



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 9

Episode 83 – Gihan Hyde, *ESG: How IC can drive the agenda*

Transcript

Katie 00:03

The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by AB, the world's first specialist internal comms agency. For nearly 60 years, AB has worked hand in hand with internal comms leaders around the world to inform, inspire, and empower their workforces, building great organisations from the inside out. If you'd like to discuss new, effective, exciting ways to connect with your people, please get in touch. Visit abcomm.co.uk. And if you do, I look forward to meeting you. And now on with the show.

Katie 00:51

Hello, and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. Today we are demystifying ESG, an acronym we have all been hearing quite a bit of lately. Environmental, social, and governance. Put very simply, this is a set of criteria used to evaluate a company's impact on people and the planet. And it's becoming increasingly interesting to investors, consumers and our employees. But we would be wrong to think of ESG as yet another initiative, another campaign, another pillar in our content strategy.

Katie 01:40

My guest today is Gihan Hyde, a trailblazer in the ESG space. Gihan believes internal communication teams can use ESG as a lever to elevate and enhance their strategic value and impact. "I am known to be bold, genuine and ridiculously curious," writes Gihan on LinkedIn. As a comms marketing and internal comms specialist Gihan has led some extremely large change programmes and communication departments. She's worked at Barclays, HSBC, Philip Morris, on the rehab metro project in Saudi Arabia and for the World Health Organisation. But today she is CEO and founder of Communique, a corporate comms social enterprise that helps organisations integrate and communicate their ESG strategy and story so they can attract the right talent, the right customers and investors. Now we cover many aspects of ESG in this conversation, but I think at its core, what you'll hear is Gihan's firm belief that gaining a solid understanding of ESG and its demands on our businesses will help elevate the IC function, and ultimately help us earn that elusive seat at the table. So without further ado, I bring you Gihan Hyde.

Katie 03:17

So Gihan, Welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast. It is a delight to have you here, and in person as well.

Gihan 03:24

Thank you. Thank you so much, Katie for having me. I'm a huge fan of the podcast. So being here is a pleasure.

Katie 03:30



Let's start with the basics about this subject; a primer if you like. I'm guessing listeners will probably know that ESG stands for environmental, social and governance. But can you unpack that acronym for us and give us the next level of detail behind those words? What is it really all about? I know, that's a big question. And supplementary to that, what's driving this interest in ESG? And what's driving it up the corporate agenda?

Gihan 03:59

Great question. Okay, so let's begin with demystifying ESG. So as you say, ESG stands for environmental, social and governance. Under the environmental element, it's all the initiatives that an organisation can undertake to demonstrate that it is playing its part in saving people and planet. In total, there's around 22 initiatives that an organisation can undertake when it comes to saving our planet. But these initiatives are different from one organisation to another. It's also different from one region to another. So to give you an example, one of the initiatives is to calculate your hazardous waste. That won't apply to all industries. And it won't apply to all regions, because not all regions have the infrastructure to take your hazardous waste and recycle it. So when an organisation does undertake an environmental initiative, it needs to be very careful if it has the right infrastructure, i.e. the country that they operate in has the right infrastructure to support it. But it also needs to align to their purpose and their values. So that's from the E.

Gihan 05:18

The S is all about the relationships that an organisation has with the humans that they interact with. So it's all about human interaction and human relationships. Think of health and safety, think of employee engagement, employee wellbeing, stakeholder communications, for example, customer loyalty. So these are all the initiatives that a company will take to make sure that they are treating their people that they deal with in a fair manner. So the S is social impact. In total, there is around 23 initiatives that fall under that.

Gihan 05:57

When it comes to governance, governance is all about how the company is being governed, right? Those are on 25 initiatives. And of course, it's not a surprise that it has the most initiatives, because it is the foundation of how a company is being run. But most importantly, how a company is reporting on its environmental impact and social impact. Some of the initiatives might surprise you. So some of the initiatives will be: what is the percentage of power amongst the board members. So for those of you who don't know what I mean, even though I would be a board member, in a large organisation, I only have, let's say, a 1% voting right. Even though I have my bum on that seat, I really am not impactful because I don't have voice on the board. And so the governance aspect of ESG gives you the right to have a voice on the board, it also allows the board to be diverse. And it also ensures that the board is not just diverse from a gender and ethnicity point of view, but also from a social background. Because board members also have to represent the people that they and the community that they operate in. So this is what ESG stands for.

Gihan 07:21



Why is it important now? Why is everyone talking about it? Because COVID actually accelerated it. So COVID allowed everyone on this earth to sit back and reflect on their purpose. If you're an investor, the investors had time to go look at their portfolios of companies, they started to understand, okay, who is making more profit than who? And why are they making this profit? And as a result, they realise that actually sustainable or environmentally and socially impactful companies are making more profit. So as a result, around 80% of the global investments have now been rebranded to green investments. The market value of companies who are compliant to ESG is equivalent to \$30 trillion by 2025, that's a lot of money. Katie.

Gihan 08:24

Yeah, absolutely. So that's from an investment point of view. From from an employee point of view, employees also had a chance to sit back and reflect on Yes, why do they want to work for a company, What's driving their loyalty towards that company. And as a result, 70% of the millennials and the Gen Zers out there globally, based on a survey from PWC and Deloitte, have said we will only work for a company that clearly demonstrates how they're impacting people and planet. And finally, customers. Customers have now also said we will not buy your product if A, we're not represented, we can see ourselves represented in this product. And B, if this product is not helping to save our people and planet. As a result, in the UK alone, for example, one in three consumers have now shifted to only buying sustainable goods. The regulators have now also realised based on the science behind climate that we're running out of time. And one way to also make sure that the companies are ethical and governed appropriately is to showcase how they're committed to ESG. So there is several laws and regulations at the moment passed around the world for listed companies and unlisted companies, forcing them to report on their ESG.

Katie 10:02

ils that the EU taxonomy, regulation or is that something else?

Gihan 10:07

So the EU taxonomy, for those of you who are not aware of what it means, so the EU taxonomy is a reflection of the EU Commission's commitment to get to become carbon neutral, or climate neutral, as they say, by 2050. Right. So to ensure that they reached that target, every company who operates in the EU, by law have to report on their ESG under the EU taxonomy, okay. Why? Because if you do that, it will allow all of Europe to have a standards that they need to adhere by. So this is one of the challenges of ESG.

Unfortunately, until now, even though 197 countries have committed to saving our people, our planet, through the UN Sustainable Development Goals, not everyone is actually using the same reporting mechanism as the others. So if I'm an investor at the moment, and I want to see which companies to invest in based on their ESG commitment, there is no one reporting mechanism. So at this moment of time, I am comparing apples to peaches. Now, why? Because the infrastructure in the countries are different. The regulations in each country is different. Hence, the reporting mechanism is different. However, in the EU, they're unifying it, right, hence the EU tax.

Katie 11:35



So what you've done there is very neatly, I think, explained the ESG is not just about sustainability, which I think is what many people might initially think I'm guessing that it's much, much broader than just sustainability.

Gihan 11:49

So this is where the unclarity happens and occurs. As communication professionals, we tend to mix up or get confused and think that ESG is sustainable. Yeah. ESG is not sustainable. Sustainability, as a term is the initiatives that as a company would undertake to save people and planet. So these initiatives will be carbon offsetting, for example, waste management, will be recycling. Okay. From an S, it will be a community impact component, a community relations, employee engagement, employee wellbeing, these initiatives, diversity and inclusion, for example, these individual initiatives, when you combine them together, This is what it's called sustainability. ESG is the datasets that you use to demonstrate that these initiatives are a success. They're the measurement of your initiatives.

Katie 12:49

Yeah. And hence why that measurement at some point needs to be, as you say, being able to compare apples with apples.

Gihan 13:03

Exactly.

Katie 13:04

Because it's a global problem that needs a global terminology and global solutions.

Gihan 13:09

Exactly.

Katie 13:10

I'll have given listeners a brief intro to you at the start of This show. But I'm wondering if we can sort of circle back to you setting up Communique, and explaining the thought process behind that what was the spark of the idea to set that organisation up? And what do you do today?

Gihan 13:29

I smile when someone asks me this question, because it brings me back two years ago, in my, in my kitchen table, literally, it was during COVID, that I realised something is missing in my life. And that is I am not living my purpose. And my purpose from day one has always been making the invisible visible, okay, and I'll get back to what that means. So, number one, I wanted to live the purpose. Okay. And number two, I have kids. So I also realised I need to contribute yes to saving our people on planet. But I don't know how to do that. Didn't know what it really meant.

Gihan 14:20

So, this is where I realised Okay, my way of contributing is by setting up a consultancy that would advise organisations to do that. Yes. So these are the two reasons.



Gihan 14:34

So going back to the first reason, making the invisible visible. For those of you who are not aware I'm originally from Sudan. And when I came to the UK, I found it extremely challenging to find work. Even though I had the UN in Geneva under my belt, I had Philip Morris Egypt under my belt, I had US Aid In Washington under my belt, but no one wanted to hire me because I didn't have UK experience, which is fine, you know, I can understand that. But it wasn't a pleasant feeling, feeling that I was completely cancelled because I don't fit the box of UK experience. So this is where I vowed that I'm going to help people to avoid feeling that way. And this is how Communique operate. So Communique, we're now on our investment rounds. We do have full time employees, but the majority of our colleagues are going to be from underdeveloped countries and underrepresented communities, and they're going to be freelancers. They will come into Communique, they will shadow us, they will work with us, they will deliver the work with us for the clients, they will take the credit for the work, and they will add it towards their portfolio of work. That gives them access to the developed countries. So at the moment, for example, I'm working with Omar. He's in Sudan. And sadly, because of the war now, we had to pause it. But he did the work for the likes of Suez waste management, for example. And now we can proudly say, I worked and delivered this work for them. So this is the purpose that we're living. And this is why I founded Communique.

Katie 16:32

It's really interesting, because you are actually practising what you're preaching, the way that you're delivering it is through an equitable, sustainable, purposeful way. So it's very clever.

Gihan 16:48

But before we went out and played our role in saving our people on planet, we want to showcase that we're living and breathing it, yes. And we did that by becoming a B Corp certified consultancy. So for those of you who are not aware, B Corp is a certification that you can get, which then if you meet the standards, and if you meet the requirements, you will be rated as one of the companies who are meeting the high- it's not highest anymore, the highest standards when it comes to people on planet. Which at that time, it baffled me to know that I'm the only female black Arab founder to ever be certified globally.

Katie 17:36

Really? Well done. Congratulations,

Gihan 17:38

Thank you. Don't get me wrong, I danced around that table. I was very unhappy with it. But at the same time, I was saddened that sustainability as an industry, it's a very, very white dominated industry. Even though if you really dig deeper, the people who are having a more impact on our planet, and people in societies are actually the ethnic minority founders. Where they're not there, no one knows where to get them and how to get them. So this is where B Corp approached me now and said, "Would you mind coming in as our equitable growth Board Advisory, to come and help us to figure out how can we how can we make our community more inclusive?" Because it's unacceptable that only 13% of the global B Corp



certified companies, which is by the way, only 6000 at the moment, are from a minority. It's unacceptable.

Gihan 18:41

So what do we do? Actually, what we do is, we help organisations to start their ESG commitments, right? We do that by integrating ESG within every decision making process within the organisation. Again, what does that really mean? It means that we write the policies, the procedures, we redefine your purpose to align with your new commitment. We help you to communicate it clearly and concisely, internally and externally. But most importantly, and this is very important for me personally, we help you design the capacity building sessions, ie training, and learning for your employees, so that they can understand why do you care as an organisation about people and planet? But most importantly, why I as an employee should go with you on that journey. And what role do I play in this journey? So these are the types of work we do. So some of our clients they included Suez waste management, who are now bought by Veolia waste management, HSBC, Barclays, they've included Vodafone Egypt, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, right? They are one of our key clients where we designed the ESG communication strategy development courses.

Katie 20:15

I've heard you say that the ESG agenda needs to be led by the top and then embedded by the bottom. Can you give an example of what this looks like in practice?

Gihan 20:29

So first of all, ESG is a mindset change. Sustainability in general, is a mindset change; it's a behavioural change. And it's not a change that will happen overnight. This is not a digital transformation. This is not a workflow or a ways of working transformation. This is a ways of living transformation. This is big. For it to really work and succeed, it needs to be driven from the top. What does that mean? It means that the board members need to understand what is their role in all of this. It also means that they need to be held accountable for the success of people on planet initiatives. How do they be held accountable? Their salaries need to be tied to achieving these metrics. Their scorecards, and objective needs to be tied to that, and most importantly, their bonuses need to be tied to it. So that's how and why should be driven from the top, because all the decisions will be made from the top.

Gihan 21:50

But it also needs to be embedded from the bottom. What do I mean by that? I mean, once the board understand, what is the commitment? How is it tied to their own success? Then comes the learning and development, learning and development ie training sessions, behavioural change, not just have to be embedded within the organisations. So I'll give you an example, one of our clients, they are a large organisation, and they have 150,000 employees globally. They've committed to people on planet, and specifically to ESG reporting. But they also wanted to make sure that everyone understands the role that they're playing. So we work very closely with HR, with procurement, with strategy, and with communications, of course. Why? Because the mindset needs to be embedded with every single decision making process.



Gihan 22:58

So if you're in procurement, when you are writing an RFP, you have to embed questions around ESG. If you're in HR, and you're recruiting, in your interview sessions, you have to include questions around ESG. And that's what I mean, embedding it within every decision making. Now come to behavioural change. How do you achieve that? One of the ways is by behavioural change, and science and nudges. So what we've done, we've created for this client, we've created an application that would be downloaded for free by the employees voluntarily. This application would allow the employees to input their steps of regarding their daily routine. So for example, I commuted from Vauxhall to Waterloo, I will write that down. The application will automatically tell me how much carbon I've emitted. Well, but most importantly, it will tell me what does that mean? So if I've emitted let's say, one kilogramme of carbon, it will tell me it's the equivalent of a small cup of water. Yeah, let's say and it will give me alternatives. They'll say to me, Gihan, why don't you, rather than, let's say, taking the bus from Vauxhall to Waterloo, why don't you walk it and by that you've been reducing, you'll reduce your carbon. Again, if Gihan puts in, I say, I've eat a boat from the supermarket today. I've had chicken cheese and vegetables. They will tell me actually, Gihan, do you know that if you eat fish, just once a week, you would reduce carbon by X amount? Okay, yeah, it's an educational process, but it's fun. Yeah, and a gamification process. Yes, Because we like have to compete against each other. Yeah. And we like to compete with amongst ourselves as well. Yeah. Once an employee was able to demonstrate that they've reduced their carbon footprint, an automatic ping will go to HR, HR will call the employee and tell me Gihan, do you know? First of all, thank you for doing this. And as a reward, here's a voucher from John Lewis, perfect. What's interesting, and this is where the power of internal comms comes in, the data that I've embedded and input it within this app, the company can use it towards calculating their Scope 3 carbon emission, yes. Or if they Don't want to do that they can call they can mention it as a way of them trying to change mindset of employees quite exactly. And that's a powerful thing to achieve.

Katie 25:55

Let's get down to the nitty gritty when it comes to how internal comms needs to act, what it needs to know, people in our field, how they can support this whole agenda. I've heard you say that, actually, it's going to be a huge threat to internal comms people, if they don't wrap their mind around ESG. Would that be fair?

Gihan 26:15

Yes. ESG will be either owned by marketing, or owned by the sustainability team themselves. And that's a danger in itself. Sustainability teams are very technical. They are not wired to communicate in a human way. I tried to explain internal comms to my mother the other day. I said to my mom, think of Beyonce. That would be the company. Internal comms will be the fan club.

Katie 26:45

Yes. Great way of looking at it. I love it.

Gihan 26:47

They will make sure that every single fan of Beyonce is in one place. They've been heard; they're advocates. Yeah, they're living and breathing Beyonce, His purpose and brand. Yeah. And they're being honest and transparent about how they feel about Beyonce songs. Yes. And attitudes and behaviour. That's internal comms. In my opinion, internal comms is all about ensuring that an organisation operates in a transparent in an honest and in an ethical and with integrity, as well. So if we do not understand what ESG is, and if we do not understand how to communicate it, we lose our power.

Katie 27:40

What I love about what you've just said, is the idea of switching employees, from that employee mindset into being fans and followers, changing the mindset from people that come into work for a living and go home again, which you've said already, that's not what people want. Now, they actually want to belong to an organisation with a shirt, a similar set of values where they understand the purpose that bought into that purpose. Thinking about our people, as fans as followers, as part of the ecosystem, if you like Beyonce, there's nothing without her fans. Nothing. Exactly. So it's the dynamic, equal relationship, as she has to listen to them as much as they love listening to her. I love it. I love it. You've totally got me sold on that.

Gihan 28:30

But yes, so what's the threat? So why do I say that? ESG if internal comes on, pick it up. Very quickly, why is it a threat? it's a threat, Because it's not going away. That it's not a trend. This is law from now on. This is ways of working. And it's complicated. This is not diversity and inclusion, where you demonstrate how you're attracting more diverse employees. No, this is how you're impacting the planet. This is data, this is decision making processes. This is a whole cultural change for a company as internal communicators. If we do not start thinking seriously about ESG and how we should be communicating it, it will harm us as an industry because we will be cancelled, yes, as an industry, and instead ESG communications will be led either by marketing, which defeats the whole purpose because they're only focused on commercial factors and sales, or it will be led by the sustainability team, who are very technical and lack the understanding of what humans really want to hear.

Gihan 29:53

But there is a reason why we also need to look into it as quick as possible. As internal communicators and fortunately for us, we are never asked from the get go to be part of the ESG strategy development from a company-wide point of view. But we are always asked, and given that strategy and asked, "go ahead go and communicate that". So there is a lot of questions related to the strategy. And we live it every day with our clients. Our clients come to us and say, "we're asked to communicate this." And I say to them, "Okay, do you know how your purpose aligns with these three pillars?" "No, we don't know." "Okay, do you know where these three pillars of your ESG came from?" "No, we don't know." "Okay, do you know what a materiality assessment is?" "No, we don't know." I say, "Okay, in that case, we need to have a training session for you right now. So I can then walk you through what are the steps that normally a company would take to determine what's important to them when it comes to people? What's important to them when it comes to planning? And how do they want to report on it? Once I walk you through all of these, you will then have an idea of



where this strategy came from. And if you have an idea of where it came from, you will be able to break it into campaigns that would resonate with your employees. But most importantly, you'll be able to measure it."

Katie 31:34

Yes, you'll know what you're measuring. Exactly.

Gihan 31:37

Yeah, measurement is key. Otherwise, if you don't do that, you will be then going through three obstacles, you will be communicating something that you don't understand, which means that your employees won't understand either. Number two, because you don't understand it, you won't test it, because you don't know which part to test. And number three, you will not tell a coherent story, because you will think of it as vomiting. I always say avoid campaign vomiting, meaning you issue a campaign, you launch a campaign, and then you forget about it – you don't link campaigns together. Yeah, and these are the dangers of us not taking ESG seriously as soon as possible. But also, the opportunities are immense.

Gihan 32:42

There is such huge opportunities for us as internal communications. If we take them seriously the clearest opportunity, we'll be having a seat on that table. Because you can then play your role in bringing this ESG strategy to life. I, for example, as Communique when we went in, and when we decided to create that app for the employees – first of all, the app wasn't the idea didn't come from us, by the way, the idea came from employees, we did a hackathon. And we incorporated design thinking in the way we work. And that's where the idea came from. And because of that idea, we were able to demonstrate that the data we're collating from the app can actually contribute to Scope 3. Which made the company extremely happy. Because Scope 3 is one of the toughest carbon scopes you can ever measure. Why? Because you don't own it. It's owned by your supplier.

Katie 33:53

I see, right. That's more out of your control out of your control,

Gihan 33:57

Scope three is the single scope that companies try to avoid. Because they can't own it, they don't own it. It's all of the carbon that's being emitted by your suppliers, by your customers, not by you as an organisation. So it was thanks to employees that we flipped the coin and we made management listen to us and say, "Guess what we're going to help you." And Because of that, the Director of Internal Comms, I never forget, she was actually invited to the board, and she was asked to sit once or twice a quarter so that she can give her input of what the employees are doing when it comes to Scope number 3, and that is opportunity that we need to take as soon as possible because we've always been saying we never get to see it on the bloody board. No one listens to our internal comms. No one appreciates internal comms. well, I guess what? You've got your opportunity now so don't mess it up.

Katie 35:02

A practical question here. You've talked about scope three. So I'm guessing there is a scope one and a two. And you started off this whole conversation talking about, there's 23 initiatives under environmental or X number of under Social. Is there a website or one place that is the authority on these things that people can go to? Is there one place that kind of governs all of it, as it were, that's the kind of central source of truth, or is it not as easy as that to find out?

Gihan 35:33

It's not as, as clear as that. If you want to understand what is scope 1, 2 and 3, if you go into YouTube, and you write my name down, and you just write Scope one and two, you'll find the video that I've demystified that for my fellow communication professionals. However, if you want to report on scope, one, two, and three, it depends on which framework that your organisation is going to appear by, right. For example, there is the GRI reporting framework, there is something called SAS B reporting framework. There is a CSRD reporting framework. So it depends, right? Okay. Each framework will ask you different questions around scope, one, two, and three. But not only that will ask you for different datasets for scope one two and three.

Katie 36:25

Right, Okay. Okay.

Gihan 36:27

So it's not sadly, it's not as easy as that. Yeah, no. Hence, majority of organisations at the moment are terrified of scope 3, because it's a mandate that they have to report on it. But how do you report on something you don't control? So the one thing or the one main way we're helping our clients with is embedding the questions of scope three within their RFQs from a procurement point of view, and educating the procurement teams, their sales teams on what is ESG? And why should the clients care about it? So we're turning their sales and commercial and procurement teams into advocates. And as a result, giving advantages to these suppliers and these clients, should they decide to join us in the in the process. So to give you an example, one of our clients is one of the biggest card issuers in the world. And they've asked us to create an E-learning Academy for their commercial directors and commercial teams, on what is ESG? Why is it important now? etc. These teams are now obliged to go and watch this, these elearning modules, but most importantly, we've also provided them with a checklist that they can ask the new clients on, regarding people on planet, and we've also armed them with nudges that they can then take, in case they see that there is a supplier or there is a client that's actually willing to go through the process with them. So for example, if a client says, "Actually, I don't, I know what ESG is, but I don't know where to start." The commercial team will be armed with, "oh, here's how we can help you. And guess what, if you start with quick wins, for example, and then we work into the more detailed wins or complicated wins we will give you a 10% discount," to incentivize them to come with them. But the beauty of doing so is that this data can be captured by the company, and then reported against their scope three,

Katie 38:57

I think it's important probably just to underscore for listeners that no matter what sector your business operates in, this is relevant. So even if you are just in, for example, a management consultancy and you're only selling hours, you're not making anything and such as a product, you're just providing a service, there must still be an enormous amount of social, environmental governance or governmental issues to consider. You've still got carbon output, for example, you've still got all the social agenda, probably more if you're a people led business, I just want to really hone in on the fact that we're not just talking about heavy industry here.

Gihan 39:39

Oh, no, no, absolutely not. Absolutely not. So for example, if you operate in Europe, and you have employees above 250, and your turnover is 40 million, by law, you have to report on ESG. Right, right. Whatever sector you are in, it's not sector specific. It could be region specific, because not all regions are as advanced as the others, but it's definitely coming your way whether you like it or not.

Katie 40:10

You talked about materiality assessment earlier, could you just explain what they are?

Gihan 40:15

After you decide why have you decided to become people on planet focused, the next step is to decide, okay, what are the topics that you want to focus on? What's important to you, that you really want to focus on when you start reporting on your ESG commitments? The importance of the topics, ie High, Medium, Low, comes from your shareholder and stakeholders, including community, employees, suppliers. You go and ask them "What's important to you, you think, what should be focused on?" Based on that then you create the materiality assessment. Why is it important for communication professionals, and I say this all the time in my training sessions... So we deliver training sessions for the CIPR, on ESG communication strategy development, and without a fail, I always say this: the materiality assessment is a document that would allow you to see how the campaigns can link together so that you don't fall into the trap of campaign vomiting. If diversity and inclusion is one of your top key material factors that you want to focus on, and the medium would be employee wellbeing, let's say, and the low will be health and safety. When you see that document in front of you, you can actually link all three together in one campaign. You don't need to have a campaign for health and safety versus diversity versus wellbeing. Think creatively. Think, how will I then create a campaign that we'll talk about? Why do we care about diversity and inclusion? How is it affecting our health and safety? And most importantly, how is it impacting our wellbeing as employees?

Katie 42:16

What that also does that approach is stop this scattergun approach of 17 different messages coming at employees all at once that appeared disjointed, that the recipient then has to make sense of somehow and decide what's important and what's not important and all the rest of it. By giving a coherent narrative, a coherent story that touches on all those points, you're doing the hard work for them, actually, aren't you?



Gihan 42:41

Yes, I am helping them to tell a story. From the beginning to the end. So right now, the type of stories that come out are, as in there... Let's imagine if you're hearing Cinderella stories for the first time. And I told you the story, when, from where she took the carriage onwards, your understanding of that story will be completely different if I told you the story from the beginning when she lost her mom.

Katie 43:12

Yeah. Yeah.

Gihan 43:13

Does that make sense?

Katie 43:14

Yeah, absolutely.

Gihan 43:15

And this is what was facing at the moment. And we're not telling full stories.

Katie 43:19

And it's very interesting. We're not giving the context in the background.

Gihan 43:24

Exactly. I've written an article actually on LinkedIn, and it I was saying, if content is king, context is queen.

Katie 43:33

I learned a new term when I was researching this episode. Tell us what is meant by green hushing? I hadn't heard that before.

Gihan 43:44

Oh, yeah. Oh, gosh. There's a lot of green things happening. There's green hushing, there is green washing, there is green rinsing, oh, there is whitewashing, there's a lot of washing happening. Green hushing is the opposite of green washing. Meaning: So if you're new to the word to the term green washing, green washing is when an organisation makes a claim about their people on planet impact, but it's actually not the right or accurate claim. This is green washing, because you're not being accurate. You're hiding a, slightly the truth. Yeah, sometimes the whole truth.

Gihan 44:30

Green hushing is the opposite. This is where you're doing amazing and wonderful work, and you're measuring it precisely and concisely according to your standards, but you do not want to share it with the world. Right? Okay, Because you're too worried that you will be attacked about it. Somehow, somewhere because deep down You know that no one is getting the data, right? And you don't want to risk reputational damage by being attacked. Hence, you don't talk about it. And we see that predominantly in the tech and the FinTech



sectors, in my opinion, purely because I'm passionate about those two, as Communique we are sector agnostic, we work with all sectors. But if you ask me, what's the sector or what's the industry that's close to my heart, it will be the FinTech and tech.

Katie 45:35

Is that because there's a nimbleness and an agility about that sector in general? That means that potentially they can, just be faster, and more nimble, when it comes to sorting these things out?

Gihan 45:49

Yes, they're faster, they're more impactful, and they've got the data. Data is a powerful weapon, that even then, by the way, they're not utilising it properly as an industry, because they don't know what they don't know. And the data means nothing if you don't know what you're looking for. Or we don't know what the problem you're trying to solve. And the reason why they are my favourite sectors or industries is because I could see real impact on society and on climate because of that. I'm not talking right now around how they're operating, because some of your viewers or listeners might think, "Oh, what about the data centres? What about the energy they're consuming?" I'm not talking about that. That is a different beast that they need to tackle. Yeah, what I'm talking about is the products and the technology that they are producing, to help save our people and planet. So for example, ANT group which is part of Alibaba Group. They've created the technology using satellite images, whereby if I'm a farmer, and I'm in the deepest, darkest parts of Pakistan, and I don't have a single bank, I'm underbanked, I don't have documentation to prove who I am. I have nothing as a farmer. All I have is land. And I have my hard work. They've created a technology whereby I as a farmer can get loans to help me buy crops and farm my farm, purely through satellite imaging.

Katie 47:34

Very clever.

Gihan 47:35

Yeah.

Katie 47:36

That's so clever.

Gihan 47:38

Yeah. what fintechs are very strong at is the financial literacy, financial well being and financial impact, from helping underbanked individuals to be banked. So believe it or not, so my family, unfortunately, because of the war, they had to just flee Sudan with nothing with them, except their mobile phones. They didn't have a single penny on them. But Because of FinTechs, they were able to get money. How do what does that mean? It means that with a certain API, which is which is a platform or the technology, my cousin was able to transfer money. Again, don't forget, we're in Sudan here, so there is no Barclays, there is no bank. So she was able with the code to send another code to the bus driver who is going to help them cross the border.



Katie 48:46

Wow.

Gihan 48:48

And that code is money. Yeah. Maybe it's not physical but it's money. Purely because of that they were able to flee the country. So This is why I'm fascinated with FinTechs.

Katie 49:00

I'm really glad you told that story. Because again, I think it just underscores the fact that we are not just talking about the environmental impact here of an organization's work, but very much talking about that social impact. Access to finance, access to money is so important. And that's a whole huge topic under that whole social element of ESG. So I think that's really, really helpful.

Gihan 49:26

The social, definitely social is the biggest element of ESG. Then environmental. Why? Because it's the human element. Yeah. And as humans, we do like the human stories. We like to be relating to a community, we like to be part of a community, but most importantly, we like to help others. Yes. So social in the ESG is definitely predominantly taking place, as opposed to environmental. But when it comes to communicating ESG, social is the most difficult to measure.

Katie 50:04

Yes, I can imagine.

Gihan 50:05

How on earth would you measure the productivity of a team purely because they're diverse? How would you do that? I personally don't know how to do that, you know, any of your listeners know, please let me know, educate me. Yeah. Because I don't know how to do that. So this is why, but with the environmental it's data, pure data. Done. The social is the difficult.

Katie 50:28

Yeah. And hence why so much of our work in internal comms is hard to measure. It's possible, but you need to be really thoughtful about setting objectives early on, as you said before about campaign vomiting. An important part of getting away from that is deciding upfront, what is it we want to achieve? What does success look like? Can I measure that? Because otherwise, if the if the objective is raised awareness, or just get it out by the first of July.

Gihan 50:56

I would love for us to start thinking as businessmen and women, when we are designing our campaigns, I would love to just sit back for all for my colleagues and internal comms to sit back and think, how is this campaign going to change behaviours? How is it going to result in the growth of the company financially? Or if you can't do financially, do it from a brand



proposition. And when you sit back and think, as a strategist, you will be able to determine how you're going to measure it. Yes. If you asked me what would be my advice for internal communication professionals, take courses in business, take courses in business strategy leadership.

Katie 51:45

So Gihan, if we had to summarise this whole conversation, we've got to the the end of a fascinating conversation. If you were gonna give our listeners a piece of advice, their curiosity is piqued by ESG, they want to go off and find more, find out more. What should they do next? What should be their next step?

Gihan 52:03

Go and talk to people who are passionate about ESG. Ask them why are they passionate? Ask them the difficult questions. Why is this important to them? What do they see in it? Then go and talk to the sceptics and see why are they against it. That would help you formulate if ESG is actually for you or not. If it is for you, then go and take courses on how would you design an ESG strategy. How would you communicate an ESG strategy? But most importantly, how would you measure and report on it? These courses should not be too expensive. Because again, you're still at the beginning of your journey. My advice is go to Coursera, for example, and take the free sessions first. Take as many courses as possible, or if your organisation is going to pay, find the right institution for you on the right course and take it, then get the ball rolling and start thinking how would you then bring it to life within your communication practices in the organisation.

Katie 53:16

And I just want to just end with the final thought that I think all of this wraps up with is that the very worst thing you can do is see ESG as another discrete and separate initiative alongside everything else. From everything you're saying, this, to me sounds like much more of an overarching framework. And we need to consider all of our work under an ESG umbrella. Would that be how I've read everything you've said? Would that be accurate?

Gihan 53:45

Absolutely. You've actually said it much better than I would have said it. I think as well. Don't think of it as an intranet. So please avoid having an ESG intranet. Embed it within your day to day messaging, and cancel all intranet deleted to its element of ESG elements. So diversity and inclusion, health and safety, etc, etc. you don't need any of that. Yeah. Unless of course, it's very technical. So if you if you have a health and safety intranet that has technical information, of course have that. But don't put campaigns on that don't, no, no, no, no... Cancel and clean your intranet, clean your campaigns and make it part of your DNA, ie part of your daily messaging and incorporate it in your decision making and make this happen.

Katie 54:36

Yes. Thank you so much Gihan, this has been an absolute fantastic conversation. Thank you for your time.



Gihan 54:43

Thank you. Thank you for having me, Katie.

Katie 54:45

A pleasure.

Katie 54:47

So that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and the full transcript head over to AB's website. That's abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. You will find this episode there, and also our back catalogue of over 80 others to choose from. If you did enjoy this episode, I would be very grateful if you could give us a rating on Apple Podcasts, it just helps other comms folks out there find our show. My thanks to Gihan, to my producer, John Phillips, sound engineer Stuart Rolls, and my wonderful, fabulous colleagues back at AB. All of you keep this show on the road, and I am immensely grateful to you for doing that. And of course, my heartfelt thanks to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast, the show would be nothing without you.

Katie 55:50

Please do feel free to reach out to me on LinkedIn, on Twitter, tell me what you want more of, what you want less of. I genuinely want this show to be as helpful as possible to you. So until we meet again, do stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.

Katie 56:11

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast was 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 and 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 a little bit more informed, hopefully 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 is super easy. Simply go to abcomm.co.uk/Friday, and you just need to pop in your email address. It is equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a whirl, that sign up page again: abcomm.co.uk/Friday. And if you do choose to be a subscriber, I look forward to being in touch.