Jarle: Hi, everyone. My name is Jarle.

Are: My name is Are.

Jarle: We come from the land of fjords and hills and trolls and Vikings, namely Norway. We're supposed to be with you guys in Little Norway, as we like to call Minnesota. As we all know, we can't be together, so, unfortunately, we are here in Big Norway, or at least I think we're still here in Big Norway, because this is a prerecorded talk, but all going well, in about 45 minutes, we will be with you guys live to answer any questions that you have for us after you hear our talk.

Are: We're both working here at Netlife Design, Oslo. Netlife Design has always been a content-first agency, which you guys probably love.

[background noise]

[applause]

Are: Today, we're going to talk a bit about mythology that we developed working within a regional Environment Agency, which we call the "Content Sprint." We have decided to divide that mythology in three parts. We're going to talk about The Prep, we're going to talk about Sprint Day 1, and we're going to talk about Sprint Day 2.

Jarle: Working with content in the Environment Agency is a bit tricky, and there are three reasons for that. First of all, the content is quite complex and technical. Second, the subject matter experts within the agency are actually the only ones who know enough about the topics to speak and write about it properly. Thirdly, it's the Communication Department who "owns" the content and are responsible for the content.

Now, this is something that we meet quite regularly working with clients as consultants: the setup. It can be quite problematic, especially if you launch a project to rework the entire content on a pretty big website, and the subject matter experts are so swamped with their daily job tasks that they can't really contribute. If you were working in the Communication Department, you would probably feel a bit like this.

Coming into the project, our brief was basically this. Number one, cover all the organization's subject fields as efficiently as possible. Number two, don't take up any more of the subject matter experts' time than strictly necessary. Number three, enable the Communication Department to make the content as user-friendly as possible.

Are: Every Sprint started with what we call The Prep. As you're all aware, you can't make big complex service pages without knowing why you're making them and for whom you're making them. At the same time, the customer, the Environment Agency was very exhausted with former huge workshops and mythologies. They had little patience for us hanging around for hours and days doing Post-its, so we had to find the

right balance between not knowing anything about the subjects and the field, and totally exhausting the whole group with huge mythology.

We found this Content Sprint mythology consisting of The Prep and the two Sprint days, where The Prep is a meeting of two to four hours where the Sprint group is gathered for the first time. The Sprint group is the Communication staff, the SMEs, and assess facilitators. This was often the first time they met, so we had to spend time for the meet and greet, getting them to know each other, and then we had to get to the part where we had to dig into the subject and ask ourselves, "What did the users need to solve on this subject? What do they need to know of information in the subject? Who do we need to talk to who are not included in our Sprint group to get a better picture of what this subject really is?"

After we finished The Prep meeting, we made a document for everyone to edit, consisting of all these points and giving it about a week's time until the Sprint Day 1 for everyone to prepare for these next exercises that we're about to tell you from Sprint Day 1 and Sprint Day 2.

Jarle: Finally, the first day of the Sprint is here. In the room, we have two to five subject matter experts. Some of them are quite excited, some are usually a bit skeptic. Then, we have two people from the Communication Department. They are usually cautiously optimistic, and then there are two facilitators, normally myself and Are. We are calm on the surface and a bit nervous underneath. Also, in the room, we have a large whiteboard, a flip over, sticky tack, felt pens, Post-its, a timer, fruit, nuts, water, coffee.

On the walls of the room, we have personas with their top tasks, goals, the Sprint questions. On their Flipboard, we have the date agenda with checkboxes before each of them and the rules. No devices, no phone calls or emails outside the breaks, no leaving the Sprint for a quick meeting.

The first day of the Content Sprint is quite similar to Day 1 in the Design Sprint if any of you are familiar with that. It's a methodology developed by Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky. The purpose of the day is to get the whole team focused and a common understanding on the user's needs, where they are in the user journey, and their context. Also, we need the whole team to understand the organizations, objectives, their opportunities, and their limitations.

Are: As we told you earlier, in The Prep we did a lot of digging into what could be the users' different tasks in this subject. What we did was make some hypotheses with the SMEs and Communication and us on what the top user tasks could be on this subject. We actually sent out real questionnaires to the users to get their answers on what were their actual top tasks. That way, we could kick off every Sprint day, showing the whole Sprint group the actual top tasks of users, and then we avoided a lot of discussions about people thinking this and thinking that. No, this is the evidence. This is what the users want to have done on these pages.

Jarle: Next up is what Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky call the Sprint Questions. In this exercise, each team member gets to face their fears and concerns for the project. We ask, "If we in six months' time realize that this project has been a complete failure, what has most likely happened?" Each team member writes down one concern per Post-it note. It has to be framed as a question, usually starting with "Will we?" "Will we have enough time to write or create this? Will the user find and use the service? Will we be able to integrate the CRM with the website?"

This exercise has two purposes. One, it shows us the real challenges that we have to overcome. Two, it's kind of cathartic. Everyone goes into a Sprint with concerns, but it's taboo to speak about them because you're expected to be positive and constructive. By writing them down, we get them out in the open. Everyone's aware of them and take them seriously, and we can focus on finding solutions. The intro, user tasks, and the Sprint Questions don't take a lot of time. You should be done with all of this within the first hour of Day 1.

We're ready for the first big exercise of the day. This one's called The Map. The Map is really helpful in understanding the user journey and how the content fits into that. The Map is something that will be with you throughout the Sprint, and you'll rejig it and work with it as you learn more. Here's how it works. To illustrate this, we're going to use an example from one of our Sprints with the NDA. It's about waste export. First, the team gathers around the whiteboard, and you put the printed out personas to the left of the whiteboard. In this case, the user personas were the professional exporters, the amateur exporters, and customs. For us, it has been really helpful to include the top tasks on the persona sheet. The next step is to write down the goal of the user journey. We do that on the right-hand side of the whiteboard. For this instance, the goal is that the waste is correctly exported. We then put down the key steps of the journey. Choose the journey of the most important persona; the others are probably just supporting cast.

Here, we have the following steps. Fine classification. Read up on the rules for the country you are exporting to. Submit a lot of paperwork. Wait while the paperwork is being processed. Bring waste through customs. Waste is received, and the exporter can file a report to the NDA. This exercise usually takes about 45 minutes. It usually generates quite a bit of discussion as well. Set aside enough time to go through it. Also, don't get too bogged down into details. If the journey becomes more than 10 steps, you have probably gone in too detailed.

Are: Next up, we have an exercise called, "Ask the experts." We have us, the small Sprint group, sitting in the room, but we may lack some expert knowledge. We have this exercise called "Ask the experts," which we set up slots of 15 minutes with two to four different experts. It can be actual users. It can be staff working closely on the subject. It can be techies knowing the constraints of the web pages. It can be other resumes that have knowledge we don't possess in this actual Sprint group. It's just to ensure that we have all the knowledge of the subject that we need, to make the page of the subject as good as possible.

Ideally, we want to have them in the flesh these 15 minutes, but sometimes we just call them up and have a video conference.

Jarle: During the interviews, each team member writes down the key findings, but we have to use a quite rigid method doing this. We write one finding per Post-it note. Each finding has to be framed as a question. It has to start with "How might we?" This is what we call "how might we" questions. The reason for that is that we want to already at this step start turning the problems into solutions and opportunities. A benefit of doing that is that you limit the amount of what people write down. You always get someone who just feels page after page, just some writing everything that the interview object says. This way, we get much less and much more focused notes.

To illustrate, here's a couple of examples for "how might we" questions. Let's say the interviewee says, "Only half of the people who sign up for a free trial actually go on to try the service." Then the "how might we" note would be, "How might we activate more people who sign up for a trial?" Another example is if the interviewee says, "Most of our target audience don't even know we exist." Then the "how might we" question could be, "How might we reach and engage our target audience?" In this exercise, there's a couple of pitfalls that you should be aware of.

First of all, the "how might we" questions feel a bit awkward, so we recommend doing a dry run before the experts actually come into the room. Also, you need to set aside a bit of time to prepare for the interviews. It's a good idea to give the responsibility for leading the interviews to different team members so you can spend 20 minutes on writing down questions for each interviewee. Then, each team member will lead that interview that they've written down questions for. Even how much you stressed it in advance not to do it, there will always be someone who writes down everything that's being said during the interview.

The best solution to how this is just to politely ask them to put down their top three findings on three "how might we" notes. To prevent people from writing really, really tiny text on each card, ask them to use felt pens, supply them with felt pens, and this also ensures brevity on the cards. After the dust settles, after the interviews, we take the most important findings, what we agree upon are the most important "how might we" notes, and place them into the map. This concludes Day 1 of the Sprint.

Are: We are finally where we want to be, the whole group hopefully agrees on where we want to go with this. We agree on who the users are, we agree on what the users need to solve their actual problems or tasks here. This is where we in that life add our magic sauce. Some of you might have already heard of it, but about 15 years ago a former colleague of ours, Are Halland, he came up with a mythology called "the core model." **[unintelligible 00:16:17]** model in Norwegian, which is all about focusing your webpage content on the user, so user-centered content. A core is where the users solve their tasks, and you actually reach your objectives.

It doesn't care about webpage or web service hierarchy, it cares about users' top tasks, how users solve them and where we send them when they've solved them. This model

has now been used to successfully create user-centered web pages around the world the last 15 years. The goal of the whole Sprint is to get to this point in the process as fast as possible, with all the insights and agreements we need to start working on this. To sketch out a core page, we need the goal of the subject, we need the user tasks, where the users usually come from. Like, if they Google "reindeer," the core content, and where we should send them when they finish their main task in this core.

In most of the Sprints, we spend a large part of the second day, this day, sketching out core pages for the subjects at hand. When we finish those, the people at Communication know exactly what the page needs to contain of information. If it needs to contain text, images, movies, guides, documents, files, all that stuff. They would also know how to optimize the content for being found; for example, search engine optimization, and also where to link the users when they finish their main task. Sometimes, we had the time to write out all the pages, and other Sprints, we had to be really quick on this core page work to actually get these sketches done.

We'll definitely send you some handouts after this, so you could read into what the core model is all about.

Jarle: Yes. That concludes the second and final day of the Sprint. What happens next? We, as consultants and facilitators, we say goodbye to the rest of the Sprint team. It's a bit weird. It feels like you've been aboard a moving train for 48 hours, and then suddenly you just jump off while it's still moving. We then start preparing for the next Sprint, whereas the Communication people who are in this Sprint, they start working on their first draft of the pages that we're going to make. Ideally, they publish them on the test server so that we can see that everything works.

The subject matter experts, as we promised we weren't going to take up any more of their time than strictly necessary, but they do have to set aside a few hours to do a quality assurance on the work that the Communications people have done. Once we got the hang of this, we got into what we started to refer to as the Sprint cycle, which is like a two-week cycle, where in Week A we do The Prep and prepare for the actual Sprint. Then, in week B, on Thursday and Friday, we did the actual Sprint days. Then, week A came around again with The Prep.

Are: To summarize, at the start of this, at the start of the Sprint, the Communication staff had an almost endless list of legally complex subjects that they needed to make user-friendly. They were exhausted of trying to make their own mythologies and exhausted their subject matter experts. After working with this for a year, we had sprinted a lot of different subjects and made a lot of sketches on user-friendly content for the new web page.

I also believe that a great benefit from this is really breaking down the silos and creating an arena where the communication staff really gets motivated SMEs to work with them, to block out their calendars and to find out what really needs to be done to help the users in these subjects. Instead of sending drafts back and forth on email, instead of

communication, just writing texts they believe are sufficient, or believe are correct. In this way, you actually get tested, good content that really meets the user needs.

If you guys know any other ways to get to user-friendly web pages or services in a short time, we would love to hear your thoughts. We just want to say thank you very much for listening to this digital version of our talk. We would love to be with you guys in Minneapolis. Maybe someday, we will. Hopefully, we hope you enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

Jarle: If you've got any questions, me and Are will be live to answer them as well as we can. Thank you.

Are: See you, **[unintelligible 00:22:13]**.

Jarle: See you.

[00:22:18] [END OF AUDIO]