Communication

**1**

**Using short, single-idea sentences**

**2**

**In the active voice...**

**3**

**...ideally using 'you' and 'we'**

**4**

**...and polite imperatives to prompt action**

# Use lists

## What does a Data Steward do?

While there is no universally agreed definition of data stewardship, there is a variety of tasks and skills that are widely recognised as central to the role. These can include: research data management planning; metadata creation and application; database management; data curation and preservation; supporting Open Data and the FAIR principles; data infrastructure development and management; teaching and skills development for researchers; advocacy; and policy development.

# Use lists

These can include:

- Research data management planning
- Metadata creating and application
- Database management
- Data curation and preservation
- Supporting Open Data and the FAIR principles
- Data infrastructure development and management
- Teaching and skills development for researchers
- Advocacy and policy development

# Use lists

These can include:

- Planning research data management
- Creating and applying metadata
- Managing databases
- Curating and preserving data
- Supporting Open Data and the FAIR principles
- Developing and managing data infrastructure
- Teaching and skills development for researchers
- Advocacy and developing policy

# Onward!

- Build a reliable business case(s)
- Genuinely listen and question
- Recognise and have an answer for common concerns and questions
- Share practical success stories
- Use simple, direct language: polite, respectful
- Collaborate: learn from everyone's mistakes



# Advocacy for Data Stewards

**Questions?**

**Takeaways?**

**Feedback!**



**THANK  
YOU!**

[damian@dcmlearning.ie](mailto:damian@dcmlearning.ie)

**dcm** THE  
LEARNING  
EXPERTS