



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 10

### Episode 90 – Sim Sian & Yvonne O'Hara, *A shared vision: ED&I and IC in action*

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**Katie** 00:04

Hello and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. If you're responsible for communicating with your organization's internal audience, then this is the show for you. I'm on a mission to help you plan and deliver more effective, creative, inspiring communication by bringing you practical insights and ideas from leading lights in our field. We are hearing more and more about the importance of organisations having a strong employee value proposition (EVP) to help them attract, retain and engage their people. Today we are exploring how the UK's leading facilities management company Mitie created and communicated its new EVP.

**Katie** 00:57

So let me introduce my two guests. Sim Sian is Mitie's Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. She was previously Talent and Diversity Manager at Heathrow Airport. And before that Sim spent more than 12 years in the police force. She has numerous awards for her work in the DE&I space. She says her strength is an ability to build strong and influential relationships at all levels of an organisation so that impactful DE&I initiatives can be implemented that really do create truly diverse workforces, and a sense of belonging. I was really struck by Sim's passion to make a difference. And so near the end of our conversation, I asked directly about what drives her to do the work that she does. Listen out for that personal, heartfelt story. And also joining us is Yvonne O'Hara. Yvonne is an award winning employer brand and culture change expert. She has deep expertise of building inclusive cultures through values-led employer value propositions, colleague listening and behaviour change campaigns. Yvonne's career spans many sectors of industry. She has communicated to donors and alumni at University College London, encouraged businesses to recruit people with disabilities in government, and led the internal crisis communication response to London's terror attacks when she was at the Metropolitan Police Service is on we'll be talking about her time as Mitie's Group Head of Internal Communication and Engagement. She has since moved on, and is now Head of Internal Communications, People & Transformation at the NatWest Group. Now I must confess that my expectations for this conversation were set pretty high. Even before we sat down together, I knew that Yvonne and Sam had spearheaded a highly successful award winning project that had a real impact on their organisation. However, the discussion that you are about to hear genuinely exceeded those expectations. So without further ado, let's meet Sim and Yvonne. So Yvonne and Sim, welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast and thank you also for being here in person.

**Yvonne** 03:37



Thank you, Katie.

**Sim** 03:38

Thank you. You're welcome.

**Katie** 03:40

We are here to talk about Mitie, and in particular the development of your employee value proposition for Mitie. To set the scene for listeners, Yvonne, I wonder if you can start just by sharing a little bit about what mighty does in the makeup of its workforce.

**Yvonne** 03:56

Sure. So Mitie is the UK is leading facilities management company. It has a global footprint but primarily UK based and by facilities management, Mitie do everything from front of house to cleaning to security, looking after a range of blue chip clients across the country. So ranging from Lloyds Banking Group to doing the security in Sainsbury's. There are just shy of 70,000 colleagues working for the organisation, and the primary makeup of those colleagues are frontline colleagues. So cleaners, security guards, landscape designers, etc.

**Katie** 04:35

Okay, so not connected in any way or hardly at all in terms of digital channels?

**Yvonne** 04:41

No, very hard to reach. Often working shifts sometimes wouldn't see their line managers that frequently as a result, some of them are part time... So definitely falling into the hard to reach category.

**Katie** 04:53

And Sim, from a diversity point of view, I'm guessing also quite a diverse workforce in terms of ethnicity, culture?

**Sim** 05:03

Yeah, definitely. So we've got good spread representation across the organisation. We've also got over 145 different nationalities, which just shows how diverse we are.

**Katie** 05:13

When we first chatted, Sim, you as Head of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, you made a comment to me, and it was something along the lines of "what you can achieve in that space is very dependent on the appetite of the organisation." And when you said that, I thought to myself, thereby hangs the tail. Now you cannot divulge confidences about other



organisations you may have worked for, but in very high level terms, what did you mean by that comment?

**Sim** 05:49

It's a really interesting question. Let's just say when ED&I started off, probably about 14 years ago, it was recognised as a really nice thing to do for our people. Whereas as it's evolved over time, businesses or mature businesses have recognised the added benefit that it brings to organisations. So what you started to see was a shift of some companies either walking the walk or talking the talk. So companies that say that they're going to do it, and they're invested in it, aren't really invested in it, and predominately the barriers themselves in trying to unlock some of the great things that can happen, definitely not what I've experienced at Mitie, Mitie have been a true enabler. And I felt very empowered to implement a lot of the good stuff that we've done over the past 18 months since I've been in post.

**Katie** 06:36

I've often said that organisations get the communicators they deserve. In other words, if you really can't get done what you need to get done, then there's probably a better place for you. So it sounds like in your space, that's very simple.

**Sim** 06:51

I found that company for me.

**Katie** 06:54

Yvonne, you have since of course, moved on from Mitie to NatWest. But at the time, when you were Group Head of Internal Communication, you obviously felt that you needed to build that collaboration with Sim. Why was that? What was in your mind at the time? What were you hoping to achieve?

**Yvonne** 07:14

So when I was thinking about culture, and the type of culture we wanted to create at Mitie, and when I arrived, I was listening to the CEO, to the executive team, to senior stakeholders, to colleagues, just really trying to get a sense of how is the organisation at the moment and where does the organisation want to be? And one of the biggest themes that emerged was the desire for the culture to be one of belonging and an inclusive culture. So in order to affect that culture change, I'm just one of many enablers. And Sim, funnily enough, was hired and started the same week as me. It was really important for me to reach out to Sim to talk about, in effect, our shared responsibility in really driving that culture change. And we were pretty much joined at the hip from then on, we just found we had a lot of common ground. Interestingly, we both worked in policing as well. So we had experience of that

sector and some of the inclusivity challenges there as well. But we found out from the get go, that really in order for both of our strategies to succeed, we had to work together, and we had to absolutely collaborate. I would say, I definitely sought Sim out, but she did the same with me. She absolutely recognised that in order to drive that cultural change, she needed a partner in the communications function. And that's what we've done.

**Katie** 08:51

From a diversity, inclusion, belonging perspective: internal comms, what role does it play, exactly?

**Sim** 09:01

So for me, there's, I think there's two things one, as Yvonne alluded to, they're an enabler. But also from that perspective they're that gateway. When you've got loads of comms going out, and I always split comms into two ways, there's your ED&I messaging, which is what everybody needs to know. These are the events that happen. These are the initiatives. And we pump that out to the organisation. And again, with the support of comms, it's about how you're getting that information out. I'm a very wordy person, generally. So it's great to have the expertise from Yvonne and the team in terms of what's the best way to get it out to our audience, pictures, videos, all of those visuals really create it really well. But also working with Yvonne and the team in terms of how do we embed and how do we land EDI messages in everyday comms? So it's not always a standalone piece of comms. And we worked our way in terms of getting that balance really right, where we do have those standalone pieces, but we're still sending those math messages throughout your daily comms.

**Katie** 10:02

And presumably, the communication works on two levels because one is direct messages about belonging, diversity, inclusion, to say we are that organisation. Are you also looking at tone, language, wording to make sure it's genuinely inclusive and calling out things that just aren't?

**Katie** 10:24

Yes definitely, I think Yvonne's team always come to me and say, Oh, we know we've got it right when Sim hasn't marked anything. But it is the tone, the language and it's a different audience that you have to cater for. So your one piece of comms has to address people with language barriers, people with hidden disabilities, and people who English isn't their first language, those that are visually impaired that like things that playback you as well. So in that one piece of comms, there's so much to think about. And you also think of those that buy into ED&I, and those that don't buy into ED&I, so it's, there's a real art to it and there's a real skill, and that's where the comms team comes to life. Because through that one piece of



comms, you need to hit a spot for so many different audience members. And for an organisation our size, it's really difficult to do.

**Katie** 11:17

You mentioned there are people that don't buy into it. And this was a question that I had for later, but I'm going to ask it now. Let's grasp the nettle. If you get pushback from, and I'm just going to give you the stereotype here, a middle aged white man that says, "Where am I in this agenda?" Presumably, you've heard that response.

**Sim** 11:39

Many times.

**Katie** 11:40

What's your response?

**Sim** 11:42

So for me, again, it's the context that it's said in. If we're talking about career development, for example, when we're looking at increasing diverse representation in those senior roles, that's probably where you would get the most pushback, because white males will feel threatened. And they will feel like their opportunities to be promoted are becoming less because we're looking at the diverse candidates. But in all honesty, it's about having that conversation and talking about levelling the playing field, there are opportunities that white men get, particularly through networking, particularly through privilege that aren't afforded to some of our diverse colleagues. The message is it's about levelling that playing field. Sometimes there are people that need just that little bit of extra support. And at the end of the day, the best candidate for the role will get the job.

**Katie** 12:33

Thank you for explaining that. And I think what's important about your answer is, you are directly answering the question.

**Sim** 12:40

The other thing is diversity hits every single one of us, whether you're a white male, or an Asian female, one of the protected characteristics is gender. And in gender, life, men and women, it doesn't exclude anybody, we just look at that representation and the balance of men to women in a lot of things. Inevitably, diversity and inclusion hits everybody. And as a white male, you may have daughters that you want to see proceed and progress throughout the organisation as well. So whatever you do now, in your day job and in your social life will help unblock some of those barriers for future generations to come.



**Katie** 13:17

I love that answer, thank you very much. Let's take you back to late 2022, I believe, and Mitie has a new employee value proposition, your EVP. Let's start with the basics for people. Why should an organisation have an EVP? What is an EVP? Yvonne, do you want to take that one?

**Yvonne** 13:43

Yeah, sure. So an employer value proposition very simply is the articulation of the employer's brand. And that has meaning to people who might be thinking of joining the organisation. But it's also incredibly important to people who exist within the organisation. And it's everything from the culture of the organisation through to the benefits that are offered, the career progression, the leadership tone in the organisation, it's really everything that makes that organisation tick, as well as the products and services they sell or provide. The reason why an EVP is so important is because we are much more discerning now about where we want to work, and how we want to work and the kind of employers we want to work for and if an organisation rests on its laurels, and perhaps its heritage, then it's going to miss out on some amazing talent. So it's so important for organisations to have a strong employee value proposition. But what we're seeing more and more and the Institute of Internal Comms index showed this is that historically EVPs they were very much owned by HR and marketing, and they were very much about prospective candidates joining the organisation. But what we've seen over the last few years is a dual role, because as well as attracting talent, we want to retain and grow talent within organisations. Everyone knows the cost involved with replacing talent and great people. That cost is qualitative and its budgetary. To prevent that a really great employee value proposition will help colleagues to feel engaged and inspired in the organisation, and feel excited about the organisation they work for.

**Katie** 14:44

So did you spearhead this? And if you did, who were you working with across the organisation to make it happen? You've alluded to the fact that it's got to be collaborative.

**Yvonne** 15:54

Yeah, I would not take the credit for leading solely on the EVP because there were a number of really interested parties to it. So I'll just talk through who they were. The marketing team were really interested from an external communication point of view, the HR team in different elements. So the recruitment team obviously had a big interest in it, but also the career development, the learning and development team and benefits team. And I've seen Sim from an EDI perspective, were really keen on a strong EVP. And then there was me from an internal communications point of view, I was really interested in making sure that it put the colleague front and centre in terms of really celebrating their stories. And back to the



ED&I questions you were asking, actually celebrating and showcasing the diversity of our colleagues, the incredible backgrounds and their career stories, that was really my starting point. So it really was Katie, a genuine collaborative effort, I could not have driven this solely from internal comms, I think to make this stick and make it really impactful, you've got to have your players from HR, your people team, as well as your marketing team, as well as your internal comms team.

**Katie** 17:20

I'm guessing any EVP has to be born out of research. That's where you start, because you've got to create one that's based on something real and something concrete. Can you talk us through a little bit about what research you did? What findings came out of that?

**Yvonne** 17:38

Yeah. So we spoke to 120 colleagues, a broad range of roles: from colleagues who worked closer to the corporate centre or more desk based roles, through to frontline colleagues. We really wanted that diversity of roles. We wanted diversity of experience and backgrounds as well, so that we could really draw on the different experiences. And the focus groups really found that the overarching theme really was that colleagues at Mitie loved the people they worked with, they talked time and time again, they said, I absolutely love the people I work with, I love my team. I feel like I'm really part of something special. And that's where the strap line Together we are Mitie came from, because they talked about particularly frontline colleagues, we work in an operational environment. Sometimes it's quite demanding. Sometimes it's tough, but it's the people that carry you through. And what they really wanted to see from my sheet was a caring organisation, one that really cared for its colleagues, supported its colleagues, helped those colleagues progress. There was, I suppose, two main themes really: one was the people and the sense of team and the other was the aspiration for the kind of organisation that those colleagues want to be a part of.

**Katie** 19:06

A quick word from our sponsor. AB is the world's most experienced internal comms agency. For 60 years, our brilliant consultants and fearless creatives have been helping organisations around the world inform, inspire and infuse their employees, building great organisations from the inside out. There is a lot of pressure on internal comms folks just now, to help you plan, prioritise and deliver astonishingly effective communications. Arrange a friendly, informal chat with us today. Simply email [hello@abcomm.co.uk](mailto:hello@abcomm.co.uk), And if you do do, I look forward to meeting you.

**Katie** 20:05



So you've got your blueprint for the EVP, and what it stands for. Just out of interest, was that able to be put on a page? Was it a framework? What does an EVP actually look like? Just for listeners who might be wondering.

**Yvonne** 20:19

So you might like this as a communicator, Katie. But we knew from our research that the take up of employee benefits wasn't as high as we wanted it to be. So only 50% of our colleagues were actively using benefits, the benefits that we— less than 50%. Actually, we're using our employee benefits and our discount scheme, for example. And as a comms team, working with the HR team, we looked at why is that it's a really great offer that we have, in fact, it's industry leading and facilities management. So what's going on there. But actually, what we discovered was some of the language we were using, for example, like benefits, lots of organisations use that terminology. But lots of people think about benefits. It's like a handout, but like the Dole, it's so is it really a positive use of language? And how could we reposition that, from a language perspective, we worked with a fantastic agency called a story called who were really great at just helping us define that framework. And they came up with this idea of my slice. And my slice was the idea that it's your slice of the pie. So instead of this is a handout that we're giving to you, it's, you've worked really hard. You deliver for our customers every single day, in COVID testing centres, in Sainsbury's looking after security, we're giving back to you your benefit. So yeah, one of the pillars was my slice. So we had a narrative first, then we defined what the different pillars were. And really everything came from there. Because once we had the framework, from a communications perspective, we could just explain it a lot more clearly, to colleagues and prospective colleagues. So at a glance, you know My Slice? Oh, yeah, that's about the discount scheme. That's about life insurance. That's about health benefits. That's about the whole benefits piece. Equally, when you were talking about My Wellbeing you knew what that was: my career, you knew that was my career development. So yeah, in a nutshell, it was defining the narrative, it was defining what the pillars were. And then from there, we built the actual creative for the campaign.

**Yvonne** 20:19

There were a few building blocks. The first one was really articulating a very simple narrative. And that was literally half a page that said, we are Mitie, what is Mitie? And we came up with a framework, interestingly, looking at essentially, what's the whole offer for colleagues culturally from a career perspective. And we came up with the 'My', so it was My Mitie, and the the different pillars were all called My so for example, you had My Well being, you had My Community, you had My Story, My Slice, which that was an interesting one.

**Sim** 23:14





I was just going to add in terms of Yvonne saying that it's translating into everyday language. Because I was one of those colleagues that didn't use the benefits. And the more and more I got involved with the EVP I was like, Oh, wow, this is really quite good. And actually, I started off in December, and I've saved myself 800 pounds throughout the year just by shopping differently, and making use of the discounts. And it does make you feel a bit rewarded in terms of yeah, these are great benefits that we've got, but we're just not taking them up. So that play on language and the tone, and the wording is really key. And that's the hook to bring people in.

**Katie** 23:48

Presumably, throughout this whole research process Sim, you were checking that the people being researched were genuinely diverse.

**Sim** 23:56

Yep, we linked in with our diversity network. So we also made sure that there was representation from all of our networks, so our race and ethnicity network, disability, LGBTQ, plus parents and carers. And that also helped our rewards team understand whether we've got the right level of benefits to accommodate everybody. So whilst EVP was around our experience and what we're providing, our offering, we also then use that to look at whether we've got something for everyone.

**Katie** 24:23

Just a slight detail on networks, because I'm noticing more and more networks being used by our clients to test things, to trial things for insight purposes. If there's a listener who's thinking, maybe we don't really have very strong networks, or maybe we haven't even set them up yet. From your perspective, is it an onerous thing to do? Can it be done quite simply? What would be some of the first baby steps to thinking about setting up networks?

**Sim** 24:55

So if you've got a head of ED&I or somebody that looks after ED&I it'd be great to link in with them. If you don't, it's about finding like minded people. So find people that are like yourself. And let's just take race and ethnicity, for example, there are going to be people of different ethnic origins within the workplace that have similar challenges and different challenges. And what you want to do is create a network of people that just get it. Sometimes it's so much easier to speak to somebody who understands the challenges that you're experiencing without having to explain what's happening, and then explain how it's making you feel, because you lose that impact. So it is just about finding and connecting with people that look like you, feel like you. And to give you that sense of belonging, and then collectively, that's when you start coming together and sharing what some of those

barriers are. And organisations are so open to listening, create that network, it takes a bit of confidence in doing that as well.

**Katie** 25:51

And presumably providing some kind of safe space for that network to talk to each other. Definitely share ideas. And as you say, not just talk to themselves, but make sure their messages, and their feedback gets heard in different places.

**Sim** 26:08

Definitely. And again, from a diverse perspective, I've got that added benefit in that I'm racially diverse myself, there are things that I may experience and others around me don't experience. So they don't understand. For me when we're looking at ED&I, if we don't know what's happening or what you're experiencing, we can't help fix it. But it's all about speaking up around what some of those challenges are, what some of those barriers are. And it can be a one to one, the number of people I have come and approach me separately. They don't want to speak to anybody else. And that's fine. But if your voice isn't heard, we can't make any changes.

**Katie** 26:40

Let's talk about how you then actually communicated this new bright shiny EVP. What was your thought process around the planning of that communication? And then how you actually executed that?

**Yvonne** 26:54

Yeah, so because the audience is geographically dispersed, not desk based, it was really important that we thought about how we communicated the EVP across a wide range of channels. We use the traditional channels that you would expect, like our intranet, for example, our digital screens and our key hubs, but we wanted to make sure we reached our frontline colleagues. So we also made sure that leaders had a briefing, and were able to talk about the EVP with colleagues. We created some really lovely video collateral which were essentially vignettes, stories of our colleagues and their career journey, their personal journeys. So they were provided as part of the pack. If you wanted to do a short briefing where perhaps you like to do it using a PowerPoint deck, you could do that. But equally, if you wanted to play some videos to really bring it alive, you could as well. We also have an extranet. So not all of our colleagues have access to the internet. So we created a standalone page called My Mitie where it was, again, just about simplifying that colleague experience. What's this EVP? Oh, how do I find out about my career development, you click on My Career, and in there, you'll find the career stories, all the links to all the information that you might need.



**Yvonne** 28:16

So the EVP was launched. And then a few months later, we essentially took the EVP on the road with an in-person roadshow. And again, we couldn't do just five locations and pat ourselves on the back. And that was great. We had to think of our colleagues. So we did a Late Show, specifically for shift workers in the evening, hosted by two of our MDs. And that was virtual, so people could either listen to it live, or they could listen to it later. We also created lots of EVP related content on this standalone extranet that people could listen to and could watch at their leisure on their mobile phone, on their device, whatever it might be. And the content ranged from financial well being, we had our CFO do a podcast, for example, with one of our financial well being providers, which was a bit of a mythbuster about what are shares and why is it good to have shares in the company – again, a benefit that lots of people have, but they're often haven't a clue what a share is, or how to invest shares, or the thinking of: why don't I just get some cash? Why do I have to get these shares? So it's an explainer around pensions, and shares, and how the markets work in a really simple, easily digestible format.

**Yvonne** 29:39

So you'd all the digital content, and then the roadshow visited five locations in the UK. We did two shows a day. And that was a mix of the CEO and the management team, sharing their stories, but actually front and centre as part of that were our colleagues on the stage being interviewed by our management team about their experiences. And then we had, as part of the whole experience, as you came into the road show, we had what we called market stalls. So Sim had her own ED&I one, which was manned by lots of the network colleagues across the country. And the objective there was people could come and find out what the networks do if they weren't a member that could sign up. And we also had the same for all the pillars. So it was a real, let's make sure we reach everyone, wherever they are, be it digitally or in person. But that in person element had a huge impact, because we hadn't taken a road show on the road since COVID. So there was a great response to that, colleagues just absolutely loved seeing the management team, but also hearing the stories of our colleagues. So yeah, that's an important element of almost bringing the EVP alive, if you like.

**Sim** 30:59

And it was a show, you said it was a show and it was a show. So it really added to the theatre of it. And no matter how many times Yvonne and I watched it, every time we watched it, we still got that wow factor. Yeah.

**Katie** 31:10

So how many colleagues in one go might have you been speaking to?



**Yvonne** 31:14

So we reached 150 colleagues in person, over 13,000 colleagues accessed the digital content. But in fact, we kept it up there. So I don't know what the current stats are. Basically, it's on demand content, so you can watch it whenever you want. And funny when I joined Mitie, I went on the extranet and had a look at some of the content around... it wasn't EVP at that stage, it was more about the organisation had some of the colleagues' stories. And it was great as that employer brand in terms of helping me understand the business. I could use that in my interview, and understand the business, but be to get a sense of the culture is fantastic. So I'm optimistic and hopeful that people who are thinking of joining Mitie now will access our content, will read it and think yeah, this is an organisation I'd really like to be part of.

**Katie** 32:06

A few follow up questions that this has occurred to me through listening to that. Let's cover off the technical one, just very quickly, an extranet, just in case anyone's wondering. I'm guessing, basically a website page that's mainly aimed for colleagues, but it's accessible without a login or password, would that be a correct?

**Yvonne** 32:30

There's the website. Yeah, which is the Mitie website, the extranet, we call mitiepeople.com. It is slightly hidden from the main website. But what we do is we link to it a lot. We use QR codes, etc. in our comms for people who don't have access to the internet. And basically what we do is we replicate all of our content that you find on the internet will be on the extranet. If you're a cleaner in Rutherglen, then you can access that content, it doesn't matter that you are not sitting at a desk looking at the data.

**Katie** 33:01

Are you seeing that line blurred between what's strictly internal and what's external, in the sense that we are being able to access a lot more without massive passwords and logins and so on?

**Yvonne** 33:14

Yeah, I think social media is playing a big role. I don't know whether I came up with it, or I read it somewhere. But I always describe it as outside in communications and into outside communications. So what was interesting about the EVP is, we started to see a big spike in social media engagement, because what colleagues were doing, there was a bit of a bit of an urban myth that not many of our colleagues are on LinkedIn. Because naturally, if you're in a frontline role, LinkedIn is more traditionally for your professional corporate centre type roles. But what we discovered was actually the EVP kind of bucked that trend, because colleagues were seeing the content we were posting, say about the road shows, and they



were resharing. They were posting it, they were giving their own view on what they thought. And we started to see the engagement levels really go up. So I think social media, now people don't distinguish between social media and an intranet. They don't really care where they see it. But if they feel proud and inspired to work, somewhere they will post it on social media, or they might go on Engage, or Yammer or whatever, whatever tool you might use internally. So yeah, I think we are definitely moving into more of an age where there's less distinction between those channels. Because I think when you're a colleague, you're like, you're fairly agnostic about the channel. It's more the one that you use. That's where you will share or post your content.

**Katie** 34:50

What kind of objectives did you set for this whole campaign? Was it general awareness or was there something very specific and tangible that you were out to measure?

**Yvonne** 35:01

We definitely had awareness measures in there because we were launching something new. So that was important. But a key driver for us was take up of the benefits. So we wanted to see if the EVP would have an impact on that. The other drivers, which we couldn't directly impact, but we were monitoring really closely, were attrition. So our attrition for people who were leaving the organisation within a year was quite high. It was 28%. So that was a big concern for the business. So wanted to see if the EVP, of course, not solely responsible for impacting on attrition, but whether that had an impact. And then we were looking at employee engagement levels as well, which had dipped 5%. And so we wanted to see what was the net result of all of the activities on employee engagement. So we had very much a measurement mindset from the outset. We wanted to see how things were performing across the channels. So we also tracked social media engagement as well. And that gave us a really kind of rich picture of the impact of the campaign itself and the road show.

**Katie** 36:18

But presumably, these are quite long term changes, aren't they? So I'm guessing you've got to leave several months, if not longer to actually see some kind of impact as well?

**Yvonne** 36:32

Yeah, absolutely. Although the roadshows happened in February, our engagement survey results came out late May, and we saw a 7% increase in engagement, which was the highest ever—

**Katie** 36:44

Wow.



**Yvonne** 36:46

–since the current CEO had joined the organisation, which was five years ago. So of course, we can't attribute that solely to the EVP or the roadshows. But they certainly helped in terms of driving those engagement levels.

**Sim** 37:00

And in terms of other measures. So with our diversity networks, we saw 103% increase in membership. Wow. Yeah. So it's huge. And that was not just from diverse people, but from allies as well. So people who wanted more information, how can I become more of an ally? How can I better understand? And we also then, as a result of that, saw more attendance at our network events, from colleagues as well. So some of those smaller measures that you could see quite instantly had a bigger impact. And again, that feeds into that whole culture piece around the inclusion and the belonging.

**Yvonne** 37:33

Back to your point Sim from earlier about the kind of two tiers comms, I think what the EVP did really was, if you think about our road shows, for example, so we would have a colleague, who was being interviewed about their experience at Mitie. So what they would talk about in that panel interview was their personal background. It could be their upbringing, or the kind of career that they had done before they came to Mitie, which covered some of that, what you would call your traditional ED&I framework. But then they also talked about their experience in the organisation, the roles they've done, the line managers that really made a huge difference to them, how they coped when they faced adversity and challenges. It was a real, it was their story. Yeah, but it wasn't badged as an ED&I story. It was the story of the people in our organisation, and the people who work in our organisation have rich and diverse backgrounds. So the EVP helped us to draw that out, as well as talk about the different things that the organisation offers that have helped them to thrive at work. So I think it achieved that second tier, yes, that you talked about, as well as the first tier. And I think for colleagues, the audience, they were like, oh, such an interesting story. I had no idea that that person had done that or had worked in the military before and then came over into my see that kind of thing.

**Sim** 39:10

I think what it does is it's, it grabs the hearts and minds piece. And then when you've got colleagues that are talking about their backgrounds and their experiences, and they've got that career development, it then sparks that need for Yeah, I want and I can do that. And I'm hearing these powerful stories... I want career development, or you spark that interest in colleagues as well.

**Katie** 39:35

But what's so interesting about this story is you already had a very diverse workforce. You already had by the sounds of it a leading benefits package. What you're doing is bringing that to the fore you're celebrating it, you're sharing it, and I think a lot of organisations so often when we do things like channel audits, we discover a channel exists that no one's actually told anyone it's there? Or how to find it? Or what is it? Well, it exists for... tell people about it, and they'll go there. So I think that's really interesting. Or anyone's listening to this thinking, Where do I start? Possibly starting by looking at the organisation itself, and what the wonderful things that it probably already is doing. You talk about leaders getting up on stage and sharing their stories. And immediately I'm thinking, some leaders do that incredibly well. That strikes fear into their heart, just getting on stage and alone, sharing a personal story, to just want to talk us through a little bit Yvonne about the journey that you might have gone on with your leadership team?

**Yvonne** 40:40

Yeah, I think like any organisation, your leadership team is made up of a diverse range of personalities, the diverse range of backgrounds with varying communication strengths, . Some are really comfortable public speakers, some are not. I think our CEO was pretty unapologetic in insisting that they all play a role. So it was a non negotiable. It was 'We're on tour, we really want everyone to be part of this.' It wasn't him standing up to say, This is my team talk live. This is our team talk live. This is the management team. And I think that sets the tone, then everyone knows they have a responsibility. And what we did from a communications point of view is for those who were really comfortable, absolutely brilliant on their feet, they needed minimal briefing. So we made sure we briefed them. For those who were a little bit more nervous, it was about spending a little bit more time with them, to help them get comfortable. I think, though, because we did two shows a day, it meant that by the second one, some of them are really in their flow. And it's often, you know when you do public speaking the first time you do it, you're like, and then the second time you do you're like, that's a little bit less horrendous. And it's practice, right? Yeah. So as the week went on, the strength of the stories of the colleagues that were on the stage, and presenters just got better and better. But yeah, I mean that's our role as communicators to offer whatever support the management team needed, or whatever support they didn't need. So it was just really about meeting them in the middle in terms of what they needed help with.

**Katie** 42:32

I'm just curious to learn a little bit more about what has happened since I know Yvonne, you've moved on. But in terms of people continuing to share their stories, Sim, Are you still seeing that?

**Sim** 42:43

Yeah we're still seeing that, and it comes a lot through the networks, through the My Voice pillar as well. We've got people writing into comms or myself saying, oh, I want to share this story. And we'll do a whole dedicated piece on them. So what we've done is we've created that platform where anybody who wants to share a story has the floor to do so. And then what we'll also do then is tie in their voice with things that we've got going on across the organisation itself, so really linking it.

**Katie** 43:10

Yeah. But I think just coming back, and we've said it more than once, but I think it's worth bearing out again, you are not communicating DE&I policies or procedures or objectives, you are simply reflecting the diversity of the organisation through your communication.

**Katie** 43:28

Can I talk to you a little bit about the media that you used? Because I'm guessing you hinted at it a little bit about a podcast video, that multimedia approach must have been really important, particularly with this audience where maybe English wasn't necessarily their first language or their native language, for example?

**Sim** 43:28

Definitely. And not long ago, as a result of Team Talk Live, we had a colleague who wrote to us at EO and said that they were transitioning in the workplace, and weren't really sure how the organisation would take that. So having been to a team talk live, recognise that actually, this is an organisation that I can be open about my transition. And following that they received an amazing email from the CEO. And we've been able to support that colleague. It's not just that hearts and minds piece, we're creating real change for our people.

**Yvonne** 44:17

Yeah, absolutely. So it was a real mix of media. Podcast, yes, we looked at and featured. Also as part of the digital content we recorded some panel interviews, which we filmed at our HQ, where colleagues were discussing different topics that people might be interested in. We also had longer form content for the different colleagues who were the stars of the campaign. You could read their story in depth, based on the interview that we did. We did a photoshoot with them as well. That was like, hands down, best day in my career and so much fun because we got them into our headquarters in the Shard, we've got a really beautiful office there. And many of those colleagues have never been to London, they've never been to the Shard, and they were very nervous. So you can imagine, oh, yes, this is you putting your face and your story out there. It's really nerve wracking, especially when you're not a professional communicator. We did a photoshoot, helped them to feel really comfortable, filmed some sort of video vignettes where they share their story, and then did



the longer form. So it was really, whatever your accessibility needs, you had a range of different media to listen to. You could listen to it on the go, you could watch it, you could actually watch back the events as well. So they were all available. Once we did the live events, you could read about it. So it was really a pick and mix approach. Yeah. And we used of course, the fabulous, you know, BBC iPlayer, as like our goal, really, we wanted it to be that experience that you have at home with Netflix and iPlayer. Where, okay, I've got 20 minutes, what do I want to watch? Oh, there's something there that's 10 minutes long. And maybe I'll sit and watch that. Or maybe there's something there, that's five minutes long that I might want to watch. We experimented with what we called ads as well. Yeah. So that's where we're promoting the different pillars and what was under that, while you're picking your content, My Mitie little ads would pop up while you were selecting. Now that's not invasive, not invasive, because we know how annoying ads are. But they're there if you want to watch them, basically.

**Katie 46:36**

That's really clever, really, really clever. I'm hearing so many more IC folk talk about the Netflix effect. And it's great to see finally, because I think IC was held back for so long by technology, so long. And now really wonderful kind of user experience is within our grasp without massive amounts of budgets. The work that you have done has since gone on to win awards. For anyone who's thinking I'd love to be on stage, being handed an award, are there any hints or tips or tricks to creating award winning work? I know it's a big question.

**Yvonne 47:17**

Having that measurement mindset, and having some really good data points on which you're building your communications is critical. I think building awareness just isn't going to cut it anymore. With communication or engagement awards, while it's a valid objective in itself, I think you've got to start to see how is communication driving some of the other cultural levers in the organisation? Whether that's externally in terms of recruitment, takeoff or attrition. So I think absolutely key that you've got those data points. And I think the other aspect of it is telling the story. And that's really apt to say it's hard, because you're often given a word limit. Yes. And you've got to try and explain the organisation in really simple terms, what the communication initiative was, and how that initiative resulted in outcomes. But I think taking a storytelling approach to that is definitely one of the things that really helps because the judges are going through like thousands of entries where everyone say, my campaign was amazing. And look what I did, and it's bright and shiny. The other thing as part of the award entries, because we created this suite of channels and media, I was able to signpost to that in the entry so people could actually go and have a play and have a love for it. And I think that's important in comms because sometimes you can describe it really beautifully. But until you actually interact with that, it's hard to see the impact. Yes. So I'd say those three things are really key really helpful yourself loads of time,

yes, the drafts and redrafts and redrafts and redrafts. Because to get it synthesised into that one and one page, sometimes one and a half page takes time. So definitely give yourself the time.

**Katie** 49:19

And Sim, moving on. Now, what's the next big challenge for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Mitie? Is it more of the same? Or have you got bigger, bolder goals that you're going for?

**Sim** 49:33

Oh, I've got bigger, bolder goals that I'm going for. But at the moment for me, we really want to put more of a focus on disability inclusion. So that's both the physical but more so neurodiversity as well as changing the narrative: what strengths do neurodiverse people bring to the organisation and how do we create roles that are going to enable those colleagues to be great? Also then how do they help the organisation grow? So really thinking of it in a more positive way. So that's our next challenge. And that's something that I'm working on in the back.

**Katie** 50:10

I love that so much because I have a sneaky feeling that the solutions of the future are going to demand minds that don't work in straight lines, definitely. And so the more interesting your mind, the better, I think. And that's probably neurodiverse.

**Sim** 50:30

It really is, when you look at some of the skill sets. In previous roles we've had bespoke apprenticeships for engineering for colleagues that have autism, and it's the way that they problem solve is so unique. And it's like, we don't take advantage of that skill set. Yeah, I think a lot of the time recruiters often think, I'm gonna hire someone with a disability. But it comes with all of this. It's extra hard work, for example. But we really need to, as a society, flip that narrative and look at the strengths that it's bringing into organisations, teams, people in society as well. So I'm looking forward to that.

**Katie** 50:32

Speaking with you, I think for me, it has really lent a different lens, this whole conversation. You sound like someone that gets a real kick out of their work, meaning in your work and results. I'm just curious about that. What sort of has led you and draw new to this role? And what kind of rewards do you get from it personally,

**Sim** 51:33

what led me to ED&I... I was in a near fatal car accident over 10 years ago, where I lost the ability to walk.

**Katie** 51:40

oh, my goodness.

**Sim** 51:41

I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. So we changed my life. And it was the support that I got from the people that were close to me, in terms of day to day care. But also then, for me, it was, you know, the emergency services, the hospitals, my family, my friends, and it's people were willing to give up their time to help me get to where I needed to get to. And without having the resources such as physiotherapy, chiropracter, all of everything that I had, I felt entirely blessed to be around a huge network that just wanted to get me back to where I was. So that kind of gave me a new sense of purpose. And that's where I was in policing. And I was in CID at the time. And then an opportunity came up in ED&I and I thought, I don't know anything about this. I don't know anything about ED&I, but I know I need to give back. And that's what made me put my hat in the ring. And I was successful in the role and I've just thrived since then. So for me, I do get a real kick out of making a difference to one person, making a difference to a few people changing, people's lives and creating really good organisations that care. And that's what I've been doing for over 10 years. And I still to this day, love what I do. I love it when someone is doing better because of the support they've had or because the organisation has changed the way that we do things.

**Katie** 53:06

I genuinely didn't know that story before we began. Thank you so much for sharing it. And it's massively heartwarming to think of something so positive coming out of such a horrendous experience. Thank you for sharing it with us. Okay.

**Katie** 53:22

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday Update. Would you like a short email from me, never more than five, but it points long, giving you my take on the week's news from across the world of communications? 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 a little bit more informed, hopefully a little uplifted as you end your week. Now, this is subscriber only content, which was initially intended just for AB 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](https://abcomm.co.uk/Friday), we just need your email address. And it's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a go, that sign up page again, [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](https://abcomm.co.uk/Friday). And if you do choose to be a subscriber, I very much look forward to being in touch.

**Katie** 54:56

There's nothing left to do now, but I hop over to those quickfire questions. I'm not sure we're going to be able to follow that. But let's try.

**Yvonne** 55:02

I don't think we can. I said there's a whole other podcast in that, Sim's life story!

**Katie** 55:10

So our first quickfire question, what trait or characteristic do you possess that you think, above all others has most led to your career success?

**Sim** 55:22

I'm gonna choose two if that's okay. And it's a bucket load of patience, and persistence. Because in my job, I don't see change straightaway. I have to wait about a year or two before you really truly start to see the change. So for me, you've got to be really patient with people, letting them get their stories out, but also line managers who probably don't get things or are really busy. So patience, and then persistence. You can't just stop when somebody says, 'No,' it's hard. You keep driving the agenda. How do you keep at the top of the agenda?

**Katie** 55:55

Fascinating. I've got to scratch another itch about the fact that you mentioned CID. I don't know if you're allowed to get away with it. Were you a detective?

**Sim** 56:06

No I was a civilian in the CID department.

**Katie** 56:09

Okay. But presumably your ability to handle people see situations work with difficult...

**Sim** 56:16

Those, yeah and again, the skill set that I picked up in the place have been crucial in my ability to navigate difficult conversations challenge... And I see myself now as challenging senior people, which is something that I probably never thought I would do. But it actually happened last week where I had to challenge a senior colleague, and it's easy to do. It's all about being decent and kind, and there's a way of doing it, but you need to be able to have, that's what policing teaches you.

**Katie** 56:48



Really interesting. Thank you for that. Yvonne, do you want to share something with us about your trait or characteristic?

**Yvonne** 56:56

Sure. I think as a person, I've always been very collaborative. So in my personal life, and my professional life, I make connections. And what I've increasingly found in the internal comms profession, when I look back at my career journey, I started with a curiosity and an interest in the colleague experience. And that started to move into the whole colleague voice and listening to the colleague voice and responding to it. But what I found, particularly when I moved to Mitie, and the work we've just described, is actually how communications is such an important lever for culture change. And it just opened up this whole world to me where I realised actually, as a head of internal communication, leading a team, I can have such a greater impact if I can collaborate with others who have a similar objective. And we work together, it's the kind of force for good piece. So I think being collaborative is really critical in communication, and in making things happen. And I think the other one is curiosity. I just, I love learning about people's stories. That's the thing, for me, that distinguishes internal comms from other communication disciplines is the beauty of being able to lift the rock on someone's story.

**Katie** 57:08

And my second question is about a book recommendation. I don't know who wants to go first. But if you had to recommend I know, it's really difficult one book for comms professionals to read, what would you recommend?

**Yvonne** 58:46

So my one isn't strictly a comms book. So it's called *Playing Big*, and it's by Tara Moore. And I found it a brilliant book, as a woman as a female leader. It's essentially a book about stepping into your own space in your career. Oh, and it gives some great tips on things like impostor syndrome, silencing that critical voice in your head. And I think sometimes in this role, Rachel Miller talks about a lot, it can be a bit lonely, particularly if you are a one woman band or you have a small team. You don't have many people you can confide in around some of the strategic issues you're grappling with. And it was just a great book that I read. At a time when I was just feeling oh, God, I don't know if I can do this. I'm really not sure this is for me. And it really helped me to think, actually, what are the skills and talents that I possess? What are the attributes that will help me be successful? And I think it just helped me have a little bit more confidence in not to sound too woowoo but you know, owning my own voice. Yeah, absolutely taking my place around the table. You don't always feel your most confident when you're sometimes in those executive coach meetings. Exactly. It's really important that you're able to articulate what you need to articulate. I think I would say it's sort of strictly a comms book. But it's a great book, if you are stepping into a comms



leadership role, maybe for the first time or you've been doing it a while, and you just need a little confidence booster.

**Katie** 59:45

Thank you. Perfect. Sim, do you have one for us?

**Sim** 1:00:34

But again, not a comms one. But it's called Beyond Engagement by Yetunde Hofman. And it's about love based leadership. Oh, so it's really getting you to think about the way that you need, and we don't often talk about love in the workplace, but it is about having that sympathetic ear really getting to know people for who they are, and then using that to lead them. So it's a really, it's a really inspiring book and gets you really thinking differently and connecting with the hearts of people. And that will help inform the way you handle situations and the way that you manage people.

**Katie** 1:01:09

Thank you. Thank you. And finally, it's as we do with The Internal Comms Podcast, we give you both a billboard. And you can put on that billboard any message you'd like? I don't know who wants to go first. But yes, what's your message?

**Sim** 1:01:24

For me, and particularly from an ED&I perspective, it's really 'change starts with you.' If you don't drive that change, we're not going to see the change. So I'm a true advocate of you've got to be the one to make the change that you want to see.

**Katie** 1:01:39

I like that a lot. Thank you Sim. Yvonne?

**Yvonne** 1:01:42

The mindset, a bit of a mash up of the famous Stephen Covey quote, yes. So mine would be 'listen to understand.' So he talks about most people listen to reply, yes. But listen to understand. And I think that has huge resonance in communications, and ED&I. Really listen hard and listen to what your colleagues are saying and respond. So that would be my one.

**Katie** 1:02:06

And a great quote, and thought for our time when we live in a very much more polarised world in many ways. Yeah. Ladies, thank you very much for appearing on the show. This has been a fantastic conversation. Thanks.

**Sim** 1:02:20



Thanks for having us. Thank you.

**Katie** 1:02:23

So that's it for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and the links, please head over to AB's website. That's [abcomm.co.uk](http://abcomm.co.uk), [abcomm.co.uk](http://abcomm.co.uk). And you will find our entire back catalogue there, we have almost 90 episodes. Special thanks to Sim and Yvonne, my producer John, sound engineer Stu. Madi in content, and all the fabulous people back at AB that keep this show on the road. We still have some amazing guests lined up, so please do hit that subscribe button today. And finally, my heartfelt thanks to you for choosing this show. I love hearing from listeners. So please do reach out to me on LinkedIn or Twitter, or email me directly at [icpodcast@abcomm.co.uk](mailto:icpodcast@abcomm.co.uk). until we meet again lovely listeners do stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.