



TICP – episode 64 – Releasing your inner sceptic

(Season 7 Episode 9)

[Katie 00:03]

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday update. Would you like to get a short email from me – never more than five bullet points long – giving you my take on the week's news from across the world of communication? This might be the latest reports, books, podcasts, conferences, campaigns that have caught my eye during the week. I always limit myself to just five nuggets of news. So you can read it in record time, but still feel hopefully a little bit more informed, maybe even a little bit more uplifted as you end your week.

Now, this is a subscriber-only email, which was initially intended just for colleagues and clients. I don't post this content anywhere else. So, you do need to sign up, but that's super easy. Simply go to ABComm.co.uk/Friday and just pop in your email address. It's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So, give it a try. That sign up page again: ABComm.co.uk/Friday. And thank you very much if you do choose to be a subscriber.

[Katie 01:36]

Hello, and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. This is a show dedicated to improving the way we communicate at work. Every fortnight, I invite a leading light from the world of communication – a practitioner, consultant, academic, author – to sit in my hot seat. My guest today is Martin Flegg, also known on the web as the IC Citizen.

Martin is an internal communications specialist and consultant based in West Yorkshire in the UK. He has more than 20 years of communications management, consultancy, and now teaching experience. He has worked in central government, financial services, legal services, and higher education. He is a qualified Chartered Institute of Public Relations Fellow, Chartered PR Practitioner, and a Certified Member of the Institute of Internal Communication.

We cover a lot of ground in this conversation. We talk about the internal comms job market at the moment, what it means to practise internal comms ethically, we talk about real and proxy measures of internal comms success. And Martin talks us through one of my favourite measurement frameworks, the ICQ 10, developed by Dr. Kevin Ruck. And this was a new one for me, Martin explains why it's much better for your change communications to resemble a Roman invasion rather than a Norman conquest. Please enjoy this delightfully wide-ranging conversation with Martin Flegg. So, Martin, welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast. What a pleasure to have you here.



[Martin 03:40]

Thank you, Katie. I'm delighted to be here. And, finally after so long, I know you've been trying to hunt me down for a couple of seasons now, haven't you? So here we are, finally here!

[Katie 03:51]

I've been trying to entice you for some time Martin. So yes, it's lovely to finally make this happen. So, we are recording this show on Wednesday the sixth of April and when I suggested this date to you, you immediately said, I think probably without thinking about it, you said, "Oh, the first day of the new tax year." Now, are you happy to reveal to listeners something, you know, really personal upfront? How do you happen to know so much about tax?

[Martin 04:23]

It's a bit of a, well, not a dirty secret I suppose. But it's it is a you know it's possibly something that people don't know about me which is that years and years ago I trained to be a tax inspector and I worked in government for a long time and I worked for Inland Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs, which that, which that became. And yeah, I trained as an inspector and then became an account investigator. So taxes kind of, or taxes in the kind of the UK sense, is kind of part of my DNA, I suppose after doing all of that training. But bizarrely, that is how I actually got into communications as a job and now a profession.

[Katie 04:58]

Is there anything from those early tax inspection days that you still use today?

[Martin 05:05]

I think there are. I mean you know, being a tax inspector's about, you know, being fairly analytical, I think really and, you know, looking at people's books or your numbers, or a situation and actually doing some research around that to kind of find out what the truth is. To try and identify whether they are, you know, they are concealing profits or something like that. But you know, translating that into a kind of a comms role, you know, at the very heart of being a good communicator, internal communicator or just a communicator or PR person in general, is being able to understand the situation that you're trying to communicate about.

And that's all about being able to do some, some decent research and some decent analysis up front that enables you to draw out you know, objectives to kind of define what it is that you're trying to communicate and what success might look like later on. But also to develop strategies and plans. Fundamentally, you know, the research that I learned to do, and the analysis that I learned to do as an inspector are things I've brought into my career.

[Katie 06:03]

Now, let's start with the very front page of your website, the IC Citizen. And that clearly states you have a manifesto – I love a manifesto, personally, I think it's great. And I quote here, to "democratise

communication inside organisations." I'm just intrigued by that word, democratise. What do you mean by it?

[Martin 06:28]

We all kind of have a sense of what democracy is. And I think in the current context of things that are happening in the world at the moment that, you know, democracy is founded on the free flow of information and the right to have a say. So, if you've translated that into an organisational context, you know, in organisations, there are lots of barriers to, to the free flow of information.

So that can be silo working, politics, organisational hierarchies, awful channels that don't work and do the things that we want them to do. So those are all barriers to informing employees. And informing employees is the pretty critical part of internal comms and what we do, and perhaps the side of things that we're most familiar with as practitioners. But on the other side is the listening side. That's about having a say, you know, almost in the sense of employees having a vote, on how the organisation does stuff.

So you know, democracy, I think, is the convection of those two things. And, to be a successful internal communicator, you need to address both sides of that equation. And, you know, to truly democratise the way that that communication happens in organisations and to build it. Build democratic structures on which that communication can be founded.

So that's really what democratising internal comms is about in that kind of sense. But also, I think, and actually, the reason that it kind of originally popped into my head was about, more sort of broadly about the profession. And, you know, what do we need to do, as a collective to be more effective as a profession overall, and to kind of reach those lofty heights of being a kind of a strategic business function, which we aspire to. And that's about making sure that knowledge, skills, are shared in a kind of a democratic way within the profession. So that, you know, people can learn how to be better.

So, you know, that's about- we are a very sharing profession, aren't we? And we do share things quite liberally with each other, you know, ideas, support, advice, and so on. So, it's already there. And it's something that we can build on, I think, to be able to take us to the kind of the next level on our journey to become a true profession in the future.

[Katie 08:43]

That's a neat segue into my next question, because you've written that doing a CIPR Internal Comms Certificate course was, and this is a quote, "Nothing less than a revelatory experience for me." In other words, it completely changed the way you thought about internal communications, you know, what it was for, how you practised it. Can you just talk us through how your thinking changed after having done that course?

[Martin 09:08]

Just to go back a bit further than that, it was, you know, how did I get into internal comms from being a tax inspector? And that was probably because I wasn't a very good tax inspector, I suppose. But what I was good at doing was writing and that was kind of picked up by my, you know, by my boss and I was encouraged to actually go and write guidance, technical guidance, to start off with for other inspectors, and then more broadly, for other groups in the department.

And out of that I segued into a marketing communications role in HMRC. And then, as a result of that one day ended up with internal comms manager in my job title. And it was entirely, it was entirely my fault, I suppose that that ended, because you know, you stick your head above the parapet and one day the doorstep of the director that was working for at the time and basically said, "The internal comms is awful round here, Jim, you need to give it to me and let me sort it out."

That was Jim Harra who's Permanent Secretary of HMRC now and he said to me, turned around and said, "Well, okay, you can do it then. Get on with it. Make stuff happen, Martin," were his words to me. And I did. I made loads of stuff happen, Katie. So, you know in a way, and I had no idea what internal comms was about you know, or what good practice looked like or anything. Certainly nothing about the theory that underpinned any of it or anything.

So I just went ahead and created lots of stuff, invented channels, wrote lots of stuff, sent loads of stuff out: emails, newsletters, events. Travelled the length and breadth of Britain with road shows and things delivering stuff to employees. And, you know, for the most part, some of that worked, and some of it didn't. And then one day, somebody said to me, "Why do you think that worked then, Martin?" And I didn't know the answer. So I thought I better find out about that.

And it was about the time I suppose when that seminal report was published, Engaging for Success by David MacLeod and Nita Clarke. And I know you've had them on the show, Katie, and they've talked about that report. And, working in government at the time, because it was a government-commissioned report, I felt the ripples of that inside the civil service. And the Cabinet Office proceeded to, you know, give lots of advice and guidance to departments about how to exploit these new findings around, you know, internal communication and employee engagement. I kind of wanted to think and find out more about that, that led me to sign up to do the CIPR's Internal Comms Certificate course, which is run by PR Academy.

Just going on that course and learning a bit of theory, learning about the things that really underpin good practice was just, as I say, it was a revelatory experience. And I kind of finally appreciated about why things did work and why things didn't. Right from day one on that course, we were able to bring those things back into the organisation where I was working, and put them into practice, and to kind of refine the things that I was doing or stop doing things altogether, because they were just, you know, bad practice basically. Having that little bit of theory behind you, I think, and that bit of, that sort of academic knowledge almost, is the thing that can really make a difference in your career.

[Katie 12:27]

And you've gone on now to actually teach modules of that course yourself. Am I right?

[Martin 12:32]

Yeah, I do, yeah. I remember sitting in some of the workshops while I was doing that course, years ago, and thinking, "I'd really like to teach this course." And anyway, be careful what you wish for, because here I am today, teaching that course. Albeit in a different format, because things move on of course. But yeah, and it's something that I really enjoy doing. And you know, I've got over 20-odd years' experience in this game now. And it's just being able to share that with people who are kind of new to the profession is a huge privilege. Almost get them on the right footing, in a way that I perhaps didn't get off on the right footing, because I kind of fell into internal communications in the way that so many of us fall into it from something entirely different. It's a great privilege to teach on that course. I learn something almost every day, both from the books, but also from the people that I'm teaching. It's an incredible, incredible experience.

[Katie 13:27]

This might be a hard question to answer. But is there- is there a common moment? Or is there a common module or exercise that you do, and you suddenly realise, ah, these attendees are really starting to get it now? Is there often one particular framework?

[Martin 13:47]

There absolutely is. And that's, that is the employee engagement stuff, which is, you know, engagement is one of those one of those words, isn't it that we bandy around in organisations. And people say, "Oh, we need to engage our people with this or create some engaging content about this topic." What do they actually mean by that? You know, it's one of those words that is so, so prevalent in day-to-day practice.

One of the questions that I ask the students is, "What does engagement mean to you? In the context of your organisation?" If there's 20 people on the course, they'll give you 20 different answers. But actually, when you start to explain to them, you know, those findings from the MacLeod and Clarke report and how employee engagement is influenced by, in sales, communications and how to do that with things like creating a good strategic narrative and making sure that leaders communicate in the right way. The scales kind of fall from their eyes and they think, Ah. That's really what engagement is about, it is not about content. It has more to do with the fundamental stuff of helping leaders to communicate effectively, line managers communicate effectively, and how to really leverage things like, you know, making sure organisations do the things that they say, they're going to do.

[Katie 15:06]

You've highlighted, I think you've called it the uncomfortable truth, that anyone can create and distribute content inside our organisations today. And you say, again, this is a quote, "This should be reason enough for all internal communicators to keep asking ourselves the question, what makes us so

unique, special and indispensable?" I'm going to kind of throw that question back to you, if I may, and just say, you know, how would you answer that question? Where does our true value lie?

[Martin 15:38]

The reason that I sort of said that, you know, that anybody can create content in organisations. And I think, you know, digital, digital stole our uniqueness, because I think we were probably for years and years, probably renowned and known for being the people that could produce great content in organisations, whether that was written content or something, something that was a bit richer.

And then digital came along, all these digital platforms and enterprise social networks, everything, we moved out of content creation into content curation. And there was a big narrative around that and a big, big debate about that, about, you know, whether internal comms now was about curation of content rather than the creation of content itself. And that was because, you know, digital was there, and employees were generating their own content. And we were just kind of like tapping into that and using it and adapting it for our own reasons, and our own purposes.

So digital kind of stole our uniqueness, I think, probably about maybe about a decade ago now, or going back a few years certainly. That should have been our cue to kind of think about what is our real purpose. And I think we've been scrambling around that purpose as a profession, probably for a few years now. The pandemic's probably exacerbated that in terms of our focus, and the things that we have focused on. You know, we've kind of hooked our ways to things like you know, the wellbeing agenda, corporate social responsibility, ESG, all those kinds of topics of the moment.

And we've kind of, some people have kind of tried to adapt those into a kind of a new purpose, for internal comms. And all that overlooks, I think, what is it that makes us special and unique? And that special and uniqueness is something that I call the knowledge. And essentially, the knowledge is the thing that we teach on courses, like the Internal Comms Certificate, which is the fundamentals of practice.

So, how to do research, how to set objectives, how to create a plan, what on earth is strategy, and how do you use it? How do you measure internal communication? How do you use theory – communication theory, for example, persuasion theory, change communication theory – how do you use all that theory and translate it into something that you can actually use in day-to-day practice in organisations?

And also, finally, it's something that really interests me and I think is really important, which is ethics. You know, how do you practice internal communication ethically? And all of those, those things are kind of the cornerstones, the bedrock, the foundation of good internal communication. And I think that we consistently overlook those things in favour of the stuff that's a bit more bright and shiny, and in the moment. But actually, the thing that will give us the edge, and the longevity, as a profession, are those foundational things. Some people know about those things. And some internal communicators don't.

And actually, if they did even know a fraction of what that knowledge represents, they would be better practitioners in the long term.

[Katie 18:51]

And I guess, also, the creativity, so the fun stuff of creating stuff that we love, we all still love that. If you've got the foundational knowledge, then that creative stuff, for want of a better word, is likely to be far more relevant, powerful, effective. You wrote a really interesting blog recently, it was actually about scepticism. There's a line in there that I loved, which was basically saying that, did your success just happen by chance? Or was it by design? And I thought, Oh, that's such a good question.

[Martin 19:29]

Where that blog came from is that so, you know, I think scepticism is a real skill. I think all of us need to be sceptics. You know, particularly in the modern-day context of disinformation and, you know, fake news and all that sort of stuff, you know, we need to have a question in mind and we need to look for the proof of things that people present as being fait accompli.

Or the definitives, you know, the definitives in life and, and in internal communications, there's a lot of experiential opinion shared about things that worked for me in my organisation, and therefore it must be something that will work for you, in your organisation. Now, as we know, all organisations are different. There are subtle differences in things like culture, hierarchies, the way that places are managed, the people that work there, you know, sort of you have of types of people. I worked in universities for a long time, you know, full of academics, that really changes the flavour and the nature of how you do internal communications in an organisation like that.

So, you know, something that might work in a financial services organisation, try and bring it into academia, it would fall flat on its face, because, you know, the academics will just not engage with that. I'm not saying that academics aren't fun people, because they are in their own way. But actually, you know, you've got to tailor what you do to the place where you work.

Now, just presenting something as a really great idea that works for everybody. And a lot of that experiential stuff is presented in that way, in terms of you know, you must do this to solve issues, and this is the ideal, may not necessarily translate into your organisation. So scepticism is something I think we all need to practice in terms of questioning why that did work.

And did it work by accident? Or did it work by design? Because there's a lot of activity in organisations, internal comms activity, that is founded on nothing. There's no objectives there. There's no research there. If it did work, that was good luck, probably, but certainly not by design. And we've probably wasted a lot of effort doing things. You know, at the behest of stakeholders, usually. Creating stuff and deploying stuff, because they want to see it, they want to see that activity without really thinking about what it is that they're trying to achieve. So actually asking the sceptical question, why do you want to do

that? What are you trying to achieve? Can be quite helpful to help stakeholders get a better outcome out of those communications.

[Katie 22:03]

Great advice there. Let's talk about outcomes a little bit more. I've heard you use the phrase proxy measures when it comes to internal comms success. And I just love the idea. That phrase proxy measures is brilliant. Just for listeners, can you kind of explain what you mean by proxy measures and why you're slightly cynical or wary of them? And is there a better way of measuring our impact?

[Martin 22:31]

There is a better way. But let's talk about what proxy measures are and what they look like, and why to probably try and avoid them. So I think most organisations will do something every year like an annual engagement survey, or they might do pulse surveys or something like that. These are often the yardsticks by which internal communicators get judged, because we know it's the truth, that communication influences engagement. We know that the proof's there in the MacLeod and Clarke report. And we've been playing to that agenda for years.

But employee engagement, employee experience, however you want to kind of frame it, is really not just about communication, there are so many other factors that kind of feed into that. And they end up being measured by those surveys and other instruments that are kind of like that. So, do you want to be beaten by a yardstick that isn't really your yardstick? Because it's not really measuring- it isn't really measuring your, you know, how effective the thing that you do. The actual communications that you do, the channels that you operate in the organization. You've kind of got to find a better yardstick.

And that's why those things are proxy measures. And we sometimes, we sometimes latch on to those or cling on to them, because there really isn't anything better in organisations to be able to do that with. The situation is exacerbated, I think, by the fact that sometimes our skills in measurement are actually quite poor. Because we're not really numbers, people. Let's face that. And also, because some of the tools that we use, some of the platforms that we use, and some of the channels that we use, you can't get very good data out of them.

That's a problem as well for us because that means that the data that we can get is perhaps a bit flaky and perhaps a little bit, not very credible. And certainly not something that you want to run to a senior leader with and say, "Oh, look at this, you know, isn't this great evidence of what we're doing?" Because leaders usually ask questions when you put numbers in front of them. If those numbers aren't very, very robust and very credible, you can put yourself into a fairly uncomfortable place.

So, what's the better way? Well, a better way is to actually persuade people in your organisation that you can do some kind of survey or some kind of research that actually relates to internal communications itself. So that's the way that the channels work, the way that leaders communicate, the way that line managers communicate, the way that you measure things. And actually, ultimately, how



do those things, which are true enablers of employee engagement feed into employee engagement and relate to that?

So, Dr. Kevin Ruck, who I know who you've had on the, on the show as well in the past, is one of my idols in internal communication. I'm very lucky that I work for his organisation as a tutor on some of the courses that his company run. But he has a brilliant tool called the ICQ 10, which is basically a sort of framework for putting together an internal communications survey. And I've used this myself in different places in different organisations, it really, really does work. And it really gets you to focus down on the things that are really important in internal communication, and the things that really make a difference.

So things like channels, so asking employees, how useful do you think your channels are? What information do employees want? How well informed do they feel? How good are senior managers at communicating? How good are line managers at communicating? How satisfied are employees with their opportunities to be to be heard and to be listened to? And when they are listened to, how satisfied are they that their views are seriously taken into account, and actually things are done with that feedback?

They're the kind of like the foundational questions, but then later on in this survey, there are two or three other sort of important categories of questions that are around employee and organisational engagement. So, you know, I'm very interested in what happens at my organisation, because some employees are and some employees aren't. That's an indicator of how bought in they are to the organisation.

I care about the future of my organisation is another sort of question or question set that you could put into that as well. And I put extra energy into helping my organisation achieve its objectives. Now, most people will know that employee engagement is about something called discretionary, extra discretionary efforts that kind of test that thing as well.

The beauty of this survey tool, and you'll have to read a bit more about it separately, if you want to know more, is that there's a correlation that can be established between the first seven questions about channels and senior managers and so on. And the last three that are about organisational engagement. And you can see from those correlations, what in your organisation is making a difference to organisational engagement. And it gives you some clues about the things that you do right, and the things that you do wrong. So it's a really good tool for actually having a better yardstick to be beaten by, than those proxy measures, and those proxy yardsticks that don't really measure internal communication in its entirety.

[Katie 27:50]

We will put links to the ICQ 10, definitely, in the show notes. I've used aspects of that survey tool myself, if nothing else, it's a massively helpful reminder of the range of questions you need to ask in order to really get under the skin of communications in your organisation. Because so often you as you say, you

can focus on channels, but then potentially miss, I feel my voice is heard, I have opportunities to speak up. Or you forget about face-to-face communication, face-to-face is still the most powerful. How do line managers communicate, how do leaders communicate?

I guess the only other thing I'm noticing, and I don't know if you're noticing this as well, is there seems to be a shift in our work from just producing regular channels of communication and moving more towards campaigns. So, whether that's campaigns to sort of protect brand internally, health and safety values campaigns. And that's an opportunity so as to bake in a measurement exercise upfront, or as part of the activation campaign. So it doesn't have to be an additional activity, if you like, but it's part of the campaign. Are you seeing that shift as well?

[Martin 29:11]

I mean, there's lots of different things you can measure in internal comms isn't there. And you can actually measure the function itself, I suppose, which is really kind of what ICQ 10 is all about. But then you can also make sure that you that you've got those measures baked into campaigns as well. And you know, campaigns are probably something, you know, there's a kind of a terminology and a kind of a concept, which are more kind of akin to external comms, perhaps, and kind of PR and marketing and things like that. And actually, we probably talked about, in internal comms, running campaigns, but they're not really campaigns. They're just kind of comms plans really, aren't they.

But a campaign, in terms of a kind of a broader sense, you could probably build a campaign like around something like a change programme, for example. So, change programmes tend to be quite long lived. They last sometimes for years.

So you kind of, you run a campaign, which is almost kind of like a sequence of individual plans. And you might have measures for those individual plans, because those plans might be about point issues, like changes in processes or changes in terms and conditions or something like that, which are often in change programmes. But as a campaign, you can measure the campaign as well in its entirety by perhaps looking at some higher-level objectives and aims of that campaign, that kind of relate more to the kind of the overall objectives and aims of the of the change programme, if it's a change programme that you're in a campaign about.

There's lots of different levels that you can do measurements, in organisations with internal comms. I always say, measure the stuff that matters. So don't get too bogged down with trying to measure everything. For years, we've been, again, beaten by another stick, which is the measurement stick, which is, you know, internal comms people, we need to measure everything, you know, we need to know exactly how everything's working. But actually, we can't do that, practically, we just don't have the time. Sometimes we don't have the skills and knowledge, or the tools. So pick the things that matter to measure those, because those are the things that you'll be able to demonstrate your value through more.

It's interesting. I was, we were talking about objectives on the course the other week, and one of the students said to me, "So are you saying that I need an objective for absolutely everything that I do? Even if somebody comes to me and says, 'Can you put this on the intranet?' Do I need an objective for that alone?" And I went, No, no, no, no, no, you've got to be sensible about this. You can't say to someone, "So what's your objective? What's your objective for posting this particular article on the intranet about whatever it might be?" Because they'll probably just like, say to you, Look, just do it will you?" And probably not be very polite about it.

But it's, you know, my answer to that was, you know, no, no, you don't need to measure absolutely every single one of these points, things like that. It's more about thinking about what are the important things that I need to measure? And if you do, if you've got an annual communications plan in your organisation for internal comms, you might at the start of the year want to sit there and say, right, okay, these are the things, at these points in the year where we want to measure those things, because those are the things that the organisation really cares about, or that's going to make most difference for the organisation. Or, where I need to demonstrate my value as an internal communicator the most. So yeah, be selective about what you measure.

[Katie 32:29]

No, you're absolutely right. And also, we hear a lot, don't worry about survey-itis, inside organisations, and people getting sick of being asked questions. So, we have to be quite respectful with people's time.

This pandemic has resulted in a lot of people reexamining all aspects of their lives, and especially their work. And if listeners are looking for a new role, and it's possible that they are, the resignation rates would suggest that there are a lot of people looking for new roles at the moment. You've called the IC job market, at least in the UK, like the lawless Wild West. Tell us why you called it that, I'm fascinated.

[Martin 33:14]

I think it comes from, partly from personal experience. And I took the decision probably 18 months ago now to become independent, as an independent consultant with my own business and everything. And I think part of that was born out of that frustration of interviewing for jobs. And going through that kind of recruitment process. And heaven knows there are some awful recruitment processes out there, and recruiters who don't really know what they're looking for in internal communicators.

And I think, you know, there's, there is a huge, a huge gap that doesn't seem to be getting any, any smaller between two alternate realities that we exist in as internal comms people, particularly when we're trying to get hired, which is the things that our professional bodies tell us that we need to know about, and be skilled in. And the things that we learn on qualification courses, such as the one that I teach. And then there's this other reality, which is the reality of getting hired, and what people who do the hiring are looking for. And almost entirely that's often around experience, experience, experience, and nothing else.

And I suppose, you know, that's what makes recruitment the lawless Wild West for internal communications, because there are no standards. There are no standards about what we need to know. No standards about job titles, no standards around salaries. It is a very difficult market to navigate. And to work out from a job advert, an internal comms job advert sometimes, where it sits in the kind of the organisational hierarchy, how senior it is. Because sometimes even the salary, the salary that's put on it isn't indicative of that.

And also, to try and work out what internal communications is for in the organisation to try and work out whether you'll be, you know, recruitment terminology, "a good fit for that." Because sometimes, you know, and this has happened to me and I know some other people that work in internal comms, you've ended up in a job that was possibly sold as being something else, but actually ends up being something quite different. And there's nothing more frustrating than being an internal communicator in an internal communications role that is not the right fit for you. That's quite a difficult difficult place to be. And often, it means that you're heading for the door much earlier than you thought, and they thought that you might be.

So, because there are no standards is very difficult to navigate. And it is a bit like the lawless Wild West. I think, you know, we've been on a journey for a few years now to professionalise internal communications as a practice. And I think we've done a great job on the supply side of that. So there are more of us getting qualified, more of us doing continuous professional development, more of us becoming members of professional bodies. Definitely on the supply side, things are looking quite good.

On the demand side, less so. I think we all need to kind of ask ourselves in the profession, what can we do to regularise that kind of demand side so that people start looking for the right thing? Start looking for the genuine internal communicator. And the genuine article, rather than looking for just somebody who is, you know, maybe good at creating content. You know, content's something that we do, but it's not the whole story. Or for people who can develop things like rich content, like who are videographers, perhaps, or who are graphic designers, because all these things get chucked into internal comms job descriptions sometimes.

So what can we do to educate people who are looking for internal communicators, about what good looks like, and what we're actually getting trained to do? And then maybe that, that gap between those two alternate realities will start to narrow.

[Katie 37:19]

What I have seen quite a lot of is clients who will come to me and say, as soon as I got into the role, I realised they just wanted me to SOS send stuff out. And they thought they were being hired for a strategic role. I think your point's so well made when you said, "What is the role of internal communications inside the organisation? How is it perceived?"

I'm doing a piece of work at the moment where I'm speaking to a leadership team, one-on-one, six members of this leadership team. And it's really interesting to ask these individual leaders, what they perceive the role and value of internal communications. Now they've got a very sophisticated understanding of it. So we're good. But I think that is crucial. It's almost the question you should be asking in your interview, isn't it?

[Martin 38:15]

It is, and do you know Katie, it's a question that I have asked time and time again, you can't kill a question. No, you just say to people, then you say, so what is internal communications for in this organisation? And you'll get all sorts of different answers. And actually, I think, you know, from what's said there, sometimes you can, you can work out whether it's, it's almost stay our run.

Let's be sensible, you know, some people are quite comfortable and very skilled at creating very good content, that you know, that hits the mark with employees and resounds with them. There's nothing wrong with that. It's just that you know, if that's not what you want, and that's the only thing that the organisation wants, then are you going to be happy in that role if you've got more of a, kind of a strategic kind of aspect to your professional skillset and your mindset? And actually, you're not just happy with sending out stuff, you want to be able to make a difference or to know that what you're doing is making a difference in the organisation.

And you know, if leaders won't let you do that, because leaders have a very, very big influence, perhaps the biggest influence of all in organisations about what internal communications is for and how it's practised inside the organisation. If you aren't in tune with that, then you're going to find it quite frustrating and quite difficult to operate there. And, you know, there's a great book by Liam FitzPatrick and Sue Dewhurst. It's the yellow book, but now it's the red book because they've just republished, republished that. And I haven't gotten the red version yet, which is the updated version, but in the Yellow Book, the early chapters are about what internal communications is for. And the value space is that it occupies, if you look at those values spaces, that can be a starting point to kind of working out what it is that you really want to do in internal communication, and the sorts of practitioner that you want to be. And having got that kind of in the back of your head, when you are interviewing for jobs that could kind of be your frame for then kind of working out, well, are these people on the same page as me, when it comes to what internal comms is for, and which value space it occupies, whether that's the same value space I want to be in?

[Katie 40:28]

It is important to ask those questions. And I'm thinking even in relation to content as well, because we've seen the shift even inside AB from a few years ago. And because we have been around for decades, it's perhaps easier to see this shift. But when mainly we employed ex-journalists, and it was about getting the stuff out accurately on time without typos, factually correct. And now, they're not even called editors, they're called content managers. And it's about how does the content fit with the message

framework of the organisation or the narrative of the organisation and the tone of voice of the organisation? So being more strategic with content, again, is a question that you need to ask even if you're just going in at that level, to design and write stuff. Would that be fair?

[Martin 41:23]

Last year I worked with a, with a housing association. And, good learning point, that actually writing content for people that work in housing associations, is quite different from writing content for people that work in a government department, or a university. And it's not just about the level of people's reading ability. Sometimes it's also about the corporate standards around you know, how they say things. The narrative, as you say, what is the organisational narrative? What are the organisation's values? And how do you promote those values, and include those values in kind of written and other content?

So there are a huge amount of influences on content creation that you need to be aware of, in an organisational context, that perhaps you don't need to be aware of in more of a journalism type of role, or external comms sorts of role. We talk about internal brands don't we. You know, organisations, some organisations want to be on brand, internally, when it comes to communicating with their employees, because it's really, you know, it's important for their, you know, their employee value propositions and all those sorts of things. So yeah, creating content inside an organisation for internal consumption is quite different from creating content for other purposes.

[Katie 42:43]

I'm just curious about your shift then to becoming an independent consultant after having spent many years I'm guessing as a as a paid employee, how are you finding it? And, um, was it difficult to make that shift? Or did it just actually come naturally, after a while of thinking about it?

[Martin 42:59]

I'd thought about it for years and kind of, almost been the kind of in and out sort of way, I suppose, really, and kind of shifted out of probably, you know, doing permanent roles into kind of stuff that was more interim. And then did a bit of freelance work on the side and then kind of went back sort of slightly in-house semi-permanently. And it kind of took a long time, to be quite honest. I guess- I guess the pandemic was, you know, like for so many other people was, that was a big disrupter. It made me really think about what I wanted to do, and the way that I wanted to work, and the sort of work I wanted to do as well.

You know, after being in house for many years, that was probably the thing that gave me the final shove onto the other side of the fence and become truly independent as a consultant and freelancer. So yeah, it's been a bit of a long journey I think, actually.

And, you know, I'm enjoying it, there are no walls in working in this way. So when you work inside an organisation, as an internal communicator, you're often bound by the four walls of the organisation and

your horizons are sometimes the walls of the organisation you can't really see beyond that. And I see that sometimes with some of the students that come onto the course that I teach, is that their horizons are quite narrow. And perhaps they're early in their career, you know, and they have only been in internal comms for a little while, and maybe this is the first job in internal comms and they can't see that wider world that you and I are very familiar with, because of the you know, the circles that we operate in and the network that we have and everything. People who are new to the profession can't see that. And sometimes people that work in-house all the time can't see that.

But you know, there's a hugely rich ecosystem, I think is a good way of describing it. An internal comms ecosystem that is just a constant voyage of discovery for me. And I really enjoy working in that way now and not having those boundaries that kind of set me in a kind of a box about the things that I can do and can't do.

[Katie 45:02]

And I suppose also, if people are employing you as a consultant, or indeed as an interim, they are actively looking for your outside, external, wide-ranging experience. That's in effect, a lot of what they're paying for, I'm guessing.

[Martin 45:20]

I think in-house, sometimes it's more difficult to get people to kind of buy into that think piece that needs to happen upfront. So if you're going to do really great internal comms, there needs to be some thinking upfront. And sometimes we're just not allowed to do that, you know, sometimes stakeholders don't want- they just want to see output, they want to see stuff happening, they want to see events happening, they want to see stuff going on the intranet. You know, they want us to be constantly in that kind of output kind of mode and be able to see that. And sometimes we're not allowed or even encouraged to do that kind of think piece up front.

And, you know, I've worked in government for a long time, and we made it drummed into us by the government communications service, that great communication is founded in great insight. But sometimes you're not allowed to do the insight. So that means that sometimes the comms aren't effective or even don't work at all. And that's, that can be quite frustrating to hear if you are working really hard. And loss of internal comms people have had, during the pandemic and afterwards, to kind of just keep the wheels on the bus, basically. So often, often people don't want to pay for that they don't want that think piece. They're probably more likely to kind of pay for and want that think piece if you are coming in to bring a kind of a more broad or external perspective, from other places that you've worked in.

But I wouldn't say that you consistently get listened to or agreed with anymore as a consultant practitioner than you would as an in-house practitioner. You've still got to be credible, and you've still got to have the knowledge to be able to bring that credibility to kind of the things that you suggest and

things that you propose, in terms of solutions to clients. You know, nobody's going to take anything at face value.

[Katie 46:59]

No, but you will sometimes be able to say an uncomfortable truth that the ICT know and have tried to say before.

[Martin 47:09]

Absolutely, definitely. Yeah, I think it's easy to do that sometimes. Because, again, you know, working in-house, you've kind of got, you know, you want to keep your job, basically don't you, so you don't want to be too, too challenging or too blunt sometimes. And, you know, having noticed that, that has gotten me into trouble in the past, sometimes just being a bit too blunt, and a bit too truthful.

So it's, you've got to, you know- I think it's easier as an external is to kind of go in somewhere and say, well, actually, you're doing this and actually, it's not really, it's not really working very well. I remember that I worked with an organisation a few years ago, and we had a bunch of linguistic consultants come in. And have you ever come across people that work in linguistics? Really, really, really interesting people. They can come in and they can look at your stuff, and they can kind of work out the DNA of your organisation just from what's just from what's written and said.

And at the time I was working on the change programme, and these consultants came in and they asked to see meeting minutes, things that we were publishing on the intranet, managers briefings, the whole gambit of stuff that organisations create every day. And they got down there looked at this, and they looked at the language that we were using, and they said to us, and we had a bit of a debrief with them one day, and they said to me, they looked at me because I was in charge of the change comms for the change programme. And they said, "Do you realise that you are presenting your change as a Norman conquest, rather than a Roman invasion? And there is an important difference between a conquest and an invasion."

And I looked at them in horror, there was a sinking feeling. And when they explained what they meant by that, you know, they were absolutely right. They stuck their finger straight on it straight away that actually we were, we were saying we were probably committing the cardinal sin of saying to employees in the organisation, "The past is all bad. Forget the past, nothing about the past was good. This is the new way. Get on the bus or leave."

That was the Norman conquest. Right. Now, we all know that with change, it is better to bring employees with you and give them a bridge to cross from the old way to the new way. But also preserve the things that they really care about, which are often things like professionalism, and self-respect, those things are built up over years in organisations sometimes. When you lob a load of change at people, they can feel quite threatened by that. And they want to know what's actually going to survive and what they're going to be able to bring with them from the past into the future.

So presenting it as more of a kind of a Roman invasion, because the Romans were great assimilators. They never went in there and just imposed their own way. They assimilated other cultures into their own culture and that's how they were so successful. Because it wasn't about trying to suppress other populations or other countries, it was more about assimilating them into the into the Roman way, and making that Roman way better.

So it's a really good analogy, I think, really for kind of how to practise good, good internal change, communication is not to present you chose communication as a Norman conquest. But moreover, a Roman invasion. If you ever come across them, linguistic consultants, be careful about what they can find out about you just by reading, reading your stuff, because it was very insightful. And I've never forgotten that experience to this day.

[Katie 50:38]

That is such a great story. I'm never going to forget that now. And that's something I'm going to check every time I see a change programme. Now, when researching for this podcast, I heard you speak at another one. And it was all about a phrase or you were talking about phrases that kind of slightly grate on you. So let's talk about this phrase, I'm guessing you're gonna know what this phrase is. But tell us about the phrase and why it's not one of your favourites. Let's put it that way.

[Martin 51:10]

Yeah, I was working in an organisation a few years ago. And somebody from the HR department came up to somebody else in the team and was, was waving a scruffy piece of paper and was very agitated about something I don't know, I don't know what it was. It was something that was obviously very important to them, and they clearly had a conversation with them. And clearly it was a bit of a tense conversation. In the end, this person from HR said, "Look, I just need you to comms it up for me, can you just comms it up and get it out there?"

We all sort of looked at each other in the team and thought, comms it up? What does she even mean by that? And, so what do you do? You post it on social don't you, you stick it on Twitter, on your Twitter, you stick it on LinkedIn, you say, I was asked to "Comms it up" today, what do you think that means?

This huge outpouring of grief and angst from the profession ensues. Other people had also heard comms it up, or comms it out as another variation of that. Sprinkle your magic dust on this, wave your magic wand. Cover this in glitter, you know, the usual stuff that we've all heard. I wrote a blog about it, drawing on some of those kind of those, you know, some of the angst and rage that people had kind of expressed in responses to those social posts. And it actually then morphed itself into a podcast, with both myself and a few other practitioners, where he kind of debated the merits of comms it up, and what it might actually mean in practice, and actually whether it might be a positive thing.

Because you know, if people are coming to you and asking you to comms it up, then maybe they want your help. And maybe they don't really know how to do that themselves. So there are positives, positives

and negatives to that. I think it's, you know, I think in a wider sense, you know, would you ever go to a HR person say, can you just people this up for me? Or a person in finance and say, can you just numbers this up for me? Or can you just finance it up for me? You just wouldn't do it, would you, it just wouldn't happen.

So why? Why is it okay to come up to a comms person and say, can you just comms it up for me? Or sprinkle whistling glitter or waving magic wand or something like that? It is what I describe as the litany of unintentional disrespect where people say those things without really understanding how hurtful that could be actually. Because, guess what, I'm a professional too. You know, I've trained for a long time and this, you know, in this profession, I've got all the qualifications and the post nominals to prove it. Why on earth, would you not- would you disrespect that, and you know, come and ask me to comms it up?

So, yeah, I think it goes back to that journey that we're on towards being a kind of a truly strategic management function is that we still in some places don't have the respect that we need. You know, however hard we tried to earn that there is some places where it is still not recognised that comms is a true profession.

[Katie 54:13]

Yeah, the only time I ever heard that phrase, I have told this story before, but it was deliberately derogatory, as a joke to make fun. But we had a content manager who once gave something to our creative director and just said, "Here, Joe, can you just press the Design button on that, for me?"

Knowing this is, this is a guy that knows everything there is to know about visual identity and brand and all the rest of it. And it was a deliberate joke, but I think you make the point. I think it's really interesting how we're on a journey, and it almost makes me think that internal comms needs its own campaign in a way to kind of explain the benefits of why we exist and why we do what we do. It's quite an interesting thought actually.

[Martin 54:57]

We are so good about communicating things. And you know, understanding the fundamentals of that and getting stuff done. It kind of makes me wonder why we're no, well, why we're no good about promoting ourselves as a, as a profession, and what we're really all about, you know, what is that? I think that's a facet that might make a fascinating piece of research for somebody to kind of work that one out really. Because, you know, how can we influence stakeholders, you know, just society more broadly. And I think this goes for PR, as well as you know, in a kind of a broader sense is, you know, how can we make people realise what it's really about and that not everybody can do it?

[Katie 55:34]

You are a prolific blogger. We've mentioned one of your most recent blogs on scepticism, I'm definitely gonna put that in the show notes, I love that post. And I just enjoy reading your posts generally. Why did you actually start blogging in the first place? What was the catalyst for that?

[Martin 55:52]

So first of all, thanks, I'm glad, I'm glad that you really, really enjoy my stuff. I mean, I- what got me into blogging, I think a couple of things really is, is, first of all, I write to think. That's, that's the main thing, and I've always been the sort of person who has to work things out on paper. And, you know, keep asking why, you know, there's that five why's thing where you keep asking, "Why, why, why?" And eventually you get to the solution. Sometimes that's just about writing things down and trying to sort of work it out from the words that kind of emerged from the, from the pen or from the fingers on the keyboard.

So yeah, just to try and work things out, I think, because some of those things, and some of those kind of musings turn into full scale blogs and articles. But also, because I have a bit of a reaction, I think sometimes, to people presenting things as those fait accomplish, and those, those absolute truths in anything, not just in internal comms, but just in life generally. And I've been like that all of my life for as long as I can remember. And, you know, I wasn't into flairs when they were in fashion. I mean, who thought flairs are a great idea?

You know, it's that not going along with the bandwagon, I suppose, and probably being one of the first people to kind of call out that the emperor has no clothes, I've always been that sort of person. And I think that was probably enhanced by my education, because I did science at university. And that's all about, you know, evidence and finding, doing research. And then being a tax inspector. And again, that kind of reinforced that kind of way of thinking as well about, you know, looking for the truth in people's accounts and numbers and things.

And when I see people saying things, in internal comms, or I see these, these trends and bandwagons starting to gather pace in the profession, and people trying to claim that certain things are our new purpose, I go, No, that's not right. There needs to be a counterpoint made to kind of like even up the scales there. So sometimes the blogs are about trying to get people to think about things that are being presented as being absolutes and norms in the profession. And, you know, just making people think a bit differently.

That's where the sceptic blog came from, which is really about, you know, scepticism is not a negative thing. It's not like cynicism, which is quite a different sort of philosophy, philosophical outlook. It's more about questioning and asking the right questions and looking for the evidence. I think all of us whether we work in internal comms or not, would do a lot better if we asked a few more questions more often.

[Katie 58:27]

I think what I like so much about your writing is that you have a point of view. And I think what I see too much of is what I would call "me too content." It's somebody else saying the same thing yet again, I've read it 1000 times, you're wasting your time, you're wasting my time. But you take a very specific point of view. I might agree, I might disagree, I might be somewhere in between. But at least it's a new point of view. And I think that is, is the secret to me. That's the secret of your success, in a way. I don't know if that resonates at all.

[Martin 59:07]

I guess it does. And, you know I don't say these things to be controversial or to upset people. You know, I have upset people with some of the things that I've written in the past and you know, quite unintentionally so and everything. You know, I've had, I've had some some kickback on social media from time to time.

But yeah, it's, I read something by an interview with Jeremy Vine the other day, you know, and Jeremy Vine, he's a bit of a controversial character isn't he. He has that kind of show where they examine controversial topics, things and he, he says something really interesting in that and he said, in this day and age, people don't want to hear from experts. They don't trust experts anymore. You know, whether they're academics or something else. They're more willing to rely on their own experience and their own opinion, whether that's valid or not. When they come across other people who have a different opinion, or a different point of view, they're really upset by that. Or they're really astonished by that, that somebody, somebody else could possibly hold an alternative view to them, that may or may or may not be equally as valid or invalid.

I think that was a really great point that he made. And I think that explains some of the vitriol that you see on social media is that, you know, people aren't willing to listen to other people anymore. They aren't willing to listen to experts, and they're not willing to listen to people beyond their own bubble. In some ways, you can't blame people for that. Because in our, in our modern age, you say that you see things coming up time and time again, the same opinion. That's because the machines work in that way. The machines that run the algorithms give us that stuff, they put stuff like that in our feed that kind of plays to our own worldview, and plays to our you know, what we think, in a kind of a groupthink sort of way.

So you can't blame some people sometimes for not being able to see out of that bubble, because that's what they're being presented with. And that's, that just, every time they see it, it reinforces that view. And that's why I think there is so much rage in debate these days is because people are being polarised, they're being put into corners, because of the way the algorithms work. It's becoming more and more difficult, I think, to hold an alternative view or to have an alternative viewpoint to others in the modern context. I think we need to be careful about where that takes us. It's not really a good environment for collaboration, innovation, diversity, diversity of thought, however, you want to kind of, you know, kind of frame that is a dangerous place to go.

[Katie 1:01:46]

You make a great point there about filter bubbles. And I noticed through Brexit, that a friend of mine who was voting a different way than I was voting, their feeds were showing them a certain type of content, my feeds were showing me something very different. And actually, I deliberately work quite hard to find content that is not what the algorithm thinks I want to read because I need to, we all need to understand how people with a polar opposite view are thinking and why they're thinking that because our job so often is to build a bridge, isn't it so often to build a bridge between different camps, different

thoughts, getting someone from here to there. And without understanding both sides of that, and where people are coming from, you can never be that facilitator of a bigger conversation that moves an organisation forward.

And that's true in organisations. It's true in politics, it's true in society. We have friends, not close friends, but they are anti-vaxxers. And my immediate reaction was, Can I have a conversation with them? I really want to find out why they're thinking like this, what's driving them being against being vaccinated? Not Oh, my goodness, me how awful, but rather the opposite. I was drawn towards that to find out more, Because these are intelligent people. So they've obviously got a view, I need to hear it. So I think you raise such an important point there, Martin. Thank you.

It kind of brings us on to our next subject. It's a kind of segue to ethics, which is what I wanted to mention next, because I know that ethics is of particular interest to you at the moment. Could you talk a little bit about how you see ethics directly in a practical way, affecting our work?

[Martin 1:03:31]

I think we tend to think about ethical issues in a really sort of big context. So, you know, organisational wrongdoing and that type of thing. Whistleblowing, that type of, sort of situation. But the fact is, is that ethical problems or considerations kind of pop up every day in internal communication practice, and we need to be able to recognise when those things do occur. And I think it goes back to the scales of justice thing that goes on inside organisations.

So, there's a tension between the sort of demands of leadership and the needs of employees. And that's an ethical tension. Because sometimes leadership teams or organisations do things to employees that aren't fair, or equitable. And let's, let's look at a particular example with P&O Ferries, you know, who sacked 800 people on the spot, using a recorded video message. You know, what's the ethics of that? If you were an internal communicator in the organisation and you were consulted, hopefully you would have pointed out to them that actually that way of doing that kind of thing was not the ideal and was not the most fair and equitable or ethical.

So, these things pop up every day. Every day. And it's not just around big stuff like that. It's around you know, making sure that you're transparent and making sure that you don't introduce your own bias into messages or particular pieces of content because you know, we write a lot of stuff. Sometimes you write it, we ghost write it for leaders. So there's an opportunity for there, for us to put our own agendas into those pieces of content and those messages. So that's another thing that we need to avoid.

But also some other things around, you know, getting feedback in in a way that's fair so that all employees have an opportunity to do that. Making sure that feedback gets acted on. Challenging leaders when they do things that might not be in line with the organisation's values. You know, so we talk about the "say do gap" sometimes. So you know, an organisation might say that it does one thing, but

then does something else internally, you know, and heaven knows these days. And then what happens on the inside shows up on the outside frequently.

You know, at the top of all of that we need to bear in mind, from an organisational perspective, who are the most important stakeholder group for any organization? And if you ask people what stakeholder groups the organisation has, they will often mentioned things like customers, suppliers, shareholders, investors. Employees might not even feature on that list. But actually, they should be right at the top. Because employees are the most important stakeholder groups that any organisation can have, and can't get anything done without them, frankly. For all sorts of reasons they're very important. Because, you know, they might dedicate huge swathes of their life to the organisation. They're probably financially dependent on the organisation. So treating them fairly and listening to them, you know, there's some huge ethical considerations there.

Enabling that, doing the right things and addressing that ethical tension and diffusing it, creating, sometimes creating compromises. I think we sometimes think of compromise as a dirty word. But actually, it's not. It's about finding a way, between the demands of leadership and the needs of employees. And internal communicators do that every day, in everything that we do.

There are some really great guides out there now that are specifically for internal communicators. You know, I was involved with CIPR inside, which is the CIPR group for internal communicators for many years. I remember one of the things that we produced was the Ethics in Action for Internal Communicators, that's a great guide to look that up. Because that's got lots of practical advice in it about how to identify and deal with ethical issues in organisations.

[Katie 1:07:16]

We'll put links to that. And also, I suppose I should mention this as I'm on the international board, but the IABC code of ethics as well. I think you're right, I think all of these are good guides. And then it needs to be translated into your organisation's values, cultures, ways of working. But I think it all comes down to – well it can be baked into what's your purpose as an internal comms team within the organisation? And if you'd like to think of your work at that level, even before you get to the plan for the year, what's our overall purpose? And why do we exist? Coming back to the questions you've asked before. Then I think we've heard this before, you know, being the conscience of the organisation. And I know some comms people, they don't like that phrase, because they think that's too onerous to be the conscience. But I think we just naturally are people people, we can't help ourselves.

[Martin 1:08:10]

Being the conscience of the organisation isn't necessarily about the big stuff. I teach an ethics module for another internal comms course. And one day when I was teaching that somebody said, "What are the ethics of the all staff email?" So I thought, I'll write a blog about that. And just pull out some of the, you know, the, I don't know, the principles, the issues to consider and everything. It's probably the most popular blog I've ever written in terms of in terms of number of reads. It's been read thousands and



thousands of times all over the world. Which I think is quite encouraging, actually, because it means that people are interested in that stuff, and they want to know. But you know, if you want a quick, a quick read that gets you into that as a topic and kind of understand why, you know, what being the conscience of the organisation kind of looks like in practice, you know, that's a fair, a fair sort of read to have a look at to maybe get into some of that stuff, and then maybe do a bit of wider reading around it.

[Katie 1:09:07]

More links for the show notes. Thank you.

Have you got time, Martin for those quickfire questions? Of course. So if you could go back in time, what careers advice would you give your younger self?

[Martin 1:09:21]

To probably be less busy, I think is probably something I would say. Because back in the day, I probably stressed about, you know, being busy and productive and having a diary that was back to back full of meetings and activities and things like that and everything and, you know, I think when it was brought to the front of mind when I kind of moved into independent practice where, you know, maybe your diary isn't full all the time. And the work tends to come in fits and starts and it's feast or famine sometimes, and to not stress too much about the gaps in your diary when those gaps appear.

And actually, those gaps quite beneficial, because that's when opportunities happen. If you're so busy to the point of distraction, you know, and somebody comes to you to ask you to get involved with something, or maybe you don't have time for those, kind of those chance conversations that we all have that often and develop into some other things, that can be a bit detrimental sometimes. So don't stress if you are not 100% busy all of the time. Create the space for opportunities to happen.

[Katie 1:10:27]

I like that. And also for opportunities simply to think. I've never had a good idea sat at my desk, it's always been somewhere else, it's on a walk or in the shower.

[Martin 1:10:39]

For me, it's usually in the swimming pool, because I'm a devoted swimmer. So that's when you know, when there's nothing else. It's just a mindless activity, you know, you don't have to think about swimming, well not too much. That's the place where a lot of big ideas happen, places like that. Definitely.

[Katie 1:10:57]

And I think also you raise such an important point there about the difference between being productive, and being effective. So, we can be in back to back meetings, feeling like we're ticking things off the to do list. But actually, maybe none of those things actually moved you, your organization, your team forward. So, stepping back and thinking, what's the high-value task here that I really should be doing that might not have a deadline attached to it, but is particularly I should push that to the top of my to

do list? Is a good question, I think. So, can you complete this sentence? World class internal communication is...

[Martin 1:11:39]

This is really easy. Democratic.

[Katie 1:11:42]

Oh, of course, we have a lovely circular conversation, one of my favourites. Thank you.

You've mentioned a lot throughout this podcast particularly Nita, and Kevin's Engaged for Success report. Are there any other books, websites, films, it doesn't really matter that you think that we should all read to better understand leadership, business, communications?

[Martin 1:12:07]

This was a really hard one, because there's so many to choose from. But I've gone back to an old favourite that I have here at my side now, listeners can't see. But I'm holding this camera now. And you'll see the amounts of sticky notes that are sticking out of this book. Because it's one of my favourites. It's quite an old book. It's called Open Leadership by Charlene Li. And it's a book that's- it was published in the wake of the sort of the emergence of social media from the transparency that that created in the world. And it kind of examines the sort of, this tension between leaders wanting to be in control, and being seen to be in control. And this, this need to now be open, more open about what you do and what you stand for, and how you do things.

And it's a very practical book, it's got lots of, lots of exercises in it that you can do yourself or that you can do with others. I've used it with leadership teams over the years to kind of work out how open do you want to be, particularly in the context of change. Because you know, sometimes, you've got I don't know, if it's a small leadership team, but if it's a big leadership team, you've often got different people in there who are willing to be open and some who are not. And they need to find a way of reaching a consensus of how open they actually do want to be with things like communication to be able to find that happy medium. Particularly if some of the things that they're communicating about they don't know all the answers, because lots of leaders don't, don't like to communicate about things where they don't have the answers.

It's a great read, like say, it's a bit old now. It's probably 10 years, 12 years old now. But I think there's so much in there that's still valid. And that can be used. And I probably reference this book at least twice a month. You know, it's one of those books that I keep going back to.

[Katie 1:14:03]

I love this book. It was one that we, we devoured lots of books when I wrote From Cascade to Conversation. So my two lovely researchers that helped with that book. But we reread this several times. And I think there's a line that Charlene uses in that book, which is something like, What is at the end of



the day, the ROI of a handshake? And she's trying to explain that relationships are quite hard to quantify, and we shouldn't attach, you know, a specific transactional financial value to every type of interaction and if we're, if we are trying to convince leaders too much of our worth and of the worth of communication, maybe that's a sign that they're not getting it at the end of the day.

So, finally, of course, you get your own billboard for millions to see and you can put on that any message you like. So, what's your, what's your message going to be Martin?

[Martin 1:15:04]

Release your inner sceptic. For all the reasons that we've already talked about.

[Katie 1:15:11]

Ask questions, don't take it at face value, jump off the bandwagon and have an independent point of view.

[Martin 1:15:17]

In a nutshell, Katie. In a nutshell.

[Katie 1:15:21]

Martin, thank you so much for your time. This has been a lovely conversation. Thank you.

[Martin 1:15:26]

Thank you. It's been a pleasure, Katie. Thank you.

[Katie 1:15:30]

So that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and the full transcript, head over to our website. That's abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. If you did enjoy this episode, I would be incredibly grateful if you could give us a review on Apple Podcasts as that will help other internal comms professionals find our show. Thank you to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. Whether you are a newbie to the show, or a longtime listener, this show would be nothing without you. Please feel free to get in touch with me via LinkedIn, or Twitter. Tell me what you want more of what you want less of. I genuinely want this show to be as helpful as possible. Thank you to my producer, John Phillips, our sound engineer, Stuart Rolls, and my lovely colleagues at AB, all of whom keep the show on the road. Until we meet again, lovely listeners stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.