

Office of the Public Sector
Integrity Commissioner
of Canada



Commissariat à l'intégrité
du secteur public
du Canada

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of PSIC's Website

March 31, 2023

Contents

Background and Objective 1

Evaluation Process..... 1

Criteria..... 1

Observations Relevant to the Current Website 2

Recommendations..... 2

Reporting of Wrongdoing or a Reprisal..... 4

The Investigation Process 5

PSIC Results..... 6

Information About PSIC 6

Appendix I – Example: Primary Landing Page..... 7

Appendix II – Example: Secondary Landing Page..... 8

Background and Objective

In March 2023, the Office of Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada (PSIC) engaged OTUS Group to complete an evaluation of the effectiveness of the wrongdoing and reprisal sections of its website, excluding the online forms, and booklets from the communications products section of its website, specifically “How Am I Protected?” and “Five questions about blowing the whistle”.

The objective of the evaluation was to review the content, accuracy, tone, length, and complexity of the above-noted sections of the website and communications products, taking into consideration the results of focus group sessions completed in early 2022, and the goals outlined in PSIC’s most recent communications plan.

The evaluation is intended to support PSIC’s plans to work toward a redesign of its website and potentially existing communications products.

Evaluation Process

We reviewed the following information to develop criteria to inform our evaluation and the development of recommendations to improve the in-scope and other sections of your website and in-scope information booklets:

- PSIC’s communications plan
- PSIC’s 2022 focus group sessions – Exploring the Culture of Whistleblowing and Fear of Reprisal in the Federal Public Sector
- 2017 Evaluation of PSIC’s Outreach and Engagement Strategy, Initiatives and Activities

We also conducted internet research relevant to human-centered design to inform our recommendations.

Criteria

The following criteria informed our evaluation and recommendations. Alignment with these criteria will support the objectives outlined in your communications plan:

- Communication is humanized and not overly procedural.
- Communication addresses the following:
 - PSIC’s mandate;
 - Recognition of whistleblowers as courageous people;
 - When to report wrongdoing;
 - What is the right thing to do relevant to whistleblowing;
 - Clarity about the rights of people who report wrongdoing;

- How confidentiality is maintained and how whistleblowers are protected from reprisals to address fear of reprisals and possible repercussions;
- Process-related concerns:
 - The impression that the process is long, involved, and stressful;
 - The impression that the burden of proof is very high;
 - The perception that little, if anything, changes because of the process (i.e., wrongdoers are rarely punished);
 - Doubts about the impartiality of the process and possible conflicts of interest based on who investigates the reported wrongdoing.

Observations Relevant to the Current Website

Our observations of the current website are informed by both the criteria previously outlined and the personas of what we believe to be users of your website.

A persona is a summary of the characteristics, needs, motivations, and environment of a key type of website user. The purpose of personas is to create reliable and realistic representations of your key audience segments for reference. We suggest that you likely have two main personas, one being a public servant who is considering reporting wrongdoing or a reprisal, and the other being a public servant seeking information about PSIC. Referring to information from your 2022 focus group sessions, it is quite likely that a public servant who is considering reporting wrongdoing or a reprisal is feeling some duress and apprehension about proceeding. A public servant looking for information about PSIC is likely a busy person who wants to be quickly informed about key information relevant to PSIC's mandate.

The wrongdoing and reprisal sections of your website contain a significant amount of information; however, the content is text heavy, and procedural oriented. A similar observation applies to the publications in scope for this review. It is not likely that either persona previously described will engage with information that is text heavy. Most people tend to prefer to be informed by and engage with short-form videos, and secondly shorter length text with graphics and imagery. The structure of wrongdoing and reprisal sections of the website convey a sense that PSIC is legalistic and formal as opposed to approachable and supportive. These sections of your website do not convey that there are people working at PSIC who people considering reporting wrongdoing or a reprisal can trust to address their most significant concerns.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are informed by the criteria and personas previously outlined, and the journey we anticipate your personas might typically follow when they arrive at your website. Our recommendations go beyond just the wrongdoing and reprisal sections of your existing website in an effort to outline how each of the criteria previously outlined could be addressed through a redesign of the overall website.

The wrongdoing and reprisal sections of your website, and the website overall, would be improved by humanizing it. Humanizing a website is about adapting a user-focused mindset, creating relationships through your content, and conveying to your target audience (personas) there are people working behind the scenes that they can trust. Speaking to people's emotions and in the first or second person helps to create a human connection. Video connects better than written content. Relevant storytelling where possible, via video, has also proven to be effective to create engagement through a website. Significant amounts of research have been completed to identify impactful words or "words that sell". An example of such insight is available at this link – The Big List of Powerful Words. The use of recognized impactful words throughout a revised website and revised publications, to the extent practical within the parameters of PSIC's mandate, is encouraged.

Referring to your communications plan, your broader target audience consists of approximately 400,000 public servants who have the right to access your website in either English or French. We suggest that you consider a primary landing page similar to that of the Office of the Auditor General (refer to Appendix I) where visitors to your site can choose their language of choice. The greater benefit of this type of landing page is the opportunity it provides to introduce words like confidentiality, integrity, support, trust, etc. that directly respond to concerns raised in the 2022 focus group sessions relevant to reporting of wrongdoing. We suggest that you consider bringing forward key points from your frequently asked questions (FAQs) and re-entitle that content to "PSIC at a Glance". This content should be presented in video format, with a friendly welcoming message from the Commissioner to set the tone for an overall more humanized website. Reference can be made to the suggested information about PSIC section for more detailed information that may not fit within this proposed content.

After a website visitor selects a language choice on the primary landing page, we suggest that he/she be brought to a secondary landing page similar to that from the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region (refer to Appendix II). The example website in Appendix II is relevant because it speaks to people experiencing distress, quite likely similar to some degree to those considering reporting a wrongdoing. This page would contain a brief summary of PSIC's mandate and simple button choices as listed below. Ideally this secondary landing page would contain a collage of actual PSIC staff members to contribute to humanizing your website, similar to the example page in Appendix II.

- I want to report wrongdoing or a reprisal.
- I want to know about the investigation process.
- I want to know about PSIC's results.
- I want to know more about PSIC.

Each button would link to a page containing relevant video content, textual information and links to publications.

Reporting of Wrongdoing or a Reprisal

Video content in this section is perhaps the most important to humanize your website and to address the following criteria:

- Recognition of whistleblowers as courageous people;
- When to report wrongdoing;
- What is the right thing to do relevant to whistleblowing;
- Clarity about the rights of people who report wrongdoing;
- How confidentiality is maintained and how whistleblowers are protected from reprisals to address fear of reprisals and possible repercussions.

The video content should feature the Commissioner. Content should be concise and simple. The tone of the video content must be supportive, including, for example, language such as the following:

- We are here to support you.
- Thank you for contributing to a better/safer workplace.
- You talk, we'll listen.

Keeping in mind the likely emotional state of a person considering reporting wrongdoing or a reprisal, this section of the website should include a simple contact option with a clear explanation informing an individual when they will be contacted in a timely manner.

Referring to your commentary provided relevant to the 2017 Evaluation of PSIC's Outreach and Engagement Strategy, we noted that PSIC has worked with the Financial Management Institute to develop five educational videos about whistleblowing featuring the Commissioner. We also noted that PSIC employees have provided presentations to departments, and at events outlining the confidentiality provisions. There may be potential to leverage or repurpose some of this content and the experience of its usage for anticipated updates to your website.

We suggest that existing text content from the Wrongdoing and Reprisal sections of your website should be succinctly combined and integrated with the publications "Five questions about blowing the whistle" and "How Am I Protected?". Increased usage of graphics and images is recommended. The tone of the written content should be more personable.

This integrated information should be presented in one publication via a link below the video content from the Commissioner. It will be easier for users of the content to access, navigate and consume it. Further, it will be easier and less demanding to manage the content because similar content would be in one place as opposed to being spread across the website and two publications.

The Investigation Process

Recommendations for this section of your website address the following criteria:

- The impression that the process is long, involved, and stressful;
- Doubts about the impartiality of the process and possible conflicts of interest based on who investigates the reported wrongdoing.

We suggest video content for this section of your website featuring a senior staff member from PSIC. The purpose of featuring someone other than the Commissioner is to convey to visitors to your website that there is a team of people at PSIC ready to support people who may be considering reporting wrongdoing.

Consistent with the concept of humanizing your website, video content explaining the investigation process should be presented in simple plain language, supplemented by simple flow-chart type graphics. There may be some potential to leverage or repurpose some content from the “Disclosing Wrongdoing in the Federal Public Sector” video currently on your YouTube channel.

Existing content from the investigations section of your website should be streamlined and presented more succinctly in a publication presented below and supporting the recommended video content. The tone of the written content should be more personable.

Case studies from the resources section of the website would be better featured in this proposed section of your website. Information on service standards from the results section of the website would fit better within a new investigation process section.

PSIC Results

The results section of the current website contains significant information about cases tabled in Parliament via a link from the main page in this section of the website. Again consistent with the concept of humanizing your website, it would be beneficial to include new video content on the main page of this website from a senior PSIC staff member specifically to address the following criteria.

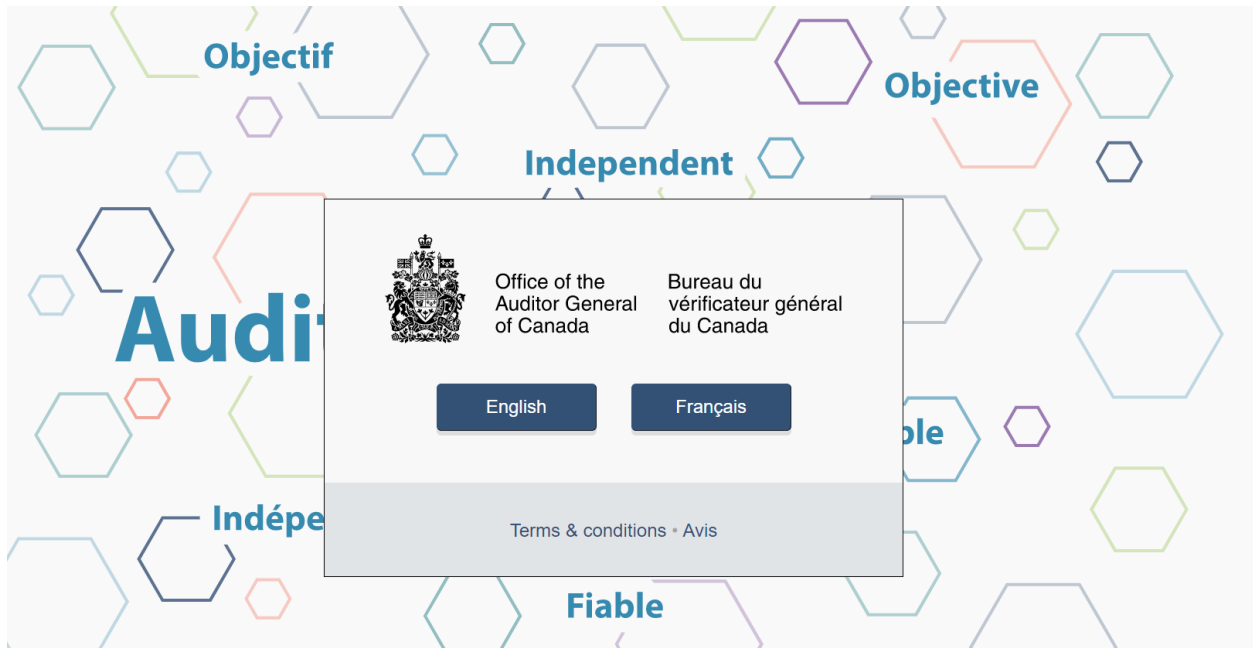
- Process-related concerns:
 - The impression that the burden of proof is very high;
 - The perception that little, if anything, changes because of the process (i.e., wrongdoers are rarely punished).

Existing video content can be brought forward. Overtime, this content should be reviewed and updated where necessary to be consistent with a more humanized/personable tone as suggested for new video content.

Information About PSIC

This section of the website should combine information from the resources and about us sections of the current website. One would expect to find more text heavy content about PSIC in this section, supporting shorter, more consumable content in other sections of the website as previously described.

Appendix I – Example: Primary Landing Page



Appendix II – Example: Secondary Landing Page

